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THE CHILD AND THE TV

"Another distinction is in the fact that the program combines our work with the parents. We learned that working only with the child is not enough. If a child comes home from Afikim and is exposed to negative atmosphere and comments, we have a problem. This is why we obligate the parents to participate in a parallel education program. This is, in fact, the payment we require for the many resources they receive from us.. This is how we strengthen the children's infrastructure so they will grow up to be givers, not takers. Just like we teach the children to honor their parents, the parents are taught to honor their children and themselves. From this, wonderful things emerge."

"I once sat in on a parent class, and one of the fathers who was an engineer by profession, and unemployed since his immigration, had been depressed for long periods of time. He said that before Afikim, his son would come home every day, make himself a sandwich and disappear till nighttime. The child was chosen to participate in Afikim, and the father was "obligated" to attend the workshops. That father told me that the program changed his life without a doubt. 'I learned one important thing at the parenting course,' he told me, 'In the two or three minutes per day in which I express an interest in my child's life, I change the entire atmosphere at home. When he walks into the house, the TV is off, I don't smoke and I ask him how school was. This influences everyone at home, the other kids as well.'

"I heard this," Lefkowitz continues, "and my hair stood on end. I started my own self-questioning: what do I do with my children, did I speak to them today? I really thought about it for some months."

CHANGING THE WORLD

IN DESCRIBING THE PROGRAM YOU DISCUSS EDUCATING TOWARDS VALUES. WHAT VALUES ARE THESE?

"Whoever is good to his/her fellowman, will be good for our world. We aim to make the child a giving child. I travel the world a lot and meet all kinds of Jews, as well as many non-Jews. I find they all repeat the same expression: tikkun olam. According to the interpretation of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ashlag, the Zohar explains tikkun olam will take place on the day when there are more people giving than people taking. We give our families that push, helping them move from the place of a taker to that of a giver, pushing his community with him. To me, this is tikkun olam.. When people ask me what we do in Afikim, I simply answer tikkun olam.

BUSINESSES SUPPORT AFIKIM

Over the years Afikim has been blessed with the support of numerous businesses in Israel and abroad.

After recently being introduced to Afikim the deputy directors of the Clal Financial Group Israel's largest (non-banking) financial institution turned to Afikim with the question. "How can we help?". Afikim looks forward to developing a long term relationship with the wonderful employees of the Clal Finance Group.

Elfassi Contact has also joined forces with Afikim providing Afikim with their expertise in marketing strategy and campaign building. Elfassi Contact is currently working on a campaign portfolio to help publicize Afikim's efforts to make a change in Israeli society.



AFIKIM'S MISSION

Afikim is a network of afternoon centers for children-at-risk and their parents, offering enrichment programs that give them new hope and opportunities. Children, between third and eighth grades, attend Afikim centers for six years. They benefit from academic assistance, daily meals, and enrichment activities in a warm, nurturing environment.

Their parents attend the Parental Empowerment Centers where they participate in workshops on effective parenting and communication, home and budget management, and vocational training. By focusing on the entire family unit, Afikim aims to empower the families with the skills and motivation to extricate themselves from the cycle of poverty and integrate into society.

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EMPOWERING CHILDREN AT RISK WITH POTENTIAL
ENSURING THE EXCELLENCE OF ISRAEL'S NEXT GENERATION



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FROM THE DESK OF RABBI DR. BENNY LAU

Rabbi Lau is the director of the Center for Judaism and Society as well as the Institute for Social Justice at Beit Morasha of Jerusalem. Rabbi Lau also serves as rabbi of the Ramban Synagogue in Jerusalem.

As the month of Nissan approaches, we are embarking on the celebration of the Exodus from Egypt, from slavery to freedom. Yechezkel the prophet claims that this exodus was forced upon the Children of Israel, according to a divine order. "With a strong hand and

an outstretched arm," our forefathers were compelled to exit from slavery to freedom. This exodus represents not only a prohibition from forcefully employing slaves, but also a prohibition from choosing a life of slavery.

Education to responsibility and self-empowerment is the first and foremost foundation of teaching a person to be free. The Torah describes a situation of man en route with an animal bearing down under the weight of its load. There is no doubt of one's obligation to help the animal; the question is a matter of how much. The Gemara puts a limit on this assistance, demanding that the person receiving the assistance also take responsibility. This was ruled as halacha (Choshen Mishpat, 172:7) and one may learn that the ruling be applied to other cases of assistance and tzedaka, where the recipient is encouraged to help himself before others are obligated to help him.

