RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS VAYECHI

THE TRUTH ABOUT BEING TRUTHFUL

As Yaakov Avinu nears the end of his life, he assembles the Shevatim to give them *berachos* and parting words. There are many lessons in the *berachos* that guide us throughout the years. The Chasam Sofer teaches us from the words *"Me'Asher shemaina lachmo, vehu yitein madanei melech,"* that some people work hard, they do what they're supposed to and see success, yet they credit everything back to the *melech*, to Hashem. Conversely, *"Naftali ayalah shelucha hanosen imrei shafer,"* other people are nothing but messengers, they're not doing their own work, yet they claim all the credit for themselves.

These are the two extremes: those who are deserving yet credit Hashem for everything, and those who are not deserving but want all the credit for themselves.

This important lesson can be applied in relationships too. If you can find a way to give your spouse some of the credit *you* deserve, you end up gaining from it.

If you can't do it right, at least don't make the other mistake that others make, those who take credit for things they had no hand in. I often tell people to give credit even where it's *not* due, but especially where it *is* due. Giving appreciation makes you look confident, and promotes a good environment. You'll probably never regret making your spouse feel good by giving them credit for something good that happened.

This is true even regarding cases where marital harmony could really use improvement. I've dealt with many situations where one side was investing a lot in the marriage; with good results. One secret tip I suggest to such a person is to give the credit for the improvement to the spouse! This is bound to get them to agree that things are getting better and work along to earn even more points, instead of constantly raising new issues and proving how hopeless the situation is and how no progress is long lasting etc.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for your interesting and informative shiurim every week.

I B"H have a wonderful husband who is a great person in every area and an amazing father to our children. There's one thing that's somewhat challenging, though. My husband has a good full-time job and works long hours. He usually leaves the house as the children are waking up and comes home after they are already sleeping. The only day we get to spend as a family is Shabbos. Since he's usually tired then, he goes to shul late every Shabbos. As far as I see, going to shul in the mornings in general is challenging for him. He always davens, but often at work without a minyan. He is *makpid* not to eat before davening, even if it ends up being a few hours into his work day... (It's interesting but he actually doesn't start work before at least 2 daily shiurim in his shul which is on our block...). I don't bother him or speak about it to him.

I understand how important it is to tell children only the truth. Yet, being that davening with a minyan is extremely important to me, is it ok to tell the children, (when they ask,) that Tatty is in shul and then going straight to work? Our children are all preschool age, and see other men in our neighborhood walking to and from shul with their *tallis* and *tefillin* in hand...

Also, our children see the men going to shul on Shabbos morning since they walk past our house. What would be the right thing to tell the children when they ask why most other fathers go to shul earlier on Shabbos morning, while their father goes much later.

Thank you.

Answer:

I'll try to address this topic from various angles so that the ideas shared can be relevant for those in similar but still somewhat different situations.

Firstly, the best thing you can do is be grateful that you have a wonderful husband and an amazing father. The fact that you can see it and mention it is one of the greatest things you can do for your marriage, your children, and your home. It's important to emphasize this because we sometimes take it for granted, and although sometimes we think it, and maybe even say it, but often not to the right people. Writing it to me, and knowing it in your head is also good, but better is to

make sure that everyone at home knows you feel this way.

I once told my son that his *rebbe* said nice things about him, and he said, "Well, he never told that to me." What a pity! If you have something nice to say to someone, the best thing to do is to say it to the person directly. And it's not always enough to just say it, rather to try and make sure (as much as possible) that he feels it. Whatever nice things you see in your husband, your wife, your children, make sure to communicate that to them genuinely.

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You mention that davening with a minyan is important to you. It's not just important to you, it's a halacha in Shulchan Aruch and is probably important to your husband as well, even if it's challenging for him. It's important to not give an impression that you think he doesn't take it seriously.

After presenting your problem, you bring up your concern about telling children only the truth. Certainly, your relationship with your children must be truthful. But aren't there topics that are inappropriate or inapplicable to children which we cannot be completely truthful about? There is a reason why Hashem created *sheker*. 100% truth is not always beneficial for children. And it's not only about children. We are taught to bend the truth for the sake of peace too. If your mother would ask you when your husband davens, it wouldn't necessarily be right to tell her that he doesn't usually make it to minyan, even if that's the truth.

So, davening is important to *everyone*. And *most of the time*, children should be told the truth.

What happens when children ask questions that may make them perceive their father differently or may affect their chinuch or the respect they have for him? In such cases, it is often correct to bend the truth. You can say "Totty davens near work." You can even say, "Totty went to daven," or "Totty has a schedule that works for him."

You still have to be careful with the truth. A child may ask, "Does a man have to daven?" Don't say that "davening is a nice thing to do but when a totty works hard, he doesn't have to." That's not true. Or when a struggling teenager says, "Right *I* don't have to daven because..." Don't validate that. We don't change the truth or create a new reality to keep the peace or avoid struggle. Still, when it comes to children, you don't have to be completely open about all the details. You can tell your child, "Totty davens later." But don't tell him, "It's not important for Totty to daven with a minyan."

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You mentioned that you don't bother your husband or speak to him about it. *Bothering* him would probably be the wrong thing to do. *Speaking* to him might be the right thing. Of course, not in a condescending or negative way and only at the right time. Sometimes not saying anything can be the same mistake as saying the wrong thing. The Zohar Hakadosh (Parshas Tazria) says that just like it's an *aveirah* to say the wrong thing to someone, whether something hurtful or *lashon hora*, it can be as much an *aveirah* not to say what should be said. This isn't what you're asking about now, but perhaps it would be helpful to get guidance about what to say and when to say it.

Furthermore, sometimes shalom bayis and chinuch start clashing when you want to be understanding of your husband but your children are picking up the wrong messages. This can be a good opportunity, albeit a

delicate one, for you to bring this up with your husband. You can tell him that you understand that he's very tired and that it's hard for him. Make it clear that you don't look down at him for it, and as mentioned earlier, you don't assume he doesn't take this issue seriously (enough), "but the children asked a question, maybe you can help me come up with an answer." Or, "maybe for the kids' sake, we can do something a little different." Saying this at the right time, with sincere and good intentions, can be the catalyst for the change you want. When you say it this way, it's not personal. And people will do things for the sake of their children.

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When your children approach you directly and ask why their father goes to shul late on Shabbos, you can tell them that Totty works hard all week. Or that he prefers the later minyan. But the deeper question is how *you* feel about it. Sometimes our own negative feelings about something come through. Are you looking down at your husband for davening late? Is that why your children are asking these questions? It's okay to see some people daven earlier and others daven later. Often, if we are okay with whatever the circumstances are, it's easier to answer the children.

This doesn't mean that one parent is responsible to have the children respect the other parent while they're lying in bed and doing nothing about it. Each parent should be deserving of their child's respect. The fact that children have a *chiyuv* to honor and respect their parents, doesn't give the parents the right to do things that aren't deserving of respect. The child has to respect his parents and a wife has to respect her husband regardless of what they do or don't do to earn it. Still, you have to do what's right, firstly because that's your responsibility to Hashem, but even more because you don't want to make it hard for them to respect you.

Yet, I repeat, it is important for one parent to promote respect for the other one in the children's eyes. It is important to know about what to be completely truthful and when it's not appropriate to share all the details. When your children ask something, talk about your spouse with respect and true acceptance. In fact, talk *to* your spouse with respect and true acceptance and know what to discuss and communicate to your spouse in an encouraging way.

Wishing you much hatzlacha in all your endeavors,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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