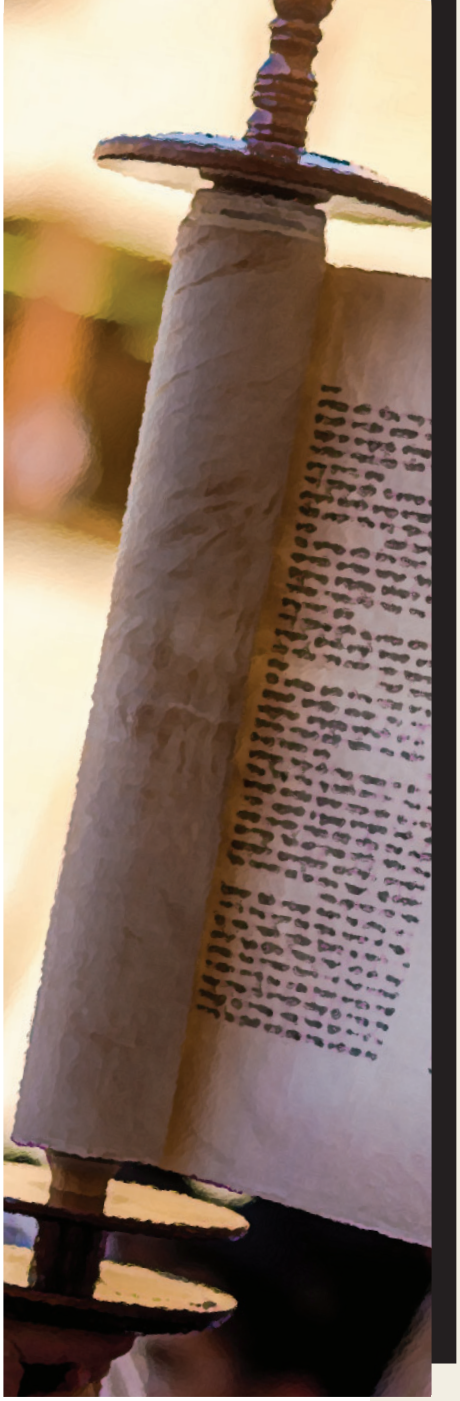


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

GETTING TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

The dream of Yaakov Avinu on his way to Charan contains many promises made to him by Hashem, relating to both Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael and concluding with a promise that Hashem "will not desert" him which, according to the Medrash, refers to *parnassah*.

It was at this point that Yaakov Avinu woke up, and the *Divrei Yisrael* cites the Medrash and notes that Hashem's promise to provide a basic level of *parnassah* applies throughout the *galus.* Despite all the difficulties and challenges, he writes, as long as Klal Yisrael has *parnassah,* we will be able to "wake up from the *galus*" and somehow manage.

Difficulties with *parnassah* are a challenge at any time, making it much harder to find peace of mind and work on our *middos*. When money is short, people are much more likely to get aggravated by a spilled glass of juice or a broken dish. However, when a person is aware that his short temper, impatience, or anxiety actually stems from financial worries, this awareness alone can help.

Many times, people assume they're dealing with *shalom bayis* or *chinuch habanim* issues when really, the problem is simply that Hashem is testing them with a lack of funds. As an example, a wife could see her husband as stingy; a husband could see his wife as inconsiderate when spending money that he's working so hard to earn. When both of them recognize and accept that the real issue is a Heaven-sent challenge in *parnassah*, they'll be able to deal with it, and all the problems that accompany it, much more effectively.

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Parshas
Vayeitzei
VOL. 6 | ISSUE 6



Q QUESTION

Thank you very much for your *shiurim*; I gain a lot from them. I have a question about my four-year-old daughter. For the past two years, she has had a "*minhag*" that every night, in the middle of the night, she wakes up (usually between midnight and three o'clock) and throws a tantrum. She cries, kicks, screams, and wakes up all the other children.

It usually takes at least an hour for her to finally calm down enough to tell me what she wants. It might be a tissue, a drink, or the bathroom. Then she goes back to sleep, but meanwhile all the other kids are wide awake.

We've tried charts, punishments, and presents—but nothing helps. I asked our pediatrician, but he's "Old-School" and told me that it's my fault because I'm not strict enough with her. He said I should just teach her that nights are for sleeping and that I won't put up with this drama every night.

