RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Pinchas

Constant Growth

In this week's Parsha, we're given instructions on how to divide Eretz Yisrael between the *shevatim*. The *passuk* tells us, "For a *shevet* with many people, you should increase the amount of land, and for a *shevet* with fewer people, you should decrease the amount of land..."

Reb Moshe'le Koznitzer explains this in his *sefer* Daas Moshe with an analogy: When someone put away a large amount of money in savings but does not keep earning, his money will diminish over time as he uses up the funds for his needs. However, if a person has a large amount of money put away, and he keeps earning more money, then his existing fortune has lasting power and keeps growing.

The Daas Moshe then draws a parallel between this idea and our *avodas Hashem*. We are all born with "real estate" in the World to Come, "Kol yisroel yesh lahem cheilek l'olam habo". We can choose to be satisfied with that and just live our lives as we please. The problem is however, that as we go about our business, we use up our merits in this world. However, if we keep growing spiritually and improving our *avodah*, then not only does our fortune up in Shamayim stay whole, but it increases exponentially, and we can also enjoy the dividends in this world.

"Lorav, for the shevet with many assets, tarbeh nachalaso, his estate will grow, v'lameat, tam'it nachalaso, but if someone doesn't do a lot, his estate will dwindle and eventually run out..."

We can take this idea into our personal relationships as well. As much as we would like for others to remember our kindnesses even years down the line, human beings tend to forget. We can't rely on a good deed we did to someone in the past to tide us over forever. We have to keep investing in our relationships to keep them healthy and rewarding.

I often come across people who are upset and resentful because they feel like they gave so much to their spouse or their child and they feel that the debt was never repaid. Someone told me that he once took in an orphaned girl and cared for her and raised her until she was old enough to fend for herself. He was deeply hurt when, as an adult, this woman failed to show him proper appreciation and respect. And he was right to feel upset! It's certainly not okay to disregard the people who have helped us and brought us to where we are today. But sadly, this is very natural for the human condition. We tend to forget.

The only solution to keeping people connected to us is to never stop giving! We need to keep adding on to the stockpile of kindness on a constant basis. There's no guarantee that when you give more you'll get the proper appreciation for it, but at least there's less chance that your deeds will be "forgotten".

>>>>

>>>> But aside from whatever someone else should be remembering and appreciating, when we find ourselves holding onto or bringing up past deeds, it isn't a good sign. We should not be holding grudges from years ago, and neither should we bring up favors that we did years ago. Relationships are fluid and ongoing. In addition to building a solid foundation, we have to keep maintaining it so that it's a gift that keeps on giving. Yes, we need to be appreciative to others, but keeping account of what others owe is not helpful in relationships.

Question:

Hi Rabbi Gruen,

My ten year old son and his friends despise their secular studies very much, and they devised this tradition of burning their textbooks at the end of each year. They did it last year, and this year someone told me that they made a fire behind someone's house and were burning books.

I told my son that this is unacceptable and dangerous. He didn't take it very well. I told him that I understand his desire, but when he goes out to play with friends he has to behave responsibly.

Two days later he asked me if I would make a fire with him to burn some more school papers. He thought my only objection was the lack of adult supervision last time I tried pushing him off, but he persisted. I told him that while I didn't really agree with this whole thing, I will do it for him as long as it's safe. And that was what we did. We made a small fire in the backyard to burn the papers.

My question is if this was right or wrong. I'm more concerned about safety and honesty - I'm happy he didn't try doing it behind my back, which is why I decided to join him so that he doesn't do something silly.

Please let me know what you think about this.

Answer:

Hi, I have to say that I don't see this as a question about burning secular books specifically. It is more a question of how to deal with a child who wants to do something that you feel is wrong or inappropriate.

Generally speaking, this is not the type of behavior that you should encourage. Some might think that "going along" with your child's ideas is better than fighting them, and others might actually have their

own resentments to certain parts of the education system too. However, generally no good can come from instigating a child to resent or be angry with something, especially to the point of doing something as drastic as burning or damaging property. Lashing out in such a way is not healthy. The Rambam says that when a person curses someone else, even if he is out of earshot, it is damaging to the person who is issuing the curse. Anger is never good, and while not always preventable, it should definitely not be stoked by a parent.

•

I understand that in your community there may be many who view secular studies with contempt and derision. It is therefore almost normal that some of this feeling gets passed down to the children. Additionally children from chassidish homes who are learning English as a second language may struggle with the subject matter and resent it for that reason alone. However, this question can come from a secular child who resents studying history, or a conservative American upset about the new CRT curriculum and many other examples. This is why I will address this question in general terms, without focusing on secular studies in yeshivas.

When your son or daughter challenges you about why it is necessary to learn all of these seemingly unimportant subjects, unless it's being asked in a very sincere way that will be satisfied with a simple answer or explanation, refrain from going into a discussion with them or trying to explain it to them, especially when you might not be sure of the reason geometry is taught yourself, and you're simply sticking up for something that may not resonate and not be accepted. In any case, the answer isn't relevant. Children should be taught to do what they need to do at the times when they are expected to do them, in a respectful and cooperative manner, whether they agree or not.

