

KOSHER ADHD

**SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN THE
TORAH-OBSERVANT WORLD**

Simcha Chesner, Ph.D.

Sara Markowitz, Ph.D.



DEDICATION

WE DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO FOUR FATHERS
AND ONE GRANDFATHER

MR. EUGENE JACOB AMSTER, A”H

MR. JACK CHESNER, A”H, HK”M

MR. IRVING GOLDOFSKY, A”H

RABBI PAUL HAIT, A”H

AND TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN
THE “LIVING” AND THE LIVING

RABBI MAYER MOSKOWITZ

A BIOLOGICAL FATHER, GRANDFATHER AND
GREAT-GRANDFATHER TO SCORES, AND A
SPIRITUAL GRANDFATHER TO THOUSANDS.

Kosher ADHD:
Surviving and Thriving in the Torah-Observant World
by Simcha Chesner and Sara Markowitz

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ADVANCE PRAISE

If “seeing is believing,” I am a believer twice over. I have seen Dr. Simcha Chesner successfully teach and lovingly develop ADHD children into impressively functioning and thriving adults in the Torah-observant community. Now, in this book, I have seen the neuroscientific scholarship and analytics – presented clearly and engagingly – which underlie this effort. This book will be a fascinating and valuable read for parents, educators, and anyone who relates to an ADHD child or adult. For most of us, it will be life-changing; for some, lifesaving.

— **Haskel Lookstein**, *Rabbi Emeritus, Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, New York City, Principal Emeritus, Yeshivat Ramaz*

Very few research studies have focused on the intersection of ADHD with religious culture and practices, and even fewer papers and books have been written on the clinical implications and recommendations of the impact of ADHD on religious practice and family life. None, to my knowledge, have focused on the impact of ADHD on individual and family life within the Jewish community generally and specifically the Orthodox segment. That is what makes this book so unique and timely. It provides tremendous insight into the adverse impact that ADHD can have on the practice of religion and on religiously-guided

family life, while at the same time offering numerous recommendations for how to deal with such adversities within this cultural context. I applaud Dr. Chesner for undertaking this much needed book and highly recommend it to the Jewish community.”

— **Russell A. Barkley, Ph.D.**, *Retired Clinical Neuropsychologist*
Previously – Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, VCU School of Medicine
Richmond, VA

Simcha’s book is brilliant! Synthesizing the latest neurological science with the realities of having to function and succeed in the world, he brings encouragement, hope, and specific strategies to aid Jewish people with ADHD (and their colleagues and families). Pick up an extra copy, because this is one of those rare books you’ll want to share far and wide, but you’ll also want to keep and treasure your own marked-up copy!

— **Thom Hartmann**, *Author – ADHD: Hunter in a Farmer’s World*

I welcome this weighty professional composition authored by my good friend, Dr. Simcha (Stuart) Chesner, and Dr. Sara Markowitz, *Kosher ADHD: Surviving and Thriving with ADHD in the Torah-Observant World*. The significance of this piece is rooted in its straightforward, candid approach to a field of invisible, yet remarkably common, challenges – the field of mental health, within a community which at times shies away from recognizing the deep pain and conflict stemming from such challenges. The topic is addressed with precision and sensitivity, comprehensive professional expertise, and above all, deep compassion.

It is a book for those committed to a life of Torah and committed to the wellbeing of their children. Understanding the latter can better enable the former, as the authors gently remind us that the Torah is

Etz Chaim – a tree of life, by which we are instructed to live, “Vechai Bahem.”

This book is an important addition to the famed Jewish library, and a simultaneous companion for anyone who seeks out the command: ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

— **Isaac Herzog**, *President of the State of Israel*

If I did not have ADHD I would have written this book!

— **Tzvika Klein**, *International Correspondent, Jerusalem Post*

Simcha Chesner has proven himself as a remarkable healer and magician in his conscientious therapeutic work helping thousands of Jewish young people in need. His ability to synthesize the best of our tradition together with modern medicine has worked so well that we are now privileged to have this book make available his wisdom to a wider audience. Read it and benefit yourself and your loved ones.

— **Jon Medved**, *Chief Executive Officer, Our Crowd*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Chesner's Acknowledgments:

For me, this book represents a final version of more than three decades of work, primarily in Israel. I became interested in ADHD when, as an aging adolescent, I realized that I either have it or something very similar to it. Although I could always earn good grades by cramming the night before exams, I have never been very good at doing things gradually in an organized, consistent manner. This is one of the reasons that I am difficult to live with and I respectfully acknowledge all who experience the thrills and agonies of living close to me. My wife, Rachel, is acknowledged by all who know her as a singularly exceptional human. I am the luckiest man on the face of the earth for marrying her. My six children, their incredible spouses, and my many grandchildren provide me with more joy and purpose than I deserve. Our extended family of Nelli and Tali Rapp and their children have geometrically multiplied our blessings.

My close friends, particularly Elliot, Ari, and Howard, are living examples of the human ability to provide unconditional positive regard to a limited and imperfect creature. Of course, I thank my mother and father of blessed memory for giving me the gift of life. My big sister,

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Phyllis, and her unwaveringly loyal husband, Mel, and my big brother, Warren, and his wife, Sharon, for teaching me essential skills for living.

My professional mentor throughout the past three decades has been Cissie Chalkowsky. Cissie personifies the words of our Sages, “Speak little and do much.” Her actions in the world of special education in the State of Israel have been pioneering and transformative. I have had the great personal fortune to learn from her and her wisdom is contained within every wise thought presented in this book.

Finally, I thank the Creator of the universe for the ability to believe and for everything else.

Dr. Markowitz's Acknowledgements:

Seventeen years ago, my collaboration with Dr. Simcha Chesner in his ADHD-focused high school in Israel, steered me towards a career in psychology. Recently, Dr. Chesner reconnected with me, highlighting the need to expand his approach beyond the borders of Israel.

My involvement in this project often prompts questions about my time management for those who know me well. As a psychologist, Jewish community leader, mother, wife, friend, and woman who experienced ADHD as a child and continues to experience its challenges as an adult, I can see the significant impact that appropriate treatment and strategies offer those diagnosed with ADHD. I feel that it is part of my mission to spread this wisdom within our community, and to help families and individuals with ADHD thrive. I am deeply thankful to Dr. Chesner for entrusting me with this sacred work.

Dr. Russell Barkley emphasizes that the success of individuals with ADHD relies on the compassion of others. Through sharing glimpses of my ADHD brain, I'd like to reflect on the role of others in my life, and express gratitude, apologies, and more. Thank you to my middle school principal, who understood my unintentional disruptions, and to my classmates, who shared their notes with me despite my waver-

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ing attention. Thank you to my high school teachers for valuing my thoughts beyond my frequent attempts to express them, and to my friends and family for their patience and reminders.

As to my current supportive figures, a special thank you to those who help me search for misplaced items and offer strategies that minimize my time spent searching. Thank you to my wise people, who are willing to help me talk through an idea to clarify something meaningful I want to teach. I rarely give advance notice for that and tend to ask for a lot. Apologies for last-minute invitations, and much appreciation for your understanding. I am especially sorry to anyone who may have felt personally targeted during my passionate discussions. Your recognition of my creativity and initiative, despite inconsistent follow-through, gives me strength to fulfill my goals.

I am most grateful to Hashem for leading me to positions that have aligned with my ADHD traits. Through the journey of writing this book, and as a true example of how one can live – and thrive – with ADHD, I am humbled by the unwavering support, encouragement, and inspiration that I received from countless individuals.

First and foremost, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my husband, Andrew. Marrying you is the best thing I have ever done in my life. Your unwavering belief in me and your constant encouragement have been the driving forces behind everything I undertake. Your love and patience have enabled me to thrive with ADHD. In my journey, you've been my steadfast “pre-frontal cortex,” always helping me think through challenges and navigate decisions with clarity. You've stood beside me, offering strength and balance when I needed it. Your forgiveness and understanding shape how I give to the world. You are truly my “*eizer k'negdi*” and the best teammate I could ask for.

I could not do anything without the love and support of my family. You are all amazing people; Andrew and I, and our children, are

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blessed to have all of you there for them, in every way. I am blessed to have you by my side. Nahum and Ruchie Winkler, Isaac, Rich, Joe, Hannah; Susan and Mitchell Markowitz, Lori, Dani, Stefanie, Adam, Josh, and Estee.

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A heartfelt appreciation goes to Dr. Malky Mayerfeld, who has been my chavrusa in life, and my sounding board in helping me to develop my approach towards effectively taking on ADHD, during the writing process, and in the shiurim I’ve given over the years. To my dear friends whose wisdom, love, guidance, support, and laughter keep me grounded, focused, and energized: Rachel and Dan Geisler, Estee Lightstone, Aviva Distenfeld, Talia Jacobs, Dana and Chaim Gitler, Lauren Frohlinger, Menucha Norowitz, Aliza Rosenwasser, Tzivi Akerman, Rachel Krich, Tzipora Halberstam, Stephanie Hartman, and

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Chaya Ladaew. I am a greater human being because of our friendships, and I am so grateful to all of you.

Ultimately, my deepest gratitude goes to Hashem. Nothing I do could happen without Your hand and kindness. I thank You for creating me with my unique ADHD constellation, and for providing me with the keilim and the people in my life to help me channel my unique traits, so that I can give back in this world. Your divine guidance and blessings are the foundation upon which I build each day, and I am humbled to be a messenger in this holy project.

DR. CHESNER AND DR. MARKOWITZ both want to thank the team of Tiferet Mondrow and Dr. Aliza Lasky-Bier for their selfless devotion and considerable talents in turning a rough manuscript into a living document that serves as the basis for parent, teacher, and professional training programs. Special thanks to Shira Moskowitz for her thoughtful illustrations. They truly capture the essence of the book. In addition, Alec and Caroline Goldstein of Kodesh Press have been exceptional partners in creating *Kosher ADHD*. Although Dr. Markowitz and Dr. Chesner assume professional responsibility for all that is written in the pages that follow, the work is truly the combined efforts and talents of this remarkable team.

This book is intended as a means to guide and educate families within the Jewish community who are struggling with the challenges inherent in raising a child with ADHD. It is not intended to replace professional mental health treatment. All who struggle with the challenges of ADHD are strongly advised to seek professional help to determine what course of treatment is most suited for them.

INTRODUCTION

HOW IS ADHD IN TORAH SOCIETY DIFFERENT FROM GENERAL ADHD?

Nine-year-old Yoni attends shul with his father. Rather than remain seated in his row, Yoni is quickly crawling under his seat, observing the events from his personal, unique perspective. Uri, Yoni's father, notices that Yishai, Yoni's classmate, manages to remain seated throughout the prayer service. Uri bemoans, "What's wrong with my kid? Why can't he just sit still and be normal?" Uri is silent but agitated in thought.

Torah living is a lifestyle that is the privilege and obligation for each and every member of the Jewish people. This is a core premise and a deep Torah value that we hold as observant Jews. Torah Judaism requires each individual to exert effort to direct and manage behaviors in daily life. Life management is dependent upon a set of specific neurological processes called "executive functions." Unfortunately, these executive functions are often the Achilles' heel of children and adults with ADHD. As a result of their basic biology, people with ADHD have tremendous difficulties in performing some or all executive functions. They are often labeled as bad, undisciplined, chutzpadik,

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lazy, or even stupid. Hence they are, in effect, excluded from the Torah community.

The purpose of this book is to open the gates of our community to children and adults with an ADHD temperament and to allow them to integrate as proud, contributing members of the Jewish community. If you are a parent, this book will help you understand and cope better with your child. If you are a teacher, this book will help you better understand and deal with your students. If you are a person with ADHD, this book will help you better understand yourself and cope with challenges yourself.

In this book, ADHD is presented as a biosocial model. This means that neurology and societal expectations are in constant interaction in determining how ADHD is manifest. When the person with ADHD has a meltdown, it is because he or she is experiencing societal demands that are overwhelming and unattainable. When we achieve an equilibrium between societal demands and a child's level of ability, more often than not, we observe positive behavior. When a child's abilities are misaligned with societal demands, we observe frustration, anger, and rejection. Unfortunately, when this negative cycle occurs in Torah society, the ramifications often involve the person with ADHD feeling rejected by, and hence disconnected from, Torah society.

When Biology Meets Torah Society

ADHD is an inborn neurological temperament. Children with ADHD are born with a higher need for stimulation and reinforcement than their neuro-typical peers. They have extreme difficulty tolerating boredom. When society demands certain behaviors that are beyond the child's current ability to perform, the child experiences failure and frustration.

As stated above, *executive functions are the specific area of deficit for children with ADHD*. Our ability to manage our lives effectively

HOW IS ADHD IN TORAH SOCIETY DIFFERENT FROM GENERAL ADHD?

depends on the brain's ability to organize and manage ourselves and the world that surrounds us. **Researchers have described executive functions as those specific tasks that neuro-typical human brains perform in order to organize, manage, and design daily activities.** Unfortunately, a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder experiences tremendous difficulty with executive functioning and hence suffers an inordinate amount of complications in daily living. The child with ADHD struggles with tasks such as self-control, organization, and reflection, all of which are dependent upon executive functioning. Sitting still for long periods of time, concentrating on boring material, and inhibiting impulses may be relatively simple for neuro-typical children. For a child with ADHD these tasks are incredibly strenuous.

Professor Ross Greene, a leading clinician and researcher in the field, and author of the excellent book *The Explosive Child*, cites research proving that children with ADHD create problems when they lack skills necessary to meet parental and teacher expectations. In other words, a child who misbehaves at home or at school does not do so because he or she wants to be bad. However, parents and teachers are often goal-oriented, and they are easily frustrated by a child who lacks specific behavioral skills or executive functioning. As a result, a child's non-compliance often elicits anger rather than compassionate understanding from adults.

When a parent or teacher directs anger towards a child with ADHD, the reaction parallels the manner that earlier generations related to children with learning disabilities. In the past, parents and teachers viewed children with reading difficulties as lazy, unmotivated, or stupid. **Their behaviors were understood as purposeful attempts to behave badly.** Today, research has discovered that children with reading disabilities are born with a neurological lack of certain skills essential for phonetic decoding, and hence have great

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difficulty in grasping reading. The child with dyslexia does not refuse to read because he is not motivated or does not want to learn. Reading inability reflects a biologically based difficulty in performing a task that seems natural to those who do not possess the disability.

In many ways, ADHD is similar to a reading disability, in that it reflects a lack of skill in being able to perform specific behaviors at particular times within a defined context. Similar to learning disabilities, the biological basis of this difficulty is hidden from observation. The child appears totally “normal,” and our knee-jerk reaction is to assume that lack of compliance reflects rebellion or lack of motivation.

How Is ADHD in Torah Society Different from General ADHD?

A child with ADHD is often mismatched to the demands of normative Torah living. When children do not manifest behaviors consistent with halachic norms, it is a severe, yet common, mistake to assume that the child’s behavior reflects a lack of piety or respect. Tragically, the child with ADHD too often experiences the Torah world as punitive and demeaning. Instead of being provided a framework that allows them to connect with a higher part of themselves, children with ADHD often experience the Torah world as an environment that rejects and devalues their basic human dignity.

In the general population, challenges associated with ADHD are often reflected in negative interactions between parents and children at home, as well as conflicts with teachers and peers. The child with ADHD growing up in the traditional Jewish home faces an additional layer of difficulties. Davening with anything approximating kavanah is notoriously difficult. Learning Torah, sitting through a long meal at the Shabbos table, and simply behaving like a *mentsch*, are tasks that frustrate many children with ADHD.

HOW IS ADHD IN TORAH SOCIETY DIFFERENT FROM GENERAL ADHD?

Oftentimes, this poor fit between the child's innate temperament and societal demands becomes the basis of severe conflict and disappointment. Studies indicate that among children with ADHD raised in Torah-observant homes, only a minority continue to live Torah-observant lifestyles beyond adolescence. If the Torah is a tree of life for those who grasp it, children with ADHD represent a tragedy. They are at high risk to seek alternative lifestyles and disconnect from the ultimate source of life. More often than not, children do not abandon the Torah lifestyle because of unresolved questions of faith. Most children who "go off the *derech*" have been subjected to intense criticism and frequent failure.

It is important to note that parents of children with ADHD suffer no less than their children. When parents are dedicated to a Torah-based lifestyle, the suffering is exacerbated. Torah living demands structure and discipline. On the one hand, people with ADHD are desperate for each of these. On the other hand, the typical structure and discipline creates an extremely uncomfortable reality for people with ADHD. Demands to limit one's movements, to be quiet, or to delay gratification, are particularly challenging and at times unattainable for the person with ADHD. We understand these challenges as stemming from an atypical neurological system. **However, unless parents, grandparents, rabbis, teachers, and other caregivers (which we include in the term "meaningful adults") are equipped with the knowledge and tools to restructure the typical environment, they experience tremendous frustration and failure with their children with ADHD.** They become saddened by their children's or grandchildren's loss of religion. Many parents perceive their child's lack of religious identity as reflecting a severe parenting failure in themselves. Teachers must deal with the frustration of not reaching their students. Adults and children are overwhelmed with guilt and anger. Children

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express their anger in the direction of parents, teachers, rabbis, synagogues, and even Hashem.

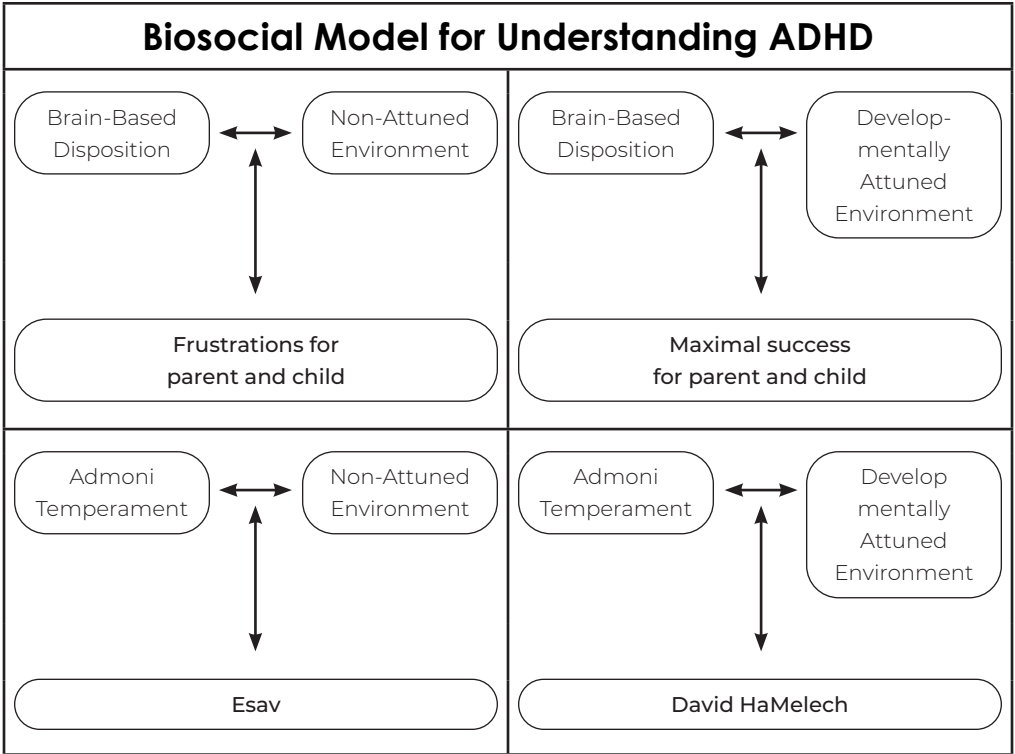
Our message to caregivers for children with ADHD: **please do not beat yourself up if you recognize that you often respond to your child or student with anger.** Because our eyes do not see the complexity of neurological functioning, frustration and anger are normal responses. *In this book, we will teach you how to see your child with ADHD as a person who requires specific skill training and practice in order to comply with our expectations.* **As a result of the poor fit between the basic neuro-biological temperament of the child with ADHD and the demands of society, parenting and educating a child with ADHD is replete with challenges. When parents desire to raise a child with ADHD according to Torah-halachic norms, the challenge is multiplied.**

As clinical psychologists, teachers, and principal of a network of Israeli schools for children with ADHD, we have seen the frustrations and fulfillment of Torah-observant families who have grappled with the challenges of ADHD. We have seen families crumble and children choose lifestyles that are inconsistent with Torah living. Unfortunately, most of these young people have not found fulfillment in their alternate choices either. On the other hand, and more importantly, we have been privileged to witness hundreds of families utilize Torah living as a basis for raising thriving children with ADHD. **To raise ADHD children consistent with a Torah lifestyle, we need to create an attunement between Torah living and the basic emotional needs of the child with ADHD. This attunement requires awareness and commitment on the part of parents and teachers.** We refer to this as “**developmentally attuned parenting.**” Your commitment to read this book is an important step in designing a family and school environment that provides for the needs of children with ADHD, in a positive manner within the framework of Torah living.

HOW IS ADHD IN TORAH SOCIETY DIFFERENT FROM GENERAL ADHD?

Our decades of work with children with ADHD and their families, in the United States and in Israel, at home and at school, has taught us that abandoning a Torah lifestyle is not a foregone conclusion, nor is it in the best interests of the child. In fact, we have found that when Torah living is harmonized with the needs of the child with ADHD, Torah becomes a scaffold that provides emotional and social support. In order to learn how to effectively parent and educate a child with ADHD within a Torah framework, we present a new theoretical basis and understanding of what ADHD is about. We hope that by understanding the nuances of ADHD, parents, educators, and other caregivers will be empowered to relate to these young people in a more positive and productive manner. This book teaches you how to modify yourself and your environment so that you and your child with ADHD experience the thrill of victory more often than the agony of defeat.

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The biosocial model for understanding ADHD conceptualizes ADHD as resulting from an interaction between societal conditions and neurology. This interaction is bi-directional in the sense that environment actually shapes neurology in forming the behaviors of ADHD. In our model, the free will of the individual is always present and capable of being a determinant of behavior. As described in detail in Chapter 1, Admoni is understood as a neurobiological temperament characterized by aggression, but ethically neutral. When utilized by Esav, it was directed towards destruction. When utilized by Dovid HaMelech it was directed towards spiritual elevation.

HOW IS ADHD IN TORAH SOCIETY DIFFERENT FROM GENERAL ADHD?

Biosocial Model for Understanding ADHD	
<p>Brain-Based Disposition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Child born with ADHD tendencies · Difficulty maintaining attention · High need for stimulation <p>Non-Attuned Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Environment demands that child behave like neurotypical children without ADHD features <p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Child feels like a failure · Adults frustrated by child's inability to "behave" 	<p>Brain-Based Disposition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Child born with ADHD tendencies · Difficulty maintaining attention · High need for stimulation <p>Developmentally Attuned Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Environment adjusts to unique needs of child with ADHD <p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Child experiences successes · Adjusted adult expectations are met
<p>Brain-Based Disposition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Child born with "admoni" tendencies · Aggressive/destructive tendencies <p>Non-Attuned Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Provided with the same education as his non-admoni brother <p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Esav · Aggressive tendencies remain · Follows his desires to the extent that he refers to a stew as "that red thing" · Does not develop beyond his inborn Admoni temperament 	<p>Brain-Based Disposition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Child born with "admoni" tendencies · Aggressive/destructive tendencies <p>Developmentally Attuned Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Shmuel is told by Hashem not to worry about the admoni temperament <p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · David HaMelech · King and leader of the Jewish people · Uses admoni temperament to fight wars with the guidance of Sanhedrin · Musician, poet, spiritual leader · Warrior

Our Reader

This book is intended for parents, teachers, and other caregivers within the Torah community who interact with children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder with or without hyperactivity as its central element, or **any other behavioral disorder that creates tension and a lack of compatibility between the child and the demands of his or her environment.** The material applies to boys and girls. It is for those who come from a Chasidic, Litvish, Modern Orthodox, or traditional Jewish family. This book is meant to help parents, teachers, and professionals who work with children who grow up in families where observance of halachah (Jewish law) is of paramount importance, where performing mitzvos is considered to be the path of life that every Jew is expected to follow, and where Torah study is considered to be the royal road towards connecting with Hashem.

How This Book Is Organized

In the chapters that follow, we will go on a journey. The first two chapters of the book contain everything that you need to know about ADHD but were too frightened to ask. We present a theoretical framework for understanding your child's behaviors, one that is grounded in research from the fields of biology, psychology, education, and sociology. Emphasis is placed on how the challenges of ADHD impact specifically a Jewish family trying to raise a Jewish child committed to Torah and halachah.

The middle chapters of the book provide hands-on practical techniques that allow the child and adolescent with ADHD to thrive within a Torah-halachic environment. **We describe principles and techniques in a step-by-step manner that enable the child with ADHD to thrive in the home and school environments.** We present a typical day in the life of a child with ADHD in a Torah-based home

HOW IS ADHD IN TORAH SOCIETY DIFFERENT FROM GENERAL ADHD?

and community. We progress from the challenge of saying “Modeh Ani” upon awakening and continue to each challenge central to Torah living. Davening, Torah study, and Shabbos are elaborated on in detail. In each area we present the specific executive functions that make the task difficult for the child with ADHD. Then we list concrete and practical solutions grounded in our theoretical understanding of ADHD. Our solutions have been tested with hundreds of families across the globe, and we have witnessed their effectiveness in helping children grow both intellectually and emotionally.

Finally, we also present a chapter on how Torah-committed adults with ADHD may adapt to the daily challenges of living as an adult with ADHD within a Torah framework.

One Final Word

As Torah-observant readers, please do not take any advice presented in this book unless it coheres with your personal religious views and those of your Rav. We do not want to cause more conflict by presenting ideas that contradict your religious values. Should this occur, any benefits will be offset by even greater losses. It is important that the ideas presented in this book are in accordance with your personal religious lifestyle and can be integrated into your own home. We have tried to present ideas that are acceptable to all Torah-observant Jews. However, in light of the myriad of opinions and sensitivities regarding this subject, some suggestions may not conform with some religious perspectives. Hence, we strongly suggest that each reader be certain, if necessary through *She'eilas Rav* (consultation with a competent religious leader), that suggestions are within the framework of your family's understanding and application of Torah living.

In addition, at specific points we point to apparent characteristics of great tzaddikim that might seem to indicate weaknesses. This is done for educational and psychological purposes. We do not intend

to disparage any of these individuals whose greatness is beyond our ability to apprehend. Rather, we bring them as examples that allow us to identify our own human shortcomings and to empower ourselves.

Our Prayer

May it be Your will, O Lord our God, that no stumbling block should occur through us, that we shall not fail in a point of law so that our colleagues rejoice because of us, that we shall not declare the impure pure, or the pure impure, and that our colleagues shall not fail in a point of law so that we will rejoice because of them.

For God shall grant wisdom; knowledge and understanding are from His mouth.

Open our eyes so we may look upon wonders from Your Torah.

Simcha Pinchas Chesner, Ph.D.

Maale Adumim, Israel

Sara Winkler Markowitz, Ph.D.

Fairlawn, New Jersey

Tishrei, 5783

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Key Points

- Torah living requires managing, planning and sublimating impulses so that our natural self displays dignity and Godliness.
- The capacities in our brain to manage, plan, organize, and sublimate basic impulses are called executive functions.
- People with ADHD struggle with executive functions.
- The biosocial model: the way ADHD expresses itself is based on an interaction between biology (the ADHD brain's neurological makeup) and society (what society expects from the individual with ADHD).
- ADHD-based behaviors do not reflect a desire to fail, destroy, or sin; they result from a mismatch between the way the person is wired and the things society expects from them.
- This book provides a framework for understanding ADHD within a Torah context and practical techniques for overcoming the challenges. It also offers methods for harnessing the strengths of ADHD in living as a Torah Jew.

What Do You Think?

When you think about someone with ADHD, what are some examples of the mismatch between their neurology and societal expectations?

**SECTION 1: ON CREATING A
DEVELOPMENTALLY ATTUNED
TORAH ENVIRONMENT FOR
THE CHILD WITH ADHD**

CHAPTER 1

ADHD: A CLASH BETWEEN INBORN NEUROLOGY AND SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS

The perspective of ADHD presented in this book is that ADHD is not a disease such as cancer, diabetes, or even depression. Diseases are physiological processes that incapacitate one's living and ultimately may lead to death. ADHD, on the other hand, is a neurological predisposition characterized by lack of sustained focus and in most cases, impulsivity and hyperactivity. This neurological predilection leads to behaviors that do not mesh well with many of our societal expectations. A highly active youngster may have difficulties sitting through a lengthy Shabbos meal, or keeping his attention focused during a typical class. These neurologically based challenges often lead the child to behave in manners that are considered inappropriate, and he is likely to be the subject of criticism and even scorn. Most adults, uninformed of the neurological basis of ADHD, react to the child's behaviors with judgment and criticism.

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However, when a child with ADHD is not participating in davening at shul or learning in school, it is a tragic error to conclude that the child is behaving in a “chutzpadik” manner without Yiras Shamayim. On the contrary, we strongly suggest that parents and teachers should understand how our expectations, particularly as they relate to their children’s Judaism, are misguided and ill-suited for the child born with an ADHD temperament. In other words, the problem is not unilateral and centered in either the child or the parent/teacher. ***The challenge is transactional and emerges as problematic when a there is a poor fit between societal expectations and children’s inborn temperament.***

The idea that inborn traits are influenced by environment is not new, but was already expressed by the Rambam approximately 900 years ago. In his *Hilchos Deios* (1:2), he writes:

And there are character traits that are inborn, in the sense that one’s nature is inclined towards them and one is likely to internalize them faster than other traits.

With these words, Rambam is teaching what we call today “neurological predisposition.” Each brain is primed to react in a singular fashion to environmental influences. Hence, it is extremely important for parents to learn how to interact with their children in a manner that reduces the likelihood that the maladaptive aspects of the ADHD-wired brain’s predisposition will manifest themselves.

Although we believe that a formal diagnosis is helpful, if your concerns stem from behaviors that are on the ADHD continuum, then the ideas we present are very important whether or not your child has a formal diagnosis. ***Severe cases of ADHD require medical and professional treatment. All children who are experiencing difficulties stemming from symptoms that resemble ADHD require sensitive and***

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effective parenting in order to prevent the neurological predisposition from developing from a difficulty into a tragedy.

The theoretical model presented in this book is important for parents and teachers, because it explains why ADHD is a problem that does not respond to Musar and exhortation. Children with ADHD are not off the *derech*. ***These are children with ADHD who have not had their basic psychological needs met by the Torah world. Torah living has not provided them with basic security, mastery, or connection. They might feel adrift, unwanted, and incompetent.*** Because they have experienced rejection within Torah society, they are naturally averse to all efforts to integrate. A tragic cycle often transpires in which parental efforts geared to connecting the child with normative Torah living result in more alienation from the Torah lifestyle.

If you are a parent and your child is inattentive, impulsive, and perhaps also hyperactive, you may suspect your child suffers from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Perhaps a physician or mental health professional has already diagnosed your child with ADHD. Whether or not you have obtained a formal diagnosis is not, in our view, the central issue. ***The central issue is whether your child is suffering as a result of certain traits that make it difficult to fit in with the typical group of children his or her age and with your family.*** From a scientific perspective, anyone who displays behaviors that are extreme enough to be different from at least 97 percent of others is considered to be disordered, assuming these behaviors cause pain and suffering. Traditionally, ADHD is formally diagnosed in between 3-5 percent of the population (1.5 to 2 standard deviations from the norm) in relation to degree of attention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. ***However, as a parent or teacher, statistical percentages are not exceedingly relevant. Of greater importance is your child's suffering.***

If you are a parent or teacher, then the child who is more disorganized and inattentive than even 80 percent of the other children is

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likely to experience a great deal of criticism and negative interactions. His or her self-esteem is likely being damaged. Although psychological and medical professionals may not diagnose that child as ADHD, he or she is undoubtedly suffering. As a parent, teacher, or concerned adult, helping the child to develop skills and cope will change the quality of his or her life.

The important point is that as of today, a diagnosis of ADHD is based upon the presence of behaviors to an extreme degree. There is no blood test or brain scan that can reliably diagnose this problem. The “relative” nature of ADHD makes it different from physical illnesses that medicine is equipped to treat. We have all witnessed the development of medical procedures, drugs, and vaccines designed to combat physical illness. Medical science has made tremendous strides in its battle with disease. However, ADHD is not a disease. Our perspective is that ADHD describes a combination of behaviors that reflect a particular way that the individual’s brain is wired. When born with a specific type of brain-wiring, an individual is predisposed to develop the symptoms that since 1970 we have referred to as Attention Deficit Disorder. Our actions in interacting with the child significantly influence the degree to which ADHD symptoms appear. In other words, although ADHD is an inborn predisposition of the brain, the actual presence of ADHD is highly influenced by the manner in which adults interact with the child.

The Neurological Predisposition

In order to optimize parenting and teaching, it is imperative to understand ADHD as a disability of controlling impulses and maintaining directed activity in essential situations. Attention deficits are external symptoms that reflect a hidden, unobservable deficit in self-regulation. Current neurological and psychological conceptualizations understand the fundamental problem to be one of self-control.

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Self-control is understood as a skill that can be taught and developed, similar to reading or math. Obviously, when we are able to identify our children's struggle, we are far better able to empathize with them and relate with compassion. We will present in a clear fashion the connection between ADHD and self-regulation in general, and in particular the challenges that this deficit presents in a Torah-observant home. We are convinced that understanding these challenges is essential for optimal parenting and teaching.

Executive Functions

As mentioned earlier, children with ADHD experience difficulty with executive functions. This executive functioning deficit combined with the ADHD child's inborn temperament is the template that shapes the multifaceted behaviors of the child with ADHD.

In scientific terminology, "executive functions" refer to organizing principles through which the human brain expresses itself in managing the multiple challenges of daily life. They are actually crucial to the accomplishment of a surprisingly vast range of simple daily living activities. For example, one executive function is inhibition of emotions and impulses. This refers to the human brain's ability to control impulsive lusts and desires when their expression is not helpful for the individual and acceptable to society. Whereas an individual with a well-developed capacity for inhibition might be able to respond calmly to a frustrating change in plans, a child with ADHD may lack that internal "gatekeeper" for his frustration and respond to the same change of plans with an angry outburst.

Likewise, "working memory" is an executive function that individuals without ADHD rely on nearly constantly. Working memory has been described as almost a mental notepad in which we store snippets of information such as, "Oh, I have to pick up the dry cleaning later" or "Right, it's my friend's birthday today." When working

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memory is not functioning properly, it becomes hard to keep track of the numerous small tasks that we want to accomplish throughout the day. A child with ADHD, for example, who struggles with this area of executive functioning may easily lose track of his mother's reminder in the morning to "please, *please* bring your lunchbox back from school."

Other areas of executive functioning include tasks like organization, self-reflection, attention, planning, and more. It takes only a moment of consideration to realize how significantly one's life is impacted by challenges across these domains.

Executive Functions

Executive functions are like the brain's management team. A company's management has to keep in mind the larger goals of the company, motivating and prompting action that will further those goals and stopping action that departs from those goals.

Specific Executive Functions

NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of executive functions but rather a sampling of some of the most common executive functioning domains where people with ADHD have trouble.

- **Inhibition:** This is the big one. Inhibition is the ability to STOP when needed. Inhibition can help a person to stop:
 - paying attention to distractions
 - engaging in unhelpful actions
 - acting out what they're feeling
- **Initiation**
 - In order to start doing whatever it is you want to do, you have to first STOP doing everything else. Someone who has trouble with this executive function may fully intend to do

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a task (homework, cleaning their room, etc.) but never get around to it.

- Foresight and Hindsight
 - With ADHD, it can feel like the past and future do not exist. There is only NOW. And when you are only aware of the current moment, who cares about the trouble you got into last week for rollerblading around the house when right NOW, it seems like so much fun?!
- Sense of Time
 - Without a good sense of time, it can feel like boring activities (like a class) are stretching on forever while fun activities (like playing ball) have only been going on for a few minutes.
- Organization
 - The ability to organize information makes everyday tasks feel more manageable. If told to clear off the dinner table, the neuro-typical child may decide to first clear off all the dishes, then put away the food. In contrast, a child with ADHD may take two forks off the table, then the salad, then a plate, then the chicken. When information is not organized, it can feel overwhelming and complicated.
- Flexibility
 - When things do not go according to plan, it is important to adjust your plan on the move in light of new information. For individuals with ADHD, flexibility is difficult, which can cause them to stick to a plan that is no longer useful.
- Self-Talk
 - From a young age, we learn to talk through problems with ourselves in order to solve them. As adults, this can take the form of thinking things through or writing things out. Self-talk requires STOPPING for long enough to think things

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through. Difficulties with self-talk often lead people with ADHD to engage in impulsive behaviors.

- Working Memory
 - Working memory is like the brain's notepad, a place to keep information handy that is relevant to the current situation. In ADHD, working memory is not as readily available, sometimes leading to decisions that are not aligned with the individual's true goals and values.

ADHD Is a Disability of Self-Control and Is Not Simply a Failure to Pay Attention

We believe that the notion of ADHD-type behavior is depicted well by the 19th-century writer Mark Twain. Although writing a full century before ADHD was defined as a psychiatric disorder, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain provides an accurate portrayal of adolescent boys with ADHD-like symptoms. Twain's writings provide a window of insight into the internal world of the frustrated young man, struggling to live with ADHD-like symptoms, in a world relatively blind and deaf to the personal experience of the suffering individual.

The intense and unobserved discomfort of children who are neuro-atypical is captured masterfully in Twain's depiction of Huck Finn getting dressed.

The widow she cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up.

Any parent who has ever struggled with their child over getting dressed in Shabbos clothes can clearly identify with these lines. Although most

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people enjoy the experience of wearing a special outfit, for many kids with ADHD (and other neuro-atypical brains), Shabbos clothes feel like being confined to a straightjacket. As frum Jews, dressing in relatively formal attire is a socially accepted and expected ritual. A child who suffers from a form of what professionals call “**tactile defensiveness**,” an exaggerated sensitivity to stimuli such as sound, touch, or vision, is easily criticized, ostracized, and viewed as rebellious.

Huck Finn continues to describe his experience of a formal meal at the dining room table.

The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come on time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn't really anything the matter with them,—that is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.

If Huck was a frum Jew, we would note many things lacking in his chinuch. First, he seems to have no understanding of self-control. When he gets to the table, all he wants to do is eat. Anything which delays immediate gratification is anathema to him. Huck Finn resembles the story in Chumash of Esav, who impulsively sold the birthright to Yaakov and devoured the red lentil porridge in an animalistic manner. Handwashing and berachos, not to mention any form of dining room decorum, are impudently disregarded. We habitually have knee-jerk criticism to children who cannot focus on these traditional rituals.

The first challenge facing parents of children with ADHD is to refrain from jumping to conclusions about the child's moral character based on samples of behavior.

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It is easy to comprehend that a child with one leg is unlikely to win an Olympic gold medal in the one-hundred-yard dash. Advancements over the past half-century have also led us to understand that many children with learning difficulties demonstrate innate learning disabilities that do not reflect laziness or lack of motivation. Only recently have researchers begun to comprehend that **ADHD is a form of behavior disability**, in a sense parallel to learning disabilities. Because our current state of technology does not allow us to actually see ADHD in the same manner that one can observe or detect the presence of a virus, it is harder for us to believe that this condition truly exists. However, today we can state unequivocally that a great deal of variance exists between people in terms of their behavioral capabilities. For some, self-restraint and self-control are relatively simple. For others, restraining impulse is more difficult than climbing Mount Everest.

Professor Russell Barkley is among the most prominent researchers in the realm of ADHD. In 1991, he was the first scientist to proclaim that ADHD is primarily a disorder of self-control. Over the past thirty years numerous studies have confirmed that people with ADHD are less sensitive to reinforcement, more prone to make errors based on impulsivity, and less able to restrain themselves from partaking in immediate gratification.

Thus, a child with ADHD may have difficulty davening if Hashem does not answer immediately. She may have trouble not touching carefully set place settings on the carefully set Shabbos table when waiting for Kiddush on Friday night. He may not be able to refrain from ice cream after his hot dog (in violation of the prohibition against eating milk after meat), even though friends of the same age may have already mastered this skill. The price paid for such behavior is enormous. Punishment for their actions is administered through formal and informal channels.

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People with ADHD receive poorer grades, have fewer friends, are involved in more automobile accidents, and are more likely to get divorced than peers of the general population. Children within the frum community are similar to the general population. However, in the Torah world, the sources of punishment are Torah institutions and their representatives. This leads many frum children to distance themselves and disconnect from all things related to Torah-life. To make matters more absurd and tragic, punishment does not lead to meaningful or sustained behavioral change.

Punishment appears to be ineffective in managing ADHD, because when we punish we do not offer any support for the underlying behavioral disability. Punishment does not teach effective problem-solving, cognitive flexibility, or mindful self-reflection. **Technological advances on equipment such as fMRIs are proving that the ADHD brain is different from a neuro-typical brain. Behaviors that are equivalent to lifting ten pounds for the neuro-typical brain are equal to lifting one hundred pounds for the ADHD brain. Understanding the physiological, neurological basis of ADHD allows us to develop empathy and compassion rather than anger.**

Anger leads adults to engage in punitive behaviors. We act harshly towards children and justify our actions with the rationalization that punishment is a powerful method to teach appropriate behavior. Unfortunately, at least in the current generation, punishment is ineffective as a primary means of child-rearing or educating. In addition to not providing positive guidance, punishment is largely ineffective because of the greater individual freedom that is inherent to life in the twenty-first century. Earlier times made each of us much more dependent upon our families and communities. Physical survival literally depended upon belonging to a particular clan that could protect and ensure that our basic needs were met. Urbanization, modernity,

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and the recent explosion of communication-based technology have shattered the fetters of dependency that used to bind families and communities together.

Today, the entire world has become a village in the sense that physical location does not limit communication, at least to those fortunate enough to have access to a personal computer or smartphone. As the electronic media has opened vistas and destroyed boundaries, dependency upon family and identifying with the local group has become less relevant, at least in terms of physical survival. A child who does not find fulfillment of basic needs within one group can easily migrate to another in the hopes of finding refuge and haven.

