Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Devarim 5780 }

Constructive Criticism

Our Responsibility

In Parshas Devarim Moshe Rabbeinu reprimands Klal Yisrael for their misdeeds and teaches them how to behave al pi Torah. We learn from this that when we see someone commit a sin, we have an obligation to rebuke them for it.

The Gemara teaches us that if a man sees someone do an aveirah and he doesn't rebuke him, it's as if he committed the sin himself. Why is that? Because we each have a responsibility to each other. Kol yisrael areivim. We are each others' guarantors. If we allow a sin to go by unmentioned, it's as if we are silently condoning the action, and like we did it ourselves.

BUT.

The only time there is an obligation to tell someone off for doing something wrong, is if that action is clearly contrary to the Torah or against halacha. If the action is only contrary to middas chassidus, or a personal stringency that we took upon ourselves, then not only do we not have a responsibility to rebuke them, it's actually wrong to do so!

The Real Reason

In his sefer Yesod HaEmunah, Rav Boruch'l Kossover z"l adds some depth to this idea. The ideal reason to give someone mussar is because we don't want to be punished for standing idly by while someone else is committing a sin. As mentioned, it is our responsibility to reprimand them – in a kind and loving manner, of course.

But when you think that someone should, for example, daven with more kavanah or sing zemiros with greater passion, and you tell them off for not doing so, it is not because you're trying to protect yourself from being held responsible. After all, this is not a halachic transgression and nobody is being punished for it. So it follows that the only reason you are telling this person off is because you want to show off your own level of zehirus. Instead of doing something admirable, you're engaging in a form of self-aggrandizement.

In short, you can only demand from those around you that which is demanded in the Torah. Any additional stringencies or behaviors are out of your scope of responsibility.

The Heart of the Matter

Very often we would like it if our spouse could do something in a way we deem "better" or "frummer". It's even possible that we do it ourselves. While it's a very beautiful aspiration, and we can certainly talk about the reasons we feel it's nice and tell our spouse how much we

will appreciate if they do it too, it's absolutely wrong to demand it of them. You can't require your husband to shuckel more when he davens much like he can't ask of you to shed tears by the Shabbos candles. When we try to shove frumkeit or piety down another's throat, it rarely inspires them to emulate you. The more common reaction is resistance and resentment.

When you think about it, the reason you do something or like something, is because in your heart you feel this passion and desire to serve Hashem with more fervor or additional sacrifice. In general, avodah is about the heart and feelings. It's not possible to make someone feel something! The best you will accomplish is that they will do it just to please you, with zero conviction. What's such an action worth without the emotion and feeling?

On their Own Path

Many of us belong to a certain sect or are members in a specific shul. We might have landed there because our fathers did it too, or we might have chosen that path ourselves. It's a beautiful thing to have a place to call our own. It only becomes a problem when we require of our entire family to do the same.

You can speak about the advantages and the benefits of your derech. You can encourage your family to follow in your footsteps. But you can't control where your children will end up. That is especially true when your child is an adult, and even more so once he's married.

You have no business ordering your married child around and telling him off for doing things that are not in keeping with your opinions or values, as long as they are within the bounds of Torah and halacha.

It often happens that our children go off on different paths than we mapped out for them. They are still Shomer Torah uMitzvos, but they choose a different rebbe, or another shul, or even a different levush! We have to remember that it's okay! Our children are not our clones! They know what we like and they're not trying to hurt us.

We might have an opinion that we feel is 1000% right, but they are grown up and they are entitled to come to their own conclusions and form their own opinions. There is no excuse for us to make them feel guilty, unwelcome, or unaccepted because of specific choices they made in life.

Your Potential

When you accept a certain stringency upon yourself, as admirable is it is, you must remember that YOU took it upon YOURSELF. Rachmana liba ba'i. The desire has to come from your heart. You can't make someone else feel the same emotions as you do.

If your family follows your footsteps and takes it upon themselves as well, that is positively amazing! Thank them for making you happy and validate their efforts, so long as you don't sideline or criticize those who don't.

The Rebbe Reb Zusha famously said that when his time comes and he will face the Heavenly Courts, they will not ask him why he wasn't Avraham Avinu. They will also not ask him why he wasn't Moshe Rabbeinu. They will ask him only why he wasn't the best Zusha that he could be. Your children and family members will not be tried for failing to live up to your standards. They will be reprimanded for not being their very best.

Family Values

When speaking about requiring of our families to adhere to our values, it's important to note that it's not always about ruchniyus. Sometimes we grow up in a family who's extremely family-oriented and we're used to "stop, drop, and roll" anytime there's a family event. Or maybe we grew up in a house where the Shabbos table was set Thursday night and nothing was done on Friday except sitting on

the couch waiting for Shabbos to arrive. These things are all beautiful and commendable, but we cannot demand that our spouse switch their entire mindset just because we would like them to.

We can tell them how much we would appreciate if they would go along with what we think is right and we can compliment them when they make the effort, but we absolutely cannot force them to do it.

Chinuch: In their Way

We all have a dream of what we would like our child to turn out to be. Maybe it's the best version of ourselves that we would have liked to grow into. Maybe it's a combination of all the wonderful qualities we notice in the people around us. But in reality, they will probably not fit the description that we have secretly determined in our minds.

When we take a moment to be fully honest with ourselves, how many of us can truthfully say that we turned out exactly like our own parents wanted us to be?

Allow your child to grow and develop in his own way. It goes without saying that it is our job to teach them and to guide them and to show them the beauty of our own path, but when we demand from them to be exactly like us it may end up being counterproductive.

Instead, you do you in the best way that you can and then there's a chance you will inspire your child to want to be exactly like you. Talk less and do more. And whatever your child decides to do, of course al pi derech haTorah, he should know with full conviction that his parents love him and support him.



Q&A



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

Question:

My children are constantly fighting, and keep coming to me to settle their disputes. I'm tired of playing judge. How can I make them stop fighting without having to figure out a way to be fair to all of them?

Answer:

It's not a parent's job to be judge and jury. When the kids come to us yelling over each other about who started it and whose toy it really is, it's very easy to get caught up in the technical details. Who's right and who's wrong? Who was I more lenient with yesterday and who had a hard day at school and will need extra attention? It's tiresome and frustrating because there really is no way to make all of them happy.

Instead of trying to even out the situation, break up the fight in a detached way. If they come to you while fighting, tell them calmly and clearly, "In this house we do not fight." Separate them if need be and wait until the tension deescalates.

Once they're not fighting anymore, you can talk to each of them separately and try to validate their feelings and arguments so that each of them feels understood. You can then try to give them the tools to handle themselves next time such a scenario comes up.

Once they see that they can't get you involved in their petty squabbles, they probably will stop coming to you for it and learn to figure it out themselves.

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