



SUMMER KRIAH: USE IT OR LOSE IT!

by Rabbi Yaakov Aichenbaum

Kriah – Hebrew reading – is not like riding a bike. It is not so easy to just hop on the “*kriah* bike” after summer vacation and regain the balance and control that were previously there. Rather, a very common outcome of a *kriah*-free summer is choppy and inaccurate *kriah* come September. What can parents do to help keep their child’s *kriah* skills honed and ready to take off when the new school year begins?

As you have probably suspected, there is no magical new method. Rather, the answer is the tried and true technique of consistent practice. A few minutes of practice a day can make a considerable difference in the retention of the *kriah* skills learned during the previous school year. To be effective, though, parents should keep two things in mind:

First, the prerequisite for a successful summer *kriah* program is that it should be a positive and non-frustrating activity for both parent and child. If the parent cannot create such a learning environment, it is better to enlist the help of a friend or relative who can. Otherwise, the child may develop a negative association toward *kriah* that can cripple his progress and even thwart the ability of others to work with the child in the future.

Second, *kriah* practice should be geared to the actual level and ability of the child. The primary goal of summer *kriah* practice is to promote the retention of what the child already learned. If parents are not aware of what the child knows, they can ask the *morah* or rebbe about the child’s level and also what skills should be practiced over the summer. In fact, many *mechanchim* and schools send home summer *kriah* packets for their students at the end of the year. (Of course, if your child is really struggling with *kriah*, or is behind and needs re-

medial work to catch up, the summer is a good time to get professional help to help him reach the level of his class when school resumes.)

Practicing Kriah

Kriah practice can be divided into two main areas: accuracy and fluency. Accuracy includes recognizing the letters and *nekudos* (vowels), pronouncing various letter/*nekuda* combinations and end blends (decoding), and knowing grammatical rules (e.g., the *shva* rules). Fluency entails reading at a consistent pace and at an age-appropriate speed.

In general, younger children will need more practice in actual letter/*nekuda* recognition and decoding than older children. However, even children in older grades can get sloppy in their *kriah* if it is not practiced through the fifth grade. Grammatical rules are also often forgotten by older children if they are not reviewed periodically.

There are many activities that promote accuracy and fluency. Some focus on only one of these areas and others address both. Whatever activity is done, it is important to provide positive feedback and to deliver corrections in a non-critical manner. Phrases such as “good job,” “you got it,” and “perfect” after something is correctly read will foster a positive environment and encourage the child to continue. When the child makes a mistake, don’t say “wrong.” Rather, gently tell him to “try again.” If the child still reads it wrong, model how to read it and then tell the child to try it again now. Here are some of my favorite review activities:

Letter/*Nekuda* Recognition

Get blocks or tiles that have letters or *nekudos* on them. Name a letter or *nekuda* and ask the child to find the correct block. This is especially good for a child who confuses certain letters. The child can be presented with blocks of several confusing letters and asked to find the correct letter. The parent can also say a

letter/*nekuda* combination and ask the child to place the correct *nekuda* by the correct letter. For a variation, the parent can make a combination and ask the child to read it.

End Blends and Multi-Syllable Combinations

Letter/*nekuda* blocks can be used to form end blends and multi-syllable words for younger children. The same activities that were used for letter recognition can also be used here.

For fluency, make a list of one-syllable words in four columns on paper or a whiteboard. The child’s job is to read across each row at a constant pace. A metronome can be used to set the pace. Every time it clicks, the child has to read the next word. The pace is gradually increased according to the ability of the child. Challenges to beat the last pace can easily be incorporated into this. When the child can fluently read one-syllable words this way, try the same activities with two-syllable words, then words with three and four syllables.

Accuracy

The *sefer Ha’idud Vehachidud*, by Rabbi Eliyahu Reichman, is a wonderful book that contains pairs of similar words that are grammatical or phonetically a little different. It forces the child to pay close attention to details and is also a good review of the grammatical rules.

Fluency

Pick something to read. Set a timer for 45 seconds and tell the child to read as fast as he can until the time runs out. Record where he got up to and read it again. Reread the same passage six or seven times and try to get further each time. The emphasis in this is speed, not accuracy. No corrections should be made.

This is just a small sampling of what parents can do to maintain their children’s *kriah* skills over the summer. Many more ideas can be found on my website at: www.thekeytotorah.com/kriah-page.html. ♦

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