
Special Challenges in **Kriah** *(Reading)*

By Rifka Schonfeld, Director of S.O.S. (Strategies For Optimum Student Success)

A colleague once shared with me a moving end-of-the-year note she had received from the father of a child she had taught in pre-1A. The parent expressed his gratitude that his daughter could now read Hebrew fluently. He went on to explain that as a child he had never mastered Hebrew reading and had suffered because of it all through his years in yeshiva.

"I learned to get by, covering it up in different ways. I listened carefully and learned most of the davening by heart. A person learns to do all sorts of things to avoid situations that will be embarrassing," he wrote.

Things came to a head with his own oldest son's bar-mitzvah. The boy was taking bar-mitzvah lessons when his teacher was called out of town suddenly. He needed his father to pick up where the teacher had left off.

"I stumbled over every other word in the Haftorah," he recalled. "I was mortified in front of my son. With my less-than-expert assistance, he eventually mastered the leining and performed well on the big day. But the incident was a turning point in my life."

The father wrote that he was determined that no matter what it took, he would overcome his lifelong kriah problem. "And with your help, I am on the way," he concluded.

It turned out that this parent had been using his daughter's kriah worksheets, based on the highly structured and meticulous step-by-step reading system "Hemshech," formulated by Rabbi Leibel Newman of Crown Heights, to teach himself to read.

The system's outstanding feature is its emphasis on carefully monitoring a student's progress while breaking down kriah instruction into separate skills, and requiring complete mastery of one skill before advancing to another.

The father noted that he had followed the highly detailed progress reports his daughter's morah had sent home, that employed Rabbi Newman's grids and graphs to measure the child's growth in various reading skills.

Using this system as well as other reading tips he had gleaned, the parent went on to successfully tackle a challenge he had ducked for decades. Imagine all the effort he

had spent hiding his embarrassing problem! Now that energy could go into succeeding at work, at home, and as a Jew. He thanked his daughter's teacher, and closed with the touching comment, "One can never know how far the ripples will travel from a stone cast upon the water."

Many closet non-readers will no doubt identify with this parent whose kriah problem was a source of pain and embarrassment to him for so many years. Most of us can think of several examples of adults we know who cannot read an unfamiliar perek of Tehillim without making multiple mistakes. There are unfortunately all too many people who stumble over the words of the Haftorah, or break their teeth on piyutim on the yomim noraim and kinos on Tisha B'av.

Time, it turns out, is *not* always the great healer. Left unaddressed during childhood, kriah problems persist for years, continuing into adulthood.

Why Are We In Such A Rush?

In most frum schools, formal kriah instruction begins at the pre 1A level, with five-year olds. At the risk of sounding iconoclastic, it must be said that many experts believe that the rate of success in teaching kriah would take a quantum leap if the skill were introduced to some children a year or two later. Talk to parents of five-year olds struggling with these hurdles. There is almost nothing as frustrating as trying to do reading practice with a child whose mind seems to have despaired of understanding the logic behind the rules, and has basically shut down. From that point on, he resorts to wild, random guesswork.

When reading becomes little more than a guessing game on the child's part, something has gone very wrong. It is time to stop and reassess.

Common Pitfalls

One of the most common sources of confusion is the teaching of the vowel-names (komatz, patach, segol, chirik, etc.) The practice adhered to al pi mesorah in many yeshiv-

as is to teach the Hebrew vowels first by their names – komatz, **patach**, segol, **chirik**, cholom, etc., as opposed to their sounds (aw, ah, eh, ee, oh, etc.). This practice often derails young children when it comes to blending, since the vowel's name has so little auditory correlation with its sound.

Furthermore, to a child's mind, where is the logic in a system that introduces a Hebrew syllable by identifying the vowel first and the letter second, but reverses this order when blending the two sounds?

For example, take "komatz-bais, **baw**." The child's attention is drawn from the bottom-up: the komatz is announced and only then, the bais. Now he must blend the two sounds, but not by following the bottom-up route, because that would yield awb, instead of baw.

In addition, the child must keep in mind that in blending, he is not to use the vowel-name (komatz) but only the vowel sound (aw). Likewise, he is not to use the letter-name (bais) but only the letter sound (buh).

Apply these **rules** to the familiar word "modeh." While it seems entirely self-evident that "mem" combined with "oh" should yield "mo," and "daled" combined with "eh" should produce "deh"... and that the end result of this "sounding out" process should be "modeh," none of this is obvious or logical to the average **five-year** old.

Faced with a mem followed by a cholom, ("moh"), a **five-year** old often tries mistakenly to blend "mmm" with a ches sound (for "cholom"), instead of **mmm/oh/**. He ends up totally stumped or comes up with a concoction (mech? moch? mochom?) that may be creative but way off the mark.

Is it any wonder that many five-year olds get confused and weary and not at all interested at such a tender age in the mental acrobatics associated with mastering Hebrew reading?

