RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS VAYIKRA

GIVING IN TOO MUCH?

When the Mishkan was established in the midst of the Jewish nation, it was the greatest gift from Hashem. After the sin of the Eigel we weren't sure if things would ever be the same, but by commanding us to build a Mishkan, Hashem showed us that He still desired our closeness. Moreover, He showed us that He wishes to live directly amongst us, without any intermediaries such as Moshe or *lehavdil* the Eigel.

In his sefer Nachal Kedumim, the Chida has a long discussion about the first *possuk* in our *parsha,* how it alludes to this idea and the marriage-relationship between Hashem and His Chosen People. In the middle of this discussion the Chida cites a *halacha* that if a woman breaks something while doing her housework, she is *patur* from paying. The Rambam says that technically she should have to pay, but there is a special enactment from Chazal to absolve her. Why?

Because of Shalom Bayis. Imagine the atmosphere in a home where every time a plate broke while washing the dishes, we would make the woman pay for it. The Chida says that although we broke something very valuable at the Cheit Haeigel, still, for Shalom Bayis, Hashem was willing to look past it and live harmoniously in our midst, in the Mishkan.

Sometimes people get stuck with *cheshbonos*. "I did this so you must do that." or, "Now that you did that, I don't need to do this" etc. But when you're close to someone and want to have a peaceful and loving relationship, you can't be particular with every detail. You don't have to notice or comment on everything. And you surely don't have to let your family know that you're being *mevater* either. The letter of the law may not require you to give in, but it will bring you more happiness and peace if you do.

This week's essay is sponsored by
R' Moshe Yakov Fischer & family
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May they be Zoche to continuous Nachas from all their children,
and may this Simcha bring about many more Simchos iyH!

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thanks for your Shiurim and for addressing the questions of the public, you are doing a wonderful service to the Am Yisrael, may Hashem give you the strength to continue.

My oldest son has access to a filtered iPad. He watches and plays things that are acceptable by our standards. Still, I'm not happy about it. It started off with limited access but he begged until I gave him more and more. By now, he basically has unlimited access because we were trying to work *with* him and not *against* him. Before that, he was doing things behind my back.

We believe the iPad access is interfering with his Yeshiva attendance even though he claims he wasn't getting up too early before that either, and he's probably right. Whenever I say something about limiting the time he spends on it, he says "but you said I can have unlimited access." I point out that it's not working for him, – but again, I'm trying to work with him. If I don't, he'll probably do his own thing, as he has threatened to and has done in the past. How do I keep a normal balance?

My second son is extremely jealous of his older brother in general, but in particular regarding the unlimited access to the iPad. He claims that if we're allowing the older one to do whatever he wants, he should be able to do the same. Of course, we tried reasoning with him, but he rejected it. He gets time to play like all the other children, but he takes more than he's supposed to. So does my oldest son, but I can't do much about that. How do I respond to my younger son when he asks for an explanation?

Thank you

Answer:

Your question touches on several sensitive points. A public forum like this is not the place to address the details about if and how much to allow children to play on an iPad, (if it is *ever* helpful), and when a child is going too far with it. Therefore in regard to what to allow or not allow, and how, with your older son, it definitely requires more personal *Torah'dige* guidance. I do want to discuss the second part of your question, where your younger son is jealous of what his older brother has. This is a scenario that plays out in many families in many different ways. Often when we take care of the needs of one child, it affects the needs of another child.

It's important to understand children; understand their needs and the various parts of their personalities. One child may need a lot of compliments, whereas another may just need more space. It gets tricky

however, when what is necessary for one child becomes a challenge for another. Individual and custom tailored attention is so important, but it poses a new challenge when there are different children together. So while on the one hand it's often true that when a child is doing something anyway, it's good to find a way to allow the child to do it rather than fight the child. This can pose a new challenge however, when other children begin to demand similar allowances.

