

TRANSCRIPT OF A CHIZUK FOR PARENTS

By Rabbi Yaakov Shamshon Rawicki, Menahel, Tiferes Elimelech, Brooklyn, NY

Good evening. My name is Rabbi Yaakov Rawicki, menahel of Yeshiva Tiferes Elimelech in Brooklyn, NY. I appreciate Torah Umesorah's offering that our message be shared with a tremendous audience - the thousands of families that are committed to the Torah Umesorah phone lines during this period of home-schooling, due to Coronavirus. Thank you Rabbi Nojowitz for this and for so much that you do for chinuch, and thank you Rabbi Reichberg for reaching out to me.

Dear Parents:

שומר ישראל, הקב"ה to שבח והודאה and ברוכים הבאים and שלום עליכם, who's guarding us with His infinite פרטית השגחה in this tough מצב that we're in. There are many, many Yidden, including some staff members of our yeshiva, who have personally witnessed the 'ה first hand, and they should be זוכה to have a רפואה שלימה and בעזרת ה' return to active life.

As a group, we say, להקב"ה חייבים להודות that we are זוכה to get together gezunterheit, and we daven together, "עד הנה עזרונו רחמיך ולא עזבונו חסדיך ואל תטשנו ה' אלקינו לנצח."

At the same time, we are well aware of what is going on in our surroundings. Many families were hit personally with illness and with tragedy, רחמנא לצלן, הקב"ה watches over everyone and we're מתפלל that Hashem should send them רפואות and ישועות. They should be able to recover, to be strong, and to go forward and see much ברכה, שמחה, and נחת.

Klal Yisroel is faced with unprecedented challenges in every area. We have to feel proud when we see that all sectors, אחינו בני ישראל, have risen to the challenges presented by the coronavirus. Chessed, Hatzala, rabbonim, askonim, and individual parents of families stepped up to the plate and provided for their families and the communities, doing what nobody believed could be done. מי כעמך ישראל!

Yeshivos and girls' schools are to be commended for doing unbelievable work. Phone lines have been set up where rebbeim and teachers have set up prerecorded lines with שמורים and למוד התורה combined with activities filled with מצוה של שמחה. Simultaneously, many rebbeim and teachers are conducting conference lines, offering their students live give and take שמורים, making every talmid feeling connected to his rebbe in learning. In addition, rebbeim and teachers make personal phone calls to each child individually. Children are never left to feel alone in this situation. Rather, they are in constant contact, as it comes out of the mouths of children: "My rebbe calls me a lot, he's interested in me."

There are so many rebbeim doing outstanding work. There are a very many unsung heroes in the home-schooling classrooms. Each one is shining in his own heart, doing phenomenal work without fanfare.

Rabbi and Mrs. Gil Friedman voluntarily set up the best conference lines available for our yeshiva. He shared with us an email from the conference line provider, stating that on April 21st, 3 yeshivos combined were learning over the phones for 530,000 minutes in one day. We congratulate rebbeim, teachers, parents and children all over for uniting their efforts to reach such high levels of participation.

In spite of all this phone activity, I still don't feel comfortable speaking to you over the phone. I very much want to join you in person; I appreciate the eye contact, the smiles, and the general reactions of the audience. I miss the interaction.

The last time our yeshiva was open was Tuesday, פרשת פקודי, six weeks ago. Needless to say, the קושי השיעבוד, the traumatic events, combined with being isolated, has made it feel like more than double that time. We really miss the children a lot and hope to see everyone back gezunterheit very soon.

Yiddishe kinderlach have a heilige and pure glow in their eyes and on their lichtige faces. When that light shines, it offers the rebbe and the parents encouraging feedback that keeps them going. It's like an approval that we're reaching the goal and touching the נשמה of our talmid. This is the ultimate goal of mechanchim and parents: We're not satisfied by getting the child to do what is important to be done now, rather we aim to inspire him and instill in him a will and a desire to want to do the רצון ה' on his own. He should want to shteig higher and higher. This inspiration is our mission. Turning our children into עבדי ה' is our ultimate goal. We miss saying good morning to our children, exchanging smiles, and seeing that spark in their eyes. We're waiting to see the live response, which perhaps cannot be attained over the phone system. A rebbe also pointed out to me that the הקדוש של"ה quotes the גמרא in מסכת סוכה, that tells us that the אפיה רברבי ואפיה זוטא "one face of an adult and one face of a child. Children need to see their rebbe in order to connect with him and achieve למוד התורה. והיו עיניך רואות את מוריך."