Poor-quality kriaH instruction does not help the situation. Some kriaH teachers, feeling that their competence is being measured by how quickly the children read, rush the class through the early stages of letter and vowel mastery. They teach the blending **skill** before the children have acquired a solid grasp of the letters and vowels.

This sets the stage for endless confusion and for **reading** errors that quickly become ingrained and, like any habit, hard to break. Children who develop kriaH problems as a result of poor

instruction or simply because at age five, they lacked the readiness for the abstract **skills** involved in learning to read, often develop a deep-seated resistance – almost an allergic reaction – toward remediation.

In addition, they may come to be unfairly and inaccurately stigmatized as "slow," "inattentive," "unmotivated," "learning disabled," or "dyslexic."

In a sign of one kriaH teacher's competence (and her refusal to bow to pressure to speed up kriaH instruction), a letter was sent home to parents at the end of November, informing them that the class was holding a **siyum** celebration for their mastery of the Alef-Bais.

This teacher addressed the questions and doubts she had heard parents express through the grapevine: "What's talung so long? Why the slow pace? My child can learn at a faster pace than this!"

"It has taken us longer than in past years to reach this important milestone," she wrote. "We are all anxious to get on with the process of blending the letters and vowels but we cannot allow our haste to get in the way of securing the foundation for kriaH as strongly as possible in every single child. To accomplish this, extra drill in identifying the letters was necessary."

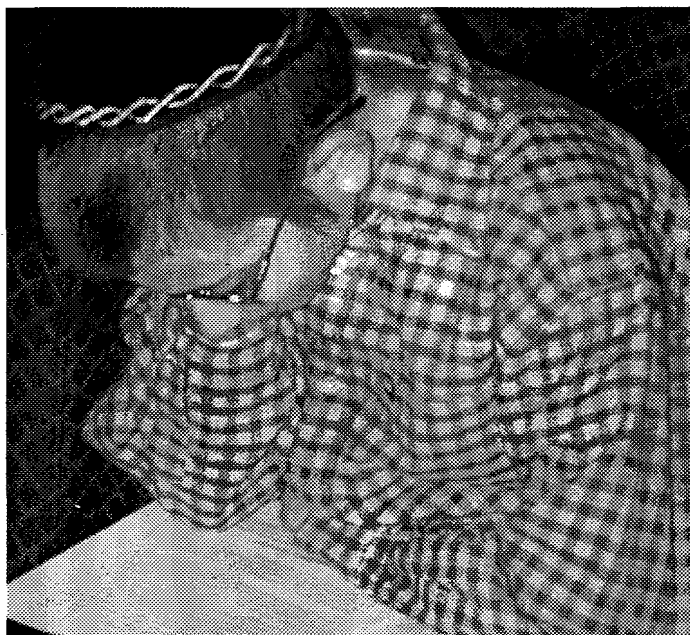
Can KriaH Problems Mask A Disability?

KriaH problems that persist into the first, second and third grades can certainly be linked to a reading disability and should unquestionably be evaluated by a reading specialist. However, such screening is seldom done at the pre 1A level because important cognitive abilities in children this age are first unfolding at this juncture.

Just as not all children exhibit the same rate of physical growth, they also show natural **disparities** in terms of their mental and scholastic growth. A lag of six months to a year is not automatically a cause for concern.

When remediation in kriaH for five-year olds is indicated, it should focus only on talung the child back to the very beginning stages of letter and vowel recognition. Rebuilding the child's confidence by proceeding very slowly and incrementally is crucial.

Only when every iota



of confusion has been eliminated and the child's mastery of the letters and vowels is flawless, should the subsequent stages – beginning with blending of the simplest **one-syllable** sounds – be slowly introduced.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of doing remediation with young children in reading without introducing anxiety and fear of failure. In addition, one cannot expect to measure progress on a day-by-day basis, but only cumulatively, in **terms** of weeks or months.

Although most yeshivas expect the mastery of kriaH to be accomplished within the **timeframe** of the pre 1A school year, for many children this timetable is unrealistic.

Pre 1A rebbes and **morahs** handing out siddurim to their students at the annual "siddur party" all know the truth; for many students, it is still too early for a siddur. These children have not yet arrived at the finish line, but require many more weeks and perhaps months of slow and patient kriaH instruction **and/or** remediation, as well as daily home practice.

Mechanchim agree that even those who have "passed the course" face a crucial test as the school year ends. Without consistent practice, continuing right into the daily classroom regimen in first and second grades, significant backsliding will erode the precious **skill** acquired over so many months of **painstaking** work.

Reading is not like riding a bike. A bike rider who gets back on his bike after a few months of being away will wobble a bit but quickly regain balance and take off. When a child "loses balance" in reading Hebrew after neglecting to practice, reading becomes choppy and riddled with mistakes. **S/he** loses his confidence. The child's wings are clipped; **s/he** can no longer "take off" as smoothly as **s/he** once did.

