Torah Lessons for the Home

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Parshas Lech Lecha

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Asking for Favors

LECH LECHA: BE NICE AND DON'T GET ME MURDERED

"There was a famine in the land and Avram was forced to go down to Egypt" (Bereishis 12, 1). As they approached Egypt, Avram explained the state of affairs in Egypt to Sarai, and explained his uneasiness about the trip. Then he said to her (12, 13) אמרי נא אחותי את למען ייטב לי בעבורך וחיתה נפשי בגללך. –"He entreated with her, asking that she identify herself as his sister, this way he would get rich, and they would allow him to live". He entreated with her, he begged her.

We know this from the wording used: אמרי נא. Chazal tell us אין נא אלא לשון של בקשה –"The word נא is an expression of pleading", of begging. Avram was begging Sarai. For what? So that she should give him the pleasure of not being murdered.

Is that something a husband has to beg his wife for?

In addition, Avram first asks for the favor "so that he would get rich", and only later explains that he doesn't want to get killed. Is that a way to talk? Is that a way to say things?

Also, how big of a deal was it for Sarai to tell a little lie, that this required pleading on Avram's behalf? She was going to be taken in any case. Only, if she would say what Avram wanted her to say, she would be saving his life. So why was pleading necessary? Avram should have said: "Look, this is the situation. Here's what we're going to do…"

THE PROPER WAY TO SPEAK TO YOUR SPOUSE

One lesson we can learn is that there is a way a spouse must be spoken to. Regardless of how right you are or how important this is, your spouse must be treated with respect.

Now, it's true that if you want something the best way to get it is by asking nicely, so that alone is a reason to be polite. But even if you could get it without being nice – even if being nice is not absolutely necessary, it's still… nice. It's nice to be nice. This is true in general, but in dealing with a spouse, and in building a relationship, it's crucial.

Being needy and demanding is not a good way of getting your message across. Even if it's important! People are more receptive to listening when you're not breathing down their backs, it is simply easier to accept a message when it is delivered in a civil manner.

SELECTIVE ACCOMODATION

Sometimes you might find that your husband will do certain things for his mother, or his boss, the moment he is asked to. But when you ask for the same thing, you are ignored! The same person is very accommodating in dealing with some people, but not so much when dealing with others.

Not always, but very often this can be attributed to the manner in which the request was made. It's not that he is not capable of fulfilling this particular demand. Only that when he is asked in a certain manner, it is easier for him to comply.

Regardless of what it is, of how important it is, or how much you deserve it: Just ask nicely. It's the polite thing to do, it's what your spouse deserves, it's healthy communication, and it's just so much more effective!

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

Most of the reactions you'll get from people are dependent on your attitude towards them. The passuk states: החיים והמות ביד הלשון –"Life and death belong to the tongue". This is generally understood as an expression of the power of the tongue. With your tongue you can bring about life, through complimenting, thanking and being nice to others. But through your tongue you can also bring about death, through gossip and slander.

However we can also understand this verse in a different light. We can understand it as referring back to the speaker. A person's tongue can bring life and death upon himself. The way you use your tongue, affects the results that you will get. Your attitude boomerangs right back to you. If we learn to speak with חיים, we will receive pleasing results, results of life.

SHE 'SPLAINED IT TO ME!

There's the famous joke about the street kid who was pushing his way to the front of the line in the bank. He didn't want to wait his turn and no amount of persuasion on behalf of the men and women on line could get this kid to wait his turn patiently. He was constantly trying to outwit people and cut the line.

Finally an old woman walked up to the young man and slapped him across the face. He waited patiently from then. When he was asked why he waited to get a slap when it had already been patiently explained to him many times that one must wait for his turn, he looked up and said: "Oh simpuh, she 'splained it to me!"

Now, most people don't need violence in order to understand a point. But this story does underscore the importance of bringing your message across in the manner that it will be best understood.

When you say "This has to be done" it may feel like a burden, you may be fueling resentment and resistance. But when you repeat the same message in different words "It would mean so much to me if this can get done today, if at all possible". It's the same request! But when you ask nicely,

when you're soft – it becomes so much easier to accommodate you.

THE GARMENTS OF YOUR MIND

The saintly maggid of Mezritch once said that speech is the attire of your mind. Just as a person can be recognized by his clothing, one's thoughts can be discerned from his manner of speech. When you communicate a request to someone, the way you express it actually reveals the way you feel about this subject.

