RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

## PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

## WHAT'S *REALLY* THE PROBLEM?

How can we understand the accusation made by Yosef Hatzaddik against his brothers, when he told Yaakov Avinu that they ate *eiver min hachai*? Reb Shmeril of Varchivka, one of the early students of the Maggid of Mezritch, explains that *eiver min hachai* can also be understood as meaning food that is eaten by people who are not united by their love for one another; their state of disunity prevents the holy sparks (known as *Nitzotzos Hakedoshos)* from the food being elevated to their source. This is what Yosef Hatzadik was telling his father – that due to the absence of love between his bothers, they were unable to elevate the sparks as they should have.

All too often, when we're faced with a problem we don't realize that the problem isn't what we think it is. Underlying so many issues is the lack of *ahavah*. If people were connected, so many issues would fall away on their own. When people truly love each other, they barely notice or overlook things that would have bothered them otherwise, or they see them through different eyes and don't blow them out of proportion. That's why people looking in from the outside often don't understand why one spouse is so upset by something the other spouse did. For them, there are no underlying issues altering their perception. And the underlying issue usually at fault is the lack of connection.

When we're ready to work on underlying causes and create more connection in the relationship, things can improve much faster. It's much easier said than done and it's difficult to build connection and *ahavah* when there are hurt feelings and aggravation. All the same, just knowing that more love in the relationship can shrink any specific issue, helps us see things in a different light. What's more, even just trying to overlook or shift perspective can bring about more connection and love – or at the very least save us from losing even more of it.

This can be true with children as well. Sometimes, when a parent doesn't have the right feeling for a child (and yes, there are some *very* challenging children), automatically so many other things become problems. When there's more good feelings and less resentment, many of those issues can fall away. And there are so many things a parent can do to promote good feelings towards their own children.

THIS WEEK'S ESSAY IS DEDICATED BY
**A WONDERFUL FRIEND**
WHO'S ALWAYS READY TO HELP AND REALLY CARES FOR KLAL YISROEL!

**This week I'll briefly address a few shorter questions that were collected from voicemail messages.**

## QUESTION #1

### DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

**Thank you so much for your help and may you continue to help Klal Yisroel!**

**How should I remind my child about *negel-vasser* and *bentching*? He gets annoyed when I remind him, and shrugs it off. His attitude is: "Leave me alone, just stop reminding me." He washes but doesn't bentch, and even the washing is just barely. He doesn't like it when I remind him, but what am I supposed to do?**

### ANSWER
RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

Firstly, this is a fairly typical situation that comes up in many homes. Typical doesn't mean it doesn't need to be addressed, or that everyone is dealing with it, but you're not the first person to be asking this question and it's sadly more common than you'd imagine, so you don't need to panic. This is *iy"H* something that can be resolved with some understanding and guidance.

One of the first things to know in such situations is not to focus too much on the short-term, on whether or not you got him to *bentch* that day. In general, *chinuch* isn't about controlling a situation and your success isn't measured by how many times you got your child to *bentch*. Especially if your child is not yet *bar mitzvah*, he is not yet *mechuyav bemitzvos*, and your obligation is simply to be *mechanech* him, to educate and to guide him in the right direction. Therefore, your job is simply to say whatever will encourage him to do what's right.

With that in mind, you can change your focus, which will also help to defuse your child's natural defensiveness. Don't nag – instead, simply state: "Please *bentch*," in a neutral tone of voice. This way, you avoid giving him the impression that you don't trust him to do the right thing. If he already bentched, he can just say: "I already did," and then you can praise him for remembering. You can also try to be more creative, perhaps by reminding the whole family to *bentch* and avoiding singling him out. You can do this even if you know everyone else already *bentched*. Or you can ask, "Who needs a *Zemiros* to *bentch?"* even when you *know* he's the only one who does. Maybe you can try *bentching* out loud yourself. It's a nice way to remind everyone else to *bentch*. Besides, it's the best *chinuch*. It may not work as fast as reminding, but it usually accomplishes more.

• • •

Children sometimes feel that the only time you notice them is when they're doing something wrong, or in your example, *not* doing something right. They may or may not be right, but if many of your interactions with this child come in the form of criticism, this may be their perception. Try to make sure a larger part of your interactions with this child is positive.

• • •

And one last point: It may be important to take a step back and consider whether there's some underlying issue that could be bothering this child. (This is more applicable with older children.) You may also want to discuss it with your spouse or your child's teacher to try to find out if something could be causing this resistance. Maybe it's just a symptom of a general issue between yourself and your child, or due to the way he perceives himself. Often, if you deal with underlying problems, the outer issues fall away. It reminds me of an episode I once witnessed, with an older *bochur* who was being rebuked daily in *yeshivah*, each time for something different. One day the *rosh yeshivah* was so frustrated that he confronted the *bochur* with a long list of the problems he was making. The *bochur* replied: "It's not the long list. All I need is one thing [in his case, a *shidduch*]. When that one thing is taken care of, you'll see that everything else will fall into place."

## QUESTION #2

### HI,

**Thanks for the *shiurim*. They have given us great insight on marriage and *chinuch*.**

**My son is a great boy *b"H*. We are trying to get him used to saying "please" and "thank you." He is very stubborn about it. He prefers to do whatever it is for himself or go without, rather than ask nicely. I feel that he simply has an issue about feeling controlled and is avoiding this feeling at all costs. Any advice would be appreciated.**

## ANSWER RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

As I often say, if you try something and it's not working, stop doing it. Try something else.

