Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Matos Masei 5780 }

Inviting Appreciation

The Purpose in the Telling

Parshas Masei introduces us to all of the travels that the Yidden endured in the Midbar. At first glance, it looks like a nice historical account about the comings and goings of our ancestors. But Rashi tells us that this isn't so. The reason we learn about the travels of our forebears is so that we can realize how many miracles Hashem performed for us in the Midbar, and so we can praise and thank Him for protecting them.

The Midrash Tanchuma elaborates, that Hashem also wanted us to know how we fared in each of the places we stayed in. We sinned in some, rebelled in others, and yet Hashem performed miracle after miracle for His beloved nation. What is the purpose of this? So that we can serve Hashem with love as thanks for all of the good that He has shown to our parents and to us.

The Ultimate Role Model

We recently saw another example of this in the Torah, in Parshas Balak. The whole story transpired without anyone bearing witness to it. Why did Hashem tell us about it? So that we will know that there was a king who wanted to harm us and how Hashem stepped in to prevent him from doing so. When we learn about it, we learn how much Hashem loves us and the great lengths He went to protect us from harm.

In Masechta Shabbos (10b) we learn that "*When someone gives his friend a gift, he needs to let him know about it.*" Rashi explains that this is so that the recipient will be aroused to love the giver. The *gemara* there continues that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe, "*I prepared a beautiful gift for Yisroel. Her name is Shabbos; go and tell them about it.*" Hashem got us a gift in order to arouse love in us toward Him.

But this is not only with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Ultimate Giver. The Gemara continues that from here Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: One who gives a gift of bread to a child needs to inform his mother that he gave it to him, so that his mother will know that he gave him a gift.

Let's learn from here how to build a home on a steady foundation of appreciation and love.

Let Them Know

Sometimes, we encounter people who don't realize that an act of kindness was done to them. They see that their button had been sewed on, they see that the garbage was taken out, but they don't think that there's any need to thank anyone for it. It's not because they are pessimists or bad people. It's human nature to notice only when things go wrong; things that go right slip right under our radar.

That's why it's so important to take a lesson from this week's Parsha. When we do someone a kindness, we need to let them know. This will make them aware that

something nice just happened to them and it will also let them know whom to thank for it.

Prevent the Heartache

So often we find ourselves going out of our way for our spouse – or anyone, really - and they don't seem to notice or care. It causes so much pain and resentment. But if anyone would ask us, "Did you tell them?" we might respond, "Do I have to tell them? Who else do they think did it?" But sometimes, they really do not notice. Either they're too preoccupied to pay attention, too used to it, or, sometimes a person intentionally does not notice when others do them a favor, because they don't want to feel indebted. Whatever the case may be, it can be remedied very easily by letting the recipient know what you've done for them.

Sometimes there might be a simple misunderstanding! A mother once bitterly complained that she has been cooking her daughter's Shabbos fish for years and never received a thank you from her. She would have long since stopped cooking, since nobody in her family liked it anymore, but still she went out of her way to do this for her daughter. She was so riled up at her daughter's ungratefulness, that she abruptly stopped cooking her fish.

Her daughter was quite bewildered. What happened all of a sudden?! When her mother told her how upset she was that she was never thanked, the daughter was flabbergasted! "But I thought I was doing *you* a favor! I didn't want you to stay with too many leftovers so I took some of your fish! I had no idea that you were cooking it especially for me!"

If the mother would have found an opportunity to tell her daughter, "Here's your fish, Esther. I just want you to know that I cooked this especially for you. We don't eat this type of fish any longer but I know how much you and your family like it so I made this for you to enjoy." Any daughter hearing that would have showered her mother with thanks and gone home feeling warm and loved. By making her daughter aware, the mother would have spared herself the resentment and given her daughter the chance to thank her and to feel taken care of and pampered by her dear mother.

Communicate!