The message to parents? Treat kriaH as you would a piece of expensive silver. Handle gently but **firmly** and polish carefully. Approach your child's reading homework with the **chashivus** and calm you would accord an important appointment, at a time when the child is fresh and alert.

The alef-bais sefer should only be held with clean hands and must be treated with respect. Your child will automatically pick up these attitudes and the process of learning to read will assume special importance for **him**.

Above all, keep in mind that of the many life skills we give over to our children, kriaH, so indispensable to learning Torah and to **tefillah**, is certainly one of the most precious. Your child's success at this **skill**, to a great extent, rests in your hands.

May it be with **hatzlacha!**

Mrs. Rivka Schonfeld teaches in a Brooklyn school and runs the widely acclaimed educational program, S.O.S. (Strategies For Optimum Student Success) in English and Hebrew. She specializes in kriaH and English reading remediation, social-skills coaching, teacher-training, student evaluation and educational consulting services.

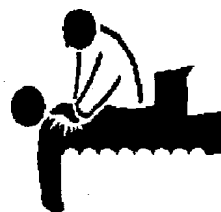
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Letters

TO THE EDITOR

I found the article by Rivka Schonfeld, on kriaH, quite interesting. I tend to agree with most of her thoughts, including not rushing the children and the importance of the children mastering the letters before going on to the nekudos. Also, when the children receive their siddurim, it doesn't mean that they have "passed the course" and are now fluent in siddur reading. It's basically a license to continue practising kriaH, on a daily basis, well into elementary school. Just like when you pass your driver's test, it doesn't mean you're driving perfectly; it means you can now legally perfect your driving skills.

However, I must take issue with the article regarding teaching the names of the nekudos. I am sure that others have found the relevant sichos about what the Rebbe and Friediker Rebbe say regarding the importance of learning the names of the nekudos, as this adds in Emunah and Yiras Shomayim, etc. so please allow me to add some personal observations.

Being a kriaH teacher for many years, I find that aside from the spiritual aspect of learning the names of the nekudos, it has a practical advantage as well, especially for children with reading difficulties. When I teach the names of the nekudos, I point out to the children that when they say the name of the nekuda, their mouths automatically shape that nekuda. When I review and drill with the children, I ask them what happens when you say the name of the nekuda, and they answer your mouth gets shaped into that nekuda. And then I go on to ask them one of two things. Either I ask them what happens when I say komatz, patach etc. and they soundlessly shape their mouths into the nekuda, or I ask them what happens when I say komatz alef and they say aw, and patach alef and

they say ah, and so on **with all the nekudos**. So when a child **has a difficult time remembering the different sounds**, they have **something to refer back to**, by saying the **name of the nekuda**, and having their mouths **automatically shaped into that nekuda** I find this method works especially well with the weaker children.

Daily review of the nekudos (with the letters of course – nekudos don't make sounds on their own) gives the children the foundation they **need** to master the kriaH, properly.

May we merit to greet Moshiach immediately, with our wonderful children leading the way.

–Chanie Serebryanski
Toronto

The recent issue (Shvat-Adar 5765, page 41) has an article about teaching children to read that includes seriously misleading information that is contrary to what was handed down to us by tzadikim through the generations.

Before I continue, I must explain that the purpose of my letter is not to blame anyone. Unfortunately, many people make mistakes in teaching Hebrew reading, because – though they really mean well – they do not know better and nobody told them. I write this letter with several requests, please:

Schools and camps: I ask that you check carefully that all who teach reading (in classes, resource rooms, tutoring sessions, etc.) know the proper way to teach.

Parents: Be alert and check if your child is being taught correctly.

Seminaries: Tell the girls about this and check that all teachers know. In the past there had been problems with this. High Schools should also tell the girls the proper way to teach reading. Some never go to seminary

and many teach earlier as tutors, in camps, helping shluchim, etc.

Boys' Yeshivos: Be aware that although bochorim don't go to teachers' seminary, they, too, teach. Also, fathers teach their children. They should learn the proper way to teach reading, while they are still in yeshiva.

In the teachings of our Rabbeim we learn so much about the holiness of the letters and the nekudos and their names. We learn about the holy effect of learning it correctly and saying Komatz Aleph aw, Komatz Bais baw.... We learn from many sources in the holy seforim that teaching the child in the correct manner puts emunah into the child (I don't want to write about the seriousness of the negative consequences if chas v'sholom it's not done right).

Those that claim that the wrong way is easier are very mistaken. Well known, highly acclaimed educators have proven that children learn better the proper way. And anyway, even if it is true that something wrong is easier, does one, chas v'sholom, go the easy way if it's against the Torah?

I can't finish this letter before mentioning that this is not a matter related to Crown Heights or only for Lubavitch. Teaching Hebrew reading correctly concerns every Jewish child: all over the world. The Torah was given by Hashem to each one of us. Torah is Toras Emes – TRUTH, not chas v'sholom the opposite. When chas v'sholom a teacher says a komatz is aw, she is teaching the opposite of truth! Nekudos do not have sounds. The whole Sefer Torah is written without nekudos and is read this way. We can never read a book with only nekudos and no letters. Put down a komatz and afterwards a vais, and we are unable to read it OV. We put down an Aleph and a Vais and even without nukudos we can read OV. There is

Letters TO THE EDITOR

absolutely no truth in saying that nekudos have sounds, no matter if one is a Lubavitcher or thinks s/he is not one, no matter where we live or which school we attend.

