Torah Lessons for the Home

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Mastering Patience

NOACH: THE SLOW CONTRACTOR

Why did Hashem need Noach to build a *teiva*? Couldn't Hashem have saved Noach in a million-and-one other ways? Why was this construction necessary? The *Midrash Tanchuma* explains that Hashem wished for Noach to be actively engaged in the *teiva's* construction. This would pique curiosity and give Noach an opportunity to teach his generation about repentance. People would ask Noach about his project, and he would explain to them about Hashem's wrath and retribution, hopefully bringing them to repentance.

Now, if we look at the *pessukim* in this week's *parsha*, we note that it took a very long time for the *teiva* to be built, an inordinate amount of time. The construction of the *teiva* stretched for as long as 120 years! What was the use of waiting such a long time? Does it take 120 years for a person to understand a simple message?

And so we understand that while the words of the *midrash* are certainly true, there is another message that we are to learn here, and that is the lesson of patience.

A LIFETIME OF PATIENCE

Noach received his instructions from Hashem, and persisted in carrying them out, for what must have seemed like an eternity! For years and years Noach labored away, 10, 20, 30, 40, 60, 100- The seasons came and went, but Noach was still working, and trying to influence the people, for years!

People were constantly mocking and taunting him, yet he reiterated the message that he carried, and continued working. We don't find him protesting against Hashem and asking when the people will change already, Noach waited patiently for the people to be more receptive.

So aside from learning that Hashem always gives us an opportunity for *teshuva* and that He is endlessly patient with us, there is something else for us to learn as well. We must learn from Noach the wonderful attitude of patience. Perhaps you asked your husband to change the light bulbs, and you're waiting "forever" for it to happen. Did you wait 120 years yet? Learn from Noach!

Perhaps another lesson we can learn from Noach's 120 years of waiting is this: At the end of the *parsha*, Hashem says that he will no longer give people thousand-year lives, rather the human life-span is being shortened to 120 years. We can thus learn from Noach's 120 years of patience, that we too, must be patient for 120 years. That is, we must be patient all of our lives!

BE PATIENT AND TOLERANT

We would think that after 120 years of delivering a message, we would like to see the message finally come through. Noach didn't have this pleasure. His message was not accepted, it was mocked instead. But did Noach get frustrated and slam the door of the *teiva* behind him in frustration? No, he tolerated years of abuse and accepted it calmly and patiently.

In Hebrew the word סובל –"To tolerate" also means "To be patient". In truth, being tolerant and being patient share the same root. Being

patient is a matter of tolerating discomfort, of tolerating things when they don't go our way, that's patience.

When we say that one must be tolerant, this doesn't mean that one just needs to tolerate and accept abuse. You can be tolerant even while you try to change a situation. You can do whatever it is that you have to do in order to change the situation, but tolerate it as long as it has not yet changed.

In relationships, it's so important to tolerate imperfection. After all humans are imperfect beings, and if we want to be in a relationship with human beings, we must be ready to tolerate their imperfections, and be patient with them

FACT: YOU WAIT EITHER WAY!

Now, some people think that being patient is bad, because it's associated with "waiting". "People who are patient are doomed to wait at the back of the line forever!" they think. But the truth is far from that. Everyone waits in line. Only, patient people are more tolerant of the wait, while the impatient are having minor nervous-breakdowns.

When your computer takes long to start, it is highly unlikely that it will work any faster by your increasing impatience. The only thing liable to be affected here is your mood. So doesn't it pay to be patient?

ANXIETY AND IMPATIENCE IS COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE

We say that there is only one thing liable to be affected, but that's in dealings with recalcitrant computer software. When dealing with humans in a relationship however, much more can be affected; Your mood, the other person's mood, and also, the relationship. The relationship itself may be adversely affected.

When a wife is impatient about something she wants her husband to do, and she keeps anxiously reminding him: Not only does she thereby affect herself, she is also putting her husband in a bad mood and ruining the relationship. So it's not patience that makes you wait for what you want. Actually being impatient may force you to wait even longer!

And we'll let you in on a little secret here too. Being patient will definitely make your relationship happier and healthier, but aside from that – many times, being patient will make you wait even less. If you consistently have a good attitude, perhaps your spouse will be quicker to take your needs and feelings into account, thus giving you what you want.