When we understand that ADHD is a disorder, rooted in behavioral disabilities, we are not advocating a permissive approach to dealing with these challenges. On the contrary, it is critically important for people to learn how to manage and regulate their behaviors if they are to have a chance at succeeding in today's society. Professor Barkley poignantly stated, **"ADHD is an explanation for behavior, not an excuse!"** If anything, it requires more parental monitoring and more child accountability, not less.

Decades ago, Stanford psychologist Professor Walter Mischel conducted the now-famous marshmallow test. Mischel's study demonstrated that only one-third of four- and five-year-old children were capable of resisting eating a marshmallow and delaying gratification for several minutes. However, those children who displayed the ability to delay gratification were more successful on every outcome a decade later. Children with high levels of self-control at a young age were more successful academically, had significantly higher standardized test scores, were more popular, and earned more money than their peers who displayed less self-regulation. When we say that someone has ADHD, we are not offering an excuse for his or her behavior. We are merely offering a non-judgmental explanation. Once we understand

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that ADHD is a neurologically based condition that makes it challenging to compete in the world, we may begin to help the individual with ADHD learn methods of coping and enhancing self-regulation skills. **When we do this without criticism, we become wise mentors that are capable of removing the person with ADHD from the shackles of frustration and failure.**

The Torah-observant home usually centers around Torah study. Unfortunately, critical and judgmental attitudes concerning the person with ADHD are likely present in this realm. Educators in the 21st century use terms such as “differential instruction” or “multiple intelligences” to highlight the diversity of human thinking and problem-solving. Sadly, many – but certainly not all – educational institutions, including yeshivas, seminaries and Jewish day schools, reflect outmoded thinking regarding the process of learning. Even institutions where the necessity of differential instruction is recognized are significantly lacking in funding. Schools are caught in a desperate attempt to abandon the unidimensional models of intelligence that characterized the past and to transform into environments that cultivate and empower individual strengths, even if these strengths are not displayed in formal “book” learning. As we have stated above, when Torah institutions do not provide for the child’s basic needs, most children in the twenty-first century abandon the society that rejects or abuses them and seek satisfaction in other settings.

Societal Expectations and Reactions

Although ADHD is an inborn, neurologically based predisposition, our actions in interacting with the child significantly influence the degree to which ADHD symptoms appear. In other words, **the actual presence of ADHD is highly influenced by the manner in which adults interact with the child.**

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When we are able to use our executive functions in an efficient manner, we satisfy our emotional needs and live satisfying and productive lives. For example, when a child behaves well at school, teachers tend to praise her and reinforce her good behavior. When parents receive a report that their child displays positive behavior at school, they are pleased and heap additional praise and rewards upon the child. These behaviors create a “magical cycle of positive reinforcement.” Parents are happy and the child is happy. The child feels a strong connection with her parents. The child feels a high level of competency. School is experienced as being meaningful and the continued positive reinforcement creates pleasurable experiences for the child. ***At the root of this magical cycle is the executive function of inhibition. Because the child is capable of exercising self-inhibition, emotional needs are met and reinforced.***

In contrast, when a child struggles with self-control, inhibition, and other executive functions, the important adults in his or her life may be not only less likely to express praise and provide reinforcement, but also more likely to express disappointment and provide criticism. Thus, the magical cycle of positive reinforcement described above may quickly be replaced by an equally powerful cycle of negative feedback. For example, when a child has difficulty sitting still at school and instead runs around the classroom, teachers tend to try to control the child’s behavior. When parents receive a report that their child, once again, has misbehaved in school, they are displeased and may sigh, “Why can’t you just sit still for once?” Parents are unhappy, and the child is unhappy. The child feels incompetent and unable to please the adults in their life. School is experienced as punitive and the continued negative feedback cycle further reinforces the child’s belief that they are flawed or misunderstood.

How can we create positively reinforcing experiences for the child with ADHD? To allow children with ADHD to succeed, par-

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ents and educators must adapt their responses to the child to fit the child's unique needs. A neurological predisposition is no more than an inborn tendency. However, the way that the environment around the child responds to his or her neurological makeup has a major influence on the way the child's inborn tendencies will develop and express themselves.

The Esav-David Admoni Temperament

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch poignantly describes the need to teach in a differentiated manner (commentary to Bereishis 25:27). Sefer Bereishis describes the personal development of two twins, Esav and Yaakov. Esav is described as an "admoni" (reddish) who is a hunter and a man of the field. In contrast, Yaakov is a simple man who dwells in tents. Rav Hirsch comments on the word, "And the children grew up..." He notes that in their early development, the difference in temperaments between Esav and Yaakov was not apparent. Only in adolescence did the "admoni" nature of Esav fully become manifest, in contrast to the more cerebral nature of Yaakov. Rav Hirsch notes that when both boys were placed in the same classroom, Esav's fate was tragically sealed. Esav required more active learning, more hands-on experiences, and the ability to develop his inborn traits in a naturalistic environment. Yaakov was more suited for traditional forms of academic study. Yaakov grew into an outstanding student of Torah. Esav abandoned the Torah lifestyle and violently alienated himself from the traditions of his parents.

Rav Hirsch notes that Esav's detachment was in fact a tragedy, for he, too, was intended to enter into the tent of his grandfather Avraham. Many generations later, no one other than David is described as also having an "admoni" temperament. In fact, the very first time Shmuel the Prophet saw David, the first attribute used to describe David is "admoni." A Midrash on this verse notes that Shmuel was perplexed

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and anxious when he discerned the admoni temperament shared by David and Esav. He was concerned that David too would have murderous tendencies. However, Hashem Himself taught Shmuel that these tendencies are energy forces, which when channeled properly allow for excellent leadership. These very qualities grant David the right to attain kingship over Israel (1 Shmuel 16:12).

In today's scientific milieu, we understand that children with ADHD have brains that are neuro-atypical. Their cognitive apparatus works differently than the majority of people. Hence they often do not smoothly fit in to the predetermined categories established to fit the majority. Our knee-jerk reaction to this tends to be an attempt to force them into our established categories. As Rav Hirsch points out, this method usually has disastrous results. ***Rather than squashing the ADHD temperament, educators, psychologists, and parents must learn to help children cultivate and develop their natural tendencies. This is an extraordinarily difficult task. It requires an intense ability to see the essential nature of the child and to believe that all human capability can be actualized in a positive direction.***

In the next chapter, we describe a model of ADHD that vividly explains how a poor fit between temperament and environment damages the developmental “self” of the child with ADHD. Although the information presented is based on psychological theory, it is an essential piece in understanding how – as parents and teachers – we may develop empathy for the child with ADHD. We suggest you study it before actually using the program with your child or students.

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Key Points

- The Rambam recognizes that character traits are widely distributed among the population of humans.
 - Many character traits of individuals with ADHD reflect inherent “brain-wiring.”
 - For example, people with ADHD have a harder time exercising self-control and maintaining interest in things that don’t provide instant gratification.
- Sometimes, our expectation of normative behavior in Torah society is not the “norm” for someone with ADHD.
 - For example, sitting still for a fifteen-minute Mincha may be normative and expected for the “typical” adult, but may be excruciatingly painful and challenging for someone with ADHD.
- Compassionate understanding needs to replace judgmental criticism when relating to individuals struggling with ADHD in the Torah world.
 - When we express a message of “You’re not a mentsch” or “not a ben Torah,” we teach children to fail in the Torah world.
 - When we focus on positive progress that allows the child to utilize strengths, we help the child overcome challenges and we fulfill the imperative of providing chinuch “al pi darko.”
- The Esav-David Admoni Temperament
 - Esav and David HaMelech had similar character traits but turned out completely different from each other.
- Rather than squashing the ADHD temperament, educators, psychologists, and parents must learn to help children cultivate and develop their natural tendencies. This is an extraordinarily difficult task. It requires an intense ability to see the essential nature of the

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child and to believe that all human capability can be channeled or sublimated in a positive direction.

What Do You Think?

Thinking about your self/child/student with ADHD, what are some of the characteristics that you've noticed in them? What are some ways those characteristics could be channeled in a positive manner?

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPMENTALLY ATTUNED PARENTING

PARENTS AND TEACHERS AS PARTNERS IN CREATION OF THE SELF

Dr. Heinz Kohut, the father of self-psychology, posited that the human self develops in reaction to intensely powerful interactions between the infant and the environment. Kohut stated that the earliest stage of self-awareness develops as the infant responds to the wondrous reactions of the adults around her. The second stage of self stems from what Kohut called the toddler's idealization of the parents. In this stage, parents are viewed as omniscient and omnipotent, and the young child accepts the rules of the universe that they provide. The third stage of self-development occurs when the child sees parents as a form of alter ego, a being similar enough to the child so that the child identifies with the parents and internalizes their principles and values.

Kohut and his students were astute observers of internal and interpersonal struggles. In our work with parents and children with ADHD, we have found it useful to modify Kohut's work and to view the devel-

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opment of self in children with ADHD as a product of the interactions between the child's neurological temperament and the environment around him. Our focus is more on what parents, teachers, and concerned adults need to do in order to provide for the psychological needs of the developing child.

We have already explained that children with ADHD are neurologically primed to be more inattentive and, in many cases, more hyperactive and impulsive than the average child. When the active or impulsive child meets the demands and limitations of the external world, the result is often failure and frustration.

"Jenny can't sit in her seat and keep her attention focused as much as the other children in her class."

"Michael refuses to sit through Shabbos davening."

"Yoni is stealing money from his parents so that he can buy candies for himself and friends at school."

Each of these children has ADHD, and each likely faces negative interactions as a result of their behaviors. When parents react negatively to these behaviors, the child develops an apathy comprising a defensive armor that protects the child from negativity and hostility. Moreover, it establishes a negative cycle that distorts the natural stages of parent-child interaction as described by Kohut.

Our selves develop out of three stages of interaction. We call these stages the stage of wonder, the stage of self-limitation, and the stage of identification. When parents are attuned to the temperament of the child, each stage serves to expand and strengthen the child's sense of self. On the other hand, when parents are oblivious to or unable to be attuned to the child's temperament, each stage may impede the child's self-development. Unfortunately, in most families, the child with ADHD does not receive developmentally attuned parenting, and

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hence emerges with a wounded self. We will describe each stage in light of the challenges that the particular stage presents in parenting a child with ADHD.

When parents, teachers, therapists, and other adults relate to the child with ADHD in a manner that is consistent with the child's emotional-developmental needs, they provide developmentally attuned nurturing and become partners with God in the process of creation. In our daily recitation of the Shacharis prayer, we describe God as "He who renews each day the act of creation." Similarly, caring adults have the opportunity to restore the damaged self of the child with ADHD on a daily basis. When criticism is replaced with wonder, when neglect and harsh rigidity are replaced with consistent yet flexible boundaries, and when critical lectures are replaced with living role models, then the child's self is reinvigorated with the capacity to live a full life.

At times, we feel powerless, especially when our children with ADHD display extremely maladaptive behaviors. In these moments, when we are near despair, many are assisted by recalling the wisdom of Rabbi Akiva, who understood that soft water, when consistently applied, can eventually change the hardest of rocks. This insight motivated the forty-year-old Akiva to begin studying basic Jewish wisdom and ultimately become one of the greatest scholars in Jewish history. When we apply the insights of child development to interactions with children with ADHD, we are capable of changing the course of not only their lives, but also our own.

Stage 1: The Stage of Wonder

Learning to observe our children with wonder comes naturally to all humans. Dr. Heinz Kohut noted that the wonder conveyed to our children provides the seeds of self-esteem. In fact, children come to know that they possess a "self" as a direct result of numerous interactions with them in which we marvel at their basic existence.

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When I (SC) teach college students who are learning to become teachers, I ask them what comes to mind when they think of babies. Their responses are always incredibly positive. Babies are cute, sweet, innocent, soft, cuddly, and loving. At this point, I reluctantly play the role of fantasy's executioner and point out, that in fact, babies tend to be extremely self-centered and egotistical, and they display no concern for anyone or anything except for their own immediate needs. Naturally, my students are horrified. My words appear to contradict the natural tendency to love, ogle at, and provide enormous amounts of positive feedback to human infants. We are infatuated with them and want to provide them with tremendous positive interactions. God's wisdom imbued human nature with natural wonder and amazement towards our young offspring. This process, according to Kohut and others, allows each of us to develop a sense of self and, over time, to value that sense of self. In cases where we do not provide enormous quantities of wonder, the sense of self is severely damaged or underdeveloped.

Children with ADHD tend to receive significant "wonder" deficits from parents and significant adults. First, if the child is highly active, parents are likely to spend most of their time and energy simply taking precautions to ensure that he is not engaged in destructive or negative behavior. When the child is engaged in non-risk-taking behavior, parents tend to utilize the respite from constant monitoring in order to be involved with other life issues. The high level of surveillance needed to assure safety tends to be of a critical nature. Non-destructive and low-risk behavior tends to be unnoticed and not reinforced. Inadvertently, parents – and later on, teachers – tend to ignore positive behavior and provide reinforcement in the form of attention for negative behavior. There are numerous research studies that display beyond any doubt that children with ADHD receive significantly less positive attention for positive behavior and significantly more criticism than their non-

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ADHD, more neurologically normative, peers. Unfortunately, failing to see the child with ADHD in a grounded, even-handed manner has significant negative consequences. Children with ADHD tend to be severely criticized, hence they are highly self-critical.

The ability to observe our children realistically and in a deeply present manner is the foundation of establishing a healthy sense of self in children with ADHD. In a similar manner, the Torah recognizes the observation of reality, in a mindful manner, to be essential for meaningful living. In Sefer Shemos chapter 3, Moshe was shepherding a flock of sheep. One day he took notice of a bush, apparently on fire, yet not being consumed. Moshe's curiosity was aroused. He deviated from his regular course and approached the unusual phenomenon of the burning bush.

Moshe experienced wonder with the burning bush. The Torah states, "And Moshe said, 'I will deviate from my usual course, and observe this remarkable site and attempt to understand why the bush is not consumed.' And God saw that he turned from his usual path in order to observe, and said, 'Moshe! Moshe!' and Moshe replied, 'Here I am.'"

It is easy to imagine that on that fateful day, many other shepherds mindlessly bypassed the burning bush without noticing the wondrous phenomenon. Moshe, by mindful awareness, displayed wondrous observation. When we use Moshe's behavior as that of a role model, we see that curiosity and wondrous attention to our immediate environment is necessary and praiseworthy. By being capable of "seeing our children" as they are, not as we would imagine or wish them to be – and at the same time noting their actual existence – we are performing the fundamental act of developmentally attuned parenting.

Stage 2: Internalization and Boundaries

Kohut referred to the next stage in development of the self as one characterized by idealization, in which children view parents as all-powerful and all-knowing. Idealization of parents is what allows children to internalize their parents' values.

Parents and concerned adults need to understand that children accept authority because they place incredible trust in the adults around them. When a very young child idealizes her parents, she is able to accept their rules and regulations. As children develop, and certainly by the time they reach the stage of adolescence, their evaluation of parents is much more critical. School-age children are capable of accepting adult rules, when they view the adults making the rules as wise and benevolent. Most children with ADHD experience a high level of negative interactions with those around them. Being neurologically wired for impulsivity and for high stimulation situations, children with ADHD tend to be psychologically unprepared to accept and internalize limitations and rules established by authorities. Failure to internalize limitations often leads to disastrous consequences.

Let's try to see the classroom through the eyes of eight-year-old Ariel, who is in third grade. Since kindergarten, Ariel has been in trouble for not sitting still, as he would not stay in his seat for story time. Back in kindergarten, Ariel was interested in stories, but he needed to be moving around when he listened to them. Unfortunately, his kindergarten teacher did not understand that motor control is a developmental task that each child progresses through at an individual pace. She interpreted Ariel's movements as indicative of disrespect and lack of motivation. She would yell at him and force him to sit in his chair for several minutes after story time, while the other children were allowed to play in the yard.

By the time Ariel reached third grade, he had already developed the basic structure of the defensive tower that we described earlier. He

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is sad that, unlike many other children, he cannot sit still, but he has learned to hide his sadness beneath anger and misbehavior. He has learned that, at times, apathy is a terrific way to get people off his back, and he acts as if he simply does not care. When adults interact with Ariel, they are confronted with his defenses of apathy, anger, or sadness and are often put off. Rather than attempt to educate and guide, and respond with empathy, they are likely to revert to rigid criticism, judgment, and punishment.



"Come on Yoni, just look at the page. We're praising Hashem, Master of the universe! Can't you pay attention like the other boys?"

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It ought to be no surprise that Ariel develops much distrust towards his adult caretakers. He is likely to understand their rules as hostile and unhelpful. He is convinced that adults, and the “system,” certainly do not understand him or have his best interests at heart. An internalized narrative – one in which the adult world is seen as threatening and ominous – reflects the reality of most children with ADHD. Moreover, we have already depicted the lack of wondrous observation that reflects the experience of most children with ADHD. This results in most children with ADHD possessing a more ambivalent or negatively valenced view of parents and caretakers. All of these factors tend to make “rule-following” harder for them. Sensitivity to the child’s narrative is critical and requires developmentally attuned parents to make significant modifications in rule setting for their children with ADHD.

Stage 3: Identification and Internalization

“What you do speaks so loudly, I cannot hear a word you are saying.”

The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson used these pithy words to express a truth about human behavior. We are much more influenced by observing actions than by words, no matter how eloquent the speaker.

The first two stages of development require us to express wonder at the child’s development and to clearly delineate expectations and goals. Now we describe the absolute necessity for parents and teachers to exemplify the values that they preach.

Psychologist Albert Bandura studied the profound influence of role models on human behavior. Numerous studies confirm that kindness, compassion, aggression, and violence are all behaviors that can be learned from others. When children observe adults acting aggressively, they, too, imitate aggression. When children observe adults relating with compassion, they emulate compassion.

The primary role models for children are their parents. Even though your teenager may be proclaiming at every opportunity that

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the last thing he ever wants to be is like his parents, research confirms that the overwhelming majority of us, in the final analysis, attempt to emulate our parents. Children absorb behaviors and values from parents without being aware of it. This simple fact places a great responsibility on our shoulders, as we are seen as role models.



"Yoni, you sat through all of birchos ha-shachar! Time for a well-deserved break! I'll see you back here for Shema."

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Children with ADHD tend to receive significantly higher doses of criticism from adults, and negative judgment at home and at school. These negative interactions lead many children to seek alternate role models that provide greater amounts of kindness and compassion. These newly-found nurturers are anathema to many parental and societal values and principles. Too many children with ADHD become attached to groups that value drug use, dropping out of school, or crime, as an escape from a critical, rejecting family and community. For children with ADHD who grow up in a Torah environment, they view rebellion against the critical institutions such as home or school as the only means of escaping severe criticism and judgment. When children break with parental values, especially Torah values, the heart-break to parents is enormous. Many parents find themselves stuck on a teeter-totter tilting from self-blame to anger at their ungrateful children. Developmentally attuned parenting requires parents of children with ADHD to clearly represent themselves as role models worthy of emulation. Of course, this is challenging even with neuro-typical children. With the added stress and challenges of raising a child with ADHD, displaying yourself as a model to be emulated becomes ever more challenging.

Although challenging, meaningful adults are capable of becoming attuned with the social and emotional needs that comprise the child's internal world. The process of becoming developmentally attuned is characterized by the three steps described previously: Wonder, Self-Limitation for mutual benefit, and Role Modeling. Adults who successfully perform these steps become developmentally aligned with the child's soul. In effect, the process of developmental attunement is a means of providing for four primary needs of the human soul. These needs have been described by theorists and researchers throughout the past one hundred and fifty years and are actually known as needs

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reflecting four major schools of psychological research. In order to help in remembering these needs, we refer to them by the acronym CAMP:

- **C** represents “connection” and reflects the centrality of attachment needs.
- **A** is “ability” and refers to our subjective sense of efficacy or how capable we are of accomplishing important tasks.
- **M** refers to “meaning” and reflects the sense of purpose or personal significance that we feel in our life.
- **P** is for “pleasure” and reflects the sense of positive enjoyment as opposed to suffering in our existence.

When a meaningful adult engages in the self-enhancing steps of wonder, self-limitation, and role modeling, he or she is, by definition, feeding the basic needs of the human soul. When this occurs in a Torah-based situation, the meaningful adults contribute to the creation of a “developmentally attuned Torah environment” (DATE) and significantly enhance the likelihood that the child will embrace the Torah world.

Years ago, a teenage student with severe ADHD penned a composition in which he described in vivid nature the significance of meeting CAMP needs. In response to an English teacher’s request for the student to describe himself as an inanimate object, he penned the following:

I am a notebook. I was born clean and shiny, but then I was thoughtlessly thrown on the floor. I was kicked around and tossed from person to person as if I was a toy. I was opened and closed by strangers without ever being asked permission. People tore pages from me and used them for their own purposes. Recently, I was picked up out of a garbage can and someone began to take care of

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me. They saw that this notebook could be used for good things. To be honest, I am not sure how things are going to work out, but at least now I am being recycled and I have a chance to live.

The teenage writer of the above piece had recently transferred into a school dedicated to empowering young people with ADHD. He had begun to experience that his basic needs of connection, ability, meaning and pleasure were legitimate and important to others. His parents and teachers were committed to doing their best to ascertain that these needs were met.

In the chapters to follow, we will teach you how to be a developmentally attuned meaningful adult to ADHD children, how to recognize and create an environment attuned to their needs and how to help them survive and thrive in the Torah world.

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Key Points:

- Developmentally Attuned Parenting presents three stages that allow parents to optimize their relationship with children with ADHD.

Stages of Interaction that Impact Self-Development	Expression in Neuro-Typical Children	Expression in ADHD Children
Parental wonder	Parent responds to child's behaviors with wonder and affection, leading child to develop foundational self-esteem.	Parent's energy is consumed by preventing child from negative behaviors, leaving little energy for responding to positive behaviors. Child develops a negative and critical self-perception
Idealization of parents	Child views parent as all-powerful and all-knowing, accepting their authority and internalizing their worldview. Child develops ability to follow rules and function in society.	Child's predisposition toward impulsivity and difficulties with self-control create a mismatch between parent's rules and child's experience. Child develops distrust of parents and other adults.
Identification with parents	Child identifies with, and therefore imitates, parents.	Child feels different and alienated from parent's experience and seeks identification elsewhere.

- Developmentally attuned parents and teachers provide for the child's four basic social-emotional needs (CAMP):
 - **Connection:** The child feels securely attached.

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- **Ability:** The child experiences self-efficacy in meeting the challenges of life.
- **Meaning:** The child experiences meaning in his daily activities and relationships.
- **Pleasure:** The child experience positive reward as opposed to suffering in his daily life.
- In short, when the parent is attuned to the child's temperament and needs, the child can develop a strong and positive sense of self... and vice versa.

CHAPTER 3

THE FOUNDATION OF DEVELOPMENTALLY ATTUNED PARENTING

NON-JUDGMENT, ACCEPTANCE, AND COMPASSION

The most fundamental skills to be learned by parents and teachers are those of acceptance, non-judgmentalism, and compassion. When adults observe and acknowledge a child's temperament in a non-judgmental manner, they encounter the child's natural, authentic self. Positive acceptance is of crucial importance for children with ADHD. Objective, factual observation of natural tendencies requires us to suspend the automatic negative labeling that usually accompanies ADHD-type behaviors. Negative labeling is then replaced with compassionate acceptance.

"She is so immature! Why can't she play with children her own age? How is she ever going to get a shidduch?"

"He is a vilde chaya! Why does he always have to hit?"

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“Can’t he just sit still? I am embarrassed to take him to shul. He seems to be interested in everything except davening.”

Each of these observations is laden with judgment and negative emotional arousal. Without modifying these observations, adults are unlikely to be able to nurture any child, and certainly not a child with ADHD. The first challenge facing parents and educators is to recognize critical, judgmental thoughts that automatically flood the mind when dealing with children with ADHD. In order to cope more effectively, we suggest trying the following exercise, which we call “Non-Judgmental Attending.” This is how you can practice it.

Non-Judgmental Attending Exercise

Take a plain piece of paper and divide it into three columns:

Things My ADHD Child Did Today	What He/She Made Me Think and Feel	Empowering Thoughts

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When you list the thoughts that naturally flowed from your child's behavior, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does this thought lead me to a negative evaluation of the child?
2. Does this thought damage his/her self-esteem?
3. Does this thought lead to negative actions in my relating to the child?

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, then it is worthwhile to transform the judgmental thought into an accepting, compassionate one. A mother who I counseled struggled with two teenage daughters, one of whom had been diagnosed with ADHD. This mom described to me the following scenario in her non-judgmental attending exercise.

“Cindy yells and curses at her sister when she gets into the bathroom before her in the morning.”

“I naturally think that Cindy is self-centered and selfish.”

“When I transform this thought into a helpful one, I think that Cindy wants to feel good about herself and needs to get herself arranged in the bathroom in a non-pressured way.”

When this mother modified her unhelpful thought into an empathic one, she was able to take a different perspective on the situation. Instead of focusing on self-centeredness as an independent characteristic, she understood that her daughter was actually insecure about her physical appearance, especially when she compared herself to her sister. This led the mom to begin focusing on ways to enhance her daughter's self-image rather than criticize her bathroom behavior. Mom went about complimenting small things like her clothes or hair style. She invested time in finding stores carrying outfits that complemented Cindy's body type. After a month of working on transforming

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her judgmental thoughts, Mom chose to address the bathroom issue directly. Eventually, both daughters were readily agreeable to make a time-sharing arrangement. In a subtle way, simply by observing and modifying her own thoughts, Mom positively impacted Cindy's self-esteem. Once Cindy felt more secure about her sense of self, she was easily able to modify her behavior. Non-judgmental observation is a powerful, but subtle, way to empower children with ADHD.

Things My ADHD Child Did Today	What He/She Made Me Think and Feel	Empowering Thoughts
Cindy yelled and cursed at her sister when her sister got to the bathroom first	"She's so selfish and self-centered" Anger, annoyance, helplessness	Maybe Cindy just wants to feel good about herself and wants to feel that she has time to prepare herself without pressure

Breaking Bad Habits Is Challenging for Children and Adults

Cindy's mom was able to intuitively transform her negative thoughts into empowering ones. Oftentimes this is a difficult task. Each of us develops habitual ways of seeing the world. These habits are helpful because they allow us to get through the day without having to pay attention to what otherwise would be an inordinate amount of details. On the other hand, habits are automatic responses and do not distinguish between humans and inanimate objects, or between our own children and complete strangers. Moreover, we tend to react in a similar manner to all children without considering the singularity of the child with ADHD. In order to parent our children with ADHD, we need to activate and utilize our discrimination skills. The fundamental

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principle regarding ADHD behavior is that *children with ADHD want to behave properly; however, they have not learned the skills that enable them to control their behavior.*

The principle that children with ADHD must be educated in self-control skills is particularly relevant in a Torah-observant family. First, when children do not behave with proper decorum in places of *kedushah*, like shul or the Shabbos table, we need not interpret it as a lack of Yiras Shamayim. In fact, behavioral lapses reflect fundamental problems with self-regulation that are intrinsic to the ADHD neurological wiring. Rather than criticize, we must transform ourselves into caring guides and educators.

The tendency to confuse ADHD neurological wiring with a lack of Yiras Shamayim is depicted clearly in the words of our old friend Huck Finn, describing his take on the life of Moshe:

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people.

Huck Finn is not being raised in a Jewish, Torah-observant home. He is, however, being raised in a home that is committed to norms that see human beings as being created in the image of God. His elders expect Huck to behave in a manner that reflects human dignity and hence, the dignity of God. Unfortunately for Huck, many expected behaviors are torturous and painful. He is not in a rebellion against God. He is merely reacting to his sense that he is being tortured by being force-fed stories to which he feels no personal connection.

The enormous gap between adult intention and child experience is acutely manifest in the realm of studying in general, and Torah study

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in particular. Huck Finn experiences study as irrelevant and distasteful. Huck's lack of interest in Moses does not reflect a lack of piety. It does reflect a sincere disconnect between the child's authentic experience and the sanctity of the material being taught by adults. Twain describes Huck's reaction to Bible study. Huck is not struggling with any issues of belief or morality. He is not questioning the philosophical conundrum of how an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God can allow evil to exist, or raising any other theological quandary. Huck simply states that he relates to the here and now. Events of the past or distant future are not meaningful to him. When he states that he takes "no stock in dead people," he is simply saying what neuroscientists describe as the idiosyncratic "time awareness" of most children with ADHD. He is not trying to be disrespectful of Moshe. It's just a simple fact that Huck's mind does not relate to people who are no longer among the physical living.

The overwhelming majority of children with ADHD are not struggling with philosophical-moral issues concerning religious life. They are, however, disconnected from societal values and tend to view their lives as disappointments and failures. They do not experience the external world as compassionate, caring, or charitable. Hence they tend to seek other environments in a quest for discovering essential human needs. Unless adults are capable of accurately observing – and responding to – the underlying dynamic of withholding rejection that dominates the child's perception of her environment, adults react with criticism and judgment.

When parents practice "non-judgmental observation," criticism and judgment are replaced with empathy and compassion. This is an enormous task. All of us are neurologically biased towards critical observation. Evolutionary psychologists teach that maintaining a critical and judgmental view of the external environment is adaptive for survival in the harsh reality of life in the jungle. Fortunately, for

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most of us, family life in the twenty-first century is much less threatening than the wild chaos of the great outdoors. Unfortunately, our brains have not had time to evolve to perceive the world in this new world order. When our Rabbis stated that one must perceive others in a positive light, they were suggesting a radical shift in human perspective. However, the difficulty in shifting from a critical perspective to a compassionate one is extremely difficult for parents of children with ADHD.

As a result of the poor fit between their neurological predisposition and societal demands, children with ADHD are criticized and judged more harshly than their neuro-typical peers. Parents and teachers become focused on “catching children being bad” and inadvertently reinforce negative behaviors. Living in a torrent of criticism, children with ADHD internalize the criticism in two basic manners. First, they devalue their basic sense of self-worth. Second, they tend to devalue the external society that heaps huge portions of criticism upon them. Both of these processes lead children with ADHD to develop a sense of desperation regarding their ability to secure a comfortable place in their families, schools, and communities. Desperate feelings often lead to desperate actions and it is not uncommon for children with ADHD to seek refuge in foreign environments that, ultimately, may be no better at providing for their essential human needs. At least the search for a different environment provides a spark of hope within the dark vacuum that characterizes the life experience of many children with ADHD who are alienated from the Torah community.

When parents and teachers let go of judgmental, critical thoughts and emotions, they allow their children to begin sensing self-worth and they become powerful agents in shaping the development of the child’s burgeoning self. Compassionate, non-judgmental acceptance is the foundation of wondrous observation.

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The quantity of energy necessary for transforming destructive criticism to constructive observation is enormous. Similarly, the power necessary to replace negative emotions with positive responses is huge. However, only when compassion and comprehension replace criticism and judgment are we able to take the first steps in rehabilitating the emotionally damaged child with ADHD.

Key Points

- There are strategies we can use to change our attitudes toward children with ADHD from critical to accepting. Thinking negatively about a child and their behavior is unlikely to be helpful in moving the child toward positive change.
- Instead, we can work on shifting from our automatic thoughts about the child to more empowering thoughts about the child:

Things My ADHD Child Did Today	What He/She Made Me Think and Feel	Empowering Thoughts
Cindy yelled and cursed at her sister when her sister got to the bathroom before her	"She's so selfish and self-centered" Anger, annoyance, helplessness	Maybe Cindy just wants to feel good about herself and wants to feel that she has time to prepare herself without pressure

- Remember: The child's challenging behavior stems from difficulty with self-control, not from a lack of Yiras Shamayim.
- Withholding criticism and judgment on the child's morals can help the child to develop a sense of self-worth.
- The quantity of energy necessary for transforming destructive criticism to constructive observation is enormous, but failure to do so prevents the child with ADHD from developing the basis of positive self-esteem.

What Do You Think?

What are some judgments you have about your self/child/student with ADHD that you can work on replacing?

CHAPTER 4

ADVANCED WONDROUS OBSERVATION

MINDFULNESS AND COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING
AS TECHNIQUES IN DEVELOPMENTALLY ATTUNED
NURTURING

Although seeing children as they truly are, without criticism and judgmentalism, may seem like a no-brainer, it is extremely difficult to apply in real-life situations. Our brains have evolved to perceive faults in the surrounding environment. When something close to me is imperfect, my brain naturally emphasizes the deficiency. Negative observation is a means of protection from potential harm. When I am aware that something may be wrong, that awareness allows me to correct it. Unfortunately, imperfection can be found throughout the entire physical universe. Perhaps, at some point in our history, when we actually lived in the jungle, it was absolutely necessary to be keenly aware of each imperfection in order to survive. However, we no longer are surrounded by saber-toothed tigers. Unfortunately, our brains are

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still primed to react critically and intensively to anything that seems threatening and potentially dangerous.

Not only does this cost us dearly in terms of our emotional well-being, but critical and judgmental attitudes poison our relationships. Children, in particular, are incredibly sensitive to parental judgment. Children with ADHD are prone to experiencing exceedingly large quantities of criticism. It is essential to step out of this habitual pattern in order to help our children with ADHD.

We are going to teach two methods that have been researched and proven effective in reducing negative criticism and judgmentalism. The first method is *mindfulness* and the second is *cognitive restructuring*. Although each method can complement the other, they are different paths leading to effective relating to children with ADHD. Mindfulness has a flavor of meditative contemplation. Cognitive restructuring is an exercise in rational, critical thinking. We hope that you will be able to connect with both exercises, but if you find that one is too uncomfortable or foreign for you, you can choose the method that best fits your personal temperament and style. Whichever method you choose, it is essential that you practice it regularly in order to gain maximum benefits. Regular practice of these methods will significantly reduce your criticism and judgment of the child with ADHD. It is also likely to boost your emotional spirit and overall sense of self, so if you practice it regularly you will probably experience the win-win effect that develops when you let go of the heavy weight of criticism and judgment.

Mindfulness Training

In Western society, psychological medicine has used mindfulness as a method of alleviating stress and pain. The most well-known mindfulness course was founded by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn and is referred to as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Subsequent programs

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in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and mindful self-compassion have been developed and taught throughout the world.

Most teachers of mindfulness point to its roots in Buddhist tradition. This has always struck us as odd in the sense that mindfulness is quite familiar to the Torah observant Jew and is quite similar to the halachic concept of kavanah. Kavanah refers to a state of deep concentration and awareness in the present moment. Most are familiar with the halachic requirement of kavanah in prayer. When we daven, halachah requires us to have focused concentration on the meaning of the words that we are reciting. Fundamentally, all prayer requires kavanah. The Rabbis, in recognizing the difficulty in focused concentration, limited kavanah as a requirement to specific parts of our daily prayer. In point of fact, kavanah, or focused awareness, is required when we perform any commandment involving our internal sense of being. Rabbeinu Bachya in the twelfth century referred to these commandments as “duties of the heart” (chovos ha-levavos). When we perform a commandment, we are concerned not only with the formal behavioral act, but with the internal state that accompanies our behavioral action. Attentive focus on our internal state is the kavanah that allows us to perform the mitzvah in an optimal manner. Beyond the formal commandments, the Jew is obligated to form a constant awareness of God’s presence. In the words of the author of Proverbs, “I have placed the Lord always before me.”

Moreover, it seems that the Torah itself is mandating mindfulness by stating that one is obligated to love God with “all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” Rabbi Akiva interprets the verse to mean that the Jew’s love of God must be so extensive that, circumstances demanding, he or she is obligated to sacrifice physical life. Mindful awareness of action imbues the act with meaning. When actions are performed mindlessly of their context, the meaning is com-

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promised. Mindfulness was certainly intuited and developed by Torah tradition, albeit under a different name.

Mindfulness, as it is practiced therapeutically, extends our focused attention to daily activities. When a parent takes a child to the park and is totally absorbed with his or her activities that occurred earlier, the parent is mindless of the child. When a husband is conversing with his wife, but contemplating how he is to complete the next report due tomorrow at work, the husband is mindless of his wife's presence. When we are on the receiving end of a mindless interaction, we feel invisible and invalidated. When we actively engage in a mindless encounter, we are mentally and emotionally absent, and it is almost as if the event has not occurred.

Mindfulness training generally occurs through drills in guided meditation. The purpose for mindfulness practice is not simply to achieve a state of calm during the meditative period, but to, in a sense, rewire the brain so that even under normal circumstances one is capable of making mindful choices and not operating on automatic pilot.

Among Torah-observant Jews, in addition to the exceptional importance of mindfulness in terms of our interpersonal relationships, mindfulness is a necessary requirement in our spiritual lives. The Talmud debates the question of whether the basic fulfillment of mitzvos requires kavanah. All agree that mitzvos that are connected to our internal state require kavanah, and all agree that kavanah is a necessary component for optimal performance of the mitzvah.

But what about the in-between state? How mindful ought we be in our mundane, daily activities?

In his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Nobel Laureate and Professor Daniel Kahneman speaks of two neurological networks that operate in tandem. One is an extremely fast, automatic system that responds immediately to threats and dangers in the environment. The other is a more methodical system that evaluates and calculates in order to

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reach conclusions. In several clever experiments, Professor Kahneman displays that we have a tendency to simply rely on the fast system, and that such reliance often leads to suboptimal results.

When we operate mindfully, we are paying attention to our behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and words. At times, we may note that we are doing what “feels” right, and fortunately, this works. At other times, we note the need to weigh the presence of various factors and alternate options. In these situations, the slower, more calculated approach is likely to be more effective. Mindfulness does not endorse one approach over the other. It simply encourages us to develop an awareness that encompasses our life, so that we do not live in a mindless, automated fashion too often.

For the halachic Jew, mindfulness demands an awareness of correspondence between our actions and God’s commands. At times, we may intuitively gush with identification with a particular mitzvah. In other circumstances, performance of a particular mitzvah may feel as if it is against our natural desire. Unfortunately, it is human nature to neglect and ignore issues that do not naturally build us up. As halachic Jews, we understand all of Torah to be God’s word. Nonetheless, when a particular mitzvah is dissonant with our natural instinct, there is a tendency to ignore it. Psychologists refer to this phenomenon as “cognitive dissonance.” However, the halachic approach requires us to be mindful of internal resistance that may arise in performing God’s commands.

The child with ADHD often behaves in a mindless manner. His thoughts and behaviors are often not aligned with the adult’s idyllic image of reality. Hence, adults tend to respond critically to negative behaviors and ignore the positives, and thus deliver a high frequency of criticism and punishment. In developing mindfulness skills, we attempt to get into the habit of seeing the child with compassion and wisdom. The most widely used mindfulness training practice

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is the “Body Scan” developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. In our holistic approach we have modified the body scan and expanded it to include the mind and spirit as well. We refer to it as a “Mind, Body, and Spirit Scan,” and it is described below.

Before beginning, it is critically important to emphasize that the underlying concept in all mindfulness training is the need to be accepting and non-judgmental. Many of us will find this almost impossible. We have been so trained to judge and criticize ourselves and others that self-critical and negative thoughts will flood our thinking as we practice this scan. The key to overcoming this habit is that when distracting thoughts of any kind enter our minds, we have to make a conscious effort to not judge them. We should not fight them. We are simply to let them glide past us, like the waves of the ocean. You can acknowledge their existence, even without criticizing yourself for having them. Remember, we are simply trying to train the mind to be focused on the present. This is a dramatic change from the busy overloaded working of our daily routine.

We have written out a full script for a mindfulness training exercise that we have used with parents and teachers of children with ADHD. You may want to record this exercise using your own voice. If you do this, speak in a slow and deliberate manner. Speak as comfortably as you can. If you do not want to record the practice, then simply read it slowly and carefully. You may practice each step separately after you read it. There is no right or wrong way to do this exercise. It works best when you apply it in a manner that you are most comfortable with.

Find a private, safe place. It may be a chair, a mattress, or a bed. The main idea is to be comfortable and dignified. You deserve to feel good about yourself for attempting to learn something new and different. If you are lying down, try not to fall asleep. If you find yourself dozing off, it's probably best to sit instead. If you are sitting, make sure your back is upright and you are not hunched over. Don't sink too far into

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the back support, but allow yourself to support your own back in a comfortable but upright position.

At this point, you may either gently close your eyes, or you may choose to keep them open. If you choose to keep your eyes open, allow them to focus gently on the ground approximately six feet in front of you. Don't try to focus on anything. Let your eyes be aware of all that is within their field of vision, but don't press to be focused on anything in particular.

Once you are in a comfortable position, let's begin gently focusing our mind on the flow of our breathing. Breathing is a terrific focus point because it is constant yet always changing. Without making any attempt to modify your breathing, simply pay attention to the cycle of your breathing cycle; inhale and exhale. Note how the body basically breathes itself, even when we pay it no attention. Right now, we are simply becoming mindful of this natural act. As you become mindful of your breathing, try to follow the breath as it enters your nose and travels down to your belly. Feel the air as it enters the nose and fills your belly. Allow your belly to expand naturally as it fills with air, and then note how the belly contracts when the air leaves on the exhale and exits through the nose. Note how the air entering the nose feels cooler and how the air is warmer as it exits with each exhale.

We are now going to proceed with a full body scan. As you inhale imagine the air entering your nose and traveling downwards through your midsection and continuing to the soles of your feet. Be mindful of your soles. How do they feel? Take note of the connection between your feet and the ground. Do you feel any discomfort? If so, try and allow the discomfort to exit your body as you exhale.

With each breath allow yourself to let go of any tension and discomfort. Pay attention to the tension that leaves your body as the air exits through your nostrils or mouth. Allow yourself to celebrate each breath and achieve another level of being present in a calm, balanced manner. You may want to contemplate the verse, כל הנשמה תהלל י-ה

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הללויה. Our Rabbis explained this to mean that we praise Hashem with each and every breath.

Now let's shift our mindfulness to the right and left calves. Imagine the air entering them and note how they feel. Are they cold or warm? Is there any tingling or other sensations in them? Simply experience them without trying to change anything.

Now we shift our mindfulness upward to our knees and thighs. Imagine the air traveling from the nose down the chest and stomach, to our knees and thighs. Pay attention to all the feelings there. Note them. Accept them and move onwards.

