From Age 6 To 9

Dr. Michael Laitman Education Series

With Limor Soffer-Fetman, educational psychologist and psychotherapist, and Eli Vinokur, education content manager for the Bnei Baruch Kabbalah Education & Research Institute – www.kabbalah.info

Eli Vinokur: We have advanced and have reached school age, age six. Thus far, we have explained the uniqueness of each stage. Now we begin a very special stage in a child’s maturing: school age.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Dr. Laitman, according to Kabbalah, is this the right age to start school?

Michael Laitman: The truth is that school begins at age three. From age three they start learning the letters. Also, from age three on, we begin to distinguish between boys and girls, and they, too, begin to distinguish, in their games and in all sorts of things. At age six, they are already becoming little people. You can begin to discuss serious matters with them, spiritual matters, too. It may seem as though they are still children or even babies, but they’re not. Of course, it has a lot to do with how we prepare them, but by nature, six is an age at which a human being begins to grow within them.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: I’m not really sure what you mean by "human being," but interestingly, Freud also said that by age five or six, all the inherent structures are formed in a person. Is that also the view of Kabbalah?

Michael Laitman: Yes, of course. From age six, we can relate to a child like a little human being.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: (smiling) Only shorter.

Michael Laitman: Yes, we already have something we can mold in them, something to build. That is, the substance is already there.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: So if they already learned to read and write from ages three to six, then they already completed first and second grades. And then what?

Michael Laitman: Not only first and second grades; they can already read, they can write a little, they know how to judge themselves and others, how to behave, why they behave in this way and why not another way. In other words, they have a system with which to judge others and themselves. They know what to do, albeit they do it with mistakes or forget. They are constantly evolving, so they often get confused, but they realize that things are not so simple, that their perspective is not the only perspective, that what they think could change tomorrow, and that others might also be right, although they can’t accept that. In short, they have the observations and the preparation to understand the world on a broader spectrum than their momentary lives.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Is this the beginning of the human being you were speaking of?

Michael Laitman: Certainly, this is the beginning of the human being.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: It is an ability to look at things from many angles.

Michael Laitman: Yes. The “human” is called what is above nature, above the animate degree. An animal is governed entirely by nature’s forces, its head operates precisely on its body, on its desires. “Head” means thought, and “body” means desire. When my head works toward satisfying my desires, this approach to life is called “a beast.”
Being a “human” means that I have desires, I want to satisfy them, yet along with that, I have another head. In the wisdom of Kabbalah, this is called “a head of clothing,” when I dress, put on a degree, a higher state over myself, and I observe my own state from that higher state. I judge myself, examine myself. I understand that I can be otherwise, that I can be different, that I can think differently, that tomorrow I may change, and that generally speaking, everything might be different tomorrow, even the environment, because it’s all in my eyes, in the way I perceive the environment. However, none of that matters. The environment, the world might change, I might change, meaning I can already make a sort of approximation, an estimate or an evaluation of tomorrow. This is already the human level, when a person understands that he or she is developing, that we should not get attached to the moment we are currently in. This is the fundamental difference between us and animals.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: From my experience, it’s very frightening to children to understand they are changing. Children struggle to be able to say that there is something permanent. They intensely search for stability, for the ability to predict what will happen.

Michael Laitman: That’s what closes us, because if I got used to certain concepts, observations, rules, which have become customs for me, and which built my personality, my world, my reality, then I examine everything before me through all that, and whatever doesn’t fit it, I won’t see. In my subconscious, I will discard it. According to the wisdom of Kabbalah, even now we are in the world of infinity. Why do we only see a tiny fraction of the world of infinity? Because we are built that way; we don’t want to see more than that.

There are plenty of things around us, we don’t want to see them. I want to see only what suits what I have. These patterns that I acquired through childhood are all I want to live with. We want only to remain with them, and there is nothing worse than that.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Is that where the fear of change stems from?

Michael Laitman: Yes.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Adults, but also children are terribly frightened of constant change.

Michael Laitman: Right, because we’re not teaching them to be free.

Eli Vinokur: What do you mean?

Michael Laitman: From here on is the path toward knowing the Creator, the upper force that designs your today and your tomorrow. You are in it. By knowing it, you will rid yourself of all the problems, limitations, and the fixed patterns that you have. You will rise above them and feel free, unbounded. You will find yourself inside a higher force, in the vast, infinite world around you, and you will open yourself to all the possibilities.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: How do you explain that to a child?

Michael Laitman: It’s easier than to a grownup.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Still, how do you go about it with a child? What words do you choose?

Michael Laitman: Just as we are talking now, they understand that.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: They do?

Michael Laitman: They do indeed.

Eli Vinokur: What, you tell them that there are patterns that close them and that they can emerge from them? What exactly do you discuss with a child?
Michael Laitman: It permeates bit by bit. With adults, it is actually much more difficult because they are already stuck in it, like stone, they are molded into it. But a child is much more flexible.

