

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

CHINUCH WITH CONSIDERATION

This week's *parshah* features the well-known *pesukim* of Kriyas Shema, in which we are commanded to "place these words upon your heart." The Kotzker Rebbe queries the Torah's choice of words and asks: Why are we told to place these important words "upon" our hearts? Shouldn't they be placed deep *within* our hearts?

To answer, he explains that a person's heart is not always open and receptive to Hashem's teachings. At times all we can do is place the words upon our hearts, so that when the time comes and our hearts open, they will be there already, ready and waiting to enter where they need to go. This is why we constantly daven to Hashem to "open our hearts to Your Torah" — because this is something that we need Divine assistance with. Meanwhile, we can and must prepare ourselves to have our prayers answered, keeping words of Torah upon our hearts and ready to enter.

This is not only true about ourselves; often, we try to instill ideas into our children only to wait, patiently or not, to see results. It can take years before we see the fruits of our efforts. It's tempting to try to speed things up, to apply pressure on our children to comply. Generally, however, additional pressure is counterproductive and makes it harder for our children to accept our instruction. Instead, we should keep the words there gently resting with the occasional soft reminder, without pressure — and keep davening for the day when their hearts will open and all the seeds we have planted and watered finally begin to sprout, in the sunshine of Hashem's *siyatta diShmaya*. When we remember that our job is to place what we're teaching in the right place so that at the right time it will all sink in and take effect, we'll find it easier to be patient when waiting for the results we hope for.

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May they be Zoche to see only Nachas from their Kinderlach!

Parshas **Eikev**

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Dear Rabbi Gruen,

First I'd like to thank you for all your wonderful *shiurim* which I listen to often and from which I have gained so much.

I've been married almost 20 years, and *baruch Hashem* my husband and I have very good *shalom bayis*; in fact, we hardly ever disagree — except in one area, and that's *chinuch habanim.* Mostly our arguments are about our 12-year-old son.

One time, he was very *chutzpadig* to my husband, and my husband decided that enough is enough — at his age, he needs to learn never to talk that way again, and to apologize from the bottom of his heart. It took a while for things to sink in for my son, and meanwhile, the atmosphere in our home was very cold, tense and unpleasant.

Eventually, my son really grasped how badly he behaved (and I helped him to get there) and apologized. My husband didn't accept his apology, saying he doesn't mean it enough. He also insists that the reason my son doesn't realize how badly he behaved is that I didn't distance him as much as my husband did.

The problem is that my husband was being so cold to my son that I felt I had to give him some warmth, especially when my son did apologize, and even wrote a letter, and still my husband wouldn't speak to him.

Then, one day in *cheider*, the boys each had to bring a few dollars for a certain activity and when my son asked my husband if he could have the money he needed, my husband ignored him. I felt so bad for him and didn't know what to do.

Meanwhile I'm trying to be *mechazek* my son but it's causing problems between my husband and myself, because my husband says that being an *ishah kesheirah* means adopting the same approach as the one he takes and instead, I'm spoiling everything.

I'd like to ask your advice on what I should do. Should I do what my husband says, even though it hurts me so much to see my son treated so coldly? Or can I show my son warmth — and how can I deal with my husband's anger if I do so?

Thank you



A marriage in which husband and wife have different opinions on matters is normal and in no way a sign that something is wrong. The question is, what happens next? Two spouses should be able to find a way forward and not allow a disagreement in one area to discolor their entire marriage.

I often remind people that *chinuch* and *shalom bayis* are two separate issues and a challenge in one should never turn into a challenge in the other. Knowing how to compartmentalize is so important. It's a shame when an issue that could be dealt with properly isn't, and instead leads to an additional challenge, which then makes the first issue even worse and harder to resolve. Investing effort to maintain a strong *shalom bayis* at all costs is in itself a big *segulah* for success in *chinuch habanim*.

Generally speaking, a husband and father should have the final say in most matters. While a wife may hold a different opinion (which deserves true consideration and respect), as long as her husband's way of seeing things is within the bounds of "normal," fighting him to have her "better" way of things accepted will usually have worse results than accepting his "worse" methods of *chinuch*. In situations where the outcome can be more significant and could even risk a child's well-being, one shouldn't just allow things to happen. However, in many situations, it's still usually best to go with second-best and reassure oneself that as long as the child sees that

his parents are both on the same page, all will turn out well, with Hashem's help.

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In many homes, the father is the stricter parent and the mother takes a more lenient approach. This will often mean that situations arise where the mother would have preferred her husband to be more forgiving and warm. Remembering that being on the same page as your husband will generally lead to the best results for the children may make it easier for you to deal with your feelings at such times.

One of the well-known explanations brought for why Hashem gives children two parents is this creates a balance between the opposing natures of man and woman. Having two strict or lenient parents isn't usually in the best interests of the children. Most often this will play itself out as a father with the *smol docheh* and the mother with the *yamin mekareves* — with one parent providing the strict rebuke and the stern approach to *chinuch*, and the other providing warmth and affection. None of this should ever be applied in a manner that makes it seem that one parent is contradicting the other; balance is about complementing each other and not negating each other.

Quite often, it's the approach taken by one parent that brings out the opposite instinct in the other. The Imrei Chaim explains the *pesukim* describing Moshe Rabbeinu's rebuke of Klal Yisrael in this light. As the "faithful shepherd" of Klal Yisrael, Moshe's instinct was to be warm, caring, and understanding of their failings. However, when it was impossible to overlook wrongdoing, Moshe deliberately chose to take a stern approach *in order to* arouse a warm and forgiving and merciful response from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, which is what happened, as Chazal teach: Hashem answered, "If I am angry at them and you are too, what will be with Klal Yisroel?" Mission accomplished.

