RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Vaeschanan

True Wisdom

In this week's Parsha the Torah is praised, "*ki hi chochmaschem ubinaschem l'einei ha'amim - for it is our wisdom... in the eyes of the nations*". The Torah is the ultimate truth and even the gentile nations are forced to admit to the purity of its wisdom. After years of research and trying to figure things out on their own, time and again, philosophers and thinkers have 'discovered' ideas already set forth by the Torah many centuries earlier.

Reb Hershele Lisker in Darkei Hayashar V'hatov describes how he cried at a Shabbos Shuva Drasha bemoaning the fact that people are so silly. They run to doctors and professors thinking they will discover the wisdom of life, when they have the resources right there at their fingertips! The Torah promises us that if we will hold her dear and follow her ways, we will possess all wisdom.

This is no less true in today's day and age, when people get easily swayed by this or that shiny new idea or concept. They read up on it, listen to podcasts, or go seek personal advice from people who claim to have the solution to their marriage or child rearing challenges. If the idea is consistent with the Torah, then it definitely has a chance of being your solution. But if it goes against the Torah, you are wasting your time. Time and time again I have come across people who try things that are not aligned with Torah advice, and – believe me – it does not work! If you are unsure of what the Torah view on a particular idea is, you can always consult with a capable Rav, Rebbe or Talmid Chacham, who can guide you.

I speak about this idea during my speeches many times, and often people come up to tell me that they themselves are proof that I am right. They have tried it and failed. By following the Torah, you can't go wrong.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen

I listen to your weekly lectures and I've read your book as well.

My six-year-old can easily be identified as a UV (hypersensitive) child, and I really appreciate your insights. They've helped me gain clarity to better understand him and navigate his Chinuch. Although I find him challenging, I feel like you have given me very useful tools to be able to relate to him.

He is an exceptionally mature and bright child, yet he struggles academically because of a Kriah issue. He started a Kriah program, which I hope will help him reach his grade level. He is among the youngest in his class, and my husband and I feel like he would benefit greatly from repeating the grade. The *menahel* **thinks that the Kriah program he is enrolled in will be helpful enough, and knowing my son's sensitive nature, he advised us to wait before taking this step.**

I know it will be hard for my son to have to face his old classmates on a regular basis, and I know that kids can be nasty about it. I even considered switching him to a different Cheder, but it would be too uncomfortable for him to be the only one amongst his brothers to go to a different school.

For now, we are heeding the *menahel's* **advice, but since I assume that issues like this will come up again in different situations, I have the following question: I know that a logical explanation will not work for an emotionally distressed child; therefore, how much do I need to protect my sensitive child from emotional discomfort, even though he might ultimately benefit from it?**

Thank you.

Answer:

When it comes to sensitive decisions such as these, it is always advisable to consider each situation on a case-by-case basis. A lot depends on the child, his nature, his surroundings, etc.

In answer to your long-term question, I may be wrong, but it seems like you're saying that sometimes it pays to hurt a child because ultimately they'll grow from their difficulties. In response to that, I'd like

to reference a *sefer* I released a couple of years ago, Mimtzukoseihem Yoshieim, in which I speak about our life's mission of breaking our inborn character defects. In that sefer, I explain how rising above your natural tendencies does not *change* your natural traits; but allows you to tap into the more desirable sides of your character.

In the last chapter of that book, I talk about *chinuch*. The reason I brought child rearing into such a sefer is because many people become inspired when they read about topics as important as breaking one's nature. After all, we are taught that "*A person was only created in order to break his nature*" (Tzettel Kotton, Even Sheleima l'haGra). However, when they embark on their own self-discovery, they quickly give up hope. They tell themselves that it's too difficult, or that they're too old, or any one of a host of many excuses.

They then promptly turn to their children and think, "Oh! Here's someone young and fresh-faced with some undesirable tendencies! I don't want him to have been created for nothing, so let me help him break them!" But actually, breaking your nature is something you need to do *for yourself*. You cannot and should not do it for others.

