Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Bechukosai |

Building Others

The Great Co-signer

At the beginning of our parsha we learn אם בחקתי תלכו ואת מצותי תשמרו ועשיתם אתם, Hashem is asking us to walk in his ways, keep his mitzvos... and do them. Is the *possuk* simply being redundant? Or perhaps there is a lesson we can learn here?

The literal translation of the words ועשיתם אותם, is and "make them". Perhaps this *possuk* gives us a practical method for building others, and for re'making them' as servants of Hashem. If you want to influence other people in Avodas Hashem, the first step is to walk in His ways and keep His mitzvos. By doing so, we will hopefully be able to build others. We can only build others by first building ourselves.

In a marriage we tend to get stuck on 'educating' our spouse, and teaching him 'the truth' with lofty intentions. Devoiry* was upset when Shimon* came back from the Technology Awareness event and shared that he was *mikabeil* not to check his phone before davening. She had wanted him to make their home completely internet free!

Chaim* was unhappy when Tamar* returned from the Shmiras Halashon event having accepted upon herself to be more careful with her speech at work. He had wanted her to stop gossiping with her sisters in the evenings! Often we get stuck on matters that affect our image; it's not necessarily so much about *l'shem shomayim* as we pretend. Isn't it great when you have Hashem co-signing your agenda? Are we as concerned about the *gashmiyus* of our relatives as we pretend to be about their *ruchniyus*?

The Depressed Couple

I heard the following story from a noted *mashpia*: Yitzchok* grew up in a very chassidishe family, and so, before his marriage to Leah*, it was agreed that she would adopt the head covering traditionally worn by female members of Yitzchok's family. A couple of months went by and Leah slowly began withdrawing. She confided to Yitzchok that her headcovering felt unnatural and was causing her a lot of stress. She slowly began falling into a depression. After a while, she stopped leaving her home and in addition stopped eating. At this point Yitzchok gave in and decided that it's preferable to have a wife who just wears a regular *sheitel* but is functioning normally.

Leah joyfully swapped to her original head covering and life went back to normal. After a few weeks a gnawing feeling

began to come over Yitzchok. It bothered him that his wife should be seen as the outcast of the family, and besides, didn't *Hashem* expect more from his wife? He consulted with this *mashpia* who gave him a solution. "You can begin withdrawing, become very cold and silent, then stop leaving home, and eventually stop eating! Then your wife will be forced to switch back"! "But I'm not ready to do *that*" Yitzchok protested. "Ah," said his adviser, "but your wife was. And that's the difference. It really bothered her to her core, whereas for you it is only a superficial problem".

Encouraging a Choice

The question we need to ask is: How important is this really? Is it really a matter of my extreme piety or is something else at play here? Is my spouse's yiddishkeit really my *achrayus*? Yes, there's a mitzvah of *Hochacha*, I'm not saying you can't state your preference. You can ask your rabbi what to say and how to say it, but at the end of the day everyone has their own *bechira* and your spouse is not your responsibility.

There is a well known vort on the *medrash* that an *isha kesheirah* follows her husband and is *osah retzon baalah*. The explanation given is that she 'makes' his *ratzon*, she gets him to actually want the right thing. You can't choose for your husband, he has his own *bechira*; the most you can do is encourage him.

Sometimes it's your obsession with your husband changing that creates pressure and holds him back from making that change you actually want to see. The fact that you keep 'hinting' at what you want, makes him naturally resist that change.

The Rambam writes *l'halacha* that "Just as it is a mitzvah to give mussar that will be heeded, it is a mitzvah to keep silent about something that would not be heeded". Of course, certain things *are* your business, they affect the home, or you personally, but there's a way of saying it.

The same applies to children, אם בחקתי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמורו, that's when you can expect to affect real change, ועשיתם אותם. If you don't teach your son anything about davening, but you daven seriously, there is a much greater chance that he will approach davening seriously than if you give him a hundred lectures about davening but fail to practice what you preach.