So let's join in a תפילה, let's daven to הקב"ה that kinderlach should be able to get back to yeshiva very soon. We should see our kinderlach and they should see us. The כח התפילה is powerful, and we need to beg that we should get together very soon and greet each other with warm smiles, and to be alive once again to be רבן פנים אל פנים של בית תינוקות.

Please allow me to share an observation. During this difficult period, we see many homes setting up shuls to daven ביחידות. Some are setting up porches because they're being allowed to operate makeshift מנינים. Fathers, mothers, and families are setting up their homes like temporary school buildings - they designate a spot for each child and provide telephone access for the many classes operating at the same time. They also set up creative schedules for younger and older children which will hopefully get them enthusiastic about enjoying activities during the rest of the day.

A thought crossed my mind: So many things have been taken for granted which have been come unavailable. We have to fend for ourselves with much thought and planning in order for us to make it through the day, or we may be left with very little to be proud of. Fathers and mothers were stripped of the basic privilege of sending a child to school. Most have no cleaning help and meals are prepared for the entire family three times a day. Basically, everyone is doing something that they're not accustomed to doing. We know that one of the mean tortures that we suffered in מצרים was that פרעה got the men to do ladies' work and ladies to do men's work. Because when you are forced out of your comfort and out of routine, it makes the struggle much more difficult. Every man, woman and child is out of his comfort zone today. Even if we want to get a breath of fresh air, it's only available through a stuffy mask.

What's happening tonight after six weeks at home? Is the menahel coming to us tonight to dictate a new list of pressures? Will he demand that we add to our workload and make sure that the part of our house that is functioning beautifully should ושלום fall apart and wreak havoc? Does he

want us to do better? Do we really need things to get better? Let me assure you this is not the theme of tonight's conference. We are here tonight, proud to say that we appreciate everything that you, the parents, and the children are doing. We look forward to seeing all of us continuing to do exactly what we've been doing until now. Rebbeim and teachers all over are delivering exciting שעורים. They take a personal interest in every talmid, joining them personally in times of שמחה and חס ושלום in coping with difficulties. WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

Parents get a message that there's written classwork material that has been prepared for the children and it's ready to be picked up. WITHIN 30 MINUTES, 16 out of 21 packages are picked up. Does it get any better? A talmid who's technically savvy called his rebbe and volunteered to help him figure out how to use all the options available on the phone line, so that the shiur could work out better. They were on the phone together for 45 minutes and it made a huge difference to the next day's shiur. Isn't this boy the best? ב"ה, it's no wonder that schools are reporting that the classes are doing great. Rebbeim are loving every minute on the phone, and many talmidim all over asked for classes on ערב יו"ט and חוהמו"ד. Therefore, all I want to say is Yasher Koach! חזק חזק חזק. Let's keep it up.

There are a number of questions that keep coming up about the future, both immediate and long term. I will try to address these issues with a few pointers.

1. For the immediate future, as we said before, continue being the perfect father or mother, which means that on pressuring days, lower the standards on meals, learning, cleaning, etc. Please be your normal, beautiful self. When you're comfortable, everybody's comfortable.
2. We trust you. We know our parents. We appreciate that you want the children to do well, and you're always ready to give them time, patience and warmth. When you come to the realization that you or the kids are stressed out and need to pull back a little, follow your instincts. You're on the front lines and you are the judge, and you can figure it out the best.
3. Prioritize. Be flexible. Try hard to maintain a comfortable atmosphere. Notice, compliment, and approve all the beautiful behaviors that are going on in the house, rather than to go to war these days to correct the behaviors or habits that require improvement. It's not the right time for it.

I have to tell you a comical story that really describes a healthy home. I heard it from a mother, בלי עין הרע with a family of children of all ages, in all stages.

It was 7:00 pm and five-year-old Chavie was being put to sleep. She suddenly remembered, "Mommy I didn't hear my teacher's hotline today!" The mother said, "That's okay, listen to it now." Five minutes later, little Chavie comes crying. "Mommy, my teacher said I need to daven, and you need to say אמן, and then I should color a sheet and get a check. I didn't do it!" "That's no problem," said the mother, "We can do it now." So at 7:30 pm, little Chavie says מודה אני לפניך and the mother answers אמן. She colors the sheet and asks her mother, "Do I really have to say Shema two times now?"

