RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Devarim

Fully Equipped

The *heiliger* Koznitzer Magggid writes that it is not a coincidence that we learn Parshas Devarim during the Nine Days. The *parsha* tells us repeatedly how Hashem was with the Yidden throughout the many difficult days as they journeyed through the terrible desert conditions, and that is a message directly to us at this time.

As a nation, we were sent into exile numerous times and forced to travel from place to place, but at all times Hashem was with us. During Bein Hametzarim, when we recall all our hardships as a nation and individually, let us remember that now - just as then - Hashem is right here with us, guiding us and protecting us.

Many of us feel like raising children in our generation is harder than it ever was. The deeper we go into this *galus*, the more enticing the outside world is becoming and the steeper the battle we wage. Many parents feel ill equipped to deal with such great challenges. But we need to remember that here, too, Hashem is with us and helping us achieve our goal.

While our work may be harder and our wherewithal weaker, it is so heartening to know that we are not doing it alone. By sincerely davening to Hashem for help, we can always tap into our Divine Source and feel His presence right at our side.

Instead of addressing one question at length, this week we will address several questions briefly.

Question:

How do I react to a ten year old child who lies to my face? He is a sensitive child and I don't want to hurt him by accusing him outright, but how do I address the fact that he is clearly not being honest?

Answer:

Lying is something that should not be tolerated, and you should not be afraid to let your child know that you are aware of his deception. However, with all children, and especially considering that he is very sensitive, you don't want to do that unless you are absolutely sure that what he said was a lie.

If you falsely accuse him of lying, he will be very deeply hurt. If you are just assuming that he's lying – even if you're correct – he may sense it and get the feeling that you think of him as a liar. That alone can be very hurtful to him.

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If you are sure that he lied, don't ask him "Was that a lie?", and don't label him a liar. Just tell him calmly and matter-of-factly that you are aware that what he just told you is not true and that his dishonesty is very disturbing to you.

You can even tell him that he might have had a reason for lying. But don't leave room for argument or discussion, simply express your disappointment. You can and should then clarify what will happen "next time". Clearly warning in advance, and notifying what consequence you'll need to carry out, makes it simpler and more effective to actually implement the coming time you are sure he's telling a lie.

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Sometimes it is helpful to tell your child that if he tells you the truth about something he might otherwise be tempted to lie about, you won't punish him. This is not always practical or possible, but might be a way to incentivize your child to stick to the truth even when embarrassing or otherwise unpleasant.

If you do this, make sure your child understands that admitting to wrongdoing doesn't make his action right. He should definitely not be lying about it, though.

Empathize with your child and tell him that you know that saying the truth isn't always easy, but the truth is the only way to go.

Question:

We are finding the pre-camp season very stressful. We don't want to deprive our children or make them feel like they are not part of the group, but all this social pressure is causing us grief and breaking the bank. How can we deal with all this expense, when we feel like this is our child's bread and butter?

Answer:

This is definitely a problem for many, many families. Unfortunately, social pressure is part and parcel of our communal lifestyle, and we have to find a way to live with it, especially since we don't want to give up on the benefits of a community. As adults, we are capable of deciding that some things are not worth the expense, but children are often not able to see things quite so clearly.

That doesn't mean that you shouldn't do your due diligence, though. When your child comes home to tell you that "everyone" or the "whole class" has something, don't be afraid to pick up a phone and verify with other parents or the teacher to find out if it is indeed true.

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Bear in mind that while you want to teach your children that their self-esteem shouldn't

depend on their possessions, some children are still far from that, and demanding that they behave contrary to how they feel is not always realistic or practical.

With some children it is important that they don't feel second class, and in certain situations it is worthwhile to give to them even what only a handful of children have. But if your child is able to understand that his identity doesn't depend on these things, you can explain to her that while you would love to get it for her, right now Totty and Mommy don't feel it's right. Reassure her that since you asked around, you know that not everyone has it, so she shouldn't be worried that she will be the only one without it.

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Some people are inclined to tell their children "We can't afford that". It's okay to teach children that there isn't an endless flow of cash, and that it's important to be mindful of budgeting, but be careful when speaking to your child about finances not to overburden them with your troubles. In fact, even if you *could* afford it, there are still some things that are a luxury and the expense is not justified, and you don't have to feel bad telling that to your child.

