RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

SEEING EYE TO I

In Parshas Vayeishev, Yosef Hatzadik spoke *lashon hora* about his brothers to Yaakov Avinu, *"and they could not talk to him in peace."* The Plotzker Gaon in Melo Ha'omer asks what Yosef Hatzadik was thinking? What made him tattle to Yaakov Avinu?

The Gaon brings the gemara in Arachin (16b) about giving *mussar*. "How do we know that if one sees a friend doing something wrong, he should rebuke him? From the passuk, *'Hocheach tochiach,* - you shall rebuke him.' How do we know that if he doesn't listen, he should rebuke again? Because the *passuk* uses the word twice. R' Tarfon says on this, that in this generation, people don't know how to accept rebuke. If a person is told to correct something small, he tells the rebuker that *he* has something bigger to correct and won't take *mussar* from him."

The Gemara continues: Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya responded that perhaps people don't know how to *give mussar*. Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri responds that "Heaven and Earth can testify," he often went to Rabban Gamliel to tell him what Rabbi Akiva was doing wrong, and Rabbi Akiva was punished because of him. Yet Rabbi Akiva only loved him even more. Why? Because if you give *mussar* with good intentions to someone who knows how to appreciate it, the person can become better because of it, he will love him even more. "*Al tochach letz pen yisna'eka, hochach lechacham veyehaveka* – Do not rebuke a fool for he might hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you."

The Plotzker Gaon explains that this was Yosef Hatzaddik's intention. He said Lashon Hora to Yaakov Avinu knowing that the brothers will be given *mussar*, but assumed they would take it the right way and love him for it.

People sometimes assume that they're in the right place and position to give *mussar*, thinking they're allowed to give *mussar* because "I love him", or more, that the person probably even realizes that I intend their benefit; after all "I'm only telling it to him because I love him." They figure the person will pick up on the good intentions. But as we learn from Yosef Hatzadik, it's not always like that. He had good intentions, assumed the brothers would take it the right way and that they'd understand that he wants them to become better people. Surely Yaakov Avinu meant their benefit. But in the end, they still hated Yosef.

When you want to tell someone something for their benefit, you should probably first verify that the person also thinks so. If that person doesn't know that you love him, or may misinterpret the message, all your good intentions can be worth very little.

This is true for a husband or wife, and even more so when it comes to *chinuch habonim*. You may assume that they know you love them and that your love is enough for them to interpret your intentions correctly, but very often that's not what happens. If your rebuke is said in a way that doesn't deliver that message, or if you're not in a position or relationship where they'll understand it, you probably have to rethink your position and your message.

The story of Yosef Hatzadik teaches us to always consider the million dollar question before offering critique; Will the words you're about to say increase love or hatred?

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I listen to your lectures every week and gain tremendously from them. I would like to post a question and hopefully receive a response.

I have a six-year-old child that has some sensory, speech and fine motor skill issues. Nothing too extreme but enough that it interferes with his behavior at home and in *cheder*. I feel that he can really benefit from therapy now when he is young. His rebbi too feels that he can use some intervention. My husband, on the other hand, feels that he will outgrow it all and I shouldn't make a big deal about it. In general, his attitude is to shove things under the rug rather than deal with it head on.

I don't want to go into this if I don't have my husband on board. On the other hand, I don't feel it is fair to let my child suffer, especially when the older he gets it will only get harder to help him. (My husband will not object if I take him to therapy, but I don't want to have to deal with his attitude of *"vus felt es ois"*)

He is from the younger ones in my family so I do know what to consider age-appropriate behavior and what not, and I feel that this child needs help.

Answer:

When you're dealing with something difficult or challenging, it's comforting to know that it's normal and typical, so the first thing I want to tell you is that each part of this situation is normal. It's normal for a child to need help, typical for a mother and father not to be on the same page, and typical to not want to do things on your own.

Now, I commend you for wanting to be on the same page as your husband, whether because you care about and respect your husband's opinion, or even if only simply because you want to have someone helping without the attitude of "why is this necessary". We'll discuss this more a little later.

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Since I don't know the child, I can't say whether he needs it or not. I assume the mother does know what is age appropriate for her child. At the same time, I would assume that her husband also feels that he knows what's normal, even when not perfectly age appropriate. It's clear, yet worth pointing out, that not every child has to be exactly the same

as other children and children do outgrow issues.