It is interesting to compare the model built by Erich Fromm (in his book "Escape from Freedom") to the route paved by the Torah in Israel's exodus from slavery to freedom. Fromm compared negative ("freedom from") and positive ("freedom to"). A lack of distinction between these two freedoms brings people to collapse. They escape from one location, but do not choose freedom as a personal objective. The gap that is created is seemingly insurmountable, and the natural response is "let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (Numbers, 14:4).

Man's growth is a fundamental goal that is used as an anchor for independence. The Torah expresses this approach in few words: "draw out and take" (chapter 12). The Torah's instruction to Israel is that the exodus from Egypt involves two stages. One - pushing off the Egyptian content ("draw out your hand from idol worship") and two - adopting the Israeli content (take blood of the Passover sacrifice and blood of the Brit Mila).

Afikim works to raise a generation of free men. Children who are growing up in an at risk-environment of enslavement to "tzedaka," a situation that not only undermines their freedom of choice but expels them from the educational system and abandons them injured and neglected on the outskirts of society. Afikim helps these children discover the secret to freedom, the power that motivates them to take responsibility and stand on their own two feet, for the sake of future generations.





AN ENTIRE WORLD SAVED

Former Minister of Welfare, Isaac Herzog visited the Afikim Hanel Talpiot branch and expressed his approval saying: "I was happy to visit the Afikim Center and to see, first hand, the pedagogic and social services provided. We are faced with the most important challenge of all and every child we save is an entire world saved."

Mrs. Beverly Barkat, the first lady of Jerusalem (wife of Mayor Nir Barkat), and co-founder of Snunit, Israel's largest educational website visited the Afikim Hanel Jerusalem branch. Upon seeing (and hearing) the children's enthusiasm for Afikim Mrs. Barkat summarized her visit by saying: "The intimate atmosphere combined with the joy of learning have the potential to generate real change."

Rabbi Scheinberg of Texas had a similar reaction on his visit. In his talk with the children, Rabbi Scheinberg let the children know that they had friends and family cheering for them in places as far away as Texas, USA.

Afikim invites YOU to visit one of our centers. To arrange a visit please contact mailto:Miriam@afikim.org

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO MAKE A CHANGE

Afikim's educational program is always supplemented by innovative volunteer projects. This year, Hebrew University nursing students ran weekly interactive sessions for Afikim participants highlighting the importance of protecting our immediate and global environment. In addition, once a week, Orayta Yeshiva students continue to mentor Afikim children in an innovative big brother program. The students utilize the time with the children to also develop English language skills. After a successful pilot last year, students from Jerusalem's Shvilei Hatorah returned to Afikim for a festive Adar celebration. We look forward to a return visit next year.



A volunteer's perspective

Helping Your Self

Every Tuesday afternoon at 2:15, Rav Noam leads of group of 11 Orayta guys to volunteer at a community center in Talpiot. The volunteering consists of teaching children in a unique after-school program, run by an organization called Afikim. We teach the children how to read and write in English. Before volunteering each week, we are provided with lessons on teaching techniques.

I work with the 5th graders. Recently a girl in my group was struggling with her English homework. I decided to help her by reviewing her homework from the day before. In the short time we had together, we only completed a page in her workbook. She thanked me and I returned her thanks, but I don't think she quite understood why I thanked her as well. I thanked her because I felt fulfilled afterwards; I had made a small difference in her learning. I look forward to Tuesdays for the after school volunteering program.

Jeremy Firestein

Jeremy is a student at the Orayta Yeshiva in Jerusalem and has been volunteering in Afikim as a big brother/English tutor since October.

HONORING OUR PARENTS

Once a week, Afikim parents meet to discuss, evaluate and learn parenting techniques, skills and responsibilities. In the Afikim Kiryat Malachi branch over 50 parents participate regularly in the weekly workshops and enjoy additional social activities together. This year, the Purim celebration took on new dimension as the participants arrived at their parenting workshop in their Purim finest to participate in a laughter workshop led by the group's moderator (who is also a trained medical clown). Not only did the participants succeed in breaking down the emotional walls that surround them but they nearly brought down the walls of the building with their exuberant laughter.

On a more serious note, one mother wrote: "Over the last few months – my relationship not only with my daughter, but also with my older children, has improved by leaps and bounds!! This program has helped me to identify the behaviors (mine and my childrens) we use to get reactions. The whole family has benefited! More concrete boundaries and expectations have been established and our family life had been more relaxed, peaceful, and less stressful. I look forward all week to our meetings. I never miss it!"



