Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Emor |

Parental Interference

Warning: Only When They're 'Little'

In his first comment to this week's parsha Rashi says: אמור ואמרת - להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים. "The passuk says 'tell and tell', this is a warning to the older kohanim regarding the younger kohanim". The simple explanation is that the *passuk* is 'telling' older kohanim what they should 'tell' the younger kohanim. Although we can take the simple meaning and turn this into a *chinuch* shiur, I'd like to provide two interpretations that will teach us a lesson on Shalom Bayis.

The first explanation is להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים - that the older kohanim should only be concerned with the 'little' kohanim, once they get older; stop mixing in! And our second interpretation is להזהיר - this is a 'warning' to the older ones regarding the younger ones. The warning is - don't mix in!

Just Trying to Help!

While we know that it *is* the responsibility of the older to take care of the younger, the question is until when, and in which areas. The damages that result from parents' meddling into married children's lives are well known. It is true that most meddling occurs from parents who truly care about their children and mean well. But good intentions do not mitigate the damage meddling causes.

Jack* and Betty* approached me at an event for advice on how to help their married daughter who they felt was having some difficulty in her relationship with her husband.. When I asked if they were sure they were helping by mixing in they quickly denied that they were meddling. Her husband's parents were causing issues by mixing in, but *they were* not meddling, just trying to help out!

We all love our children and that's what makes this a very sensitive topic, but in all probability we are too subjective to know when to stop. Before going into a shidduch you can check out the other side all you want, but once they're married; your job in this area is officially over.

Let Them Gain Experience

Due to a parent's great love for their children and in their desire to help them,, parents may inadvertently smother them. So, while you obviously have more experience than your child *at everything*, make sure that you don't impose your opinion or advice unless you are asked. Even then, the most you can do is offer your suggestion. (But even that should not be done in front of your child's spouse.) It's okay if your children make mistakes, that's how people grow. You also grew and "improved" as you learned from the mistakes that you made.

I've seen many instances where the resentment of being told what to do, actually made things worse. So, while you're trying to be helpful, you may end up accomplishing the exact opposite. By the way, it's very normal for your child to rebuff your efforts at giving them advice. People, as a rule, don't like to be told what to do. Young couples, especially, like to feel independent. So instead of giving your child advice, how

about telling them, "Whenever I was unsure of what to do, I spoke with Uncle Pinchas. I found him to be a great listener and he always seemed to know what to do."

You can't imagine the damage you will do to your child when you criticize her spouse in her presence. Don't even criticize *your own* child in front of her spouse. Zevi* shared with me this week about a certain annoying habit of his wife that he personally never even noticed until his father in law scolded her and said, "Don't do that in front of your husband"!

The Torah Says: Forsake Them!

Hadassah* confided in me that she doesn't feel comfortable in her husband's presence. "There's something about my father's presence that is just comforting; I feel loved, I feel safe. Unfortunately, I just don't feel that way with Moshe*". It's beautiful when parents provide their children with a secure and loving environment, however, fathers should not be replacing husbands and mothers should not be replacing wives.

"Al kein yaazov ish es aviv v'es imo". One who is married is commanded to 'forsake' his parents! (Bereishis 2:42). The joke goes that Adam Harishon lived so long because he didn't have a shvigger. I don't like 'shvigger jokes' and I'll stop right here, but meddling mother in laws can certainly cause trouble.

Another issue that often comes up is the naming of grandchildren. Why should grandparents feel that they have the right to name their grandchildren? I once heard a wise person say, "If they're old enough to have them, they're old enough to name them". In short, it's an intrusion of the couple's privacy and indicative of a lack of respect and maturity.

The halacha teaches us that it is forbidden for a father to strike an older son, because the child may strike back, and thereby sin. At a certain point we have to take a step back, say "*baruch shep'tarani*", and acknowledge that our children are already adults. It may not always be easy, but it is the best thing you can do for your child.

Don't Talk to the Rabbi!

Actually this class is geared to what *we* can do to improve *our* marriages, and it is definitely not our place to tell off our parents or in-laws. You know Chazal tell us כל המהרהר אחרי רבו כמהרהר אחר השכינה - Doubting one's *rebbi* is like doubting the *Shechina k'vayachol* (Sanhedrin 110a). A certain *chashuve yid* once asked; why bother telling a thousand *talmidim* not to doubt their rebbi? Tell one rebbi to conduct himself in a manner that will not lead anyone to doubt him! But it's easier to tell a thousand talmidim how to behave than to tell one rebbi...

