

TEACHING TALMIDIM TO DAVEN WITH KAVANA

You ask how you can implant into your *Talmidim* “to daven with *kavanah*”. I would like to refer to a fundamental rule, accepted by all - we learn mostly by example. In order to achieve any sort of lasting success, you, yourself, must set an example to your *talmidim* of how one should *daven* with *kavana*.

We all refer to *davening* as the prime example of *Avodah Shebaleiv*. *Leiv* is heart and heart is all pure feeling. You must therefore turn to ‘*aiyin roah veleiv chomed*’, the eye sees and the heart desires. The eyes of your *talmidim* should observe proper *tefilah* and their hearts will tell them to emulate it. Along with teaching *peirush hamilim* and a global understanding of the various *Tefilos*, the *Rebbe/Morah*’s most important job is to physically show his charges, by personal example, what it means to *daven* in a *geshmake* way. This is, by no means, a small feat, as the *Rebbe/Morah* is continuously working with students to pay attention to their *Siddur*. The student must desire to *daven* with feeling. To achieve this feeling, he must see and understand why so much time and energy is being invested by his parents, *Rebbe, Rav*, mentors, or even his peers, into his *davening*, resulting in his desire to emulate them.

I have a few suggestions the *Rebbe* may find to be useful. First and foremost, the *Rebbe* should never, ever, talk during his *davening* whether he is in the *Yeshiva* or at any another *minyán*, even if none of his *talmidim*, or other students from his *Yeshiva* are present. I am also referring to those parts of the *davening* where it is *halachically* permitted to speak, as young students don’t know how to make the differentiation. The *Rebbe* should stop using sounds such as ‘uh’ ‘uh’ or ‘nu’ ‘nu’ and all body language to convey a message during his *davening*, even if it is only being used to correct others. All of these actions must be discarded, whether or not it constitutes a *hefsek*. We often forget that we are having an audience with the *Melech Malchai Hamlachim*, and that some of our actions may be completely inappropriate. What, then, can we hope to achieve with our *talmidim* if our own *kavana* is lacking?

I am a strong proponent of the practice that in the older classes, where a *minyán* is being conducted, only one *Rebbe*, who has already *davened*, should be supervising all the classes. All the other *Rebbeim* should *daven* for themselves along with the students to set an example of what it means to *daven*. This should certainly be done in a girls’ school where a few classes are *davening* together with one *Morah*, who *davened* at home, supervising, while the other *Moros* are *davening* along with the girls. We tried this in our high school and it worked wonders. I believe this will also be successful with the upper elementary classes.

In the younger classes, the *Rebbe* should show his *talmidim* what it means to make a *brocho*. The *Rebbe/Morah* should wash, eat and *bench* with his students. He should not use this time to supervise them; he should use it to show them what *benching* means without a “nu nu nu”, how to make a proper *bracha* with *kavanah*, make a loud, meaningful *shehakol* on your coffee during recess so your students can hear, etc. This is crucial to their growth as *erleche Yidden*.

Other suggestions which might make *davening* more meaningful for the students, is that the *Rebbe* can do something that would get students into the right mood, such as going to wash their hands prior to *Tefilah*, giving them a name of a *choleh* or those who are *omdim betzara* to *daven* for, or simply to *daven* for others’ needs whatever they may be, or even asking them to put on a cap they keep in school just for *davening*.

In the end, the students’ *davening* will mirror the *davening* of his parents and *Rabbeim*. The *achrayos* is awesome.