RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Beshalach

Love and Trust

As the Yidden approached the Yam Suf they were beset by tremendous fear, and so they cried out. The Maor Veshamesh asks why the Yidden were afraid? Moshe had just told them, "Don't fear, just wait and see Hashem's salvation."

Honestly, why *shouldn't* the Yidden have been afraid? They were human beings. There was a giant body of water right in front of them, and a huge army of bloodthirsty Egyptians behind them. Who wouldn't be petrified?!

He explains, with the following concept. When a Yid serves Hashem with his whole heart and out of love, even when everything is going well for him, Hashem doesn't have the need to test his dedication, because He sees it clearly. It's only when he serves Hashem out of Yirah that Hashem tests him to see if he is really loyal to him.

With that the Maor Vashamesh explains, that Moshe wasn't saying not to fear the situation, He was saying that it's time to stop serving Hashem out of fear. Moshe said to them, "Don't be afraid, meaning don't serve Hashem out of fear! Stand there and serve Hashem out of love, like the *malachim*, and you will have nothing to fear." When Klal Yisrael turned to Hashem in absolute love and trust, miracles began to happen.

Sometimes, married couples have a hard time trusting each other. They constantly test each other and try to see if their spouse is as devoted to them as they claim. They don't allow themselves to let go and trust.

Many times, this isn't done out of malice but rather, as a reaction to having been hurt before. But whatever the case may be, constant cynicism and distrust is a huge hindrance to marital harmony.

Just like when Yidden serve Hashem out of love, Hashem has no need to challenge that love to see if it is real. He doesn't bring up old sins and say, "But last week you spoke *loshon hara*, how do I know you mean it when you refrain from doing so today?" He accepts us wholeheartedly. So too it would do us well to do the same.

When your spouse offers to help, accept it. When your spouse apologizes, forgive them. When they compliment you, thank them. Don't bring up old sins or make them feel like they need to prove themselves to you.

And just like you should accept love, you should certainly give it to those whom you love. Show it as often as you can and hopefully other difficulties can become resolved. And with that let us examine the following question.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

We are a very *chassidishe* family, members of a large *chassidus*. Our 20 year old son was never too enchanted by it, though, and when I read your book recently, I realized that he is a typical UV personality: gifted, smart, and needs a lot to stimulate him. We did try to give him extra stimulation while he was growing up, but he was always very rigid and never happy in yeshiva, despite our efforts.

When the time came for him to travel abroad to learn, he didn't want to learn in the yeshiva of our *chassidus*, having disliked the local yeshiva so much. We reached a compromise that he will learn there for a year and then he will be able to move on if he won't be happy. Indeed, after a year he switched to a different overseas yeshiva. Now, he barely calls home unless he needs money, and he's in general in a grumpy and upset mood – even though we try to be as nice to him as possible. Recently, he expressed his desire to change his (our) dresscode, in the way the men of our family wear their peyos, and my husband and I are devastated. I firmly responded in the negative. Was that the right way of setting boundaries?

Answer:

I am happy to hear that you found some clarity in understanding your child – even if it took you twenty years to come to the realization. It often takes years of trial and error until parents are able to figure out the right approach to reach each of their children individually. Sadly, many people never do, though one can hardly blame them. It's not like babies come into this world with an "instructions for care" tag.

It's definitely wise to try to learn better ways of figuring them out and I commend you for reading books such as my own. It helps us understand our children better, and why they find certain struggles more difficult than others, and helps us know how to deal with them, what will work, and what definitely won't.

Somebody left me a message recently after hearing my telecourse. Before the course, she felt like with one of her children her only responsibility was to bring the kid into the world. Raising him was beyond her. Now she found a way to talk and relate to him, she feels like she was granted a new task in life thanks to the new approach.

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Regarding the question of your child's desire to change his mode of dress, I want to say that I understand your devastation. And this is what I want to address first.

There are probably those who might argue, "What's the big deal?! Be happy your son has *peyos* at all! What difference does it make where he chooses to keep them? Externals aren't all that important anyway."

But to those people I would like to say this: First of all, when a person is experiencing pain or feels like he has a problem, that sensation is very real to him, regardless of whether others agree that his source of anguish is legitimate. Whether a person struggles himself, or with a child, telling him that others have greater problems will not diminish their pain. Someone once aptly put it, "Knowing that someone has cancer cha"v does not make my big pimple in the center of my nose bother me less." Of course, on a cognitive level, the person is thankful that he isn't sick; but the monstrosity on his face still bothers him!

