

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# Torah Lessons for the Home

## THE NACHAS RECIPE

This week's *parshah* describes how the Mishkan and all the holy *keilim* were carried from one place to another as Klal Yisrael made their way through the Midbar. The Torah tells us that the Aron "carried those who carried it," and yet, it still had to be physically placed on the shoulders of its bearers.

Commenting on this idea, R' Moshe Kobriner *ztz"l* writes that "we need to work hard at serving Hashem," adding that our hard work needs to be accompanied with an awareness that although the effort is ours, the achievement is Hashem's. Without His input, nothing happens. We remain obligated to devote ourselves to serving Hashem but we need to remember at all times that the outcome isn't in our hands.

Nowhere do we see this more clearly than in *chinuch habanim*. People have been searching for the recipe for *nachas* from children for centuries, yet guaranteed results and foolproof methods for success elude us to this day. While part of the reason is that each child needs a different recipe, the real explanation is that it's just not up to us. While we have to do ours, just as in the building of the Mishkan, it's Hashem who makes it happen. We must constantly turn to Him, the third partner in our *kinderlach*, and *daven* to be *zocheh* to *hatzlachah* in our *chinuch* and to see *nachas* from our children.

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In celebration of

**Naftuli and Reizy's marriage**

on 15 Sivan 5786

*May The Almighty bless them with happiness, excellent health, marital harmony, and all good things in life.*

***Shaindel & Gedalia Arnstein***

Parshas **Naso**

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Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for your constantly thought-provoking and inspiring essays.

I'd like to comment on one that I read recently about a wife who was upset about some of the ways in which her husband was no longer as strict about certain aspects of Yiddishkeit as before. She gave a few examples, and I really appreciated the way in which you noted the difference between *halachah* vs. *minhag* etc., as well as the advice you gave on how she could accept him and help him to grow.

Sadly, it sounded like this man had fallen into a cultural FFH (Frum From Habit) Yiddishkeit, as they call it, and that he doesn't really have a relationship with Hashem. His wife pushing him to maintain certain standards clearly won't solve the problem as she can't build his relationship with Hashem for him.

With that in mind, I have two questions on the same idea as it relates to our children.

1. How can we help our children cultivate their own relationship with Hashem? When they're young, they're too little to understand the concept, and by the time they're old enough to truly begin to develop that relationship, there are many other factors at play, and we, their parents, are often no longer the decisive influences in their lives.

2. How can we truly accept someone with whom we have a close relationship (for example a sibling) when they do things that are out of sync with Torah *hashkafah*? I know I can't control them, and of course I love them and *daven* for them. But when what they're doing is disgusting, saddening, and a waste of their *koichos,* how can I accept them?

Thank you




You've perfectly identified the key "challenge" with *chinuch*. When our children are young and impressionable, they are too young to understand what it means to have a relationship with Hashem; when they're old enough to understand, they're no longer as impressionable. Furthermore, by then, there are so many forces conspiring to impress them that their parents fear getting drowned out in the noise.

Just as a wife can't create her husband's relationship with Hashem, so too are parents unable to do so for their children. We can't take them by the hand and lead (or drag) them down the right path — it simply doesn't work.

Thankfully, though, that's not what *chinuch* is all about and that's not what Hashem expects us to do. *Chinuch* is about teaching and showing by example, laying the best possible foundations for growth, and giving the support and encouragement needed for our children to build on those foundations. We can't control what they decide to build, even if we think we know what it should look like.

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When the inevitable bumps in the road appear, it can feel very complicated. For every child who struggles, ten people will confidently explain what caused the problem. Some of these people have the best of motivations; they truly want to make "the system" better. And, of course, there is always room for improvement; our *chinuch* system isn't perfect. And yet, perhaps the way we do things isn't all that bad. After all, despite so many efforts to improve things, no one has come up with something better on a society-wide scale.

Part of the reason why solutions are hard to find is that all this analysis does nothing more than look at outcomes with hindsight. "Oh him? He comes from a broken

home." "That girl? Her parents indulged her and look what happened." "Mr. Cohen put his whole heart into bringing up his children and they are such a source of *nachas*." It all seems to make sense until you question the script. Do all children from broken homes go off the *derech*? Does indulging children always turn out badly? Do all parents who truly invest heart and soul in their children see only wonderful outcomes?

No one has an answer, and there isn't really an answer for people who want a formula that will guarantee outcomes. We can't fully protect our children from negative influences either outside the home or even within. Every child has a *yetzer hara* and needs to learn how to grapple with it. We can't fight it for them. What we can do, along with all our investment in our children's *chinuch*, is *daven* for them and teach them by example — by struggling with our own *yetzer hara*.

This is why *tefillah* is fundamental in *chinuch*. Parents can do "everything right" and still not have *nachas* from their children. And yes, some parents make terrible mistakes and have wonderful children. The reasons for these outcomes are often beyond our understanding. Yet, that doesn't absolve us from doing the best we can to bring them up to be *ehrliche Yidden*.

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Much of *chinuch* is about balance, and in almost any area it's important not to go to extremes.

You mention the difference between *halachah* and *minhag* and so forth, and while you didn't link it to *chinuch*, this is an area of debate in how we teach our children.