Furthermore, you don't want to give in to your child's every whim. Just because they express a desire doesn't mean you have to scurry over to the nearest store to get it for them. Your child should know that if he wants something and he asks for it nicely, you *might* buy it. It's okay to tell a child that you will consider his request, ask around about it, and let him know in a day or two what you decided.

Question:

Thank you for your classes. I find them very helpful.

How do we get our children to respect us? My teens' level of chutzpah to both parents is intolerable. How do we fix this?

Answer:

Honoring and respecting parents is one of the Aseres Hadibros. It isn't optional. Parents should be aware of this and not be afraid to demand respect. At the same time, just like a child isn't born knowing Shas, they are not born knowing how to, or how much they are obligated to, respect their parents.

By educating clearly what respect is, praising children for being respectful and making them aware when they cross the line, we are cultivating in them the understanding of what respect means.

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Parents also need to be mindful not to behave in a boorish or childish manner that can lower their standing in their children's eyes. When you have self-respect and conduct yourself as such, it is easier for your child to look up to you. Of course, even if you didn't, it wouldn't justify your child's disrespect, but it will certainly make your job harder.

If parents don't respect each other, that will also affect the way their children see them. If a mother or father can be yelled at by their spouse, then the child sees their parent as someone undeserving of respect.

You need to respect your position of authority yourself! Don't let your children push you around. When they see that they can simply ignore your requests and you don't stand your ground, you're in effect teaching them that you don't need to be respected. You don't have to be controlling or lash out in anger, but if you tell your child to do something, calmly and unequivocally stick to what you said. Teach your child that your word carries weight.

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One final thought: while parents do not need to *honor* children, they should show respect to their children. Every human being deserves respect, and when you model respectful behavior, there's a greater chance that your child will follow suit.

Question:

I recently started listening to your shiurim and you mention that in *chinuch*, we should only do what works. Why, then, have we been saying the Kinos for 2000 years, even if it doesn't work?

Answer:

The easy answer would be that Kinos was not written to "work". When you flip a light switch, you expect it to turn the light on. The Kinos weren't written for such a purpose. The purpose of the Kinos is for us to mourn the Churban Bais Hamikdash. When a person sits down for *shiva lo aleinu,* he doesn't expect it to bring the deceased back to life, but rather as a way for him to mourn and grieve after the relative he lost.

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But there's more to it. The Mishna tells us that we toil and they toil. We toil and get rewarded and they toil and do not get rewarded. This goes to show that sometimes, just by doing what we should be doing, we are gathering reward - even if we don't see it immediately.

We have been promised that if we mourn the *churban*, we will merit to see the Bais Hamikdash rebuilt. If you feel that saying the Kinos is not serving as a conduit for mourning for you, you can try to listen to some *shiurim* or learn a *peirush* on it to help you get into the right frame of mind.

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To address the metaphorical aspect of your question I want to reiterate that, yes, *chinuch* means doing something that works. If we try to teach something to our child and it doesn't penetrate, we may need to consider finding a better way to get through, instead of insisting that we did what we had to and were *mechanech* him.

Of course, we need *Siyatta Dishmaya* and the results are not in our hands, but we must always look for a method that has the highest likelihood of working.

We find something similar by the general Mitzva of *tochacha*. It is a *mitzvah* to give *mussar* to someone, even if the discussion might end in confrontation. However, if the listener won't heed our *mussar* and it won't work, it is an actual *mitzvah* NOT to say anything!

When raising children, the idea is that we should not get stuck on one path. Even if this method worked for your neighbor or your nephew or even your own older child, if it is not working now, it is incumbent upon you to find a way that does work.

Sometimes, we try something and it doesn't work right away, so we quickly try it again. We need to remember to give things a chance to work. If we push too hard or try too aggressively, we might be sabotaging our own efforts. The fact that it didn't help yet, doesn't mean that it never will. With patience, persistence, and prayer you will IYH see results.

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May we merit to see the nechama of Yerushalayim speedily in our days!

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