BIG CHANGE, THE RIGHT WAY

So practically speaking, in a marriage, when it comes to the little day-to-day encounters, patience is a great asset – Affecting not only your mood while you wait, but also the general mood of the household and the feelings of love and affection between the spouses. Whether you're waiting for your husband to get home from work, or for your wife to be ready to go to a *simcha*, being patient will only work to your benefit, and impatience to your detriment.

But patience doesn't only help you in the short-term; When it comes to the big picture, when there is a big change that you would like to see happen, patience will help you there as well. Now, I'm telling you this because people find this very hard to accept.

When it comes to their daily encounters people are used to the idea that you have to be patient. But when it comes to big things, people find it hard to accept.

So often, we're waiting for people to change – we want them to be like us! Not completely like us obviously, not with all our character

flaws and imperfections – as if we have any – but we want our loved ones to share our qualities. If we're more laid-back we don't like that our spouses are always so exacting and precise. And if we're more of the punctual type, we can't stand that our spouse "can't get their act together".

Now the truth is that when it comes to these "big things" such as personality changes, often we just need to accept that we didn't get what we want and we may never get what we want. But in fact, most of the time, we can get pretty much anything, as long as we learn the proper way to go about it. There are ways of and methods of bringing up a topic and steering conversations so that you will end up getting your way.

WHAT IS PREVENTING THE CHANGE?

However, most of the time, the main component in getting what you want, is patience. Sometimes it may take a lot longer than you would like for something to happen. Now, we hope you don't have to wait as long as Noach did! But it may take time.

And as we said before, your attitude, while this time is passing, will affect you, your spouse, and possibly even the result you're waiting for! Being impatient with your spouse may in fact be what is preventing the change from taking place.

THROWING IN THE TOWEL

There is a well-known story about the Pesach Seder. Someone was told that all Jewish homes are open Passover night so that strangers can join them for a delectable meal, and what a meal! Golden chicken soup, puffy matzoh balls and many more delicacies. This man was excited at the prospect and he joined a Jewish family for the seder. After hours of endless Hebrew ramblings they finally served hard matzoh, then our friend was almost choked by the sharpest horseradish he ever tasted. When he was then served more matzoh and marror in a sandwich, he had had enough. He got up and bolted – just in time to miss Shulchan Oreich!

And this happens so often! I see it all the time, people are being patient, and being patient, and being patient. And then they throw in the towel at the last minute. And as an outsider, with an objective point of view, I can see that the results were almost there. The other party was just about ready to change, but they gave up and insisted on having it NOW.

THE SHORT LONG WAY

And it's sad, because when someone who is not ready to change is forced into it, it never ends well. Chazal teach us about the דרך ארוכה שהיא קצרה, וקצרה שהיא ארוכה. –"The long way that is short, and the short way that is long".

Sometimes you think you found a shortcut, an easy way to get results quickly, but you end up with sloppy work and you have to restart, doing it the long way. So taking the shortcut, sometimes ends up taking you longer, while taking the longer established route may get you to your destination quicker in the long run.

When a husband puts his foot down and decides that he will break his wife's nature NOW, he may very well succeed. But he will probably break other things in the process. He will break her, he will break her trust, and he will break the marriage. So you have to learn to be patient! "Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet".

Even if patience will not help matters, and you'll never get what you want, the fruit is out of reach. Perhaps all you'll get is a white beard, while you wait patiently. However impatience will certainly not help and can only damage. So stay far away from impatience.

THE FRUIT RIPENS

Who says that everyone needs to be ready to do things the way *you* want, at the exact second *you* want it? When someone is forced into something he's not ready for, there is a great chance of it backfiring. More often than not, even if the *derech ktzara* gives you your result, and your spouse does what you asked, they will merely be going through the motions. You don't want that.

It happens with children too, sometimes a parent will force a child do something right now, and the child will do it, but clearly resenting it the whole time, and trying to get out of it as quickly and easily as possible.

The forced result will always be lacking in enthusiasm, lacking in completion, lacking. And the reason is simply because it's half-baked, it's not ripe!

Now it can be that you're right, you're "the man of the house", you're the "queen of the kitchen". You have the "right" to make these demands. But the fact remains that it will probably work against you, they may slack off, they may not do it properly, all because you couldn't wait for the fruit to ripen.