Clearly there are benefits to distinguishing between obligations and customs etc. A child who is taught, when young, that his family's customs are just as binding as *mitzvos d'Oraisa* may end up questioning his entire approach to Yiddishkeit when he grows up and realizes that what he was taught was a very distorted version. On the other hand, people who go to the opposite extreme and present *mesorah* and centuries-old *minhagim* as optional extras, often also end up doing a great deal of damage. Why would a child take something seriuosly if it was presented as optional?

Knowing which approach to take isn't always clear, and each situation needs to be addressed individually.

The same applies to any approach that is adopted without careful thought for whether it fits the child and his unique circumstances. Parents who feel they suffered because their parents were "over-protective," for instance, may feel that they need to give their children more freedom. In doing so, they often ignore not only that freedom given today can be far riskier and dangerous, but also that some children thrive on being within very firm boundaries and feel insecure and neglected without them.

Conversely, parents who believe that their parents paid too little attention to them often over-correct by going to the opposite extreme and fail to take into account that some of their children, due to the way they're made, will rebel at being micro-controlled.

For the most part, trying to control a child is not only unlikely to work but likely to backfire.

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Regarding how to encourage our children to build a relationship with Hashem, the first piece of advice I would give is: Let them decide how they can do it best.

To illustrate this idea, let's use a classic and well-known example. The Steipler Gaon *ztz"l* initially sent his son, Rav Chaim Kanievsky *ztz"l*, to a *yeshivah* that focused on learning *b'iyun*. It didn't take him long to realize that he wasn't thriving there. Instead of insisting that his son "must" follow the same *derech halimmud* as his father, the Steipler encouraged R' Chaim to learn more *bekius*. This wasn't a case of "if you can't have the best, then second-best will have to do." This *was* the best for R' Chaim and we know how the story ended for the future Sar HaTorah.

As our children grow up and enter the transition between "too young to understand" and "old enough to get it," we have to pay close attention to their personalities and preferences and allow them to blossom in their own unique way.

The *rosh yeshivah* Rav Koppelman *ztz"l* would say: We know that everything in creation was created on the first day and then, over the six days of creation, each item was set in place. But where was the sun until the fourth day of creation, when Hashem placed it in the sky? Why wasn't it shining from wherever it was until then, and illuminating the world? And Rav Koppelman answered: It was there all along, but even a sun doesn't shine if it's not in its right place.

Each child has a place, and that's where he'll shine. This doesn't mean that we stop guiding children and just allow them to "find themselves" and figure things out on their own. They still need a lot of help and we should always be there providing it. But we do need to respect that the kind of relationship they forge with Hashem may look different from our own. As long as it's still a relationship on Hashem's terms, within Torah boundaries, it's just fine.

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The second piece of advice naturally builds on the first: one of the most powerful ways to inspire our children to follow in our footsteps is by setting a positive example ourselves.

Even if the path we are on is slightly different from the one they choose, if we follow it *b'simchah*, it's so much more likely that they will too.

This is one area where we can't fake it. Children of any age see through hypocrisy with ease. So, if you want your children to enjoy speaking to Hashem, you have to show them how much you love to speak to Him too.

And, if you want to show your children anything at all, you have to be in a relationship with them yourself. They may be very different from you in so many ways, but that doesn't mean that you can't communicate.

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My final piece of advice is to be truly invested in your children's *chinuch*. It's not enough to set a wonderful example; you have to work hard too. In practice, that means doing what you can to live in a place conducive to bringing up children to Torah and *mitzvos*. That should be the first criterion when choosing where to live. It also means providing ongoing guidance, seeking out advice for difficult situations, and, above all, *davening*.

A friend of mine recently spent a Shabbos with his extended family. He described how his grandfather was *zocheh* to see all his children and grandchildren going in the *derech Hashem*. And he made an interesting comment during that Shabbos: "I worried so much while my children and then their children were growing up. I *davened* so hard that they would be *ehrliche Yidden* and it caused me so much anxiety. If only I'd known how beautifully things would turn out, I would have had a much calmer life." But perhaps it was actually "his anxiety" that was key in leading to the results he merited? Without his worries, he wouldn't have been motivated to *daven* so much and to do whatever he could. The results aren't in our hands, but we are still obligated to put in the effort.

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Your second question is also relevant to *chinuch*, because our children often do things we don't approve of and we still need to not only accept them but also love them. And it can be very hard.

It would be far easier to accept — and perhaps even appreciate — this quality in someone living halfway across the world than in a person under our own roof or right next door. Recognizing that helps us understand that the challenge is not really the person itself, but the emotional response it stirs within us.

Sometimes, we feel betrayed by a family member who is doing something we consider unacceptable: "How could he do this to me?" Sometimes we care about them so much that we can't bear seeing them ruining their lives. When we take a step back and try to look at things more objectively, it becomes easier.

In the *Sefer HaTanya*, the Alter Rebbe discusses the concept of each person being made up of two separate parts — the part that's doing right, and the part that's slipping. We usually find it easy to make our peace with our own parts, but when we look at other people, with their different challenges, it's harder. We need to remember that the good parts in another person aren't cancelled out by the less-good parts, just as the areas in which we slip don't erase the good we do.

Accepting people isn't easy; sometimes, accepting ourselves isn't easy either. Certainly bringing up our children and doing what we can to inspire them toward a life of Torah and *mitzvos* isn't simple at all. But we can only do what's in our hands and remember that Hashem controls the outcome. If the outcome is good, we thank Him; if it's not what we wanted, we thank Him too because that is just another challenge for us to overcome.

## **TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME**: NASO 5786

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