



MASTER MECHANCHIM

INSIGHTS AND INNOVATIONS FROM THOSE
WHO ARE TEACHING OUR CHILDREN



Stuck on Pshat?

JUST PICK UP THE PHONE FOR HELP

By Rabbi Eliezer Brand

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Resnick—a *talmid* of Novominsk, Rav Shalom Shechter and Beth Medrash Govoha—is a member of Kollel Toras Nochem Zev in Cleveland. He has always been passionate about helping *bachurim shteig*, but after years of learning with *bachurim* one on one, he found that he didn't have time for all the boys who needed help, so he tried to match them up with other *yungeleit*. Eventually, under the guidance of Rav Boruch Hirschfeld, he set up a database of tutors, resulting in a "tutoring service" that exploded during the pandemic, when many boys were stuck at home. "We had 60 *yungeleit* learning with *bachurim* over Zoom," he tells *Ami*.

Tutoring is essential for the development of many young *bachurim*. "Some need it because they can't keep up in *yeshivah* or they just need the extra attention," he explains. "Other times, the father isn't familiar with the material or isn't home to learn with his son."

But while tutoring is a wonderful tool, it also puts a great strain on the parents' finances, especially when there is more than one child in a family who needs tutoring. "An hour of tutoring can range from \$35 with a *bachur* or high school student to \$100 if a boy is being tutored by an experienced *rebbe*," he says. These days, the average tutor in Brooklyn and Lakewood charges between \$60 and \$80 an hour.

Aware of the widespread need for tutoring help and how difficult it was for many parents to provide it for their child, Rabbi Resnick racked his brains for a way to alleviate the situation. "I thought, why not set up a phone number with *chashuve rebbeim* on call who could answer questions without charging the caller?"

Not one to sit on a good idea, Rabbi Resnick found a *rebbe* and did a test run. "It was a big hit, and I realized that I had identified a real need." His team soon ex-

panded to four *talmidei chachamim* who manned the phones from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

This innovative program is designed for boys who do not require extensive traditional tutoring. "Many parents hire a tutor because their sons have no one to turn to, but they really only need a few occasional minutes of help. For now, that is our primary objective."

The program has been a huge help for families that cannot afford to pay for a tutor. Simply by dialing 856-40-REBBI, a *bachur* can receive answers regardless of whether he is stuck on a question or is having difficulty with simple *pshat*. "We started at the beginning of this *zman* and were quickly inundated by calls," Rabbi Resnick says. "I went around to *menahalim* to tell them about the program. A short time later, someone in Monsey offered to sponsor the program.

"The money goes to the *rebbeim* who answer the phones, who may be tutoring or giving *shiurim* and bringing in *parnasah* in other ways.

At the Torah Umesorah conference in Florida this winter, Rabbi Resnick presented the program to Rav Hillel David.

"After the conference, Rav Dovid Nojowitz, the director of Torah Umesorah, informed me that Torah Umesorah would officially endorse the hotline. That was a huge validation for our program."

Since the endorsement of Torah Umesorah, the call volume has increased dramatically. "The queries are coming in from all over the United States. We get calls from New York, Lakewood, California, Texas, Chicago, Detroit, and of course Cleveland, where it all started.

"Even though the official call hours are between 6:30 and 9:30 p.m., the line is open at other times, as well. If one of the *meishivim* is available, he will pick up the phone and answer the question."

Still, Rabbi Resnick says that sometimes even the *meishivim* are stumped by a question. "But even when the boys don't get their question answered, it is still a valuable experience. Hearing that it's a good question and that they understand the *sugya* leaves them with a great feeling, and their efforts are validated."

While boys without fathers, *Rachamana litzlan*, obviously benefit from this service the most, there are plenty of others who do, as well. "Many fathers work until late at night and aren't around to learn with their sons. Or sometimes a father is also lost when it comes to a particular *sugya*. We also sometimes have two boys who are learning together call in."

Rabbi Resnick says, "I stumbled across a need and decided to act on it. If anyone has an idea for how to improve something that is important, don't wait for other people to jump on board. Not trying will be a greater regret than trying and perhaps failing. But if the idea is good and the need exists, it probably won't fail." ●

We're looking for stories of rebbeim and teachers who made a difference for their students. Nominate a mechanech at submissions@amimagazine.org, with the subject line "Master Mechanchim."