

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# Torah Lessons for the Home

## TAKING IT THE RIGHT WAY

This week's *parshah* begins with Hashem telling Moshe Rabbeinu that every single member of the Jewish People is to give a donation toward the building of the Mishkan. The *passuk* states, "*Veyikchu-Li trumah*—And they shall take for Me an offering," and Rashi explains the inclusion of "for Me" as Hashem's instruction that donations be "dedicated to My name." After all, we can't actually give anything to Hashem, as everything already belongs to Him.

The *sefer Teshuos Chein* recounts an exchange between Harav Shmuel Kaminker *ztz"l* and the Baal Shem Tov, who noted that *tzedakah* can be given even with ulterior motives, as the main objective is ensuring that the poor man has his needs provided for. Based on that, R' Shmuel provided an additional interpretation of Rashi's words, where it is the "*veyikchu*," the taking and not the giving, that should be *Lishmi*, *leshem Shamayim*. This is achieved by the recipient of *tzedakah* using the money only for the purposes for which it was intended — not to buy luxuries, but to purchase food and other necessities.

The issue of how to give and receive is one that we encounter on a daily basis, especially between husband and wife. It's very common in relationships for friction to arise when one person gives and the other complains that "it's not what I wanted" or "you didn't give it the right way." What's less common is couples figuring out what the real problem is and learning how to approach such issues in a constructive way.

No one can "make" another person do things for us exactly the way we want. And even if we could, what gives us the right to decide how another person should behave? If the other person is doing the best he can but it doesn't measure up to our expectations who's to say that he is required to do more? And perhaps "more" or "better" won't even help, because the reason why he doesn't measure up in our eyes is an issue that *we* have, not something *he's* doing wrong.

This doesn't mean that we have to resign ourselves to being chronically dissatisfied with whatever we're receiving in a relationship, or that we have to take the blame every time there's a difference of opinion. It does mean that we have to know how to react to what we are given. Gratitude should always be the initial reaction, regardless of our interpretation of the other person's motives. And even if they didn't manage to give "correctly," we can still receive "correctly," as the Baal Shem Tov explains.

When you learn to accept what people offer you with grace, you'll often find that *later* (at an appropriate moment) you'll have the opportunity, with kindness and sensitivity, to introduce the idea of doing things differently. Not because the other person "should," but because "it would mean so much to me." We should not try to manipulate others into giving us what we want. But what both people in a healthy relationship really do want is to learn how to give and receive in the best possible way, and when both are honest about their feelings, the result will *be'ezras Hashem* be a manifestation of *veyikchu Li terumah*, building our own *mishkan me'at*, with the presence of the Shechinah in our homes.

This week's essay is dedicated

לזכר נשמת
מרן ראש הישיבה
הרב יהושע דוד ב"ר שלום
פוברסקי ז"ל
ר"י פונוביזש ב"ב
נלב"ע ו' אדר תשנ"ט לפ"ק

By a Talmid

Parshas
**Terumah**
VOL. 6 | ISSUE 18




**Dear Rabbi Gruen, thank you for all your *shiurim* on TorahAnytime.com. I listen to them in both Yiddish and English!**

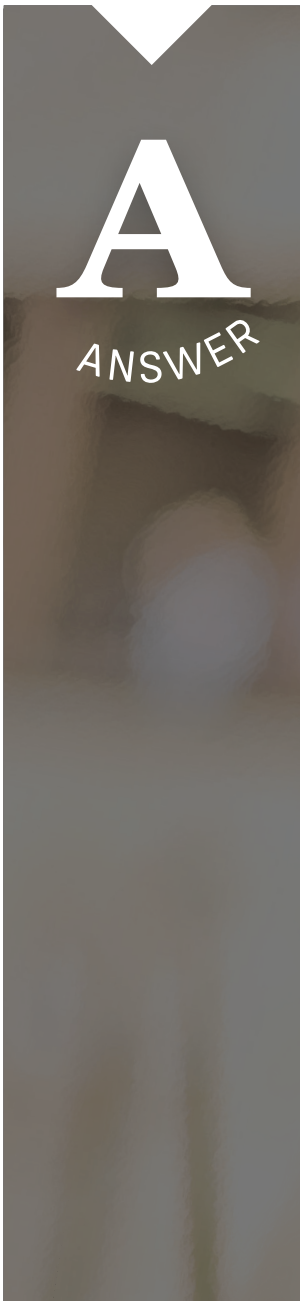
**I have a question I would like your advice on.**

**I would say that I have amazing *shalom bayis* — believe it or not, my wife and I hardly argue at all. All the same, sometimes when I get home and I didn't buy exactly what my wife had in mind when she asked me to pick it up, the way she speaks to me really bothers me.**

**She'll tell me, "I'll teach you how to do things right — when you go shopping, you have to do it like this..." I've told her that I don't like it when she tries to "teach" me things, and that she could just tell me what she thinks and I'll listen, but I don't like being "taught" stuff. But she gets upset and says, "What, only people on TorahAnytime can teach you? Why not me?"**

**What would you advise me?**

**Thank you**




I'd like to begin by complimenting the writer of this question on the positive way in which he frames the issue he's asking about. Even though he is seeking help on a certain problem, he introduces the question by stressing that he has "amazing *shalom bayis*." If only more people would be so wise when confronting a problem, and realize that it doesn't define their situation as a whole.