It is possible to ask for something in a critical way, in a way that sounds like you're not satisfied. You can request something in a manner where there's a hidden undertone of "Why was this not done yet?" This negative undertone somehow takes over the whole conversation, and it will probably end in frustration for both of you.

There is a way of speaking, where it's not so much about what you're saying, but how you're saying it. Your wife is thinking "Oh, so I should've done it of my own initiative" or "Oh, so you weren't happy all along!" "So you're saying that I never do anything for you"! Now, you didn't say that! But that's what the other party is hearing.

On the other hand, when you ask nicely, and you show how appreciative you'll be when your request is granted; that feeling is transferred over. The other party feels your sentiments and it is much easier for them to accommodate you.

THE MISSING MAGIC

Sometimes you encounter couples who are married for a while, but there's something missing in their relationship. It's not quite sour, but there is something about their communications that's getting sticky, it's getting stale. Someone is just not ready to give in and work with the other.

I was just working with a man who told me that lately he just can't do anything that his wife asks of him. He just can't! You know what it is? It's all about the way she's phrasing it. It's not about the requests she's making, they're not unreasonable. It's about the way that she's demanding these things. It's the negativity and unhappiness that's being conveyed along with the request.

BE VULNERABLE AND ASK

It's so much smarter to just be nice, and ask nicely for things; you then have a much greater chance of getting what you want. But I must emphasize; the first step is for you to ask. If you want something, you need to ask for it.

So many people don't know how to lower themselves and ask "Would you be able to do this for me?" It's always "I can't believe this wasn't taken care of", or "If I don't do this I see nobody will" and the like. They may also say: "This 'has to' get done" whether for the kids, or for the home, or for you yourself. Forget about "why" the other party must do it, if you're asking for it, just ask for it!

People come up with very original ways to avoid the humbling experience of asking for a favor, and it's wrong. If you want someone to do something for you, ask them for it. Acknowledge that you need this done. You don't look 'stupid' by asking for something, it doesn't mean that you're 'less'. It is merely a healthy way of communicating.

WHO'S DOING THE FAVOR HERE?

In fact, one of the healthiest things that you can do for a relationship is to ask for a favor. And if it's not anything major, often the person doing the favor will feel better than the recipient! By asking your wife for a favor, you're empowering her, you're showing her that you need her. You're giving her the greatest gift; the opportunity to be of service.

It is such a good feeling to give, and by giving you strengthen your relationship. So when you ask your spouse to give, you're not taking. You're actually giving him an opportunity to give, which is the greatest thing you can possibly give him!

WHAT'S YOUR ATTITUDE?

Now the second step, once we've learned that we must ask, we need to internalize this concept of asking nicely. It's not enough to ask for things.

We need to know how to ask for things. The less demanding you are, and the less you stress how much this needs to be done, the more likely you are to actually get it done.

Another factor that people often forget, is that when you're asking for a favor, you're asking for a favor, that's all. Just because you're asking for a favor doesn't mean that your spouse must drop everything and do exactly what you want right now, in the precise way that you like it done. Your spouse is still an independent human being – she didn't become your third and fourth arm, just because you asked for something. You can't control her.

So we learn from Avraham Avinu that although what he was asking for was very important, and it was something that maybe Sarah should have offered to do without being asked. Still he asked for it in a nice and non-threatening way, without pressure. Instead of stressing that "I'm going to die", he focused on the positive, "If we do this we'll get rich!"

This is the way to approach a conversation with your spouse; it's not about what "the facts" are, or what is "right". It's about "How can my communications be more respectful?" and as a side benefit; more effective.

CHINUCH: DO IT THE EASY WAY

In parenting this is sometimes even more difficult. "Shouldn't my child be jumping to fulfill my will? Do I have to ask him? And ask him 'nicely'?!" I get this from parents all the time, and I tell them "No, you don't 'have to' ask him. You're right, he really 'should' be listening to you. But you might just get the desired results more easily if you do it this way…"

Make life easier for yourself and for your child. If you'll be less demanding, if you'll treat her like an adult – by the way, there's no passuk anywhere in the Torah "Thou shalt not be civil with your children": You're allowed to be nice to your kids! If you'll speak civilly with her, it is quite possible that she'll listen to you, and you'll get what you want.