The holy, permanent effect on the holy Yiddishe neshoma of a child saying Komatz Aleph aw, Komatz Bais baw, is the right of each Jewish child everywhere.

These little children are our future!

Thank you, dear editors for giving me the opportunity to put these words into your newsletter.

Best wishes for hatzlacha,
-Chaya Kramer

Mrs. Serebryansky and Mrs. Kramer, you are both right. Please see the article rectifying and clarifying the matter, carefully researched by Rabbi Levi Goldstein (and approved by several prominent mechanchim) in this issue. -The Editors

I would like to share my own thoughts and experiences, inspired by Sara Rosenfeld's article on page 88 of the Kislev-Teves issue, about mothers davening.

Anything that you will do "if and when you get around to it" will probably never get done. Therefore, our Rebbe spoke about *kvias itim*, to designate a regular time for certain things to be done.

According to the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, a woman is obligated to daven shacharis and mincha. I'm sure he knew that B"H most women have children and I think that in his days, housework was harder. There is no mention of that.

What a woman has to do is decide firstly that davening is an important, non-optional part of her day. There are ways to arrange it - and

most certainly *not* at the expense of her family.

Some possibilities:

Get up a little earlier and daven before the family wakes up. At a N'shei Chabad Convention someone spoke about how to be mechanech your children to daven properly. She said her mother never told her children how to daven, or even to daven, but

they woke up every day to the sweet sound of her davening aloud, and learned about the beauty and importance of davening.

If you don't work (outside the home), as soon as you send off your children, have a hot drink (or light breakfast), remove the receiver from the hook, arrange the little ones (*dry* and *fed*) to play (with a tape recorder

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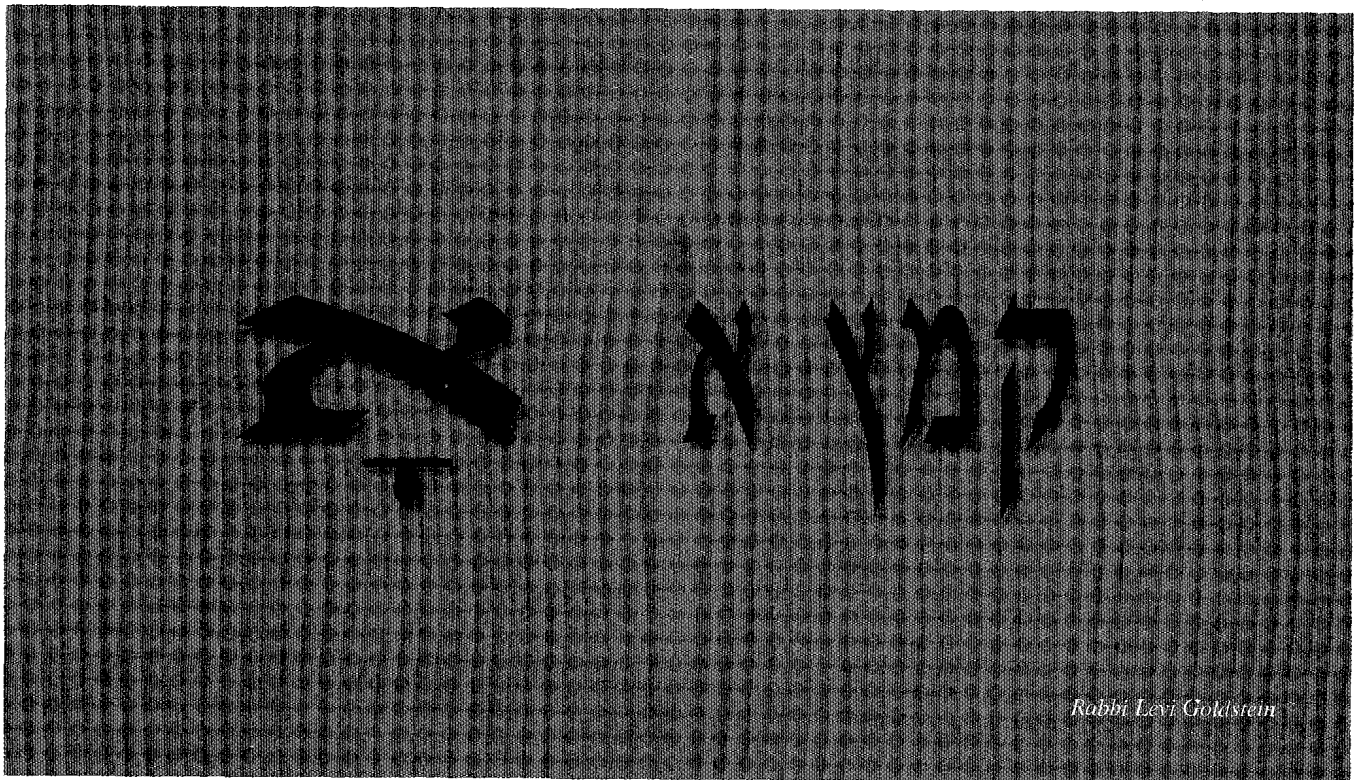
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The Alef Beis letters are holy. The Torah was written with the 22 letters of the Alef Beis, so too, the entire Universe was created by means of Ten Utterances of Creation that are comprised of the same 22 holy letters.