Eli Vinokur: And what if you encounter a child who is afraid of it, as Limor just described? What if you see that he can’t let go?

Michael Laitman: You soften him. You tell him, “It’s okay, things change. Together with the Creator and with the society, everyone changes, you have nothing to fear. Let it all go, don’t be afraid of changes and you will be freer.” I explain to the child that I am no different, that everyone is like that. I actually give support and reinforcement. I tell him, “Open yourself to the world, be sure that the upper force is in your favor, and you will actually feel that the world is nice and warm.”

Limor Soffer-Fetman: I’d like to bring up another topic: the fear of death. Many times children don’t even ask about it openly, but are suddenly terribly frightened of leaving the house, or suddenly don’t let the parents go on vacation. A six year old child who didn’t mind being away from the parents previously suddenly won’t part from them. How does Kabbalah relate to that? Does it have any suggestions?

Michael Laitman: We have nothing to offer but the truth, in everything. In all that we are saying here, I am promoting only one principle: open everything to the child. Treat children like grownups, without hiding or pretending, do not confuse them, but rather give them all the tools and they will cope. Don’t be afraid, nothing will happen to them. They are very strong and they will turn out to be good and balanced grownups.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: But what if a child is terrified that his parents won’t be there forever, and that he won’t be forever?

Michael Laitman: They won’t be there forever, nor will he in his current form. He will grow, and he will become eternal and whole. Explain how during life, we attain eternity; show him that perspective.

We need to show children that the body goes because the body is a beast, but the questions they are asking aren’t coming from the animate in them; they come from the speaking in them. This level of the speaking is what’s rewarded with eternity. We begin this life complete, eternal, and we live in it and don’t feel that we are dead. We should explain that a dying person doesn’t feel that he is dead. It is just like cutting our fingernails or hair. We have to do it, and likewise with the body. But just as the body remains alive when the hair dies, the human in us remains alive when the animate body dies.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Actually, there’s something very comforting about that.

Michael Laitman: Not comforting. It is very encouraging, and our ego wants very much to hear it.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Yes, that there is something that doesn’t end...

Michael Laitman: Of course, and that is why they perceive it on the corporeal level: “Just tell me that I won’t die.”

Limor Soffer-Fetman: But by that, you separate the physical part from the spiritual one.

Michael Laitman: I can’t lie. They see that people die. The cemeteries are full of bodies.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: True, true, but I am trying to say that children have that sensation of their inner part, which is only theirs.

Michael Laitman: Yes.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: And by talking to them about that, you are actually talking to them about reincarnation.
Michael Laitman: Yes, and they understand it.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Okay, so we’ve overcome the fear of death at age six, which is a huge issue. So what should we teach them at this age? Also, in the first year of school they can already read and write but...

Michael Laitman: Wait, are you talking about educating or about teaching? We are getting confused again.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: So will we have a building for educating and a building for learning?

Michael Laitman: The education building will be very large, and the learning building will be a room.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: A room?

Michael Laitman: We should teach them everything through the principles of life, physics, chemistry, geography, zoology, or biology, all the natural sciences should be explained through the principles of life, through how to relate to society and why, to ecology, to the world around, to the human society, or to relatives.

In other words, first we need to open life to them. We open to them the correct outlook on life regarding family, social life, the world, the stars, movement, shopping and selling, some history, some geography, etc. Afterwards, we should remind them that it is all one mechanism, that in the end, we are living in one world, one sphere where everything exists in harmony, and we must properly integrate ourselves in this harmony.

To the extent that we interrupt that harmony, we suffer from all sorts of problems like diseases, natural disasters, financial crises, war, terrorism, and so forth. So we educate them toward the one world, and from here onward we develop our approach to society.

It’s a gradual process. Society is the last thing. First, we must explain to them what they can gain by seeing life through a communal view, a higher, greater, holistic form.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: They also need to be taught about what is happening around them.

Michael Laitman: Of course, we take examples from everything they are familiar with, not something detached from life.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: The topic of harmony is very clear in nature, and children love to hear about it.

Michael Laitman: Yes, and when I show them nature, I include in it physics, chemistry, biology, and zoology, as well as some history, geography, and a little bit of astronomy. Everything is included.

Eli Vinokur: But history, for example is a subject...

Michael Laitman: And then I don’t divide it into subjects.

Eli Vinokur: Oh, so that is the issue.

Michael Laitman: I don’t divide into subjects. Subjects are created when we take some part of nature and build something artificial and isolated out of it. There is no such thing. In nature, everything is closed together. When we observe, we observe with a single glance, and then we have biology, zoology, and astronomy all together. Why divide it?

Limor Soffer-Fetman: But from the teacher’s perspective, you can’t teach everything together. You need to teach about animals, for instance, or biology, or zoology, or botany. That is, shouldn’t there be some order here?