BE A ROLE-MODEL

You're actually teaching your children a valuable lesson when you say "Do you think you would be able to this for me, please?" It makes things much simpler. It makes the attitude and the mood of the home lighter and easier. It is especially important to consider this when dealing with what I call "The Fragile Child".

In fact the שלחן ערוך writes that if a parent causes his child to be disrespectful, he has transgressed לפני עור! This means that if you know that by behaving in a certain way, your child will disobey you, or fight with you – you are actually guilty of causing him to do an aveirah!

WHEN CHILDREN ARE ADULTS

In the hakdama of the sefer Chovos Hatalmidim, the Piacezna Rebbe ztz"l writes, that children of the modern generation are very different from the children of previous generations. In earlier times one could do anything to children and they would never fight back. Children understood that they were still young, and didn't understand everything, and thus they accepted whatever they were told by adults.

Whereas today, children believe themselves to be adults. They feel like they are on the same level as their parents, and are capable of questioning the logic of adults. It is no longer okay, just to tell children what to do, writes the Piacezna, rather nowadays, we must also explain everything to them, so that they feel like they are part of the decision making process. They must be treated as adults, if their cooperation is desired.

DON'T BE A TYRANT!

We'll end off with this vort from the Shlah, and we'll quote him word for word: וישלח יעקב ויקרא לרחל וללאה וגו' (בראשית לא, ד). This is in parshas Vayeitzei, when the time came for Yaakov to leave Lavan's house. Hashem told Yaakov that it was time for him to leave; so what did he do? He called Rachel and Leah, and he asked their opinion.

So the Shlah Hakadosh says אין ראוי לאדם כשירצה דבר מה מאנשי ביתו When someone wants something

from the people in his home, it is not correct שיכריחם על זה על צד האונס והנצוח, -that he should force them into it so that he gets his way. אף כי הוא מושל בהם. Even though he has the ability to do so, he is the 'king of his castle'.

אבל ישתדל לפתות אותם אל מה שירצהו בתכלית מה שאפשר, Rather he should try to convince them, and try to win them over to see his side, as much as possible כדי שיתעוררו לזה מעצמם. So that they come to the same conclusion as he did. כי זה הוא יותר טוב משיעשו זה על צד האונס וההכרח. This is far better than if they do something because they are forced into it.

ראה כמה הרבה יעקב דברים עם רחל ולאה כדי שיתרצו בטוב לב, Just look at how Yaakov went into a whole conversation with Rachel and Leah, in order that they agree wholeheartedly. ואעפ"י שהקדוש ברוך הוא ציוה לו שישוב לביתו and this, despite the fact that he wished to act on the orders of the Almighty!

Yaakov learned from his grandfather Avraham how one must speak with his wife. No matter how important this is, and despite the fact that this decision is already made up, Hashem told you what to do! Still, he treated his wives with respect, and made them feel that he valued their input and their opinion.

"I BEG YOU, PLEASE ENJOY PARADISE"

Interestingly, in parshas Bereishis, when Hashem told Adam to enter Gan Eden – Rashi says פתוהו ליכנס: Hashem persuaded him, he spoke to Adam nicely. Hashem didn't say, "Hey, this Eden, this is where you belong!" even though it was for his benefit and he would eventually come to understand that. No. Hashem spoke to Adam in a nice and gentle manner and coaxed him to enter Gan Eden.

So we see that there's a way to talk nicely, to ask nicely; whatever your message is, no matter how crucial, how vital. It can always be relayed in a gentle manner.

Avoiding Conflict

LECH LECHA: AVOID CONFLICT AT ALL COSTS

In this week's Parsha we learn from Avraham Avinu the proper way to deal with conflict. The passuk (13, 8) states אל נא תהי מריבה בינינו –"I beg of you please! Let there not be conflict between us – we are brothers!" So what should our attitude be when faced with machlokess, as Avraham was? To run as far away from it as possible.

But let's take a bit of a closer look at the pessukim here and see if there's any other practical advice we could glean. What was the reason that a conflict was about to break out? What was the catalyst for Avram's impassioned pleas to Lot that "there not be conflict between us"?

So if we read the parsha we discover that some of Lot's servants had made an error in judgment and believed that they were entitled to certain benefits, which they weren't. They were then rebuked by Avram's servants. So let's understand this now; Avram was Lot's uncle and his rebbe. He could have easily called Lot aside, and said "Look, your servants made a mistake, this is what is right, and this is what must be done". He could have done that… and left a resentful Lot.

