Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Tetzaveh |

Keep Your Loved Ones Close to Heart

Is Your Family in Your Heart?

The *choshen*, the breastplate, is distinctive in the *Kohein Gadol*'s wardrobe in that it wasn't a regular article of clothing such as a hat or pants. The purpose of this accessory, the Torah tells us, is for Aharon to wear it on his heart and to remember the nation, *lezikaron tamid*. Every time he would enter the *Kodesh*, Aharon would take the time to pray for klal Yisrael.

Part of the way that Aharon, the ultimate peacemaker, expressed his love for klal Yisrael was to keep them close to his heart, to think of them always, and to *daven* for them. That's what a genuine *oheiv Yisrael* does—always caring, thinking about the other person, caring them in his heart.

In order to mention someone in your prayers, that person has to be close to your heart. That was what Aharon excelled in, and every *Kohein Gadol* was expected emulate that, to be *mitalmidav shel Aharon*.

For a Constant Remembrance

When it comes to the marital relationship, the concept of *zikaron tamid* is vital. Remembering our spouse all the time is an important element in building and fortifying the bond.

If you want someone to know that you love them and care about them, make sure they realize that you're constantly thinking about them. This doesn't mean that you're obsessed about each other. But, when a person is always in your heart, they're always in your mind too. When a husband regularly thinks about his wife, for example, it would be highly unlikely that he would forget to pick up that bottle of milk on the way home.

When we care about someone enough we think about them all the time. It's not about having to remind myself what my husband asked me to do as much as it comes naturally that I simply won't forget.

Constantly thinking about our spouse doesn't only make a difference in the way our spouse feels about us. When I think about my spouse, it does something to me too. I become a more caring individual, more tuned in to what my spouse needs. This is how the relationship becomes fortified, thought by thought.

Only He Can Make it Happen

Here's another important point regarding the proper way to build relationships.

Often, after we've listened to an array of lectures or *shiurim* on a certain topic, we feel that we know it all in that domain. We start seeing ourselves as the expert in parenting, marriage, or whatever it may be, that we

have the tools in our arsenal to take care of any issue. We tell ourselves, "Now I'm good. I know what I'm doing." But the reality has proven otherwise. It doesn't work like that. Without *siyatta diShmaya*, no matter how much I know about breaking up tantrums or having a great marriage, I'm completely at a loss. An individual can't do anything on their own. If we want to be successful in our parenting or marriage, we must *daven*.

A special added benefit of engaging in *tefilla*, even in our own words, is that the more we *daven* for something the more we realize how much *siyatta diShmaya* we really need. By verbally expressing how much we need Hashem's help in everything we do, we become aware of how dependent we actually are on Him for every move, every breath. An interesting thing happens when we *daven* for someone else with this approach: we start blaming them less. With every *tefilla* we express that they merit improvement in a certain area, for example, we gradually internalize that Hashem is the One who gave them this challenge and only with His help can they extricate themselves from it. With time, such type of *tefilla* kindles our sympathy toward them.

From this perspective, *davening* for our spouse or child serves to not only connect us more to Hashem and bring about *yeshuos* but also provides a healing element to our relationships. Perhaps we can understand *"kol hamispallel be'ad chaveiro v'hu tzarich l'oso davar"* in this context. When I *daven* for someone else and I'm desperate for them to get this thing that I'm *davening* for—because I care so much for them I too need it to happen—I get helped, and my prayers are answered.

Aside from what we accomplish through our *tefillos*, the more we *daven* for someone we care for, we gradually become aware of what they need. When we're *mispallel* on behalf of a child, for example, we spend that time focusing on not only what she needs but how much she needs it. That's something we could learn from Aharon HaKohein. Perhaps because he was constantly *davening* for klal Yisrael, his love for them was reinforced.

Often, when we take the time to *daven* for our spouse, we end up focusing on the areas in their life that affect us. A wife may *daven* that her husband to be successful in business and a husband might *daven* that the wife manage better with the children. Subconsciously, the individual is having his own benefit in mind here. The wife wants the month's expenses to be covered without stress, and the husband would appreciate if his wife would be more invigorated and positive when he comes home, and that's perfectly understandable. But how much time in our *tefilla* do we dedicate toward *davening* for something that pertains only to our spouse? The more we do this, the more connected we feel to our spouse. Even if we don't express it verbally, they will feel it.

Daven for Your Child

Most people can relate to what it means to *daven* for our children. It would be hard to find the parent who doesn't do that. Which parent doesn't want to have *nachas*? Perhaps we find it simpler to *daven* for our children because we realize how little is in our hands. Through the child's birth and development we become aware time and again how out of control we are of their destiny. But this is true not only of our children. Looking at how little control we have over them should help us come to the realization how little control we have over every area of our lives. With this understanding, we come to *tefilla* with a different perspective.

Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz zt"l once said that he noticed in some families that the child who exhibited the most weaknesses in his youth ended up being more successful than his siblings as an adult. In explaining this seeming enigma, the Rav pondered that perhaps because the weak sibling struggled so much as a child, his parents *davened* the hardest for him. Thanks to all the *tefillos* and the tears that were shed on his behalf, he turned out the way he did.

I once spoke to an *ehrlich Yid* who merited to raise a beautiful family of *ovdei Hashem*. This

father doesn't consider himself a *mechanech* or *talmid chacham*—not even a chacham. But in our conversation, he confided that he mentions the names of every child, grandchild, and great-grandchild in every single *Shemoneh Esrei* that he *davens*. If someone realizes how dependent he is on Hashem, his prayers have a special power—and his children absorb this powerful lesson in *emunah* as well.

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-Q&A-

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

Question: My son is complaining that he's being picked on in *cheder*. He says that the *rebbi* and *menahel* are accusing him of provoking other children and causing trouble. From the way he's describing it, it sounds like what he's saying is true. How can I know how much of this is my son's perception of the circumstances and how much of it he should be taking responsibility for? How do I bring this to the faculty's attention so that my son can have a more positive *cheder* experience?

Answer: Of course there are two sides to every story. But, our work is not to listen to both sides in order to pass judgement and have one party emerge victorious and the other in the wrong. Rather, this is about realizing that we're looking at two perceptions of one situation, of which both are probably right.

Your son is probably correct. There's something about his perception that's right. Don't try to fight it.

On the other hand, the perception of the faculty is that he's breaking rules, provoking others, and disturbing the class. And they are probably right too.

Since both parties have correct perceptions, it's important for the older people to understand the younger people, as Moshe Rabeinu descended "*min hahar el ha'am*," from the mountain to the nation.

Thus, I would advise you to discuss the issue with the faculty from this perspective. Make it clear that this is not about blaming the *hanhala* or taking the child's side. Instead, let them know that you understand them, that their perception is entirely correct, perhaps noting that the child exhibits similar behavior at home too and that you're not making believe that all of it is their issue. Once that is established, ask the *hanhala* what can be done if the child's perception is what it is. In most cases, once you validate and justify the other side's perception, they will be willing to look at the situation from your perception as well. And, it is safe to assume that when your child feels understand and validated, he will then be capable of working toward a solution to the issue as well.

This approach is helpful when handling a *chinuch* issue with an older child, as well. Validation of their perception goes a long way in having a constructive conversation that will leave both parties feeling understood and willing to improve the circumstances.

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