The very first thing that a chdd is taught when he enters the Cheder (Hachnos L'Cheder) is the Alef Beis, which will serve him as a foundation for all the Torah that he will be studying during his lifetime.

After learning the Alef-Beis, the chdd is taught the Nekudos (vowels), as well as how to combine them with the letters, and then finally how to read Lashon-HaKodesh.

Now, one might assume that teaching a child how to read is merely a means to an end, to the more important thing, which is reading and learning Hashem's Torah. And if so, it really shouldn't matter **how** one accomplishes this task. And for that matter, the sooner it gets accomplished, the better.

However, our Rebbeim have taught us that it is most definitely not so at all.

- 1) It is not merely a means to reach another, greater goal;
- 2) It matters very much how we go about it, which methods are used to teach the child how to read.
- 3) Time is not at all of the essence. We should not be concerned at all about how long it takes the child to master

it, for the actual learning how to read is a goal in itself, and is an extremely *important* subject and stage in the *child's* spiritual growth and development (as will be explained later in detail).

This is why Gedolei Yisroel in all generations, as well as our Rebbeim, have put so much focus and emphasis on the importance of teaching the child to read exclusively Al-Pi-Mesora (as was handed down through the generations).

Al-Pi-Mesora is the way that includes the three separate stages:

To teach *him/her* the letters of the Alef-Beis by their names (Alef, Beis, Gimel, etc.)

To *separately* teach the child the Nekudos by their names, Komatz, Patoch, etc.

Then, finally, to teach *him/her* how to blend them together, "Komatz Alef Aw," then "Komatz Beis Baw," etc.

There have been other educators who have tried to introduce *other* methods (NOT the Mesora) of how to teach the child to read, and to skip the three important stages mentioned before. Rather, to go straight to Aw, Baw, Vaw, etc.

For this reason, let us explore the teachings of our Rebbeim on this subject.

The Friediker Rebbe and the Rebbe both write extensively, in their Maamorim, Sichos Kodesh, and Igros Kodesh, that the method of teaching children to read Lashon Hakodesh must be exclusively Al-Pi-Mesora. This is very holy and absolutely may not be changed whatsoever.

Alef-Beis, Nekudos and Their Names - From Har Sinai - Names of Malochim

The Rebbe writes in a letter: *"The holiness of the Alef Beis letters, the Nekudos, as well as their names, originates from Moshe Rabeinu who received it from Hashem at Har Sinai. The names of the Nekudos are the acronym (Roshei-Teivos) of the names of Malochim..."*

This Way Instills Yiras-Shomayim

The Frierdiker Rebbe writes in a Maamor²:

"By learning exclusively in this manner, there is a Kedusha and a G-dly Koach which awakens the inner strengths of the Neshama. ...The children who learn in this manner have an inner Yiras-Shomayim, and are sensitive to G-dly matters. The case is not so by those children who are taught by other methods. [These other methods] actually dull their brains and hearts."


The Alter Rebbe's Horo'oh - Teach Komatz Alef Aw

In a holy manuscript³, the Frierdiker Rebbe writes: *"The Alter Rebbe has specifically instructed that we should teach children by the method of Komatz Alef Aw etc."*

Teaching the Alef-Beis and Nekudos Separately Engraves its Holiness into the Children

The Rebbe writes⁴ to an educator who asked the question about how to teach children to read:

"It is obvious that one must teach children how to read by first teaching them the letters and the Nekudos separately, as it is well known how much the Gedolei Yisroel as well as our saintly Rebbeim 'waged wars' for this purpose, to engrave into the children the holiness of the Alef-Beis letters and the holiness of the Nekudos."

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The Advantage of Teaching the Nekudos by Their Names

In one of the Igros Kodesh⁵, the Rebbe explains the advantage of the Alef-Beis Chart as it has been printed by Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch (included in every Tehillas Hashem Siddur):

"The Nekudos (in our publication) are printed along with their names, Komatz, Patoch, etc. [This is in contrast to] other publications, that do not have the names, in which case, not only will the child never learn the true names of the Nekudos, but also, there is another problem, that the Nekudos are not pronounced by themselves, but rather, as they are connected to the letters [only]."