Michael Laitman: Of course, but first I teach them those things as a part of the whole. The approach is holistic.
Eli Vinokur: So now, for example, we are discussing the part of the whole which is called “biology.” So does a biology teacher arrive at that point to explain that part of the whole?

Michael Laitman: I don’t think that a biology teacher should come at this point. I think that it should be the same teacher.

Eli Vinokur: So what kind of teacher should it be, a super teacher?

Michael Laitman: We are talking about age six.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: So we need very different curricula than what there is today.

Michael Laitman: Of course.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: This is very difficult because the requirement of a teacher, the way you have just described a teacher, is very demanding.

Michael Laitman: I don’t think so. Children’s encyclopedias, you know these little 4x6” are enough. Everything else is through discussion with them, talking about it. Each one should go over the topic several times and tell it to the others—how he felt it and how he understood it. This is the whole study.

Eli Vinokur: What does a lesson like that look like?

Michael Laitman: Only discussion—a discussion among them, and with the educator. I wouldn’t even call him a teacher because it’s education, it isn’t teaching. That’s all. He sits with them in a circle and explains to them, and they look at pictures or movies, and he explains to them. He may take them to a museum or to the zoo, to the planetarium, to all kinds of places. At this age, the majority of schooling is done in this way, outside of school.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: At what ages, six to twelve?

Michael Laitman: No, not twelve. Let’s say six to nine.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Six to nine. I’d like to ask about the size. How big is the group we are discussing?

Michael Laitman: Ten kids.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: And of course, boys and girls are separate.

Michael Laitman: Ideally yes. If you asked me, then yes.

Eli Vinokur: Wait a minute, we’re avoiding the content. How would I implement what you said in mathematics, for instance?

Michael Laitman: At first grade age, everything is done through discussions. They watch films and discuss them. They listen to, or read a story and talk about it, and each one must say something, encourage them to participate, stimulate them. They should learn the art of discussion. In fact, rhetoric is a subject they need to acquire; they must know how to speak. After all, this is what we are—the human, speaking level, and this is the difference between us and animals.

We see how today, people can’t express themselves. But with ten students sitting in a circle with a male educator, or a female educator if they are girls, this is something totally different.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: Oh, so it’s important for the boys’ group to have a male teacher and for the girls’ group to have a female teacher?

Michael Laitman: Yes, absolutely, only this way.
Eli Vinokur: Can it be said that six to nine is their environment, and we gradually expand from that little room to the entire globe?

Michael Laitman: Yes, because from age six, you are always talking reality, and you constantly expand it. The only things that change are your means. At these ages you need a lot of outings to nature, to museums, to the beach, or the forest. This is how you want to show them life. Go to town with them, show them a sports stadium, a theater, all kinds of things. They need to be familiar with life. And afterwards, a great deal of discussion on that. Where did we go? What is it for? What did we do? What people were there? Why has it developed in the first? Numerous discussions.

Eli Vinokur: So let’s say that the goal of this learning unit is to get to know the world.

Michael Laitman: ...to get to know the integral world, that it is all coming from completeness.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: There is the issue of knowing the connection between things, but you are explicitly saying that there is also learning of all kinds of field of knowledge. That means that the child also learns, not only encounters.

Michael Laitman: Of course! When we go to the zoo, of course we are learning. What types of animals are there, why some are like this and why some are like that. Where does each type live in the world, their habitats. Then you look it up on the map, etc. This is zoology.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: This is fun!

Michael Laitman: They need to see, to get an explanation, and to talk about it.

Limor Soffer-Fetman: And that is truly a very concrete age. At that age children think in a very concrete way. It’s hard for them to understand what they don’t see.

Michael Laitman: Everything begins from studying about the integral world we are in, and everything is also concluded in that, that the world is whole.

Also, we should constantly mention that this world is operated from above, remind children where everything comes from. It has to permeate their awareness, because in the end if you show them a picture without explaining where it is from, why it exists, and where it is all leading, you leave a child with that question inside. They won’t express it, but it’ll stay within them, and they will take that inner uneasiness with them. You need to raise the questions of what things are for, why they exist, how things are connected, and in what order. We see that this vast nature is completely integral, what is it for?

Limor Soffer-Fetman: But children do ask. They ask what caused it.

Eli Vinokur: Do we answer them or just arouse questions?

Michael Laitman: Of course we answer them. Do it through debates, discussions, but do provide the answers.

Eli Vinokur: To summarize: We talked a lot about how to explain to children that the world is integral, that during the three years between six and nine we should constantly go outside with them to nature, to museums, and to all kinds of places. We said that we should have discussions after every such activity, and that they should all be encouraged to participate.

We said that we do not divide the learning into subjects, but introduce everything as part of the integral reality, and that in the end, this reality, this nature that we’re in leads us to resembling it.