In other words, say מודה אני at 8:00 pm if it keeps your house happy and intact!

I'm afraid to mention it over the phone, but Reb Gershon Edestein Shlita, Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovezh, was asked by a parent recently regarding corona lockdown days: If the entire family goes to sleep very late and gets up very late, what should they do about a boy who sometimes

gets up after the זמן of שמע? קריאת שמע? He answered that of course we must get up on time and impress upon our children that getting up in time for קריאת שמע is important. Encourage, entice, give חשק with chinuch, not with force. If we look at it from the bochurim's perspective, they are אונסים just like we are. They are being restricted in a way that is more difficult for them than it is for us. Bochurim are very active and they have no way of giving off their steam and energies.

I was shocked to hear an eighth grader on the block say, and I quote: "I never thought I would live to say it, but I actually miss yeshiva and hope they would open up already."

I think that after six weeks, it is time to recalculate. Let's make it a new stretch, and let's start planning again. How do we encourage our children again and again?

We need some new ideas and some more fuel. I've been listening to many שעורים over the phone and would like to share with you a shmooze from HaGaon Rav Shaul Alter שליטא, Rosh Yeshiva of Ger, speaking to elementary age children. Children need to hear it and can gain much chizuk.

1. The Gemara tells us in מסכת שבת that the world only exists because of the הבל פיהם של תינוקות של בית רבן. The breath and vapor that our children produce when they learn Torah fights and removes the germs that exist in the air, allowing for the world to continue to exist. It is our children who are keeping up our world.
2. Learning at home over the phone when we are not in our place is called learning with צער. Avos D'Rebbe Nosson says that the value of Torah that we learn with צער is equal to 100 times the value of Torah that we learn with convenience. Imagine a father who learns with his son for an hour and then sits down at the supper table and makes an announcement, "I enjoyed learning with Yossi one hundred hours today! That was absolutely fantastic!" And Yossi turns around, "Tatty, 100 hours? What are you talking about?" And the father takes out the גמרא זרה, מסכת עבודה זרה, and shows the Avos D'Rebbe Nosson ד' פרק, where it says that learning צער מתוך is valued at 100 times the rate of learning with convenience. When we learn one hour צער מתוך, we actually learned 100 hours. The children can do the math and see how much Torah our children are learning, and then multiply it by 100 to see what the children are doing to keep up the world in its existence, and to bring רפואות and ישועות to Klal Yisroel.
3. These times are also demanding from us to act with מדות טובות. We're accustomed to associating מדות טובות with hearing nice stories about מדות טובות, but not to being tested on how we perform when מדות טובות are noticed. For example, we need to demonstrate tolerance when siblings are annoying, and it happens more often when you are home with them all day. We need to give up our comfort and share it with others who need it. We may also not have everything we want and still need to be happy. All this gets included in the הבל פיהם של תינוקות של בית רבן that keeps the world going. All beautiful מדות contribute to the existence of the world.

Last but not least, I would like to address the issue of fear. Some children may be dealing with fear. They hear the news about people being sick and about tragedies, רחמנא לצלן. They may get scared and need our reassurances. We need to assure them that הקב"ה is here with us. We deposit our נשמות every night faithfully into הקב"ה's hands, כביכול, as we say in שמע, " בידך אפקיד, " מודה אני לפניך, " In the morning, He returns the נשמה back to us refreshed, and we say

תהלים קל"א (it might be advisable to sit down with the child and show him the words), " בגמול עלי אמו בגמול עלי נפשי, " Seforim explain with a משל that when you ask an adult,

“Where are you now?” the answer is at home, in shul, at work, shopping, on the avenue, out of town. When you ask a young child where he is, he will answer, “I’m with my mother.” Wherever she is, that’s where I am. I’m just very comfortable because I’m with my mother. So too, the Yid is never in crisis or in trouble, דוד המלך says. He is always like the child in his mother’s arms. He is in the hands of הקב"ה and feels secure because he is being cared for by the שומר ישראל.

“Just like a little child is comfortable and secure in the hands of his mother...” When children hear you speak such words with conviction, they too feel secure.