Unfortunately, many people in similar situations automatically, even instinctively, start seeing the negative wherever they look. Sometimes they dredge up ancient incidents to justify their anger and frustration ("You're acting just like you did last year, when you..."). Sometimes they compare their spouse to others ("Why can't you keep things as clean as my mother does?). And sometimes they just forget there's anything positive in their marriage at all.

Certainly every marriage has its share of challenges. However, the way we look at the marriage as a whole makes a huge difference when it comes to approaching individual problems. If the background to the problem is "we have amazing *shalom bayis*," then the atmosphere of positivity will make it much easier to resolve things. If the background is, "This just isn't working — here's another example of why it's all wrong," then anyone can understand that solving things is going to be much more of an uphill struggle.

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A more cynical reader might be thinking, "Yes, but this couple is exceptional. The husband writes that he and his wife hardly ever argue. It's easy for him to say he has amazing *shalom bayis*." A lot of people make the mistake of thinking this way — thinking that *shalom bayis* is only possible in homes where no one ever argues. That's not the case. It's certainly wonderful when a couple can agree on almost everything, and definitely unusual as well. But there's nothing actually wrong with disagreeing (that is, arguing...) as long as it's done the right way.

Disagreeing in a way that doesn't destroy the harmony in the home means that husband and wife treat their conflicting opinions with mutual respect. They allow each other to be individuals and neither tries to dominate the other with their "correct" approach. They also take great care to express themselves in a kind and sensitive manner, and to reach a mutually acceptable solution.

When spouses treat each other with respect, the whole picture can change. Much of creating *shalom bayis* is about what you *decide* to see and say. Making up your mind to see and focus on the good really does do a lot for you and your marriage. Notice the good and say how good it is — and only then address whatever you feel can or should be addressed.

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A certain Yid once went to see the Satmar Rebbe, the Beirach Moshe *ztz"l,* complaining about his marriage. "Rebbe, it's so difficult, I don't have *shalom bayis*, I can't go on like this anymore," he moaned.

The Rebbe commiserated, and then added, "You know, it's not just your marriage, it's the same everywhere. No one has *shalom bayis*." The Yid visibly cheered up. After all, *tzaras rabbim*...

However, a week later, he was back at the Rebbe's home. "Rebbe, it's not true!" he protested. "I asked all my friends, and they told me that they *do* have *shalom bayis*! They're all happily married!"

"Ah..." said the Rebbe. "That's what they're saying, is it? So you go ahead and say the same thing!"

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Now, issues don't generally disappear just because we look at them differently. However, if we've already tried to solve them numerous times without success, changing our approach is only sensible.

In this particular situation, both husband and wife are trying to create a positive solution for both of them, but the way in which they are communicating their feelings seems to be taking them further from their goal. The husband is frustrated by being "taught" things; the wife is frustrated by not getting what she wants. Both of their feelings are understandable.

It's very common for a person not to enjoy being told what to do, and to instinctively resist the "advice" of others if it's not given tactfully and with consideration. Sometimes, in our impatience, we favor a direct approach and just want to tell the other person what they should be doing instead, hoping to get the desired result instantly. It doesn't work, of course.

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A *chassid* once came to the Baal Hatanya, who immediately perceived that the man needed to have his way of thinking straightened out. The *chassid* was a wagon driver, and the Baal Hatanya complimented his horses and then asked, "What should a person look for when buying horses?"

"The most important thing with horses," the wagon driver replied, "is for them to be swift. That way, you get to your destination much faster."

"True," said the Baal Hatanya. "But what if the horses are taking you to the wrong place? If that happens, then it will end up taking you much longer to get where you want to go."

"In that case, the driver has to quickly figure out that he's going the wrong way, and correct his course," said the wagon driver.

"Ah... he has to figure it out and correct his course..." mused the Baal Hatanya, and the wagon driver got the hint.