The impact of a child being educated Al Taharas Hakodesh is stressed over and over again by the Rebbe, both in the positive (the good effect if done properly) and in the negative (the unconstructive effects if chas v'sholom done improperly).

Now, there are those who feel, or have actually experienced seeing in the child, a "confusion," or "delay," in the developmental progress of learning how to read by using the Mesora-method.

There are, however, several important points to be explored in this matter, based on the words of the Rebbe.

What's the Rush?!

In a Sicha of Purim⁶, the Rebbe addresses the issue of "delay" and says:

"Jewish children are to be taught Toras Hashem in the ways of Hashem, namely, in the manner that Hashem commands us to teach them Torah. As [my father-in-law] the Rebbe would often say, 'Komatz Alef Aw, Komatz Beis Baw.'"

"We should not attempt to save time for Hashem's sake, by trying to get the child to read as fast as possible, using alternative methods (other than the Mesora), and consequently not telling the children about the holiness of the Alef-Bais letters and the holiness of the Nekudos."

"What's the purpose? Just for the sake of getting the child to read sooner! Such training is analogous to a bird which was trained to whistle, but does not actually know what it is doing."

"The truth is that trying to save time in this matter is wrong to begin with. For time is in Hashem's hands. He who spends more time on this subject will not only not lose time, but on the contrary, will be rewarded by Hashem with additional long years and a good life."

Even the Experts Admit

The Rebbe adds in a Sicha of Simchas Torah⁷:

"This was actually the approach of the Maskilim, who

did not want to follow the Mesora. Their goal was to shorten the time it would take for the child to learn how to read.

"However, now that we are on the threshold of Moshiach, when everything becomes much clearer, the methodology-experts too have come to realize the truth in this matter, that by teaching the child in the "old" Mesora'dike way, one will succeed much more..."

It Does Not Slow Them Down - Just the Opposite!

Furthermore, says the Rebbe, in another Sicha⁸:

"It is the Horo'oh of our Rebbeim to teach children the letters and the Nekudos separately, and only afterwards may we blend them together. Not as those who mistakenly claim that by using the Mesora'dike method we 'slow down' the child's development and progress in learning how to read. This is not true for it is just the opposite!"

Komatz Alef aw - Instills in the Child the "Alef" of Yiddishkeit

"It is specifically through teaching the child in the correct way (Komatz Alef Aw, etc.) that we will succeed in instilling in the child the 'Alef' of Yiddishkeit in general."

Komatz Alef Aw - Its Connection with the א of אנכי

"When we teach the child 'Komatz Alef Aw,' this is actually 'related' to the 'Komatz Alef Aw' of the first letter of the first word of the Ten Commandments, אנכי and therefore, by teaching him so, we 'connect' this child with the entire Torah!"

The Best Guarantee that the Children Remain Yidden

In several Sichos, as well as in his Igros Kodesh⁹, the Frierdiker Rebbe expresses himself very sharply against the Maskilim who teach children how to read by "the new method" (emulating the manner that the Goyishe languages are taught), and do not use the Mesora-method of "Komatz Alef Aw."

The Frierdiker Rebbe says:

"The letters of the Torah are holy, Komatz is 'Kesser,' Patoch is 'Chochma,' and the holiness of these letters and Nekudos actually radiate into the neshamos of the children who are learning this way, so that they will always remain erliche yidden (loyal Jews).

"Those teachers who do not teach in the proper way are profaning the 'Hadrass Kodesh,' the beauty of holiness,

and are breaking and destroying the inborn pure and genuine hearts of the children, in regard to the holiness of the Alef-Beis letters and Nekudos. These teachers are our biggest enemies, despite their claims that they are seeking our children's benefit.

"These children [could], sadly and painfully, grow up as Apikorsim, chas v'sholom.

"The only way we can be assured that our children grow up and remain as Yidden, believers in Hashem, is by teaching them in the proper way Al-Pi-Mesora, Komatz Alef Aw..."

* * *

In light of the above, let us now examine the proper approach and technique in teaching our children to read.

For this goal, we must turn to the experts in the field, those with both experience and knowledge. There is a way (or ways) to successfully teach our children to read without confusing them or turning them off, chas v'sholom but rather by helping them become accurate and fluent readers, b'ezras Hashem.

The following is based on the advice, instructions and guidelines given by Rabbi Hodakov, a"h, Rabbi Y. B. Raices, sheyichye (renowned expert, and very successful in this field for nearly half a century, ke"h), as well as many other melamdin and other sources.

Without going into too much detail (due to the space constraints imposed by this being an article), the basic guidelines are as follows:

After the child has been taught and has mastered the Alef-Beis letters, and s/he knows their names as well as all the Nekudos too by their names (Komatz, Patoch, etc.), the child is ready for the second step, to combine letters with Nekudos.

Parentetic note: The Rebbe writes¹⁰ to a teacher :

"One does not have to teach the child all the letters of the Alef Beis before beginning to teach the child the Nekudos. Rather, once the child has learned several letters of the Alef-Beis, it is alright to begin teaching him Nekudos for those letters, as well as teaching him how to combine the letters with the Nekudos."