Now following this allegory, if you do wait patiently, the fruit is sweet. You will be delighted with the results. The results will be sweet as a fresh ripe fruit and, will bring you joy.

BE PATIENT WITH EVERYONE, YOURSELF INCLUDED

For many people, the way to teach this lesson would be by saying "Be as Patient with others, as you are with yourself". ואהבת לרעך כמוך is a great source for this idea. But sometimes people need to learn to be patient with themselves as well! Very often people become impatient with themselves. They didn't reach a certain goal, their aspirations weren't fulfilled, and they lose patience!

This is detrimental to their mood and it ends up rubbing off on others as well! Patience is something that needs work. And you need to be patient about getting patient! Everything requires patience. Learn to tolerate yourself, and to tolerate others. Don't be impatient or intolerant about yourself, or about others.

PATIENT PARENTING

In parenting as well, patience is an extremely important quality. Giving a child time to learn and develop, requires patience. Giving the child that chance, tolerating him and being patient with him as he learns and grows will assist the child in his learning. While being impatient with him will only stunt his growth.

When parenting several children it is important to remember that just because one child met a milestone at a certain age, doesn't mean that his brother must measure up to him exactly, it may take him longer to reach that particular goal. Now we're not even talking about some parents who get impatient with their seven year old for not being on the level of her nine year old sibling. That's ridiculous! But even if the sibling was already at a certain level when *she* was seven years old… who cares? Every human being is a different world, you can't compare two people. Be patient. In the right time, your second child will also master whatever it is that your first child did.

Another thing, maturity takes time. People grow up. But until they do, be patient, and remember that your child is still a child. "If I can set the table nicely, why can't you?" It's absurd! "Because you're like thirty years older – that's why!" But still, people lose focus and they forget that they're dealing with a child and then the impatience steps in.

If you're patient with your child, and tolerant of his or her inadequacies, and you throw in some encouragement as well, chances are that your child will thrive and acquire life skills. Your child won't be doing things half-heartedly because he was forced into it, rather he will have become sweetened like a ripened fruit with all the skills and maturity you wished he had.

BE YOUR CHILD'S PRIVATE TUTOR

An astute educator once remarked that private tutors are generally more successful at learning with boys than their fathers are. This is not because of their training or techniques. Rather it is because of their patience. A father who has great hopes for his child's success in learning quickly gets anxious and frustrated when learning with a child who is not one hundred percent where his father wants him to be. While a tutor, who is not so vested in the success of his student, and is getting paid by the hour, can have much more tolerance for the child's level. Very often people who are very patient with other people's children, can have a very low tolerance level with their own children. I know this for a fact, I've seen it happen.

So to recap: Patience is very beneficial in the short-term, when waiting for little things. Patience and tolerance are also indispensable in a long-term relationship. Giving people time and space to learn and develop will always be helpful, whether in Shalom Bayis or Chinuch. And the lesson of the Torah, of just how patient one must be, is always beneficial.

The Power of Unity

TORAH LESSON: UNITY IN BABYLON

In the beginning of this week's *parsha*, mankind is destroyed and utterly obliterated due to its sins. The *passuk* tells us what their sin was, חמס –Robbery. At the end of this week's *parsha*, mankind sins once more, at the Tower of Babel. This time their sin is very severe – they are out to wage war with G-d Himself! Yet their punishment is not very remarkable "They were dispersed". Why the disparity in punishment?

It appears that the Torah is teaching us a very great lesson here. When mankind is stealing from one another and cheating each other – there is no hope for them and they will be destroyed. If however, mankind joins together for a purpose – even if that purpose is blasphemous – their unity is a quality that will save them. Rashi puts it this way: וכי איזו קשה, של דור המבול או של דור הפלגה? אלא שדור המבול היו גזלנים והיתה מריבה ביניהם לכך נאבדו, ואלו היו נוהגים אהבה וריעות ביניהם. למדת ששנאוי המחלוקת וגדול השלום. He concludes – "We learn from here how hated dissent is before Hashem, and how great Shalom is".

SYNERGY IN EMOTION

Thus we learn that when people stick together, the result is happier and they can be spared a lot of pain. This is the lesson that we discuss today, the lesson of living *together*.