So I think it's important to address the children on how to deal with parental interference. It's definitely easier than bossing around bossy in laws. Besides, whether my in-laws are right or wrong is irrelevant. What can *I* do when I feel like someone is intruding on my marriage?

Who Comes First?

We've already mentioned that there is an explicit *passuk* in the Torah that a husband must forsake his parents in order to connect with his wife. The Rambam says that a husband is obligated to honor his wife more than he honors himself. Ditto for a wife; the gemara says that a woman has an obligation to honor her husband over her father. So a woman should never feel '*torn*'. A woman shouldn't feel like she doesn't know where her responsibilities lie; they're clearly delineated by the Torah. Of course, if you feel that your case may be an exception, ask your Rov. But there's no reason to feel pained and undecided, there is a clear halacha, and generally it is, that your shalom bayis takes precedence.

It should be mentioned that when it comes to honoring your husband or wife, your parents' opinion of your spouse should not be a factor. A husband must honor his wife even if his mother would have preferred that she change her style of dressing. Just as you have a Torah obligation to honor your mother regardless of how *her mother* would have wanted *her* to turn out, you have an obligation to honor your wife regardless of your mother's opinion of her.

Now of course, we're not saying that that married couples should detach from their parents completely. Just because you're married doesn't mean that the *aseres hadibros* of *kibud av v'eim* no longer apply. To the contrary; work on your *kibud horim* together, brainstorm together about how you can honor your parents. And by the way, if your married children *are* giving you the cold shoulder perhaps you're a bit at fault too...

Let it Blossom

Sometimes you feel so intimidated by your parents that you're very busy getting your spouse to respect them. Stop. That is definitely not your responsibility. Your first loyalty is to your spouse, and your spouse will immediately feel if it this is not the case. The only way your relationship will blossom is if it is only between

the two of you. Being bound to others, will most often not work.

When your parents are constantly giving opinions, you must know how to set healthy boundaries with utmost respect. "Thanks, I appreciate your opinion, I will discuss it with my wife". It's fine to tell your parents you will discuss it with your spouse (even if it's not easy!). Some parents will argue, "What do you mean, your wife?!" "Thanks Ma, I know you really care about me, but this is really a decision I can't make without my wife"

Parenting and Toilet Training

In parenting, don't make the same mistake with your own children! When you toilet-train your toddler, you go to the bathroom with them. When they get a bit older, you allow them the dignity of going alone. Allow your older children the independence to make their own decisions. If you don't like the way your daughter's husband is acting, you can be a bit more careful when looking for a shidduch for your next daughter. But don't criticize; all you should be doing is promoting good feeling. Rav Avigdor Miller z"l would say: "Never give your son in law advice. You can give money and smiles, but no advice." Would you appreciate it if *your* parents were constantly breathing down your shoulder and telling you what to do?

Generally parents that are overly controlling after their child gets married were over-controlling before the marriage as well. As a child grows older he no longer needs as much control, and thus you should ease off on the control.

You can teach your children while they're in your house. As they get older, they will make their own decisions, just like you did. Your son who is learning in Eretz Yisroel may discover a new rebbe and choose a different path than you did. Your best option is to make peace with his decision. As long as your adult children are good people nd following the Torah, thank Hashem and appreciate them for who they are, and who they've become.

-Q&A-

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

Question: My son, a bachur, hasn't been in yeshiva for a month. It's not that he's fallen in with the wrong crowd, he just sort of dropped out and lounges around all day wasting time. Should I push him and force him to go? Should I try learning with him at home?

Answer: Usually, when dealing with such a situation, you've already tried, pleaded and threatened to no avail. After all, it's been a month already. And so if it's not working, we need to try something different. Now the following suggestion may sound radical, and obviously this answer is only for this specific situation, but I'm sharing the answer anyway for a reason I will soon explain.

I suggested to this parent that he ask his son what interests him. "Do you like building model airplanes? Would you be interested in seeing the Statue of Liberty? Let's go tomorrow, let's do it." Find something your son is interested in and do it together with him. Forget about yeshiva for now.

It is impossible to 'motivate' someone from 0 - 100 in one day. Someone who hasn't left the house for a month cannot be expected to learn in yeshiva for a full day. Try taking small steps. Spend a week getting him out of bed in the morning… eventually your son will realize that he belongs in yeshiva.

The reason I'm sharing this is because so often I have seen this happen with poor results. Parents demand a complete attitude change from their children, or wives from their husbands - yesterday. We have to realize that when it comes to affecting someone's mindset we need to give them the time, (and tools!) to help them make the change.

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