I know that really, she should be sleeping in her own room, and then we could ignore her when she wakes up. But since she shares a room with three siblings, it's not an option to just let her cry.

Please advise me what to do, because I'm so sleep-deprived and it's affecting my morning routine.

Also, because our apartment is so small, there's another problem which is that my children don't have enough space to play, so they end up jumping on the couch, crawling under the table etc. If I had a basement or playroom I wouldn't let them, but since I don't, do I have to let them break all the furniture from jumping on it?

I appreciate your help and look forward to hearing your advice.

Thank you



A ANSWER

I'll start by mentioning that I'm not an expert in addressing the specific problems of toddlers, or of children in fact. My expertise is with adults, with people who can discuss their issues with me and want to understand things on a deeper level. That said, I believe that people tend to have certain patterns of relating to others which apply to all their relationships, and this is why my book, *Get Along With Everyone,* includes examples pertaining to all ages and stages, using the same sets of rules. With a person who is generally argumentative, for instance, you'll see this play out in all their relationships with others, whether they're relating to a child, a friend, a sibling, or an in-law. Of course there are slight adjustments made due to the person's age or status, but in general, people relate to others in a very individual way.

When someone faces a specific relationship issue with one person and learns how to relate to them in a healthy way, they will often find that their new level of understanding starts to influence all their other relationships as well. Here it's a question related to a four-year-old, but the principles I'll discuss can be applied to any relationship.

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The mother asking the question describes how she has already asked her pediatrician for advice, but she hasn't accepted it as it's "Old-School." It's true that new ideas, methods and suggestions regarding *chinuch habanim* have been introduced over the past few generations, and many things that parents and teachers once said, would never be said today. But that could be for two reasons. While

some specific "Old-School" advice is simply no longer applicable in the particular examples and conditions of the current generation, most "Old-School" advice is still extremely appropriate; it's just that it's packaged in an old-fashioned way. These days, we're not accustomed to being told things in a direct manner—today, there's a lot more awareness of the need to take sensitivities into account, for instance— and so we often find "Old-School" advice hard to accept.

Here, the pediatrician told the mother that the situation is "her fault," and no one likes to hear that they're to blame for anything. The instinctive reaction is, "No, I'm not," even before thinking about whether there could be some truth in it.

Similarly, "strict" is an old-fashioned word that people don't use so much anymore. Who wants to be a "strict" parent? However, "strict" is just one way to describe an approach in relating to others and we could equally use words like "consistency," "firmness," and even "boundaries" and "natural consequences" and so forth. These words don't arouse such a strong negative reaction.

What I'd like to suggest is that when the pediatrician told this mother that her daughter's behavior was "her fault," he didn't mean that she made the problem occur. If someone speaks to you in an abusive manner, is it your fault? Of course not. However, if someone treats you abusively on a regular basis and you either silently accept it or react inappropriately, then you are partially responsible for allowing the situation to continue.

In this particular situation, the mother obviously didn't make her daughter start waking up in the middle of the night. However, her reaction to the problem seems to be allowing it to continue, rather than solving it.

Could a "strict" approach be part of the solution? We have to know what "strict" means. It doesn't mean harsh, unfeeling, or nasty. What it does mean is refusing to tolerate and enable an unacceptable situation and enforcing correct boundaries. It doesn't mean controlling the other person and imposing your ideas of right and wrong. But it can imply finding an effective means of solving a problem so that everyone benefits, and doing so by being consistent and clear with what you can't or won't cater to.

Sometimes, it seems that tolerating a difficult situation is the easier option, even though people are suffering. It's not easy to enforce boundaries and consistently follow through with consequences, so people figure, "I'll manage somehow—we can deal with this, even though I'd love for the problem to just go away." But what they don't realize is that this approach is actually making the problem persist, and it may even be making it worse.

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The mistaken tolerance in this situation is clearly having a negative effect on the entire family. The mother describes her sleep-deprivation, and presumably this also applies to her children, who are getting woken up every single night. Getting enough sleep so that you can function the next day isn't a luxury. A mother has a responsibility to make sure she gets enough sleep so that she can be a good mother to her children, and that means that she mustn't allow a situation which is stretching her beyond her capabilities to continue.