AVRAHAM AVINU TAKES THE BLAME

But no. what does Avram say? "I beg of you, please! We're brothers!" and he continues: הלא כל הארץ לפניך הפרד נא מעלי אם השמאל ואימנה ואם הימין ואשמאילה –"There is so much opportunity for you, the whole land is open; let us separate - if you go this way, I'll go the other way…"

Avraham Avinu does not try to explain why he is right and Lot is wrong, there's no argument and no debate. He states "We cannot coexist peacefully,

let's split on good terms, just let me know your plans, and I'll go the other way, let's avoid conflict!

"NOT FIGHTING" VS. "PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE"

Sometimes people think that if they've succeeded in avoiding a fight, they've done it. They've conquered the yetzer hara, conquered their passion and their ego, and succeeded at living peacefully.

But the truth is that ."not fighting" is not enough. We see that after Avram and Lot split up, there was a war in Sodom, the place of Lot's new residence. "And Avram mobilized a huge force to come to Lot's aid" (14, 14). It wasn't an easy feat and it wasn't something you do for an enemy. Avraham worked hard on himself, and he actually felt love for "his brother" (ibid.). It wasn't just the absence of hate. Avram actually overextended himself for his nephew; this man who could have become his nemesis had the situation been handled a bit differently.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT REALLY?

So when faced with conflict we need to learn to look at it through Avraham Avinu's lenses. We need to understand how terrible machlokess is and feel the אל נא תהי מריבה בינינו "Please, I beg of you, let there not be conflict between us!" How important is this issue really? Is it really impossible to give up on?

I always tell people who come for counseling and they're not ready to concede on a certain issue; "If the issue is not really important, so you could give up on it, let the other side have their way. But if the issue is very important, then certainly let the other side have their way!"

Let me explain: The more important the issue is to you, and the closer it is to your heart, all the more bitter the fight will be. You don't want that, you don't want a bitter fight. Once a fight reaches certain proportions it's nearly impossible to control. The seforim compare machlokess to eish, to fire. When people have opposing positions on a matter that touches them very deeply, it quickly becomes a blazing inferno, a wildfire of epic proportions.

So if the issue is very important, let your spouse have her way. Over time, perhaps things will change; perhaps you have a chance of winning her over. But if you insist on your position now, good luck trying to battle that blaze!

THE MANIPULATOR AND THE SCHMATTE

It is so important to learn how to be mevatter, how to accept someone else's views, how to yield to someone else's opinions and wishes - and not be stiff about it. Your shalom bayis is so immeasurably improved when you're not digging your heels into the sand over everything, and getting stuck on all the details.

Sometimes people tell me: "But how can I keep giving in? I don't want to be a schmatte – I don't want to be a rag that's stepped on all the time!" There are many levels between someone who gets her way all the time, and one who never gets her way. Most people don't need to worry about becoming a schmatte, it's ok, you can compromise a bit here and there!

I've often seen something interesting, most of the people who are afraid of being schmattes, are in fact the ones who are treating others as schmattes. It's the woman who is constantly manipulating her husband, or the man who is constantly stepping on his wife who argue "but how can I be a schmatte?!".

THE REWARDS OF GIVING IN

Nobody ever regretted giving in. You don't regret running from machlokess and doing the right thing. Recently I attended a funeral, where the eulogies were all about how this man always made sure to live harmoniously with others, how he distanced himself from various conflicts even when he was right and would have been the "winner". Everybody respects such a man, you only gain from being nice to others. No one considers such a man a "loser".

The sweetness of winning doesn't last until your funeral. It's a fleeting enjoyment to "win" and be right, but it doesn't last. Many times the "winner" ends up wishing he had never won! But the fruits of giving in to your fellow, the reward for giving in to your spouse, is immediate and everlasting.

Chazal tell us (Rosh Hashana 17a) כל המעביר על מדותיו, מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו "One who can overcome his tendencies, is forgiven for all of his sins". Now that's a big statement! If you'll forgive other people easily, Hashem will forgive you easily. That's a pretty good deal to make!

THE FALSE PEACE

The rebbe of Lublin, the famed Chozeh ztz"l, once said: "It is preferable to have a peace that is false than to have a true war!" Yes you're right, yes you have the emes, the truth and righteousness on your side. But you have war. Sometimes you're better off with a bit of fakeness, a bit of falsehood, as long as you have peace.

