Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Shoftim |

Issues of Trust

Blind Trust

The *parsha* of *eidim* is mentioned twice in parshas Shoftim: על פי שנים עדים או שלשה עדים יומת המת - *By the word of two or three witnesses a man should be put to death*. And later on, על פי שני עדים או על פי שלשה עדים יקום דבר - *By the word of two or three witnesses the matter shall stand*.

The Torah gives a lot of trust to *eidim*. Of course Beis Din questions them first, but generally, their testimony is accepted, and people are killed based on their word alone. No one is turned down because we're not 100% sure of his honesty. If someone comes into Beis Din, that's enough; his word is accepted. We can learn a big lesson from this about how we are supposed to trust people in our personal relationships.

When we enter into a marriage we are expecting our spouse to be loyal and helpful, and we put our trust in them. Trust is one of the main ingredients in any relationship, especially marriage. This means being faithful to one another, open and honest, and not breaking the trust. You should be careful not to do anything that will cause your spouse not to trust you; "Be worthy of trust!" is a common refrain.

The Other Angle

Right now however, let's discuss this from the other side. So many difficult relationships I've seen are caused not by a breach of trust, but rather by *distrust*. Not trusting your spouse can be extremely harmful and painful. Telling your husband, "I don't trust you, I can't believe what you tell me", is very hurtful and damaging to the relationship.

Often, people say things like, 'it will take you a long time to earn my trust'. They sound macho by putting the onus on the other person. "If I can't trust you, obviously I'm the 'victim' and you're the 'perpetrator'." But that's not true! *You're* the perpetrator! Your distrust can be more damaging than anything else. It's one thing not to trust someone, but expressing it and telling them "I can't trust you" is just downright hurtful.

The whole world runs on trust. You trust police officers, bus drivers, and your babysitter. You seem to trust almost everyone! (It almost seems that the only one you don't trust is your spouse!) You trust a stranger, but someone who is your partner in life and helpmate in all your endeavors, you don't trust?! That makes no sense. Even if your wife was not *completely* open and transparent one time, eventually you have to move on, and work on rebuilding trust.

Let's Get Real

Is anyone really 100% transparent? Holding someone else to a level of honesty that you yourself can't live up to, is in itself a form of dishonesty. We're all human and we aren't always 100% open and honest in all of our dealings.

Would you want someone to say, 'I didn't pick up the phone because I wasn't really in the mood of speaking to you just then'? As much as we want someone to be totally open and transparent with us, at times it just may not be possible.

There is a certain allowance to what's normal when someone gets caught off-guard and cornered. Unfortunately, at such times very few people will respond 100% honestly. Do not judge and accuse people of lying for every 'breach in trust'. Let your expectations be reasonable and realistic.

Who Has the Issue?

Very often you're not trusting someone else because you have a 'trust issue'. This may be a result of a trust issue you encountered previously with parents, siblings, or a neighbor, and now because of an issue *you* have, you're blaming someone else - that's very hurtful.

Yehudis* appreciated Shimi*'s help in the house, and she made sure to tell him that. But his reply was very disappointing. 'I don't believe that; you don't *really* appreciate it'. A response like that is just so inappropriate and hurtful. Maybe she really did mean it, only you have a hard time believing that people actually appreciate you.

Acknowledge that you have a trust issue, and that's why it's hard for you to accept gratitude or a compliment. Don't use someone's nice gesture against them. It's your issue, and it has nothing to do with them.

Baseless Accusations

Sometimes we accuse someone of dishonesty without any basis at all. Saying, "You're just saying that, you don't really mean it" creates a barrier between you and your spouse. It's very hard to be close to someone if they tell you something, and you don't believe them.

For example, someone tells his wife, 'You mean so much to me', and she says 'If you *really* love me, then you would …' Why? You decided that if I would love you I would do xyz?! Just accept the love. At most say 'I have a trust issue, and it's hard for me to just accept what you tell me and really feel loved.'

There is another example that unfortunately comes up quite often. One spouse tells the other, 'I can't trust you with the kids, I never know what you'll do with them'. Obviously if it's a question of danger that is a different story. But usually it just means that I can't trust that you'll do everything the way *I* want. But who gave you the right to say that; are the children yours, don't you have a partner here? Why shouldn't you trust her?!

