RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS PIKUDEI

KIDS AND CLEANING UP

In Parshas Pekudai, Moshe Rabbeinu gives an accounting of everything that was used to build the Mishkan. The Tiferes Shlomo explains that the Bnei Yisroel were afraid some of their donations might have been left out because it was given with the wrong intentions. They knew that Hashem asked for wholehearted donations, and they weren't sure they gave of their wealth with the proper enthusiasm. In the end, the accounting from Moshe proved that all donations actually were included in building the Mishkan.

We know that the Mishkan reflects our *mikdash me'at* because Hashem rests in a *Yiddishe* home. The Torah teaches us here that part of building the Mishkan was that each person doubted himself. Did I do the right thing? Did I give properly? Should I have done something differently and better? It's not a lack of self-confidence; it's a rather healthy approach we can all adopt. If ever something goes wrong at home, we should consider this idea: "Did I do something wrong? Should I have done something differently? Do I have a part in this?"

You shouldn't necessarily take blame for everything that goes wrong, nor should you assume that you're automatically the problem. It's just always worth taking into consideration that as hard as it is to believe that you're at fault, you may still have had at least some part in the problem. Questioning one's self seems to be an integral part of building the Mishkan, and part of building your home.

People often wonder what they will benefit from reaching out for help in their Shalom Bayis, if their spouse is the one who needs it more, being that they caused the problem to begin with. The answer is that if a person is willing to see what they can do differently *even if they're not at fault*, they will almost always come up with something which will have an effect on their *shalom bayis*.

Often, the one who caused the problem is not even all that capable of being part of the solution. Questioning yourself doesn't mean taking blame, it means taking responsibility for a better future by noticing any part you may have in a situation, and learning to work on that regardless of what someone else should be doing differently.

It's heartbreaking when people go for help, only to be told by an incompetent therapist that it's all their spouse's fault and there's nothing for them to do differently. It doesn't take skill to tell someone that he's doing great and doesn't have to fix anything. It takes skill to learn how to fix something you had no hand in actually breaking.

When you go for help, make sure you go to someone who actually *helps* you and helps your marriage. Although there is sometimes room for divorce, in general, if someone tells you there's nothing you can do and to get rid of your marriage, that person is not helping you. Go to someone who can help you find out if there's something you could have done differently and should now do.

This week's essay is sponsored by
R' Aron Avrum Wertheimer & family
in honor of the birth of their daughter

May this Simcha bring only Simchos and Nachas
for many more happy and healthy years to come iyH!

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

What can I do to get my 13-year-old daughter to help out with the housework? She helps me as much as a four-year-old would, nothing age-appropriate at all. When I ask her to do something, she stamps her feet and screams that I always ask her for everything and she's not my slave. Should I just not ask for help at all? I really do need her help, though.

Also, how can I get my other children to pitch in as well? They are between the ages of 6-10, and whenever I ask for anything to be done, there's 'nobody home'. They get busy with other things. Cleaning up their toys and bedtime routine takes forever. I really want to have an easy-going and relaxed home, but with their attitude, everything takes an extra two hours, and I end up doing everything myself. I often go to sleep crying because I have no cooperation whatsoever. Should I use force and be strict? I believe that will only bring short term results and nobody will end up being happy anyway.

Thank you.

Answer:

As much as I empathize with the struggle you're describing, I can't help but clarify that this is a very common situation and happens in very many homes. Many parents struggle when it comes to getting their children to help out.

You mentioned that you can't manage without your daughter's help. But that's not why she should be helping you. We don't ask children for help because *we* need the help. What if you wouldn't need help? Part of parenting is teaching children about responsibility, cleaning up after themselves and helping out. The reason you want to figure out a way to get your children to help happily is because it's important for them to become helpful. whether you do or don't need the help. If you would teach them that it's okay not to help, you'd be making things worse in the long run.

◇

You question if you shouldn't ask them for anything at all or if you should be strict. Truthfully, you don't have to take either of these extreme mindsets. Based on your experience, you know that neither of these work. If you get no help, you will be unhappy, resentful and will probably *plotz* sooner or later. However, if you try to get too strict and controlling, your kids will probably be unhappy, resentful and *plotz*.

Yes, children do need to listen to parents, and that alone is something that you eventually want to help them understand and accept. For now, however, you might be more successful trying to get the help you need without having achieved their full compliance.

◇

Although it doesn't sound like this is the issue of the questioner at all, I will start by mentioning that many have similar frustrating and resentful feelings toward their children (or spouses) without realizing that they never actually asked for help in the first place. Sometimes people think: "I need to ask?! Shouldn't my child realize on their own what has to be done??" That's a big mistake. Hoping

children will "get it" on their own is unreasonable and not something you should take for granted. So just in case her 'helping like a four year old' has anything to do with expecting her to do more than she was specifically asked, please note that and do things differently going forward.

Let's now address the topic, beginning with the general rule that when it comes to children – and to most relationships as well – it often doesn't depend as much on *what* you say as on *how* you say it. Your tone and demeanor can chase your children away or bring them closer more than any words or techniques you use. We'll discuss some ideas and tips that may be helpful, (these ideas are not in any way limited to getting children to help, they can work with other challenges, and with adults as well when applied appropriately), but whatever you try, remember that much of your success will ultimately depend on *how* you give it over to your children.