This is especially true when dealing with those we love. If you have a fight with a co-worker, with someone in shul, with your neighbor – so it's not so important, your emotions aren't running that high. But when dealing with your spouse or with other close family, remember: I love this person! At the end of the day, you love this person, do you really want to inflict this on yourself? Are you really ready to lose a loving relationship just so that "justice" is done?

BEING RIGHT FOR A HIGHER PURPOSE

Life is so much simpler, so much easier when we keep the passuk of אל נא תהי מריבה בינינו in our minds - when we remember to avoid conflict at all costs. Actually, there's another lesson that we can learn from this parsha, from this story of a conflict averted.

This potential conflict wasn't about Lot interfering with Avram's personal interests. It was about thievery on behalf of Lot's servants. His shepherds were misinterpreting a prophecy and appropriating property which was not rightfully theirs. Avram should have bristled with indignation at this.

The rightful property owners; the people who were being wronged – they wouldn't differentiate between the shepherds of Lot and Avram. They would say "Men from the camp of Avram, 'the Prince of the Lord' (Parshas Chayei Sarah 23, 6) have stolen from us". It could lead to a terrible chillul Hashem! Avram should have rebuked Lot, not for his honor, but for the kavod of Hashem!

But here we learn that we don't use Hashem for machlokess. We run away from machlokess! Your husband schmoozes in shul? Let Hashem deal with it; we don't invite conflicts, אל נא תהי מריבה בינינו.

THE SECRET TO GETTING RICH

The gemara (Bava Metzia 59a) tells us that a husband who honors his wife will be blessed with ample parnassah. The story is told of Rav Pinchas'l Koritz'er ztz"l, whose wife was a big spender. He once said to her "Ser'tze, my crown, should I argue with you over your spending habits? One argument will cost me my whole parnassah!"

Notice what he did there: he honored her – thus opening for himself the heavenly channels of abundance – avoided a conflict, and got his message across about her excessive spending. בתחבולות תעשה לך מלחמה –"Go to war with cunning" (Mishlei 24, 6). But if you can avoid war through cunning, obviously that's the best choice!

When you're in a relationship with somebody, or rather, when you're in a marriage; it's a big deal. It's all encompassing. Don't limit yourself to one detail and destroy the entire relationship over it. You worked so hard to build a home, will you destroy it because one brick is out of place?

CHINUCH: CHILDREN LEARN BY EXAMPLE

Before we talk about avoiding conflicts with our children, it is important to make mention of the following. You can teach your kids whatever "morals" you want, but they will learn from your actions. You can talk about the importance of "giving in and relenting to others" until you're blue in the face. But if you insist on getting things done "your way" – that's what your kids will pick up on.

"Let there not be conflict בינינו –between us". What is between the spouses? When the father is on one side, the mother on the other side, who's in middle? The same word – בנינו "our children". If there is conflict between the parents, if a wife is always nitpicking and can never give in to her

husband, the children feel it. Certainly they do, and it's very important to avoid that.

NOT NOTICING EVERYTHING

Sometimes a child will do something wrong, and the parent- the mechanech will pounce on her before she even realized what she did wrong! This creates unnecessary conflict. You don't have to point everything out immediately. You don't have to keep an exact tally of the times your child disobeyed the rules. It's okay to be a bit flexible and "not notice" everything.

Constant criticism can destroy a child. You don't feel like there's a "fight" but that's what is happening. How happy can your daughter be if at every moment she's being reprimanded for something else? What do you think your son feels like when his flaws are constantly pointed out to him? "I'm anyway worthless, I never do anything right anyhow…"

It's so important to be able to pass over mistakes, to ignore slip-ups. Your child will not grow up a pere adam, a wild animal, just because you set him straight three times a day instead of thirty. Actually he has a bigger chance of growing up an unhealthy adult if all he hears all day is criticism.

BE POSITIVE

You can say "Totty likes when we express ourselves nicely" "It's important to have derech eretz" but don't get stuck! Don't spend a half hour pontificating on your child's error and reminding him of every other mistake he made in the last six months. You want an aura of positivity to surround your home. You don't want constant negativity and everyone snapping at each other, and getting on each other's nerves constantly.