Do the Letters of the Alef-Beis Themselves Have "Phonics" (their own sound)?

The Rebbe says no. The explanation is as follows¹¹:

"Let's take the letter ב from the word בראשית as an example: When one pronounces the word בראשית, the only reason why we are able to hear the sound of the letter ב of בראשית, is because it has a שוא under it, [otherwise, we would not be able to hear its sound].

"When a Nekuda is attached to a letter; it serves the same function as a neshama serves to a body... Before the

neshama enters the body, the body remains stationary and motionless. A letter without a Nekuda is the same. It is the Nekuda that causes the letter to 'move,' so to speak, and become capable of [serving a function, of] being heard. Place a Komatz with an Alef – it becomes Aw, place a Patoch with an Alef – it becomes Ah..."

Perhaps, this explains why we say "Komatz Alef Aw," the Nekuda before the letter, and not the reverse, "Alef Komatz Aw," because, the neshama, which is the main thing, must obviously come first!

This means that we do not treat the letters the same as the letters of the English Alphabet, namely, as "phonics." For example, the letter "Beis" alone (without a Nekuda) should not be pronounced as "Bhh, for it has no Nekuda yet. It is only after it gets a Nekuda, that it can be vocalized. Until then, it only has its name – "Beis." And for that matter, it seems questionable whether we may show a child a picture of a Ba-yis (house) (with or without the word **בֵּית**) and tell him that the sound of the letter "Beis" is like "Ba-yis."

The same applies to all the other letters of the Alef-Beis, as well as with the Nekudos. It is only after the two individual objects (the letter and the Nekuda) are joined together that an audible syllable is created.

Now, at this point, it is imperative to give a fundamental introduction.

There are basically two distinct techniques in teaching "Komatz Alef Aw":

1) The Popular Shita:

a) After teaching the child all the letters and Nekudos separately, by their real names, the teacher shows the child a letter with a Nekuda underneath it.

For example, the teacher shows the child א and tells him to repeat after him: "Komatz Alef Aw." Then the teacher shows the child ב and has her repeat after her: "Komatz Beis Baw." And likewise with all the other letters and Nekudos.

b) Then the teacher trains the child to merely whisper the words "Komatz Alef" and only say aloud "Aw" and then to merely whisper the words "Komatz Beis" and only say aloud "Baw."

c) Then, finally, the teacher trains the child to skip out (or, just think) the words "Komatz Alef" and "Komatz Beis," while saying aloud "Aw" and "Baw."

Now, this technique can be difficult and taxing on a child, and according to many expert Mechanchim, may hinder the child's development of reading skills. For, at first she is told that א is three words, "Komatz Alef Aw." Then s/he is told to whisper two of the three words and only say "Aw" aloud. Then, everything changes yet again when s/he is finally told that it is merely "AW."

This can, indeed, be confusing and leave the child

stuck with whispering, either aloud or in the mind, at a later stage too.

2) The Shita of the **מבוא לקריאה**

It must be prefaced, that the only Sefer designed for teaching children how to read that was published by Chabad is the Sefer **מבוא לקריאה**

In the introduction of the Sefer **מבוא לקריאה**, עזר, by Rabbi Moshe Schwartz, there are specific guidelines from Rabbi Hodakov on this topic, instructing teachers on how to use the **מבוא לקריאה** in the most successful way possible.

It is also noteworthy to mention that if anyone has encountered difficulties in using the **מבוא לקריאה**, it may very well be due to the lack of knowledge of the correct technique and Shita that was intended for the **מבוא לקריאה**.

Incidentally, Rabbi Raices reports that he has used the **מבוא לקריאה** method for many, many years with great success. Many, many melamdin with decades of experience concur.

Perhaps we need to be reminded of the Rebbe's words, that there is no need to rush, so that the child should master the skill of reading quickly. Indeed, the method used in the **מבוא לקריאה** might at first appear to be a **דרך ארוכה וקצרה** a long (at first) but short (eventually) road. It is a slower process, but also a more thorough approach. If we take our time, and do sufficient review, we will b'ezras HaShem be very successful.

The following is the proper and ideal technique for using the **מבוא לקריאה**:

a) After teaching the child the letters and Nekudos separately, by their real names, the teacher shows the child the following three independent objects, in the same line and in sequence (from right to left, obviously, exactly as shown here): א א ,

b) The teacher then proceeds with the following three steps: 1) Pointing to the א the teacher says with the child "Komatz." 2) Next, pointing to the א the teacher says with the child "Alef." 3) Finally, the teacher points to the א (and says with the child "Aw."

Then the teacher does the same with all the letters and Nekudos.

In other words, the teacher does actually say with the child the three words "Komatz Alef Aw," but in a sequence of three consecutive, distinctly written steps.

