RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Shoftim

Passing Down the Passion

Kehuna is hereditary, and is passed down from father to son through the generations. This week we learn the *possuk* that the Kohanim were chosen "*to stand in service in the Name of Hashem together with their children for all eternity*".

The Yetev Lev takes an important lesson out of this *possuk*. He says that when parents do *mitzvos* and good deeds "in the Name of Hashem" – out of Ahava and Yirah, rather than fear of punishment – then the passion and desire for these actions are passed down to their children more easily.

This is a great lesson for us in how to approach the chinuch of our children. "Adorn yourself and then you can adorn others (Bava Metzia 27b)". Not merely because if you're unadorned yourself, you're a hypocrite. Actually, a precondition to adorning others is to be adorned first. If you are truly passionate about Hashem and the Torah, if you truly love the Shabbos then your enthusiasm will overflow. "Words that come from the depths of the heart enter the heart".

Especially when it comes to true Yirah and Cheishek which are not things that can be given over to children by force. Rather than forcing, manipulating, shaming or guilting our children into doing what we feel is right, we need to model that behavior – with the right intentions – and hope they will imbibe our sentiments as well. Chinuch should not be a chore, it should be an outgrowth of our passion. If we are truly passionate about Hashem we will seek to introduce others to his service.

Question:

Hi,

I wonder what your thoughts are on the new trend of women and older girls wearing sleeves that are only three-quarter length. My wife and I never allowed our girls to wear it, and spent extra to lengthen the sleeves on their clothing.

I always talk about the importance of *tznius* **to my daughters, and tell them that "***ehrliche Yidden* **did not dress like this". I try to be sensitive about it, but I feel like I am fighting a losing battle.**

I don't say anything to my married children, but my wife did tell them that out of respect for my wishes they should conform to our standards in our home. What bothers me, though, is that my two older teenage girls just returned from a trip abroad and told me that while they were there, they wore their sleeves shorter. I told them that, as their father, it is my responsibility to tell them that it isn't right, but they are adults and have to make their own choices. They responded that "everyone was doing it".

My question is, do I continue talking and hope that one day it will penetrate their hearts, or should I give up the fight and talk about other things?

Thank you very much for all your help.

Answer:

Thanks for your letter. As I read the two sides of your question, I couldn't help feeling that you're suggesting one of two extremes. Do I force the issue or do I give up entirely? You need to remember that most situations aren't so clear cut. There might be other angles for you to consider.

You start by asking for my opinion on the trend, but truthfully, my opinion on it doesn't matter. [For the benefit of readers who are not acquainted with such a standard of tznius, I will point out that the Chazon Ish was very stringent in this regard as mentioned in Sefer Levusha Shel Torah]. Aside from my opinion on this matter not being worth that much, in general, whether I agree with your opinion or not doesn't change the fact that as a father,especially as one who is running a Torah home based on values he was taught to appreciate and believe in, you can be entitled to your own opinion. You should not feel constrained in your own home

and like you need to hide your opinions or beliefs. Your children are allowed to know what you think of certain things, and ideally should be ready to accept it as well, and there's nothing to be ashamed of.

Furthermore, even if you feel like your words aren't taken like you want them to be, don't give up too soon. It could be very frustrating, but often things take time to take root. If you mention something gently once and twice, and then again in a week or a month, eventually the message will get across, [as discussed in last week's essay]. The Gemara tells us that just as water can make a hole in a rock by dripping on it gently and consistently, (note the two important conditions), Torah values can infiltrate even the hearts of those most opposed to them.

Reiterating your Torah beliefs only becomes a problem if you do it in a way that annoys people or turns into a battle. If you say it in the wrong way or at the wrong time, it might become a point of contention and have the opposite results. If that happens, then being right or justified, doesn't get you, or anyone else for that matter, too far.

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However, in general, as much as you are entitled to an opinion, you definitely should first make sure that you are being reasonable and realistic. Some people have no problem admitting that they know that nobody shares their opinion, and yet they stand by what they think is true. Realize that if you find yourself all alone in any belief, there's probably a good reason for it. Your opinion is likely not reasonable or feasible, even if idealistically correct.

When you make demands on your family members that are not typically accepted or practiced in your circles, it is understandable if they have a difficulty to comply, even when you are right. In such a case you may reconsider exercising your right to constantly reiterate your "shittah".