Some children really do find it hard to tolerate feeling "controlled" – and some parents find it equally hard to relinquish control. Don't get me wrong – parents are allowed to ask for and maybe expect things that children don't want to comply with, but the question is always whether or not that works. In general, no one likes *feeling* controlled, but in a case where someone is actively trying to control them, they're likely to react far more strongly. Sometimes, backing off a little can make it easier. It would be a shame for your stubbornness to be bringing out his stubbornness.

Let's try to be creative. For some it works to clarify that when there is a "please" mentioned you'll be more likely to comply with the request, and if not, you may not. You don't have to mention it each time though, you can simply wait for it to be said. For some though, that alone will also cause the reaction you describe, and you'll be better off *not* demanding it but you could tell him how much it would mean to you if he said "thank you," and then add, "But I love giving to you so I'll give it anyway, even if you don't say it." Try saying it with a smile. If your child asks for something, you can answer, "Can I please have it? Sure!" (with you supplying the correct dialogue). And then give it with a big smile.

• • •

Some people think that saying "please" and "thank you" is childish. We demand it of our children but don't practice it ourselves. It's not childish. Adults should do it too. You'd be surprised how many *shalom bayis* cases start with, "My spouse never says 'thank you.'"

If parents are polite and appreciative and model saying "please" and "thank you," they're modeling something very healthy. It may not get you the results you want in the short-term – your child may not pick up on it right away – but in the long run it will rub off on him too. This is especially true if you're particular to address your children with the "pleases" and "thank yous" that you want to hear from them.

*Chinuch* is about teaching, not about controlling. Let's try to find the ways that work to teach and allow our children to be taught.

# QUESTION #3

## DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

**Thank you so much for your classes and advice. One of my children is a success story based on your guidance.**

**My question is how to deal with my nine-year-old twins, both very sensitive. They are extremely competitive, and both need to be the center of attention at all times. I see that when one goes up, the other goes down – they can't share success. How do I handle them?**

## ANSWER RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

Having twins is never simple, but when both are very sensitive it makes for difficult dynamics. There isn't always a simple solution, although there are a few things you can try.

Firstly, try to limit the times they have to "share" success and give them individual attention. If you can give them separate quality time, instead of spending time with "the twins," that may help.

Many parents place each twin in a separate class or even in different schools where necessary. It's obvious that being too close in school can be problematic. We sometimes don't realize, however, that even at home it can be difficult for them to share everything. Maybe have them sleep in separate rooms so they both have a chance at being the "big brother" to a younger sibling. Such ideas can take away some of the competition.

Another thing to consider is that it may just not be a "shidduch." Just because they're twins doesn't mean it's always good for them to be matched up. Try to have

them succeed separately so that they don't feel like they're taking away from each other's success.

Aside from all that, try also to focus more on giving them positive feelings about how kind and accommodating they are to one another, instead of only noticing and pointing out all the times they fight. This may help them to change their perception of their relationship.

## QUESTION #4

### DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

**You discussed in a previous *shiur* that it can be okay for a husband or wife to let the other spouse go on vacation with others or spend money on things only one of them finds important. To me this doesn't sound like a good relationship where each spouse really cares for the other. It's more like two people coexisting. Shouldn't a relationship be deeper than that, where instead of letting the other person spend money and take care of himself/herself, they should actually be taking care of each other?**

## ANSWER RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

You are right that when everything is beautiful and a couple are like two birdies in a cage, they should spend time with and care for each other. Such situations do exist and it doesn't have to mean that one of them is controlling the other. They genuinely need and want the same things. There really are marriages where both husband and wife are living in bliss.

But what happens in other cases? What happens when spouses agree on some things but disagree on others – maybe even major issues?

In my class on "The 10 Secrets of Marriage," I mention how common this scenario is, so much so that we should probably even expect this to be the case. If a wife wants to go on vacation to a place that doesn't appeal to her husband, he can try to become more enthusiastic about it because he wants to do things together with her. If he really succeeds, that's wonderful. Couples shouldn't ever get stuck on doing things "my way or the highway." But there are times when it doesn't work, and then, a healthy approach can be, "You do your thing and I'll do mine. We'll meet up again soon." Maybe it's not coming from the *best* place, but I think it's fine.

People sometimes assume there must be an underlying issue if a husband and wife don't want to do the same thing all the time. There doesn't have to be. Two people who get married remain two people. Where to go on vacation or what to buy shouldn't have to be a cause for disagreement. Arguments are not the same thing as disagreements or differences of opinion. If two people can be on the same page about how to handle disagreement, with a plan for what to do when they disagree, that's the healthiest thing.

*Rabbi Shimon Gruen*

# TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

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**

If you enjoy and benefit from Rabbi Gruen's work please consider sponsoring a weekly Parsha essay which is read and enjoyed by thousands of readers, and have a Zchus in the many hours of classes which help so many homes.

To dedicate a week or a month of this newsletter, in honor of a Simcha, in memory of a loved one, or to show appreciation for Rabbi Gruen, please email to parshalessons@lehair.org, and your donation will be most appreciated.

*Thank You & Tizku Lmitzvos!*