Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Ki Seitzei 5780 }

The Need for Space

Two Ways

In this week's Parsha, the Torah teaches us that if someone owes you money, you may collect collateral from them. However, *lo savo el beiso laavot avoto*, you must refrain from going inside their homes to pick it up. You need to wait outside their door until they bring it out to you.

Some would say, "I have it coming to me, so I might as well just go and get what's rightfully mine." But that's not what the *passuk* teaches us. Even if you are fully entitled to receive that which you came to collect, you should still wait patiently from afar, without invading your debtor's personal space.

We Must Initiate

We are not required to sit at home and wait for our debts to collect themselves. The Torah clearly tells us that we need to go over to our debtor's house to ask him for payment. We just need to make sure that we let them give it to us of their own volition.

There's a joke about a fellow named Mechel, an old Horkichover chossid. Mechel was was overjoyed when he heard that the new Horkichover zemiros had been published. He was excited to finally be able to sing all the old niggunim and practice the exact minhagim of his beloved Rebbe. After singing Kol Mekadesh, from his new zemiros, he saw a note informing the reader that the Rebbe would then sit and wait, and the fish would be brought in. A fiery chossid, he decided to do just as the Rebbe did. And he's been waiting ever since.

Sometimes we need to initiate the action, and then the other party will come towards us. This reality exists in our relationship with Hashem, as well. *Ani l'doidi* – I to my beloved; we make our way towards Hashem, and then *v'Dodi li* – Hashem comes towards us. It goes the opposite way as well. *Hashiveinu Hashem eilecha* – we ask of Hashem to return to us, *venashuva* – and we will return to Him.

The Long Way and the Short Way

This idea comes into play in our relationships as well.

When we want something from our spouse, we can choose to either wait for them to do it on their own, ask it of them and allow them to agree on their own, or we can push the issue and force

them into agreement. Each of these approaches might yield results, but they will be very different from each other.

Waiting till someone does something on their own can be great, and you can and should be very appreciative when someone understands and cares about your needs on their own. But if that doesn't happen, you might be better off asking, to avoid the inevitable disappointment and resentment that something important to you didn't materialize. So initiating, hinting and even asking nicely for something is great. That's what communication is about.

But when you choke your spouse into compliance, you might end up getting what you want. You might even get it faster! But it would be a classic example of the shorter long route. While your spouse may go along with your plan, or give you what you asked for, it will be done with loads of resentment and many hard feelings. It might also be quite short lived, as they quickly become disenchanted with robotically doing your bidding.

If, on the other hand, you broach the subject, you open the discussion, and allow your spouse to get a word in edgewise or come up with an idea themselves, you might be surprised by how much more gladly they will do the kindness. What's more, they will want to keep doing it for much longer because after all, it was their own idea or contribution.

Meet in the Middle

People generally need their space, some more than others. There are people who might actually want you to move away from them physically, while for others it might mean that when you pitch an idea you need to let it fester without bringing it up again for a while. You need to give them a chance to come to their own conclusions and decisions.

Sometimes even when you just tell your spouse precisely what you want and how you want it, they feel backed into a corner. To them it's either they agree with you completely, or they have to fight you on this.

If you give them an open ended statement instead, like , "I would appreciate it if you…" or "I'd like to…" and let your spouse try to help you out, there's a good chance that they will come up with the exact same idea that you were about to propose. Even if the idea is not perfectly suitable to you, perhaps it's another angle that you might consider and then you can both find a satisfactory compromise?

Instead of telling them "I can only do it right now" or "We can only go today", try telling them, "I will be available anywhere in the next hour. Let me know when you're ready." Or "I'll be available Tuesday afternoon and Thursday morning. Tell me what time works best for you." Because they get to make their own choice, they might be much happier accommodating your needs, and you will both be satisfied.

A Possible Reason

You might sometimes wonder why your husband or wife is dragging their feet and not doing what you asked them to, even if it's really not such a difficult request. Maybe it's a case of you looking over your shoulder too much. I am referring to the famous fable of the fellow who complained that even though he's been escaping honor for years he doesn't see any sign of it pursuing him. He had learned that "*Whoever runs away from honor, honor runs after him*" and still he has been

so terribly unsuccessful in garnering some recognition! He was gently made aware that perhaps if he will stop looking over his shoulder so much, then honor will indeed start following him around.