A child is allowed to get criticism once in a while, but you must make sure that the positivity outnumbers the negativity by far. Instead of pointing out what your child did wrong, you might say "You always remember when it's your turn to sweep, now I know to appreciate that I don't usually need to remind you!" If you can dress criticism up as a compliment, it's wonderful. But even when you can't, compliment her about other things. Don't criticize if you're not also complimenting.

Let us always remember to follow in the spirit of our forefather Avraham, and distance ourselves from arguing and bitterness. We can then hope to be blessed with a happy and peaceful atmosphere at home: a happy marriage, and happy children.

-Q&A-

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

Question: A bachur was accepted only by a sub-standard yeshiva and he feels humiliated about it. How should a father go about making his son feel comfortable and excited about the new zman?

Answer: This is a very important question. And like we say שאלת חכם, חצי תשובה "A wise questioner has already provided half of the answer". It is very important that the child feel comfortable with this decision. He shouldn't enter into a yeshiva because there's no other choice. Even if there really is no other choice. It also goes without saying that the child should not be made to feel that he is responsible for not getting accepted elsewhere.

Ask him if he's ok with it, if perhaps he wants to try something else… even if you all know that there is nothing else. Show him that you're on his team, that you believe in him and want to do what's best for him.

It's important that he comes to terms with this on his own. The fact that he's okay with it, and that he feels that he made the decision, will make matters easier later in the game. He won't resent the decision, he won't fight it; and if anything goes

wrong later he won't blame it on your forcing him to enter the yeshiva, he'll be able to accept it easier.

It also must be stressed that a child should never be made to feel that he isn't good enough. He should always get the message that "We believe in you, we see all of your strengths and good qualities". The fact that he was not accepted should not make him feel like his parents are disappointed in him.

Question: My son, whom you would probably refer to as a "fragile child", came home from school with a very distressing tale. He just got a new melamed who acted very nastily towards him. The melamed took something away from him, embarrassed him in public, and also added some snide comments which hurt him deeply. How am I to react to this scenario?

Answer: The first thing we must be careful to do, is not to attack the melamed in front of the child. He is your son's rebbi, and it is your job to ensure that your son always treats him with the utmost respect. Many parents think that the way to sympathize with their children is by attacking the melamed, teacher or menahel. At the end of the day, these are the people your children must look up to, and you're sending a very unhealthy message by attacking them.

But of course, you can't attack the child either – don't blame the victim. Don't say: "Teachers never lie" "You probably deserved it" or things like that. Especially when dealing with a sensitive child. Comments like these can deeply wound a child and his entire sense of self.

A child needs to feel he has a listening ear with his father. Not necessarily that his father agrees that "the teacher is an idiot", but that his father heard him out, and took him seriously: "Wow! He really did that? Is that how he made you feel? What do you think we should do about this? How can we fix this situation?" Now, you don't have to act on the child's recommendations, but give him a few options; ask him: "Should we call the rebbi? Should we call the menahel?" Let him know that he is being taken seriously.

It might also be a good idea to try and get the child to see the melamed's side of the story. Maybe he can understand that it's important that rules are enforced at the beginning of the semester. Maybe you can find some other limud zchus. But don't push the child to see his rebbi's side. Put in a suggestion and leave it at that. You don't want the child to feel that you're siding with his teacher rather than with him.

Now, how to deal with the melamed: When calling a teacher, it's always good to double check the story with him first. Don't call up yelling and screaming "My son said this, my son said that!" Your child's teacher should always be treated with respect and dignity. No one on the school staff appreciates it when a parent takes his child's side and goes on attack. You're just making things difficult for yourself by doing that. Don't set yourself up for difficulty.

Once you've listened respectfully to the other side of the story, you can ask for your son's feelings to be taken into account. Say, "Look, you're an experienced educator, you've probably already noticed that my child is more sensitive than some others. And of course I trust your abilities, but maybe here and there you can cut him some slack. Even though you must certainly reprimand him when he's wrong, but maybe you can do it in a way that won't hurt him. I trust that you can figure out a smart way to handle him…"

This melamed may argue with you "I was being careful and sensitive" or something like that. Don't argue. You've said your part, and he heard. Don't think he didn't hear! This is a great tip in general when dealing with people. If you have something to say, there's no need to argue with people over it. You lay it out clearly, be assertive, and just leave it at that. The other person will change when he is ready.

If you're respectful in your communication, and non-accusatory; your words will probably be heard and accepted. So the child has to know that he's right, the melamed has to know that he's right, and hopefully everyone will be happy!