We now become mindful of our pelvic area. We are mindful of the pressure that our bottoms create on the chair or bed. We feel the air entering our pelvis when we inhale and we imagine the air exiting on our exhale.

Now we approach our mid-section and our belly. Let's pay attention to the belly as it expands when air enters it and as it contracts when air exits. Pay attention to your lower back on each side as it gently moves with your belly and continue to be aware of your breathing.

Now let's focus on the chest and upper back. Simply feel the air entering your lungs as your chest rises and note the lowering of the chest and the upper back as the air exits upon exhale.

And now let's bring our attention to the shoulders and neck. Let the shoulders rest gently with each breath. Be aware of any sensations that are within your neck as you take air in and let air out.

We'll now focus on our face and forehead. Imagine the air rising through your nose and flowing through the chin, lips, nose, eyes, and forehead. Feel the air flow through your face as you breathe in and feel the air leave your face as you exhale.

Now let's focus on the back and top of our head. Imagine the air flowing through the back portion of your head as you inhale, and imagine the air exiting the top of your head as you exhale, as if you were a dolphin with an air hole at the top of your head.

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And now, as we sit or lie in this relaxed state of awareness, let's scan the entire body for any feelings. Note any discomfort, anxiety, pain, or fear that is contained anywhere in your body. Fill this area with air as you inhale, and allow the uncomfortable emotions to be released when you exhale. Spend one minute cleansing your body in this way.

We are now going to focus on our brain, the center of our thinking and emotions. Let your inhale fill your brain with air. As the air flows through your brain, allow yourself to notice any thoughts or feelings that may be present. If they are pleasant thoughts, savor them. If they are unpleasant thoughts, simply allow them to flow and be washed ashore like a wave in the ocean. In your in-breath, take note of the thought. On the out-breath simply let it be washed away. Take a moment to savor and deepen this experience of being mindful with your thoughts.

Finally, we are going to return to that blowhole that we imagined at the top of our heads. Imagine that we breathe in light from a Higher Source through that hole. Imagine that this light flows through your entire body and then flows out of you as love that you are able to give to the universe. It is a constant flow of energy and you are able to access it whenever you need to. Take a moment to enjoy the connection with Hashem. On each exhale, allow yourself to connect in a loving manner with Hashem as He is present in your world.

At this point, allow yourself to imagine your child with ADHD. Note his or her physical features, pay attention to them, and note any feelings that arise as you note his or her physical self. Breathing in and out in a slow and comfortable manner, allow yourself to envision your child engaging in behaviors that are challenging and problematic. As you clearly observe these behaviors in your child, take note of the following. Note the heavy price that your child must pay for his problem behaviors. Note the anger and upset they cause in others as well as in yourself. Allow yourself to feel compassion for your child as

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you observe that his behaviors are driven by an ADHD brain that is not the master of its own domain. Allow yourself to feel deeply your desire to help this child, and forgive yourself and the child for anger and criticism. Allow yourself to immerse for a minute in feelings of compassion, empathy, and forgiveness.

Don't be concerned if you are not successful at letting go of all of your criticism and judgment. Simply note its presence. Label it as criticism and go forward breathing and accepting yourself, your child, and the universe.

Now we are slowly going to release ourselves from this state of mindfulness and return to our more usual way of thinking. As we practice this exercise, we will be able to access this state of higher consciousness and mindfulness quicker and more often. For now, let's practice letting go of this way of thinking and gently entering the world as it flows in a usual manner. I will count downwards from 5 to 1. With each lower number, try to become more aware of yourself in the room and the spot where you are sitting or lying. When I reach 1, and when you are ready, open your eyes and allow yourself to gently and slowly return to your regular awareness. 5... 4... 3... 2... 1.

This concludes the formal mindfulness training exercise.

When we practice the Mind, Body, and Spirit Scan, we are placing ourselves into a state of mindfulness in which we feel connected with our cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual selves. When we practice compassion and empathy, we reduce the criticism and judgment that we feel towards our child with ADHD and ourselves. Research indicates that repeated practice of this meditative exercise leads to mindfulness being integrated as a personality trait. We tend to be more aware of ourselves and those around us. We tend to react, less under the command of instinct and more under the control of careful observation. We tend to feel a greater sense of peace in our decision-making,

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and we become better parents equipped to face the challenges of our child with ADHD.

Ideally, this mindfulness practice can be done daily. It is best to do it in the morning. It is important to practice in the same spot consistently over time. Regular practice of mindfulness allows parents of children with ADHD to develop a compassionate, empathic mindset, which is absolutely necessary for the parenting challenges involved with daily interactions with our neuro-atypical ADHD children. Over time, you will be able to engage in mindful meditation without following the steps that are outlined in this guided exercise. You will be able to sit in a state of mindfulness in a freestyle manner, simply being aware of your internal state of being.

There is no set amount of time that mindfulness needs to be practiced. It is important to do it regularly, even if at first you are only able to sit for five minutes. Many people set a routine of about 20 minutes of mindfulness practice daily, but consistent engagement is more important than the length of time.

We have found that many parents of children with ADHD, who are depleted and worn out, are able to derive great energy from mindfulness practice. When you give yourself the gift of mindfulness, you are also acting as a role model for your child by displaying the importance of self-care. You can find numerous quality mindfulness training sites on the internet. Find one that feels comfortable for you and practice mindfulness in order to become a better human and a better parent for the child with ADHD.

Cognitive Restructuring

A second skill for reducing judgmental and critical thoughts is called cognitive restructuring. In order to engage in cognitive restructuring regarding the child with ADHD, you will need to focus awareness on criticisms and judgments that arise when you focus on his or her

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behavior. If, in your mindfulness practice, you became aware of these critical interpretations, then you can write them down now. If you have not practiced mindfulness, simply think of those behaviors that your child engages in that you find disturbing. Note what about them disturbs you. It is important to realize that the goal is not to undo the fact that some of your child's behaviors may be disturbing. It is important to be aware of behaviors that truly have negative consequences for your child or for those around him. On the other hand, we want to differentiate between concern stemming from negative actions and your more general feelings of anger, frustration, or disappointment. Teaching your child the skills necessary to behave in a more adaptive manner is critically important. However, you only have a chance of effective teaching if you are not harboring anger and resentment. In cognitive restructuring, we want to identify and temper all criticism and judgment that is not productive in helping the child with ADHD to develop the skills necessary for thriving in life.

Take a piece of paper and divide it into three columns. In the left column write any behaviors that your child engages in that disturb you. In the middle column, identify what your child's behavior makes you think and feel, and how those thoughts cause you to become critical and judgmental. In the right-hand column, try to take a different perspective, and see if you are able to understand your child's behavior in a manner that reduces or eliminates the negative judgment and criticism.

Let's take a simple example. Mrs. Schwartz is incredibly upset by the mess in her nine-year-old son Shimon's room. Last year Shimon was diagnosed with ADHD but nothing she has tried has enabled him to straighten out the mess. She finds herself angry, upset, and resentful that Shimon does not take responsibility.

Underlying anger in adults leads them to engage in punitive behaviors. We act harshly towards children and justify our actions with the

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rationalization that anger and punishment are powerful methods of teaching appropriate behavior. Unfortunately, at least in the current generation, punishment is ineffective as a primary means of child-rearing or educating. Earlier times made each of us much more dependent upon our families and communities. Today, adult interventions motivated by anger are largely ineffective. In the example above, Mrs. Schwartz is well advised to try to modify her thoughts in a manner that distances her from anger and empowers her natural ability to be empathetic and compassionate.

For example, her initial thoughts regarding her son's sloppiness may be something like,

"Shimon is simply lazy and he doesn't care about cleaning his room. He is happy when I am his cleaning lady."

"Shimon is so self-centered; he only cares about himself."

Cognitive restructuring is a means of reducing the negativity and judgment in the way we think about our children. At this point, it is important not to evaluate how true or false we view each statement to be. It is helpful to simply convert harsh judgment and criticism into expressions of empathy and compassion.

The third column of our page converts Mrs. Schwartz's critical judgment into empathic compassion.

"Shimon has a very hard time with organization. It requires tremendous energy for him to create order in his room. Perhaps I can come up with some ways to make this easier for him."

"I know that Shimon loves me. He is like a drowning man, trying to save his own life in the water, who threatens the lifeguard trying to save him. He is drowning in the mess of his room and feels hopeless and helpless. Maybe I can offer an idea about starting to clear the clutter."

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“I know that Shimon also suffers at school because he is so disorganized. Maybe I will be able to figure out a way to help him keep better track of his stuff.”

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Example

My Child's Behaviors that Disturb Me	My Thoughts and Feelings About These Behaviors	Possible New Perspectives
<p>Shimon keeps his room messy and does not listen when I ask him to clean it.</p>	<p>"Shimon is simply lazy and he doesn't care about cleaning his room."</p> <p>"Shimon is so self-centered; he only cares about himself."</p> <p>Anger</p>	<p>"Shimon has a very hard time with organization. It requires tremendous energy for him to create order in his room. Perhaps I can come up with some ways to make this easier for him."</p> <p>"I know that Shimon loves me. He is like a drowning man, trying to save his own life in the water, who threatens the lifeguard trying to save him. He is drowning in the mess of his room and feels hopeless and helpless. Maybe I can offer an idea about starting to clear the clutter."</p> <p>"I know that Shimon also suffers at school because he is so disorganized. Maybe I will be able to figure out a way to help him keep better track of his stuff."</p>

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My Child's Behaviors that Disturb Me	My Thoughts and Feelings About these Behaviors	Possible New Perspectives

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Cognitive restructuring is what psychologists mean when they refer to the process of observing our thoughts, assessing their negative or critical value, and substituting negativity with empathic and compassionate assistance. In many instances, we tend to think in familiar patterns. For example, many people tend to see life in terms of extremes, everything is black or white, all good or totally bad. Others may always assume that someone else's behavior reflects evil intentions. Others may never be able to see the good in themselves, but readily acknowledge all failings as reflecting personal failure. Cognitive-behavioral psychologists call these thoughts "cognitive distortions." Psychodynamic psychologists call them "defense mechanisms." When we become aware of the automatic thoughts that typify our patterns of thinking, we gain important direction in correcting our course of action and positively transforming our relations with the children we care about.

Ronen is a 14-year-old who attends a yeshiva in Yerushalayim. During the week, Mincha is at 1:30. By this time of the day, Ronen's medicine for ADHD has mostly worn off. He is usually pretty compliant with Shacharis davening, but Mincha is more challenging. Ronen has a hard time not squirming in his seat or talking to other students. His Rabbeim have noted this problem for some time. Last year, his Rebbe was quite upset with him. Whenever Ronen would act inappropriately, he received a harsh "nu!" After several rounds of "nu," Ronen was asked to leave the Beis Midrash.

This year, Ronen's Rebbe participated in a teaching seminar on social-emotional learning and decided that he wanted to work on improving Ronen's behavior during tefillah. He implemented several interventions, the first of which was cognitive restructuring.

"When I saw Ronen fidgeting, not sitting still, and disturbing the davening of the classmate sitting closest to him, I felt angry and thought to myself that he has no Yiras Shamayim. Then I started thinking more rationally and compassionately. I understood that Ronen was

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truly crawling out of his skin and had trouble sitting still. I decided that I would have him sit next to me during Mincha and that I would give him as many assignments that I could that were connected to davening in order to keep him busy. First, I would send him to the Beis Midrash three minutes before the other students arrived in order to set up the Siddurim and seats for everyone. Then, I would have him mark attendance for our class for davening. I began praising him for saying “Baruch Hu u’Varuch Shemo” during chazaras ha-shatz. When I saw that he could not sit still, I allowed him to leave the Beis Midrash for brief, timed breaks. By the end of the year, he was one of my best daveners. More importantly, he saw that I cared about him and I didn’t view his challenges with davening as reflecting a deficit in his ruchnius (spiritual development).”

When Ronen’s Rebbe performed cognitive restructuring, he was able to view the challenges of ADHD from an empathic and compassionate perspective. When this occurred, Ronen was no longer treated as a pariah. Changes in the manner in which the Rebbe related to Ronen positively influenced Ronen’s relationship to davening in general and to his Rebbe in particular. Ronen began to view himself as a valued part of the Torah community. For the first time in his life, he began feeling at home in the Beis Midrash. The Rebbe’s concentrated efforts at empathizing with Ronen’s challenges are likely to have had a meaningful effect on the student’s commitment to a Torah lifestyle.

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Trigger and Problem Behavior	Critical Judgmental Thought	Empathic and Compassionate Restructured Thought
Ronen doesn't sit still, disturbs others, and doesn't daven during Mincha.	Ronen is undisciplined and has no Yiras Shamayim.	Ronen is neurologically challenged to sit still at this time of the day. He probably already feels like a failure, because he wants to be an oveid Hashem. I want to try to help him.

The first challenge facing adults who want to help children with ADHD is to separate religious commitment from ADHD-type behaviors. People with ADHD behave in certain ways because they are born with impulsive natures and require high levels of stimulation in order to remain connected to whatever the task at hand may be. Parents and teachers need to observe behaviors as reflecting this neurologically based predisposition, rather than reflecting moral character. The fact that one child sits respectfully while another creates chaos and disruption is not necessarily reflective of moral delinquency. This is a basic tenet of cognitive restructuring that every parent of a child with ADHD must cultivate.

Mindful, non-judgmental, adult observation is the cornerstone for all efforts at empowering the soul of the child with ADHD. Only when we truly allow ourselves to observe the child as she exists in real time and space do we allow an authentic connection to develop. Many people with ADHD report that they are never seen for who they truly are, and that in order to survive, they need to disguise their real selves. Psychologists refer to this “false self” as a destructive factor in all

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human interactions. When someone feels misunderstood, not appreciated, and rejected, it is almost impossible to function as a productive member of society.

Parents and educators who practice mindfulness are able to relate to their child with ADHD in a focused, present-oriented, non-judgmental manner. Accordingly, they may begin seeing their children through new a new lens. Rather than being critical naysayers, parents and teachers serve as empowering educators. They utilize cognitive restructuring as a means of enlightening the path of behavior change. When you practice the techniques detailed in this chapter, you transform your perceptions and take an immensely important step in empowering your child with ADHD. These steps allow you to successfully perform the first step of Developmentally Attuned Nurturing, namely, wondrous observation.

Equipped with non-judgmental, present-centered, compassionate lenses, parents and teachers are now capable of tackling the challenge of helping the child with ADHD internalize and accept rules and limitations. Discipline and acceptance of authority is extremely difficult for children with ADHD. In the following chapter, we teach how children with ADHD can empower themselves by following well-intentioned rules and by accepting benevolent authority.

Key Points

- There's a human tendency to focus on the negative
 - While this can protect us from harm, it comes at a cost to our emotional wellbeing and our relationships
- Two strategies to reduce our negative judgments:
 - Mindfulness
 - Cognitive Restructuring
- Mindfulness: the practice of being focused on the present moment with acceptance and without judgments
 - We discuss the importance of mindfulness to Torah living and suggest practicing it on a regular basis.
 - There are many mindfulness exercises you can try; we included some in this book but you can also find others online.
- Cognitive Restructuring: the practice of replacing automatic thoughts with new, more helpful thoughts
 - See the included chart for practicing this skill.

What Do You Think?

Where in your life can you incorporate opportunities to consistently practice mindfulness? What is an unhelpful thought you have about your self/child/student with ADHD that you can use to practice cognitive restructuring?

CHAPTER 5

INTERNALIZATION OF RULES AND ACCEPTANCE OF AUTHORITY

SETTING SMART GOALS THAT EMPOWER CHILDREN
AND CONNECT THEM TO TORAH

When adults set goals that are attainable and meaningful, children are capable of internalizing these goals as their own and develop a sense of mastery by achieving them. The psychologist Lev Vygotsky conceptualized the importance of setting challenging yet realistic goals when he described zones of development. Vygotsky states that expectations which reflect current behavioral capacity are considered to be within the zone of present development. Behaviors that are slightly beyond the current level of performance are within the zone of proximal development. Behaviors that are several stages beyond what one currently does proficiently are in the zone of distal development.

On a practical level, Vygotsky's conceptualization exhorts teachers and parents to challenge children with tasks that are within the zone of proximal development. This means that development occurs when we leave our comfort zone and are challenged with behaviors

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that, although difficult, are attainable. Professor Mihaly Robert Csikszentmihalyi, in his work on flow as an optimal state for growth, spoke about exceeding our current comfort zone by four percent. When parents and teachers set goals for children, it's important that the goals be behaviors that the children have a pretty good possibility of achieving.

Setting goals that are within the zone of proximal development for children with ADHD is exceedingly challenging, and almost impossible if one has not first established the consistent ability for wondrous, non-judgmental observation, as described in the previous chapters. If we compare the child with ADHD to neuro-typical children on the dimensions of impulsivity and inattention, standard behavioral expectations are likely to be beyond the child's realistic capability. Most children with ADHD have extreme difficulty sitting still for long periods or concentrating in relatively low-stimuli situations. Parents and teachers tend to expect children with ADHD to perform on a level commensurate with their neuro-typical peers. This is simply a formula for failure and frustration. Unless a child has experienced significant trauma or has grown up in a jungle, his or her not sitting quietly in shul, not paying attention in class, or classroom misbehavior do not reflect a lack of desire to be good, but extreme difficulty in self-control. Just as teachers must utilize specific psycho-didactic techniques to educate children with learning disabilities, so too do we need to teach children with ADHD specific techniques to allow them to develop control over their behaviors. Dr. Stuart Ablon and Dr. Ross Greene have pioneered a program in collaborative problem solving that allows parents and teachers to focus on educating children with ADHD in skills such as cognitive flexibility in order to enhance coping with life's daily challenges.

Wondrous, non-judgmental observation allows us to discipline children with ADHD in a developmentally attuned manner.

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Internalization of societal and parental principles and values occurs when we align our expectations to the child's level of ability. When parents and teachers learn to observe their child's behavior without criticism and judgment, they are able to present the child with achievable goals that empower the child's soul and sense of self.

Developmentally attuned goals are based on the child with ADHD competing only against himself. In the past, your son Aiden was incapable of sitting in shul without disturbing anyone for longer than two minutes. Currently, he is reciting Shema Yisrael and saying the silent Amidah for ten minutes. This is an incredible advancement. It matters not that Shmuel, your neighbor's son, who is the same age as your Aiden, is sitting in shul throughout the two-hour Shabbos prayer service. If we make Aiden's success dependent upon Shmuel's neuro-typical brain, we are condemning Aiden to failure and frustration. However, if we internalize the Talmudic requirement of viewing each child as a universe unto himself, we may establish a set of developmentally appropriate expectations that Aiden is capable of mastering. When we provide him with this gift of mastery, we provide him with an essential tool for success in life.

The first step in establishing developmentally attuned expectations is determining "where your child is currently holding" regarding the challenge in which you want him to improve. Some Jewish psychologists relate this idea to the Torah phrase *ba-asher hu sham*, that psychology needs to start by recognizing where the patient is in the current moment, in order to help.

In keeping with the example above, let's say that you want to increase your child's ability to sit in shul. Let's say that, as of today, you observe that your child is constantly off task, fidgety, and not at all focused on davening. Beyond the behavioral symptoms, this is concerning because it reflects a lack of connection, meaning, and fulfillment within the davening experience. Hence, our goal ought to be

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to help this child enhance his davening experience by increasing his connection to davening, the personal significance of davening to him, and the fulfillment that he can obtain from the experience. Although this may seem daunting at first, it is relatively simple if we are willing to take baby steps. Let's illustrate what some of those baby steps may be.

First, we want to **connect** our child to davening. We can do this in multiple ways. Some may be able to share a story in which tefillah was significant to them personally, or we may watch a short film that depicts the power of tefillah together with the child. Many options are available that allow the child to connect with the activity that we want to focus on. Among children with ADHD, it is absolutely necessary to create a connection with the activity, in this case davening, because their wandering attentional system makes it easy to forget the meaningfulness of many important activities.

After we have engaged the child in a "connecting" activity that mimics the developmental process of wonder, we can proceed to actually implementing the behavior. Note that connecting behaviors ignite natural curiosity. All healthy children are natural explorers of the universe. Wonder and fascination are part of our biological temperament. Unfortunately, the negative interactions, which are so prevalent among children with ADHD, tend to negate the curiosity that connection stimulates.

The extent to which a child with ADHD connects to any experience is related directly to the child's sense of competency. During this process, we need to be particularly sensitive to the child's needs for developing mastery. All of us tend to avoid activities that emphasize our deficiencies and weaknesses. Regarding prayer, our behavioral plan is meant to shape the child's behavior so that he will willingly engage in tefillah.

Psychological research has clearly identified certain characteristics that increases the likelihood of any plan's success. A plan likely to suc-

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ceed has been identified as a “SMART” plan, with SMART being an acrostic for five ingredients essential for success:

- ☑ Specific
- ☑ Measurable
- ☑ Attainable
- ☑ Relevant
- ☑ Timely

Specific

It is important to specifically express the target behaviors. In the tefillah example, we may state, for example, that our initial target behavior is ten minutes of engaged davening time displayed by saying kriyat Shema and the Shemoneh Esrei.

Measurable

This means that our target behavior must be something that we can measure through direct observation. In the target behaviors of Shema and Shemoneh Esrei, note that we have no way of knowing whether the child actually said the prayers. We only can observe if his behaviors during tefillah were consistent with praying. When we set up any target behavior, it's important, especially in the beginning stages, not to be stingy with recognizing success. As long as the child behaves in a way that approximates what we want him to do, we ought to be generous with praise and any other rewards that we dish out.

Attainable

When setting goals for children with ADHD, it is essential that the goal be realistic for the child. It does not matter if your neighbor's child can sit in shul for thirty minutes. If your child is only sitting in shul for five minutes, an increase to ten minutes is an improvement of 100%.

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Although social pressure can easily blind us, as parents and teachers of children with ADHD we need to remember that the child is competing against himself, and only himself. Comparisons to neuro-typical children are likely to be harmful to the child with ADHD.

Relevant

The target task must be relevant for the child with ADHD. This means the child must be motivated to perform the task. Motivation is a complex phenomenon and, unfortunately, it has been widely misunderstood. In general, psychologists have spoken of internal motivation and external motivation. In popular understanding, intrinsic motivation has been defined as “good” motivation that stems from the internal interests and desires of the child. Extrinsic motivation has been understood as “bad” motivation in which the child does not truly care about the task, but only performs it because he receives a reward.

This split in understanding has led many parents and educators to believe that children must always be guided by intrinsic motivation. Children should behave because they have internalized the notion that good behavior is a virtue. Children should read because they love reading. Children should do homework because they clearly accept the connection between homework and mastery of important life tasks. Children should do mitzvos because this is Hashem’s will.

Chazal had a more advanced understanding of human motivation. We are told, מתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה which may be translated to mean, “Behaviors that are initially done for ulterior motives are eventually done for intrinsic motives.” In many synagogues throughout the world, children who attend shul on Friday night or Shabbos pay a visit to the candy man, who provides them with sweets. For many young children this is the highlight of the prayer service. A custom for many generations in Eastern Europe was to attach a swatch of honey to the child’s Chumash on the first day of school. Although we aspire for

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our children to do good for its own sake, the Rabbis were aware that reaching this level was a lengthy and arduous process. Hence, tangible, physical rewards were connected with acts of goodness in order to condition the younger generation to behave in a manner consistent with traditional values.

Today, experts in childcare and parenting recognize that learning requires a combination of material and spiritual rewards. Most parenting programs encourage parents to reward children with encouragement and praise, as well as providing them with the opportunity for tangible reinforcement for their hard work. When we combine concrete prizes with spiritual values, we make the spiritual value relevant to the child. Thus, when a father sets a ten-minute goal for his ADHD son to sit in place and daven, and he offers him verbal praise along the way, and promises the child a tangible reward for successfully accomplishing the task, the father is helping the child gain something positive today, while at the same time he begins to get his son into a habit of behaving in a principled manner. Prayer, which may not be intuitively relevant to the ten-year-old with ADHD, becomes meaningful and important.

The Rambam states the need to combine intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcement (Laws of Repentance 10:5):

Whoever studies Torah for the sake of receiving a reward or avoiding disaster is not engaged with Torah for its own sake. On the other hand, one who is not engaged in Torah out of fear and not in order to receive a reward, but for the love of the Master of the Universe who commanded it, is engaged in Torah for its own sake. Therefore when teaching children or those who are ignorant, they are taught to study Torah out of fear or for the sake of reward until their wisdom grows and matures. Only at that point is this secret [Torah's intrinsic

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value] revealed to them, slowly and gradually, so that they become habituated to the notion in a comfortable manner and be capable of understanding and worshipping out of love.

Note that the Rambam encourages a slow and gradual teaching method in which the inherent value of Torah is only understood as a primary motivator in the final stage of development. Parents and teachers of children in general, and children with ADHD in particular, experience the difficulty in grasping the concept of “lishmah.” We need not to be angered at the transactional level of interaction between us and our children with ADHD. The cognitive and emotional sophistication necessary for acting lishmah is an extremely high developmental level that is not relevant for most children with ADHD. In order to institute a SMART plan, we need to make sure that our method of teaching is attainable and attuned to the child’s level of development.

Timely

Each intervention for the child with ADHD must be conducted in a clearly defined period of time. Numerous studies have proven that children with ADHD have a very different understanding of time, as compared to neuro-typicals. Children with ADHD tend to be extremely present-centered. They are aware of the here-and-now. The past and future are extremely nebulous concepts for them. They are poor at estimating how much time is necessary to perform tasks. They are inaccurate at estimating the amount of time that they themselves actually spend working on specific tasks. Many students are told on the first day of school that they will receive report cards on Tu B’Shvat (which usually falls out in January or February). For the average child with ADHD, Tu B’Shvat is equivalent to being told we will receive our electricity bill in twenty-three years. Most of us would have a hard time modifying our use of electricity today if the bill were to arrive

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twenty-three years in the future. Similarly, most children with ADHD are incapable of modifying behaviors based on an evaluation that will only occur on Tu B'Shvat. In contrast, many neuro-typical children are capable of partially modifying behaviors based on that same piece of knowledge.

The time factor in any plan for a child with ADHD must take account of her limited comprehension of time. We must be sensitive not only to the need to implement the total plan in a relatively brief time period, but we also must be certain that we are reinforcing positive steps in the right direction at a rate that is sufficient for the child with ADHD.

Setting Smart Goals with Your Child

Sample goal: I want my child to daven in shul

Your goal: _____

		Sample Goal	Your Goal
S	Specific	Spend 10 minutes actually davening	
M	Measurable	Say the words of Shema and Shemoneh Esrei	
A	Attainable	Yes, these two tefillos and the 10 minutes in shul are something my child can really succeed in doing	
R	Relevant	I will keep my child motivated to accomplish this goal by praising him and letting him take candy from the shul candy man on Shabbos	
T	Timely	We will work toward this goal for the next week	

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To sum up, when we parent and teach our children to behave according to certain standards, we are trying to get them to internalize principles and values that we hold to be of ultimate importance. In every Torah-observant household, Torah is the wellspring from which all principles and values emerge. In our program of working with children with ADHD, we have learned through experience that values are internalized in a positive manner only when these values have been linked with positive reinforcement and self-esteem. This is why it is critical that the wonderful observation that dominates the initial formation of our “self” continues throughout the stage in which the child internalizes rules and accepts limitations. The sad reality is that the overwhelming majority of children who “go off the *derech*” of living a Torah lifestyle do so because they have internalized Torah living as something that is punitive and detracting from their self-esteem. Few children abandon Torah living due to philosophical quandaries. In our generation, where multiple options of lifestyles are available to almost everyone, children tend to choose a lifestyle that makes them feel good about themselves. Because children with ADHD are likely to be the targets of intense criticism and negative comparisons to their peers, they are at high risk to reject Torah living. In contrast, when meaningful adults are sensitive to these needs, children with ADHD can find acceptance, meaning, fulfillment, and even fun, within the Torah world.

As meaningful adults, we are capable of pairing wondrous observations with rules and limitations. We do this by explaining the inherent benefits of order as opposed to chaos. We do this when we present rules in the form of SMART plans. When these steps are taken, the child with ADHD is able to internalize rules and feel good about herself. People who feel good about themselves do not seek other environments in order to self-actualize, and hence tend not to “go off the *derech*.”

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The art of nurturing the child with ADHD in a Torah observant home is to pair the first stage of development, “wondrous observation,” with the second stage of development, internalization of rules and boundaries. The final step in the art of parenting a child with ADHD lies in incorporating the final stage of self-development, the stage of identification. In the next chapter, we will explain how parents of children with ADHD can make sure that they provide an environment that allows their children to master this final stage in the healthy development of a self.

Key Points

- When we set goals that children can actually achieve, we give them the chance to feel a sense of mastery and accomplishment.
- How can we set goals that are appropriate for the child in question?
 - First, we have to practice wondrous observation, seeing the child for who they are, NOT for the ways that they're different from other children.
 - “Developmentally attuned goals are based on the child with ADHD competing only against himself.”
 - Then, set goals that are SMART.
- SMART Goals
 - Specific: What exactly is the child supposed to do?
 - Measurable: How can the goal be measured? How will you and the child know if the goal was accomplished?
 - Attainable: Is this goal realistic for this person?
 - Relevant: Will this goal feel relevant for the child? Will they feel motivated to accomplish this goal? If not, how can we increase their motivation?
 - Timely: When should the child do this behavior? Are you taking into account the child's sense of time?
- By establishing SMART goals, parents can pair the first stage of development, wondrous observation, with the second stage of development, internalization of rules and boundaries.

What Do You Think?

Are there times when the goals that you set for your self/child/student with ADHD are not SMART? How could you adapt those goals to make them more achievable?

CHAPTER 6

HOW CHILDREN IDENTIFY WITH THEIR PARENTS AND TEACHERS AS PRIMARY ROLE MODELS

The final stage of Developmentally Attuned Nurturing is that of Identification. During this stage, children adopt their parents as their primary role models and seek to emulate their behaviors. Most live in a manner that reflects parental values. To achieve this in your home, we recommend that you focus on three discrete aspects of your living situation. First, it is critical to identify core principles. These are the central themes around which your life ought to revolve. Second, it is important for children to experience these values in an emotionally positive climate. If Shabbos reflects a basic value of retreat from materialistic pursuit but is experienced in your home as tense and confining, your child is unlikely to identify with and internalize it. On the other hand, when Shabbos is experienced as joyful and energizing, the child can identify with it in a simple and natural manner. Third, values must be matched with each child's particular strength and children must be given opportunities to express core values within their area

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of strength. For example, if a child has hands-on intelligence necessary for building, but is weak in the area of academic study, offering him the opportunity to build the sukkah is likely to be much more empowering than having him study all fifty-six pages of tractate *Sukkah*.

Parents and teachers of children with ADHD need to highlight the “best interests of the child” aspect of rules as a prelude to compliance. Unless we convince our children that rule-following is in their best interests, it is foolish for us to believe that they will be compliant once they are capable of avoiding our direct punishment. Many studies have displayed the unequivocal reality that compliance based only on fear of punishment is untenable over the long haul and unhealthy for all involved. Rather, three dimensions of teaching values are essential if children are to internalize societal values in a healthy fashion. First, values must be visible and observable to children. Second, behaviors that reflect living values must be accompanied by positive emotional intensity. Third, value-based living must be presented in a manner that is sensitive to and consistent with children’s innate temperamental pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

The values dearest to our hearts must be made publicly visible to our children. As a father, you may know in your heart that you deeply value Torah study. However, if your study of Torah is done only in private, your children are not privy to recognize or internalize the central importance it holds for you. If you preach to them that they need to study Torah, they are likely to view you as hypocritical and judgmental. On the other hand, if your commitment to Torah study is clearly displayed, then children tend to see you as a straight shooter. Don’t expect any lavish praise for your stellar commitment, but know that your behavior is not unnoticed.

Publicizing values in subtle but clear ways is part of the mechanism by which children identify with the principles and norms of society. With regard to the value of Torah study, this may be publicized in

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many ways. What comprises the decor in the main gathering room in your home? We can adorn our homes with paintings and ornate furniture. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. On the other hand, the central adornment in our living room can be bookshelves filled with *seforim*. When the central area in your home contains *seforim*, you transmit a message that Torah learning is a central life value. When your living room is adorned with candelabras and renaissance paintings, you project values as well. The relevant question concerns identifying core values that we aspire to pass forward.

In addition, it is essential for children to actually observe their parents studying. When children actually see mother or father learning with a study partner, they are privy to role models living their highest values. The children do not have to be an active part of the learning. They may hide away in their rooms when the learning occurs. The fact that they observe and are aware that their parents are devoting time to Torah study engraves the value of Torah study on their soul. This is especially important for children with ADHD, who tend to require concrete experiences in order to internalize learning.

The second component necessary for internalizing familial and societal values is the “emotional weather” that is connected to the modeled behavior. When we use the term “emotional weather,” we are referring to the feelings that parents project around the value-based behavior which they desire to transmit. If Shabbos is a time of boredom and stress for parents, it is unlikely that their children will want to internalize Shabbos as part of their lives. On the other hand, if Shabbos is perceived as a time of joy, calmness, and relaxation, it is extraordinarily difficult not to internalize it as a life-long value. It is important to understand that children do not necessarily need to imitate parental behavior in the here-and-now. If taking a Shabbos nap is part of the parents’ Oneg Shabbos, we do not need to force our kids to sleep in the afternoon as well. It is sufficient that they understand that this is

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part of their parents' experience of joy. Of course, parents need to set down expectations for children's behavior during parental rest time.

Finally, for positive internalization to occur, it is important for parents to focus on each child's singular constellation of strengths and limitations. If one child displays a talent for cooking, it is essential to allow that child to cook something for Shabbos. When the child's dish is served, parents should positively reinforce it. When positive reinforcement occurs, it's important to not only praise the dish itself, but to connect the dish to the mitzvah of enjoying Shabbos. When a parent is able to thank a child who has prepared a dish for adding to Oneg Shabbos in a meaningful manner, the parent is teaching that connection to Shabbos is not limited to study and prayer. Because many children with ADHD are challenged in the area of study and prayer, it is crucial to expand connections to Torah observance to other important activities, like cooking. By doing so, the parent is affecting internalization of the value of Shabbos within the child.

Another aspect that helps children to internalize parental values relates to the issue of who children choose as role models. We have already stated that parents have a head start over all others in being chosen as role models by their children. The overwhelming majority of teenagers state that when they grow up they want to be like their mothers and fathers. However, for children with ADHD, this is not always the case. It is extremely difficult to parent a child with ADHD. Parents are often exhausted, frustrated, and angry. This leads to a sort of Catch-22. The exhausted mother of the child with ADHD plops on the couch at the end of an incredibly hectic and stressful day. She has invested tremendous energy in preventing her children from violently hurting each other. She has cajoled them into doing something that resembles homework. They have finally showered and her energy level is totally depleted. Even though it's only 8:30, she lies down on the couch and dozes. Each of us has empathy and compassion for this

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burnt-out mom. However, her children, through no fault of their own, simply observe another human who takes no pleasure in life. A behavioral rule is that we internalize role models who live vibrantly and tend to reject those who live marginal existences.

Parents of children with ADHD must devote time and energy to self-care. When parents of children with ADHD allow themselves to have all of the life-force squeezed out of them by the demands of living, they, in effect, lose their status as role models. Clearly, parenting children with ADHD requires more effort than parenting normative children. So how are parents to prevent themselves from ending their days as squeezed-out rags?

An intelligent answer to this question is presented by Professor Stephen Covey in his bestselling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. In this book, Covey divides all life circumstances into four quadrants. Quadrant 1 contains life events that are considered urgent and important. These include anything that involves an important deadline that must be done now in order to avoid an immediate consequence. All acts of crisis intervention fall into this category. Quadrant 2 contains life events that are important but not urgent – such as building long-term relationships, as well maintaining and improving one's physical and mental health. The lack of urgency stems from the fact that these events do not usually lead to an immediate consequence. Ironically, this quadrant contains principles and values that are of ultimate importance to us.

Most of us consider it extremely important to engage in physical exercise and maintain close personal relationships. However, if today you were a bit lazy and did not make it to the gym, you probably did not experience any major catastrophe. Similarly, if you didn't check in with your loved ones because you were too busy, the relationships probably didn't suffer that much. But activities won't stay in Quadrant 2 forever. You could develop severe health issues that require more

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immediate attention (Quadrant 1), or your health could get so bad that it can't be improved much (Quadrant 4). Similarly, if you don't make time to spend with your loved ones, then they will need more immediate and regular attention (Quadrant 1), or those relationships will be lost forever (Quadrant 4). Whenever any activity that belongs in Quadrant 2 is ignored for too long, it will migrate either into Quadrant 1 or Quadrant 4.

Covey recommends that activities that are not urgent, but still important, be scheduled into our weekly planner in the same manner that we schedule daily appointments. Scheduling events and taking necessary actions that allow us to participate in them are the steps necessary to avoid neglecting them. If we neglect our own self-care, even under the most justified circumstances, we are reducing our power as role models for our children.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I	II
Not Important	III	IV

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We understand that this point may seem counterintuitive to many spiritual people who are accustomed to putting the welfare of others before themselves. Research and clinical experience both prove that children will not emulate our values if we devalue ourselves by not prioritizing our own wants and needs. Parents need to value themselves enough so that they invest in their own self-care in a consistent and regular manner. Self-care encompasses all personal needs, physical and spiritual. When you invest in yourself you are also investing in your children. Remember, children – especially children with ADHD – react strongly to what they experience in a concrete manner. When they see parents caring for their physical selves, and participating in classes and in communal activities, they observe vibrant living, and they want to be like their moms and dads.

Unfortunately, almost all value-based activities, particularly those concerning ourselves, are Quadrant 2, important but non-urgent behaviors. As a result, they tend to be neglected by people struggling with ADHD. If you purchased this book in order to help your child with ADHD, there is a pretty fair possibility that you struggle with ADHD yourself. This is your opportunity to prioritize yourself, secure with the knowledge that self-importance is essential if our children are to engage in value-based behavior.

In this chapter, we have consciously focused on parents to the exclusion of teachers. This reflects our position that teachers need to reinforce and strengthen core values of parents rather than introduce foreign principles of living. Teachers are extensions and representatives of parents. As such, the skilled teacher may need to help parents identify their core values. Teachers may need to help parents learn how these core values are reflected within the home. It is usually counterproductive for teachers to stress values that contradict core values of parents. Experience has taught us that we can affect children more

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intensely when we teach their parents to live core values rather than trying to present children with values at school that contradict values at home. It is far better to teach a parent to display the importance of Torah study than for a teacher to stress Torah study to a child who comes from a home in which study is not valued. The art of successful teaching requires educators to align modeled value-based behavior in the classroom to behavior that is reinforced by parents at home.

In the preceding chapters we have outlined how parents and teachers of children with ADHD can raise healthy children in a Torah environment if they practice developmentally attuned nurturing. We have described three aspects of developmentally attuned parenting, specifically: Wonder, Internalization of Rules, and Identification. We have shown how these stages are particularly essential in raising a child with ADHD, and how parents who implement them actually provide for their child's fundamental emotional needs. In the next section of this book, we will follow a typical day in the life of a Torah-observant child.

HOW CHILDREN IDENTIFY WITH PRIMARY ROLE MODELS

Key Points

- This chapter discusses the final phase of Developmentally Attuned Parenting: identification with parents as the main role models whose behavior they want to emulate.
- Children will typically only follow rules in the long term if they believe those rules are in their best interest.
- How can parents establish values that their children will emulate?
 1. Values must be visible and observable
 - ➔ Kids can't emulate what they don't see and are not aware of
 2. Values must be accompanied by positive emotional intensity
 - ➔ Example: Is Shabbos preparation pleasant or a stressful time in the home?
 3. Values must be presented in a way that aligns with the child's own strengths and weaknesses
 - ➔ Example: If a child is good at cooking, let them help cook for Shabbos
- Parents of children with ADHD must practice self-care so that their children don't grow up with parents who live joyless lives.
 - See Stephen Covey's time management chart in this chapter for one strategy for prioritizing your time effectively.

What Do You Think?

Which of your values do you want your children to emulate? Are those values:

- In the child's best interest?
- Visible in your home?
- Accompanied by positive "emotional weather"?
- Presented in a way that aligns with your child's unique abilities?

SECTION 1 SUMMARY

THE DEVELOPMENTALLY ATTUNED TORAH ENVIRONMENT FOR THE CHILD WITH ADHD

1. Stages of Interaction that Impact Self-Development	2. Expression in Neuro-typical Children
Parental wonder	Parent responds to child's behaviors with wonder and affection, leading child to develop foundational self-esteem.
Idealization of parents	Child views parent as all-powerful and all-knowing, accepting their authority and internalizing their worldview. Child develops ability to follow rules and function in society.
Identification with parents	Child identifies with, and therefore imitates, parents.

SECTION 1 SUMMARY

<p style="text-align: center;">3. Expression in ADHD Children</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4. Developmentally Attuned Parenting Tool(s)</p>
<p>Parent's energy is consumed by preventing child from negative behaviors, leaving little energy for responding to positive behaviors. Child develops negative and critical self-perception.</p>	<p>Mindfulness</p> <p>Cognitive Restructuring</p>
<p>Child's predisposition toward impulsivity and difficulties with self-control create a mismatch between parent's rules and child's experience. Child develops distrust of parents and other adults.</p>	<p>SMART goals</p>
<p>Child feels different and alienated from parents' experience and seeks identification elsewhere.</p>	<p>Publicize your values.</p> <p>Connect your values to positive "emotional weather."</p> <p>Find ways for your child to use their strengths to connect to your values.</p> <p>Parental self-care</p>

**SECTION 2: ATTUNING
MITZVOS FOR THE CHILD
WITH ADHD**

CHAPTER 7

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TORAH-OBSERVANT CHILD WITH ADHD

THE MODEH ANI CHALLENGE

In the chapters that follow, we will present a structured approach towards raising the child with ADHD within a Torah-observant home. The approach presented is grounded in an awareness that a halachic lifestyle presents an excellent structure in which the child with ADHD may develop. On the other hand, the demands and expectations of Torah living can create intense conflict between members of a family and can wreak havoc on the self-concept of children with ADHD. We hope that the following chapters will help parents and teachers allow Torah living to be a tree of life for ADHD children, empowering their God-given strengths, and allowing them to connect to Jewish tradition.

