Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Toldos 5780 }

Requesting Favors

Speaking His Language

In this week's *parsha* Yitzchok calls Esav aside and says to him "Hunt an animal and prepare me a tasty meal the way I like it".

Yitzchok Avinu, the *korban* of Hashem, the man who epitomized *mesirus nefesh*; does he need "tasty meat the way I like it"? Is that a way for a *tzaddik* to speak?

Perhaps the Torah is teaching us a lesson here: It is crucial to ask your loved ones for favors. It may sound strange and counter-intuitive; but actually, asking for favors is one of the best things you can do for a relationship.

When one gives, feelings of love are aroused within him towards the recipient. So when Yitzchok wanted to draw Esav close, he asked him for a favor; he made Esav feel as if he was giving something that his father really needed. And that was how he got Esav to feel such intense love and loyalty towards him.

Learn To Ask

Men think that they're doing their wives a favor by not making any demands of them, "I don't need anything" and that's all. But it's wrong, you *want* to feel that you're doing something for your spouse. "If my spouse doesn't really need me, and gets along quite well without me, then why did he marry me?" Knowing how to give and how to take, really builds a relationship.

When you ask your husband to do something for you, you're gaining at least four things: 1) You're making him feel needed. 2) You're offering him the opportunity to give, which will create feelings of love for you. 3) You get a favor done for yourself. 4) You can shower your spouse with appreciation, further building the affection between you.

So much warmth is injected into a marriage by one simple request. If your marriage is cold, and the two of you are just barely tolerating each other, try asking for something. Ask for a small favor and watch yourselves get drawn into a cycle of mutual giving and loving!

Know What To Ask

If you've been asking for things and not getting them, perhaps your requests are worded wrong, or maybe you're demanding too much. When we speak of requesting favors, it's the little things we're talking about.

Don't ask for something that you know will be refused. Ask for little things in a non-demanding way. Say "I would really appreciate it if you could... it would really mean a lot to me/ be a big help for me".

You may think that you're not accomplishing anything, after all, you don't really need that little favor anyway. But start by giving "snowballs"; once you start with little things, you will be surprised at how quickly they can morph into "snowmen".

Ask For Specifics

It is very satisfying to be able to give someone else exactly what they need, so don't just tell your wife that you had a long day, you'll be home soon and you'd appreciate some food. Tell her that you're really in the mood of a specific recipe. Not in an unreasonable, demanding way; but get specific. Don't just ask for a favor, ask for something very specific. That's how you gain the full value of requesting favors.

Yitzchok Avinu didn't say עשה לי מטעמים, he said עשה לי מטעמים כאשר אהבתי – *the way I like it!* When a favor is more specific and personalized, there is more love in it. If you ask your wife to prepare supper for you, she's not sure that you'll appreciate all the details. But if you specify the details, then everything is part of the request, everything is done exactly the way you want it, thereby generating affection on both sides.

Esav Didn't Learn Tosefos

Obviously, if you try to manipulate people, or make big demands, you're not giving rise to any affection, only resentment. Yitzchok didn't tell Esav, "Go for a *farher* on Bava Kama with *tosefos*, and then I'll give you a *bracha*". No, Yitzchok knew that Esav enjoys hunting and roasting meat, and so that was the demand that he made of him.

So don't tell your wife "I would really appreciate it if we can have a *chavrusa* in *ketzos hachoshen*". Don't tell your husband "Maybe you can drive me an hour and a half to the mall". Choose something that's doable, and that the other party enjoys doing.

Appreciate What They Appreciate

By the way, Yitzchok would have had more *nachas* had Esav studied Bava Kama, than from all the roast venison in the world. Yet he knew that Esav would feel good if he could provide his father with roasted meat, and therefore requested roasted meat.

So if your husband loves saying long boring *divrei Torah*; ask him for it. Tell him how much you appreciate it – even though you don"t. Your wife loves setting a fancy table; you couldn't care less for the table setting, but tell her how much it means to you to have purple candles that match the flowers. Get out of yourself and give... by taking *what you're given*.