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Of course, there is no need to get impressed every time a child says "everyone else does it". While there's a chance that it's true, oftentimes it is a gross exaggeration. Your best option is to ask around and find out if it is true, not so that you can argue your point with your child, just so that you can be confident when standing your ground.

However, if you find out that it is indeed true, then as long as the discussion is not about something that is specifically a clear-cut halacha, it is probably not right to make your child stand out from the crowd. You need to assess each situation and determine the different parameters involved. It is best to discuss this with your Daas Torah who can advise what the right thing to do in such a case is. I've seen situations where Rebbes and Rabbonim took very much into account the feelings of a child and the difficulty of standing out, especially when it wasn't an explicit prohibition being violated.

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We need to be aware that it is very difficult to give over something that for you is a "feeling" or a certain sensitivity. There is no way to guarantee that our children will feel the same way we do. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Yetev Lev says that if we do something for the right reasons – "in the Name of Hashem" – there is a segulah that it will be passed down to our children. But forcing an issue will most likely backfire.

When we offer sincere compliments to our children for doing the right thing, it creates a positive association in your child with this action. There are parents who will only compliment when their child does the one thing that is a point of contention and an intense struggle for the child, but not for any other good that their child does. That is manipulative and destructive, and hardly a sincere way of complimenting.

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Another great way to promote acceptance of your views by your children is by offering to help with this matter. For example, you can offer to pay for your married daughters' new, more modest, outfits, so that she feels more comfortable looking good in a way that's Tzniyusidg and refined.

I remember a man who would show up in shul with a new shtreimel every couple of years. Someone asked him how come he had a new one so frequently – shtreimels are expensive! He answered that although he lived in a neighborhood where not many people wore one, and his children didn't associate with too many shtreimel wearers either, he

very much wanted his sons to wear shtreimels after they got married, and so, he bought a shtreimel for each of his sons for their wedding and told them that if they choose to wear it, they can. Some of them chose not to wear it, and he took the shtreimels he bought for himself. While in this story alone we see that this is not a no-fail solution, very often when children see that something is very important to you, and yet you care about it being easy and doable for them, enough for you to spend money on it, it makes more of an impact.

You need to be genuine and develop a healthy connection with your child in all areas, so that you can both be comfortable telling each other things. You can sometimes see that children accept things better from one parent over the other. Usually, it is because that parent worked on creating a safe and comfortable relationship with their child over time by giving abundant and genuine compliments and being open and nonjudgmental with them.

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If you find that talking to your children isn't effective, you might want to choose different words. Of course, aside from your choice of words, there's the tune and tone, which when tweaked can often carry a very different meaning. But if that's not the issue, if saying "ehrliche Yidden didn't dress this way" has lost its punch, or even became a turnoff by now, it might be time to update your refrain. You can try saying something like "It would mean a lot to me if you could…", or "It would make me very happy if you would…"

Aside from choosing the right words, you also want to keep in mind the type of child you are talking to. Some children will become annoyed if you tell them things, especially once they get older. While your obligation to be mechanech your child is never really over, you can't expect to parent a 17 year old like you would a 10 year old. Your message needs to be geared for a more mature audience. Your daughters should feel like you are understanding them, and maybe even giving them a choice, not like you are forcing your views onto them.

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For an interesting perspective, sometimes children feel embarrassed by how we look and conduct ourselves, too. They might complain that we look outdated or weird according to what other parents look like. That is not to say that parents need to conform to what their children think looks "normal", but it just drives home the fact that they are people, too, and can also experience the same frustrations with you.. In some situations it might even be wise to at least give their feelings and perspectives thought and consideration, without making them feel like your equal or authority of course.

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Chinuch comes from the root of "Chanukah - Inauguration". Chinuch is not about teaching, or controlling, but inaugurating a new servant of Hashem and easing her into her role. When we strive to forge a positive connection with our children, while conducting ourselves in a befitting manner out of love and awe for Hashem, then we will be able to convey our values in a non-threatening and authentic way. When our children feel connected to us and see that we really mean what we're saying, they will naturally ease into Avodas Hashem and follow in our footsteps. And as the Yetev Lev says, if we do it right they might just inherit our righteous passions.

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