In our attempt to provide you with a practical guide on managing a child with ADHD, we are going to participate in a journey through a typical day. At each point in the day, we will note a halachic requirement which may significantly impact upon quality of life. We will present each halachah in a precise pattern. First, we will explain the

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basic halachah. Then we will highlight the brain functions required to perform it. Then, we will emphasize those factors that make performance of this halachah challenging for someone with ADHD. Finally, we will delineate steps that parents or teachers may take in order to turn the halachah into a successful experience for the person with ADHD.

Let's begin at the start of each day, the challenge of waking up.

Torah Jews wake up and immediately recite an ancient formula of gratitude.

מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקיים, שהחזרת בי נשמתی בחמלה, רבה
אמונתך.

*Modeh ani lefanecha, Melech, chai ve'kayam, she'hecherzarta bi
nishmasi b'chemlah, rabbah emunasecha.*

I give thanks before You, King, living and present, who has returned my soul to me with compassion; great is Your trust.

This simple proclamation is an incredible way to start the day. Positive psychology has studied the wide-reaching positive effects of gratitude. On the most basic level, saying Modeh Ani is a clear and succinct statement of thanking God for granting us another day of life. Numerous research studies show that people who express gratitude are happier than those who do not.

A child must have mastery over several life skills in order to say Modeh Ani:

1. The sleep-wake cycle must be activated so that one achieves at least a minimal level of conscious awareness.
2. The person must remember to say Modeh Ani. This requires working memory.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TORAH-OBSERVANT CHILD WITH ADHD

3. Once a person develops the habit of saying Modeh Ani, one only continues saying it if there is some sense that repetition leads to some sort of benefit, either spiritual or physical. This requires several brain functions, such as the ability to understand benefits, even when the consequences are not immediate and the ability to appreciate abstract benefits (such as closeness to God) in addition to physical benefits.

The understanding of ADHD that we have outlined in the first part of this book ought to demonstrate clearly why children with ADHD are likely to have difficulty with regularly reciting Modeh Ani. First, children with ADHD have disruptive sleep-wake cycles. Second, working memory is a primary deficit in executive functioning that characterizes most children with ADHD. Third, children with ADHD do not react to consequences that are not immediate and powerful. Subtle connections between behaviors and events tend to pass unobserved and unregistered by the conscious mind. Each of these reasons create a challenge for the child with ADHD who hopes to benefit from regular recitation of Modeh Ani upon awakening from sleep.

Waking up after a night of slumber is challenging for most. For individuals who have problems with regulating their alert-sleep cycle, this task can be particularly challenging. There are many anecdotal tales of sleep problems that accompany ADHD. Research is still somewhat unclear as to whether children with ADHD in fact suffer from more sleep disorders than the general population. However, it is clear that wake-up time can be an incredibly challenging task for children with ADHD and their beleaguered parents.

How each of us wakes up is quite individual and personal. I (SC) happen to be a morning lark. I wake up early and automatically, barely ever needing an alarm clock. Originally, I assumed that this was how everyone operated. Then I went to live in a dormitory and was exposed

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to a plethora of sleep-wake cycles. Some could not fall asleep until late at night. Others had incredible difficulty awakening in the morning. Only by observing the reality of others did I truly comprehend that sleep cycles are built into our biology. Environmental manipulation can modify them, but it is clear that not all humans sleep and awake in the same way.

As stated above, there is controversy in the literature regarding whether a particular sleep-wake cycle can be identified as characteristic of individuals with ADHD. In order to teach a child to say *Modeh Ani* in a meaningful fashion, parents and teachers must be keenly aware of the child's sleep-wake cycle.

An initial point to clarify is the manner in which the child regains awareness after emerging from sleep. Some children regain conscious awareness gradually and slowly. These are kids who can sleep through earthquakes and who open their eyes before they are even near being awake. One family that I worked with purchased three separate alarm clocks for their child, each sounding an alarm tone of higher volume. While the first alarm simply bothered the child, the second clearly awakened him, and the third was loud and apparently obnoxious enough to get him out of bed.

Another family had a three-alarm set-up where the first alarm played soft, folk music, the second alarm played rock music, and the third alarm – the one that actually got the child out of bed – played heavy metal music. In each of these cases, the children eventually reached the point where they requested only one alarm, and in each case the child requested that the alarm play the most intense signal.

Obviously, when three different levels of alarms are used, more time is needed for the task of waking up. In the cases described above, parents were able to reduce the time needed for their child to get out of bed from fifteen minutes to five minutes. This presents an obvious advantage to both child and parents, but is usually not recommended

as a first-line approach. At first, it is critically important to convey a sense of empathizing with the child's difficulty. Not everyone awakens in a flash. Our thoughts of our child's wake-up behavior may be filled with judgmental criticism. Our thinking might be dominated by the thought, "She doesn't get up because she is lazy." With each and every step that we learn, parents and teachers must do their best to replace critical thought with constructive problem solving. When we provide solutions that are inherently empathic, we significantly increase the likelihood that our child will comply with them.

Getting to Sleep on Time

Oftentimes, waking up on time is complicated by having too few hours of sleep. Research indicates that children and adolescents need between eight and ten hours of sleep in order to function adequately. In spite of contrary claims by many children and teenagers, scientific research does not support the notion that humans function optimally on a few hours of sleep. Therefore, it is critically important to create an environment that encourages and reinforces falling asleep. In addition, the clear connection between quantity of sleep hours and quality of functioning provides parents and teachers with a strong foundation to act in an assertive and authoritative manner regarding sleep hygiene and etiquette.

We are going to list steps that parents ought to take when trying to get their children to sleep at a reasonable time:

One-hour separation from all screens: Screens – whether televisions, computers, cell phones, or game boxes – all delay the onset of sleep. Parents need to create the simple rule that all electronic devices must be shut off a full hour before designated sleep time.

Rituals preceding sleep time: When families engage in pre-sleep rituals such as storytelling or book-reading, children are more easily able to flow from activity and movement to restful sleep.

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Personal room time: Before parents demand for their children to be in bed, it is helpful to limit them to a specific time period where they must entertain themselves quietly in their rooms. During this time, I have found that kids can listen to music on headphones without affecting their ability to fall asleep. Interestingly enough, we have not found it helpful to dictate to children what kind of music they can listen to. Some truly seem to be comforted by loud, cacophonous sounds. Others are soothed by calm, classical pieces. Until further research conclusively proves that certain music excites all brains, there is no sense fighting with a neuro-atypical child about what he or she must listen to. Rather, regardless of the preferred genre, listening to music on earbuds or headphones can be a means of transitioning from external activity to internal focus and rest.

Lights out: It is critical to implement a “lights out” time for children in general and children with ADHD in particular. This means that the child must be in his bed, without any entertainment, electronic or otherwise, by a certain time. In some ways, this approximates a time-out from reinforcement. In simple terms, this means that the child is not permitted access to positive stimulation that is likely to be more exciting than falling asleep. If the child is stimulated by video games, for example, “lights-out” denies him access to them and increases the likelihood that he will actually fall asleep.

Some children with ADHD may find this period to be extraordinarily challenging, as their minds may still be racing. This is a time for parents to firmly suggest the practice of breathing or visualization exercises, but it is essential to just say no to any form of external stimulation. In the majority of cases, children with ADHD soon drift off into the altered state of consciousness we call sleep and the possibility for starting tomorrow in a positive manner is established.

The Challenge of Working Memory and Modeh Ani

With persistent work, we can get some control over the sleep-wake cycle and have our children with ADHD enter a reasonable state of conscious awareness so that saying Modeh Ani is possible. The next challenge for the child with ADHD lies in getting him to remember to say it.

Working memory, you may recall, is the ability to use material already learned at the appropriate time. The child with ADHD may have already been taught at home and at school that saying Modeh Ani is a positive way to start the day. However, when he first awakens, his ADHD brain may be thinking of a football game that he will play later in the day (or any other imaginable thought), rather than remembering to say Modeh Ani. Because of their deficits in working memory, having the Modeh Ani file appear on their morning default home screen does not happen automatically.

Parents can significantly raise the likelihood that their child with ADHD says Modeh Ani by creating a Working Memory Activation Cue (WOMAC). A WOMAC can be a picture, poster, audio recording or any other external device that jogs a lethargic working memory. In the case of Modeh Ani, one may use a poster with the words of the prayer visible from the child's bed. Alternatively, one may play a recording of the Modeh Ani prayer put to music. The basic idea is that this, and many other tasks throughout the day, can be successfully accomplished if we are able to compensate for deficits in the working memory of children with ADHD. Many parents report that the Modeh Ani WOMAC has made a remarkable difference in helping their child wake up in a positive manner.

WOMAC's are a great way to help the child with ADHD activate his memory to focus on saying Modeh Ani. However, turning an event into a habit is another matter. Ultimately, we want to shape

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the child's behavior, so that he recites Modeh Ani in an automatic but non-robotic manner. This is challenging, particularly for children with ADHD. Habit formation requires practice and repetition. Any behavior that we practice and repeat is done because we believe the behavior is important. Many of our habits serve important functions in preserving and enhancing our lives. Unfortunately, this requires significant perception of future consequences. Children with ADHD are simply less able to activate this future perception in a meaningful manner. When the future consequences are abstract or spiritual, children with ADHD are at an even greater disadvantage. As parents, we can help these children bring values and principles into their lives. In order to do so, we must utilize present and tangible rewards.

Parents do not like to reward behavior that they believe ought to occur "naturally." They often feel that rewarding is bribing their children. Let's make a few statements that resist that kind of thinking. First, no one naturally says Modeh Ani. The fact that a neuro-typical child has brain function that allows for more efficient working memory and for easier visualization of future benefit does not mean that the child with ADHD is deficient or inferior. It does mean that responsible adults need to work harder at caring for his needs.

Second, a bribe is a payment that is usually given in order to have a person perform a morally questionable act. When we reward children, we do so by having them perform a morally positive action.

Third, a bribe is usually given to prevent a person from acting in a certain manner. When we reward our children, we are showing appreciation for a job well done.

Now that we have clarified the legitimacy of rewarding positive behavior, let's return to how we can positively reward the child with ADHD who wakes up and says Modeh Ani.

The art of reward-giving is actually somewhat complicated, and to do it right requires understanding some basic behavioral guidelines.

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Rewards are most effective when they are given in close proximity to the desired behavior. In terms of Modeh Ani, this means that rewards for saying Modeh Ani are most effective in helping the child establish a daily habit if the reward is given as soon as possible to the child having said the prayer. Many parents we have worked with have had prize bags in which they had many trinkets of prizes (e.g., key chains, small stuffed animals, marbles, small dolls, high-bounce balls). Whenever the child says Modeh Ani on his own without having to be reminded, the parent takes out the reward sack and allows the child, without looking, to select one prize. When we first began suggesting this technique, we recommended it only for use with younger children. However, we are often surprised that even many adolescents enjoy the randomness of the reward sack. It is important for you to know your child well enough and to determine whether the prize sack will motivate him.

In addition to the prize sack, parents may utilize a reward chart. The reward chart may be completed either by the child, parent, or both. The basic technique involves having a daily calendar near the child's bed. Every morning that he says Modeh Ani a checkmark is placed on that day. Parents may determine the number of checkmarks either in total or consecutively that a child must earn to receive a moderate reward. Two things are important here. The expectation must be an improvement as compared to the child's current behavior. However, it ought to be within range of what the child is likely to be capable of achieving. The last thing we hope to do is to create another situation of disappointment.

In addition, the moderate prizes selected need not be expensive, but they need to be meaningful to the child. Things such as extra screen time, getting to choose what the family will eat for dinner, or having a sleep-over playdate with a friend, are items that commonly appear on the mid-level reward charts. As we know that children with

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ADHD tend to have low tolerance for frustration, it is important that parents determine the number of points needed to earn a reward in a prudent manner. Children with ADHD are usually excited by these programs and, more often than not, their behaviors improve rather dramatically. Parents need not be concerned about going bankrupt or turning their children's lives into carnivals. You are always able to readjust the prize-performance exchange rate, so that prizes aren't achieved too quickly. But please remember, as the days go by, children's pace of compliance tends to slow down and it is preferable to reward too freely than to frustrate and recreate a cycle of failure.

Finally, parents are well advised to put some relatively large prizes on their reward charts as well. In order to obtain larger prizes such as computer games, dinner at a favorite restaurant, or a one-on-one outing with a parent, children need to earn more points. Earning these large prizes will require children to actually save their points and forgo immediate, smaller prizes. This is a very high level of delayed gratification. Most children with ADHD are not capable of achieving this. However, some are. Those who actually restrain themselves from the immediate gratification available from smaller prizes in exchange for long-term benefit are actually learning an incredibly important life skill and it is incredibly meaningful to allow the minority of children this learning opportunity.

Moreover, we have found that parents can surprise their children by adding the following bonus into their plan. In Chapter 5, when discussing the SMART plan, we suggested that all plans be time-limited. Although some families choose to use reward charts for long-term periods, we have found them to be most effective when implemented for about one month. Throughout the month period, children will be spending their hard-earned points for rewards. Whenever a child purchases a reward, he in effect pays for it with his points. However, parents may keep a tally of all of the child's earned points. At the end

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of the program, parents may announce that over the entire month the child earned a total of X points. Even though he spent many of them on various rewards, parents may use the total earned points to award their child a bonus prize of one of the large reward items on the list. This is an optional activity. We recommend that you implement it if you have had a particularly successful month with the rewards chart. The bonus enhances the parent-child relationship and is a concrete display of the parent's love and appreciation of their child.

Finally, we have already described that the developmentally attuned parent or teacher understands that children with ADHD tend to have fragile self-images. Each of our therapeutic strategies is geared to enhance the self-esteem of the child with ADHD. In order to achieve this, we suggest that, in addition to the WOMAC's described above, parents also design Self-Esteem Enhancing Cues (SEEC's). The concept underlying a SEEC is to connect performance of mitzvos with the child's self-esteem. For example, when a Jew says Modeh Ani, he is stating that he has a personal and intimate connection with Hashem, and hence is a true VIP. After all, Hashem cares about his life and is observing our behavior. Children with ADHD often feel alone and isolated. A SEEC is a concrete visual reminder of the intimate connection between the child with ADHD and Hashem that is exemplified when we perform mitzvos. Some examples of SEEC's that parents and teachers have created include the following:

- A picture of a two-seat motorcycle with your child in the driver's seat and the spot next to him reserved for Hashem. Underneath this is the caption: Say Modeh Ani and partner with the Highest.
- A picture of the Kohen Gadol from the Beis Hamikdash with a caption underneath: "He began the day just like you. Serve Hashem and say Modeh Ani."

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- A picture of someone your child admires with the following caption: “I said Modeh Ani this morning. Did you?”
- The words of Modeh Ani in clear, easily readable letters.
- The possibilities are literally endless and are only limited by your imagination. Remember that children with ADHD tend to feel worse about their position in the world than the neuro-typical children. When we create a SEEC, we boost the child with ADHD’s self-concept by showing that we partner him with a superstar.

In the next chapter, we will focus on the next challenge in the life of the Torah-observant child with ADHD, the challenge of netilas yadayim (ritual handwashing). It is worthwhile to note that Modeh Ani and netilas yadayim are among the very first activities that the Torah-observant Jew undertakes each and every day. The Lubavitcher Rebbe proclaimed that the activities with which one begins each day are critical because they set the tone for the rest of the day. Not surprisingly, netilas yadayim and Modeh Ani are both challenging for the child with ADHD.

Key Points

- This chapter and the chapters that follow provide a structured approach to raising a Torah observant child with ADHD.
- Each chapter will include:
 - Basic overview of a halachah from a typical day
 - Explanation of the brain functions necessary to perform this halachah
 - Understanding of the factors that make this halachah difficult for someone with ADHD
 - Steps that parents or teachers can take to help the child succeed in their experience of this halachah
- Modeh Ani: Executive functions and challenges
 - Activation of the sleep-wake cycle
 - ➔ Sleep-wake cycle is disrupted in children with ADHD
 - ➔ Waking up in the morning may be a challenge
 - Working memory
 - ➔ Often impaired in children with ADHD
 - ➔ May be difficult to remember to say Modeh Ani
 - Ability to understand long-term and abstract benefits
 - ➔ Children with ADHD often struggle to do things that do not provide an obvious and immediate benefit.
 - ➔ Continuing to say Modeh Ani day after day without seeing immediate benefits can be a challenge.
- Modeh Ani: Tools for success
 - Getting the child to sleep on time the night before
 - Working Memory Activation Cue (WOMAC)
 - ➔ This is something that activates the working memory, reminding an individual to do something they might otherwise forget

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- ➔ WOMACs for Modeh Ani can include playing a recording of a Modeh Ani song or hanging up a poster with the words to Modeh Ani
- Rewarding the recitation of Modeh Ani: rewards should be immediate, with the option of longer-term rewards as well, based on the parent's assessment of the child.
- Self-Esteem Enhancing Cue (SEEC)
 - ➔ This is something that connects mitzvah performance to the child's self-esteem.
 - ➔ Example: A picture of the Kohen Gadol with the caption, "He began the day just like you. Serve Hashem and say Modeh Ani."

CHAPTER 8

THE CHALLENGE OF NETILAS YADAYIM

Each Jew is required to perform a ritual handwashing upon arising. The handwashing consists of filling a washing cup with water and then pouring it onto one's hands in an alternating manner, beginning with the right, and pouring water three times on each hand. After the washing a beracha is said:

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו
וציוונו על נטילת ידים

*Baruch attah Hashem, Elokeinu melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu
b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu al netilas yadayim.*

Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the universe, who has commanded us regarding the washing of hands.

There are numerous explanations offered for the rationale of this ritual. During the hours of sleep, our hands may have come in contact

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with unclean parts of the body. Alternatively, our Sages equated sleep as a minute portion of death, so reawakening requires a purification process as we re-engage with life. A third opinion states that the work of the Kohanim in the Temple always required washing prior to engaging in the service, and our immersion in life is viewed analogously.

Numerous executive functions are necessary to perform this mitzvah; hence, it is challenging for those with ADHD. The difficulties involved include the following:

1. **Organization of Equipment:** The vessel and water must be close to one's bed from the night before, or a washing cup must be available next to the closest sink.
2. **Working Memory:** One must recall that handwashing is required before pursuing other activities.
3. **Sequential Analysis:** Handwashing is a general term and may be understood in multiple manners. A surgeon will wash his hand differently than a typical eight-year-old leaving the washroom. Ritual handwashing upon awakening is a process that demands multiple steps to be conducted in sequential order to be done properly. Although neuro-typical brains may perform this sequential analysis rather effortlessly, it can be extremely difficult for many children with ADHD brains. It can be demeaning and embarrassing to be required to perform a ritual that is second nature to others, yet extraordinarily difficult for the ADHD child. Dr. Russell Barkley has recognized sequencing and analysis as among the core difficulties of ADHD.

Let's present an ADHD-friendly ritual morning handwashing program. In order to create an ADHD-friendly netilas yadayim ritual, we suggest utilizing materials that were presented in the previous chapter. Working Memory Activation Cues (WOMAC's) and Self-

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Esteem Enhancement Cues (SEEC's) are critical aids for successful Netilas Yadayim among children with ADHD. As mentioned above, the WOMAC for netilas yadayim focuses on the executive function of organization. As a first step, one needs to design a chart on which the "how-to" of the mitzvah and the materials needed to perform it are clearly listed:

Netilas Yadayim: Morning Handwashing

Materials needed: Natlan (washing cup), water, towel

How to do netilas yadayim in the morning in 8 easy steps.

1. Fill the cup with water as you hold the cup in your right hand.
2. Transfer the filled cup to your left hand.
3. Pour enough water to cover your fingers and palms over your right hand.
4. Transfer the cup with the remaining water to your right hand.
5. Pour water covering the fingers and palms of your left hand.
6. Repeat steps 2-5 two more times, so that each hand has water poured on it 3 times.
7. With your wet hands raised in front of you, say the blessing: Baruch atah Hashem, Elokeinu melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu al netilas yadayim.
8. Dry your hands with a towel.

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In addition to the working memory enhancement cues (WOMAC) cited above, *netilas yadayim for children* also requires a Self-Esteem Enhancement Cue (SEEC). With this tool, we boost the child's self-esteem by conditioning him by presenting him with heroic figures from our tradition, or any esteemed role model in the child's eyes. This may be accomplished in a myriad of ways. You may place a picture of a great Gadol performing *netilas yadayim* and set it next to a picture of your child with the underlying caption, "Pure Greatness." If your child is not currently in the frame of mind wherein he respects Gedolei Yisrael, you may take a picture of any celebrity figure with the caption, "Netilas yadayim, because cleanliness and Godliness go together." Any connection of *netilas yadayim* with an esteemed role model increases the likelihood that your child will actually start performing *netilas yadayim*.

Although parents or teachers tend to explain verbally the meaning of the SEEC to the child, we have found that the presence of a visual cue such as a poster is a powerful reminder of the mitzvah's importance. Instead of long-winded philosophical lectures or criticism, the child is conditioned to visually see the mitzvah and himself in the context of desirable holiness. This is a terrific self-esteem boost, and we have found that kids with or without ADHD benefit from it tremendously.

The third strategy for helping the child with ADHD internalize consistent handwashing is the reward chart. As with *Modeh Ani* mentioned earlier, concrete rewards are most effective when they are offered sporadically and in conjunction with the other forms of reinforcement. Parents and teachers can choose to reward children who perform *netilas yadayim* in a manner similar to the use of rewards for saying *Modeh Ani*. *Netilas yadayim* may allow the child a chance to pick a prize from the reward sack. You may choose to reward the child with a check mark after each successful handwashing, and the child can trade in these points for rewards. In any case, rewards ought to

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be selected in advance and used to reinforce the child's performance of the mitzvah, in combination with extensive verbal praise, until the mitzvah is fully internalized. As noted before, *מתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה*, even if an act is done for an ulterior motive, in the end his motives will be pure.

Key Points

- Netilas yadayim: Executive functions and challenges
 - Organization of equipment: Preparing water and vessel the night before
 - Working memory: Remembering netilas yadayim before other activities
 - Sequential Analysis: Even though this may come easily to neuro-typical children, it can be difficult for children with ADHD to follow the correct handwashing procedure.
- Netilas yadayim: Tools for success
 - WOMAC: Create a chart that outlines how to perform this mitzvah and what materials are needed to do so.
 - SEEC: Poster with a photo showing a role model performing the mitzvah of netilas yadayim.
 - Reward chart
 - ➔ Remember, rewards are most helpful when offered periodically and together with the other forms of reinforcement.

CHAPTER 9

THE CHALLENGE OF DAVENING

PRAYER AND ADHD

Three times daily, the religious Jew, wherever he or she may be, turns in prayer towards Jerusalem. The daily prayers are held in a communal setting, at synagogue, in the presence of a minyan, a quorum of at least ten Jewish males above the age of 13. Morning prayer services generally run between 30-45 minutes. Afternoon and evening services are shorter and usually do not last more than 15 minutes. Shabbos and holiday prayers are longer, with morning services sometimes lasting three hours, and much longer on the High Holidays.

Anyone who has ever prayed knows that prayer is intended to be a passionate and intimate encounter. Unfortunately, for many children with ADHD, the basic prayer experience is boring and punitive.

Prayer requires focused concentration on the meaning of the words being stated. Our Sages referred to this concentration as *kavanah*. According to halachah, ideally, *kavanah* is required throughout prayer. Hundreds of years ago, the Rabbis were aware that sustained concentration was difficult for everyone, neuro-typicals and neuro-atypicals alike. They proclaimed that fulfillment of the mitzvah of

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prayer requires focused attention during at least the first of the nineteen blessings of the Amidah, the recognized prototype of all prayer.

In spite of this Rabbinic leniency, prayer is one of the most challenging acts for children with ADHD. Here are the major reasons why prayer is so difficult:

- Traditional Jewish prayer has been codified in the Siddur (prayer book). This requires the ability to read Hebrew, but a significant number of children with ADHD struggle with reading disabilities. Even those without significant reading challenges have difficulty focusing attention on areas that are not their preferred subject area. Not many of us have achieved the level of righteousness so that we are obsessed with the return of the Davidic monarchy to Jerusalem. However, the neuro-typical brain is capable of focusing attention even on low-interest areas. Research clearly indicates that **ADHD brains find it exceedingly difficult to focus sustained attention on an area of minimal interest**. Hence, most children with ADHD are significantly disadvantaged in their ability to “daven with kavanah.”
- Prayer services demand limited movement for considerable periods of time. **Many children with short attention spans and high activity levels find the confinement of sitting in a synagogue pew to be torturous**. As the Siddur has developed over the past thousand years, there have been numerous reasons to expand upon the content of our prayers. In effect, the number of prayers continues to grow with every significant event that confronts the Jewish community. In addition, Rabbis’ sermons and study sessions have been incorporated into many prayer services. The end result is that the typical davening exceeds the capability of the average child with ADHD to sustain attention and to restrict movement. Hence, davening in shul is highly problematic.

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- Davening requires activating many executive functions that are core deficiencies in children with ADHD. ***Prayer often requires a delay of gratification.*** More often than not, our requests are not immediately answered. All parents of children with ADHD are acutely aware that the ADHD brain has difficulty inhibiting or directing present behavior for a result that is far in the future. Second, ***prayer requires conceptual thought.*** There is no concrete representation of God in Jewish prayer. God transcends anything that can be physically imagined. Hence, prayers to an unseen, unimaginable Deity require deep focus on an existence that transcends all physical perception. This concept is challenging for most, but almost insurmountable for the ADHD brain that seeks physical sources of stimulation.

So, how can we help the child with ADHD survive and thrive in the world of Jewish prayer? Unfortunately, because so many parents and teachers are serious about praying, they tend to have a hard time empathizing or showing compassion for those who have not yet tasted its sweetness. The first hurdle to overcome is the tendency to criticize and judge the child who does not integrate into davening. It's natural for our first reaction to be critical and judgmental. However, if we are to educate any child with ADHD, we must reflect mindfully upon our own relation to the challenges inherent in praying.

A few basic clarifying questions may empower us to develop empathic compassion towards the challenges in davening faced by the child with ADHD:

Do the child's difficulties reflect a moral-philosophical problem, or are they manifestations of a neurological temperament that does not easily align with the restrictions of davening?

Our ability to ponder and consider this question is of tremendous importance. As stated above, most children and adults with ADHD

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face incredibly difficult challenges when attempting to connect to davening in a meaningful way. They are disorganized and have problems following the sequence of a pre-established text. They may focus attention on numerous objects and topics and have difficulty maintaining long focus on any topic that is not of direct and immediate life consequence. It's not that the child with ADHD cares less about the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash than the average yeshiva student, but rather that his time-blindness makes it harder for him to focus on its rebuilding and he is less proficient at using words to describe his inner experience. This is simply how his brain is structured and does not reflect a "religious" problem. Unfortunately, when we criticize or humiliate the child who is off task or disruptive during prayer, we tend to do so in a manner suggestive that the child is lacking in religiosity or Yiras Shamayim. It is obvious that this has devastating emotional effects on the child.

So, how can we help him?

If we practice mindful acceptance of the child's basic neurological difficulties, then parents or teachers are potentially capable of modifying the environment in a manner that allows the young person to try to create an environment that will help him engage in prayer in a more positive manner. In order to do this, we utilize Working Memory Activation Cues (WOMAC's), Self-Esteem Enhancement Cues (SEEC's) and Mitzvah Reward Charts that were discussed earlier, but now the focus of these tools is on davening. In order to assist the child with ADHD, meaningful adults must design the davening experience in a manner that allows the child to express strengths and have them reinforced. Below is a list of various methods that work for turning davening into an experience that empowers rather than disenfranchises the child with ADHD.

1. WOMAC's for Davening

WOMAC's for davening, first and foremost, organize the service visually for the child. As opposed to his natural tendency to lose sight of structure and to experience davening as an experience in chaos, basic davening WOMAC's display the structure of the service. An example of a WOMAC for the morning service, which we refer to as a "Shacharis Structure Card," may look something like this:

<h3>Shacharis</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Morning Blessings2. Pesukei D'zimrah3. Borchu4. Shema and its Blessings5. Amidah6. Conclusion of Service and Aleinu
--

Many children with ADHD achieve a sense of stability and comfort simply by knowing that the service is following a structure that has a beginning, middle, and end. When they focus on davening as a structured process and not as a disorganized abyss, they are able to remain connected and positively involved. Some parents and teachers place the Shacharis Structure Card next to the student and simply check at different points as to whether the child knows what part of the service is currently being conducted.

2. Highlighting Essential Prayers

Many children with ADHD have difficulty saying all of the words of each prayer. The technical task of reading each word may overwhelm

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their system. Of course, the problem is confounded if, as is characteristic of many children with ADHD, they also possess a formal reading disability. Moreover, people with ADHD tend to have shorter inhibitory control than the average neuro-typical person. Psychologists refer to this as frustration tolerance, and it is a well-established fact that people with ADHD have lower levels of frustration tolerance than neuro-typicals.

Rabbanim and halachic authorities can provide guidance with parts of the prayer service that can be shortened for a child or adult with ADHD. When the child's challenges stemming from ADHD are discussed with a halachic authority, the Rav can present the person with an individualized list of essential prayers. For example, some Rabbanim have abridged chapters of Pesukei D'zimrah and have allowed the person with ADHD to focus on particular psalms, while emphasizing the Shema and the Amidah. The key is for the poseik to allow the person with ADHD to understand that, in light of his circumstances, praying the parts of prayer designated for him is not second-rate by any means, but is his own unique avodas Hashem. When the person with ADHD prays the designated prayers with concentration and devotion, Torah obligations are fulfilled. The manner in which the p'sak halachah is transmitted is no less significant than the content of the p'sak.

3. Using the WOMAC as a Mitzvah Reward Chart

Once the Rav has given a p'sak concerning those prayers essential to the person with ADHD, a WOMAC with these prayers can be created. This is simply a chart that has the prayers that person with ADHD should recite. Here is an example of one such WOMAC for a 15-year-old boy, who could literally not sit through davening. It is important for a meaningful adult to use this form of WOMAC in a flexible man-

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ner. You may choose to have it filled out based solely on the self-report of the child. Alternatively, it may be filled out jointly by the meaningful adult and the child. When both adult and child separately fill out the WOMAC, they may choose to enter into discussion as to how each party graded differently. In some cases, the adult may choose to modify his rating, or teach the child what significant behaviors are necessary in order to improve the rating. Rewards ought always to be based on the adult's ratings as this reinforces the reality of a hierarchy in order to provide safety and security for the child. Below is an example of a davening WOMAC completed both by the teacher and the child.

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Prayer	Low level of kavanah	Medium level of kavanah	High level of kavanah
Morning Blessings	Teacher: You seemed distracted as you were looking all around the room and ignoring your Siddur. Focus on the Siddur.	Student: I was into the tefillah from the start	
Baruch She'Amar			<p>Student: I was totally focused and chanted every word out loud with the group.</p> <p>Teacher: You were saying the tefillah out loud with the rest of the group and you were looking into the Siddur!</p>
Ashrei		Teacher: Pretty good concentration, but in the middle you seemed to be more concentrated on getting the attention of the boy next to you than on saying Ashrei. You poked him twice and tried to get him to laugh at something. But for most of the prayer you were right on focus.	Student: Totally nailed it!

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<p>Yishtabach</p>			<p>Student: Sang with everyone. Teacher: Great, loud singing. Looks like real kavanah!</p>
<p>Shema and its Blessings</p>		<p>Teacher: Pretty good, but you seemed to space out after the first beracha, as you were moving around a lot in your seat and not looking in the Siddur. You got it back together when we reached Shema and then you davened out loud with the group.</p>	<p>Student: Total focus.</p>
<p>Amidah</p>			<p>Student: Total focus. Teacher: You took your time and it looked like you were really davening. You did not rush through it and you finished just before the Chazan began to say the repetition of the Amidah.</p>

4. Breaks During Davening

For some children with ADHD-like brains, sitting for extended periods without physical activity can be incredibly upsetting. It is important to proactively create opportunities to move in the course of a minyan. This may be achieved by arranging with the child to utilize breaks and leave the davening when he feels it is necessary for him. He may be given a pass that allows him to take a specific number of davening breaks. The child needs to know the exact time that he is permitted to utilize for these breaks. If he does not abide by the time limit, this privilege may be modified or rescinded.

5. Giving the Child a Job Connected to Davening

Appoint the child to serve as a Gabbai responsible for setting up the shul. This task can involve all logistics from making sure lights and air conditioning are on, to setting up chairs, to arranging the Siddurim and Chumashim, and ensuring that the Torah is in its proper place. Moreover, many children and adults with ADHD are more than competent in performing the tasks of the Gabbai in charge of calling people up to the Torah. This allows for activity in the midst of the Torah reading and breaks the reading into shorter chunks. In order to increase the probability that the child will be successful at this, parents or teachers can prepare a WOMAC that lists specific responsibilities. It may look something like this:

Gabbai Responsibilities

- Put all Siddurim together on shelf.
- Put Chumashim on shelf.
- Put talleisim on shelf.
- Set up chairs in rows.
- Make sure the Aron Kodesh is open or that a key is readily available.
- Make sure the Torah is rolled to the proper starting point.
- Make sure the floor is clean.
- Make sure the list of names of those to be called to the Torah is set before the service whenever possible.
- Obtain the name of each person to be called to the Torah before the aliyah is called.
- Provide the proper name to the Gabbai who calls out each aliyah.

When the young person with ADHD is assigned the role of assigning aliya to the Torah and other honors, he plays an active role in the shul and is able to move around actively and legitimately. This responsibility may also suit his temperament. Instead of feeling bored and disconnected, he now serves a vital role for the proper performance of tefillah.

We can also create a SEEC, if we frame all of the above-stated tasks as a way of performing the mitzvah of davening on the highest level. This can be done by adding a heading to the above listed tasks, such as

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ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם

or

ועבדת את ה' אלוקיך בכל לבבך

or

והדרת את ה' אלקיך

Any of the above sentences conveys the importance of the task of the Gabbai. It is not a technical role, but one that enhances the prayer service for all involved. When a parent or teacher assigns this role to a child with ADHD, he builds self-esteem in a manner that connects the child to the mitzvah of davening.

Allow the Child with ADHD to Serve as the Baal Tefillah

It is great to offer the youngster with ADHD the opportunity of davening from the *amud*. Many people with ADHD love singing and are quite proficient at learning the nusach of tefillah. ADHD characteristics tend to attract so much negative attention, and it is essential to exploit any aspect of natural temperament that may be directed towards pro-social behaviors. At times, it may not feel natural to ask the student who was totally disconnected during the shiur to serve as the Baal Tefillah. However, for the child with a natural aptitude for music, leading the service may allow him to connect with the community and with the tefillos. People who find a role within a community do not need to seek their identity outside of the community. Therefore, it is important for parents and teachers not to rigidly hold on to grudges. Simply because the child with ADHD behaves inappropriately in a particular situation, that does not automatically mean that we punish

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him in another situation. Some children who may not shine in learning during shiur will glow when given the opportunity to lead the prayer service. Children with ADHD need to experience that single shining moment in the positive sunlight.

Hisbodedus: Mindful Solitude

Hisbodedus is an ancient tradition that is generally associated with Kabbalistic and Chasidic prayer. The basic idea is for the one praying to find a quiet spot, sometimes in nature, in which, through chanting and meditation, he is able to communicate in an intimate manner with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Hisbodedus presents several advantages for a person with ADHD.

First, it is generally performed in a quiet, secluded area, removed from the multiple distractions present in the minyan in a shul.

Second, it is generally performed by spontaneously speaking with God, in a heartfelt manner, without any formal text. Thus, the person with ADHD is able to connect directly, without having to focus concentration on prepared, external texts.

Finally, hisbodedus has no time limit. The time set for hisbodedus depends upon the individual. It is important to encourage and reinforce hisbodedus to the extent that one is able to perform it. Some may be able to be in a state of personal communication with Hashem for a long period of time (more than 20 minutes). Others may only be able to speak to Hashem for very brief time periods. Although it is important to commit to a certain number of minutes for hisbodedus, the amount of time is dependent upon the individual person. Moshe Rabbeinu himself provides a formidable precedent for the power of either short or long prayer. When he prays for his sister's recovery, he is succinct and uses only five words, "Please Lord, heal her now." On the other hand, according to the Midrash, he steadfastly repeated no fewer than five hundred and fifteen prayers beseeching God to allow

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him to enter the land of Israel. Parents and teachers may reinforce and encourage hisbodedus, and allow the child to establish the time to be spent. Any time is considered sufficient and is to be praised.

Hisbodedus shares many aspects with what the general world calls meditation, particularly meditations focusing on mindfulness. As we have previously explained, in Jewish tradition, mindfulness is referred to as *kavanah*, or focused concentration. When one prays or performs commandments, one is expected to formulate a state of *kavanah*. There are many ways to achieve this awareness. One is by simply focusing on the words of prayer and meditating on their meaning. Another is to focus on specific words, particularly the names of God, and meditate on their significance. The *Mishnah Berurah*, a widely accepted Jewish authority of the early 20th century, for example, suggests focusing on the four letters of the Tetragrammaton (*Yud Kei Vav Kei*) and imagining different permutations of their vowels. We cite this, for although it is merely one among many sources, it is viewed as a normative rabbinic opinion and is not the writing of a relatively obscure mystic.

When we teach hisbodedus, we explain that it is part of davening called *tachanunim*. The *Shemoneh Esrei* is the formal part of prayer that focuses on everyone's needs. *Tachanunim* is the part of prayer that focuses on each individual's personal needs. The Rambam writes that a particularly propitious time for the recital of *tachanunim* is immediately following the recitation of the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

When a person performs hisbodedus, he or she asks Hashem for his individual, personal requests. There is no set formula for these words. Rather, the words flow spontaneously from the heart of the individual.

Hisbodedus can be performed anywhere. Traditionally, a Rebbe and his *talmidim* would often take advantage of nature as a surrounding that encourages hisbodedus. However, one can offer sincere,

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personal prayer anywhere and anytime. We have a couple of suggestions that seem to work well in allowing hisbodedus to be meaningful.

First, as we already stated, there is no particular place where one must perform hisbodedus. Although natural settings may be conducive, it is more important to make hisbodedus a regular activity in the stream of living. This is particularly important for people struggling with ADHD, who have difficulty with setting times and keeping appointments. Parents and teachers can encourage children to perform hisbodedus as part of their daily davening, especially when they feel that they are unable to participate in the regular communal prayer. While sitting with the group in communal prayer, the child with ADHD needs to focus his attention on his personal, private needs. Below is a WOMAC that suggests clear steps on how he or she may accomplish this:

Hisbodedus

1. Make sure you are seated or standing in a comfortable, dignified manner (not like a schlumper, but posture yourself in a way that projects both comfort and self-respect).
2. You may keep your eyes open or closed. If you are more comfortable keeping your eyes open, have them gaze downwards, about six feet in front of you, towards the floor. Practice achieving a soft gaze, not working hard on noticing anything, but being aware of the full scope of whatever happens to be in the field of vision.
3. Breathe normally and pay attention to your breath as it enters and leaves the body. Notice how it feels to free yourself of the breath and to disconnect from any thoughts or feelings that may be invading your brain.
4. Gently focus on things that you need help in and ask for Hashem's help. Use whatever words come to you. Say them in whatever language they come out. If you lose concentration, go back to focus on your breathing and then continue your conversation with Hashem.
5. When you have finished asking for all of your needs, take a slow deep breath and thank Hashem for the opportunity for the meeting.

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Parents and teachers may also prepare a “Hisbodedus SEEC” that highlights its great value and shows an example of a great figure in Jewish history engaged in hisbodedus, next to a picture of the child. As with other daily *mitzvos*, this allows the child to internalize his behavior as being similar to a role model from Jewish tradition. Examples of pictures that parents have used as part of Hisbodedus SEEC’s include Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Eliyahu, Rivka, Rachel, Chanah, Yael, or Devorah. Any figure doing hisbodedus can serve as a role model. When we place a photo or drawing of the child next to the role model, we have created a SEEC that helps the young person internalize and identify with the specific values of the role model. As with other *mitzvos*, the SEEC is a visual aid that reinforces and encourages this positive form of identification.

Rewarding the Practice of Hisbodedus

Hisbodedus requires practice. Particularly in our society, where so many ritual observances are done by rote, it can be frightening to try and write your own script in order to communicate with Hashem. Parents and teachers can help children with ADHD by sharing stories that stress the importance of authentic and sincere prayer. There is a well-known Chasidic tale about a shepherd who played his flute in the shul of the Baal Shem Tov on Rosh Hashanah. The congregants viewed the young shepherd’s flute blowing as disrespectful and inappropriate. However, the Baal Shem Tov recognized the authenticity of the boy’s communication and encouraged others to view him as an example of sincere prayer.

Parents and teachers can share stories that emphasize the need for sincerity in prayer. Children can be given time to write out their own prayers in their own words that they will say in their preferred language. Families or classes can go on hisbodedus outings in which children can practice this informal, yet intensely personal, dialogue

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with Hashem. When we allocate time from our busy schedules to incorporate these kinds of activities, we are teaching children that we value hisbodedus and view it as an important part of our service to Hashem. For many with ADHD, it is an opportunity to escape the category of those without a prayer.

As with the other *mitzvos* that we have discussed, parents and teachers may reward hisbodedus practice with material reinforcements. After composing a Hisbodedus Chart, children can be rewarded after successful acts of hisbodedus on a specified number of occasions. Alternately, parents can offer a specific prize if the child is able to share a particularly meaningful aspect of the experience. Most important is to keep the focus on the child's mastery of this important skill and stress that the reward is a symbolic way of showing how much we value the child's efforts.