Maybe you're standing over your spouse too much, or calling them every half hour, or mentioning it every five minutes, and they just feel like you're suffocating them! Very often, they don't even know exactly what's bothering them, but your incessant badgering is building up this inexplicable resistance in them and they'd just rather *not*.

A man once complained to me that he can't get his wife to do something that both of them knew she needed to do. He said he even went so far as to give her an ultimatum. "Until you do X, we are not going to Y." Still, despite all his "encouragement", she kept finding excuses why she couldn't do it. Per my suggestion, he stopped talking about it and simply let it go. Shockingly, within a matter of days, she gladly did what she needed to do and everyone was happy. I still had some work convincing the husband that his wife complied *because* of his taking a step back, not *despite* of it.

Obviously, I am in no way trying to condone anyone for not doing what they are supposed to be doing. Justifying and rationalizing your not taking someone else seriously because they didn't yet read this essay is definitely not the right way to do things. This is just to demonstrate how sometimes you might wonder what the reason for someone shirking their responsibilities or refusing to do *you* a favor is. The answer is you. You might be the reason, because you are crowding them out of their space and not giving them a chance to process your request and to willfully comply.

The Upside

Another advantage to letting your spouse come to their own conclusions or help you on their own time, is that then they can feel like they were of assistance to you. If you tell them what you want outright, and then keep insisting they do it at that very moment, it feels like a chore. Nobody feels noble when completing a chore. Additionally, you will have no reason to be thankful because they're just doing what they were supposed to!

When they are given the time and the space to grant you your wish, they do so with a full heart and then you can feel true appreciation towards them for being so kind to you.

Of course, in the event of a spouse doing something that causes you pain, you must put an immediate stop to it and not wait for them to get the hint or come to their own conclusions.

As a whole, when you say what you want once, or allow your spouse to helpfully suggest a way for both of you to be happy, it might be the longer way, but it will surely be the better and more gratifying way.

Chinuch: Don't Hover

As parents, our job is to raise our children on the right path, teach them how to behave, and compliment them when they do things right. But we also need to give them the space and the time to come to their own realizations. When we stand over them or push them into doing what we want, it will build up resistance in them. Eventually, when we will be out of sight, they will be more than happy to defy our wishes.

If we throw the ball into their court, and allow them to come up with a way to do what we would like them to, it will put them in control and motivate them to please us. For example, if you would like to learn with your son during Bein Hazmanim, instead of telling him "I want to learn with you every day at 1PM", ask him, "I'd like to learn with you every day. What time would be good for you?". When he's the one who calls the shots, he will be a much more willing participant.

Don't forget to compliment them when they make a good choice, and give them the space to take a day off here and there when they feel it's too much.



Q&A

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



QUESTION:

My newly married child is making poor decisions that I know will cost him dearly. When I try telling him what I think, he pushes me off and tells me it's none of my business and I should let him make his own mistakes. It's very hard for me to watch him doing that. What can I do?

ANSWER:

There are some married kids who will be interested in hearing your opinion and won't mind when you tell them what to do. In such a case, you might try suggesting to your child that what he's currently doing is a bad idea and he will come to regret it.

If you don't know if your child is interested in your guidance, you can try to broach the subject very vaguely and gently and see how he reacts.

But if the child clearly tells you that they're not interested in what you have to say on the matter, then there's nothing you can do and nobody you can send to talk sense into him. You have no choice but to take a step back and let them make their own mistakes and learn from them.

You might be pleasantly surprised when, after unplugging from the situation, you child will be the one coming to *you* for advice. If they do, don't scare them away by shoving their failures in their face and telling them "I told you so". Just kindly suggest what you feel is the right thing for them to do. You might also consider referring them to someone who is either more knowledgable or even just less emotionally involved as you are, who can help more objectively that you can.

Ultimately, there is nothing we can do to prevent our married children from making poor decisions. Trying to butt into their lives or sending people to check on them will be counterproductive and only drive them farther away from you.

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