Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Vayeitzei 5780 }

Be Understanding

Yaakov Remains Silent

"The morning dawned and Yaakov realized that Lavan had tricked him, for it was Leah that had been given to him. He approached Lavan and asked him: "What did you do to me?! Why did you deceive me?!"

It must be noted that Yaakov said nothing to Leah. Any one of us would have surely been upset with Leah for her part in the deception. Yet Yaakov didn't utter a word of complaint against her. He remained loyal to her for the rest of his life and had many children with her.

Chazal praise Rochel for her sensitivity towards Leah, yet nowhere is Yaakov praised for *his* silence here. After all he worked long and hard for Rochel and now he was duped. Wouldn't he be justified in complaining about Leah?

I asked a young child this question, and I believe the answer he gave is the correct one; it's simple, yet brilliant: The reason nothing is made of Yaakov's silence is because *he was only being decent* in his attitude towards Leah. After all, it wasn't her fault that she was placed in this unfortunate situation. Why quarrel with her? Yaakov had good reasons to argue with Lavan, and so he did. Most of us would find reason to be upset with Leah too. But Yaakov realized that she was innocent and undeserving of his ire.

"How Dare She?"

Our takeaway from this *parsha* is: "Don't shoot the messenger". People get emotionally excited over something and they lose their proper judgment. It's so easy to jump the gun and snap at your wife. But we must learn to take a step back, to view a situation objectively and ask: Is she really responsible? Is there anything he could have done to avoid this?

You know, people go for couples therapy. Very often no special insight is added by the therapist, it is simply a third party who is not personally involved, who can take a step back and view the situation objectively.

Berel*, a client of mine, had an urgent appointment, so he asked his wife to remind him about it. His wife failed to remind him and he missed the appointment. Berel was very upset and he was explaining to me just how wrong his wife is for failing to remind him of this very important appointment.

I as an outsider however, immediately realized that Berel was guilty of the same "heinous" crime as his wife. After all, he forgot about the appointment himself! So why can't you be a bit more understanding?

Stop Blaming

When our feelings are hurt, our tendency is to point fingers and blame. When Berel started yelling at his wife, she responded with logic; she said "I forgot". A person can forget after all, what can she do? She forgot and she apologized. But logic does nothing to pacify strong feelings, it merely pours fuel on the fire: "What do you mean you forgot?!"

Mrs. Levy* was offered a certain position. She and her husband discussed the pros and cons of taking this job but couldn't come to a decision. They decided to follow their Rov's advice. Mrs. Levy finished discussing the issue with the Rov and informed her husband that she had accepted the

job as per the Rov's advice. He then got very upset with her, and started second-guessing her; maybe she hadn't explained the situation to the Rov well enough etc.

Here too, Mrs. Levy was not guilty of wrongdoing. They had discussed it, they had come to the decision to follow the Rov's advice, and that's what she did. You can't get upset with someone who is doing her best.

If you want peace in your home, you must learn to have a forgiving attitude, even when your spouse is guilty, but certainly when he's innocent. We're all human, we all make mistakes, and we need to be open to accepting someone else's mistakes and deal with our disappointments in a healthy way. Yes, I don't like my current situation, but my wife wasn't trying to hurt me. She's not Lavan; she's Leah. Let's try to stop blaming and live in peace.

Chinuch: Kids Make Mistakes

Let's look at *chinuch* for a moment. It's important to realize what *chinuch* is about. *Chinuch* is about educating and teaching, not about setting standards and expectations. Your responsibility is to guide your children in the right direction, but let's face it: Children are children. You can't expect something of them just because you've taught it to them. When a child makes a mistake, he shouldn't be blamed; he should be understood.

Most mistakes can be overlooked. But even when you must say something to your child – in a case where you can't pretend you didn't see it; try to say it with understanding. You can tell your child that you understand that it was a mistake, and that she didn't mean to do anything wrong. And by the way, it's usually true. So let's treat children with the understanding they deserve, let's treat others the way we ourselves would like to be treated.

One final thing: there should never be fear in a home. A child and a spouse should never feel that she's "afraid" to say something. A home should be a safe haven where people are free to express themselves without being blamed or yelled at. A child shouldn't expect a yelling from mom just because he fell and ripped his pants, he should get a kiss and some antiseptic for his knee, that's all.

Don't be a pushover when dealing with Lavan, but remember that Leah is innocent.



Q&A



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

Question: We got married around three months ago, and are very happy together B"H. We have an issue though. My parents keep interfering in many different aspects of our relationship. My father especially keeps putting pressure on my husband. In short, we feel like they're constantly breathing down our necks. We tried explaining to our parents why this can be damaging to our marriage, to no avail.

Answer: First to any parents who might be reading this. It is not your place to micromanage your married children. The fact that you invested a lot in marrying them off doesn't give you the right to interfere. People need space to grow, please recognize that they're adults and have their own lives.

But here the parents are not the ones asking for advice, so let's respond to the children. You're right that this is a very serious situation and must be stopped, albeit in a respectful manner. Parents are parents after all. Perhaps it would be a good idea to discuss the situation with an objective outsider - not your *chavrusa*; someone who is wise and can guide you in this sensitive area.

But I'll give you some tips: Don't accuse your father of trying to ruin your marriage. Make it about you. Acknowledge that he means well, and that you appreciate everything that he's done and still does for you. But explain that it is simply too difficult for you, and that you feel it is detrimental to your marriage when it feels like there are four voices in a marriage, instead of two. But talk only about yourself, from your perspective. Don't *teach your father* about shalom bayis, he knows better than you, or at least he thinks so. And then stick to your guns. Once you explained that his behavior is unacceptable, make sure that you don't accept it. You should be able to stick to your boundaries in a respectful manner.

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