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Key Points

- Prayer and ADHD
 - Tefillah requires kavanah
- Prayer: Executive functions and challenges
 - Reading the Siddur requires Hebrew reading skills
 - ➔ Many children with ADHD also have reading disabilities
 - Sustained attention
 - ➔ Most children are not automatically excited by many of the topics in the Siddur
 - ➔ ADHD brains find it exceedingly difficult to focus sustained attention on an area of minimal interest
 - Impulse control
 - ➔ Staying still for long periods of time
 - Delayed gratification
 - ➔ Making requests to Hashem that are not immediately answered
 - Abstract thought
 - ➔ Davening to Hashem, who cannot be seen or even pictured
- Prayer: Tools for success
 - Recognizing that the child's difficulties stem from a mismatch between their neurological makeup and the demands of davening, not from a moral or philosophical problem
 - WOMAC
 - ➔ Shacharis Structure Card that outlines the morning davening
 - Highlighting the essential prayers rather than demanding that the child say everything in the Siddur with kavanah (consult with your poseik)

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- ➔ Create a WOMAC with the prayers that the child has been instructed to say
- Breaks during davening
- Meaningful tasks during davening
 - ➔ Make the child a Gabbai and give them specific tasks, such as arranging chairs
 - Create WOMAC with Gabbai responsibilities
 - SEEC
 - Frame Gabbai responsibilities as a way of performing the mitzvah of davening on the highest level.
 - Example: ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם
 - ➔ Allow the child to serve as the Baal Tefillah
 - ➔ Give the child permission to take breaks at specific points (and be clear about what they can do during those breaks!)
- Hisbodedus is a less structured form of prayer
 - ➔ Encourage the child to engage in hisbodedus
 - ➔ Hisbodedus WOMAC
 - ➔ Hisbodedus SEEC: Picture of Avraham Avinu, Rivka Imeinu, or other role models engaged in hisbodedus next to a picture of the child
 - ➔ Reward hisbodedus practice

CHAPTER 10

THE CHALLENGE OF SAYING *BERACHOS* BEFORE EATING

Birchos ha-nehenin, blessings related to pleasurable experience, are a staple of Jewish living. An entire chapter of the Talmud in Tractate *Berachos*, the section of the Talmud dealing with blessings, is devoted exclusively to blessings before food. There is much psychological and emotional wisdom that is gained by saying these blessings. First, they are a means of developing self-control over basic impulses, and this is particularly challenging for many with ADHD. Although the “bestial” part of the individual simply wants to eat, the Godly side wants to express gratitude to Hashem for providing the food. Whenever we say a blessing before eating, we are building “muscles” that restrain the “animal self” from satisfying desires freely, and we are training ourselves to control the basic desire to pursue pleasure in a mindless fashion.

Second, when a beracha is said with kavanah, we become mindful of the abundance for which we naturally express gratitude. Numerous psychological studies prove beyond a doubt that expressing gratitude

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is beneficial in numerous ways, particularly for the person who recognizes his or her good fortune.

Recently, a yeshiva high school student came to his therapist's office suffering from ADHD and anxiety. The seventeen-year-old student was wearing a shirt upon which was written the expression, "Nothing is Given."

When asked about the meaning of the statement he explained that life is a struggle and that one only receives what one invests. "No pain, no gain," he said.

He seemed to believe that all in life is obtained only through struggle.

When asked if this was in fact so, he answered in the affirmative. "When I go to the gym, I need to work out hard if I am going to be in shape, and at school, if I don't study I flunk. Without hard work, we get nothing."

The therapist wondered if this really described all of life. "How about what is happening in this room right now? Has nothing been given to us? I mean, what are we doing right now?"

Looking a bit perplexed, he replied, "Well we're sitting and talking. I mean our bodies are here, and I guess we didn't really work to get our bodies, they kind of just came along with us."

"Yes, and our bodies do an incredible amount of stuff that we didn't do any work for. Wouldn't you agree?" queried the therapist.

"Sure," he nodded, showing some confusion. "Well, our bodies are sitting in these chairs and they seem to know how to position themselves properly. We breathe air that we had no part in creating, and our bodies know how to process the oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other elements in a manner that allows us to live. We also did not do anything to receive these benefits. When you think about it, it's overwhelming to consider the number of free gifts that life presents us."

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The young man smiled and said, “Maybe my shirt should say, ‘We have everything we need’ on the front, and on the back we should print, ‘So don’t be a pig.’”

The therapist wistfully smiled with amusement at the young man’s comment. At the next session, the young man presented his therapist with a shirt emblazoned with the pithy maxims he had formulated. This conversation served as a springboard to help him begin restructuring the way he thought about life. On one hand, the young man began internalizing the notion that we are surrounded by multiple blessings that have been given to us as free handouts. On the other hand, long-term achievements such as money, social status and professional success require significant effort and commitment. When this adolescent with ADHD began sensing the balance between personal effort and God-given blessings, he became capable of relaxing a bit and enjoying the blessings that engulfed him.

Any parent or grandparent who has witnessed the miracle and wonder of birth can intuitively resonate with the overwhelming abundance for which we are grateful. Birchos ha-nehenin are expressions of gratitude. When we teach our children to say berachos in a mindful fashion, we teach them to appreciate the bounty of blessings that surround us. We teach them that when we take things for granted and do not appreciate them, they become invisible to us. Psychologists call this process “hedonic adaptation.” It means that if we do not actively focus our awareness on physical pleasures, we stop enjoying them. On the other hand, when we are mindful of the gifts around us, we experience them as sources of great pleasure and it is natural to express thanks and gratitude.

Taking time out to appreciate the wonder and blessing of life is particularly difficult for children with ADHD. People with ADHD experience physical impulses with intensity, and exerting restraint is much more difficult for them than for the neuro-typical person.

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Additionally, the ADHD brain stops paying attention to stimuli much quicker than does the neuro-typical brain. Hence, a person with ADHD is likely to “forget” about what there is to be grateful for. Berachos provide a powerful antidote.

In order to help our children with ADHD become experts at saying berachos with kavanah, we can employ WOMAC's and SEEC's. We can also positively reward practice. This is how:

Prepare Beracha WOMAC's

A “Beracha WOMAC” can be any pictorial aid that reminds one of the concept of expressing gratitude and appreciation. On a simple level, we can take pictures of common foods with the appropriate berachos listed above:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ

You are the Source of all blessing, our Lord, King of the world, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

Alternatively, we may show two pictures, side by side. On one side we may show a person scarfing down a hamburger and on the other side we have a picture of someone holding the burger in his hands and savoring it with intent concentration before eating it. We can ask our child, who, in their opinion, enjoys the burger more, the one who basically inhales it mindlessly, or the one who savors it? Berachos can be explained as a means of savoring something before consuming it. The beracha allows us to savor the object in our minds and experience the wonder contained in the pleasure of eating. It allows us to express a deep sense of gratitude for the gift of food.

Prepare a Beracha SEEC. When we recite a beracha in a mindful manner, we are displaying that we are masters over our desires. If we were just to eat whenever we felt a pang of hunger, without being

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mindful, we would be slaves to our desires. Each time we delay immediate gratification and say a beracha, we display self-mastery and empower our spiritual selves. A “Beracha Self-Esteem Enhancing Cue” may have a title such as “Who’s in Charge Here?” and then have a slew of different parts of our human experience such as hunger, thirst, tiredness, anger, and Hashem. Each time we say a beracha before indulging our physical desires, we display that we are trying to prioritize Hashem as the bedrock of our lives and we are trying to align our behaviors with His will. When we do this, we are partnering with Him on this physical earth, and, in effect, enhancing our personal self-esteem.

Key Points

- Berachos before eating: Executive functions and challenges
 - Impulse control
 - ➔ Stopping to say a beracha before eating
- Berachos before eating: Tools for success
 - WOMACs
 - ➔ Pictures of common foods together with the appropriate berachos
 - ➔ Two pictures side by side: one person scarfing down a hamburger and one person savoring and enjoying the hamburger
 - SEEC
 - ➔ Title: Who's in Charge Here?
 - Images: Pictures representing hunger, thirst, tiredness, anger, and Hashem

CHAPTER 11

THE CHALLENGE OF *TALMUD* *TORAH*

Throughout generations, Jewish children would often return home from the first day of school with a dash of honey on their Bible or prayer book. This symbolic act was a concrete manner of displaying the sweetness of Torah and its central role in allowing our lives to be both palatable and enjoyable. Unfortunately, many children with ADHD do not experience the sweetness of Torah. The lack of proper fit between their temperament and the rigorous demands of Torah learning creates a punitive and devaluing environment. It is no mystery that many abandon the world of Torah and *mitzvos* at the first opportunity. Oftentimes, the alternatives that they choose do not empower or enhance their attachment to positive wellsprings. In this chapter, we will discuss how parents and teachers can create an opportunity for Jewish children with ADHD to internalize and identify Torah study as a meaningful and self-empowering tool and value.

Studying Torah is the cornerstone of Jewish life and is a *mitzvah* which provides huge rewards for those fortunate enough to experience it. On a sociological level, Torah learning is an important

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benchmark for measuring one's status. Intellectual skill in Torah study and internalization of Torah knowledge are viewed as extremely desirable personality traits. We want our children to become talmidei chachamim and Yirei Shamayim, and we invest energy and resources in our efforts to achieve these goals.

There are numerous factors that may convert the experience of Torah learning into a bitter experience, specifically for children with ADHD:

1. As previously described, many children with ADHD also suffer from reading disabilities. The centrality of written text in the standard classroom places these children at a fundamental disadvantage.
2. In addition to written text, most classroom learning occurs through auditory listening. Paying attention to the spoken word is often a weak link in the ADHD learning cycle.
3. Many classes are scheduled for extended lengths of time that often exceed the normative ADHD attention span.
4. Many classes do not allow physical movement, and the inhibition of physical movement is difficult, if not torturous, for many with ADHD.
5. Many topics of Torah study do not directly connect with the child with ADHD's area of interest. It has been established that focused attention on areas that are not primary areas of interest is extraordinarily difficult for the child with ADHD.
6. Many topics of Torah study require sequential analysis of data and this contradicts the typical ADHD brain that *seeks associative connections*.

In addition to the direct negative effects that emerge from the mismatch between the average classroom and the workings of an ADHD

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brain, the child with ADHD, misplaced in an inappropriate learning environment, may also suffer long-lasting emotional devastation.

When he or she does not succeed in Torah learning, failure occurs in an area that is considered to be of ultimate importance. Attempts at rationalizing are futile. When we say things like, “So he won’t be a *gadol hador*, but at least he will be an *ehrlischer yid*,” the child, who may be quite intelligent, experiences a personal sense of inferiority. Moreover, he likely begins to visualize a glass ceiling that limits his belief regarding personal potential.

In many cases, the child with ADHD may, in fact, possess the prowess to develop into a great talmid chacham. Because his cognitive and behavioral style do not match well with the modalities employed by standard teaching, he and we may conclude that the child is intellectually inferior. ***Believing an ADHD child is intellectually inferior is a tragic misconception. Simply because the child’s brain is not neuro-typical does not mean that he or she is stupid or dull. Rather, it presents a challenge for parents and educators to unlock the child’s hidden potential and to allow him to express his abilities that currently are latent. This incredible responsibility is balanced by the incredible satisfaction for those who allow the child with ADHD to develop mastery through Torah learning.***

Most parents and educators are working under very stressful conditions, and many do not possess the training or professional support necessary for unlocking the learning potential of the child with ADHD. When parents observe their child suffering in the educational system, it is hard for them to empathize with the child’s teacher. However, in order to effectively assist our children, it is critical to cultivate empathy and compassion for the challenges facing the educator. The development of collaborative cooperation is described in the steps below.

Multiple Torah Intelligences Require Differential Instruction

In teaching Torah, it is absolutely essential for parents and educators to extend their teaching methods beyond reading and writing. Although reading and writing skills ought to be developed and encouraged, it is simply unethical for educators and parents to use reading and writing as the exclusive tools for Torah teaching. It is critical that children can easily access Torah information in modalities other than reading or writing. Technological advances make this relatively easy. Videos and animations may be produced without too much effort. Not only are videos and animations a means of teaching not dependent upon reading or writing, but they also tend to be highly stimulating and are more likely to capture the attention of the child with ADHD.

Dramatic presentation of Torah material also allows for Torah to be presented without exclusive reliance upon the written word. Anyone who teaches Torah must be committed to presenting the material in the manner in which it can be most easily and enjoyably comprehended by students. To do anything else is to risk losing the students' connection to the Torah community and lifestyle. Thus any integration of emotion, movement, music, construction or acting are means of teaching Torah in a heterogeneous fashion.

A useful structure that parents and teachers can utilize to help children with ADHD connect to Torah study is the concept of "multiple intelligences" developed by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner. Gardner makes the simple observation that, although school learning is dominated by verbal and mathematical intelligence, "smarts" in actual living is much more expansive and involves other types of cognitive skills. Currently, Gardner has identified eight different types of intelligences, as follows:

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- Naturalist Intelligence is understanding living things and being adaptive in nature.
- Spatial Intelligence involves the ability to perceive objects in three dimensions and from different perspectives.
- Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence involves coordinating one's mind with one's body.
- Musical Intelligence involves discerning sounds, their pitch, tone, and timbre.
- Linguistic Intelligence refers to one's ability to use words efficiently to express meaning.
- Intrapersonal Intelligence involves becoming aware of your internal world of thoughts, feelings, and sensations.
- Interpersonal Intelligence is one's ability to identify and empathize with the feelings of others.
- Existential Intelligence involves one's ability to sense abstract, spiritual, metaphysical, or transcendent experiences as present and significant. Some refer to this as "religious intelligence."

Torah needs to be presented in a manner so that each child can express their preferred intelligence through it. If a child who has a natural affinity towards nature is not able to direct her Torah learning towards the natural experience, it is highly unlikely that she will internalize Torah as an important life principle. Fortunately, the scope of Torah is vast. Unfortunately, traditional education tends to provide a limited view of Torah learning so that only those with strong linguistic intelligence may excel in it. Although this contradicts the adage of our Talmudic sages, *הפוך בה והפוך בה*, *כי הכול בה*, most schools still emphasize verbal learning and expression. Most children with ADHD express their preferred mode of intelligence in an area beyond words. Some are dancers, others are athletes, painters, builders, or musicians. When we allow children to express Torah through their particular area

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of strength we are creating an experience of mastery that allows for internalization, commitment, and growth. Additionally, we allow the child to experience her personal development as being connected to the service of God.

The Right to Be an Autodidact

Some children prefer individual learning more than learning in classrooms or groups. The proliferation of computers and Torah information on the internet has made learning on one's own a very realistic possibility. Many children with ADHD who cannot adjust to the expectations of classroom learning are quite effective students when given the opportunity to study individually on their own terms. Individualizing schedules complicates the job of school administrators. On the other hand, this accommodation allows many children with ADHD to learn Torah and boost self-esteem. When children with ADHD are able to study Torah in an individualized manner, they are able to enjoy the experience as meaningful, growth-producing, and pertinent to their lives.

The Miracle of Recording Lectures

Many children with ADHD, due to the lack of control over behavioral and emotional inhibition, are not necessarily capable of learning at the same pace as their scheduled classes. When we record lectures and make them available to our students, we create a potential for them to listen to the class at times and in quantities of their own choosing. They need not keep their attention focused at a time that is overly challenging, and the length of the class can be broken into smaller segments that are commensurate with the child's span of attention.

When I (SC) was principal of a high school in Israel for students with ADHD, we videotaped classes and uploaded them to YouTube.

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The particular program allowed us to observe the times that students actually watched the classes. We were surprised to discover that over 80 percent of students were tuning into classes after 10 PM. Although this probably did not help their ability to wake up on time the following morning, we found that students actually learned significantly better when they were allowed to study at times when their attentional systems were active. Many of our students were truly night owls.

Talmud Torah WOMAC's

Classrooms and homes may use multiple Working Memory Activation Cues that project the importance of Torah and convey the centrality of learning. Probably for reasons connected to space and financial limitations, the presence of *seforim* is less common in the average classroom. However, it is clear that the Torah classroom needs to be decorated with *seforim*. Basic texts such as Chumashim, Mishnayos, and Gemaras ought to be the standard decor of every class. Similarly, schools that study secular studies ought to have basic texts of secular books displayed prominently on shelves as well. When students absorb this environment, they internalize respect and appreciation of the texts. For a child struggling with ADHD, who likely is challenged with the executive function of working memory, the presence of books in the classroom is a concrete reminder that Torah is considered to be more precious than any ornate decoration. The importance of Torah as an ultimate value is conveyed by the choice to “decorate” the room with Torah books.

It follows that parents who have *seforim* prominently displayed in the living areas of their home are also utilizing a memory activation cue that powerfully influences all who dwell within the home. Of course, for this WOMAC to be effective, the books must be used and not allowed to merely collect dust. When parents adorn the public areas of their home with *seforim*, they express their priorities and display Torah

study as a primary value. Hence, Jewish books that decorate the walls of public areas are powerful working memory activation cues and are essential for the child with ADHD.

The Living Torah Learning WOMAC – Parents!

Nothing is as powerful as observing your role model diligently devoted to an activity of value. When we observe role models engaging in an activity, our natural system of identification is activated, and we want to imitate the role model. This is why we dress and speak like our role models. In the Torah-observant home, parents who allow their children to observe them learning Torah, or enable Torah learning to occur, provide a direct and powerful example that children may imitate. When our children observe our Torah learning, the natural process of internalization and identification occurs and they naturally desire to imitate us.

Recently, I (SC) had a conversation with my twenty-eight-year-old son, Adin. He told me that he fondly remembers the excitement he felt when he first started learning Gemara in grade school. Adin told me that he cannot remember the content of the learning, but he was excited that he was “big enough” to learn Gemara, like a man rather than a little boy. Adin was describing the process of identification in enhancing his personal self-identity. Because he had seen adult men engaged in serious Talmud study, he had internalized this as part of his ideal self. When he reached the age where he too began studying Talmud in the classroom, the experience of Torah learning was a meaningful step in his notion of becoming a man. As his father, I can share with you that this is great nachas.

It is important to provide our children with the opportunities to observe us learning. I would always try to learn in my home in order to allow my children to see me in this role. At times when the learning would occur in a Beis Midrash or other location, I would try to have

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my children attend in order to witness the simple fact that their father engaged in Torah study. If you study as an avreich in a yeshiva, where learning is your full-time occupation, it is still important to make certain that your children see you learning. Sometimes leaving the house – and not providing children with the experience of observing their parents involved in Torah study – denies children the opportunity to observe role-modeling behavior.

Witnessing Torah study is particularly important to children with ADHD. As a result of the poor fit between their temperament and the traditional classroom, they tend to have more negative associations with Torah study than does the average child. For them, observing a parent engaged in learning may be the only opportunity they have to experience the intense importance and joy of Torah study. When children observe their mother or father engaged in study, they are privy to experience their parents engaged in their ultimate value. This permits identification to occur, and consciously or unconsciously, the child internalizes Torah study as a value that he or she hopes to internalize. When we allow children to see us learning Torah, we are acting as human WOMAC's in “real time” and are deeply affecting their lives.

Talmud Study for Children with ADHD

Each technique cited previously is also relevant for the study of Talmud. However, because of its unique nature, Talmud study presents a particular set of challenges, especially for the child with ADHD. The Talmud is the compendium of the Rabbinic interpretations of Torah law. The first part of the Talmud is the Mishnah. This was edited by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi around the year 220 C.E. The second part of the Talmud is the Gemara. The Gemara expounds and elaborates upon the teachings of the Mishnah and contains the core of Rabbinic wisdom for approximately the next 300 years. The largest center of Jewish life at this time was in the area surrounding Babylonia, hence

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the Talmud primarily studied is called the Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud). The Mishnah is written almost exclusively in Hebrew. The Gemara, on the other hand, is written in a combination of Aramaic and Hebrew that was the vernacular of most Jews at the time. Thus, the first challenge presented is one of language. For many students Hebrew itself is challenging, and Aramaic is a completely foreign language. But the challenges with Talmud study extend far beyond language.

Since the 16th century, the typical page of Talmud was formatted as what is today called *tzuras ha-daf*. *Tzuras ha-daf* was, at the time, a high-tech solution to the problem of how to intuitively present the core text of the Talmud along with some of the most crucial commentaries. The text of the Talmud itself appears at the center of the page. The masterful commentary of Rashi, an 11th-century rabbinic giant located in Troyes, France, appears on the inner margin of each page. The *Tosafos* commentary, which is a collection of rabbis who were Rashi's descendants and students, appears on the outer margin. Both Rashi and *Tosafos* are printed in a small Hebrew font that has come to be known as "Rashi script." Although it is quite similar to classical Hebrew, most students need to learn Rashi script in order to achieve fluency in reading. In the form of *tzuras ha-daf*, each page was numbered in a two-sided format.

Throughout the ensuing hundreds of years, the *tzuras ha-daf* has achieved a semblance of sanctity. In addition to the pragmatic functions cited above, some have come to see the *tzuras ha-daf* as a Divine intervention that is the proper representation of the Oral Law. Some students feel that if they are not studying Talmud from the canonical *tzuras ha-daf*, they are not really learning.

Others have abandoned the *tzuras ha-daf* in order to use current technologies to present the Talmud in a more user-friendly model. A third approach, a sort of compromise, maintains the *tzuras ha-daf*

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while offering “study pages” that present material in a manner that is more easily understandable.

I (SC) teach in a teachers college in Israel. In order to give Israeli students a sense of the daunting challenge facing students confronted with Talmud study, I present them with Shakespeare’s famous soliloquy from the play *Hamlet* in the form of tzuras ha-daf, and I ask them to study it and decipher its meaning. The page they receive looks like this:

Below is a poem written by William Shakespeare. What feelings and thoughts do you experience upon observing it?

TO

be, or not to be that is the question whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them to die to sleep no more and by a sleep to say we end the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to tis a consummation devoutly to be wish’d to die to sleep to sleep perchance to dream ay there’s the rub for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil must give us

pause there's the respect that makes calamity
of so long life for who would bear the whips
and scorns of time the oppressor's wrong the
proud man's contumely the pangs of despised
love the law's delay the insolence of office and
the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy
takes when he himself might his quietus make
with a bare bodkin who would fardels bear to
grunt and sweat under a weary life but that the
dread of something after death the undiscover'd
country from whose bourn no traveller returns
puzzles the will and makes us rather bear those
ills we have than fly to others that we know not
of thus conscience does make cowards of us all
and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied
o'er with the pale cast of thought and enterprises
of great pith and moment with this regard
their currents turn awry and lose the name of
action soft you now the fair Ophelia Nymph in
thy orisons by which all my sins remember'd:

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Here are some immediate responses that come from these student-teachers:

- Where is the punctuation?
- Where is the translation?
- What does this poem have to do with me?

When students are then asked to attempt to decipher the structure and meaning of the section, they often are surprised by the sublime insights into the human existential condition that emerge. However, their initial response is one of being appalled and repelled by the text.

The negative reactions of the students stem from their feelings of disconnection, incompetence, lack of meaning and displeasure that arise simply upon viewing the foreign body of words. Obviously, students are not highly motivated to decipher the text's meaning.

Realistically, a similar response is evoked by most students when challenged to study Talmud. Parents and teachers who view Talmud as an important part of the school curriculum must develop their craft well if they are to present this challenging subject in a productive manner. The tzuras ha-daf is an example of this dilemma. We suggest that teachers be mindful of the pros and cons of presenting material in the form of tzuras ha-daf. There is no right or wrong way to teach, but a mindful teacher may use the resources available in an intentional manner that benefits students. Using the tzuras ha-daf, we can be mindful of its advantages and disadvantages by organizing some of them in the chart below:

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Advantages of Tzuras HaDaf	Disadvantages of Tzuras HaDaf
Sense of “really learning”	Incomprehensible to some students
Easy to reference source	Difficult for some students to locate sources
Massive amount of material on each page	Many consider the layout chaotic
Tradition	Tradition

Note that in the table above we have listed tradition as an advantage and a disadvantage. This is not an error, but reflects the mindful teacher’s need to intuit how each student experiences learning. For some, joining the chain of tradition may be an incredible self-esteem boost. For others, it unfortunately symbolizes the opposite of what they presently seek to connect with.

Below we present a method that we have found to be particularly effective among children with ADHD. We refer to it as “CAMP Teaching.” CAMP teaching requires that the teacher design the lesson to directly address four basic needs of the human soul:

- **C** stands for “connection.” We need to feel an attachment to the material.
- **A** stands for “ability” or “achievement.” We need to feel that the activity empowers us and that we are proficient at it.
- **M** represents the meaningfulness of the material. Obviously, we invest more into material that we can conceptualize as meaningful, as opposed to material that we are disconnected from.
- **P** represents “pleasure,” and the material must be internalized in a pleasurable, rather than torturous, manner.

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We have found this methodology to be effective for parents as well as classroom teachers when considering how to present Torah learning to their students. “CAMP” is a pedagogical approach that focuses on enhancing the personal connection between each student and the subject matter being taught. Although the general principles apply to all areas of study, in the paragraphs below we focus our analysis on the study of Talmud.

“CAMP” Talmud Teaching for Children with ADHD

The “CAMP” method is a way of teaching Talmud that has been developed in over thirty years of working with students diagnosed with ADHD. CAMP is an acronym for four basic social-emotional needs recognized by major thinkers in the fields of psychology and education. Specifically they are “connection, ability, meaning, and pleasure.” When we teach in a manner that addresses each of our children’s emotional needs, we empower them to relate in a significant manner with the material presented.

Connection refers to the child’s relationship to and attachment with the subject matter being taught. Professor John Bowlby was a major theorist who postulated that our need for attachment is inborn, and any experience that empowers the security of our attachment is internalized as part of our overall personality. Hundreds of studies indicate the importance of attachment in terms of the quality of our life experience. Parents and teachers have the potential to present Talmud.

Connection to the Oral Law requires sessions to be presented in what we refer to as an “RIP” manner. RIP is an acronym we use for “relevant, interesting, and personal.” When we connect students via RIP, we trigger interest in the material being taught. We must ask ourselves if the material is relevant, interesting, and personal. Teachers need to

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make certain that the learning experience satisfies a natural curiosity that all children, especially those with ADHD, desperately need.

Researchers who have studied the challenge of presenting Talmud in a RIP manner have determined that connection occurs on three levels. First, the students must connect on the societal level. This occurs when, through learning, the student partners in an *ideal* that is valued by the greater society. Second, students experience learning as a means of becoming members of a *society* dedicated to the particular principle being studied. Finally, students must experience learning as a means of strengthening their individual *self*.

To make this educational abstraction clear, let's take an example from the first Mishnah that appears in the Babylonian Talmud. The Mishnah deals with a debate regarding the proper time to recite the evening Shema. "CAMP" teaching requires teachers to formulate a strong connection between the student and the ideal or value of the subject matter. Many children may not be overly concerned with the obligation to recite the Shema. Some may not be aware of exactly what the Shema is. Regardless, everyone in the role of teacher must first make a serious attempt to connect his or her students with the material being taught.

Many Israeli teachers have utilized the story of Captain Roi Klein, of blessed memory, to dramatize the ideal and value of kriyat Shema. Roi Klein was a religious soldier commanding an elite unit in Lebanon during the 2006 war. A group of soldiers under Roi's command were in an alley when a terrorist rolled a grenade that landed in their midst. Roi leaped on the grenade and recited with great concentration, "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad." His act of devotion saved the lives of numerous soldiers. Several short films are available depicting this event and teachers often utilize them to enhance the impact of the tale. This is an example of beginning a session by utilizing a trigger that connects students to the inherent value within the material

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about to be studied. This significantly increases students' motivation to learn. We encourage teachers to be mindful of triggering students' connection to the subject matter at the start of each learning session.

Ability is the second step in CAMP teaching. Mindful teaching requires teachers to enhance their students' sense of ability through the learning experience. Alfred Adler was one of the first who spoke of "competency versus inferiority" as the most basic human need. More recently, Professor Susan Harter has researched the essential role of subjective competence in emotional well-being and academic achievement.

Learning Talmud presents multiple challenges regarding the child's ability to comprehend and master the material. First, the language is foreign, being an ancient form of Hebrew and Aramaic. Second, Talmudic debate is often centered around third-century technological innovations. It is difficult for many students to connect the situations described in the Talmud to life in the twenty-first century. Third, as previously stated, the standard edition of Talmudic texts are organized in an intimidating layout. Students of Talmud must be able to read Hebrew and Aramaic, without vowels or punctuation, following several different literary threads (Talmud, Rashi, and Tosafos, and must master regular Hebrew font as well as Rashi script). Fourth, Talmudic discussion often requires significant "sequential processing." Sequential processing is the ability to follow an argument in a step-by-step fashion. Inattention to any step in the sequence may make comprehension of the passage extremely difficult, if not impossible. It also demands significant use of "working memory," as understanding later steps of the logical chain of reasoning require retention and reflection upon earlier steps of the chain. Finally, Talmudic reasoning is often abstract and symbolic. In his classic work on cognitive development, Jean Piaget contended that conceptual thinking is a capability

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that does not develop before the age of 12. More recent studies indicate that conceptualization occurs, on average, only in the mid-teens.

Many Jewish schools begin teaching Talmud at the age of 10. This challenges the cognitive capacity of even the strongest of students. Because children with ADHD often have brains that are developing at a non-typical pace, learning Talmud at such an early age can be overwhelming.

In light of the difficulties listed above, parents and teachers of children with ADHD must be acutely sensitive to the child's level of cognitive functioning and learning skills. Lev Vygotsky understood that effective teaching requires teachers to challenge students with material that is slightly beyond their current level of comprehension. Recent research in the concept of "flow" supports the notion that optimum performance requires the students to attempt to solve problems that are slightly beyond, but not too distant from, their current ability level. The art of teaching Talmud, whether being done by parent or teacher, requires an in-depth awareness of the student's strengths and weaknesses and precise application of teaching methodologies that allow strengths to be enhanced.

When teaching Talmud to our students, it is essential that we utilize every tool within our didactic and interpersonal arsenal in order to teach in a manner that enhances the student's sense of self. Above we have described techniques that the educator may use in order to connect the child to the material in a manner so that it becomes relevant to his or her personal life.

Rabbi Moshe Yudelov, in an important book titled *Shutaf LaDaf*, outlines a series of actions that parents and teachers can undertake to enhance the student's sense of competency and ability in mastering Talmud.

First, Rabbi Yudelov suggests that a separate notebook be created for new vocabulary words. Each section that is going to be studied

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contains words that may be unknown to some students and hence make the portion to be studied incomprehensible. Truth be told, because Mishnah and Gemara are often written using technical jargon, often using abbreviation and even code, even a complete knowledge of vocabulary does not guarantee comprehension. However, knowledge of vocabulary is essential if understanding is to be possible. Understanding vocabulary provides each student with a sense of mastery that motivates them to grapple with the complex text.

Teachers may choose to present students with a list of words contained in the portion to be studied and their definitions. Some teachers prefer for students to grapple with the text and identify unknown words on their own. They can then look up their meaning, either using an Aramaic dictionary which is available in book or virtual form, decipher the meaning based on one of the commentaries, or they may ask a friend for the word's meaning.

Because vocabulary is necessary for textual comprehension, we recommend quizzing the children on vocabulary before they actually begin to learn the Talmudic text. Most children, including those with ADHD, are capable of memorizing word lists and achieving a level of basic competency. Of course, there are some children who will find word memorization extraordinarily difficult, and for those, the mindful teacher will not demand this competency requirement.

Once students have achieved basic competency in vocabulary, the educator then presents the text. At this point, the type of text presented becomes pivotal. Teachers must decide whether to present the tzuras ha-daf as the basic text form, or choose an alternate form that may be more user-friendly. Today, many alternate forms of text display are available and may be easily obtained on the internet or at bookstores. The principle involved is to choose a text format that will allow the largest number of students to obtain an initial grasp of the issues at hand.

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Aristotle said that the key to proper living is to “know thyself.” In teaching our children, we need to enlarge this concept to also include “know thy students.” There is a range of processing styles that affect one’s ability to decipher written material. Some read Hebrew better with vowels. Others are confused and distracted by vowels. Some comprehend well through linear translations, while others lose continuity of thought with linear formatting. Color-coding can be an exceptional organizational tool for some. For others it is a distraction and a confusion. The mindful parent or educator must develop an awareness of the child’s cognitive processing strengths and present textual material that allows the child to develop emotional confidence and cognitive competence.

After determining appropriate formatting of texts, parents and educators must choose didactic methods that are particularly suited for children with ADHD. As we have already stated, this is not a one-size-fits-all situation. Parents and teachers must be keenly aware of their child’s particular preferences in learning. We will enumerate techniques that we have found to be highly effective in working with most children with ADHD. However, our recommendations do not alleviate the teacher’s responsibility to find the best fit between the child and the educational methodology.

Context as a Means of Compensating for Poor Organization

Many children with ADHD struggle with executive functions of organizing materials, one’s own time, and oneself. When a teacher provides a clear context to the material being studied, the ADHD child’s ability to comprehend is enhanced significantly.

In *Shutaf LaDaf*, Rabbi Yudelov recommends framing each learning session in a clear well-defined context.

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1. What exactly is the situation being discussed in the Talmud?
2. What problem is present and must be dealt with?
3. What is the law according to the Talmud?
4. What is the source of the law?
5. What chiddush, or new learning, emerges from the Talmudic passage?

These five questions of context are critically important in helping the child with ADHD organize the information that he is presented with.

Let's take the first Mishnah that appears in the Talmud to display this exacting depiction of context:

מתני' מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבין משעה שהכהנים נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן עד סוף האשמורה הראשונה דברי ר' אליעזר. וחכמים אומרים עד חצות. רבן גמליאל אומר עד שיעלה עמוד השחר. מעשה ובאו בניו מבית המשתה אמרו לו לא קרינו את שמע אמר להם אם לא עלה עמוד השחר חייבין אתם לקרות ולא זו בלבד אמרו אלא כל מה שאמרו חכמים עד חצות מצותן עד שיעלה עמוד השחר הקטר חלבים ואברים מצותן עד שיעלה עמוד השחר וכל הנאכלים ליום אחד מצותן עד שיעלה עמוד השחר א' כ למה אמרו חכמים עד חצות כדי להרחיק אדם מן העבירה.

Here is our English translation of the above Mishnah:

From what time do we read Shema in the evenings? From the time that the Kohanim enter to eat *terumah* until the end of the first watch. This is the view of Rabbi Eliezer. And the Sages say until half of the night. Rabban Gamliel says until the rising of dawn. An event occurred in which his sons arrived from the party hall. They said to him, "We have not read the Shema." He

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said to them, “If dawn has not risen, you are obligated to read.” And not only did he state this, but each instance that the Sages state until half of the night, the mitzvah is in force until the break of dawn. The burning of residue fats and limbs from the daily sacrifices may continue until the break of dawn, sacrifices intended to be eaten on the day of the sacrifice may be consumed until the break of dawn. If this is so, then why did the Sages declare the mitzvah active only until half of the night? In order to distance people from transgression.

Children with ADHD, because of their “executive function deficits,” are easily flooded by this torrent of concepts and facts. When teachers utilize questions of context, they provide an organizational framework that permits the child to understand the material being taught. Let’s apply each of the questions of context to the Mishnah:

1. *What exactly is the situation being discussed?*

- The Mishnah is discussing a situation in which a Jew wants to fulfill the mitzvah of saying Shema in the evening. This simple question requires the teacher to instruct the class in underlying concepts necessary to comprehend the mitzvah. These concepts include:
 - The mitzvah of reciting Shema twice daily.
 - The division of a day into halachic hours that do not necessarily correspond to the sixty-minute hour of a typical day.
 - ➔ Terumah (a contribution of approximately 1/50th of one’s harvest that was earmarked for the Priests)
 - ➔ Evening watch periods
 - ➔ Making a fence around the Torah

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Only after the teacher is certain that these concepts are understood can the student's understanding be directed towards the problems present in the text itself. At this point the teaching methodology changes focus to the actual situation described in the text. The teacher must be certain that students are aware of the concrete situation described in the text.

The following questions allow the teacher to ascertain that, in addition to understanding basic concepts, students are focused on the specific situation outlined in the Mishnah.

2. *What problem is present and must be dealt with?*

- The Jew wants to fulfill the commandment of reciting the evening Shema and is uncertain when the mitzvah comes into effect and the time at which it can no longer be performed.

3. *What is the law according to the Talmud?*

- The Mishnah cites different opinions regarding the ending time for the mitzvah of the evening Shema. Rabbi Eliezer maintains that the evening Shema must be recited before the end of the first watch shift of the evening (commentators explain this to be either one-third or one quarter of the night). The Sages maintain that the evening Shema may be recited until half of the evening (halachic midnight). Rabban Gamliel contends that the evening Shema may be recited until dawn.
- This debate allows the teacher to direct the learning in multiple directions. The concept of machlokes, or debate, is fundamental to Talmudic study. The teacher ought to pursue a direction that is grounded in the level of conceptual under-

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standing and interest displayed by students. Some examples of different avenues of inquiry include:

4. ***How did arguments arise if we received the Torah from Moshe on Har Sinai?***
5. ***What is the concept of d'rabbanan as opposed to d'Oraisa, and what power does the Torah give to the Rabbis?***
6. ***What is the concept of l'chatchila and b'dieved?***
7. ***What is the source of the law?***
 - The Talmud offers two sources for the law requiring the Jew to recite Shema twice daily: either the verse “when you lie down and when you arise,” or the verse, “and there was evening and there was morning.” The use of biblical proof-texts is an excellent opportunity for teachers to display the transmission of the Oral Law in terms of specific interpretations of biblical verses. Teachers may choose to emphasize that the Talmud is transmitting in writing the oral interpretation that was presented to Moshe. On the other hand, there are instances when the Talmud cites Rabbinic innovation. The basis and extent of Rabbinic authority is a rich field of discussion and debate.
8. ***What new learning emerges from the Talmudic passage?***
 - Depending on the depth of study, teachers may choose to elucidate numerous clarifications that are provided by the Talmud.

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- The time for saying the nighttime Shema is from when the stars are visible at night until break of dawn the next morning.
 - ➔ In the times of the Beis Hamikdash, Kohanim who were *tamei* (ritually impure) could not eat *terumah*. They were only allowed to eat *terumah* again once two conditions were met: (1) they needed to engage in purification procedures, and then (2) they needed to wait until the stars came out at night.

The Rabbis had the authority to make a fence around the Torah so as to keep people from inadvertently transgressing.

Given this context, most children with ADHD are able to navigate through the Mishnah. Without this contextual information, children with ADHD often feel overwhelmed with unprocessed data. Feeling overwhelmed, they tune out and stop learning. Unfortunately, this tuning out often leads to feelings of inadequacy as well as undesirable behaviors.

Once the context of the material has been clarified, the next ability goal of teaching children with ADHD is to make certain that they are capable of mastering the text itself. We know that, due to short attention spans and difficulties with organization and analysis, children with ADHD are easily overwhelmed simply by the quantity of material to be learned. In order to deal with this dilemma, we utilize the didactic method of “chunking” large quantities of material into bite-size units that do not exceed the attention span of even the most inattentive child. We refer to these “bite-size chunks” as meaning units (יחידות משמעות). Students are asked to break down the text into meaningful units, with no individual chunk being longer than seven Hebrew words.

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If we use the Mishnah presented above as an example, here is how the first part of it is broken down into meaningful units. First we show you the analysis in Hebrew and then in English.

יחידת משמעות Meaningful Unit	מספר היחידה Unit Number
מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבין From what time is Shema recited in the evening	1
משעה שכהנים נכנסין לאכול בתרומתן From the time when Kohanim enter to eat their terumah	2
עד כוף האשמורה הראשונה Until the end of the first watch period	3
דברי רבי אליעזר These are the words of Rabbi Eliezer	4
וחכמים אומרים עד חצות And the Sages say until half of the night	5
רבן גמליאל אומר עד שיעלה עמוד השחר Rabban Gamliel says until the break of dawn	6

“Chunking” has been shown to be an effective teaching methodology for many children with ADHD, and our experience has proven it to be incredibly useful in providing a sense of mastery for students who have difficulty assimilating large quantities of information.