Are You Intimidating?

When Dovid* came back from an outing with his kids, he didn't mention the bathroom stop at a gas station, because he knew that Shoshi*, an overprotective and finicky mother, would never approve of a pitstop at the gas station for the kids. When she heard about it eventually, she was very upset that he had hidden it from her. However, before getting upset about his 'dishonesty', she should stop and think, *why* did he choose not to share this tidbit with me? Was he afraid of what my reaction would be?

That should give her a lot to think about. Is that healthy shalom bayis, where one spouse is afraid to be open with the other one? Is it right to be so intimidating? Accepting and showing confidence in your spouse's decisions, would generate much more openness and cooperation.

Be Respectful

Expressing a lack of trust in someone, may be just as dishonest as whatever you're blaming them for. There's honesty in not misinterpreting whatever was done, and not taking it out of proportion. In addition, many times what you're calling a lack of trust, is actually your lack of security and confidence. You're disguising your own issues in a lack of trust, which is really just a form of leverage and manipulation.

Trusting, is respectful. Even when your spouse wasn't 100% transparent, telling him that you still trust him sends a very powerful message. Adopt the attitude of not trying to come across as the more competent one, and putting your wife down. Do not hurt each by discussing the lack of trust you might be feeling.

Figure It Out Yourself

Sometimes people will say to me, 'Tell me how I can ever trust her again'. That's not helpful and really manipulative. What do you expect, that they come up with some way to prove

themselves? You're supposed to be trusting them. If you find it difficult, suggest something that will make it easier for you to trust them, and let them see if they want to do it. But the ball is not in their court. If you have a problem trusting, it's your problem.

If your husband tells you 'I don't trust you' you have to know how to put a stop to things, even if he keeps on pushing this message. A good response would be 'Wow, that really hurt me.'

'But how can I trust you if did so and so….?

'I feel I'm a trustworthy person"

'But you once said …'

'It could be I did'

'Then I can't trust you',

'It's hurtful when you say that. I'll try to do my best, but if you have a trust issue, don't try to pin it on me'.

Extreme Trust

Obviously, in extreme examples if someone is a pathological liar, continuously lying to you and/or doing dangerous things with the kids, that must be dealt with. But most often, people deserve to be trusted. The Gemara in Sanhedrin gives us an example of trust to the extreme. Someone was seen coming out of a house with a dripping knife, and a bloody corpse was found inside. If no one actually saw him kill the dead man, we have to 'trust' him when he says that he didn't do it.That's the lesson we learn from this week's *parsha*.

People say, "If you trust people you may sometimes be disappointed, but if you don't trust anyone you'll *always* be miserable". This is a lesson we need to take to heart.

Chinuch: Trust Your Child

Putting your child down for not being honest is very hurtful too. Never tell him "You're a liar, I can't trust you anymore". You want to tell him, 'I trust you and believe you'. Even if he lied – tell him 'I'm disappointed with what you did because I trust you'.

Of course if there is an ongoing issue, you have to deal with it. However, your attitude and approach will definitely make a big difference.

All the time we hear from children that their parents don't trust them anyway, so why should they even bother doing the right thing. Showing them you trust and respect them will generally encourage better behavior and cooperation.

-Q&A-

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

Question: What should I do if my four-year-old is touching himself inappropriately?

Answer: This is a tricky topic. It could be a sign that something happened that needs to be dealt with. In most cases with young children around the ages of three and four, making a big deal about it, and making the child aware that it is an issue, could be worse than ignoring it. It's normal for kids to touch themselves, especially when they're young, and exploring their body. Telling them not to do it might just make them even more curious. (Obviously check if there is a physical condition that is prompting this.)

For children that are a little bit older it is obviously more of an issue. There is an idea that I have used in the past, which I heard in the name of R' Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz z"l. Tell a child that it's dangerous and it can cause him to get an infection. This will usually make him want to stop the behavior. Whenever possible you should avoid saying something that isn't really true to a child, but this might work much better than just telling him repeatedly not to do it.

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