◇

With regard to involving your younger children, there's a well known idea about making the cleanup process fun. That's easier said than done. It's certainly much more fun to play and make a mess than to pack away.

But you can definitely try it. Perhaps turn on a CD they enjoy listening to while they work, or maybe you can make a contest out of it and offer to give or do something when you finish. You can turn cleanup into a game or sing songs while you're cleaning to make it more enjoyable and less stressful. With time, cleanup hopefully becomes part of the routine and doesn't require as much incentive.

Which brings up the subject of incentive vs. consequence. A good way to use these techniques with a good balance is to offer both at the same time. "If we finish cleaning up in 10 minutes, everyone will get a special treat. But if we don't, we may not be able to use these books/toys tomorrow." If you present only one – just a consequence or just an incentive – a child may choose to bear the negative or pass up the positive. Most children, though, will not choose to lose out on the bonus *and* take a consequence.

Offering the incentive and consequence together changes the balance. The more directly connected the consequence is, the more natural it seems, and makes it more "consequence" and less "punishment". This is not manipulating or controlling, it's simply presenting the child with a worthwhile choice.

Another important part of this is that you may have to supervise or work along with your children as they help you. Don't assume that just because you told a child to do something, that they got busy with it right away. When you give instructions and walk away, it's harder for children to see a project or task to the finish.

You can also try pairing up children to work together. Allow one pair to choose a job first and the next time, let another pair choose first. When it becomes a group effort, and there's choice involved, along with worthwhile incentives, it becomes easier for children to do what they should. Be creative.

◇

Don't assume that one conversation about this is all you'll need to change the situation. Nor should you assume that because you once said that something should be done - even if you clarified that it should be done every day - means that they will do it on their own. Children do not like to clean, and have a tendency to remember only that which they are tempted to do - just like adults, *shhh!* So a conversation may make it better for one day, but it's a longer process. This is a mistake parents make often. "I spoke to my children. It was better for a while, but now it's over." Well, you may have stopped talking about it. Things don't change overnight. You may have to be there to guide them through the process and make it work.

Be proactive about it. If the mess needs to be cleaned up before bedtime, don't bring it up 15 minutes before the kids go to sleep. Maybe plan it with them an hour or two *before* cleanup needs to happen. "It's suppertime now. Then we'll have time to play and do homework. Then I have a good idea for a quick and fun cleanup at 7:00." In the heat of the moment, children can often get defiant, defensive and resistant. Talking about it before it's relevant and before it's an emotional challenge for them may get you much further.

◇

There's an important key here, and that's consistency. If you want your children to clean up after playing with the toys, do it every day. If you confuse children by demanding certain things sometimes but not other times, it makes it harder for you to get the result you need. If you let them get away with it sometimes, they'll try to get away with it all the time.

You'll notice that many of the things your children do are part of their consistent routine. It's the tasks that are not consistently demanded of them that they have a harder time fulfilling. Many children subconsciously know that this new obsession of Mommy is probably going to pass soon like many other such things in the past. Don't make the (common) mistake of blaming or criticizing a child for not being consistent with something that you forget to follow through with on your own.

Another key component is appreciation. Everyone wants to be appreciated. Often, parents don't express enough appreciation when children help out. Some parents have the attitude that they don't have to thank their children for things they're supposed to do anyway. Others feel that the help they get is not enough to warrant appreciation. But showing gratitude might be the most effective way of promoting the behavior you want.

Don't worry that thanking a child for something small will make him think he doesn't have to do anything more than that. The more you tell your children – even little ones – how much you appreciate their help that they made things easier for you, the more they'll want to do it.

Appreciate the little things even before it's at the level you really want, and things will get better and better. The more critical we are, the more we point out what's lacking and what else they should have done, the less motivated they become. And this goes for everyone and everything, not just children and helping out at home.

Compliment your children as you're going along. "You work so nicely. You work so neatly. I like the way you did that. You did that so quickly! You made it so much easier for me by doing that job. Wow! It looks beautiful here!" A controlling tone and/or pointing out everything that wasn't done well chases people away and makes it harder for them to help you. Compliments, on the other hand, make all people feel good and make it easier for you to get across to them.

Try this on adults and enjoy the results of gratitude and praise in your marriage too! While our home is compared to a Mishkan it doesn't pay to double and triple check our spouses to see if their intentions are 1,000% pure. Take whatever you get and be generous in showing appreciation, you won't regret it!

Wishing you all the best,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

If you enjoy and benefit from Rabbi Gruen's work please consider sponsoring a weekly Parsha essay which is read and enjoyed by thousands of readers, and have a Zchus in the many hours of classes which help so many homes.

To dedicate a week or a month of this newsletter, in honor of a Simcha, in memory of a loved one, or to show appreciation for Rabbi Gruen, please email to *parshalessons@lehair.org*, and your donation will be most appreciated.

Thank you and Tizku Lmitzvos!!

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

PIKUDEI 5782

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557** or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**

To subscribe to receive the weekly essay, please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SEND ANY QUESTIONS, ON THIS TOPIC OR ANY TOPIC TO RABBIGRUEN@LEHAIR.ORG