We Each Have Our Own Challenges

This is an issue that affects many people, and I will often hear someone say: "But *this* is so basic and so fundamental. How can I turn a blind eye to this?" We must recognize, however, that everyone has their own *nisyonos* and their own *bechira*. Your wife has some complaints about you that *she* thinks are basic and fundamental. We each have our own challenges, and often your spouse feels that you are judging her or simply undermining her individual challenge just because you can't relate to it. You can only do your best in trying to point these issues out to your spouse, but don't take the issue personally. At the end of the day, praising your spouse for what he is doing right, is what will bring out the best in him.

It's also important to remember that most often, criticizing simply doesn't work. את מצוותי תשמורו ועשיתם אותם is not a guarantee, it's simply taking care of your own side of the road. Forget about your spouse and what he is not supposed to be doing to you – you're actually supposed to be taking care of yourself, it's about you *not* taking care of him/her.

The Season of Respecting Others

Now during the days of *sefirah* we all mourn the disciples of Rabbi Akiva who were punished because they did not adequately respect each other. Can it be that Rabbi Akiva's own talmidim forgot his great rule of ואהבת לרעך כמוך? It cannot be. They certainly loved and respected one another. However because they felt such a great responsibility for one another, they told

each other off when they saw something they felt wasn't right. This was considered a lack of respect for their fellow *talmidei chachomim*.

Last week it was Lag B'omer and we all learned the story of how Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elozor came out of the cave and began burning up people whom they felt were engaging in mundane pursuits. They couldn't understand how a person could ignore the fundamental truth that it's only the next world that counts. "Get back into the cave" Hashem said to them. "Don't destroy My world!" After another twelve months Rabbi Elozor burned wherever he looked but Rabbi Shimon reinstated it. When he saw an old Jew carrying hadassim, he respected him for that. Our avodah in these days is to begin seeing the good in others and avoid being critical of others.

Chinuch: Lead by Example

In parenting, there are many sources to this idea. Seforim explain חנוך לנער על פי דרכו, that it means according to the father's *derech*. What is the *derech* you choose? Is it a *derech* of את מצוותי תשמורו? Only then will you be a success. Telling your child what he is supposed to be doing, and even adding that that's what you did when you were young, has very little meaning to him. You can't yell at your son from the comfort of your bed that Shabbos afternoons are for learning. We have to teach by example.

We tend to be very overprotective of our children. Who hasn't heard of the "Jewish Mother"? But in order to be effective parents we need to step back a bit and allow our children to grow with their own *bechira* in their own *nisyonos*. The sefer Kedushas Aharon says that א'ם ב'חקתי ת'לכו ו'את is roshei teivos אבו"ת, fathers. And the passuk continues מ'צותי ת'שמרו ו'עשיתם א'ותם' which is the roshei teivos of אמו"ת, mothers. If we as fathers and mothers take the message of this *passuk* to heart and parent by example we will be *zoche* to children who follow in the Torah's ways.

-Q&A-

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

Question: Our son cut off all contact with us completely. No matter what we try we can't even get him to the table. It's a very painful situation. Is there anything you would suggest for us?

Answer: Not everyone is dealing with such an extreme situation of a son whom you love dearly who cuts off contact with you. But most of us can relate to this question at some level. We may have inadvertently hurt a relative or a colleague and they are now shutting us out completely, or sometimes it may even be a spouse to a certain degree. I think that if we want to mend such a relationship and make it whole again it requires some humility on our part.

Usually when someone cuts off contact with us, it comes from a feeling of not being able to measure up to the demands of the relationship. It could be that according to this person's perception, you are being too demanding, and it's just way too much trouble to deal with you. I think the way to move ahead is to send a clear message that you are ready to reopen communication, completely on your son's terms. Tell him that you acknowledge your past mistakes and are willing to accept his feedback and improve the situation. Bez"h you will be able to rekindle your relationship. It may take time and patience but slowly you should be able to see an improvement.

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