As correct as a mother's intuition is, it's important to remember that your intuition is based on your own perspective and perception. We sometimes focus on something from a certain perspective, become passionate about it, and even become defensive about it. We also tend to look for people who agree with us, in this case the child's rebbi. Our own understanding of things may make us think in a certain direction.

Here's a cute story: Two of my children brought home parsha sheets with the story of Eisav coming to Yaakov with 400 men. On one sheet, Eisav was dressed in shorts, with long, straight hair. On the other sheet, he was wearing different clothing with curly hair.

My three-year-old told his older brother, "Look, this one is Eisav and this one is Elifaz," pointing to one sheet and then to the other. My older son said, "No, they are both Eisav." My little one pointed out that they can't be the same because one had straight hair and the other one had curly hair. Then he turned around and said, "Mommy, right Elifaz had curly hair?" It is such a typical comment for a child, yet we sometimes don't realize how we do the same; we look for people to support our opinions and assumptions.

It's good to understand that when it comes to *chinuch habonim* and things like that, there is room for more than one opinion. When you look at something and only see your opinion you're starting off at a disadvantage. You're only seeing your way and you will get resentful that the other one doesn't. You might also wonder why the other person doesn't want to work along with you.

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I'm going to nit-pick on another thing, please don't take it personal, as it's possible that you're right, but my job is to point these things out. You write: "*In general his attitude is to shove things under the rug*." It could be that this is his general attitude. But you often hear people being critical of other people's perspectives in a general way: "Oh, he *always* shoves things under the rug." Or, "My wife is *so obsessive* about what the kids are doing."

Subconsciously, we want to give less credibility to someone else's opinion because 'That's how she does things. That's just how he is. You don't have to take it seriously, she obsesses…' It's wrong to say about someone "she always obsesses," because besides that it's probably not 'always' true, it's wrong to generalize and do away with someone else's opinion on something because of what they did before. It doesn't make a person less correct in a specific situation or debate. Take each thing on its own merit and understand it for what it is. People do have different opinions and approaches and that's fine.

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Let's understand the difference between arguments and disagreements. In an argument, each side wants to prove that they're right. There's a fight and both want to be proven right. A disagreement simply means that we don't agree, but we can agree to disagree. Most facts can be checked up. "Is it raining or not? Let's look outside and see." But when it comes to less obvious matters, it's usually fine to have different opinions on them.

Spouses don't necessarily have to agree on everything, (even when it comes to the children,) yet they can try to understand each other *despite* the disagreement. For example, one spouse wants to go on vacation and the other one feels it's not important. They don't have to agree about the feeling; they simply have to decide what they will do.

Still, people sometimes go ahead with the expectation that the other one will be as enthusiastic about it as they are. It's enough if one spouse has strong feelings about the decision and the other one is only okay with it. As long as there are enough areas in your life where you agree with each other, it's fine to have other areas where you don't.

In this case, regarding therapy, I understand that you don't want an attitude of *"vus felt es ois,"* but your husband doesn't have to feel that it's important just because you do. It's enough that he allows you to go ahead even if he doesn't believe in it. Here you feel your child needs therapy, your husband is allowing it, I can't see why you wouldn't go ahead with it.

What if you do need help or support? Ask for it. "It would mean a lot to me if you would take interest in the therapy and ask me how it's going." And then show appreciation when you do get the support. But understand that it's okay that he's not enthusiastic about it, and it's actually admirable that he's going along with you even if he feels it's unimportant.

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A few pointers on therapy. When you take a child to therapy for a specific issue, stay focused on the issue. Often therapists try to get you to work on other things, but not everything is a big issue. Not all children are the same. Correct what needs to be corrected and move on.

Also, when discussing opinions on therapy, you may want to think about how the child feels about it. We don't necessarily discuss things with a six-year-old, but making sure the child is comfortable and perhaps offering choices about when and how to go can be helpful. If the child is comfortable, there are greater chances of success.

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I want to take a minute to discuss the general idea of parents being on the same page and its importance to good *chinuch*.

Parents should be in agreement about the general direction of their home. Although parents don't have to agree with each other all the time, but children should not hear them arguing. Such conversations should take place behind closed doors. Furthermore, once you come to a decision, children should not be able to feel that there ever was a disagreement.

Aside from the importance of children seeing a mutual respect by each parent for the other's opinions and positions, it definitely offers a better level of stability and confidence for a child, and helps him grow in a healthy way.

Wishing you much Hatzlacha,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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