Don't Ruin The Experience

When your wife does something for you, it's a positive experience, don't ruin it by pointing out what she did wrong. If your husband went to the grocery store for you, don't criticize him for spending an unnecessary 59 cents.

Taking in a marriage can be for the purpose of giving. So while you're taking, make sure that you keep on giving. Make sure that you're being positive and showing gratitude, not negativity.

Your husband brought home the wrong type of tomatoes. That's ok, make a note to yourself to be more specific next time. But if you get all worked up about it... there may not be a next time. Why should someone do a favor for you if all they get in return is a shower of bitterness?

Don't Wallow In Disappointment

Chaim* spoke to me this week, he was very upset about the vacation he and his wife had just taken. All year round he thirsts for some recognition, some words of encouragement from his wife. Finally now that they were on vacation, he thought that they would get truly intimate, and his wife would finally express some words of closeness. But he was disappointed.

But did he ever ask for it? It's very uncomfortable to ask for a compliment, and it feels silly. But a compliment isn't so hard to give. Chances are that if you ask for it, you'll finally get it. Although it feels silly now, perhaps your wife never realized that you need it. Now that you asked for it, she'll provide it in the future.

On the other hand, some people pride themselves on their self-sufficiency; they don't need anything or anyone. But even if you really don't need anything, and you have everything figured out, try to ask for help anyway. Tell your wife that you need her advice about something. Tell her how much you respect her opinion and how much you appreciate her giving you her

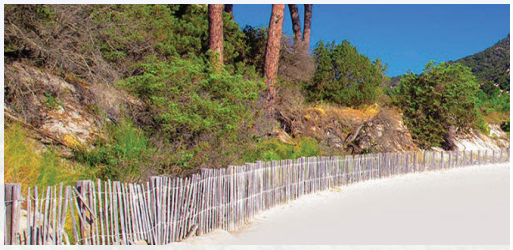
opinion. Sometimes taking is giving.

Chinuch: Show Satisfaction

Some children only get negativity at home, they never get compliments. It could be that they never manage to live up to their parents' expectations. The parents are frustrated, and the child is crushed. A father might say "What's with you Moishele? When will you be worthy of a compliment already?!"

Don't make your child feel like a loser, or a failure. Who says that a *bachur* can only get a compliment when he's the first one at *fartugs seder*. Maybe he can get a compliment for being the best *cholent* chef in town. Yitzchok didn't expect Bava Kama from Esav; he asked for roasted meat. Be realistic in your demands of your children.

Let your recognition of your children's accomplishments overflow. It can be the silliest thing; Avrumy always knows which nosh to get in the grocery. Surelle chooses the cutest dresses for her dolls. Descend to the level of your children and help them thrive. It starts with little things, but as you show your appreciation for the little things, the bigger things will surely begin to surface.



Q&A

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



Question: We have an eight year old son who is just plain difficult. He is constantly getting expelled from school over one issue or another. We've tried to encourage him and we constantly remind him to be better next time, but nothing's working, what do we do?

Answer: The first thing I want to address is what you say "nothing's working". When something doesn't work, we don't stop trying. There are many methods of parenting and you have to find one that works. It's not about which philosophy appeals to you most, but rather focusing on what works. So if you keep trying something but you're not getting results, it's time to try something else.

Children have ears. And when you say something, they hear. There is no need to repeat something a hundred times. If you're constantly reiterating "be better, be better, be better": your child may be hearing "I'm not better, I'm not better, I'm not better". You don't want to give your child such a message.

Find ways to show your child that he *is* good. Try asking him "What was a good thing that you did in school today?" Praise his good behavior. Try to give 9 compliments for every criticism. Always keep the balance towards the positive.

When your child tells you of something positive that he did, you can say "Wow, I can't wait to hear about more good things tomorrow!" But saying, "Tomorrow I want to hear from the *menahel* that you were good", comes across as negative. It's true that you're not actively hurting your son, but you're telling him that you're disappointed in the way he is now, that you're not happy with him. By asking your son to report his own good behavior, you're communicating your trust and your confidence in him and thus helping him to thrive.

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