That is what "*Chanoch l'naar al pi darko*" means. Raise your child *on his path*. Work with him in whichever way he is comfortable. It was never your job to challenge his nature. On the contrary, a child who feels emotionally stable and grows up in a supportive environment is much more likely to find the fortitude to work on his *middos* on his own – in due time.

•

There are some children who might be able to withstand a parent who attempts to "break his natures", but most children – especially those that are very sensitive - will get broken first under the strain.

A father told me recently that he always gets a phone call from the rebbe of one of his sons about a month into the school year. He is a restless and challenging child, and his *rebbeim* struggle with him in the classroom. Every year, he advises his son's *rebbe* to give him lots of attention and to make him feel needed and respected. Time after time, when the *rebbe* heeded his advice, he was successful. There was one *rebbe* though, who resisted and took it upon himself to "fix" this boy and whip him into shape. And so, he spent a full year destroying the kid.

You don't have to worry about your child being "too comfortable". Often children struggle because they are not emotionally comfortable. Life will give him his share of challenges. In fact, your son already has a challenge – he is struggling with his reading. It is up to you to give him the support and encouragement so that he is equipped to deal with this challenge.

•

Usually, the choices you have to make on behalf of your children aren't all black and white. Your child certainly does need to know how to read. Even if getting remedial services will cause him some emotional discomfort, it will likely be less uncomfortable than him being illiterate. It's similar to when you need to do a medical procedure on your child that will ultimately benefit him, but is uncomfortable now. On the other hand, it could be that his ability to read is dependent on his emotional stability and comfort.

If you know that keeping him back a grade will definitely solve the reading problem, maybe it's worth it to do it, even if there's a chance that he will be embarrassed about it. If you are not 100% sure, you might want to first explore different avenues. The best course of action is to try and find a way to solve both issues at once.

One of my own sons was once struggling with a similar issue and I was advised to hold him back a grade. In his case, it was possible to do it without him running

into his old classmates, because they were in different parts of the building. Even so, we had to decide if it was the right thing to do. We discussed it with a Rav, who told us that sometimes it is preferable for a child to struggle a bit more in his studies so as to save him from emotional anguish, and sometimes the opposite is true. Being that in this case we could avoid the emotional anguish, we decided to go ahead and keep him in his old grade. B"H in our case, it turned out to be the right decision.

•

Another challenge is that it's not always clear cut whose advice to follow. Sometimes the *menahel* is very experienced and doesn't have an agenda, and he really knows what he's talking about. Other times, he might have an ulterior motive that is driving his advice.

By the same token, parents often know what's best for their child. However, there are many times when they are too subjective and emotionally involved to be able to see things clearly.

The best thing to do is to discuss it with an impartial third party who can assess the situation and advise you on the best course of action. In your case, the Kriah specialist might be the right address for your query.

•

Most decisions aren't all or nothing. This should not be something that scares you away from making them, though. Many people avoid making decisions because they think that it's either/or. As responsible adults, our job is to weigh the pros and cons, come to a sensible conclusion, and place your trust in Hashem. There is no way to predict how things will turn out and nobody expects you to make a perfect decision every time. You ask your Rav, your Rebbe, you discuss it with a qualified third party, you follow your gut, and hope for the best.

If you do choose to keep your son back, explain to him clearly what is going to happen. Tell him that his previous *rebbe* enjoyed him so much as a student, he wants him there again next year. Tell him how much he will gain from being in that class. You should check with the Rebbe if it's okay that you tell him that he will be able to be his *rebbe's* helper, because he is so well acquainted with how the classroom works. You can also make him feel like it's his decision, by placing the choices in front of him.

Make sure that whatever you do, your child does not feel slighted or at a disadvantage. Don't give him the feeling that you don't have a choice, or that you are resenting this turn of events. Make him excited about it.

May Hashem guide you to the right decision and you should be *zoche* to raise your children to be smart, capable, and well adjusted.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SEND ANY QUESTIONS, ON THIS TOPIC OR ANY TOPIC TO RABBIGRUEN@LEHAIR.ORG