

# BLAZING NEW TRAILS IN TEACHING CHUMASH

Rabbi Yaakov Aichenbaum



The 2008 Torah Umesorah convention changed my life. I presented a small workshop together with Rabbi Dovid Freeman on the topic of building and developing Chumash skills at the convention. The topic hit a raw nerve among mechanchim.

Nine years later, our methodologies thrust us into the limelight of over seventy professional development programs around the world, articles in chinuch magazines, hundreds of conversations with mechanchim, and tens of thousands of downloads on chinuch.org. What was our original message back in 2008 and how has it further developed over the last nine years? Read on for a saga that will help catapult your Chumash lessons to a previously unfathomable level!

It all started with the Chumash Vocabulary Test. I developed this diagnostic tool to determine how well students were acquiring and retaining basic Chumash vocabulary words. The results were telling. Across the spectrum of frum schools, we consistently were confronted with standard bell curves on basic Chumash words with class averages in the lower eightieth percentile. The implications of these scores were that up to a third of our students (even eight graders!) were on a third grade skill level in translating Chumash. This was not acceptable to us.

We developed a system of active vocabulary instruction of frequent words with intensive review. We were not satisfied with ten vocabulary words a week. We set our goal on learning over 400 hundred new words a year and retaining them even in the lowest elementary grades. We succeeded. Rabbi Freeman's second grade accomplished this task and his class's average on the Chumash Vocabulary test was consistently near 90% (with the whole class near the average). Moreover, Rabbi Freeman was able to learn 200 more pessukim a year as a result of the student's vocabulary proficiency.

It remained to be seen if these results could be replicated by mechanchim in other schools. The last nine years have confirmed that our techniques can and have been replicated in dozens of classrooms ranging from modern day schools to Chassidishe chadorim. Participants in our programs have set new standards in their classrooms and schools that nobody thought could be achieved.

One of the hallmarks of our programs is that our techniques are flexible and the cost to implement them is minimal. They can be adapted to fit the unique personality and circumstances of each mechanech. As a result, many mechanchim have personalized our programs and developed many wonderful programs in their own schools. The following is a small sample of what they have created:

- *Master Milim Faster: A Hebrew Language Program by Torah Prep School of St. Louis*
- *Words of Wisdom: A computer program by Rabbi Yosef Karman Of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin*
- *A Spanish version of The Chumash Vocabulary Test and a Gateshead version*
- *Beautiful mnemonic pictures for flashcards by Beis Chinuch Lebonos Senior School, London*
- *Flashcards in Swiss Deutsch by Jüdische Mittelschule Basel Switzerland*
- *A Biur Tefilla program based on frequent Chumash words by Rabbi Mordechai Edelson of the Scranton Hebrew Day School*

As our programs became more known, mechanchim urged us to expand it. Based on their appeals, we developed the following:

- *The List- A comprehensive teacher training manual for developing Chumash skills. The List also contains a master list of frequent Chumash words organized according to their first appearance in Chumash and twenty classroom videos of our program in action.*
- *Supplementary workbooks for the frequent words in parshas Noach & Lech Lecha*
- *A free online version of the Chumash Vocabulary Test*
- *Videos of our workshops on chinuch.org*
- *WWW.THEKEYTOTORAH.COM- A website dedicated to our programs. It contains videos of many of our techniques, a kriah page, a chinuch blog, a LD blog, and much more.*

I really do not know how many mechanchim are using our Chumash program. I do not know how many people use it who I have not yet met. I do know that I periodically meet mechanchim who tell me that our program changed their career. One s'gan menahel summed it up at a recent Torah Umesorah convention. This rebbe told me that he supervises six parallel fifth grades classes in which he implemented our Chumash program. What was the result? 90% of the students mastered 400 words in one year. Only Hashem knows the staggering amount of students who are benefitting from it and especially from our material on chinuch.org.

On behalf of the thousands of students who are benefitting from our programs, thank you Torah Umesorah for giving us the opportunity to present our first workshop back in 2008. Mechachim who are interested in learning more about our Chumash program can view our workshop on chinuch.org, look at our website, or contact me. **H**



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