

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

PROBLEM ~~SOLVING~~ AVOIDING

"Even if the merit of the Avos has been exhausted and you think there is no longer any hope," we can still *daven* to Hashem, asking Him to save us from suffering. This is what Hashem taught Moshe Rabbeinu with the 13 Middos, writes Rashi on this week's *parshah*. Similarly, Tosefos (*Rosh Hashanah* 17) explains that Hashem's *middah* of *rachamim* (compassion) is limitless.

R' Aharon of Belz, quoting his father R' Yissachar Dov, explains that *rachum* is appropriate for *davening* about the future, whereas *chanun* refers to the present, when we ask Hashem to save us from the predicament we are already in. We don't always have the necessary *zechusim* to merit Hashem's rescue and salvation from pain or difficulty. But we can and should always *daven* that Hashem spare us from future challenges. This is also why Hashem sometimes allows *tzaddikim* to see troubles that are on the way, giving them the opportunity to *daven* and spare us from sorrow.

In day-to-day life, it's so much easier to avoid falling into a trap or a problem, than it is to extricate oneself after already falling in. I sometimes joke that when someone calls asking for a therapy appointment, the wise therapist should reply, "Sure, but I don't have a free slot for another two weeks." By then, the couple will have figured out how to solve whatever problem they're currently facing, leaving the therapist to deal only with the far simpler problem of how to avoid ending up there again.

Clearly, this can only be achieved with *tefillah*, as mentioned. However, learning from past mistakes makes it so much easier to prevent similar problems from recurring. When we understand the personalities of the people around us and take them into account, we will usually find it far easier to avoid the obvious pitfalls. We must always ask Hashem for His help; and at the same time, we should do what we can to avoid the problems in the first place.

This week's essay is dedicated in loving memory of a proud Abba and Zeidy

ר' שלמה יהודה ב"ר אליעזר טסלר ע"ה
נלב"ע כ"ז אדר תשמ"ו לפ"ק

Who survived the Holocaust and rebuilt a family of בנים ובני בנים עוסקים בתורה ומצוות

תהא נפשו צרורה בצרור החיים
עדי נזכה לקיום הפסוק יקיצו וירננו
שוכני עפר בביאת משיח צדקינו

Parshas
Ki Sisa
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Dear Rabbi Gruen,

We truly enjoy the weekly question-and-answer and *parshah* essays.

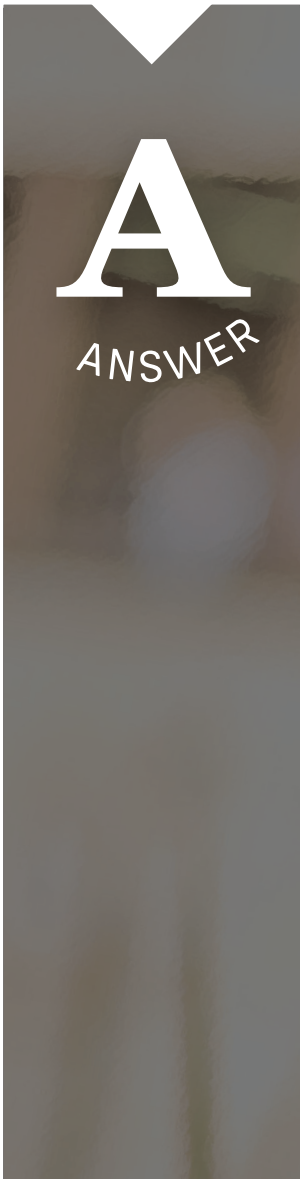
We have a question regarding our five-year-old daughter. When we tell her to do something, most of the time she doesn't want to listen and will usually say she'll do it but differently from the way we want her to. Or, she'll say she'll do it later, not now. Or, for example, when she's told to eat breakfast, she'll say that she'll eat breakfast now, but not what she was told to eat or was told she'll be given.

