

Let's Talk Torah Sheb'al Peh

V'Shinantam Best Practices Across North America

On my recent trip to North America, I had the honor of visiting many of our member schools, and watching many great teachers in action. On pages 2-3, we bring you spotlights on the great work being done in the Yeshiva of Central Queens, and in the Hillel School of Metropolitan Detroit. Many other schools have shared inspiring stories of success with the V'Shinantam Mishnah Program, and with the V'Dibarta Bam Talmud Skills Program. At HAFTR in the Five Towns, a 6th grade girl explained to me the relationship of Mishnah and Tosefta, and demonstrated remarkable mastery of the Mishnayot being learned. At Kushner Academy in Livingston, New Jersey, 7th grade boys have already begun to understand how the Gemara is put together, and how to approach a sugyah on their own. At Northbrook Solomon Schechter in Chicago, Illinois, 7th grade students have learned about how to compare Tannaitic sources carefully. At Bet Shraga in Albany, New York, students recited mishnayot like masters, and celebrated their success with a special event!



Slowly, we witness the development of "Best Practices" in instruction of Mishnah and Talmud, ranging from methods for memory learning of mishnayot, techniques and timing for teaching the Nesi'im and Tannaim, and unique approaches for helping children master navigation through the six orders and sixty-three tractates of Mishnah, and strategic reflective thinking before the study of a sugyah in Talmud. Thousands of students across the continent are becoming loving pupils of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi and Ravina and Rav Asi! The learning of Torah Sheb'al Peh has become an experience that unifies all segments of the Jewish community. As we think ahead to school year 5770, and the expansion of our network to more than seventy schools continent wide, we are considering improving the infrastructure for guidance of teachers in the dozens and dozens of member schools. One idea is to recruit the most successful teachers to be available for phone guidance of other teachers, according to region, school movement (AMODS, RAVSAK, Schechter, etc.), gender, etc. In the coming weeks, I will be approaching specific teachers to join this initiative. I have had preliminary conversations with leaders of the various educational movements about this idea, and have received their blessings and promises of support.

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Important Dates

- **May 1—Deadline for orders to be shipped by sea**
- **June/July/August Teacher training for new schools in North America**
- **September 30, 2009 Full payment due for workbook discount**
- **September—Send in Excel sheets for Mishnahkids site-passwords**

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To quote some of my students:

“When I know a Mishnah B’al Peh, I feel like I’m the Boss” (Yigal Masturov)

“Seeing the hand motion helps us remember the Mishnah” (Naomi Jacobobitz and Arianne Rothchild”

Yeshiva of Central Queens Reports on the Success of the V’Shinantam Program

The Bonayich Mishnah program is an amazing 21st century program incorporating technology and educational methodology to ease the study of Mishnah. The study of the historic periods is also a main part of the Bonayich curriculum. Knowing the time line and which Tannaim lived when makes the subject more factual.

The students are taught and encouraged to master Mishnayot b’al peh (by heart). It is truly amazing how in the beginning of the year the students are hesitant to try repeating the Mishnayot ba’al peh. In just a short time, even the weaker students will volunteer to say some part of the Mishnah. All in all, the Bonayich Mishnah program has been a huge success at the Yeshiva of Central Queens.



Rabbi Finkelstein teaches using one of our posters

To quote some of my students:

“When I know a Mishnah b’al peh, I feel like I’m the ‘Boss’”
(Yigal Masturov)

“Seeing the hand motions helps us remember the Mishnah”
(Naomi Jacobovitz and Arianne Rothchild)

To experience the excitement of the Bonayich program, I invite you to come into our classroom and simply say the first word of any Mishnah. Watch and listen how they recite the Mishnah enthusiastically and with confidence.

“Mrs. Clara Gaba, who has taught fifth grade mishnah since Hillel began to use the V’Shinantam curriculum, can remember when Rabbi Hayman first began to train the teachers. She was impressed, but did not truly imagine that this could succeed at Hillel so thoroughly. Yet, thanks to the time, energy and soul invested by her and her fellow teachers, mishnah has become a favorite subject of Hillel students.”

The Growth of Torah Sheb’al Peh at Hillel Day School of Metropolitan Detroit

It is hard to believe that just three years ago Hillel Day School of Metropolitan Detroit did not even have Torah Sheb’al Peh in its curriculum. Now, any fifth grader can tell you the sedarim and masechtot of the mishnah, and this academic year saw the introduction of a Kitah Chet class in Talmud. Mrs. Clara Gaba, who has taught fifth grade mishnah since Hillel began to use the V’Shinantam curriculum, can remember when Rabbi Hayman first began to train the teachers. She was impressed, but did not truly imagine that this could succeed at Hillel so thoroughly. Yet, thanks to the time, energy and soul invested by her and her fellow teachers, mishnah has become a favorite subject of Hillel students. It has impacted other programs as well. What was once a simple Brachah Bee is now an annual Hillel tradition that incorporates the students’ knowledge of Torah Sheb’al Peh (picture below). Mrs. Rachel Buckman, who teaches both fifth and sixth grade mishnah, was instrumental in creating a fifth grade shabbaton experience for the students, which now includes a number of Torah Sheb’al Peh-based activities. Students are proud to memorize mishnayot, have brought mishnayot to life through games and drama, and seventh grade students were proud to show Rabbi Hayman their music video of the first *himnon!*



Of course, the most gratifying aspect of V’Shinantam’s integration into Hillel Day School is the fact that students will graduate knowing the critical role the Oral Torah has played in creating their Jewish world, and how it will continue to help them make sense of their lives as Jews in the modern world.

Saul A. Rube, Dean of Judaic Studies

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The new edition of the V'Shinantam Program is not only far more developed in cognitive process and alternative activities, it is also far superior graphically to the previous edition, and many new posters and aids have been added. Here is one of the new posters included in our redesigned V'Shinantam program, meant to teach the Masorah from Sinai until the Tannaim. This improvement was suggested by Rabbi Eliezer Kessler of the Beren Academy in Houston, Texas, and we hereby acknowledge his remark!

Best Practices, continued

Another idea is the structuring of regular times and topics for videoconferencing with administrators, teachers and parents. I want to express my appreciation to Rabbi Mark Landsman of YCQ, for his kind offer to host an administrators' conference in August. More information on this event will be on its way to you in the near future. I look forward to hearing from all of you, with your suggestions for how we can better serve your needs.

With best personal and professional regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

Pinchas Hayman

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