And we'll begin with a simple math equation: 1+1=3. Yes – you heard right, according to the concept of synergy, the combined energy of two people is more than their individual energies put together. This means, that two people who can carry fifty pounds each, can in fact carry more than 100 pounds when together. That's just the way it is; when two people join together, they can accomplish much more then when they're separate.

And it's not because you have twice the energy, wisdom and talent. It's not just energy, wisdom and talent, it's much more. There is something spiritual in the unity of two people who are working together harmoniously; it's not something tangible that can be pointed at. There's a certain mood, an aura, a spiritual energy which helps their goals be met.

TOGETHERNESS IS VITAL

Hashem created the world in such a manner that two people are required to raise a family. It's not merely because there's a lot of work which needs to be split between two people. Or that there are different roles that are better suited to the two genders. No it's much more than that. A certain energy, a dynamic, is necessary for building a home. This energy is only present when two people are together in harmony.

When two people work together, and we don't mean merely that they don't fight. Two people can live together, not fight, and still not be "together". When two people live together, and encourage each other, support each other, whether in words or in actions – great things can be accomplished.

USE THE "W" WORD

They say that in order to change from "Me" to "We", everything needs to be turned upside down… Some people find it extremely difficult to use the "W" word – we. Instead, it's "me and you" or "you and me" – everything

but *we*, everything but *us*. In marriage, it's not "*I* need to take care of this" or "Can *you* take care of this for *me*". No, it's "*We* need to take care of this", that's all. It's very important in marriage, to be together, to accept responsibility for each other.

Now, this doesn't mean that one drinks "because *we* are thirsty". No, you're thirsty and your husband is thirsty. But when the household is involved, it is *our* problem.

AMALGAMATING GENDER AGENDAS

I was just dealing with a couple who came to me with *shalom bayis* difficulties. She wanted to know "Why *you* don't help *me* for Yom Tov" and he said that *he* had built the *sukkah*. She replied "Well, that's *your* sukkah, but *you* didn't do anything for *me* for *yom tov*".

Of course men and women have different natures and different roles. But when it comes to Sukkos, *the family* needs a sukkah. When it comes to Pesach, *the family* needs to go shopping and have a kosher kitchen. *Our* child needs to be taken care of. Yes, most of the time your wife takes care of the baby, but that doesn't make it any less your responsibility.

OUR SEPARATE BANK ACCOUNTS

Regarding the *dor haflagah* the *passuk* tells us that Hashem was *kaveyachol* worried ועתה לא יבצר מהם – "Since they are together in unity, nothing will be impossible for them"!

If we want to reach that stage where we can accomplish all that we wish, we must learn to live together in harmony. To be happy, to build a home, to raise children, these are all great goals, but one must learn to live in harmony in order to accomplish them.

Someone once gave a speech where he explained how to resolve all *shalom bayis* issues. Since most issues develop through disagreements about spending, he said, therefore the husband and wife should share one bank account and pool their money. This way there's no "*You* used *my* money for X but *you* won't let *me* use *your* money for Y" etc. And all marital financial issues are solved! Brilliant.

Except that sometimes the quarrels originate when there's one bank account and both spouses see exactly where everyone's money is going. "This is what you're spending so much money on?" Sometimes it's better for a couple to keep their money separate, every couple must do what works for them. But at the root of this all is the question: Is it "me" and "you", or is it "us"? That's what it boils down to. Because if it's *our* money and *our* sheitel and *our* parking ticket, most of the squabbles simply disappear, whether there's one bank account or six.

WE ARE THE PROBLEM

It's not *your* sukkah, *your* kitchen, *your* responsibility. It's *our* home, and *we* work together to have a successful home.

And I'll share something else with you. Sometimes a couple runs into problems, but going for therapy is very difficult, because they have two different problems. Her problem is that "*He*'s making my life miserable", and his problem is that "*She*'*s* making my life miserable". So how can one therapist possibly help with two different issues? If however, you come to a therapist and say that "we" have a problem – now you've said something! Now we can try to tackle the issue. But if you can't even agree on the problem, how can you possibly get help?