Even if only the mother was being woken up, it's still not something any mother should tolerate. It's not good for anyone to deny themselves essentials (such as sleep) and it certainly shouldn't be viewed as idealistic self-sacrifice. But even worse is the effect on the young daughter at the center of the drama. She's actually the person who's losing the most, because she's being given the message that she can get away with anything. Sometimes, we see adults who habitually behave in selfish and unwise ways, and very often, it's because they've always been allowed to get away with it. Such people feel entitled; they're self-absorbed, don't know how to take criticism, and are convinced that they're always right.

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Being a good mother to a child who has become accustomed to bad habits means enforcing boundaries and doing what you can to ensure that all the children grow up emotionally healthy. Everyone knows that a home where "anything goes" is the worst possible environment for children to grow up in. In this particular case, boundaries are going to mean leaving the child to cry, so that also means that the mother will have to think of some creative solutions. No one should ever give up on something important because "I don't have a choice."

If there's no obvious answer, then you have to think out-of-the-box. Here this could mean making space on the floor in the parents' bedroom for the other three children so that they don't get woken up while the four-year-old gets used to sleeping normally. Or perhaps they could sleep in the kitchen, or at the grandparents' home... Most likely, it will only take two to three days before the four-year-old comes to terms with the new rules, or at least starts gradually transitioning into healthier behavior.

It's usually not a good idea to send the four-year-old to sleep somewhere else for the three days that you hope it will take for this to pass, however. This is a general rule

that applies in all problematic situations. You can take a person out of the problem—physically, or by providing them with something to help them along—but you always have to keep in mind that the end goal is to enable them to thrive in regular circumstances.

Since this child is four years old, not two, you can talk to her and prepare her for how things are going to work from now on. You must tell her, in advance, not when she's already having a tantrum, that, "Mommy and Tatty love you and don't like when you're unhappy. We can try to give you what you need before you go to bed. Tonight, and from now on, if you cry at night, Mommy and Tatty aren't going to come." There's no need for explanations; this is just a fact that needs to be accepted. You should also show that you're taking your child's concerns seriously: "I'll leave a drink/tissue/toy near your bed, where you can fetch it for yourself if you want it." And then, add that once your daughter starts sleeping through the night in her own bed and not waking up to call for you, she'll get a nice prize.

Be prepared for your child to test your resolve. The first night, she's going to cry, maybe even for two or three hours. Eventually, she'll go back to sleep. In the morning, you tell her right away: "You stayed in your bed the whole night! Wow!" and you give her a prize.

It's important to reward improvement and progress even if your daughter cried for three hours, because bottom line, she did stay in bed and you didn't come to comfort her. In general, when we set goals for our children, it's always recommended to reward them even if they don't make it one-hundred-percent right away. Sometimes, parents don't think they should give a prize if the child still needs to make more progress, but this is a mistake. They won't take the prize and think, "Great, now I can stop trying." Rewarding genuine improvement will only encourage them to keep trying, now that they see how much you appreciate the effort. So, even though you told her that she'll get a prize once she's used to normal sleep behavior, you should also recognize that things are already starting to improve.



It's also important to give a prize before a child demands it, to avoid giving them the impression that they're controlling you. The parent has to be the one to decide if a prize is warranted, not the child.

The next night, you remind your daughter that she's going to stay in bed, and that if she does so, she'll have another prize in the morning. Most likely she won't cry for so long the second night, and I believe that within a few days, she'll be sleeping right through.

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Before I answer the second part of the question, I would like to make it clear that if this involves a conflict in approach between the husband and the wife, then it's another question entirely. But assuming that it's not, and this is just a problem about a small apartment and lack of space for the kids to play in, it's not so complicated.

That's not to say that there aren't significant challenges in living in a cramped home. It is hard. And there isn't a black-and-white solution; you shouldn't go to either one extreme or the other. Children shouldn't be allowed to jump on furniture all the time and break things. They also shouldn't be forced to play quietly and be careful of the furniture all the time. There is a middle way, but the main thing is that the children should know and feel that their parents care about them infinitely more than they care about the furniture.

B'ezras Hashem we should all have large enough homes, enough *parnassah*, and *harchavas hadaas*, and Hashem should give us all the wisdom to find the right approach to each issue.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: VAYEITZEI 5784

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