Based on the story of *Mechiras Yosef,* Chazal teach us that a person should not create obvious differences between his children. Yet we see that when Yosef Hatzaddik gave gifts to his brothers, he gave Binyamin more. Shouldn't he have learnt from his own history not to repeat this mistake? It seems that there must be times when it *is* okay to do things differently between siblings. In fact, that was likely why Yaakov treated Yosef differently in the first place.

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When it is necessary to treat one child differently, I tell parents to try to do it "off the record" whenever possible. Not everyone has to notice that one child is getting more compliments or more time alone with you. You may have to be creative to do that, but it's often possible. Perhaps you can take a child out of *yeshiva* or school for a short time to give them the extra time and attention they need. Tell him that this is your special secret – which can make him feel even better. Even with allowing more access to the iPad, try to get the child to do it when the others don't notice. Perhaps you can explain to him that it's okay for him to have extra time if the other children don't see.

In general, though, it's possible that you'll have to do things differently for *all* your children because of the specific needs of one child. If you have to give one child something, take that child somewhere, or change your standard for one child, you may have no choice but to do the same for the other children. It may or may not be possible to explain to the other children why you're doing it. This can happen when you have a child with any type of special need or special situation. Certainly, this has to be applied carefully and with the guidance of *Daas Torah*.

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Explaining to the other children can get complicated and you may require special guidance, but here are some general principles. You may be able to explain to a child that because of the circumstances, needs or age of a certain child, you're allowing that child to do what's necessary for them. It probably won't make him feel good, but it'll take away the sting of "him yes, me not."

Be careful not to give the child the message that you don't allow that child to do what they're doing and they're doing it anyway. You don't want this child to think that he can also get away with doing things you don't allow. Still, try to give a sensible explanation so that the other children don't become resentful. You can explain to the child that he may have noticed that the other one is going through a difficult time and that although you're not really okay with it, you chose to allow something. If you consulted with someone before, maybe you can tell this to the child as well to help him understand how you balanced your feelings with the needs of the child. Be sure to express your appreciation and admiration of this child for understanding the other one's needs. Again, your child may not like it, but he'll be able to understand it.

On the other hand, maybe you can address the child who is getting the preferential treatment – in this case, the older son. "I understand that we discussed that you'll be allowed to have unlimited access to the iPad. I would appreciate if you can understand though that it's hard for me to tell the other children 'no' when you get to have it all day. What can we do about it so that you get what you need without making it hard on me or the other children? Can you limit your time? Do you think you can use it when the other children don't see? Can you pretend you're not using it as much?" When a parent communicates to a child

that they need the child's help, the child may be more understanding and willing to cooperate.

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Going back to the original question about the child with greater needs, true; there are times when we *can't* fight a child. Still, it's important to think about what the child *really* needs. Is it really the iPad? Is the iPad solving his problems? Obviously not. You may no longer be able to dictate how much time he spends with his devices, but maybe you can try to give him what he *really* needs. Is he numbing certain feelings by playing on the iPad? Can you help him feel better about himself in other ways? Can you make him feel needed, productive, fulfilled? That may and probably *will* end up accomplishing more than unlimited access to the iPad ever can.

Children have different needs and those needs should be taken seriously. But that doesn't always mean letting them try to solve their problems in a way that doesn't get their problems solved.

One more important point. There are times when we need to allow a child to break rules or do something we don't want. Some parents throw in the towel and let the child know that they can do whatever they want and they're okay with it. Other parents just keep holding it against the child. (And some parents flip-flop between the two.) There has to be a fine balance. It's okay for a child to know that their parents won't fight them on this specific thing for whatever reason. But at the same time, the child can and should know that the parent is not okay with it.

You don't have to make your child feel good about it. You can communicate to your child that you understand them, or understand their need, without talking for or against the action you don't like. Don't make your child feel that you're upset each time you allow them to do it. By not saying anything, your child can feel accepted and at the same time know that you don't condone what they're doing. We should take people's needs seriously and be considerate of them, and we'll be able to bring out the best in them, iy"H.

Wishing you much hatzlacha,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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Thank you and Tizku Lmitzvos!!

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME
VAYIKRA 5782

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