It seems like she has a strong need to always be the one in control. The interesting part is that when we give her a choice, she won't choose from any of the options we give her and instead thinks up a third option and says she wants that.

She also can't admit that she ever did anything wrong. She'd rather get punished again and again and again and in the end claim that it wasn't her fault and it was all just a mistake.

So we're trying to figure out a different way of talking to her which won't make her need to oppose what she's told in order to stay in control. We're looking forward to the answer.

Thank you.



It's great that you're looking for something that works for this particular daughter, rather than something that "should work with any child." The *passuk* tells us clearly that *chinuch* means "*al pi darko*" — each child needs an individualized approach. Sadly, many parents never figure out that they need to understand a child in order to find the approach that is appropriate for him.

You're asking about a young child, and when it comes to a child who is just five years old, it's clear that a variety of issues will *iy"H* naturally disappear or at least fade over the years. Other issues, however, derive from innate personality traits that will accompany the child throughout life. Within this category, there are challenges that can be modified with help and patience. You seem to have figured out many aspects of your daughter's personality already, and this is extremely helpful in knowing how to proceed.

Once a parent (or spouse) "knows" the person they are trying to relate to, they can predict many of the obvious pitfalls and avoid them. They also stop expecting the impossible and no longer have to deal with ongoing frustration and disappointment.

This is all easier said than done. Accepting the limitations of another person's personality can require a lot of adjustment. But in the long-term, there's no question that this is the only way in which one can successfully build a relationship.

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The story is told that when the Chofetz Chaim was in his later years, he no longer had the strength to *daven* in shul and on Shabbos, his children and grandchildren would come to his home to *daven*. One week, one of his sons tried to persuade a young grandchild to greet his grandfather but the young boy was too shy and refused.

"It's fine — he's just a *bayshan*," the Chofetz Chaim responded. "It's a good *middah*, a Yiddishe *middah*."

A short while later another grandchild arrived, with a cheery, "Gut Shabbos, Zeide!"

"This one is an '*az panim*,'" commented the Chofetz Chaim. Seeing that some of those present seemed taken aback at his choice of words, he explained, "Parents need to know what kind of nature their children have. A child who is shy needs one kind of approach in order to thrive; a child who is full of self-confidence needs another kind."

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Your daughter is clearly a highly sensitive child. By nature she is dominated by her emotions to a great degree. Being highly sensitive often goes together with a strong aversion to feeling controlled, as you've noticed. Nonetheless, it's not good for any child to control his or her parents, so let's look at some methods that might work with your daughter.

You mention giving your daughter choices, which is an excellent idea. It hasn't yet brought the desired results so it's worth trying to tweak the way in which you present those options to her.

A mother might tell her child, "Bed time is at eight o'clock. If you're not in bed at eight, tomorrow you won't get a treat." This is technically a choice between doing the right versus doing the wrong thing, but it doesn't feel like much of a choice for a child, especially one who is resistant to being told what to do.

However, bed time really is at eight o'clock, so what should the mother do?

Another option is for her to say, "I'd like you to be in bed at eight, and then I'll have time to tell you a story and sit by your side till you fall asleep. If you're not in bed until eight-thirty, I won't have time to tell you a story or sit by your side, and that's a shame as I love telling you a story."

Allowing a child to choose means that they could make the wrong choice at first, and that's okay as they will, generally, learn from the natural consequences. Suffering from the logical, direct outcomes of their decisions, like going to bed later without a story, is more likely to prompt learning than receiving what seem like random punishments, such as losing out on tomorrow's snack. It might take longer to see results, but those results are more likely to be long-lasting than those prompted by punishments that bring about fearful compliance with no understanding of why it's really a good idea to be in bed on time.

It's also important to present the options at the right time. Don't wait until right before bed time when tensions are already running high. Pick a relaxed time during the afternoon and let your daughter know that she can think about it before making her decision.