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I'd like to throw in an unrelated Chinuch tip here: If this is true regarding adults who really do understand better, how much more so that this is especially true when dealing with one's children. Never tell your child that his problem is unimportant or silly, just because you have bigger issues to deal with. To him, his problem is anytime as all-encompassing as yours.

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Another point for those who will make light of your situation, is that every single person has that one sore spot that will bother them. It might not make a dent if their child puts his *peyos* up, but there is definitely *something* that *will* bother them.

Understand that just because this particular breach theoretically won't bother you, it doesn't mean that it can't bother others. Everyone has their red line, and even if it isn't logically explainable, it still hurts when your child doesn't respect it.

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Furthermore, mode of dress does play a very big role in Yiddishkeit. We always learn how the merit by which Klal Yisrael was rescued from Mitzrayim was, among other things, their refusal to change their dress. They were at the 49th level of impurity – one step before the point of no return! And yet, sticking to their traditional clothing was what saved them. Don't underestimate the weight that mode of dress carries.

Finally, it is very often not just the action of changing one's clothing that is hurtful to parents, as much as the reason for the change. Usually, when a child rejects his parents' mode of dress it is only a symptom of a deeper struggle and that is what hurts his parents the most.

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Having said all that, it is time to tackle the problem at hand. The path to successful *chinuch* is a discussion unto itself, but suffice it to say that at this point – with your child a 20 year old adult – there might not be that much you can do in terms of "raising him" anymore. It's true that with a younger child it's normal and expected to guide him to what you feel is right. It would be silly to say that parents should ask their young children what dress code they feel is right, and let them choose to do things however they like. This is both because you're supposed to teach your children what's right, and because they should be taught to yield to authority and respect their surroundings. However, at age twenty, with a past of resentment to a specific path, things change a bit.

Your son's problem right now has very little to do with his *peyos.* Dealing only with this detail will distract you from addressing the actual problem at hand – his obvious efforts to somewhat disassociate. Furthermore, even if I were to teach you a surefire way to convince him not to put his *peyos* up, it's only a matter of time before he does it again if the underlying cause isn't addressed.

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Now that you have come to a better understanding of your son's personality, I'm sure you've realized - something you did mention - that he is deeply sensitive. Over the years, he has probably been feeling misunderstood, threatened or controlled by the *kehilla* and/or the figures of authority around him. You might realize that behind his ma-

cho attitude is really just a broken boy trying to get a grip on his destiny. By doing what he does, he is trying to gain a bit of control over his personality and his self-image. If you will try to control him by forbidding him to do so, you are very likely only pushing him further away. Currently, he needs to feel like you understand him and love him, and not that you find him a source of disappointment and heartache.

I am sure you have been giving him your all these past twenty years, but you need to realize that for a child of this type, the efforts we expend are sometimes not accepted in the way we would like. They might not understand that we are trying to help them, and instead see it as a way to make things harder for them! As always, when trying to help someone out, you need to be mindful to do so in a way that the *receiver* prefers.

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If your son is waiting for you to be okay with it and encourage this change I think it's fine for you to say you'd rather he doesn't do it. Without any negativity or debating. However if he's adamant about what he plans to do, and is letting you know how he feels, then regardless of your motive, I believe that the only way to draw him back to you and your way of life is by respecting him exactly as he is. You don't have to condone his choices, but you don't need to tell him that you disapprove of them either. He already knows that on his own. If you keep reiterating your disapproval, this can easily turn into a power struggle and cause him to resent and rebel against you – and there's no quick route back from there.

Not only that, but if you keep pushing the issue, this will become a lifelong sore point for him and he will make sure that eventually his children don't wear their *peyos* down either. When you empathize with him and show him that you don't judge his choices, he will at least not do it out of spite. After all, he is an adult and there is no way for you to force anything onto him. He needs to know that you accept him no matter where his *peyos* are.

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One more very important point I must mention: you end your letter by asking if you were right in setting this boundary. You seem to have misunderstood what boundaries are. When you set boundaries, they are never for other people!

You set boundaries to prevent other people from taking advantage of you or invading your space. It is also a way for you to strengthen your *avodas Hashem* by setting spiritual boundaries for yourself. But when you do accept or decide upon a boundary for yourself, you cannot force others to do the same!

Your son is an adult, and he's obviously a bit resentful at your way of life. He is choosing a different path, and trying to control him or "forbidding" him from doing that is not going to help you in any way. I know it's easier to say this than to do it, but as important and beautiful as the *chassidishe levush* is, it is not worth losing your son completely in the conflict.

Genuinely love him, respect him, and accept him, and your son will sense that and eventually come around – one way or another.

May Hashem help you to see much nachas from all of your children,

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TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: BESHALACH 5781

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