Once the student has analytically divided the text into meaningful units, the singular quality of each unit is designated. When students identify the essential character of each unit, they are able to follow the natural flow and progression of the text. We refer to the inherent nature of each unit as its structural content (רכיב מבנה). In simple terms, we determine whether the unit under study is a question, answer, story,

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proof-text, or other descriptive term that can explain why the chunk appears in its specific place and sequence. Using the piece of Mishnah cited above, the structural content is added to our study chart in the following manner:

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רכיב מבנה Structural Element	יחידת משמעות Meaningful Unit	מספר היחידה Unit Number
שאלה Question	מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבין From what time is Shema recited in the evening	1
פתיחת דעה ראשונה Beginning of first answer	משעה שהכהנים נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן From the time when Kohanim enter to eat their terumah	2
סיום דעה ראשונה Conclusion of first answer	עד סוף האשמורה הראשונה Until the end of the first watch period	3
בעל דעה הראשונה Author of First answer	דברי רבי אליעזר These are the words of Rabbi Eliezer	4
דעה שנייה Second Answer	וחכמים אומרים עד הצות And the Sages say until half of the night	5
דעה שלישית Third Answer	רבן גמליאל אומר עד עלות עמוד השחר. Rabban Gamliel says until the break of dawn	6

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When students are able to chart the flow of the text, the apparent randomness of words take on a clear meaning and structure. The final step in our charting requires the student to translate the text into his own words. Here is an example of that:

פירוש במילים שלך Your interpretation	רכיב מבנה Structural Element	יחידת משמעות Meaningful Unit	מספר היחידה Unit Number
<p>באיזה שעות מקיימים מצוות קריאת שמע בלילה</p> <p>Between what hours does one fulfill the mitzvah of kriyat Shema in the evening?</p>	<p>שאלה Question</p>	<p>מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבין</p> <p>From what time is Shema recited in the evening</p>	1
<p>מהזמן שהכהנים מתחילים לאכול תרומה (צאת הכוכבים)</p> <p>Beginning with the time that Kohanim are allowed to eat terumah (appearance of the stars)</p>	<p>פתיחת דעה ראשונה Beginning of first answer</p>	<p>משעה שהכהנים נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן</p> <p>From the time when Kohanim enter to eat their terumah</p>	2
<p>עד שליש הלילה</p> <p>Until one-third of the night</p>	<p>סיום דעה ראשונה Conclusion of first answer</p>	<p>עד סוף האשמורה הראשונה</p> <p>Until the end of the first watch period</p>	3
<p>זה הדעה של רבי אליעזר</p> <p>This is Rabbi Eliezer's opinion.</p>	<p>בעל דעה הראשונה Author of First answer</p>	<p>דברי רבי אליעזר</p> <p>These are the words of Rabbi Eliezer</p>	4

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<p>חכמים מסכימים שמתחילים לאכול בצאת הכוכבים, אבל לפ דעתם רק מותר לקרוא את השמע עד חצות הלילה.</p> <p>The Sages agree with Rabbi Eliezer that the earliest time for saying Shema is when the stars come out, but they say that the mitzvah can be fulfilled until half of the evening.</p>	<p>דעה שנייה</p> <p>Second Answer</p>	<p>וחכמים אומרים עד חצות</p> <p>And the Sages say until half of the night</p>	<p>5</p>
<p>רבן גמליאל גם מסכים שמותר להתחיל לאכול בשעת צאת הכוכבים אבל טוען שמותר לקרוא את השמע כל הלילה עד עלות השחר.</p> <p>Rabban Gamliel also agrees that the starting time for Shema is with the coming out of the stars, but he maintains that Shema can be recited until the break of dawn.</p>	<p>דעה שלישית</p> <p>Third Answer</p>	<p>רבן גמליאל אומר עד עלות עמוד השחר.</p> <p>Rabban Gamliel says until the break of dawn</p>	<p>6</p>

I was taught this technique many years ago, by a teacher of special education whom I remember only as Carmela. I refer to it as Carmela's Method for Talmudic analysis. I view it as an extremely useful didactic method for all children. And for children with ADHD, it is a life-preserver. The structure provided by the technique prevents them from feeling overwhelmed. Because they are not accustomed to working in a structured, step-by-step manner, they often initially resist confining

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themselves to this sequential analysis. The initial resistance usually transforms into cooperation once the child begins to experience success and mastery. Clear and firm instruction coupled with frequent verbal reinforcement for concerted effort more often than not allow children with ADHD to begin feeling empowered through their study. As the child progresses to internalize a sense of mastery and ability, the motivation to learn manifests itself. Experience has taught us that when adults empower children's ability to perform, motivation ceases to be a problem.

We have found that the structure of Carmela's method works best for most children with ADHD when they work together with a learning partner (הברותא). Some children prefer working alone. When teachers employ this method in classroom settings, most of the learning period is similar to a study hall in which the teacher is present as a resource to guide and direct students who are experiencing difficulties. The teacher allows different groups to work at their own pace. Many teachers provide short quizzes when students have completed a specified number of worksheets. It is wise for teachers to set a minimum grade necessary for students to proceed. When students do not achieve the minimum grade, teachers review the worksheets with them in order to identify where the gaps in comprehension occurred and to remedy them.

Some teachers utilize Carmela's method, while still maintaining a portion of each class to teach the class as a whole unit. During this time, difficult textual passages may be explained, or essential background information may be provided. This allows for teachers to include traditional frontal teaching in their pedagogical repertoire.

Over time, some teachers shape students' learning behavior so that the reliance on the formal worksheets becomes less mandatory. When this occurs, students no longer write out their complete learning process. Although this allows for learning to occur at a faster rate,

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it is extremely important that teachers implement the shaping process slowly. We have found that students with ADHD tend to require a longer time to wean off the worksheets than neuro-typical students, and the weaning process ought to be conducted in a cautious and individual manner.

To conclude this section, we want to emphasize that children with ADHD are at high risk to drop out of education in general and Jewish education in particular, not because of their thinking but because of their feelings. For most children with ADHD, school feels like a torture chamber. It is confining, restrictive, and suffocating. When parents and teachers make the effort to educate neuro-atypical children with atypical didactic methods, they significantly increase the likelihood that children with ADHD will benefit from Torah as the tree of life that it truly is.

Key Points

- Talmud Torah
 - Cornerstone of Jewish life, very significant mitzvah
 - An individual's Torah knowledge and Torah-learning ability are often used as societal measuring sticks
 - It is critical that we provide children with opportunities to succeed in and feel connected to Talmud Torah
 - ➔ Consider the devastating consequences for a child who feels like he has failed in this area of ultimate importance
 - ADHD children aren't intellectually inferior, but they do present a challenge for parents and educators to unlock their hidden potential.
- Talmud Torah: Executive Functions and Challenges
 - Possible reading disabilities
 - Auditory learning
 - ➔ Often harder for children with ADHD to learn by paying attention and listening to the spoken word
 - Sustained attention
 - ➔ Many Torah classes extend for long periods of time, far exceeding the normal ADHD attention span
 - Inhibition of movement
 - ➔ Talmud Torah often requires children to sit still for long periods of time
 - Attention and motivation
 - ➔ Many topics of Torah study do not directly connect with the child with ADHD's area of interest, making it even harder to maintain attention and motivation
 - Sequential analysis
 - ➔ Whereas the ADHD brain seeks out associative connections, many topics of Torah study require sequential analysis of information

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- Talmud Torah: Tools for Success
 - Multiple Torah intelligences require differential instruction
 - ➔ There are many different ways of learning and absorbing information
 - ➔ The method of Torah study should be matched to the child's preferred modes of learning
 - ➔ It is essential to extend beyond simple reading and writing and incorporate other tools for teaching Torah
 - The Right to Be an Autodidact
 - ➔ Provide the ADHD child with opportunities to learn on their own and on their own terms
 - Recorded Lectures
 - ➔ Recording classroom lectures can provide students with ADHD with the opportunity to learn at their own pace
 - WOMAC's
 - ➔ Presence of *seforim* in classrooms and at home
 - ➔ "The Living Torah Learning WOMAC—Parents!"
 - Watching role models engaged in and excited about learning Torah can be infectious
 - It's important that children actually see their parents learning
 - Be aware of pros and cons of teaching Talmud using tzuras ha-daf
 - CAMP Talmud Teaching
 - ➔ Connection: Make sure child has a relationship with the material being taught
 - ➔ Ability: Make sure the child has opportunities to succeed, that the methods of teaching and expectations do not extend beyond the child's ability
 - ➔ Meaning: Make the material meaningful in relation to the child's world.

- ➔ Pleasure: Provide the children with an activity that enhances their experience of existential pleasure.
 - Provide a strong vocabulary foundation (see chapter for suggestions)
 - Only present the daf once basic competency in vocabulary has been achieved
 - Present the daf in a format that meets the child's needs
 - Provide context (see chapter for suggestions)
 - “Chunking” the material into manageable units
 - Carmela's Method of Talmudic Analysis

CHAPTER 12

THE CHALLENGE OF SHABBOS

Our Sages teach us that he who toils on the eve of Shabbos will eat on Shabbos. Simply put, preparations for Shabbos, while halachically representing kavod Shabbos (honoring Shabbos), are necessary for the enjoyment of Shabbos.

Unfortunately, in many homes the hours and minutes before Shabbos are stressful and chaotic. Many of our clients describe these times as periods of screaming communications and impatient demands. Unfortunately, children with ADHD are particularly vulnerable to suffer during these periods. First, numerous studies indicate that children with ADHD have a poor sense of time transition. Moreover, they are horrendous at time management. They tend not to plan in a sequentially organized manner. Taken together, it is unrealistic for adults to expect the child with ADHD to be able to anticipate and collaborate in “getting ready for Shabbos” in a helpful manner. In this chapter, we will show you how to help the child with ADHD be an integral and useful part of Shabbos preparation.

Remember that clear, concise, and accurate expectations significantly increase the likelihood that children with ADHD will comply with our requests. Parental expectations related to preparing

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for Shabbos must be concrete and measurable, so that even an outside observer can determine whether or not the task has been completed.

Those who attended summer camps may remember a chart which listed daily cleaning tasks with the name of the individual responsible listed next to the particular task. We recommend a variation of this technique for Shabbos preparations when one or more of your children has ADHD. Here is exactly how this is done:

First, list all of the tasks that are absolutely necessary in order for your home to be prepared for Shabbos. Then specify the exact time from which all family members must be engaged in these tasks. For example, if Shabbos starts at 6 PM, your Shabbos preparation chart might look something like this:

Beginning at 3:30 and ending at 4:30 these are the tasks to be accomplished:

- Set dining room table for the Shabbos meal.
- Clean the floors in the kitchen and living room.
- Empty all garbage bags in the kitchen and bathrooms and place them in the cans outside of the house, then place fresh garbage bags in the kitchen and bathrooms.
- Individual bedrooms are tidy: Dirty clothes are in the hamper. Clean clothes are folded in drawers or hung in closets and all “stuff” like toys and books are stored away.
- Challah baking is completed.
- Cooking is completed.
- Hot plate is set on the stove.

Once you have prepared your “Shabbos Jobs List,” you assign each time to a specific family member. Sometimes, a family member may be

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given two jobs. You may list each job on a large round piece of paper or post board and then list each member of the family's name on a smaller circular paper or post board. The smaller paper may be rotated weekly so that each job is assigned to each family member in an equal manner.

In order to increase the effectiveness of this technique, at least in the initial stages, it is important to reward each participant for successfully accomplishing his or her personal task and to reward the group for an overall successful performance. If you are using a point system, then Shabbos Preparation Tasks can be awarded with points. Otherwise, you can simply award each family member with a reward that he or she finds personally meaningful. For example, you may allow 30 minutes of screen time for those family members who have completed their task successfully.

It is important to provide a group reward when the family has successfully completed the task. For example, you can determine that if five out of seven tasks of Shabbos preparation are done adequately and on time, the entire family will order pizza on motzaei Shabbos. Perhaps parents may choose a star family member who excelled in the preparation to also get to choose the toppings put on the pizza.

Children with ADHD may require special guidance in preparing to perform their tasks. They may need a specific list with what needs to be done in their personal room in order for it to be considered tidy. They may need to be prompted in advance of the time that the task is to begin in order to start mentally and physically preparing. They may need to receive more verbal reinforcement during the task in order to stick with it and complete it.

Parents who invest the energy in preparing the pre-Shabbos plan reap tremendous benefits as the family enters Shabbos in a much more peaceful and cooperative manner. Remember that it is important to design erev Shabbos in a manner that will allow Shabbos itself to arrive with a sense of joy and peace. Explain to your children what you are

doing and why you are doing it. Especially if your child suffers from ADHD, allow her to display an area of strength in this assignment. If she is artistic, perhaps she can prepare the chart. If she is strong, let her carry out the garbage bags. If she has an aesthetic sense let her decide how to fold the napkins when setting the table. If she loves to bake, let her bake the challahs.

Families who prepare for Shabbos in this manner enjoy both physical and spiritual benefits of the following 25 hours.

Shabbos Davening

Because Shabbos davening tends to be long, it is recommended to review Chapter 8 on the challenges of tefillah for the child with ADHD. Coercion to the extent that it leads to suffering is not a means of educating the child to love davening. Choose specific prayers or time periods that in your view are realistic for the child to sit in shul. Describe exactly what your expectations are for the child. In addition to the times that you expect him to be present, tell him what he is expected to do during these times. These behaviors may include: sitting in his chair when the congregation is seated, pointing to the place in the Siddur that he is davening from, singing with the congregation, or any other behavior that seems reasonable. Remember to praise with words, physical contact, and gestures, so that your child with ADHD sees that you notice his efforts and are proud of him.

Shabbos is also a terrific opportunity to experiment with some alternate forms of davening. Kabbalas Shabbos was constructed by Kabbalists who sought to commune with God in nature. It's a perfect time to allow a child to experience hisbodedus (described in Chapter 8).

Prayer can be expressed in different ways other than simply in words. It's a wonderful opportunity to allow dancers to welcome Shabbos through dance, singers through song, and performers through

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Shabbos plays. In any case, the beginning of Shabbos is a great time to allow children to express their areas of strength and connect it to the values of Shabbos.

Shabbos Meals

Shabbos meals are an excellent time for families to bond and connect outside of the hectic pace of the work week. Unfortunately, meals present many challenges for children with ADHD. These challenges include:

- Inhibiting the physical urge to eat or drink until after Kiddush.
- Restriction of movement for long periods.
- Listening to others speak for long periods.
- Inability to engage in desirable activities that are readily available (e.g., reading instead of simply sitting in boredom at the table).
- Understanding the value of allowing others to express themselves as you listen in a respectful fashion.

Because the nature of sitting through a meal presents many challenges, it makes sense to establish clear accommodations for your child with ADHD. Basically, it's a fantastic opportunity to apply many of the strategies that we have already suggested.

First, it's a great time to highlight your child's area of strength. If a child loves to speak or answer questions, make sure he is primed to get positive attention for answering the questions at the Shabbos table. If the child is great at clearing the table, then let that child get a lot of positive reinforcement for that task. If a child loves to sing, then let his singing be featured. The child who loves cooking should have the dishes specially prepared highlighted and praised.

Those of you who use reinforcement charts may find it essential to have a special Shabbos reinforcement chart and to specify those

behaviors that children can do on Shabbos and be rewarded for them. In most cases, as with all of the reinforced activities, it is prudent to collaborate with your children on their expected behaviors. Clearly define what the problem is and allow children to collaborate with you on finding the best solutions. Practice the best solutions in advance, and reinforce the best solutions when they are relevant at the Shabbos table.

Shabbos: The Time for Actualizing Ultimate Values

It's important for Shabbos to be a period in which each family member gets to share in the ultimate value of other family members. For many parents this value may be learning Torah or doing a special act of chesed. Shabbos day is a terrific time to schedule these activities involving the child with ADHD. For example, if you determine that it's possible to learn Torah with your child for fifteen minutes, then you and your child ought to devote fifteen minutes to Torah learning. During this time, it's important to keep positive and focus on the positives that the child displays. More important than the content covered is a joyful, positive process.

Of course, your child with ADHD will be greatly empowered if you, as a parent, also engage with the child in an activity of ultimate value in his or her eyes. This may be playing a game, reading a book, taking a walk, or performing any Shabbos-appropriate activity. Parents discover that the extent to which they enter into the lives of their children is often reciprocated when children internalize parental ultimate values.

The Shabbos Nap and Kids Getting Along

For most of us, once we have reached adolescence, sleeping becomes a pleasure. For most children, sleeping is a torturous waste of valuable time. For those (like us) who understand the importance of a Shabbos nap, it is essential to include this on your list of rewarded behaviors for children with ADHD. The time for the parents' nap ought to be determined in advance. Let's say that mom and dad, Yisrael and Rina, want to rest between 2 and 3 PM in the afternoon. It's essential to inform Beni, their child with ADHD, as to what exactly he is to do during that time period. This may include playing in his room with quiet toys, reading, playing with friends at the shul or on the playground, or any activity that will be safe, enjoyable for the child, and not disturbing to others who desire to rest.

The fact is that our memories often erase the enormous challenge that Shabbos presents for young children in general, and children with ADHD in particular. When parents tune in to their child's struggle, they are capable of deeply enjoying Oneg Shabbos and passing on this experience to the next generation.

Key Points

- Shabbos
 - Preparations are a crucial part of keeping Shabbos
 - Shabbos davening differs from weekday davening in significant ways
 - ➔ Kabbalas Shabbos provides a different sort of tefillah
 - ➔ Shabbos davening is lengthy
 - Shabbos meals provide unique opportunities and challenges
 - Shabbos can be an amazing time to actualize values like Torah learning and time with family
- Shabbos: Executive functions and challenges
 - Time management and organization
 - ➔ Can make it difficult to prepare for Shabbos effectively
 - Sustained attention
 - ➔ Can make it a challenge to sit in shul for a long davening or at the table for a long Shabbos meal
 - Impulse control
 - ➔ Can make it difficult to keep quiet while others are speaking, to wait until after Kiddush to eat and drink
- Shabbos: Tools for success
 - Shabbos Preparations
 - ➔ Provide clear expectations and specific guidance as needed
 - ➔ Create some sort of cleaning chart, including times when each task should be accomplished
 - ➔ Assign tasks based on each child's strengths
 - ➔ Reward accomplishments both individually and for the family as a whole
 - Shabbos Davening
 - ➔ Create clear and realistic expectations for what your child should be doing during Shabbos davening

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- ➔ Use Kabbalas Shabbos to take advantage of other forms of davening (Hisbodedus, singing, dancing, etc.)
- Shabbos Meal
 - ➔ Create opportunities to highlight your child's strengths
 - ➔ Consider creating reinforcement charts with rewards for certain behaviors at the Shabbos meal
- Planning ahead can make all the difference in your and your family's Shabbos experience

CHAPTER 13

WHEN ADOLESCENTS WITH ADHD SEEM TO “LOSE THEIR WAY”

In previous chapters we have shown how to better cope with the multitude of challenges faced by parents and teachers trying to raise and educate Jewish children with ADHD. Adolescence presents a particularly complex and hazardous period. It is not uncommon for adolescent children with ADHD coming from Torah-observant families to adopt lifestyles that deviate from Torah values and traditions. Almost all from parents experience this as devastating. Many parents are overwhelmed with a sense of despair and believe that their children's abandonment of the halachic lifestyle reflects a fundamental failure in their life project and compromises their integrity as parents. These powerful feelings do not necessarily reflect objective reality. Oftentimes, parents who do “all of the right things” still experience children who choose alternative lifestyles. We do not believe there is a parent alive who would not like to take back some of his or her actions in moments of weakness. None of us are always patient, understanding, and empathic. At times we are tired, cranky, and short-tempered. Children with ADHD tend to offer little wiggle room for these natural human characteristics. When the external environment does not pro-

vide for the child's social-emotional needs, any parental shortcomings may land on an explosive powder keg of emotions. When children with ADHD do not have their needs met by the Torah community, it is natural that they seek satisfaction from other sources. It is essential for parents to try to understand their children's behavior as reflecting a desire to achieve personal satisfaction. It is not necessarily a rebellion against parental or Torah values.

Three decades of experience in working with thousands of families struggling with challenges of ADHD have taught us that anger and rejection on the part of parents towards children with ADHD who have "gone off the *derech*" are counterproductive and quite often destructive. Conversely, parents who learn to relate with compassion, empathy, and acceptance of their child are those who build bridges for long-term repair of broken selves and shattered relationships.

A Chasidic Family Coping with Trauma and ADHD

Aharon and Rivki are Chasidic parents of six children. Their five older children are married and living within the community. Their youngest child, Elisheva, has been more challenging. In elementary school she appeared dreamy and inattentive. She was a beautiful child, and from a young age, she displayed an interest in her hair, clothing, and physical appearance. Some of her teachers felt she was dull and unmotivated to learn. Her fourth-grade teacher told her parents that she believed that Elisheva was quite intelligent, but not focused on schoolwork.

When her parents had her undergo a psycho-didactic evaluation, the psychologist diagnosed Elisheva as possessing above-average intelligence, but suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder with primary symptoms of inattention. (In Chapter 1, we explained how these children do not display hyperactive symptoms in their behavior, but are hyperactive in the sense that they do not keep attention focused on necessary daily tasks). Although medication was

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prescribed, Elisheva resisted it on a regular basis. Because her situation was not horrible, she “*shlepped*” from grade to grade without receiving any active intervention.

By the time that Elisheva was in seminary, her behavior took a dramatic turn for the worse. She began spending more time out at night. Unbeknownst to her parents, she would leave the seminary, change clothes and hang out with kids on the streets of Jerusalem. During this period, Elisheva experimented with drugs, alcohol, and relationships with boys, and her grades plummeted. When her parents were informed by the school and became aware of Elisheva’s behaviors, they were frightened. They were outraged at what appeared to be Elisheva’s outright rejection of their lifestyle and values. They were frightened that she was spinning out of control and that they were going to “lose her.” Their impulsive, intuitive response was to punish and limit her. She was not allowed out of their sight and could not meet friends in town. They received reports weekly from each of Elisheva’s teachers. Elisheva began seeing a therapist, recommended by the school. Although things appeared to quiet down, when Elisheva turned 17 years old, she decided to leave her home and move in with a boyfriend. Aharon and Rivki, Elisheva’s parents, were mortified and they considered excommunicating her from the family. After all, they were parents to six children and Elisheva’s behaviors were anathema in the eyes of the rest of the family.

It is easy to understand the reaction of Aharon and Rivki. Their worldview was being trampled upon by their youngest daughter. They were deeply concerned that her behaviors would model inappropriate behavior for their other children and grandchildren. However, when seeking therapeutic advice, Aharon and Rivki met a professional who encouraged them to offer Elisheva love and acceptance. This advice, although being counterintuitive and confusing, felt right to each of them. As parents, they deeply loved their daughter and they sensed

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that her behaviors reflected deeply rooted unrest rather than rebellion. Aharon and Rivki began a therapeutic journey in order to learn acceptance, compassion, and empathy for their “off the *derech*” adolescent.

The ability to embrace their daughter’s personal struggle, in spite of her unacceptable behavior, was brutally difficult to learn. With each step, Aharon and Rivki had to deal with the intense anger that Elisheva’s external rejection of the religious lifestyle evoked in them. Under the guidance of a trained therapist, each parent came to understand that Elisheva’s life choices emerged out of her frantic attempt at psychological survival. She sought connection, competency, meaning and pleasure outside of the Torah community, because she had personally experienced rejection and devaluation within the community. Although Elisheva’s parents and teacher had been well-intentioned, they were battling against hidden demons, known only to Elisheva herself. On a personal level, the singular, poignant fact for Elisheva was her perception that the Torah community was rejecting and devaluing her. Her search for an alternate community did not reflect an ideological rejection of Torah values. It did reflect her personal experience of rejection and abandonment at the hands of the Torah community.

Aharon and Rivki began to realize that blaming themselves or feeling anger towards Elisheva would not help them or their daughter. They learned to become mindful of their reactions of hurt and anger and to move past them. They learned to see the world through Elisheva’s eyes and to provide opportunities for healing.

Implementing their plan was incredibly challenging. First, they needed to explain their approach to the other adult children in the family. They explained that although they did not agree with Elisheva’s decisions, they understood what motivated them. They explained that acceptance, love, and assistance would dominate their relationship with Elisheva, and they asked that Elisheva’s brothers and sisters be

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partners with them, to the extent that they were able, in rebuilding Elisheva’s connection with the family and the wider community.

On a practical level, Aharon and Rivki accepted Elisheva’s boyfriend into the family circle. They agreed to assist him in paying tuition for his attaining a professional certification, and they agreed to meet with the boyfriend’s parents regarding the planning of a wedding. They participated in therapy sessions with Elisheva in which she described to them many of her painful experiences of rejection that she had been exposed to. They listened when Elisheva shared her personal ambivalence regarding her decision to marry. Although they were deeply tempted to tell her what to do, they understood that healthy decisions would require a healthy self and that valuing her own intuition and feelings was necessary in order for a healthy sense of self to emerge.

Synergy began to develop between the listening skills of Elisheva’s parents and her willingness to disclose personal details of her life. When Elisheva began to reveal her early experiences, she disclosed that in primary school she had been the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of older boys within the community. It is critical to note that ADHD may often be a “gateway” to other disorders. The child with ADHD has an impetuous, impulsive nature that, more often than not, interacts in a negative manner with the world. As children become less trustful and more detached from positive role models, they increase their vulnerability to the dangers of the street. Many teenagers with ADHD are thus at high risk to develop relationships with undesirable figures. These destructive relationships often create trauma in the lives of adolescents with ADHD and are often unknown by parents and teachers.

Nothing is harder for parents than to allow an adolescent to reach a decision when the concerned adults have conflicted and contrary thoughts and feelings. In many cases, it is expected and reasonable for parents to provide directive advice based on their personal life expe-

rience. In fact, in such cases, which constitute the majority, research and experience indicate that directive guidance by parents is necessary and positive for adolescent children to avoid disastrous choices. However, directive guidance alone is ineffective when adolescents have suffered extensive damage to their basic sense of self. Many teenagers with ADHD have fragile senses of who they are. In many cases, they perceive Torah society as restrictive and devaluing. In such cases, when the self has been squashed or distorted, correction can only occur when the self is rehabilitated. This can only occur by allowing the damaged adolescent to experience parental support in making autonomous choices. Obviously, parents must protect teenagers from acting out in explicitly self-damaging ways. The art of setting relatively safe boundaries while allowing for autonomous self-expression is the heart of the art of parenting adolescents. Because no one-size-fits-all answers are appropriate, it is extremely important for parents to seek advice and guidance from others they trust. Essentially, parents must walk the tightrope between encouraging autonomy and empowering the self of the emotionally damaged teenager.

When Torah Is Perceived as the Enemy

Natan was a 20-year-old student who had grown up in a Religious-Zionist home in the center of Israel. He was diagnosed with ADHD in high school and had been taking Ritalin strategically for several years. After two years of college, he announced that he would no longer observe Shabbos. I (SC) had been meeting with Natan for regular psychotherapy sessions. When he shared with me his decision to stop observing Shabbos, I reflected and shared with him that as a Shomer Shabbos Jew myself, his decision was not easy for me to digest and I deeply wanted to understand it. He asked me what exactly made his decision difficult for me. I reflected and shared with him that on a personal level, Shabbos observance was such a valued part of my life, that

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I had difficulty with his rejection of it. He explained to me that for him, Shabbos observance was intertwined with his father forcing him out of bed to attend synagogue services that were fundamentally meaningless to him. He viewed the day as a period of burdensome restrictions that suffocated him.

As I listened, I came to understand that once the self has been damaged, repair of the self requires allowance for autonomy. Natan felt compelled to violate the Shabbos in order to experience any ability to take control of his life. Without this, he felt completely impotent as a human being. Speaking without religious authority, but as a psychologist, I told Natan that, in my eyes, his choice of going to the beach on Shabbos was a step in the *teshuvah* process, as it was a means of rebuilding himself. As a footnote, several years later, Natan married a young woman who had not grown up in a religious family, but who was interested in a Torah-based lifestyle. Today they have four children who attend religious schools and the family lives in a religious community quite similar to the community in which Natan himself was raised.

The central idea is that when children with ADHD grow into adolescence, they often begin to reflect upon the lack of good fit between their temperament and the Torah environment in which they were raised, and this is often a necessary step for psychological and emotional growth. When these young people act out in manners that defy, deny, or devalue their parents' most cherished values, it is extremely hard to respond in a loving, accepting manner. However, when their rebellion emerges from the debris of destruction that a neuro-typical-dominated society inflicted upon the self of a child with ADHD, parental love, compassion, empathy, and support provide a method of relief. Nothing is more courageous or more difficult for parents to express; however, it is a way of wisdom that offers repair for the damaged self of the adolescent with ADHD.

Key Points

- Rebellion against a Torah lifestyle usually reflects a lack of attunement between the young person's social-emotional needs and what the individual internalized from the Torah community. In order to correct this, the person must experience the Torah based family and community as being attuned with one's social-emotional needs. Spiritual growth, today, only occurs when the individual is absorbed in a developmentally attuned environment.

SECTION 3: ADHD IN ADULTS

CHAPTER 14

THRIVING WITH ADULT ADHD IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

In the past, it was assumed that most children outgrow ADHD. Updated research indicates that more than half of those diagnosed with ADHD in childhood continue to exhibit ADHD symptoms as adults. The average adult must navigate a myriad of responsibilities related to career, family, finances, home management, and more. Like their children, Torah-observant adults are faced with the additional expectations of daily tefillah, *berachos*, shemiras Shabbos, and good *middos*. Unlike their children, however, adults with ADHD are expected to be “grown-ups” and assume personal responsibility for their religious lives while also remaining involved in the community, adhering to a work and/or learning schedule, and modeling appropriate Jewish behavior to their children. The frum adult with ADHD is expected to live an integrated and responsible life with much less support and scaffolding than is available to the child.

Dr. Ari Tuckman understands adjustment to adult ADHD as a sequential process. Those who first learn about their ADHD in adulthood often go through a process starting with excitement, and then

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they transition to programmed action. This is followed by a sense of being overwhelmed. Only those who subsequently effectively process their sense of being overwhelmed are capable of settling into a status of positive coping. Similarly, as you read through this chapter, you may find yourself experiencing some confusion and consternation. Many adults with ADHD have lived for decades thinking that they were lazy, unintelligent, or otherwise incapable. Realizing that there is an explanation for a lifetime of frustrations and seeming shortcomings can be a lot to take in. Be kind to yourself as you read this chapter. Proceed at your own pace and pay attention to those “demon” or “negative” voices that may cry out claiming either that the text has nothing to do with you, or that you are only searching for another excuse.

If you are ready, we will journey in this chapter through a two-phase process. First, we illustrate what life with unmanaged ADHD may look like for a frum adult, providing examples of challenges, identifying the relevant executive functions, and describing the potential emotional consequences of living with adult ADHD. As you read, you can decide the extent to which the examples and explanations presented are reflective of yourself. If you see similarities between yourself and ADHD symptoms, please do not despair. Any similarities between the symptoms of ADHD and yourself are simply indications that you may possess a neurodivergent brain that may be trained to utilize its own strengths in order to cope more effectively and live more fully.

In the second phase, we describe perspectives and strategies that the adult with ADHD can use to lean into their neurodivergent brains and more effectively utilize their strengths. Research clearly supports the conclusion that ADHD is not an insurmountable struggle. Knowing how to utilize techniques that are specifically intended for the ADHD brain can make all of the difference, even where years of trying to “figure it out” have not. Antacids may have been the mag-

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ical solution to your friend's heartburn, but that does not mean that they will cure your headaches. In the same way, all of the well-meaning advice targeted toward neuro-typical brains will not necessarily have any effect on the neurodivergent ADHD brain. However, that does not mean that all treatment is ineffective or that your condition is incurable. It simply means that you have not yet found the correct formula or tried the correct treatment. *So please continue reading, as we describe some adults with ADHD who have successfully transformed their lives in positive manners.*

Chani

Chani was certain that she could make a meal for a new mother that night. When she volunteered last week, she figured that preparing the meal would not be a big deal and would add only a few minutes to the time necessary to cook for her family. She had forgotten about the doctor's appointment that she scheduled during her work break and did not realize that the appointment conflicted with her usual shopping time. "Not a big deal," she thought, "I can stop at the store on my way home." Unfortunately, she forgot that her husband was working late and that she had agreed to get home immediately after work. "I need to start writing these things down," she thought, for the hundredth time.

Chani stopped off at the supermarket and picked up the necessary ingredients to cook the meal. She sped home frantically, and only arrived 20 minutes late, to find an angry husband, tersely saying goodbye and running out of the door. "Oh well, at least I remembered that I have to cook the meal," she thought, as her self-esteem deflated another notch. After some creative workarounds, Chani was feeding her family, sending the food over to the new mothers home, and attempting to eat some of her own dinner. She decided to wash Hamotzi along with them. One of her children asked for help with homework, so she got up to get a pencil. On her way to the pencil, a different child asked

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for help preparing food for the next day, so she kindly set them up, not wanting to ignore them. Around that time, her husband came home from the office and Chani handed him an overdue bill that she had noticed on the countertop. Wanting to perform kibbud av v'eim, Chani called her mother to check in. Soon she heard screaming from the other room with her child asking her if she was coming to help with homework. From a different room, she heard shrieks of either joy or pain, and Chani – with a sense of futility – encouraged her kids to play nicely and work things out. As the interminable night progressed, Chani found herself in an automatic chain of impulsive behaviors. She reacted to whatever need popped up: putting children to bed, answering phone calls, and chaotically remembering important things that needed to be taken care of for the next day or the remainder of the week. The awareness of Shabbos approaching again flashed in and out of Chani's mind. She would think momentarily about inviting company and making plans, but would get distracted by more urgent and immediate matters. She thought, "Anyhow, I have some time before Shabbos, so there is no pressure to prepare now." Sporadically, she remembered she wanted to write a mitzvah note for her daughter who was so kind to her siblings; this was a big deal for her. She also thought about planning school lunch for tomorrow. Quickly those thoughts left her mind, as she attended to her children who seemed to emit incomprehensible shrieks.

With each demand to prioritize, attend, follow through, remember, organize, plan, Chani felt her emotional fuel tank dwindling. At that moment, Chani's husband had to leave for minyan. She wanted to be supportive, but felt torn between wishing her husband a good davening and demanding that he help her deal with the chaos at home. Feeling guilty at the thought of holding him back from shul, she opted for the former, but felt a combination of resentment and shame. "Some eishes chayil," she thought to herself with cynicism and self-loathing.

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Miraculously, Chani survived the evening. As she put her last child to bed, she realized that she had forgotten to bench. In order to avoid forgetting, she resolved not to eat bread on weekdays. Finally able to sit down, Chani realized that it was too late to return phone calls. Although she thought of preparing some things for tomorrow, she was exhausted and decided to put off any further chores. "I'll just figure it out in the morning," she convinced herself.

When morning came, Chani struggled to get out of bed. She said Modeh Ani. Running slightly late, she rushed to wake up her sons for minyan. Somehow, although she had designated a specific "shoe place," stressful minutes were usually wasted on searching for each child's matching pair. Baruch Hashem, a friend had offhandedly reminded Chani that today was her day for carpooling. That meant five minutes less before everyone had to be out of the house. Chani managed to get all of the kids out of the house more or less on time, albeit with frantic jostling and thinly veiled threats. Once again, however, Chani was frustrated that she lost her cool and had provided her children with another aggravating morning. When she finally returned home after dropping all the children off, she was greeted by her son Yehuda's lunchbox still sitting on the kitchen counter where she had forgotten it. Chani realized that it was already Thursday and that she had not planned out the details for Shabbos. She felt embarrassed about inviting another family so late in the week, but she knew her children loved being with others on Shabbos. "Maybe we'll visit my parents?" she thought. But when remembering the pressures involved with packing and the chaos involved in getting everyone ready to leave on time, she vetoed that option as well.

Chani remembered that she had forgotten to drop off the dry cleaning. She grabbed the dirty suits and dresses, rushed to the cleaners, and pleaded with them to have the clothes cleaned and pressed by Friday afternoon. After dropping off the clothes at the cleaners, Chani's

friend Yocheved called on the cellphone. Chani was surprised to hear that Yocheved too had not yet finalized preparations for Shabbos. Spontaneously, Chani invited Yocheved, her husband, and their four children for Shabbos lunch. On the one hand, Chani was pleased that she had arranged to have guests. On the other hand, she felt more pressure in having to put together an impressive meal for her newly invited guests.

Next stop for Chani was the supermarket, where she managed to shop from memory, because she had forgotten her grocery list at home. Although she forgot a few items, Chani was grateful that she required only one additional trip before being satisfied that she had enough ingredients to commence cooking. Although through Divine intervention she had managed to get everything together hundreds of times in the past, she was filled with dread as she faced the challenge of preparing for another Shabbos.

Aryeh

Aryeh rushed into shul, later than planned—again. He sighed and assumed what was becoming his usual place in the back. He recalled the kind but devaluing words of his father, how “the back was for people who came to shul late or left shul early,” the kind of people who didn’t understand the importance of davening. “Three times a day we get to talk directly to HaKadosh Baruch Hu!” his father used to proclaim with excitement. Aryeh was lucky if he made it to shul twice a day, and he couldn’t remember the last time he had shown up on time. Today, it seemed, was about to become another nail in his coffin of self-contempt as a tardy and disorganized human being.

The usual crowd of guys had gathered to shmooze after davening, but Aryeh was frantically and mindlessly trying to say the prayers that he had missed due to his late arrival. He felt “out of the loop” and socially isolated. On Shabbos, when he was able to join the crowd for

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Kiddush, he found them discussing the continuation of events from the week, and he usually had no idea what they were talking about. On weekdays, Aryeh rushed out of shul in order to arrive on time for work. As he raced past the yeshiva, where some friends spent their days learning Torah, his deflated sense of self caused a tightening in his chest as he once again heard his father's voice reminding him of his faults. From a young age he had been told that he was never going to be successful in full-time learning. Unfortunately, many of the same characteristics that prevented success in Torah learning were also relevant to success in his professional career. Aryeh had been at his current job for about eight months, and already he was starting to feel that itch to try something different. He couldn't understand how his co-workers seemed content to sit behind their desks doing work that wasn't meaningful, fun, or interesting. The only part of his workday that Aryeh really enjoyed was the time he spent talking with his co-workers. However, he worried that his time schmoozing was starting to outweigh the time he spent working.

Later that evening, on his way home from work, Aryeh's phone buzzed. It was his friend Shlomo. "Aryeh! Are you still coming to us for Shabbos this week? The kids can't wait to see you!"

"Of course!" Aryeh reassured Shlomo, making a mental note to pick up candy for the kids and a bottle of wine for Shlomo and his wife.

"Nu, are you still dating that girl you told me about?" Shlomo inquired.

Aryeh panicked, "Wait, is today Thursday?"

"Yes...?" replied Shlomo.

"Shlomo, I'm supposed to be taking her out in an hour, and I completely forgot! I have to call you back."

The gears in Aryeh's head started turning. He had to shower, get changed, come up with a plan for the date, and get to Esti's house by 7:30. The clock read 6:39.

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Many hectic moments later, at 7:45 PM, Aryeh pulled up to Esti's house. He profusely apologized as she entered the car, and she graciously accepted. "She probably thinks I'm a mess," thought Aryeh. "And you know what? She's not wrong."

"What's the plan for tonight?" she asked.

"Well," Aryeh announced with gusto, "Our evening will begin at the store, where we will buy fifteen random items from which we will construct the perfect date." Esti smiled back at him, and Aryeh breathed a sigh of relief.

At least he was creative... and passionate. His chavrusa always told him, "Aryeh, if not for your excitement about learning, I don't think we would have made it this far." The problem was, Aryeh's excitement about a particular sugya only ever lasted one, maybe two weeks at a time, before his attention started to wander. Then, he would lose track of where they were up to but was often too embarrassed to ask his chavrusa. Aryeh only really followed where they were up to about one in every three times they learned together. He was lucky, he often thought to himself, that his chavrusa's schedule was almost as erratic as his own. Otherwise, there was no way his chavrusa would have stuck around this long.

The date with Esti seemed to go well, and after dropping her off, Aryeh finally relaxed and allowed himself to become excited for Shabbos. He loved spending time with Shlomo and his family, and he had a great game in mind for the kids. He reminded himself again to pick up some candy for them and some wine for their parents.

The next day, Aryeh was proud of himself for making it to Shlomo's house before candle-lighting time. That is, until he realized that he had shown up empty-handed. He vaguely remembered passing a gas station a few blocks away, so he rushed back to search for some candy for the kids. There was no way he would find any wine there. When he returned to the house, Shlomo joked, "You're early—we still have ten

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minutes before shkiyah!” Aryeh smiled, but internally he felt ashamed. “Shabbos comes every week. Why can’t I get it together to show up on time?” He had little time to dwell on these thoughts before Shlomo’s kids came running over. “Uncle Aryeh!” they proclaimed. Aryeh went straight into a rousing round of purposely mis-guessing everyone’s ages, sending the kids into fits of laughter. “You’re so great with the kids,” Shlomo remarked. Aryeh’s stomach sank, “Good with the kids?” he wondered, “Or just like them?”

Executive Functions

The examples above are a selection of many illustrations that could be used to depict the challenges facing an observant Jewish adult with ADHD. We have already discussed the central role played by executive functions in allowing children to function effectively. Now, let’s look at the effects of executive function failures on adults. Jewish life is replete with holidays throughout the year, each of which requires knowledge and application of rituals in a formal manner. Many laws focus on self-control in the areas of time management, food, and sleep. Shabbos and holidays limit the scope of permissible activities. Electronic gadgets, computers, and cars are basically off limits (except in emergencies). Only kosher food is to be eaten. Meat products are separate from dairy. Intimate relations between spouses are permitted only at specified times. Formal times for prayer services require waking up and staying awake at certain times of the day and being aware of the passage of time throughout each and every day. Consider the amount of planning, organization, time management and self-control necessary to manage all of that. In addition, Jewish law expects the adult to maintain a level of community involvement, maintain obligations to family members, and care for aging parents. The challenge is substantial for everyone. Unfortunately, many with ADHD perceive it as insurmountable.

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Jewish law expects Torah-observant men to either maintain a rigorous full-time learning schedule or to balance a full work schedule with set times for individual or small group learning. Prayer is mandated, three times daily, and one who is truly devout is expected to pray at formal synagogue services.

The prototypical ideal Jewish woman faces a singular set of challenges. First, she is responsible for her personal closeness to God. Shabbos and Yom Tov (holiday) observance, performance of all non-time-bound commandments, and cultivating a sense of internal spirituality are expected obligations. Second, although the responsibility to preserve love and passion is also demanded of the husband, the wife is, more often than not, endowed with greater emotional intelligence and hence necessarily assumes the role of leadership in this domain. In many families, it is the woman who monitors and regulates the ebb and flow of emotional couplehood as well as the emotional expressiveness of family life.

All of these tasks are highly dependent upon persistence and perseverance. Executive functions such as self-control, organization, and emotional regulation are necessary in order to regulate emotional and spiritual intensity and presence within the family. This presents a clear challenge for the adult with ADHD struggling with the demands of Torah living.

Emotional Consequences

In our discussion of children with ADHD, we identified sadness, masked by anger and apathy, as a common emotional consequence of living in an environment that is a poor fit for ADHD. What are the emotional consequences for adults trying to live a frum lifestyle with ADHD?

First, ADHD, particularly when undiagnosed, may lead to significant identity confusion: “Do I really care about Shabbos if I’m so

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unprepared for it every week?” or “Do I really care about my relationship with Hashem if I spend all of my time thinking about other things when I am supposed to be focused on davening?” are prevalent queries in the thoughts of many with ADHD. Similar to children, the sadness common to many adults with ADHD stems from an accumulation of shame, guilt, and inadequacy. The seemingly effortless manner in which others appear to function causes the Jewish adult with ADHD to detach from his or her sense of self. “That fellow across the street is a real ‘ben Torah.’” “The guy around the corner who is always smiling is an ehrlicher Yid.” “The Rabbi’s wife is a true ‘eishes chayil.’” The Jewish adult with ADHD often perceives him- or herself as an outcast who is incompetent in meeting the demands of Torah living.