CHINUCH: DAD'S HOMEWORK

Let's move on to the topic of raising children. So much can be accomplished when the parents work together with their children as a team, when the parents guide their children to

contributing their part to the family. But how much conflict is created when the "me" and "you" make their appearance. "Totty and I invest so much in you, the least you can do"…

Even doing homework with a child can bring up this negative mode "*I'm* very unhappy with the way *you're* doing it". Or "Why aren't *you* up to par with this yet"? The "me-you" method introduces a negative feeling to the relationship dynamic and defeats the purpose. If you want to live *together* with people you have to make it about *us* and leave "me-you" at the door. When a child feels that his parents are on the same page as him, and it's not "us against them" – *we're* doing homework *together*, much more can be accomplished.

BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT I SAID

This can be used in transmitting Yiddishkeit as well. Sometimes parents get annoyed with their children when they challenge an element of religious observance and the knee-jerk reaction is "Because I said so". When a child hears that, all he hears is "I don't care what you want or think, only what I say is important and relevant". It then turns into a personal fight.

It would be so much wiser for the parent to identify with the child's challenge. "I know it's difficult to sit still during Birkas Hamazon, it's so long! But this is what we have to do. We enjoyed our food, now we say birkas hamazon respectfully". By using We, and agreeing with the child, it is so much easier to make an impact, and for our voices to be heard.

When a child feels a pressure to succeed because he needs his father to be proud of him, it is just that – "a pressure". However if a father makes his child feel that it's *our* success, the child is excited to be successful along with his father. Instead of a hierarchy it's a team. And that's what our lesson for today is: Be a team player and watch your relationships flower.

-Q&A-

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

Question: I'm trying to get more help at home. My husband isn't mean or inconsiderate, but he seems to just never get around to it. On Shabbos and Yom Tov when he's finally home, he needs to enjoy his vacation. Getting cleaning help is not an option for us. What can I do?

Answer: I didn't really receive enough details in this question to provide a detailed answer, but I'll say the following: When you want something from someone else most people think that there are only two options; either you insist on it and don't take no for an answer, or – you do take no for an answer and remain without whatever it is that you wanted.

But that is incorrect. There are actually more options. It's not just passive or aggressive. You can also be assertive, stating and reiterating your needs until they are met. This needs to be done in a sensitive manner, ensuring that you're not belittling or too demanding. Simply stating your needs and clarifying them can do wonders.

Consistently being assertive, repeating your message while being sensitive to the other person, will probably get you what you need. If you're not getting what you need, you are probably either being

very demanding and critical, or you're simply not being assertive enough, and the other party doesn't even know what you need.

If you want something to happen, make it happen. In an assertive way, in a consistent way, and with kindness. Don't be ashamed to ask for what you need. And be sure not to ruin your chances by being overly negative. There is a way to get whatever you want done, there's a way to make things happen, with positive energy and good feeling. [See also *parshas vayigash* for a longer discussion]

Question: During a conversation with my teenager, I goofed up; I said something wrong and embarrassed him. He was very upset and we had a bit of a confrontation. By now, I'm ready to admit that I was wrong. How do I apologize to him without losing my authority as the father and the leader?

Answer: Many people are confused about "apologies" so I'll use this question as an opportunity to elaborate. There a few common pitfalls people run into while trying to apologize, so we'll go through them briefly.

1. Don't explain: There's no need to explain why you're really right or even why *he's* really right. If you want to apologize, do simply that, apologize. Don't embroil yourself in a fresh conflict about "this time" and "the other times", "I was wrong and I'm sorry". That's all.

2. Don't generalize: "I feel so bad, I'm a terrible father". We're not discussing *you* right now, and certainly not your parenting skills. We're apologizing for a specific case; bring up the case and apologize for it. Don't give your son a chance to attack you.

Mistakes are universal. Everyone understands it if you made a mistake and you own up to it. So if you keep your apology clean and to the point, generally you will be successful.

What if your son doesn't want to accept the apology and tries to bring up "that other time"? Don't be taken by his bait! Don't get involved in a new conflict. Say "I'm sorry that you feel that way" and cut it short. You did your part, now move on.

Stick to your point, admit your mistake, and it's enough. Even if your son doesn't appear to accept your apology, you can be sure that he's quite happy to hear that you made a mistake. You apologized, and you're a success.

In the zechus of us working to live together in harmony, may Hashem help that לא יבצר מהם *we should be helped in all inyanim, amen.*