A similar story happened when a *cheder rebbi* was called up by parents, complaining about something that happened with their son that day in *cheder*. The *rebbi* was highly annoyed. This was a boy who needed special attention, and he had been going out of his way all year to make sure this boy was properly taken care of and got the help he needed. And still, the parents call to complain. Will nobody ever be happy?

But then, he realized that he never told the parents what he was doing! They had no way of knowing that this *rebbi* was working tirelessly for their son every day. In fact, if he would have taken the time to place a call to the parents and tell them what he was doing, they would undoubtedly have been full of gratitude! And let's not mention the generous tip he might have received on Chanukah and Purim...

So much anger and hurt can be prevented and our connection can be so much deeper if we just let our beneficiary know that they just received a kindness from us.

The Right Time and Tone

You might be inclined to protest, "I don't need appreciation!" But if you honestly think about it, you will realize that you do. Everyone does. And if you don't get it after ten times, your patience wears thin and you become resentful. Once you're already at that point, your feelings might become disproportionate to the current lack of appreciation.

However, it is important to know how to tell your spouse that you did something nice for them.

First, never use it as ammunition. Avoid bringing it up in the midst of an argument as a way to one-up your spouse. This will only have the opposite effect. They will dismiss your actions as selfish and "thank you" will be the last thing you can expect to hear from them.

Also, don't demand appreciation. Don't hold it over their heads and say, "Nu? Where's my thank you?" Telling them what you did is so that they can realize how much you care for them and that they *feel* appreciation towards you for doing it. But demanding it will not increase mutual love and appreciation.

It's also important to remember that when your spouse *does* thank you, never throw it back at them and say, "Nah, it was nothing." They're thanking you, accept it! You don't want to turn them off. Instead, respond that "It's a pleasure. I was happy to do this for you." This will generate mutual feelings of love and caring for each other.

When You are the Recipient

Of course, we can't end this article before addressing the other side of the coin. If you are ever made aware that a kindness was done to you, refrain from becoming defensive and telling them "I didn't ask you to do it." Besides for being an extremely distasteful thing to do, you are squandering an opportunity to enhance the connection between the two of you. Take a moment to appreciate the kindness you experienced, and tell them a heartfelt thank you for it.

After all, you will both benefit from that.

Chinuch: Educate your Kids

Children don't know what their parents do for them. I speak to *bachurim* and from their questions and comments I can clearly see that they simply have no clue how much their parents go out of their way for them. They're used to it and they don't find it to be remarkable at all. Hence, their apparent flippant attitude towards our efforts.

To counter this lack of knowledge, we need to tell our children how much we think about them and do for them. This shouldn't be done in a way to make them feel guilty, "See how hard you make me work?!" but rather in a way that they learn how much we love them. "I knew how much you wanted these shirts, so I went to three different stores until I found them in your size. All because I love you so much."

By letting them know in a loving way how much we do for them, at the very least we will create a loving connection, and in the best case we will hear the words we so want to hear. "Thank you, Totty. Thank you, Mommy."



Q&A



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

Question:

Whenever I tell my wife how much I care for her, she dismisses and refutes it. "You're just saying it. It's not even true."

Answer:

Often, when you tell someone a general statement, "I love you" or "I care about you", it's very easy to deny it. Either because they have a distorted perception of love, because love means something else to them entirely, or because they have one point of contention that to them negates the entire premise of your love. Whatever the case may be, in order to counteract the possibility of your spouse refuting such a statement, be specific. "I like how upbeat you are!" "I really admire your sensitivity with the children." "I appreciate your wisdom." "I love tonight's supper!" With these expressions of love and thanks, you will create a bridge that will strengthen your connection and prove to your spouse that you really do mean what you say.

It's also important not to allow yourself to get destroyed when your wife says something like this. Instead of shutting down or getting angry, tell her, "I felt very hurt by what you said. I really do love you and I wish you'd feel it. If there's anything that makes you question it, please share it with me and I'll see if there's something I can do about it. Please don't just disagree with what I try to genuinely express." Hopefully, she will realize that what she said was not very nice, and you can start to repair the rift from there.

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