

Reading, 'Riting, Rebooting

By Yitzchok Adlerstein

Haman Redux

Enemies who try to destroy us have never been in short supply. We have always had recourse to a secret weapon proven effective in rousing Hashem's compassion. *Yalkut Shimoni* (Esther 1057) reports that Haman, power-intoxicated but brimming with hate, found Mordechai teaching Torah to young children. He immediately swore that these children would be his first victims. Their mothers tried solacing them with food and drink, but the children vowed that they would die fasting.

They kept up their Torah study. Late at night, their cries pierced the Heavens, and God reversed the decree. The children, and the special holiness of their learning, had saved the community.

As we saw in the recent war in Iraq, secret weapons often work better with some computer guidance. Enter **e-chinuch**, a new web-based tool to help children learn better.

Sixteen years ago, Donna Zeffren, a

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young, creative teacher, brimming with enthusiasm, attended a presentation in St. Louis by Shana Kramer, the orga-

nizer of the Creative Learning Pavilion (CLP). Under the aegis of Torah Umesorah, CLP was, at the time, a sort

of road show of proven educational ideas and materials that toured day schools around the country. A partnership developed between the two women, and Zeffren now devotes herself full time to the gathering and distribution of effective educational tools.

Recently, technology caught up with them, and much of the material they squirreled away is available at www.e-chinuch.org.

Make sure your children's teachers know about this site, besides exploring it yourself. It could change the course of American *chinuch*. The site is visually attractive and wonderfully structured, but its real promise is in promoting networking. Good teachers can become more effective by borrowing materials (including lessons, graphics, technological tools and creative programs) from better teachers. They can reach out for advice, far beyond the classroom walls. They can build on the experience of others and seek counsel from big-name educators, either through a highly organized system of specialty message boards or through direct communication.

The site gets good grades from the professionals. A surprising one thousand *mechanchim* and *mechanchot* were willing to share their precious free time with unseen and unknown colleagues in cyberspace by making their contact information available to those who sought their counsel. Although parents do not have access to this feature, they can view and download a dizzying assortment of materials for their own use. These will be particularly helpful to parents looking for enrichment material or for use during vacation breaks or when children are homebound.

The material is superbly organized. Browsers can search by topic, or by events tied to the months of the Jewish calendar. Special interest rooms help you quickly get to the material most relevant to your children. These rooms run the gamut from pre-school to *beit midrash* and include

sections for special-needs education, parents, teachers and administrators. Make sure your printer is warmed up and filled with paper. Among the ideas, graphics, charts and forms, you will find it hard to leave the site without printing out some of the material. Much more material than can be imagined is waiting in the wings. Thirteen years' worth of archived treasures await the funding to get them digitally transferred to the site.

Shakespeare maintained that all the world's a stage. E-chinuch will make all the Jewish world a classroom. And our children will be the primary beneficiaries.

So Fix it, Dear Henry

Edna Wodnicki used to whip new Israel Defense Forces recruits into shape. Her charges never groaned about the workout, though, unless they had to do it in Hebrew.

Edna would take new *olim* (immigrants) in the Army and sharpen their conversational Hebrew skills. When she moved from Netanya to Southern California, she simply switched clientele but continued teaching Hebrew. Morris, her Austrian-born husband, had spent many years servicing airplanes. When he retired from that job, he began repairing printers.

Morris was frequently asked questions from friends about ways in which they could coax uncooperative printers back to electronic health. It occurred to Edna that a merger of her educational skills with Morris' technical savvy could teach people how to repair their own printers and save time and money in the process. Thus www.fixyourownprinter.com was launched.

My aging HP Laser-Jet 4 Plus was chewing paper like a cellulose-deprived behemoth. The last time I had to take it into a shop for service, I was set back a few hundred dollars. My kids urged me to try and fix it even though I could get a new laser for pretty much the same amount that it would cost to take it to a shop. I made one lame

attempt at convincing myself that all I needed to do was replace the fuser and set out to find a good Internet source in order to buy one.

Instead, I stumbled upon the Wodnickis' site. I quickly located my printer model from a pull-down menu with names of many popular manufacturers and found myself confronting multiple descriptions of horrific printer ailments. One description perfectly matched the symptoms of my ailing machine. I found that what my machine had been trying to tell me was that it needed new pick-up rollers. The fuser assembly I had been prepared to purchase would have been as effective as plopping two Advil into the paper tray.

The charge for this problem was about \$40 (others go for anywhere between \$2 and \$74), and I took the chance. A kit arrived a few days later with a bunch of parts and a video. (I could have chosen a CD instead). My thirteen-year-old son and I watched it (okay, we actually kept playing back each step slowly, several times). The explanations were remarkably clear and detailed, the photography sharp and crisp. Within an hour, we had almost completely eviscerated the machine, performed the delicate surgery and put the apparatus neatly back together. I've had more trouble assembling bookcases from kits. The operation was a stunning success; my printer has worked flawlessly for months.

I was delighted. So were many others, as can be seen by the huge trove of glowing testimonials on the site. The word is spreading. Satisfied customers now include the US Air Force, the IRS and NASA. Judge Lance Ito (who presided over the OJ Simpson trial) was so happy with his repair that he insisted on coming into the shop and thanking the Wodnickis in person.

You will need simple tools and a basic comfort level with tinkering and puttering. If you are not mechanically challenged, however, you may never see the inside of a printer repair shop again. **JA**