RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Noach

Intent is Everything

In Parshas Noach we learn so much about the Flood and about Noach, let's turn to a less explored topic; Nimrod, the wicked king. We can learn from Nimrod too, we can learn what we should NOT do.

The Ibn Ezra writes a shocking *pshat* on the *possuk* that Nimrod was a *gibbor tzayid lifnei Hashem.* He explains it to mean that Nimrod would expertly hunt animals in order to bring *Korbanos* – sacrifices for Hashem. The Ramban argues on the Ibn Ezra saying we shouldn't attribute any noble deeds to such a *rasha*. The Chiddushei Harim explains this dichotomy with an insightful parable.

There was once a king who had many ministers, and all of them respected and liked him very much. One minister in particular was very devoted to him and was constantly looking out for ways to showcase his devotion and loyalty to the king.

On one occasion, the minister decided to give the king a very special gift. He thought long and hard, but could not come up with any ideas of a respectable gift to give the king. After all, a king has everything!

Suddenly, the perfect idea popped into his head. He was going to bake the king the most magnificent, intricate, delectable cake ever! Wasting no time, he got right to work. He poured his heart and his soul into his confection, and sure enough, the king was quite pleased when the beautiful, multi-layered creation was presented to him.

Truthfully, the king didn't need a cake. He had staff bakers and artists in his employ, who could possibly have topped this creation had he fancied for them to do so. But the king recognized the effort and the thought that this minister had put into his offering, and that was what made him so very happy.

The other ministers, though, were very jealous of all the praise the king was heaping on their fellow minister's head. And so, to spite the king's now-favorite minister, they banded together and collectively decided that each of them would bake a fancy cake for the king. They were well aware that the king had no need for any more cakes, and when he will be inundated with too many of them, even the nicest one will lose its luster. They wanted to diminish the greatness of the original cake that the king had received.

Nimrod was like the ministers in our parable, he wanted to try to diminish Hashem's love for the righteous descendants of Noach and Sheim who brought *korbanos.* Nimrod figured that if he will overwhelm Hashem – so to speak – with many sacrifices, Hashem will not notice the offerings of the righteous.

Nimrod overlooked one important detail. When a Yid brings a *Korban*, it is not because he thinks Hashem needs it; it is so that he can physically demonstrate his devotion, his love, and his remorse for any sin he might have committed. His desire is to sanctify and glorify Hashem's Name, and that desire is what causes him to find favor in the Eyes of Hashem, not the sacrifice.

We learn a very important lesson from this. When we give someone a gift, it is not the size, the color, or the dollar amount that counts. It is all about the intent. When we give a gift without feeling, devoid of love and caring then even if it's big and impressive and really expensive, it is essentially worthless. When you buy a gift out of genuine love and caring, then even if it is just a small trinket, the message will come through clearly.

With that, let's address a question that was sent in...

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I have two daughters who are close in age, but very different. While the younger one of them is naturally obedient and uncomplicated, the older one needs a bit more reinforcement to help keep her on the right track. How can we buy things that we normally wouldn't buy – think current kids' fads like certain toys or gadgets – and give them to our older daughter without our younger one feeling jealous? She has begun questioning the apparent disparity and it seems like sometimes she also needs more attention.

Please provide me with some practical advice and clarity. Thank you in advance.

Answer:

You asked a very good question which comes up often. Sometimes parents come up with a method of raising their children that works -- for most of their kids. Then they come up against this one child for whom it *just won't work*. Often, instead of tweaking their method to make it work for their other child, they try to make the child fit the method. That is not a very successful or wise approach. *Chanoch l'naar al pi darko*. We are to raise each child according to *his* ways – the way *his* brain works, the way *he* processes things, in a way that works *his* strengths.

I am very impressed that you seem to have realized this on your own. You have a method that works for your younger child, but you realize that the same approach will not be successful with your older one. You want to find a way to deal with both of them, without causing any undue friction.

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The truth is that sibling rivalry is as old as the world itself. The first set of siblings hated each other so much that it ended in murder. There's the story of a *rebbe* who asked his students whether they knew which of the Ten Commandments referred to parents. One little boy raised his hand and said, "I'm not sure which one speaks about parents, but I know the one about siblings. '*You shall not kill*'..."

Truthfully, the commandment that speaks directly to siblings is *Lo sachmod - You shall not covet*. When your child will notice you giving more to their sibling than you give to them, it will naturally cause jealousy or even hatred. Even if you, as the mature parents, determine that there needs to be a differentiation between your treatment of the two siblings, most of the time those children are too young to comprehend your logic. Chazal warn us about this when they tell us to be careful not to differentiate between our children. And that makes giving individual attention much more difficult.

An older child might be able to understand why you need to give her younger sibling more, especially after you explain it to them in an age-appropriate way. However, most of the time children and teenagers do not have the capacity to see outside of themselves, especially when the child who is shorted is the younger one.

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How can you help your child grow in her own unique way while not inciting the jealousy of her sister?

Try to find a private moment where you are alone with her and then you can shower her with all the compliments you want. You can even tell her that you would love to get her something special, but you don't want her sister to be jealous so you're going to think of a way to work it out.

Sometimes, just the knowledge that you're thinking about her in this way will be enough to give her the extra love she needs. The upside to this approach is that her sister will not have to be ogling this interchange from the sidelines and wondering whether you like her sister more than her.

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You mention that your younger daughter seems to be needing more attention now as well. The solution to that is to *give her that attention*. Even if it stems from pure jealousy, it is still a legitimate need that needs to be met. Your question shouldn't be "How can I give to one and not to the other?" The idea is to find a way to give each child what they really need.

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Giving in to your child's every whim normally doesn't yield beneficial long-term results. Even if your children are regular and run-of-the-mill, it's still not a good idea to spoil them and buy them everything they want. If you feel like your child really should be getting more from you, you can work it into a rewards program so that your child doesn't become spoiled and so that her siblings understand why she was rewarded and they weren't.

Creating a chart and giving your child a timeframe to perfect a certain area you'd like to see improvement in, will cause long term change by turning it into a habit, as well as give her a chance to get what she wants.

This might be advantageous to you in more ways than one. If her sibling asks how come her sister got the prize and you tell her that there was a chart and she worked for it, she might offer to complete a chart, too, so she can get something that *she* wants! Win-win!

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Another important angle that you might want to consider is figuring out why it is that your daughter needs so much from you. Often the things we buy them just serve as a band-aid to cover up a deeper wound. Maybe your child wants to feel more connected to you or feel like they are special to you.

Sometimes there is an area in your child's life where she struggles, be it in school or socially. Try to find out what it is that is bothering her. If it's something outside the house, create a space within your home where she can feel successful so that she can feel better about herself. Every child wants to feel loved and special, and you don't necessarily need to give this to them with an object, which might make everyone around them jealous.

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Very often taking her on a shopping trip with you or buying her a tiny, little trinket and giving it to her with love and attentiveness will serve as a form of connection and will give her what she needs. When you can, ask her for her opinion on matters or write her a little note. She will feel valued and respected and she might not need so many lavish gifts anymore.

Even in the event you do decide that a gift is the right approach, remember what we learned in this week's Parshah. It's not so much WHAT you give, it's HOW you give it. Your recipient will sense when the gift is given out of love and with a full heart and will respond accordingly.

Hashem should help us give each child what they need by taking the effort to understand them and letting them know it and feel it.

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