Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Vayera 5780 }

Communication and Openness

Discussing Things

After Avraham sent the *malachim* on their way, the Torah tells us what was *k'viyachol* going through Hashem's mind (18, 17-19). "*And then Hashem thought: Am I hiding my plans from Avraham? Avraham is the man who will become a great and mighty nation" etc.*

Rashi explains: "*The simple meaning of all this is: This man will accomplish so much, and I love him for that. Can I hide my plans from this man whom I love so dearly*"?

Because Hashem felt love towards Avraham, He felt that He must include him in His plans. When you love someone you don't keep them in the dark, you discuss things with them.

Sharing is Caring

By sharing with your spouse, you're expressing a certain respect. You're showing that you enjoy talking to this person and value their opinion. "This is what's going through my mind, I'm inviting you to share in my thoughts and my feelings." That's what open communication is.

Sharing your plans with others is being considerate of their feelings, and you're expected to be considerate of people whom you relate to.

No Sharing!

It must be stated that sharing is not always appropriate. Sometimes people can speak words that are terribly damaging and hurtful, for the sake of being "open and honest". I've seen it happen many times. People may hear from a therapist that they must share certain information with their spouse, or they come up with the brilliant idea on their own, and they wreak havoc on their marriages.

In this week's *parsha* (see Rashi 18, 13) we learn that Hashem Himself, whose trademark is truthfulness, resorted to lying for the purpose of keeping the peace between husband and wife.

Sharing is meant to strengthen a relationship, not to tear it down. When we speak of being honest, it is for the sake of building our relationships.

Even When It's Difficult

But don't shy away from sharing just because it might make you uncomfortable, or

because the other party may object. The other party has a right to object!

Sometimes you think you shouldn't share something with your spouse so as not to hurt them. This may backfire and your spouse will be doubly hurt; hurt by what you've done, as well as by the fact that you didn't include them in the decision making process.

When Hashem shared His plans of overturning Sodom with His beloved, Avraham, He knew that Avraham would make it "difficult" for Him to proceed with His plans to destroy Sodom. Yet He shared it with him anyway. When there's love between two parties, there's sharing, easy or not.

It's Not About The Schedule

This week I dealt with a couple who was suffering from this issue. The husband had made plans for the couple and finalized them without discussing it with his wife. She had a whole list of reasons why her husband had wronged her and how he had messed up her whole schedule.

The husband was arguing with her, trying to show her why it wasn't so bad, and how it was so easy to reschedule this or that.

I explained to him that although she's not saying it, her issue isn't with the schedule change. She feels like you don't appreciate her, that you don't respect her and her schedule. It's not about rescheduling an appointment. It's about showing her that she matters.

I'd Rather Not Bother You

Some people are very resourceful and are used to "making things work". Getting used to the idea of sharing is difficult for them. "Why should I bother my husband with the details? I'll figure it out on my own already."

It's true that you don't necessarily *need* your husband or your wife's input, but try to act like you do. People like to feel needed, so even though you can prepare breakfast on your own, accept your wife's offer, and make her feel good that she's giving you something. And the same goes for our topic; although you're not used to discussing things with others, and asking their opinion, do it anyway. Sharing is important for a relationship.

A Rewarding Experience

Including their spouse in decision-making is difficult for some people, because sharing isn't something that you get rewarded for. When you do your husband a favor, he appreciates it, and expresses his thanks. But if you discuss something with him, he doesn't realize that he has to thank you, on the contrary, he thinks you need to thank him for the excellent [in his opinion] advice that he's given you!

However the intangible rewards are very great. Your relationship becomes much better when there is open and honest sharing between you. And besides, you don't want to risk excluding your spouse. Your relationship can be damaged by the breach of trust.

When It's About Us

It's important to note that when it comes to matters that affect the couple, there's no way to avoid discussing it.

When it comes to naming your baby, you can't make the decision without your spouse. If you want to buy a house, you can't do that without your spouse! It sounds so obvious, but some people just don't get it. I'm not talking about the *halacha* of who gets to make financial decisions, or who gets to decide which *cheder* the boys get sent to. I'm talking about simple common sense. Making a decision that affects

"us", without a discussion between "us", hurts. So don't do it.