In addition to sadness, the adult with ADHD often feels exhausted and overwhelmed. Remember, the ADHD brain may have to exert significantly more effort than the neuro-typical brain in order to perform a similar task. Long-term strenuous effort leads to anxiety and confusion as stations on the way to exhaustion. Self-doubts such as “Why is this so hard for me?” and “What am I doing wrong?” dominate the thoughts of the adult with ADHD. Imagine repeated attempts to get your act together that “always” end in failure. Imagine “always” disappointing not only yourself but your family and loved ones. Imagine repeatedly making impulsive decisions that derail your chances for business and economic advancement. Throughout this process, it is likely that your personal emotional needs are unmet as you race to keep pace with the demands around you, things that feel absolutely basic to daily Jewish living. Daily mitzvos such as prayer, blessings, learning, and social involvement all require intensive effort. **Without the knowledge that your neuro-atypical, ADHD brain is, in fact, wired differently than most, negative self-assessment is almost inevitable. Unless you are able to learn how the ADHD brain operates, sadness and frustration are likely to cycle repet-**

itively throughout your life. Ultimately, you may simply surrender and adopt a stance of apathy from which productive effort is perceived as futile.

Impact on Relationships

A primary area in which ADHD affects adult relationships is the sense of perpetual disappointment described in the previous paragraphs. The adult with ADHD often feels like he or she is consistently disappointing friends, family, and Hashem. Without understanding the ADHD brain, forgetfulness in matters important to your spouse, child, and parent can represent selfishness and insensitivity. In the absence of a more plausible explanation, it is easy to conclude that you are, in fact, a despicable, self-centered individual. Our experience has taught that behaviors that appear as egocentric and insensitive are, more often than not, simply the result of deficiencies in executive functions that characterize ADHD. When spouses need to give constant reminders to follow through with tasks like getting up for shul, setting up a chavrusa, getting involved with social activities, or having an organized home, they end up feeling, “I am married to someone who is not self-motivated to live the values we set out to live by.” ***Attributing moral meaning to these behaviors and the subsequent self-flagellation is not only inaccurate but unhelpful.*** Keep in mind too that our human relationships are often used as metaphors for our relationship with Hashem. Thus, feeling like a failure as a child, spouse, friend, or parent can lead to increased shame and detachment in the relationship with Hashem as well.

Individuals with ADHD often engage in behaviors that their spouses perceive as disrespectful or dismissive, causing hurt and frustration. Behaviors may include interrupting work meetings or important conversations, as their spouse describes fear they will forget an important thought (seemingly oblivious to the reality that their

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spouse is in the middle of something important). When asked to speak or touch base, they are multitasking when listening (e.g., doing other things or looking on their phones), forgetting to do something asked or doing a behavior that bothers a spouse again, after discussing extensively how to work on it and how much it means to their non-ADHD spouse. Consequently, these behaviors unintentionally communicate a lack of respect for their non-ADHD spouse, sending a message their needs are secondary to that of the ADHD individual or not important at all.

Adult ADHD is particularly challenging for couples in which only one partner carries the ADHD diagnosis. The non-ADHD, neuro-typical partner, blessed with normative time awareness, will usually comprehend time pressures involved in meeting social commitments. The neuro-typical spouse naturally comprehends that preparing sandwiches and getting each of the children dressed requires a commitment of time. On the other hand, the spouse with ADHD is much less sensitive to the need to plan ahead and commit periods of time in order to be on time for societal demands. This often leads to repeated reminders and nagging, which likely results in mutual frustration for both spouses. The non-ADHD spouse often feels like the sole bearer of responsibility. On the other hand, the spouse with ADHD often feels micromanaged, harassed, and incompetent. Because the ADHD spouse is primed for activities that tend to be high in excitement and reinforcement, the non-ADHD partner often ignores neurological reality and imputes moral deficiency in the spouse with ADHD. In effect, the spouse with ADHD is perceived as being selfish, egocentric, and only interested in fun and excitement. Mundane tasks are the exclusive responsibility of the spouse without ADHD. As this pernicious situation festers, resentment and anger grow.

Our experience teaches that non-ADHD spouses need to understand the overwhelming challenges facing the ADHD brain when it is

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required to engage in low-stimulation activities. People with ADHD tend to avoid these activities because they are experienced as dreadfully boring and interminable. *In working with hundreds of ADHD couples, we have learned that husbands and wives are able to work through the challenges of mundane activities only when both partners perceive ADHD as a neurological rather than a moral challenge.* When we are capable of empathizing with the huge stress associated with planning and routine, we are capable of relating with compassion. Only compassionate relating allows the person with ADHD to feel secure enough to embark upon the challenges of mundane routine. Usually, when one is able to view the ADHD partner as someone coping with neurologically based challenges, it is relatively easy to form a program based on acceptance, reinforcement, and shaping that allows the spouse with ADHD to face the challenges effectively.

Michal and Moshe

It's the week before Pesach and tensions related to holiday cleaning are running high in the Greenbaum home. The kids are off from school, the house needs to be cleaned, and of course, the search for chametz must be completed. The fact that Moshe's brother is visiting from out of town adds a bit of further stress, as both Michal and Moshe view him as critical and judgmental. Although Michal had sat Moshe down at the start of the week to run through everything they needed to accomplish, she was aware that Moshe had ADHD and she was quite skeptical that he would successfully carry his share of responsibilities. She was happy with the way they had divided their to-do list but worried about whether Moshe's ADHD brain would be capable of dealing with the mundane of routine. Moshe has been trying his best to keep up, and he's exhausted. It feels like an impossible task. At the same time, Michal, who has been trying to be patient, is at her wit's end. "I cannot be in charge of waking you up to go to davening, Moshe. You're

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an adult, and you've been late to Shacharis every day this week. What kind of an example do you think you're setting for the children?"

One of the responsibilities that Michal delegated to Moshe was to shop with the children for new clothes. On the way to the men's clothing store, Moshe thought of the tremendous burden of purchasing groceries that rested solely upon Michal. It seemed to him that taking part in helping out with food shopping would be a sign of caring.

"Let's surprise Mommy by going to the supermarket for her!" exclaimed Moshe excitedly to the children. After forty minutes of canvassing the supermarket aisles, Moshe and the children were desperate for a break. On the way home, they took a detour to the local pizza shop.

Upon arriving home, Moshe was surprised that Michal was not pleased with his actions. "Moshe, I asked you to buy the children's clothes. Now the children have nothing to wear for Pesach. I feel like I need to care for everything on my own," Michal stated in exasperation.

Moshe was angry and ashamed. Overwhelmed by his feelings, he snapped back at Michal, "It's impossible to make you happy!" He knew that his angry reaction was not appropriate and not even directed at the right person. The familiar feeling of self-loathing, so endemic to adults with ADHD, began to spread throughout his inner being. Moshe was flooded with an internal sense of inadequacy. "Michal is right in being upset and hurt. I could not even complete the simple task of purchasing holiday clothes for the children." And now, not only had he failed to make his wife happy by doing what she had asked, he had yelled at her, moving even further from his intention of doing something to help her. Once again, he had acted based on impulse. Unfortunately, although he had already been diagnosed with ADHD as a child, he did not understand the machinations of the ADHD brain and how to cope with it. Instead, he entered the holiday feeling worthless, isolated, and inadequate.

Marriage and Partnership Require Everyone to See Other Perspectives

The difficulties for adults with ADHD and the people around them are clear. While there may not be a perfect solution or “cure” to the challenges described above, overcoming ADHD requires each individual with ADHD and the couple to adopt a new perspective as well as implement strategies to help the ADHD adult to significantly ameliorate the effects of ADHD on his or her life. Below we will outline what we call **mindset shifts, helpful perspectives so that the individual and spouse of an ADHD individual can view the individual with ADHD with compassion, acceptance, and empowerment. Additionally, we outline strategies to develop skills that the individual with ADHD can utilize to improve their level of responsibility and effect positive changes in their lives, as well as skills to help couples deal with ADHD and its challenges.**

Key Points

- ADHD does not disappear when the individual enters adulthood
 - While adults with ADHD may struggle with the same issues as their younger counterparts, they are held to a higher standard.
- Frum adults with ADHD are expected to successfully juggle their personal, professional, religious, familial, and communal responsibilities.
- Living a halachic Jewish life demands a myriad of executive functions
 - Inhibition, for example, is required to refrain from eating dairy after meat and to refrain from using muktzah objects on Shabbos.
 - Time management, for example, is needed to get to minyanim and start Shabbos on time.
- Unmanaged adult ADHD can lead to significant emotional consequences
 - Identity confusion: “Do I really care about Shabbos if I’m so unprepared for it every week?”
 - Exhaustion: The ADHD brain must exert more effort to do the same tasks as a neuro-typical brain
 - Sadness and self-doubt: “Why is this so hard for me? Why can’t I get this right?”
- Adult ADHD also impacts relationships
 - The individual with ADHD may feel like they are constantly letting others down.
 - Friends and family may feel like they have to compensate for the ADHD adult’s areas of difficulty.
 - Friends and family may also feel like the individual with ADHD does not care about or respect them.

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- Husbands and wives are able to work through the challenges only when both partners perceive ADHD as a neurological rather than a moral challenge.

What Do You Think?

- Do you or your spouse/friend/family member struggle with ADHD-like symptoms, whether or not you/they have ever been diagnosed?
- Do you view those struggles as moral failings or part of the way your/their brain is wired?
- What would life be like if you could let go of the guilt and shame/blame and focus on what works for you and your spouse/friend/family member?

CHAPTER 15

MINDSET SHIFTS FOR THRIVING WITH ADULT ADHD

Mindset Shift 1: Dialectical Thinking: A Frame for ADHD Living

Dialectical Thinking

Children are often most comfortable thinking about the world in black-and-white terms. People are either good or bad, tall or short, kind or mean. As we progress through adolescence and adulthood, we begin to understand that the complexities of life render dichotomous thinking to be unproductive. For example, when your generally grumpy neighbor one day picks up your garbage cans that had been blown by the wind into the street, this defies the all-or-nothing, good-or-bad characterization. As adults, we tend to perceive life in higher resolution and begin to think in a dialectic manner. Thinking dialectically means that we are capable of seeing many contradictory pieces of information as part of a whole picture. I can love and hate the same person. They are not “evil” or “saintly,” “good” or “bad.” They are *both!* As opposed to a child who tends to maintain rigid, monolithic views of reality, when we think dialectically, we understand that there are

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many gradations of reality. Things can be interpreted on multiple levels. In pure form, dialectics need not be consistent with simple logic. For example, a psychological approach known as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) posits that the fundamental life dialectic is, on one hand, perceiving that all people are doing the best that they can, while on the other hand, believing that everyone needs to try harder and do better. Many adults can fall into the trap of either/or thinking: *either* people are trying their best and focus on validation and acceptance principles *or* they hold onto the other part and believe that they must change. The tension and apparent contradiction in this dialectic is clear. What DBT posits is that two opposing realities can exist at the same time and both be true, creating a new reality. At any moment, a person is doing the best they can *and* they can do better; our job is to hold onto both. What Marsha Linehan, the creator of DBT, found was that when people with intense emotions were prodded to change, they pushed back and said, “You don’t understand how difficult it is to do what you ask.” When she focused only on compassion and acceptance they said, “I appreciate you understanding me but nothing is changing in my life.” Out of this reality, the dialectic of focusing on compassion *and* change was born.

Because individuals with ADHD are so intensely emotional, the dialectic is a fundamental principle necessary for effective living. On the one hand, neurological deficits and negative life experiences have led people with ADHD to a level of being which is as optimum as can be reasonably expected. On the other hand, our understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes active in an individual with ADHD allow us to develop strategies that, once learned, will allow for better functioning. **Effectively living with ADHD requires a dialectic of having compassion *and* taking responsibility.** We spoke earlier about how Developmentally Attuned Parenting demands that the parent have compassion and empathy while creating targeted solutions.

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As adults, we are expected to parent ourselves rather than relying on others to meet our basic needs and expectations. Thus, the demand for compassion and responsibility shifts from the parent to the adult with ADHD.

Dialectical Mindset for Individuals with ADHD

Adults with ADHD must have compassion for themselves, recognizing aspects of their thinking and behavior that are rooted in a neurological condition. However, it is important that this compassion and understanding not become an excuse for completely abdicating responsibility. “Sorry I didn’t prepare dinner, I have ADHD,” may work a couple of times, but it will quickly become a tiresome and unhelpful excuse. Instead, the adult with ADHD can adopt a mindset of, “I know my ADHD makes remembering to prepare dinner challenging for me. What can I do to set myself up for success?”

Dialectical Mindset for Spouses or Family Members

Similarly, the spouse of the ADHD adult may become angry and frustrated quite easily. The spouse can say, “Yes, I have to help him with reminders, but I have come to learn that he reacts negatively to my rigidity and uptightness.” Once the spouse adopts dialectical thinking, he or she understands that their partner with ADHD is doing as well as can be expected, and that critical judgment is futile. All attempts at improving must be based on an accepting view of the challenges that the partner with ADHD is dealing with. Perhaps a visual poster or an alarm set on the cellphone may help the weak-working memory of the spouse with ADHD. Although choosing to adopt this approach is effortful, it allows the neuro-typical spouse to relate to the spouse with ADHD in a compassionate manner. Hence it is likely to enhance the responsible behavior of the spouse with ADHD. At the same time,

it is likely to empower the self-concept of the ADHD spouse and to empower positive emotions in the couple's relationship.

For religiously observant families, this dialectic provides a manner of understanding the conflict between determinism and free will. **Although genetics and environment powerfully influence our behavior, the capacity for free will exists to the extent that we choose to act compassionately and responsibly in any particular situation. When we consider the biological reality of the ADHD brain, we are free to choose to relate to the behaviors stemming from this brain critically and judgmentally, or with empathy and compassion. Decades of experience with families and couples with ADHD has taught that compassion and empathy lead to far more productive results than do criticism, punishment, and judgmentalism.**

A Word on Compassion

People sometimes confuse compassion with taking it easy or making excuses. One might think that exercising too much compassion will lead to complacency and stagnation, whereas being “tough” and maintaining high standards will lead to growth. This belief stems from a misunderstanding of compassion. ***Being compassionate does not mean saying “everything is fine the way it is.” Rather, compassion involves empathetic understanding of why things are the way they are.*** For example, when I am compassionate I would say, “You’re upset, because you had a hard day,” whereas one lacking compassion might say, “We all have tough days. Why are you making such a big deal about it?” If the adult with ADHD thinks, “I’m not trying hard enough. I just need to do better,” he or she is likely to continue trying and failing to make changes to their behavior. In contrast, if this person thinks, “Because of my ADHD, I have a hard time remembering

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my obligations,” they have set themselves up to ask a more productive question, “What can I do about that?”

For those who are unaccustomed to exercising compassion or for whom compassion feels like the easy way out, it is important to ask: What will be most helpful right now? If I continue to blame and berate myself for my behavior, is that going to help me change? Or will it just leave me feeling disempowered and badly about myself? On the other hand, if I take a gentle approach with myself, will that give me an excuse to keep repeating my behavior? Or will it motivate me to find ways to work with myself to do better?

Mindset Shift 2: Mindful Awareness

Maintaining mindful awareness is the process of looking at ourselves and our behaviors with openness and curiosity and without judgment. Doing so can provide both clarity and compassion regarding the areas in which we would benefit from making changes or bringing in additional support. This can help us take responsibility for making positive changes in daily living. Below is a script to practice bringing mindful awareness as we observe one’s or a loved one’s ADHD symptoms. Let’s take a moment to examine a day in your life through a mindful exercise and lens. Let’s observe the present moment, one’s thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations without judgment. Observe and describe actions and observations based on facts. *Focus on today.* Try to observe these experiences without judging them as good or bad. Rather than labeling myself as lazy or undisciplined, I can acknowledge that symptoms are simply part of my experience at this moment.

Mindful Awareness of ADHD Profile: Executive Functioning Strengths and Weakness

Let’s look at our reality. What does my ADHD profile look like? What are the executive functions that are difficult for me? What are

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my strengths? As you look at yourself, notice yourself possibly being distracted despite efforts to focus, notice jumping from one task to the next, leaving in the middle of the task, possibly not to return to it in the time you need. Notice being absorbed in a task and completely losing a sense of time, missing another activity because of it. Notice an impulsive emotional reaction to something that does not go your way. Notice yourself in a moment where you forgot to take care of something and now your day is upended to adapt. Notice yourself considering sleep or waking up. Notice the times of day when you function better. Notice times when it hurts to think. Notice when you are overthinking and indecisive about a simple question, like vanilla or chocolate ice cream. Notice moments when you manage challenges better. Notice moments when you feel at a breaking point and consider what factors made it more difficult. Notice choosing a course of action completely without considering the consequences. Notice feelings of having a task and pushing it off to do... anything else.

As you attempt to think about your current life, you may notice that you are pulled to think about the previous years when you may have struggled with executive functioning challenges (e.g., remembering birthdays, being ready for Shabbos on time, reacting intensely and impulsively to others). Notice the pull towards those thoughts. Try not to push them away. Rather, bring your attention back to your breath which will serve as an anchor in this present moment. The goal of bringing all of your past experiences along with your beliefs about yourself into the current moment puts a weight on the experience and makes it even greater to create new, different outcomes and experiences. It causes additional sadness and shame, or future worries that you will continue to struggle, and a sense of overwhelm that you are unable to manage something as big as the struggles from your whole life. The likelihood of succeeding at a task when you bring your perceived failures from the last twenty years would feel insurmountable, rather than approaching this moment as a new moment. Let's approach this one

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moment. Today. To counter feeling overwhelmed, use mindfulness to focus on one moment at a time. It may be that we are noticing something challenging, but it is only looking at this moment in time.

Every adult with ADHD needs to practice this routine if they are to avoid the escalating cycle of negative judgment, self-blame, and greater inferiority and hesitancy to engage the challenge. Practice leads to mindfulness, and mindfulness leads to addressing challenges in small, doable steps that ultimately lead you to a better life. For those of you who tolerate meditation well, the above paragraph can be a meditative text. Others may simply choose to read it, and re-read it until you are fully capable of internalizing its message. The bottom line is that no one is doomed to continual repetition of failure. Change can be made. It may occur slowly. It may occur unevenly. But being gifted with the potential for free will is what allows each of us to change those parts of life that we want to improve.

Let's return to reflecting on how wondrous self-observation may positively affect our executive functions. Observe a specific chore that involves cleaning or organization. Perhaps you may imagine a large Yom Tov meal that requires considerable planning. Allow yourself to observe your own impatience with yourself and with others. Notice what you do that can be hurtful. Notice moments when you feel in the zone and are capable of acting efficiently and with kindness. Observe yourself feeling a sense of connection to something you enjoy. Observe yourself while feeling bored. Notice when you feel energized. Notice yourself absorbed in an activity. Notice your strengths. Notice when you are passionate. Notice when you are sensitive. As you reflect without judgment on the presence of certain behaviors, remind yourself, *"This information is the first step in taking ownership in my growth."*

Mindful Awareness of the Executive Function Fuel Tank

In addition to developing a sense of personal executive function strengths and weaknesses, it is also important to know how capable one is of integrating various executive functions in performing daily tasks. Many individuals with ADHD are capable of performing individual tasks that require specific executive functions, but are inept and inefficient when required to integrate several executive functions simultaneously. The analogy from Dr. Ari Tuckman is that of snowflakes: they are pretty individually but scary in an avalanche. Although someone with ADHD may be able to manage individual tasks, they are easily overwhelmed when required to perform multiple executive functions simultaneously. Dr. Tuckman discusses how the multiple executive functions necessary in order to organize a household constantly threaten to create a state of entropy for the person with ADHD. Simply maintaining the status quo requires immense focus and energy. This has led some researchers to refer to ADHD as “a disorder of routine task management.” Although developing routines can be helpful for the ADHD brain, the repetitive training is often experienced as boring. Remember, the ADHD brain has less tolerance for boredom.

Dr. Russell Barkley uses the metaphor of a fuel tank in order to help us understand how executive functions are performed. Each application of an executive function reduces the fuel available for self-control and self-regulation. At the end of a school day, a child with ADHD is basically “on empty.” Adults with ADHD operate on a similar principle. Later in the chapter, we will discuss ways to refuel one’s tank throughout the day; however, as we encourage learning about your personal profile, it is helpful to be mindful of how a specific task can impact your executive function fuel tank. Consider your fuel tank on a spectrum from empty, shut down, or overwhelmed to full and energized. Take a moment to reflect on moments you feel energized.

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What types of activities are you doing? What are your thoughts at that time? Take a moment to reflect on a specific task that requires executive functioning, such as planning or preparing dinner. Notice how much fuel is needed to do this task. We will revisit this in the following chapter to learn how to fill our fuel tanks.

It also is essential to learn how to recognize when your fuel tank is low. This requires awareness and a sense of connection to our bodies and their needs. Cognitive awareness, bodily awareness, fatigue, and hunger are areas that require mindfulness in order to assure adequate executive functioning. When we do not take care of these basic needs, no one can function. If you have ADHD, your tendency towards less mindfulness and higher sensitivity combine to create disastrous results. Mindfulness, like muscles, can be strengthened with practice. Practicing mindfulness might involve a daily body scan, a few moments of kavanah during tefillah, or simply becoming acutely aware of your present physiological, cognitive and emotional experience. When you notice your executive function energy level with wondrous observation, many negative ADHD behaviors can be eliminated or at the very least ameliorated.

Mindset Shift 3: Cognitive Restructuring

As discussed previously, cognitive restructuring and mindfulness are useful means of cultivating a dialectical mindset through developing compassion and an empowering attitude towards ourselves or loved ones with ADHD. Similar to the ways that parents use these tools to non-judgmentally observe their children's behavior, adults with ADHD and their significant others can use cognitive restructuring and mindfulness to cope effectively with ADHD.

All humans tend to attribute the behavior of others to character rather than to external forces. This tendency leads towards criticism and judgment. To correct for this tendency, the Rabbis command

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us to judge others favorably. Acceptance and compassion in place of criticism and judgment require an ADHD couple to understand the unique wiring of the ADHD brain. In the example of the couple in Chapter 14, Moshe is actually displaying sensitivity to Michal's needs by trying to aid her in grocery shopping. Unfortunately, his ADHD brain, with its deficits in the area of organized planning, does not take into account the havoc that abandoning his pre-assigned task causes Michal. She does not understand the tremendous challenge that Moshe faces in carrying out the set plan of clothes shopping. Moshe is acutely aware that Michal would never be so absent-minded. He is struggling intensely with focusing on the details of shopping for clothes. Neither partner appreciates the other's efforts to make things work. When actions resulting from neurologically based ADHD are misinterpreted as character flaws, the couple tends to adopt a critical and judgmental stance towards the partner with ADHD. To more effectively deal with the daily struggles of life, each partner must develop skills of empathy and compassion.

Philosophers have noted that our experience of life is not direct; our reality is determined by the way the brain processes. In other words, we perceive subjective experience rather than objective reality. When spouses refrain from criticism and moral evaluations of each other, they are capable of interacting in a compassionate and loving manner. With regard to ADHD, Professor Russell Barkley has noted that a key for a successful relationship involves an accurate and compassionate acceptance of the individual suffering from the disorder. When we perceive the disorder grounded in facts and not based on moralistic sermonizing, we are able to help the individual with ADHD cope with his or her weaknesses in a productive manner. At the same time, the individual with ADHD can work on fostering a healthy relationship by providing an accurate and compassionate acceptance of

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the frustration and pain their spouse must endure as a result of their living with an ADHD-challenged partner.

The complexity of marital dynamics is clearly depicted by Dan Wile in his book *After the Honeymoon*:

Paul married Alice, and Alice gets loud at parties, and Paul, who is shy, hates that. But if Paul had married Susan, he and Susan would have gotten into a fight before they even got to the party. That's because Paul is always late, and Susan hates to be kept waiting. She would feel taken for granted, which she is very sensitive about. Paul would see her complaining about this as her attempt to dominate him, which he is very sensitive about. If Paul had married Gail, they wouldn't have even gone to the party because they would still be upset about an argument they had the day before about Paul's not helping with the housework. To Gail, when Paul does not help, she feels abandoned, which she is sensitive about, and to Paul, Gail's complaining is an attempt at domination, which he is sensitive about. The same is true about Alice. If she had married Steve, she would have the opposite problem, because Steve gets drunk at parties and she would get so angry at his drinking that they would get into a fight about it. Relationships will work to the extent that you have wound up with a set of perpetual problems you can learn to live with. When a problem is a perpetual problem, instead of solving it, a couple needs to learn how to dialogue well about their different subjective realities. The masters of relationship seem to be able to come to some acceptance of their problem. They are able to simultaneously communicate acceptance of the partner and the desire to improve this problem, often with amusement, respect and affection.

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The challenges in ADHD relationships are two-fold. First, the neuro-typical partner is often totally unaware of the challenges confronted by the spouse with ADHD. Second, the partner with ADHD is often blind to the extent that his deficits in executive functioning complicate the marriage. *Notice thoughts and beliefs that arise as you attempt to observe and describe your actions in a non-judgmental way. If you notice negative self-talk, such as berating yourself, consider that if your goal is to be more effective and succeed at tasks that are difficult, yelling at someone may work initially, but in the long run is an ineffective form of coaching and motivating behavior. Individuals end up disliking or feeling ashamed in the face of the person who attempts to motivate in those ways. It makes it less likely for a person to try or sustain motivation. If our inner voices are harsh and condescending, we will not enhance our relationship with the people around us. Notice old thoughts and replace them with new thoughts. "My brain is wired differently than most." "I am not choosing to forget things intentionally." "I do indeed care about others and the things I forget." "Caring will not translate into me being able to do it successfully." "There are strategies out there that I can use. But before I do that, I can look at this incident where I forgot my husband's schedule and I can forgive myself." "I can look at waking up late to go to minyan and recognize, I do care about my Yiddishkeit. I very much want to connect with Hashem in tefillah, and I want to be a role model for others." "We all make mistakes and struggle. This is one area that I struggle with more than other people. Only Hashem is perfect. Hashem asks us to try."* Empowered thoughts are those that encourage us to try, and will lead to acting more effectively. Cognitive restructuring can be practiced in a formal manner by using the charts that are provided at the end of this chapter, or by simply focusing on judgmental thoughts that flood our consciousness and replacing them with effective therapeutic thinking.

Mindset Shift 4: Baby Steps and Appreciating the Process

Baby Steps

Let's be realistic, we have been struggling for years. The challenges are relentless. What can we do to actually make changes, and what change can we really expect?

Rav Wolbe in his sefer *Alei Shur*, addresses this exact question in the beginning of Avodah Musaris – working on ourselves. He notes we approach the first foundation of working on ourselves by acknowledging the value of *maasim ketanim*, small actions. He notes that we speak and see the world where the Torah and mitzvos are lofty and great, but when it comes down to it practically, Torah and mitzvos depend on *maasim ketanim*, small actions. The large world is not built from large things, rather from atoms and other small particles. Similar to the physical world, our spiritual world is based upon the accumulation of many miniscule actions. Rav Wolbe states that to affect change, the individual must undergo a cognitive shift. Although one may have a lofty idea such as world peace, the concept must be divided into its component parts that a person can perform. These tiny but concrete steps actually may lead to world peace, similar to the manner that a minute amount of medication can cure an entire body. On the other hand, overdosing may produce the diametrically opposite effect. Rav Wolbe notes that there is another significant aspect to this concept. When something is too much, we resent it and stop wanting to do it. If someone takes upon themselves something huge, its enormous weight may be onerous. This discomfort fuels the fires of rebellion. Small actions don't awaken the temptation of our internal need for rebellion.

People with ADHD experience these feelings and responses. We make a huge commitment towards a family member, colleague, boss, or friend. We say we are going to change an aspect of our personal-

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ity, and initially we are totally devoted to the task. Unfortunately, we quickly become overwhelmed, causing us to feel exhausted and resentful. The ADHD brain has a sensitive radar system, especially to certain types of tasks. If we ask too much of the system, particularly executive function requests, without setting up the appropriate environment, the brain will get overwhelmed and shut down. There will be a pull or push to take on more. As the famous Chinese proverb, attributed to philosopher Lao Tzu states, “A journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step.” I can try to take thirty steps at a time, but that is not a human capability, ADHD or not. Rav Wolbe is teaching us wisdom for true growth. We can develop the capacity to train our brains to focus on actions that we *can* do, and to recognize the significance of small steps. For individuals who have difficulty with attention and consistency, sitting and learning for ten minutes straight, day after day, is significant. When a person with ADHD misses a few days, it is easy to be flooded with hostile thoughts telling him that he is a total failure. On the other hand, the ability to use cognitive restructuring to get back on track is invaluable. Through self-compassion, the person with ADHD is capable of living more optimally.

Mental filtering is another cognitive distortion that characterizes adults suffering from ADHD. We tend to devalue actions that we perform adequately, and elevate and idealize actions that we tend to perform poorly. Hence we think, “It is not enough. There is no reason to work on it because I will never get to where I want,” or “They will never change quickly enough and I cannot wait around for them to change.” Working with individuals struggling with extensive difficulties across multiple areas, the way to get back on track is by taking one step at a time. Rather than focusing on what is not being accomplished, each small step forward proves that change is possible and reinforces the hope of positive outcomes.

Appreciating the Process

The adult with ADHD generally is not interested in tasks that do not feel inherently meaningful or interesting. This leads to a tendency to prefer end results rather than to appreciate the process necessary for achieving those results. The ability to break a large outcome into small steps towards a goal is an executive function called “analysis.” Another example of this function is the ability to be immersed in one moment in time, almost to the exclusion of future outcome. Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar posits that blindness to process is a major impediment towards achieving happiness. Unfortunately, it also characterizes most people with ADHD.

People with ADHD often lose interest when dealing with a particular task detail. Our experience teaches that much of the unhappiness of adults with ADHD reflects their overemphasis on finishing the never-ending task, rather than enjoying the baby steps necessary to perform the task. To create the potential for happy living, it is essential to focus on your personal connection, relevance, and commitment to the baby steps required for each task to be accomplished. For example, you may be excited to have your sukkah built, but may feel less motivated to read the long and tedious instructions explaining how to build the sukkah. The challenge is in connecting the boring instructions to the more meaningful result of having constructed the sukkah. Maybe you can keep a picture of your sukkah from previous years nearby and imagine the pride you will feel when the sukkah is standing once again (creating an adult WOMAC!). Perhaps you can highlight the essential steps in the order that they are presented in the instruction manual. Perhaps you can choose to ignore the instruction manual and rely on intuition (should you choose this option, remember not to get flustered when you need to improvise and make changes along the way). Lastly, you can make a list with each step of the process, check off each

one, and reward yourself accordingly as you achieve the mini-steps towards successfully completing the mitzvah!

When faced with any task that feels mundane and cannot be effectively paired with a more exciting task, try to figure out what makes this task meaningful to you. Ask yourself: How does this connect to a value of mine? Is this task something that I personally want to do? Is completing this task consistent with fulfilling a role that I value? Is doing this laundry important for me, despite its boring, tedious nature, because I deeply care that my family have what they need to be *ovdei Hashem*, to live in a calm home? How difficult is this task for me? Is this task something that I could share with someone else, or outsource? How connected is this task to core parts of my identity (for myself, or for what others in the community perceive as vital to being a father (e.g., bringing your child to shul on time). What are the times of day I can be most productive, creative, focused, nurturing? When do I get most overwhelmed?

Additionally, something is “relevant” because attempting to complete executive functioning tasks when we are low in fuel can have negative consequences. We can anticipate consequences and link them to tasks to remind us why they matter. For example, if we do not commit to developing our executive function skills, when faced with a task, we may become overwhelmed and shut down. Even if we do find a way to accomplish a task and meet our end result, it is possible that the means in which we got there was detrimental to others or at the expense of our own well-being (e.g., agreeing to host others without proper planning and being frenzied and irritable leading up to the “gorgeous” meal you hosted). Our means to the end may include acting against values we care about (e.g., we may react in ways reflecting our exhaustion, snap at others, etc.).

Once you have connected to the value and/or relevance of a task, find ways to remind yourself of that meaning as you work on accom-

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plishing the task. It may be helpful to remind yourself that “**a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.**” Success should include an appreciation for the process. We are unable to snap our fingers or simply wish things into being. Our physical and interpersonal reality is the result of our actions, and even though we may want to have it all right now, all success stems from persevering in the face of innumerable obstacles that are part of living in the universe. It is noteworthy that in journeys, people take breaks, and they face obstacles along the way. It is part of the process! The goal is to stay in it. Try again tomorrow, beginning one step at a time. Remind yourself of Rav Wolbe’s teaching that all spiritual growth is built on *maasim ketanim* and each small action is valuable within itself.

Mindset Shift 5: Realistic Empowered Thinking

The last strategy focused on part 1 of the dialectic: developing a compassionate, understanding perspective and orientation towards ourselves and loved ones with ADHD. We accept that the ADHD brain is neurodivergent. Does this mean I should accept that this is who I am and how I act, and everyone will just have to live with it? That would be ascribing to only one aspect of the dialectic! We don’t want to stop here because we all want to do better and try harder. We know that if we only focus on change, we will find it invalidating and maybe impossible, because we will make mistakes; it is part of life. We honor the value in understanding and accepting the reality of ADHD in our lives. Now we are moving to the second part of the dialectic: **accepting responsibility for behavioral changes that will make life more effective for myself and others.** Let’s say I feel more hopeful. I gain a tremendous amount of confidence and I have begun to see myself positively: “I have many wonderful qualities. I don’t mean to mess up in these ways. I am doing the best I can.” **This is wonderful but that itself is not enough to help me succeed. I don’t know what**

to do, or where to start. It is not like I wasn't trying before. The executive function difficulties are still present. There are a number of recommendations to help us regain control by using scaffolding. Executive functioning is not about a lack of intelligence or interest or motivation to do better. As mentioned earlier, *it is about lacking the ability to execute skills in the moment when they are needed.*

A crucial step in managing adult ADHD is the ability to evaluate progress in relation to oneself and not in relation to others with neuro-typical brains. Most parents readily intuit that comparison between children is unproductive. Similarly, if you or your spouse has ADHD, it is unhelpful and usually injurious when we compare the neuro-atypical ADHD brain with the neuro-typical adult. As described in working with children regarding SMART goals, progress will be determined in comparison to ourselves, what we are capable of now and what a natural next step could be. My (SM) father, Mr. Nahum Winkler, LCSW, taught me another helpful way to determine what is realistic for someone and an empowering way to measure success. We can look at a person's current behavior. Then we can **choose to target new behaviors that reflect change in IDF: Intensity, Duration and Frequency.**

1. Intensity: "I may have gotten annoyed at my children and yelled, but my tone of voice was lower and I only made one comment rather than going on a tirade." The measurable amount and level of problematic behavior is decreasing.
2. Duration: "I came late to davening, but instead of coming for the Shemoneh Esrei, I came by Barchu, thus improving in the length of time the challenging behavior interfered with the outcome of interest" (e.g., coming to shul on time).
3. Frequency: "I may have run into the 18 minutes of Shabbos, but I used to do that every Shabbos, now I do that maybe once a

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month. Baruch Hashem!” The problematic behavior is happening less often.

First, accept that the ADHD brain is neurodivergent. Next, lean into the way that the ADHD brain works, instead of trying to make it work in a manner identical to that of the neuro-typical. “What is attainable for *me in THIS moment?*” Just because your wife can tackle fifteen big tasks in a day does not mean that you can or should. Instead, get to know yourself and develop realistic expectations regarding what you are capable of achieving. Remember that success breeds success. Even as you troubleshoot the less successful moments in your day, remember to celebrate your successes as they arise. You remembered to take the garbage out before the garbage collector drove by? That’s great! How did you do that? How can you build on that success for next week’s garbage collection? Give yourself credit for the small stuff that you accomplish, even if it appears to be baby steps.

As you learn how to establish realistic expectations for yourself, help other people in your life maintain realistic expectations for you as well. Do you struggle to return phone calls? As you work toward a solution, communicate with the people in your life. You can say, “I’m not great at returning phone calls. I’m working on it, but if you don’t hear back from me by the end of the day, please call me back.” In fact, this sort of communication encapsulates the dialectic of compassion and responsibility. It allows you to utilize a compassionate understanding of yourself so that others align their expectations to what you can realistically accomplish. Take responsibility in a manner that maximizes the probability that you will actually accomplish the expected task.

Once you’ve embraced these mindset shifts, you can start to tell yourself things like:

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Instead of...	Try Thinking...

We addressed ways of thinking that can promote a healthy approach to living a responsible Torah life and now we will shift to providing a few recommendations of practical strategies to strengthen weaknesses in executive functioning.

Key Points

- This chapter presents a number of “Mindset Shifts” for thriving with adult ADHD
- Mindset Shift 1: Dialectical Thinking: A Frame for ADHD Treatment
 - Moving from “either/or” to “both/and”
 - You can both have compassion for yourself *and* focus on creating change; have compassion *and* take responsibility
 - ➔ With ADHD, compassion and empathy lead to far more productive results than do criticism, punishment, and judgmentalism
 - Mindset Shift 2: Mindful Awareness
 - ➔ Observing our behaviors with openness and without judgment
 - ➔ Use mindfulness to get to know your executive functioning strengths and weaknesses
 - ➔ Use mindful awareness to notice how full or empty your “fuel tank” is
 - The ADHD brain and body are drained by multiple executive functioning demands
 - Mindset Shift 3: Cognitive Restructuring
 - ➔ Shift your unhelpful thoughts about ADHD into more helpful thoughts by practicing the cognitive restructuring described in Chapter 4
 - Mindset Shift 4: Baby Steps and Appreciating the Process
 - ➔ Rav Shlomo Wolbe discusses the critical importance of small actions
 - Just like powerful medicine is administered in doses of milligrams, so too change should be administered in small, bite-sized pieces

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- ➔ This is especially true for the ADHD brain, which becomes overwhelmed when faced with too many demands
- ➔ Start small and appreciate the steps along the way
 - The key with ADHD is to connect the smaller pieces of the overall process to something meaningful
 - Connect the pieces of your SMART goal to your relevant values
- Mindset Shift 5: Realistic Empowered Thinking
 - ➔ When you want to make a change, focus on IDF: Intensity, Duration, and Frequency
 - ➔ Example: If right now I pay attention to 0% of davening, tomorrow I will try to focus on the first paragraph, the first 1% of davening.
 - ➔ What is attainable for me in this moment?

What Do You Think?

- What is one way that you could apply each of these mindset shifts in your own life?
- Now, which one of these ways do you want to start with tomorrow?

CHAPTER 16

STRATEGIES FOR THRIVING WITH ADULT ADHD

Remaining stuck in the guilt and shame of our previous failures is generally counterproductive. As Dr. Ari Tuckman notes, “We can’t leave the past in the past if it’s still happening in the present.”

Research shows that adults are able to benefit from treatments that involve addressing problems with functioning and building coping strategies. When they are more aware of their difficulties, they are more motivated to work on them. This chapter will focus on practical strategies for translating that motivation into actual change. We draw from the approaches of such ADHD experts as Drs. Ari Tuckman, Mary Solanto, Russell Barkley, and co-author Simcha Chesner, who recommend utilizing a blend of ADHD education, executive functioning strategies, and medication to manage ADHD.

Strategy 1: Creating Accountability and Accepting Responsibility

Due to executive functioning challenges, individuals with ADHD are often prone to distractibility, time blindness (lack of awareness of

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the passage of time and difficulty seeing anything beyond the current moment), and impulsive motivation (jumping to do whatever feels most instantly gratifying). For instance, an individual with ADHD may start one task, see and feel more excited about another task, and jump to the second task without completing the first. When engaged in an enjoyable activity, it may seem like no time has passed at all, leading the individual with ADHD to completely miss an appointment or other important commitments. This “time blindness” combined with working memory difficulties can cause adults with ADHD to lose awareness of needs that exist outside of the current moment. (“Yikes, who can I call at 12:30 AM for more shampoo?”) Dr. Barkley states that individuals with ADHD are not always aware of consequences due to their time blindness and notes that **one may (erroneously) conclude it is therefore unfair to hold these individuals accountable.** Dr. Barkley says **individuals with ADHD benefit from being more accountable more often.** When people lack a sense of natural internal deadlines, it is crucial to intentionally create a sense of accountability and responsibility. Therefore, the individual with ADHD must learn how to set up an environment that will keep them accountable. However, the environment does not then become responsible for the individual’s behavior; rather, the individual remains responsible for their actions and for responding appropriately to the environment that they have created.

Our first strategy centers around awareness of the critical role of accountability and, as adults, accepting responsibility to create accountability. Accepting responsibility means taking ownership of a task and committing to completing it. Accountability, on the other hand, goes beyond the initial assignment of tasks. While responsibility focuses on task ownership, taking accountability involves acknowledging the outcomes of the task, whether they are positive or negative, and assuming ownership over them. In other words, accountability is

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about how individuals respond to the results of their actions and take responsibility for their role in achieving those outcomes. It includes being answerable for the consequences of one's decisions and actions, learning from any mistakes or shortcomings, and actively working towards improvement and growth.

What does this mean in practice? If I'm scheduled to carpool and I set reminders on my phone and ask a friend to text me thirty minutes before carpool time, I can create accountability. However, if I don't accept a sense of responsibility to find a way to ensure I will comply or follow through with this task, I may not accomplish this task. It is my job to ensure I have set up a system of accountability. If I don't have accountability, it will be difficult to carry through despite my ownership, motivation, and best intentions.

I am responsible for my actions, and given my ADHD, I will need strategies to help me do it. It is my job to ensure I can fulfill my responsibilities. It's on *me* to get out of bed on time in the morning, not my parents, roommates, or partner. It's my job to pack what I need for this flight and have my passport ready. It can be effective to ask others for help in doing so, as long as we remain aware that this task is ours, not theirs, and if we do rely on others, we remind ourselves that our long-term goal is to learn, practice new skills, and scale back on support. When others do help out, we should make sure to express gratitude (see below, strategy 5).