Dear parents...Speeches make things sound simple. I realize that the flexibility and tolerance that I am speaking about is easier said than done. Every parent would like a sense of law and order in their homes even during straining times. We expect יראת שמים and עבודת ה' with some structure or סדר to reign in our homes all the time, and especially in times when we are in dire need of רחמי שמים. So how do we resolve the conflict between having higher expectations and allowing for tolerance on middle standards for the sake of peace and harmony in our family?

A story is told about the two holy brothers, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk and Reb Zisha, who wandered around the world together disguised, in גלות. They were often forced to live in sub-standard living quarters. They did this for lofty reasons which we can't explain. One day, they were grabbed by authorities and thrown into jail. The cell that they were in had no bathroom facilities, rather a pail in the middle of the room. In the morning, Reb Zisha asked his brother Reb Elimelech, “Why do you seem so upset?” Reb Elimelech answered, “What do you mean? We can't even daven here! The smell is intolerable!” Reb Zisha got up to dance. “Why are you dancing?” asked his brother Reb Elimelech. “Because we are being tested and we are passing the test with flying colors!” Reb Zisha answered.

“We both love to daven, and today we're both not davening, because we are willing to sacrifice our beloved davening in order to be מקים ה' רצון ה'! If הקב"ה put us into a cell that we're not permitted to daven in, then we have a מצוה to abstain from davening today. I'm happy to do Hashem's מצוה, whatever He may ask me to do.”

The guard, hearing Reb Zisha dancing and singing, bashed the door open and asked, “What is this party all about?” Reb Zisha pointed to the pail. “This makes you happy? Then I will remove it!” He did, and the heilige brothers were ready to get up and daven.

Reb Zisha teaches us two points:

1. Accept the reality. Don't view our inability to daven with a מנין as a rejection. Don't feel defeated or deflated. אדרבא! Feel exactly the opposite! Embrace the opportunity to be מקים this new mitzvah of "ונשמרתם מאד לנפשותיכם" and view each restriction as a מצוה. This is the מצב that הקב"ה put us into.
2. When הקב"ה sees us recognizing the רצון ה' in a challenging situation, then just like he got the prison guard to punish Reb Zisha זצ"ל by removing the pail, He will send us the ישועה. He will remove the restrictions and put us into better situations.
Perhaps this is the new עשה רצונו כרצונך, כדי: פרק ב', משנה ד', אבות ח' משנה ה' פשט "שיעשה רצונך כרצונו" and changing it to do it the way הקב"ה expects it from us today, in these times, הקב"ה will change the new way of doing things and put us back into our old gezunta way.

What is the מצב today? Our children, bochurim, younger boys and girls, are struggling in the absence of schedules, loss of connection to rebbeim and friends, and many are missing the

support systems of being part of the tzibbur. Parents need to recognize that we, too, as adults, are experiencing our own pressures and need our own doses of support. At the same time, we need to rise and see what the הקב"ה wants from us, in order to be מחזק ourselves in our new role, a role to understand, to tolerate, to encourage and to support. It is our role to maintain a warm, kind relationship with our children - it helps the relationship survive corona, בעזר ה'. Our relationship may even thrive in the מצב of Corona.

We can rise to this challenge and realize that when we tolerate, we're not giving up on standards. We're not losing any battles. We're gaining on all fronts because we're doing exactly what the הקב"ה wants us to do NOW. We need to be happy to do it in the הקב"ה's new way. When the הקב"ה will see our commitment to be mechanech His children in all מצבים in a שמחה way, He will give us בנים in all circumstances. Perhaps this reward is included in the משנה of "כל המקיים את התורה מעוני, סופו לקיימה מעושר": אבות פרק ד' משנה א', ר' יונתן אומר. If we keep our responsibility to chinuch על פי תורה in trying times, we will be זוכה to raise our children in times of עושר, when everything will turn into better days.

Parents are concerned. They ask, what about academics? What will be with getting our children to keep up with the class? How will they complete the grade? What can we, as fathers and mothers, do to get them up to the level?

