RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Vayeitzei

Who Said It

A story is told of a young *chassid* who wanted to travel to Bardichev to experience a Shabbos with the holy Bardichever Ruv. His father-in-law, clearly not impressed by *chassidim* and rebbes, challenged him. "Why do you have to inconvenience yourself and travel so far? "The *toiros* that you hear over there, you can hear from me too!"

The *chossid* explained himself by referencing a Rashi in this week's Parsha.

In Yaakov's words to Lavan, we find an expression that Rashi says "Even an *am ha'aretz* wouldn't speak in such an uncouth manner," but Rashi explains it away, ascribing a higher motivation to Yaakov's expression, "because he wanted to raise a family, and therefore he said that".

But then we find a different Rashi; when Bilaam said, "*Even if you would give me all of your silver and gold, I am bound by the Word of Hashem.*" That sounds like a very pious statement. But Rashi says otherwise: Bilaam was actually haughty and greedy. The seemingly pious words are explained away.

This looks like a bit of a contradiction. In one case Rashi justifies unrefined speech saying there was good reason for it, while on a different occasion he negates elevated speech, ascribing a negative motivation to it. We therefore deduce that it doesn't really matter *what* is said; what matters is *who* is saying it.

The *chossid* smiled at his father-in-law and said, "It's true that you can teach me the same Torah as the Bardichever. But it's not necessarily *what* is said, it's *who* says it.

"Who" says something makes all the difference. Instead of focusing only on what you're saying, and wondering why it might not be taken well, focus on being the one entitled to say, the one who cares and believes in the other person, then your words may be taken much better.

A young, married woman once complained to her therapist that her parents were interfering with her life and telling her what to do. After meeting with her parents, and hearing the details of the negative comments, the therapist seemed surprised to report back to the daughter that "Your parents don't seem to be controlling at all"! It seems that the negative experiences this woman had with her parents, caused her to see every word they said as an affront. Her parents were just trying to be involved in her life, like many well meaning parents, and honestly weren't being controlling at all, but because of the way she felt towards them, she heard a totally different message.

If we are generally critical or dismissive most of the time, even if and when we *are* sincere, our family members might just perceive it as another way we found to undermine them.

We must be careful to "build enough credit" with our families, by being there for them and showing them how much we genuinely care for them and love them, before we can try to be critical of their behavior or tell them what to do. When we build that secure connection, then even when we have to say something a bit negative, our family members will know without a doubt that it's coming out of love.

And with that, let's address a question...

Question:

Hi Rabbi Gruen,

I noticed that my teenage children are not careful with washing their hands for *neggel vasser***, before Hamotzi, and after using the bathroom. I know that their father is also not very scrupulous about this. I don't feel like it is appropriate for me to be on top of them and ask them if they washed, especially since I don't think they appreciate it. I also don't think they're doing it purposely, and certainly not out of rebellion, as much as plain laziness. It bothers me a lot, and I was wondering if there's anything I can do about it or should I turn a blind eye?**

I would appreciate it if you can offer some clarity on this topic. Thanks for all that you do.

Answer:

Since your question does not include a lot of context, I will answer based on the little I know about your situation.Please feel free to apply whatever is appropriate for your particular situation.

Chazal tell us that we are required to rebuke a fellow Jew "even a hundred times". We can understand that to mean that we mustn't tire of reminding our brethren of the right thing to do. Of course that itself has in it a powerful message, implying that all 100 times should be said with the same tone, not getting worked up over having to repeat

the words again and again. However, Chazal also tell us that when our words will not be heard, it is just as big a mitzvah *not* to say anything.

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Some children will fail to do certain things out of negligence. Like in your case for example, they won't wash their hands when they're supposed to because they're lazy, distracted, or they don't feel a connection or obligation to certain *mitzvos*. Other kids will not do things because they don't want to do it; they *want* to forget. The former will likely appreciate a gentle reminder, as long as it is not said harshly, while the latter will get annoyed at you for barging into their business.

You have the very difficult job of trying to determine which of those two categories your children fall into. You mention multiple children, and there's a chance that each of them requires a different approach. What's more, some kids are a combination of both!

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It's important to take the specific temperament of each particular child into account. Some kids are more sensitive, and have a fragile self-esteem, while others can take typical criticism without batting an eyelash. Addressing all children the same way is never the way to go when being *mechanech* children.

Aside from the personality of a child, this specific issue needs to be understood better as well. For a child who misses *mitzvos* out of plain neglect, it might be helpful to come up with a plan together with them to help them overcome their challenge. A chart, a contest or an incentive, can accomplish a lot. It's okay for any child to need motivation.

For a child who is doing it out of spite or decided indifference, you need a more delicate approach. You don't want to confront such a child while he is in the act. While it may solve the problem temporarily, it will likely put him on the defensive as well as possibly sow the seed for long term resentment.

You need to broach the subject gently, in a calm moment, and clarify that you don't see his actions as being deliberate or intentionally bad, and you understand that sometimes people forget. Only then should you ask your child why it is that he finds this particular thing difficult to do. You can also ask him if he would like you to remind him when you see him forgetting to do it. With this preface and wording, chances are he'll be a lot more okay with discussing the subject.

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Keep in mind that by the time your kids have grown into teens, they are well aware of what they need to do. They know what you expect and they know exactly how they can please you. While it is very hard to watch a child neglect something that you hold dear, instead of immediately attacking them for it, you need to try to figure out the reason for his behavior. If he already knows what he should be doing, and what's expected of him, then why is he resisting or finding it difficult? What kind of messages has he been getting? Was he hurt by someone? Is he going through a rough patch? Instead of fighting his action or inaction, find out what motivates him to behave that way.

Also, as mentioned above, if your child constantly heard you criticize him, then your well-meaning reminders about him washing *neggel vasser* might sound like just another bone you have to pick with him. It's not what you say, it's *who* is saying it, and it's possible that the *who* doesn't have such a good record...

While *chinuch* at a young age involves a lot of talking and active teaching, as the chil-

dren get older, the primary way they learn is through watching others in action. When you are careful to behave in the way you would like to see them behave, there's a greater chance of it actually happening. Moreover, when you cultivate an atmosphere of acceptance and respect in your home, your children will feel that and be compelled to imitate your actions. Unfortunately, it is in no way a guarantee, but it is certainly a good place to start.

In general, you might want to discuss with a Rov exactly what your obligations of *chinuch* are as your children grow older. This might clarify and make it easier to look away when that's the best thing to do.

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You did mention that your husband is not careful in this area, which might have had an influence on your children's indifference. You didn't say whether you have tried to broach this topic with him, or whether you didn't feel it was your place to rebuke him about it.

In any case, this might be a good opportunity to bring the issue to his attention by telling him how much it bothers you that the children are lax in this area, and whether he can suggest a possible solution to the problem. Of course you should stay away from any negativity or offensive implications when talking to him, so that your words can be taken well. Perhaps he will realize that if he will become more careful, the children will follow suit.

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Once again, it's important to remember the message of "It's not necessarily what is being said, it's who is saying it". The way our criticism and comments are taken depends a lot on our existing relationship with our children, and what we tend to communicate more often. If we pick up on every little good deed, and we're lavish in our praise and compliments, if we generally see our children as doing good and well, chances are they will better handle a reminder or even a bit of non-threatening criticism.

May Hashem grant you the wisdom and strength to know what each of your children truly need, and to be able to raise them and guide them on the Torah-true path.

All the best,
Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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