EXCERPTED FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH MOSHE LEFKOWITZ, DIRECTOR OF AFIKIM MAKOR RISHON, 04.03.11

By: Avi Gaz

Dana and Chagit are seven and eight-year-old sisters who decided to take control over their own fate. Their father is in jail for domestic violence; their mother is mentally unstable. Dana and Chagit took to begging for money outside the neighborhood bank. A passerby who saw them called the Afikim club coordinator, who rushed over. The girls explained their fear to the coordinator. They understood from their mother that if her financial situation continues to decline, she will have to send them to a foster home. "We must help her, so we could stay at home," they told the coordinator.

Dana and Chagit's story is only one of so many – stories of children and many teenagers that consider the Afikim organization as a second home, an anchor of stability and health within the intricate tapestry of life, which can sometimes be traumatic.

NO AMBITIONS

Afikim was established by Moshe Lefkowitz, an ultra-Orthodox Jew living in Jerusalem, who serves as the organization's director. There is something very refreshing about meeting with him. Contrary to the popular notion that the ultra-Orthodox provide charity solely within their own community, Afikim works almost exclusively outside the community. "As an ultra-Orthodox Jew, find satisfaction in giving and connecting with the weak sectors of general society, specifically the Ethiopian community," Moshe stresses. Nor does the manner in which this help is given fit the conventional mold. "The highest level of charity is not necessarily distributing food, but supplying the tools for a person to earn his/her own living, by granting a loan or teaching a skill," says Lefkowitz, explaining his worldview in accordance with Maimonides's degrees of charity.

Lefkowitz (43), a father of seven and grandfather of two, was born in Tzfat to a family descending from the Alexander Hassidut lineage, and studied at the Slovodka Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. He worked for many years in education and then proceeded to the realm of welfare and charity, and was one founders of Meir Panim, the network of soup kitchens. Later, he established Afikim, providing a warm home to impoverished school children.

WHAT WAS YOUR AIM IN ESTABLISHING THE ORGANIZATION?

"The aim of the food distribution efforts at Meir Panim where I worked for seven years embodied an innovative idea: to provide in a way that is not humiliating... However, while experiencing the blessing of giving, I noticed a sad social phenomenon. There is a Yiddish expression: "If someone gives – take". After awhile I began feeling that

this was the pervading attitude, and it troubled me".

"The State of Israel is already over sixty years old. It may be young compared to other countries in the world, but every year the poverty report indicates a scope of 1,700,000 poor people, out of which 850,000 are children, and the number grows every year. There are also great socio-economic gaps, similar to a third world nation. How does this happen? I think the simple answer is in the words of our Sages: "Btar Ania Azla Aniyuta" (poverty follows the impoverished). Poverty exists in a vicious cycle. Many times the parents lack ambition and vision and work in degrading jobs which lead to loss of hope and so on...."



A BADGE OF EXCELLENCE

"The State of Israel is a hi-tech nation, but instead of standing at the forefront of education worldwide, lending a light unto the nations, many of its citizens are far from reaching even their potential. For the children, we need to break the cycle of poverty in which their family exists. This is

the future and security of the State of Israel, no less than a strong army. These things are important to me because I love Israel and I love the Jewish people. It is important to understand that education is a strategy."

"Our tour guide is Maimonides, who delineates the eight degrees of charity. The first is giving a loan or teaching the person a skill from which they can earn a living. We need to distribute the fishing rods, not the fish."

SO WHAT EXACTLY DOES THIS ORGANIZATION DO? WHAT FIELDS DOES IT WORK IN?

"Afikim cares for children from difficult families and neighborhoods. In our eyes, a child who comes to Afikim is not wearing a badge of misery, but rather a badge of excellence. I have no doubt that for many of them, this is the first time in their lives someone actually believes in them.

"We run five branches over the country, a total of 300 children. The children come to our after-school educational facilities, four times a week. First, they receive a nutritious meal. Mealtime is the time for conversation and observation. You get used to eating properly, in an organized manner at a set time and in an accepting social atmosphere.

"After the meal, we have academics, the heart of our activities taught by professional teachers supplemented by volunteer assistants. What is unique about the Afikim program is its duration. Our project stretches over a period of six years, starting from the third grade."

PLEASE TURN OVER