And the truth is, it's an issue. If schools don't open until the end of the year, children will have missed four months of school. We will have to deal with it בעזר ה' when we come back to it gezunterheit. Parents need to be supportive, not add pressure. I'd like to explain the difference with a short comparison. If you push your child's size 12 foot into a size 8 shoe, that's pressure. If he is trying on a new shoe his size, and he's having a hard time getting in, and you hand him a shoe horn, that's encouragement. Raising your son's level of academics when it's hard for you and for him to focus will lead to pressure and frustration. We can't afford it.

Let me read you a note that's been circulating. A teacher wrote it on behalf of all the other teachers on planet Earth. She writes as follows:

Dear Parents,

Don't stress out about schoolwork. In September, I will בעזר ה' get your children back on track. I'm a teacher and that's my superpower. What I can't fix is social, emotional trauma that prevents the brain from learning. So right now, I just need you to share your calm, share your strength, and share your laughter with your children. No kids are ahead, no kids are behind, your children are exactly where they need to be.

With love,

All the Teachers on Planet Earth

So now, after all this, what **can** parents do?

Parents at this point can feel responsible to encourage their children to be involved in the program and participate whenever possible. Although it's not your responsibility to teach the child to excel in academics in these times, we need to create a serious atmosphere around your son's למודים. It is important to take an interest in his למודים, listen to him review them on Shabbos, and be proud of the למוד that he accomplished. Make his a pleasant experience, set a time for learning followed by a treat or a game. Do not find faults or get busy correcting mistakes. All you

will accomplish is that חס ושלום your son won't want to come learn with you anymore because he will feel like he can't please you anyway, you are just too critical.

There's one suggestion that I feel is very important. I believe that many parents are doing it already. I want to be מחזק an ענין that I feel it is extremely important, and that is QUALITY TIME. Our homes are rolling on, day after day, for 42 days. It almost feels like חול המועד is here to stay forever. Some kids wake up in the morning and don't know whether they should dress Shabbosdik or not. The מצב calls for clarification. Most importantly, our children need to come to the realization that although our family is in the "we" mode, we do things together all day, there also needs to be an "I" and "you" mode at the same time.

I and you need time for myself and yourself. I and you want to grow. I and you have a personal aspiration and a goal that I and you want to achieve, so let's talk about it in private. Set up a short meeting with Tatty, Mommy and a child in a private area. Begin by saying, "Zalmy, we're very proud of you, we see you're trying to do your best and to be your best. How do you feel you're doing? What part of our program is working for you? What can I do to help you? What is a reasonable bedtime?"

There are many more questions which will help him figure out what will work for him. You may need to set up a better space in the house for him, he may need a designated phone, he may ask to be exempt from certain family programs, he may not be enjoying the class program as much as he could. If so, perhaps you could contact his Rebbe/Morah and ask them for ideas. The purpose of this meeting is not to increase pressure, חס ושלום, but rather, to provide our child with his personal care and help him deal with personal difficulties during these tough days. After you're done with the meeting, make up to meet him again, and see how things are improving. Then take a break and schedule another meeting with your next child.

On a personal note, parents should realize they need a meeting like this, too. Schedule similar meetings for yourselves. Let's grow up and admit it - we need chizuk too! It's not always going the way we want it to go. We have greater expectations and need to assure each other that we're doing just fine. If every child has what to eat, what to wear, and we generally run our homes maintaining calmness, warmth and care, We ARE DOING GREAT! Who cares if we are eating sandwiches for supper? Our goal is to raise healthy, happy, resourceful children with flexibility. בעזר ה' we will weather this storm.

Last but not least, rest assured that you are not alone. All parents are experiencing the same challenges as you and your family. Everybody is either managing or not managing, depending on the time of day. Reach out for help, advice, or reassurances. Call a friend, call your yeshiva, call your menahel, or call your rebbe. We are all ready to help.

Let me just conclude: טייערע parents, we all see what is going on in the world. We need to go to bed at night thanking Hashem and wake up in the morning with a שמחה, thanking Hashem that we are ב"ה gezunt and able to tend to הקב"ה's kinderlach. This is our life, and this is our purpose! Make your own תפילה, use your own words: רבונו של עולם, thank you for yesterday, and please help me make this day a good one for the entire family. הקב"ה is listening. He guards us and He helps us.

Thank you very much for joining us tonight. Best wishes for gezunt, נחת, בשורות טובות, We are all looking forward to seeing our kinderlach again and to ביאת משיח צדקנו במהרה בימנו אמן!