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Staying focused, especially in challenging times, is crucial. Our children are not "ours" — they are deposited with us by Hashem, our "third partner." Keeping in mind that whatever we're doing should be in order to benefit our children and enable them to grow into *ehrliche Yidden* will give us the right perspective on how to act during disputes.

Just as the obligation of a child to obey his parents no longer applies if the parent instructs him to act contrary to the Torah, the obligation of an *ishah kesheirah* also changes depending on what's right and wrong in a given situation.

Therefore, if you, as the mother, have any questions about your husband's approach, you should consult with daas Torah, and obtain clarity. It's difficult to have an objective view of things, being submerged in the situation yourself.

What one person sees as "normal," effective, and appropriate, may in fact be very skewed, due to their upbringing or other factors. It's important to gain clarity by seeking out an objective opinion, even if you see things that you feel are definitely wrong.

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If possible, you should also ask your husband to consult daas Torah together with you. Tell him how much you want to be on the same page as him, and that involving your rav will make it easier to achieve that. Even if you're right, it may be easier for him to accept your position if he hears it validated by a third party.

In the event that he refuses to join you, and won't accept that your way of doing things may be better, stop trying to convince him to work with you and do what you can on your own. If you are confronted with a situation in which you feel your son is too broken by his father's strict approach, and you have been told by daas Torah that something softer is needed, you may have to be the one to try and tip things in the other direction. That may mean being even softer and warmer than you would naturally be. Again, don't use this right or obligation to cause a bigger rift in your marriage, but be aware of your child's needs and do your best to fill the void.

Meanwhile, you should do everything you can to strengthen your *shalom bayis* in all other areas, so that your husband has no reason to conclude that your difference of opinion here reflects a general lack of respect for his views. This will also have a spillover effect on your son (and your other children), and will hopefully help him to realize that his father is a person who is worthy and deserving of his respect. If at all possible, you should ensure that your home doesn't become a battlefield with one spouse "triumphing" over the other. This doesn't have to be a zero-sum game — everyone can emerge a winner, if that in itself becomes a priority.

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Even when a husband or wife is told by a daas Torah that the way their spouse is doing things is not acceptable, how you handle the situation makes a tremendous amount of difference to what happens next. If your rav tells you that your husband is being too strict toward your son, and that you may contradict him and give him money for the class activity (for example), you still have choices about how to go about this.

Taking a position that contradicts your husband's shouldn't appear defiant or confrontational. You can introduce the topic with something like, "I understand why you want to take a strict approach, and I admire you for your standards. I would love to stand by your side and follow your example, as I'm also very disturbed by what Moishy did. I wish we could, together, come up with another way to go about this." This makes it clear that you are not interested in "winning."

You can then stress that you are concerned that your child is too broken to be able to accept the stricter discipline

(even though technically, he may deserve it), and that your softer approach derives not from caring less, or disagreeing in principle or theory, but rather from your wish to strengthen your son and give him the ability to confront his behavior and repair his relationship with his father. Clarify that all you want is to make his *smol docheh* as effective as possible, by using the "*yamin mekaraves*" of a Yiddishe Mamme, and reassure him that you'll make sure to not contradict him in any way, so that your child doesn't get the impression that you think his father's approach is wrong.

It is very important that your son understands the distinction between you complementing your husband's position and contradicting it. Implying that his father was wrong is usually unproductive. Although some children can handle hearing that you essentially agree with their father's strict approach, others can't and there's no need to say it. You can simply give a hug and leave the topic semi-unaddressed for the time being. Don't make the (sadly common) mistake of comforting your child by telling him how wrong his father is, in the hope that this is what will make him feel better.

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Having a husband who doesn't see eye-to-eye with you on such an important issue can feel extremely challenging. It's important in such cases to remember that you can still do so much for your child even when it seems like you're on your own. Your contribution becomes even more crucial in such situations.

Sometimes, I'm asked for advice by teachers dealing with badly behaved students, and they detail all the discipline issues they're facing and then add, "And he has such bad friends too — they're such a bad influence on him."

While the teacher sees the bad friends as just one more problem (which they are), and maybe another reason to "get tough" on the kid, they don't always realize that it's specifically because of the bad friends in the picture that it's even more important for the teacher to keep a warm relationship with the student. Often a child will look for warmth and acceptance elsewhere, if he isn't getting it from the right sources.



This is why having two strict parents ostensibly on the same page can be disastrous if the child is only getting crushed. While one possible outcome is that the child will humble himself in order to repair his *kesher* with his parents, the more likely outcome is that he'll turn to others to give him even a counterfeit version of what he's missing, with disastrous effects.

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While firm parenting is good, being overly strict is generally not what will keep your child on the right path. Furthermore, while it seems logical that if both parents have the same goals and approach, the children will find it easier to follow their example, it's usually not as simple as that.

Feeling out of control is one of the challenges of raising children. We can't control how they grow up and develop, and we may have very set ideas about how they should live their lives. When things don't turn out how we would have liked, the temptation is great to blame the other parent, the one who wasn't strict enough, and assume that things would have turned out better if they had followed your lead.

Being on the same page as one's spouse, however, doesn't mean that husband and wife become clones of one another. The left and right hands may have different ways of doing things but they are united by a common purpose. When both husband and wife are focused on bringing up children to serve Hashem, they will merit the *siyatta diShmaya* to humble themselves, seek out daas Torah, and find a way forward that involves winning the child, not the argument.

Virtually every parent truly loves his children and wants what's best for them. Like everything else in life, *chinuch habanim* comes with struggle, with humility, with genuinely seeking emes. *Be'ezras Hashem* when we keep focused on the goal we will merit to raise *ehrliche Yidden* and have *nachas* from them.

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To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557** or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**
To subscribe to receive the weekly essay, please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org