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Allowing a child, especially such a young one, to make their own decisions can feel very wrong to many parents. After all, the parents really do know better, and often, they just want to protect their children from the consequences of their own actions. Obviously, it's not always going to be appropriate to allow a child to pick one of several options and one has to exercise a great deal of judgment. It's also important to examine your own motives every time your instinct tells you to "tell, don't ask."

In most cases, a parent isn't doing anything wrong in telling a child what to do as opposed to asking them. It's just that when it comes to sensitive children, relationships can turn into a battle of wills (or egos). This is where we have to keep the goal of *chinuch* foremost in our minds. *Chinuch* isn't about gaining compliance. It's about training a child to follow, of his own accord, along the right path. A forceful approach may keep a child on the path for the first few steps, but in the long-term, it offers no guarantee of success.

Chazal teach us that once a child reaches the age of maturity, a parent should not discipline them by hitting them, as they could hit back. This obviously doesn't excuse the child from behaving in a totally unacceptable fashion. But it does imply the parent's responsibility to take the likely consequences of any form of discipline into account.

According to the *poskim*, this teaching applies to a child of any age, if they are likely to respond inappropriately to being forced to do something (even something they have to do).

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You describe how your daughter can never accept that she was at fault, even when she must know that she is, having made the same wrong decision again and again. This is common with sensitive children. Some children react very badly to being given even a gentle slap; other children can't deal with being blamed, even (or perhaps especially) when they know they deserve it. They find it very hard to confront the shame of being in the wrong.

What you might like to try doing next time this becomes relevant is discussing the issue in a more

indirect way. "Yesterday you were late to school because breakfast took too long. How about deciding tonight what you're going to eat for breakfast so that it will go quicker in the morning?"

If your daughter becomes defensive even with this very gentle approach, clarify that you are not blaming her and that you know she didn't mean to take so long deciding what to eat for breakfast. All you want to do is make things easier for the future.

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These are all methods that can work well with any child. That said, they'll usually work far better with a child who has a positive self-image. When a child sees himself as basically a good kid, it's so much easier to guide him toward ever better behavior.

By contrast, with a child who has become accustomed to seeing himself — and being seen — as a problem child, their defenses are very easily triggered. The slightest hint that the parent is getting upset or frustrated can provoke a tantrum, which traps them both in a vicious cycle.

The best way to break out of this damaging cycle is for the parent to work hard to change the way the child perceives himself, which starts with the way the parent sees the child. Sometimes it really is hard to focus on the positive aspects and see the challenges as side-issues. In most cases, with determination and goodwill, parents can find at least one or two things that they truly appreciate in their child. They then need to emphasize these positive traits and help the child build an identity around them.



For instance, a fun-loving child who isn't afraid to try new things can be praised for not being lazy and for being happy and enthusiastic. You can then build the child via this trait: "Would you like to do this for me? I know it's a bit tricky and it might take a while, but I know how you love a challenge and I think you'll be able to figure it out."

Your daughter is clearly very creative and inventive, so you could develop this aspect of her personality and suggest that perhaps she'd like to draw a weekly menu for breakfast for all the family, with pictures of all the options so that everyone can circle their choices the night before. "I think you'd be really good at that. You always have so many good ideas, and this way, we can plan things in advance. If you don't want to, that's fine and I'll do it myself."

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When a child is just five years old, it can be a challenge to envision them ten or twenty years down the line. Nonetheless, having a certain vision of how they can develop their strengths and modify their challenges can be very helpful when it comes to keeping an eye on the big picture. Otherwise, it's very easy to get carried away with the day-to-day difficulties and to be tempted to look for quick fixes that seem more satisfying in the short-term. Those usually don't solve any problems.

Virtually every parent truly loves and wants the best for their children, and when we combine that love and concern with the *rachmanus* the Torah tells us to have for our children, we can guide them to become the best they can, building rather than crushing them, and setting them on a path that they will *iy"H* remain on for the rest of their lives.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: KI SISA 5786

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