•

(As an aside, I will mention that even if you think that certain topics or subjects aren't important, some children find their success there. We all want our children to shine most when it comes to Torah and Gemara, but we must remember to make our child feel good when he excels at anything, and not ignore a good grade even if it is something that isn't necessarily a priority to us. That is not because we value the subject he is good at, as much as we value him and his ability to succeed. Often success can start with a compliment on his intelligence, which can motivate a child to succeed where it's more important too).

•

You need to teach your child that, out of *mentchlichkeit* and respect, he needs to behave in English class. Not only that, he should use the time wisely to expand his knowledge and use his brain. Whether you believe in the studies or not, you should definitely not comment derisively on his school's curriculum. Anything that a person does should be done fully and wholeheartedly. When we train ourselves to approach life in this way, it shows character and good *middos,* and isn't that what we all want from our children?

This needs to be your main message to your child. Respect needs to be awarded to all elders, whether it is his *melamed* or teacher, and regardless of the instructor's nationality or religion. It isn't a bigger *mitzvah* to behave in *limudei kodesh* classes than it is to do so by *limudei chol*. As an *ehrliche yiddishe* boy, he must be respectful at all times. The importance of the studies, or anyone's opinion on them, does not change that.

Of course, when he mocks his secular studies, it isn't as terrible as it would be if he would do the same for *limudei kodesh chas veshalom*. But it is really problematic to act out and express negative emotions. Working on your *middos* is part of *limudei kodesh* after all.

•

Your question was, do you go along with the book burning or not? As mentioned earlier, you should definitely not be the one to instigate or encourage it. However, as long as your child wants to do something that isn't forbidden outright or truly terrible, you might want to choose the path of least resistance. Of course, if you can diffuse the situation and convince him to stop being silly and just dump the books, you should certainly do that. You can even tell him that you'll take him out for ice cream or pizza afterwards to celebrate the completion of the year, or even celebrate not having to

continue sitting in class this year, if that's what he'd rather hear.

But if you see that he is bent on the burning, especially if all his friends are doing it, then perhaps it would be wise not to make a big deal about it. If it is done in a safe manner, without making a *chillul Hashem*, and it doesn't affect his behavior in class, then it might just be okay for you to be his "bad friend" who does it with him.

Additionally, consider the fact that this action is not likely to affect your child in the future. Will he look for his old textbooks to burn when he's in his twenties? Probably not. Will this cause him to burn his credit card bills when he feels annoyed by them when he's an adult? I don't think so. It seems simply to be an immaturity that he will outgrow, and in such instances where there will probably not be after effects of a silly choice, it's not as bad to play along when necessary.

•

Someone once told me that he belongs to a Kehilla that does not allow children to play sports, but this wasn't the standard where he lived and it was very hard for him to enforce. After all, it wasn't a *halacha*, the neighbors all did it, but it was against what his *chassidus* deems appropriate. He asked *daas Torah* if he should make a big deal about it and he was told not to. If this will cause his child to feel singled out, especially considering that he didn't have a clear explanation, it did not justify enforcing it.

The Rachmistrivka Rebbe Shlit"a related an interesting story of his father-in-law the Skvere Rebbe z"l. He once saw a child playing with the Sereifas Chometz fire on *erev* Pesach after the adults were done burning the Chometz. The Rebbe noticed that he was still playing with the fire after being told to leave. The Rebbe then cleverly called him over and gave him some twigs to throw in the fire and then go home.

Why did he do that? He realized that getting into a confrontation with the child was not going to work. However, playing with an unattended fire is terribly dangerous! So, he gave him a chance to indulge under supervision, and then the child was more inclined to listen to his advice.

•

Another thing to consider is that sometimes we are against something, but we know that our children will do it anyway. While you're BH not dealing with anything too drastic, it's something minor that the child will surely outgrow in a year or two, this is unfortunately the case with children who are rebelling against *yiddishkeit R"L*. In such cases, you might want to ask rabbinical guidance whether it is better for you to go along with them, rather than having them do it behind your back.

Another idea you might try, is that if you end up choosing to do whatever it is with your child, try to trivialize it rather than making it a "thing". For example, in your case, make it about the fire, not about the books. Roast some marshmallows, give him a lesson on fire safety. Shift the focus away from the fact that he is using this activity as an expression of anger or resentment. It is not beneficial for your child to run to tell his friends the next day and say, "My mother/father burned my English books with me!"

In closing, if you focus on the respect and safety aspect, and don't make it about the studies themselves, then your child will IY"H get the message that *derech eretz* and *mentchlichkeit* are the things that matter to you most.

Wishing you much Hatzlacha,
Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: PINCHAS 5781

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