The advantages of the **מבוא לקריאה** method are:

From day one, the child is consistently saying the same

thing. A Komatz is always called a Komatz, an Alef is always called an Alef, and -mainly- the \$4 is always "AW." In other words, the child does not have to change his/her description of what the \$4 stands for. \$4 is not called "Komatz Alef Aw", but rather "AW." This is the same exact way s/he will read \$4 throughout life. This approach eliminates the confusion of the three stages of a) first saying then b) then whispering, and finally c) thinking (and eventually skipping out) the words "Komatz Alef."

Based on the vast experience of Kriah-teachers, it seems that for many children it is helpful to complement the optimal **מבוא לקריאה** method above with the popular Shita, that is, to also have the child whisper the words "Komatz Alef" before reading the \$4 and likewise with the other letters and Nekudos. And for this purpose, the teacher will use the **אָ בֵּי בֵּי גֵּי** chart, printed on the reverse side of the Alef-Beis and Nekudos chart, in the Siddur (and **מבוא לקריאה**). This will eventually aid the child in the **מבוא לקריאה**.

1) This optimal Shita emphasizes, and is more consistent with, the Rebbeim's Shita of separating the letters from the Nekudos. For in the other Seforim, they do not (physically) separate the letter from the Nekuda. They put it all (the letter and the Nekuda) together as one unit **אָ בֵּי בֵּי גֵּי** \$4 etc. and they tell the child to read it as "Komatz Alef Aw," "Komatz Beis Baw," etc. This is not the case with the **מבוא לקריאה**, where each part is distinctly separated: **אָ בֵּי בֵּי גֵּי**.

In conclusion:

About 20 years ago, Rabbi Shmarya Katzen sheyichye wrote a letter to the Rebbe in which he said that he was told by friends that there are advantages in other Seforim over the **מבוא לקריאה**. He asked whether it would be alright for him to change from **מבוא לקריאה** to another Sefer. The Rebbe answered: ("at first do not change") **כקדימת לא לשנות**, that the Rebbe sees changing from that sefer as a last resort, if it is to be considered at all.

I once asked Rabbi Hodakov about the Alef-Beis script that is printed on the inner cover of the Kehos writing book (replaced today by a different script). I wanted to know whether this specific script was chosen or at least approved by the Rebbe. His answer: "In order to answer your question, I would have to search through the archives which is difficult to do presently. However, I can guarantee you that absolutely nothing was published by Kehos without having been checked over by the Rebbe, and the Friediker Rebbe, in his times."

In light of the above, one may rest assured that the **מבוא לקריאה** was personally checked and approved by the Rebbe.

The technique and method of the **מבוא לקריאה**

(versus others) is consistent with the Rebbe's Horo'oh, mentioned earlier, that once the child has learned several letters of the Alef-Beis, we may begin teaching him/her Nekudos for those letters, as well as how to combine the letters with the Nekudos.

Some teachers expressed some difficulty in using the **מבוא לקריאה** due to the fact that it is very concise. It does not provide sufficient exercise pages, and for some Nekudos, it is lacking the 3-step procedure. This might be due to the financial constraints of those days, when the **מבוא לקריאה** was printed.

There is however a solution to this: the **עזר מבוא לקריאה**, which complements the **מבוא לקריאה**, by providing sufficient pages for practice (available in Judaica bookstores).

Sometimes when teaching a learning disabled child, we find that the child is unable to work with the method of learning of "Komatz Alef Aw", "Komatz Beis Baw", and needs to go straight to **אָ בֵּי בֵּי גֵּי**. In such a case I suggest that the teacher or parent should ask a Chasidishe Rav and Mechanech what to do.

If the Rav agrees, a suggestion might be, as an introduction to the learning, to at least have the learning disabled child verbalize all the names of the Alef-Beis and the names of the Nekudos, while looking at them. In that way the learning disabled child, too, will benefit from all (or at least most) of the special advantages that a child gets by learning to read the proper way. The Kedusha of the holy letters and Nekudos that enters into the child only when s/he actually verbalizes the holy names of the letters and Nekudos (as explained at length in the holy letters and Sichos) is every Jewish child's birthright.

- 1 Zgros Kodesh of the Rebbe, vol 13 page 93.
- 2 Sefer HaMaamorim 5680 page 200.
- 3 Published in Beis Moshiah #431.
- 4 Igros Kodesh Vol. 8 page 82
- 5 Vol. 1 page 188.
- 6 Sichos Kodesh 5716 page 184
- 7 Sichos Kodesh 5729 page 48
- 8 Hisvaaduyos 5782 Vol. 4 page 2123
- 9 Sefer Hasichos 5689 page 44. Sefer Hasichos 5691 page 159. Sefer Hasichos 5701 page 88. and Sefer Hasichos 5704 page 157. Igros Kodesh Vol. 2 page 490. Vol. 7 page 142 and Vol. 8 page 323
- 10 Shaarei Halacha Uminhag, Vol. 3 page 194
- 11 Hisvaaduyos 5742 page 2197.

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