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The wagon driver got the message — but then, aside from being delivered gently, it was delivered by the Baal Hatanya. What if your wife isn't the Baal Hatanya? What if she doesn't know how to help you feel good about thinking or doing things differently? Does that give you the right to disregard what she's saying? The Mishnah tells us that someone who "learns from everyone" is a *chacham*, and not everyone can be a *chacham*. Most people have a hard time taking advice from anyone, even from Rebbes, but only a fool refuses to take any advice whatsoever. But most of us are somewhere in the middle, and can benefit from learning both how to give advice and how to receive it.

It's worth considering who are the people we are willing to listen to. They usually fall into one of several categories. The advice of a very wise person is easier to heed. If someone treats us with respect, it's also easier to listen and internalize. On the other hand, if the other person has a clear agenda and they're only interested in getting us to toe the line for their own reasons, it's understandable if we resist.

Similarly, if the person asking us to change our ways explains why, without being judgmental or critical, we're more likely to listen. And if they are open to hearing our side of the story, that makes a huge difference.

My mother, the esteemed and well-known veteran *mechaneches* "Morah Rochel," relates a story that illustrates this point well. Years ago, when she was principal of a certain school, there was a young boy who was acting inappropriately and constantly needed to be put in his place. Years after she left that school, this child was thrown out of school for his intolerable behavior. His parents tried to speak to him but to no avail. They tried getting him to speak to someone but he refused to cooperate. Finally, he approached his parents and said he was willing to speak to someone. They were shocked when he said it was his old principal Morah Rochel herself. After my mother was done "teaching him," she asked: Why did you say that you would only listen to me? and the boy replied: "Because *you* listen to *me*."

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Another key to productive communication is not insisting on being right. This is actually part of listening with

respect, because a person who has to be right will never truly be able to validate another person's point of view. If you're only listening to someone in order to go through the motions and you've already made up your mind about the result you want, expect the other person to sense your lack of authenticity and respond accordingly.

In a marriage, right and wrong must take second place to creating harmony. This often applies even when the right and wrong are clear, but the truth is that in most cases, no one really knows what's right or wrong. It's a matter of feelings, and the feelings of both spouses are usually equally valid.

This is why, when introducing a problematic issue, the first thing to do is to acknowledge this and stress that it isn't a battle. Your wife isn't trying to hurt your feelings and you aren't trying to hurt hers. Make this clear: "I know you have good intentions when you tell me how to do the shopping. We both want to get this right." Then move on to solving the problem. Don't dig up the past ("You keep on telling me..." "You never listen to what I say...").

When you treat your spouse's feelings with respect, you don't have to be afraid of validating or justifying your own feelings as well. There are many reasons why you may feel upset about someone "teaching" you things, and you don't have to justify the way you feel, just as you don't have to pressure your wife to justify the way she feels about things either.

For instance, a person who lacks self-confidence will have a harder time taking advice. Maybe the way your wife addresses you brings back painful memories from your past. It doesn't matter. All you have to say to your wife is, "I know I'm sensitive on this point. It's not necessarily your fault. I would really appreciate it if you could tell me things that you'd like me to change as 'suggestions' or 'requests' rather than 'teaching' me. I guess this wording really irritates me for some reason, and I really want to be able to accept your message better. Thank you for understanding."



Being vulnerable and admitting that certain phrases jolt our self-confidence isn't always easy, but it does usually improve communication and relationship issues.

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What happens if things don't improve, and your wife continues to try and "teach" you the right way to go about things? You can certainly keep asking her to phrase things differently, but you do also have to accept that just as you're not perfect even though you're trying, neither is she.

You tried to buy what she asked you for, but you didn't get it right and she's not happy about it. You tried to get her to understand that you don't have an easy time responding well when she tries to "teach" you what to do, and for whatever reason, she didn't get it. Sometimes, saying things more forcefully or in a different way can help, but at some point you may realize that things aren't changing. It's then that you have the choice to turn it into a huge issue and "teach her" that this way of talking won't work with you... or you can decide to let it go.

(I would not necessarily recommend this in a situation where the issue is serious and damages the relationship. However, it's important to recognize the difference between a troubling issue that is essentially one of preference, and one that is truly terrible and unacceptable.) As hard as it may be, you can actually thank your wife for her guidance. "I appreciate it — I tried to do things the way you wanted, and it doesn't come naturally to me. Thanks for the advice, and I'll try to get it right next time." Who knows — maybe when your wife senses your willingness to listen, she may become more willing and capable of listening to you as well, when you ask her to phrase her advice differently. She also may not, but that just gives you the opportunity to practice "receiving correctly," *Lishmi*—for Hashem's sake, because He wants each of us to do our part in building a *mishkan me'at*, a sanctuary for His presence, in our homes.

## **TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME**: TERUMAH 5784

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