Creating accountability can include setting up a fifteen-minute morning "chavrusa" with a friend where you both articulate your goals for the day. It can include carrying a notepad with you at all times, writing down reminders as they occur to you, and setting alarms for every hour to remind yourself to check the notepad. It can mean rewarding yourself for your accomplishments – sending yourself a "well done!" email at the end of the day or leaving encouraging sticky notes around your home.

The benefits of implementing this strategy are tremendous. In addition to accomplishing more of what you want and are expected to accomplish, by accepting responsibility to create accountability you can show yourself that you really are able to succeed in daily living. And the more you succeed, the less overwhelmed you will feel when asked to do certain tasks, and the more fuel you will have left in your fuel tank throughout the day, week, and year. Remaining both responsible and accountable can also decrease the strain that ADHD may place on relationships, giving those around you a sense that they can rely on you to take charge rather than having to continuously check in to make certain you are doing the job.

Strategy 2: Skills to Support Executive Functions

As mentioned, the responsibilities for adulthood requires significant use of executive functioning. Torah living as an adult adds unique components to these demands. Learning ways to develop executive function skills and practicing them leads to effective functioning. Some individuals with ADHD struggle to hold more than a little information at one time (e.g., juggling various demands as a Torah-observant Jew). The brain struggles with organizing information, prioritizing tasks, setting goals, and planning them in life. Then, once a plan is established, it can be challenging to activate (initiate), focus, persist (without jumping to more exciting activities), shift flexibly when things don't go as planned, and encourage oneself throughout this lengthy process. The following strategies are a non-exhaustive set of tips. Consider each strategy as it serves to compensate for each executive functioning deficit.

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I. Material Organization

1. Dr. Mary Salanto shares a mantra regarding organization: “A place for everything and everything in its place.” That is quite ambitious for those with ADHD. However, it’s possible to have a place in your home (a primary place and a back-up place) for the most-used items that you spend countless hours of looking for, like keys, phones, wallets, Siddur, Tehillim book, etc.
2. Make duplicate copies of your most important items. This way, if your ADHD brain loses track of something important, you will have no need to panic and a backup copy is readily available.

II. Information Intake and Organization

To counter challenges with working memory where information and tasks are “out of sight, out of mind,” we need to develop a helpful way to absorb information and ensure it does not get lost. It is difficult for the brain to store massive quantities of new information.

1. **Write important things down and access them frequently.** This significantly increases the likelihood that you will be able to access to this information when you actually need it.
2. **Always have an ongoing to-do list and add to it throughout the day as you remember new tasks.** Otherwise, the brain will be wasting energy and getting distracted by trying to remember them.
3. **Create the best fit between yourself and your external environment in order to access information when you need it.**
 - A. Mount paper or white boards in well-visited areas in your home, e.g., put lists on the refrigerator, near a phone, or in other places where they are likely to be seen regularly.
 - B. Use planners. (Refer to *CBT for Adult ADHD* by Dr. Mary Solanto for strategies.)

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- C. Except on Shabbos and Yom Tov, always carry note cards and a pen with you and leave them all over your house. You can use a fanny pack, purse, briefcase, suit jacket pocket etc., to place a piece of paper and pen inside and keep running lists.

4. Organize information/tasks

- A. **Prioritize.** Organizing information and making decisions without an internal system weighing consequences and learning from the past can be difficult. Many feel paralyzed by indecisiveness. Create an order of priority for the tasks using these questions.

- i. What items are time-sensitive? Work chronologically.
- ii. What is most important? (It may not be time-sensitive.)
Do not forget to do important things, even if they don't feel urgent.
 - a. Don't get stuck in deciding what to do! Many people struggle with figuring out what is most important. To quote a dear friend and wise mentor, "Anything is better than nothing." Choose one thing and go with it.

- B. **Categorizing lists.** Find an organizing system that works for you. I (SM) like to have one sheet of paper for the upcoming week that has a schedule of activities I commit to weekly. I have lists around the schedule for things to do or items to buy, and I break them down based on family, work, and community, although some weeks I just put everything on one paper of what I need to do. While I may lose this paper, more often than not this system works. If you own a camera, or a phone with a camera, take a picture of this sheet in case it gets lost.

- C. **Break down tasks listed into even smaller parts.**

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- D. Identify every material that will be needed to execute the task at hand.**
- E. Turn lists into checklists and check off tasks as you complete them.** Checking or crossing things off your list can be very satisfying.

III. Planning

1. Timing & Schedule

- A. Choose specific times when you will do the tasks, e.g.,** I will take out chicken to defrost for dinner at 10 PM on Wednesday night. This time works for me because the kids are already asleep. Although the time is only an educated guess, this helps me to remember to do the task even if the timing is not perfect.
- B. Schedule based on your personal ADHD profile.** Are there tasks that you find especially draining? Try to do those tasks during the times of day when you tend to have the most energy. Does cooking leave you feeling depleted? If you have the most energy at 10 AM, maybe you can cook some meals for the week on a Sunday morning.
- C. Allot realistic (i.e., MORE) time for your task.** Add 5–10 minutes when you estimate the time required for each task. You can learn to talk back and not accept your ADHD brain's time estimates as being reflective of objective reality.

IV. Execution of Task

Below are ten ways to help an individual follow through with a task they have chosen. Note that task completion requires one's brain to get activated, initiate a task, focus on it, and persist (without jumping ship).

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1. Create Accountability:

A. Don't assume that you'll remember what you have to do when you have to do it. Set alarms *and* make sure those alarms tell you what it is you're supposed to be doing. (e.g., "8:45 PM – Maariv"). Most people with ADHD find it helpful for alarms to be connected to specific prompts. For example, if you have a specific tune that reminds you when you are supposed to daven Maariv, you should have a different tune connected with helping the kids with their homework. Otherwise, the ADHD brain is likely not to focus on the specific activity that needs to be attended to at that specific time.

i. Set up times where you will check your lists. The goal is to remember what you are meant to be doing that day. Frequent checking reduces forgetfulness.

B. Develop artificial deadlines. For example, if someone asks you to let them know about volunteering, give yourself a specific time for getting back to them.

C. Ask others for help in remembering. This can help you shift from one task to another at the proper time, help you develop gratitude to someone else and keep you humble.

2. Pairing: The ADHD brain wants instant gratification. It will always opt for the exciting conversation with a friend over the mundane task of putting away laundry. ***Get your ADHD brain on board for the less-exciting tasks by pairing them with things that offer you instant gratification.*** You can overcome this challenge by talking on the phone while you put the laundry away or listening to enjoyable music.

3. Rewarding: What types of rewards speak to you? Immediate, short and/or long term. To counter a brain that does not value and recognize consequences, we want to provide reinforcements

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as needed throughout a process. These can be visualized or actually done.

4. **When you think of something you have to do, do one of two things:** Do it immediately, or write it down. (e.g., When you remember to write a mitzvah note for your child.)
5. **WOMAC for planning:** Link what you have to do to a part of your day that is already in place or a mitzvah that you perform daily or weekly. For example, use saying Modeh Ani as a WOMAC for checking your planner in the morning. Use your weekly visit to your mother as a WOMAC for your weekly grocery shopping. Or build a routine of daily planning connected to the time right before kriyat Shema at night.
6. **Don't let perfectionism get in the way of planning.** Remember:
 - A. "*Great is the enemy of the good.*" Choose one thing and go with it. Anything is better than nothing.
 - B. "*There's no wrong way to start.*"
7. **Use procrastination to your advantage.** If you have one task that seems extremely daunting, and other tasks that need to get done that are less daunting, procrastinate by getting these other tasks done. While writing this book, at one point I had to write a part that felt daunting. I procrastinated by editing something I had written rather than expending the mental energy in writing something new. Both needed to be done.
8. **Body doubling:** Work with someone else present. Even if they are not involved in your process, their mere presence serves as a reminder to stay on task.
9. **Perseverance:** Work with a plan and persevere rather than jump between different tasks. Stick to the order of the list. Mindfully notice the urge to impulsively neglect an item on the list because of an exciting, novel thought that you become aware of. As tempting as performance of the novel task may seem, it is likely to

disrupt a thought-out plan. To help increase implementation and follow-through, strategies such as WOMAC, encouraging statements, and rewards can be helpful (see chapter 14).

- 10. Shift Flexibly and Problem Solve:** Despite our best efforts, circumstances do not always work out as planned. Individuals with ADHD have difficulty shifting sets once they have a plan. The ability to be flexible, to pivot, and to consider an alternative course of action is challenging. We are allowed to feel annoyed. After that initial frustration about the change of plans, we have the choice to stay miserable, or we can practice flexibility when the situation demands it. We can use mindful awareness to notice what is going on in the moment and cognitive restructuring to remind us of the value in being flexible and leaning into situations that we cannot control while upholding our value of being calm and kind.

Strategy 3: Medication

It is important to understand that, similar to its positive effects on children, medication can be incredibly helpful in treating adults with ADHD. It is important to examine the pros and cons of medication in an open, non-judgmental manner. At the time of this writing, there exists no magic pill for curing ADHD. However, different medications can be effective in coping with ADHD.

Currently, there are a number of medications that target symptoms of ADHD. Though most people are familiar with psychostimulants, it is important to note that there are multiple other non-stimulant medications that can be effective in managing symptoms. Individuals with ADHD who also struggle with depression and anxiety, may also benefit from treating them. Any decision regarding medication ought to be made with a physician experienced in treating adults with ADHD. Our contention is that effective treatment of ADHD involves a multi-modal approach. Try not to engage in all-or-none, dichotomous

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thinking when approaching the question of medication. A scientific approach based on trial and error almost always works best.

Even if you decide to medicate, please keep in mind that “pills don’t teach skills.” Medication tends to work best in conjunction with behavioral and mental shifts, such as those described in this book. For example, people will often complain that although they took their medication and their attention increased, they failed to focus on the target that was needed most at that moment. So rather than writing a term paper that was due the next day, they became super-focused on organizing their sweater drawers. In addition, ironically, those with ADHD often forget to take their medication. These are just some examples of how developing the skills of accepting responsibility and planning is a necessary complement to taking ADHD medication.

Strategy 4: You Are Your Best Resource: Keeping Your Fuel Tank Full

Living with ADHD is exhausting. Tasks that neuro-typical adults do not think twice about can leave the individual with ADHD feeling depleted. It is important to keep an eye on your metaphorical battery and make sure to recharge it as needed. The more fuel individuals have in their tank, the more they can take on tasks that involve executive functions. How do you fill your fuel tank? How do you keep it full? There are universal ways everyone must fuel their tank as well as individual, personalized ways to feel replenished to engage in this holy mission that we call Torah living.

First, make certain that you are taking care of your basic human needs. The Torah states that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Simply taking the words literally indicates that love for anyone else is an extension of our ability to recognize the Divine within ourselves. When the Torah commands us to “carefully guard our souls,” it obligates us to care for our physical and emotional well-being. One cannot

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be expected to perform as an employee, father, husband, mother, wife, son, daughter, or friend if one's emotional needs are neglected. For example, almost everyone has less patience for others when they are tired, hungry, or sick. Most individuals with ADHD have difficulty prioritizing basic human needs that "charge their car" and forget "to put on the brakes" when their tank is empty. While they often value self-care in theory, they don't notice it as a practical need until it is urgent. This pattern of living can lead to many negative health outcomes and burnout. To illustrate, imagine an ADHD individual's pattern of refueling their car. How many times has that person's gas tank been on empty before they even considered refueling? Hopefully, recognizing the need to fill the tank occurred before the car was stalled on the side of the road. Similarly, taking care of one's body should be a constant concern not because of an emergency and/or sickness.

A proactive antidote to reacting to urgency is prioritization. We prioritize things that are important based on our values and build these important tasks into our lives. Stephen Covey recognized self-care skills as being specific to Quadrant 2, activities that are important but not urgent (see chapter 6), and hence prime candidates to be neglected. **We should be sure to prioritize the paramount Torah value of taking care of our bodies and souls, of living a long life to continue to do God's work meaningfully in this world.**

To promote the likelihood of success, it is important to keep a well-charged battery by creating structures to support our physical well-being. Planning skills can help towards this end. Dialectical Behavior Therapy uses the acronym PLEASE to keep various domains of physical wellbeing in mind:

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- **PL:** Treat Physical illness
- **E:** Maintain balanced Eating
- **A:** Avoid mood-Altering drugs (e.g. alcohol)
- **S:** Balance Sleep
- **E:** Get Exercise

You can even use berachos as an anchor for your PLEASE or Quadrant 2 skills. Before or after making a beracha, mindfully check in with your PLEASE domains, determine whether any areas may be impacting your fuel level and plan ways to address them.

Proactively carve out ways to recharge daily and weekly. The more consistent, the better. Additionally, you can add in ways to recharge yourself as needed throughout the day in a spontaneous fashion. There is value to both. It is also important to know what activities leave *you* feeling recharged. If you tend to be more extroverted, perhaps a phone call with a good friend recharges your battery. If you are more introverted, perhaps curling up with some music or a good book will recharge you. Maybe exercise, art, or chesed projects leave you feeling happy and satisfied. Whatever does the trick for you, keep an eye on your battery levels throughout the day and make sure to recharge as needed. A five-minute recharge can make the difference in one's successful approach to an evening of responsibilities. Dr. Barkley shares various ways to refuel the ADHD child's fuel tank; these strategies can be applied to adults as well. Check off ones that apply to you and add ones that may speak to you as well.

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- Statements of self-efficacy, e.g., “I can do this!”
- Brief breaks more often, breaking down tasks into smaller units, and build in breaks where you stop using the executive system
- Rewards and visualizing rewards
- Physical exercise! Research shows that physical activity benefits ADHD children more than it does any other disorder
- A seemingly counterintuitive strategy is sipping on energizing drinks to keep your blood sugar levels up. Blood glucose in the frontal lobe is found to help
- Time with friends
- Quiet time
- Learning a piece of Torah
- Family/spouse time together without talking about practical things
- Spirituality
- Listening to music
- Art
- Reading/listening to audiobooks
- Chesed
- Other: _____

Strategy 5: Collaboration and Outsourcing

In spite of what many of us have learned in school, collaborating with others is not cheating or neglecting. **The need for support from others is an inevitable and enriching part of life.** Community is an incredible resource. In the world we live in, people feel more alone and less connected with a community. People both in and out of the Jewish community appreciate the emphasis Judaism has on the community. With ADHD, the principle of having externalized support is strongly established as a great source of accountability, reminders, and reinforcement. In a Torah environment, various people can be a tremendous resource for someone with ADHD: family, study partners, minyan buddies, Rabbis, and friends can be invaluable. Greater connection with community allows the ADHD sufferer to utilize the skills of others, automatically enhancing executive function skills. After we recognize our needs, we must remember **to communicate those needs to others.** This allows for collaboration and a healthy reliance on others. It combines accountability with communication. It shows that when you ask for help, you are taking ownership of a need, and you're willing to accept responsibility and also receive help.

When we reach out for help, we are demonstrating a high level of mindful awareness of ourselves. Collaboration often involves authentically facing our own limitations. Although for many reasons this may not be easy, it is an essential skill necessary for social relations. There is a significant difference in proactively asking someone to collaborate – thus demonstrating a sense of agency, owning one's deficits and setting up their environment for help – and reaching out once it's too late. Though we don't want the people around us to feel burdened by *our* responsibilities, we can ask them if they are willing to take on a supportive role. This can take different forms depending on the type of relationship.

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An important principle within this domain is that clear communication is essential. In the example with Michal and Moshe described in chapter 16, imagine if Moshe had said to Michal, “I know the weeks before Pesach are busy and that my absentmindedness can create extra stress for you. Would you be willing to remind me at the start of each day what you’d like me to do for you?” In this way, Moshe would have acknowledged his challenges while also showing that he wants to be a reliable support for Michal. And if Michal had responded, “That’s too much for me to keep track of,” Moshe could then work with Michal to come up with a better solution. With his chavrusas, Aryeh (in chapter 14) could have said to his study partner, “You know, I tend to run late, and I’m working on that. I’m going to try to set a reminder on my phone to text you ten minutes before our learning time to let you know if I’ll be on time. If you don’t hear from me by five minutes before our chavrusa, would you mind texting me to check in?” It would be helpful to have similar conversations when setting up a new chavrusa, letting the other person know from the start what they can expect of you.

3 C’s: Chavrusa, Chabura, Community.

When we think about leaning on others we can think about 3 C’s. *Chavrusas*. When we say chavrusa, we mean a partner. You can set yourself up with a chavrusa for successful ADHD living – someone who gets you, who can encourage you and whom you can encourage in return. Having used this method often, I feel better when I reach out to a friend to communicate disappointment in myself when I make a mistake despite my effort, or to get motivation about a task I’m having difficulty completing; our relationship is positive, supportive and helpful. One can even seek out “partners” for specific tasks. Do you have a friend who shares the same carpool day as you? Would they mind sending you a reminder when they’re loading up their car? You

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can find someone who can appreciate this struggle and, while it is harder to remember individually, you can remind each other, or find another parent in the class or person in the shul who can remind you.

Chabura

Another helpful way to set oneself up is to create a chabura, a group, focused on self-growth specifically related to strengthening executive functions. As working memory is a struggle (out of sight out of mind), weekly meetings to reorient to goals and provide accountability can be extremely valuable.

Community

By being part of the larger Jewish community, we have access to role models and learn from others. In *Pirkei Avos* our Sages teach us, “Who is wise? Those who learn from *every* person.” Often, we may be very accomplished in many areas of our lives, yet in certain areas that require many executive function tasks, we struggle to “get it together.” Hashem wants all people to be humble. Rambam’s *shvil ha-zahav*, the middle path, works when honing every character trait, except arrogance. At this moment, we may want to thank Hashem for giving us ADHD brains because it is humbling. Furthermore, as we practice this part of *Pirkei Avos* that teaches us to learn from each person, we can take the opportunity to find others in our community – family, friends, rabbanim, teachers, neighbors, etc. – with strong executive functions, and watch how they do specific tasks we want to do. How do they bring in Shabbos? What does their erev Shabbos look like? How do they prepare for mornings? What is their Pesach Seder like? We all can learn from each other. In fact, have in mind that when we seek to gain guidance from others, we are developing our wisdom in accordance with the Torah, as our teachers have set forth.

Couples/Family Member Involvement

It often happens that a family member or spouse can be burnt out in supporting their loved one with ADHD. A helpful mindset is that small investments can lead to greater returns in saved efforts and increased happiness. What does a supportive role look like? We don't want to infantilize the person, and your spouse or sibling should not treat you like a parent; parents should not infantilize their adult children.

Different players bring different skill sets. What makes a team work well is communication and checking in to ensure everyone accepts the different roles and works together. If we ask others for help, we must take ownership and direct this process. Through education and non-judgmental problem-solving, a professional can encourage couples not to get bogged down in addressing past wrongs. Instead, the professional can guide them to focus on helping a spouse or family members understand some of their negative responses and collaboratively brainstorm ways for success. *Example: You may want to remind your partner with ADHD to pick up milk on the way home. The simple phone call may serve as a WOMAC and result in the person remembering to get milk. You have a choice to resent having to make the reminder call, or you can choose to relate to your ADHD partner with understanding and compassion. Obviously, we recommend the wise compassionate approach.*

Another example centers around the reality that many adults with ADHD live amongst clutter and chaos. Keys, wallets, loose change, and papers of various shapes and sizes may be strewn across your living room table. The lack of organization may infuriate the non-ADHD spouse. Wisdom and compassion dictate establishing a WOMAC that will enable the partner with ADHD to organize his stuff. Perhaps shelves can either be built or designated where various articles that usually make a mess are to be placed. One couple that we worked with had the husband with ADHD conceptualize a two-tiered cabinet as the head drawer and the pocket drawer. The upper cabinet

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became the place where all objects connected to the head were stored. This is where he knew to place reading glasses and kippot. The second drawer was used to store things that usually went in his pockets, such as change, his wallet, and important papers.

Another challenge for individuals with ADHD is deciding what tasks to focus on and what to outsource. When I (SM) consider outsourcing, I remember that when I choose to outsource a specific task, I am not absconding from my responsibility to the value represented by the task. Consider the value of nurturing your children. One way to provide nurturance is to cook with love. Another way can be to drive to a restaurant and have a quality experience outside of the home.

Expressing Gratitude

Expressing gratitude to those who help is a crucial part of the process. It is their kindness, compassion, and care that make them part of our team. Thanksgiving and gratitude should be an integral part of our relationships.

Strategy 6: Using Mitzvos as Cues for Activating Executive Functions

We've spoken about some of the unique challenges that Jewish life presents for the individual with ADHD. By the same token, Judaism provides unique tools for managing ADHD.

Mitzvos as Brakes on Automatic Living (PARC: Pause, Anchor, Reflect, Connect)

Mitzvos are actions that are actually cues for activating executive functions and rituals that allow for intentional focused experiences that are extraordinarily helpful for the individual with ADHD. Chani's day-to-day life (in chapter 14) felt frenetic. She went from one thing

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to the next, usually acting impulsively, based on whatever came up. For someone who is constantly on the go, it is hard to find fixed times to ground oneself and practice living intentionally in the moment. As Jews, we are blessed with mitzvos that often are action-oriented. It may be difficult to ask someone jumping from one thing to the next to be present and have kavanah for all they do in each moment. Alternatively, a more realistic and helpful request would be to use a mitzvah as a cue to “PARC” yourself: Pause, Anchor, Reflect, and Connect.

- PAUSE: stop what you were doing
- ANCHOR yourself in the present moment
- REFLECT on the purpose of the mitzvah
- CONNECT to Hashem, perceive the value of doing this mitzvah, and connect to the present moment of what is going on around you. Connect to an intention (kavanah).

For example, as Shabbos starts, we have the opportunity to transition from “doing” to “being,” from the six days of work to the seventh day of rest. Even if you are stressed with the preparations of Shabbos, once you get to the mitzvah of lighting the Shabbos candles, remind yourself:

- PAUSE: breathe in deeply and say, “I am doing a mitzvah.” Even with people around or with children calling, give yourself a minute of tranquility.
- ANCHOR in the moment and be still. Inhale and exhale. Say to yourself, “I am here right now, in this moment, bringing in the Shabbos.” This process is similar to an anchor on a sailboat. The boat usually drifts; however, when the anchor drops, the boat stays in place. When ready, we may lift the anchor and return to the turbulent sea of our rapid-paced lives. When we light Shabbos candles

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or say tefillos welcoming Shabbos, this can be an opportunity to anchor ourselves in the present moment. We may have thoughts of not getting everything we wanted done that we wanted to do, and it's fine to notice those thoughts. But as you hold your Siddur or the candle, anchor yourself by saying, "Right now, I'm lighting Shabbos candles and bringing Shabbos into my home. Right now, I'm davening for the people in my life."

- Then, you can REFLECT on the value and purpose of this mitzvah, the meaning in this moment: "I am lighting Shabbos candles to bring in the holy Shabbos because we love Hashem, and for shalom bayis. Right now, I'm welcoming Shabbos through communal prayer and I experience a deep connection with those around me."
- After you reflect with thought, take the moment to CONNECT to that mitzvah. In this example, you can imagine that maybe you will have extra kavanah, and you will want to daven more for your family, for a longer time.

(Let's say, though, that as you ground yourself in the moment of peace, you hear your children screaming. You can remind yourself that at that moment the value of davening is connected to your love of your children. It would be self-defeating to daven for your children as they inflict bodily harm on each other. Hence, interrupting your prayer to take care of the children is not abandoning your value. Once the children are out of harm's way, you can always go back to davening.)

PARC'ing yourself in the moment doesn't necessarily mean you are so lost in contemplation that you become unaware of your surroundings to the point that you or others are endangered. Rather "PARC" is meant to help us break the pattern of automatic, impulsive living, and build intention and connection to more moments of our day. Thus, mitzvos may be used as external cues that allow the person to pause

and focus on a mindset of connection to their values, Hashem, and the people around them.

Mitzvos as Cues for Executive Functioning Working Memory (Reminders)

Think about the moments in your day and week that may jog your working memory to focus on things that are personally meaningful. Perhaps when you prepare to say Shema before going to sleep, this can serve as a cue to first plan for the following day; then recite Shema. Remind yourself that while planning can be overwhelming – as you may not know what to do, or when, or it may be boring – the more you plan, the more your day-to-day life goes smoothly. When an individual with ADHD utilizes any mitzvah as a means of refocusing, prioritizing, and planning for the future, the act becomes a powerful tool in overcoming the deficits of ADHD.

Strategy 7: Using Torah Messages for Positive Self-Talk & Cheerleading

ADHD is a relentless beast that continues to present itself in challenges throughout each day. Even with efforts to problem solve and make changes, mistakes are inevitable. Cheerleading and positive self-talk can be helpful and powerful tools to keep us motivated and feeling capable of doing and sticking with this work. Over the course of a busy day, you may not have time to pick up this book and reread the parts about mindset shifts. Additionally, while we hope for positive reactions and cheerleading of oneself throughout one day, it takes time to develop. Nevertheless, the most effective way to expedite the process is by inserting private cheerleading into your daily living. Dr. Mary

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Solanto, an expert in adult ADHD, offers the use of mantras, a statement or slogan repeated frequently, as a strategy to help remind and encourage individuals to use executive functioning skills throughout the day. One mantra she uses is, “If it is not in the planner – it doesn’t exist.” What do you want to tell yourself throughout the day? What messages would be helpful to you? Remember to reward yourself for the efforts that you put in. Outcomes are in the hands of Hashem.

There are many Torah messages that we can use daily to cheer us on and be mechazeik us in this difficult work. For example, in Sefer Devarim, teshuvah, the act of repentance, is described as *lo nifleis hi mimcha*, “**not beyond our reach.**” Given that this is not a pasuk we say on a daily basis, you can anchor this and other messages to particular moments in your day, or even put your mantra on a sticky note on your fridge, at your desk, or in your car. Additionally, as described above, we can use mitzvos that are already part of our lives to set the tone for each day. For example, to counter the pessimism and bitterness one may feel towards failures of the day, or fear of starting a new day, the nighttime Shema can be a reminder of your faith in Hashem’s providence, even in the midst of struggle. Similarly, every morning when we say Modeh Ani, the first prayer upon waking up, we express our gratitude to Hashem for a new day. Rav Berzon, based on Chazal, explains that Hashem returns our soul because He has emunah in us. He has faith in our ability to do the best we can today.

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Overview of Strategies for Adult ADHD			
#	Strategy Name	Brief Description	Example
1	Thinking Dialectically	Move from “either/or” to “both/and” thinking	“I am both challenged by my ADHD and responsible to do better.”
2	Mindfulness <i>and</i> Cognitive Restructuring	Practice non-judgmental awareness <i>and</i> Work to actively change Wunhelpful and/or judgmental thoughts	“I notice that I struggle with getting out of bed in the morning.” <i>and</i> Move from “I’m lazy” to “I work hard in many areas, but the mornings are a tough time for me.”
3	Maintaining Realistic Expectations	Asking: “What is realistic for me?” instead of assuming you “should” be doing what everyone else does	Advising people to follow up if you don’t call back instead of assuming that you will remember to return calls.
4	Using Mitzvos as Cues for Activating Executive Functions	Using mitzvos that are already in your day/week to create positive moments	Instead of using the end of your day to dwell on what went wrong, focus before saying Shema on the ways that Hashem’s providence was evident today.
5	Planning		
5a	Perseverance	Creating a plan and resisting the urge to deviate from it	Even if the unbuilt Ikea dresser is calling your name, proceed with the next item on your to-do list.

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5b	Timing	Scheduling tasks for the times when they will be most easily achieved	If you hate cooking and are most energetic in the mornings, try to schedule your meal preparation for Sunday mornings.
5c	Pairing	Pairing boring tasks with more exciting ones	Talk to your friend on the phone while putting laundry away.
5d	Do it or write it down!	When remembering something you have to do, either do it right away or write it down	Just remembered finishing the ketchup last night? Either buy more now or immediately add it to the shopping list.
6	Outsourcing and Collaboration	Leaning on others where possible and appropriate	If cooking for Shabbos feels overwhelming, give yourself a break and pick up some prepared foods.
7	Using Mantras	Developing messages that will be helpful and hanging them up where they will be seen	Hanging a sign that says, "Breathe" in areas where you tend to feel overwhelmed (e.g., the office, the kitchen).
8	Appreciate the Baby Steps and Focus and Process	Trying to recognize that each step along the way is a crucial part of the end goal	When clearing a path in the garage to get the sukkah boards feels like a pain, try to picture how proud you will feel when the sukkah is built.
9	Medication	Considering whether medication might be helpful	Think about booking an appointment with a doctor or psychiatrist.
10	Love Yourself	Taking care of your physical and emotional needs	Make sure to eat and sleep enough and take breaks when you need them.

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Chani

Area of Difficulty	Manifestation of Difficulty	Strategy	Manifestation of Strategy
Impulsivity	Volunteering to make a meal without considering how realistic, or planning	Maintaining Realistic Expectations, Planning, Outsourcing/ Collaboration	Chani can take into account her other obligations for the day in question, assess whether she will realistically be able to provide and deliver a meal and then either: -plan accordingly -outsource some of the work (order takeout, ask another friend to deliver, etc.)
Sense of Time	Thinking that preparing the meal would only add a few minutes	Maintaining Realistic Expectations	If cooking always takes longer than planned, Chani can look at the time written in the recipe, and double it!
Working Memory	Forgetting her husband was working late	Do It or Write It Down!	As soon as her husband tells her he will be working late, Chani can write it down as a reminder in her phone (or planner/paper she keeps with her).

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Set-Shifting	Helping a child with meal preparation when she was helping another child with homework	Prioritize, Plan, Mindfulness	Chani can pause when pulled with two things and prioritize which is time sensitive. She can write down other, less pressing tasks, for a time she thinks she'll be more likely to do them. Then she can tell herself this is what she is doing now and practice staying present in the moment as an antidote to feeling pulled in different directions. (PARC)
Impulsivity	Attending to whatever needs pop up in the moment	Planning and perseverance with reinforcement or accountability	Chani can create a schedule for school nights and then stick with it.
Planning/Organization	Not planning for Shabbos until the last minute	Using mitzvos as cues for activating executive functions	Next to Wednesday's shir shel yom, Chani can put a sticky note that says, "Start working on your Shabbos plan!"
Working Memory	Losing track of fleeting thoughts like writing her daughter a mitzvah note	Do It or Write It Down!	Chani can keep a whiteboard on the fridge for writing down these thoughts as they arise.

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Foresight	Pushing off returning calls without realizing it would be too late to return them	Outsourcing and Collaboration	Chani can tell her friends, "I'm going to try to call you back, but if you haven't heard from me, can you try me again?"
Negative Self-Talk	"Some eishes chayil"; cynicism; self-loathing	Mindfulness, Cognitive Restructuring, and Appreciate the Baby Steps	<p>Chani can think, "I'm noticing myself being critical. Maybe I'm not a worse Jewish woman than my friends; maybe I just have different struggles."</p> <p>"What can I do to take a step closer to being the kind of Jewish woman I want to be?"</p>

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Aryeh

Area of Difficulty	Manifestation of Difficulty	Strategy	Manifestation of Strategy
Time Management	Coming late to shul and work	<p>Planning/Pairing</p> <p>Outsourcing and Collaboration</p>	<p>Aryeh can pair getting up for shul/work with something exciting, like spending time with a friend.</p> <p>He can see if a friend can commit to taking a quick walk with him before Shacharis each morning.</p>
Sustained Attention/ Need for Stimulation	Difficulty staying focused on learning and maintaining interest in work	Appreciate the Baby Steps	<p>Aryeh can create reminders of his larger goals: Placing a picture of the Siyum HaShas in his Gemara. Printing out complimentary emails from bosses and colleagues and hanging them in his office.</p>

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<p>Working Memory</p>	<p>Forgetting to pick up Shabbos candy for the kids</p>	<p>Do It or Write It Down!</p>	<p>As soon as he has the thought to pick up Shabbos candy, Aryeh can put a sticky note reminder in the front windshield of his car.</p>
<p>Sustained Attention</p>	<p>Difficulty staying put at the Shabbos meal</p>	<p>Use Mitzvos as Cues for Activating Executive Functions</p> <p><i>and</i></p> <p>Planning/ Timing</p>	<p>When feeling antsy at the table, Aryeh can start singing upbeat zemiros.</p> <p><i>and</i></p> <p>Aryeh can save the exciting parsha book for the parts of the meal that feel harder to sit through.</p>
<p>Negative Self-Talk</p>	<p>Shame about being late to shul and not being a full-time learner</p>	<p>Cognitive Restructuring</p> <p><i>and</i></p> <p>Appreciating the Baby Steps</p>	<p>Aryeh can go from “I’m not a true ben Torah” to “I’m doing the best I can with my unique kochoš”</p> <p><i>and</i></p> <p>Go from “I’m always late to shul” to “Wow, I made it before Kedushah today!”</p>

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Michal and Moshe

Area of Difficulty	Manifestation of Difficulty	Strategy	Manifestation of Strategy
Working Memory	Forgetting the items on his to-do list	Using Mitzvos as Cues <i>and</i> Planning	Before saying Shema every night, Moshe can review the to-do list for the next day with Michal. He can place a physical to-do list in his pocket after washing netilas yadayim every morning. He can check the to-do list after each of the three daily tefillos.
Sense of Time	Struggling to get out of bed in the morning	Love Yourself	Moshe can create a plan for trying to get enough sleep at night to feel well-rested in the morning.
Impulsivity	Choosing to go grocery shopping instead of clothing shopping	Perseverance	When tempted to do something, Moshe can check the to-do list. Is the new task not there? Then don't do it!
Negative Self-Talk	Feeling like an inadequate husband	Mindfulness, Cognitive Restructuring, and Thinking Dialectically	Moshe can go from "I'm a terrible husband" to "I try to do so much for my wife, and I'm going to work on doing even more for her."

Conclusion

In this chapter we have touched upon many of the main ways that have been helpful to others and ourselves in the constant battle with ADHD. Because ADHD is a diffuse condition, what works for one individual may not necessarily be useful for someone else. It is important to find the methods that work best for you within the circumstances of your life. You need not do everything, but you need to do whatever is necessary to live your best life.

We would like to hear the strategies you have tried, their impact, and your experience, by emailing us at KosherADHD@gmail.com.

Addendum: Strategy 8: Laugh at Yourself: Bloopers from ADHD Living

This strategy is an addendum rather than a main strategy. We intentionally placed it here because, for many, ADHD is wreaking havoc on their lives or the lives of their loved ones. We do not want to make light of that, since the purpose of this book is to find true, workable solutions for individuals and their children with ADHD. Despite these challenges, the ability to laugh at ourselves is one of our favorite methods for managing the ADHD brain. The point is that mistakes happen, and rather than getting upset, we can learn to laugh at ourselves. We'll start:

1. Once while running a staff meeting, I (SM) walked out to take a call. When I came back, I sincerely thanked the others for getting me a bottle of water. They said, "You got it yourself."
2. On several occasions, I hear my doorbell ring and see a client waiting for his weekly appointment. Unfortunately, I had forgotten to write his name in my appointment planner.

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3. One motzei Shabbos, I drove a friend home, mortified by how dirty the car was. I quickly threw out a bag in the car that I thought was the garbage, only to find out when we got to their house that I threw away their bag with the keys to their house.
4. In high school, I would often get off the subway in Manhattan and get interested in some activity, parade, or program, and forget about the fact that I was on my way to school.
5. As I progressed in my career, I became a Program Director. During a large Grand Rounds, where various mental health professionals packed into a conference room, my boss, a well-accomplished, respected psychologist, was presenting. Eager to learn, yet quite an active participant, I continued to impulsively react to content, sharing my thoughts with my dear friend, excitedly reacting to the topic. At one point, our boss said, “Dr. X and Dr. Y,” insinuating that I wasn’t letting the more senior psychologist speak. While embarrassed, I thought of all of the times I had been asked to leave class in middle school for not ceasing to talk. I was able to laugh at myself and thought, “At least now I am a doctor! Nachas! My teachers would be so proud!”
6. Two of my high school teachers, so exasperated by my misbehavior, told me that they could not stand me.
7. There are many moments that come up where I find myself saying a few phrases that remind me about the classic nature of my behaviors. Initially, I may feel exasperated, thinking “ADHD, you are back? I just got rid of you.” What is wild about adult ADHD is that it gets us every time. While we know these struggles well, our working memory challenges contribute to feeling like each challenge is new, and the routine experiences are somewhat shocking!

But these refrains help me laugh. The first is called “Really... Again.”

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- Dinner... AGAIN? Somehow, it's 3 PM and the notion of dinner pops into my head and feels like a shocking revelation, a new experience that I never encountered and did not even anticipate coming... even though, apparently, it comes EVERY DAY!
 - How much time have you spent searching for your (insert item you lost) _____? Only to find that it was right in front of you the whole time.
 - How often do you walk into the other room and have *no idea* why you are there?
 - I can hear a dvar Torah that my husband has shared many times, or even one that I gave over in a class, and it feels like new. At least I am enthusiastic as ever to learn something I already heard!
 - Another similar classic refrain is, "Oh, Sara" (with a figurative motion where I put my hand on my head and think, "Oh, me... doing a classic move").
8. If you would ask to borrow my ADHD books (all of which are noted in the recommendation section), you will find coffee stains splattered throughout.

Please send your bloopers to us! When I share such stories with others who have ADHD, it can be comforting and makes them feel like they're not the only ones. Then we can laugh and remind each other, "We got this!" Tomorrow is a new day.

CONCLUSION

In this book, we have outlined ways for parents and teachers to provide for the social-emotional needs of their Jewish children with ADHD without disregarding their personal values. The art of parenting and educating is always challenging, yet parenting a child with ADHD can be daunting. The singular challenge of raising children with ADHD in a manner that allows them to thrive in the Torah lifestyle often appears insurmountable.

This book is an attempt to provide skills anchored in research and clinical experience to adults who are committed to transmitting Torah as a way of life to children with ADHD. Each of us has goals in life. We have dreams we hope to accomplish. For many of us, nothing rivals the desire to raise children who live according to Torah values in a healthy and empowering manner. However, statistics and experience clearly reveal that children with ADHD are more likely than their neuro-typical peers to reject Torah living. In order to meet this challenge successfully, adults must be perpetually mindful of their internal states and the particular needs of their children. They must be sensitive to their children's capabilities and experts at what we have described as Developmentally Attuned Parenting.

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About half a century ago, ADHD appeared as a discrete diagnostic entity. At the time, tremendous emphasis was placed on the neurological basis of the disorder. We were taught in psychology courses that it was incorrect to blame parents for their children with ADHD, as ADHD reflected a neurological condition. The rapid escalation in the use of psychostimulant medication as “the cure” for ADHD reflects this mindset. Today, we can say with a fair amount of certainty that understanding ADHD as a purely neurological or physiological problem is reductionistic, simplistic, and not accurate. The understanding presented throughout this book, grounded in research, is that ADHD may in fact reflect a neurological temperament. However, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of significant adults tremendously affect how ADHD will manifest itself in a child’s life. When we transform ourselves into educated, compassionate, and dedicated guides, we deeply impact the life of the child with ADHD.

Those committed to a Torah lifestyle are faced with an additional challenge. We want our children to be *mentshen*, morally upright humans. However, we also want them to be *ehricher Yidden*, proud Jews. Not only is this possible, but in our experience, when we work at attuning Jewish law and ritual to the neurological temperament of the child with ADHD, the child is able to thrive and develop a rich Jewish identity. Establishment of Jewish identity, grounded in self-esteem and concern for the general welfare in children with ADHD, was the motivation in writing this book.

We conclude with a story told of the Rebbe of Kotzk. As an elderly man, close to death, the Rebbe reflected upon the stages of his life. “When I was a young man,” he reflected, “my goal was to transform the universe. However, as I got a bit older I realized this was unattainable. Then I set out to affect all the inhabitants of my country. However, I soon realized that this too was too grandiose. With the passage of time, I modified my goal to impact the residents of my city. However, this

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too could not be achieved. Then, I took it upon myself to change the behavior of my family members. Truth be told, I have reached the conclusion that this too is beyond my capabilities. Now, as I stand before the gates of Heaven, I realize that the only realistic goal is to hope to change myself.”

Developmentally attuned Torah parents and teachers are well advised to heed the wisdom of the Rebbe of Kotzk. When dealing with children with ADHD, we exert direct control only over ourselves. Mindful of the potential power within each interaction, the knowledge presented in this book allows you to present your best self to the child with ADHD. When adults act in a manner consistent with their deepest values, they become passionate role models for their children and others. When these same adults see their children as they truly are, with strengths and weaknesses, their passion becomes something that children may emulate. Ultimately, free will granted by the Creator of the universe allows and obligates each individual to choose the path upon which he or she ultimately embarks. We believe that by creating a Developmentally Attuned Torah environment in our homes and schools, we join forces with the Creator in allowing all parts of creation, including the ADHD part, to flourish and thrive.

ADHD RESOURCES:

1. Support Groups- CHADD:
 - <https://chadd.org/>
2. Mary Solanto ADHD-CBT for Adult ADHD
 - *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Adult ADHD: Targeting Executive Dysfunction* by Mary V. Solanto
3. Dr. Russell Barkley
 - *Taking Charge of Adult ADHD: Proven Strategies to Succeed at Work, at Home and in Relationships*
 - *12 Principles for Raising a Child with ADHD*
4. Martin Kutscher
 - *ADHD: Living without Breaks!*
 - *Organizing the Disorganized Child*
5. Dr. Ari Tuckman
 - *Integrative Treatment for Adult ADHD*
6. DBT
7. Executive Coach
8. *ADDitude* (magazine- online)
 - <https://www.additudemag.com/>
9. <https://add.org/helpful-resources-for-adults-with-adhd/>
10. J-ADD- <http://www.j-add.org/>
11. Services Kids with ADHD
12. Achieve Behavioral Health

FUTURE:

- *Kosher ADHD: Parent Training*
- *Kosher ADHD: Child Skill Building*
- *Kosher ADHD: Adult Skills Training*
- *Kosher ADHD: Teachers*
- *Kosher ADHD: Parent Mentors*
- *Kosher ADHD: PACT Skill Building Seminars (Parent, Adult, Child, Teacher)*