Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Noach 5780 }

Together We Stand

Unity In Babylon

In the beginning of this week's *parsha*, mankind is destroyed due to its sins. The *passuk* tells us what their sin was, חמס –Robbery. At the end of this week's *parsha*, mankind sins once more, at the Tower of Babel. This time their sin is very severe – they are out to wage war with Hashem Himself! Yet their punishment is not very remarkable "They were dispersed". Why the disparity in punishment?

It appears that the Torah is teaching us a very great lesson here: When mankind is stealing from one another and cheating each other, there is no hope for them and they will be destroyed. If however, mankind joins together for a purpose – even if that purpose is blasphemous – their unity is a quality that will save them.

Rashi says: "We learn from here how hated dissent is before Hashem, and how great Shalom is".

One and One; Not Two

The benefits of *shalom* can be explained by a simple math equation: 1+1 = 3! According to the concept of synergy, the combined energy of two people is more than their individual energies put together. Two people who can carry fifty pounds each, can in fact carry more than 100 pounds when together. When two people join together, they can accomplish much more than when they're separate.

There is something spiritual in the unity of two people who are working together harmoniously; it's not something tangible that can be pinpointed. There's a certain mood, an aura, a spiritual energy which helps their goals be met.

When two people live together, and support each other, whether in words or in actions – great things can be accomplished.

Turning Things Upside Down

They say that in order to change from "Me" to "We", everything needs to be turned upside down…

In marriage, it's not "I need to take care of this" or "Can *you* take care of this for *me*". No, "*We* need to take care of this". It's very important to be together, to accept responsibility for each other.

This doesn't mean that one drinks "because *we* are thirsty". No, you're thirsty or your husband is thirsty. But when the household is involved, it is *our* problem.

Gender Roles

I was just dealing with a couple who came to me with *shalom bayis* difficulties. She asked her husband, "Why don't you help *me* for Yom Tov?!" and he replied, "I built the *sukkah*." She replied, "Well, that's *your* sukkah, but *you* didn't do anything for *me* for *yom tov*".

Of course men and women have different natures and different roles. But when it comes to Sukkos, *the family* needs a sukkah. When it comes to Pesach, *the family* needs to go shopping and have a kosher kitchen. *Our* child needs to be taken care of. Yes, most of the time your wife takes care of the baby, but that doesn't make it any less your responsibility.

Our Separate Bank Accounts

Regarding the *dor haflagah* the *passuk* tells us that Hashem was *k'v'yachol* worried –"Since they are together in unity, nothing will ועתה לא יבצר מהם be impossible for them"! If we want to reach that stage where we can accomplish all that we wish, we must learn to live together in harmony.

Someone once explained how to resolve all *shalom bayis* issues. According to his experience, most issues in marriage stem from disagreements about spending, and therefore, he believes, the husband and wife should share one bank account and pool their money. This way there's no "*You* used *my* money for X but you won't let *me* use *your* money for Y" etc. And all marital financial issues are solved! Brilliant.

Except that sometimes the quarrels originate when there *is* one bank account and both spouses see exactly where everyone's money is going. "This is what you're spending so much money on?"

Sometimes it's better for a couple to keep their money separate, every couple must do what works for them. But at the root of all of this is the question: "Is it "me" and "you," or is it "us"? Because if it's *our* money and *our* sheitel and *our* parking ticket, most of the squabbles simply disappear, whether there's one bank account or six.

We Are The Problem

It's not *your* sukkah, *your* kitchen, *your* responsibility. It's *our* home, and *we* work together to have a successful home.

Sometimes a couple runs into problems, but going for therapy is very difficult, because they have two different problems. Her problem is that "*He*'s making my life miserable", and his problem is that "*She*'s making my life miserable". So how can one therapist possibly help with two different issues?

If however, you come to a therapist and say that "we" have a problem – now we can try to tackle the issue! But if you can't even agree on the problem, how can you possibly get help?

Chinuch: Dad's Homework

Let's move on to the topic of raising children. So much can be accomplished when parents work together with their children as a team.

Even doing homework with a child can bring up negative feelings when there is no sense of togetherness: "*I'm* very unhappy with the way *you're* doing it". "Why aren't *you* up to par with this yet"? The "me-you" mode introduces negativity to the relationship dynamic.

If you want to live *together* with people you have to make it about *us* and leave "me-you" at the door. When a child feels that his parents are on the same page as him, and it's not "us against them", much more can be accomplished.

Because That's What I Said

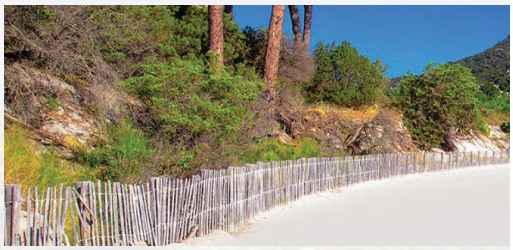
Sometimes parents get annoyed with their children when they challenge an element of religious observance and the knee-jerk reaction is "Because I said so". When a child hears that, all he hears is "I don't care what

you want or think, only what I say is important and relevant". It then turns into a personal fight.

It would be so much wiser for the parent to identify with the child's challenge. "I know it's difficult to sit still during Birkas Hamazon, it's so long! But this is what we have to do. We enjoyed our food, now we say *Birkas Hamazon* respectfully". By using We, and agreeing with the child, it is so much easier to make an impact, and for our voices to be heard.

When a child feels a pressure to succeed because he needs his father to be proud of him, it is just that – "a pressure". However if a father makes his child feel that it's *our* success, the child is excited to be successful along with his father. Instead of a hierarchy it's a team. Be a team player and watch your relationships flower.

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Q&A

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



Question:

During a conversation with my teenager, I said something wrong and embarrassed him. He was very upset and we had a bit of a confrontation. By now, I'm ready to admit that I was wrong. How do I apologize to him without losing my authority as the father?

Answer:

Many people are confused about "apologies" so I'll use this question as an opportunity to elaborate. There are a few common pitfalls people run into while trying to apologize, so we'll go through them briefly.

1. Don't explain: There's no need to explain why you're really right or even why *he's* really right. If you want to apologize, simply apologize.

2. Don't generalize: "I feel so bad, I'm a terrible father". We're not discussing *you* right now, and certainly not your parenting skills. We're apologizing for a specific case; bring up the case and apologize for it. Don't give your son a chance to attack you.

Mistakes are universal. Everyone understands it if you made a mistake and you own up to it. So if you keep your apology clean and to the point, generally you will be successful.

What if your son doesn't want to accept the apology and tries to bring up "that other time"? Don't get involved in a new conflict. Say "I'm sorry that you feel that way" and cut it short. You did your part, now move on.

Stick to your point, admit your mistake, and it's enough. Even if your son doesn't appear to accept your apology, you can be sure that he's quite happy to hear your apology.

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