Taking Feelings Into Account

Even when there's no decision to be made, you've already decided that you must stay at the office until late, let your wife in on it. Let her know that you'll be late.

In Yevamos (62b) the *gemara* tells of two great *tzaddikim* who died young. And the *gemara* tells us that the reason is because they hurt their wife's feelings by tarrying and not coming home when they were expected.

If you're a chronic latecomer never tell her when you think you'll be home, always tell her two hours later! It's so important to take another person's feelings into account. You're better off saying that you might be late and coming home on time, than chancing being later than expected.

A Discussion Has Two Sides

You don't have to be afraid that sharing with your husband will force you to give in to him. If you ask: "When should we go to the *chasuna*?", you're not leaving very much room for your own opinion, so try stating "About the *chasuna*, I was thinking that it would be better to leave at four because of... what do you think?"

When you phrase your question this way, you are soliciting your husband's opinion, while clearly delineating your own. When you start out explaining your opinion, it's not so easy for your partner to dismiss it.

Chinuch: Just Between Us

Parents sometimes may disagree over an issue, however, it is vital never to include the children. Sometimes a father might tell his son, "It's okay, just make sure your mother doesn't find out". Besides for the very high risk of his mother finding out anyway, it's just so unhealthy for a relationship.

You may succeed at salvaging your *shalom bayis* as far as this issue is concerned, but what type of *chinuch* is this? What message is your child getting when he hears that his parents can't get along and are going behind each other's backs?

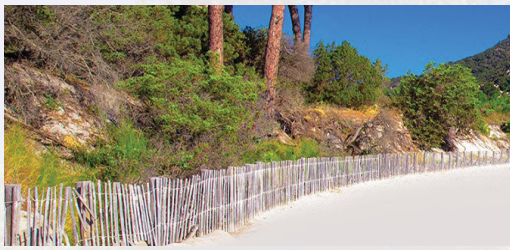
The pleasure of being on your son's "team" is not great enough for the price you're paying. You're paying the price of your child's stability and trust, and you're risking your child's own *shalom bayis* when he grows up and marries.

Children Are People Too!

Although children can't always express it, many times a child gets the feeling that "My parents don't care about my opinion" "I don't really matter". There are many things on which you can accept input from your child. When it comes to the little things, why not let the child decide for himself?

Even with regard to big things, where you *are* making the final decision, it's still possible to take the child's feelings into account and include him in the decision-making process or at the very least, let him know of the decision before it affects him.

Many times when I begin speaking about this subject, parents get upset with me "Are you saying that I have to treat my child as if he's my equal?" No, I'm not saying that. But I am saying that your child should be respected as a person. Why shouldn't you let your child know? המכסה אני מאברהם מה שאני עושה? You love your children; let them know beforehand, especially when it affects them!



Q&A

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



Question:

Our daughter is in high school and she had a serious run-in with her principal which led to her being suspended. Now she doesn't want to go back to school anymore. Obviously, she's going back, we're not letting our daughter become a dropout. But what should we say to her? Should we be strict with her and side with the school? What should we do?

Answer:

There are a few points to clarify here.

It is not healthy to denigrate authority figures. You must cultivate respect for authority, you can't side with your daughter against the school administration. On the other hand it's also certainly not good to side with the administration and attack your daughter.

So what's the middle road? Make it clear to your daughter that while you understand and clearly see her side of the story, there is another side too. Try to explain the school's position to her, show her how the school administration must sometimes overlook the needs of a single student for the benefit of the entire student body.

But don't argue with her and try to convince her of why the principal is right. You said what she needed to hear, she heard it, and you can leave it at that.

In this particular case there happened to be a teacher who *was* more understanding and a bit more sympathetic to this girl. When there is such a situation, it's a good opportunity to point this teacher out to your daughter. You can tell her that "the principal must be respected in the way that she demands, but if you ever need something in school – try going to this teacher. She's nice and understanding…"

Give her the way out, give her the feeling that while school rules are school rules and must be respected, still you have an insider, someone who is helpful and approachable.

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