RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Vaeira

Finding Mutual Happiness

When Shaltiel, a fine young man from a Yemenite family married Shprintzy, a chassidishe girl from Williamsburg, everyone knew there would be cultural adjustments to make. But they weren't prepared for just how different everything would be! When they would spend Shabbos with Shprintzy's parents, Shaltiel would refuse to eat any of their traditional Shabbos foods. And when they would visit Shaltiel's parents, Shprintzy would starve. Eventually they stayed home for Shabbos and Yom Tov meals where they were able to find a happy medium together.

I don't think this story ever happened. It's based on a parable from the sefer Olelos Efraim. He explains there that our body and soul come from different places, too. The body comes from a physical source, and therefore enjoys physical nourishment, leaving the neshama starving. The soul comes from Shamayim, and thus prefers the spiritual, while allowing the body to hunger.

How can we bring the two together? How can we satisfy them both?

It's not as hard as one might think. There is a place where these ideas co-exist. When a person elevates mundane, everyday pleasure to an act of a mitzvah, both the body and the soul can rejoice. For example, when we eat a festive meal so that we can beautify the Shabbos with it, our physical action of eating becomes a spiritual act as well.

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef brings this into our parsha : "*Vaeira el Avraham*", there are times which belong exclusively to the *neshama*, which is called Avraham. Then, "*El Yitzchok*" which symbolizes the body, "*ki tzayid befiv*". Yaakov is the combination of both. The beginning of our parsha alludes to the idea that revelation and enlightenment can best be found when the physical and spiritual are combined.

We may add an extension to this idea that our physical and spiritual worlds aren't all that far apart. Just like we can combine both worlds in our actions, so too are we expected to learn one from another, and to see the connections they really have in our daily lives. For example, we can observe how

people afford the proper respect to authorities in a position of power, and learn from that how to behave towards Hashem. Additionally, we need to keep in mind that those around us have a *tzelem Elokim*, and just like we show reverence and respect towards Shamayim, we need to do the same to our peers.

Of course, in marriage, this is even more important. A husband and wife come from completely different backgrounds. One might think that there is no way for them to enjoy the same things. There are some people who get stuck on the things they enjoy and refuse to consider anything else that they are not used to. But these people are doomed to a life of disappointment. Throughout the course of their lives, they will have no choice but to concede to their spouse's preferences from time to time!

Instead of refusing to budge from your position, find a mutual interest that both you and your spouse can enjoy together, so that one of you doesn't always have to be compromising. In this way, you can both be happy, and serve Hashem with happiness and a glad heart.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

One of our children has a prized collection that he watches over protectively. One day, he didn't see it in the drawer where he had put it away. The entire family helped him search for it, to no avail.

During the search, I passed the coat closet and noticed one coat hanging a bit haphazardly. When I picked it up to hang it properly, I felt the collection my son was looking for hidden deep inside the pocket. This was the coat of my other son, who had seemingly taken part of the search together with the whole family.

This is not the first time he has done something like this, but this is the first time we caught him red-handed. In previous instances, when we suspected that he was behind something that went missing, my husband would take him aside and confront him. He readily admitted that he was the one who took it.

At still other times, my other kids would openly accuse him of stealing, which made me angry, because I didn't think it was fair that they would do that to him without proof.

To be fair, this child is a very easygoing, happy child who wouldn't mind if others would help themselves to his belongings. But I still take issue with two things: First, the stealing – where he knowingly takes other kids' stuff without their permission. Second, his

lack of self-control – something I see in other areas, as well. For example, if something he asks for is denied he will not take "no" for an answer. He will become upset and lash out and there is no way to reason with him. If he wants another cookie, he will take one himself if I say no, even while I'm standing right there! This was actually what had happened with the card collection. He mentioned over supper that he wants a collection like that, too. When it became clear to him that for several reasons it wasn't feasible, he went ahead and stole his brother's collection.

When he was younger, we would give him a pass. But he's now eight years old and fully aware that what he's doing is wrong. My husband feels that he might need a bit more time to mature, but I'm beginning to worry if these bad habits will only become more ingrained in him and grow along with him *cha"v***.**

Is it time to tackle this issue, and if so, how?

Thanks in advance

Answer:

Accusing a child of wrongdoing when you're still unsure if he's really at fault is very hurtful. Even if the child knows that he or she did it, it can hurt them deeply to hear you accusing them and they know you are not yet sure of it. In addition, parents need to give the child the benefit of the doubt, even if they have good reason to believe that this child is actually at fault.

Siblings should most certainly not confront their sibling in such a case. In fact, you should stick up for the accused child if he is being shamed by his siblings. Even if parents know the right way to approach such a situation, most children don't.

Whatever you do, do not do it in front of the other kids. Keep the child's embarrassment to a minimum. His siblings should not be involved. They should know that whatever the case may be, their parents – and only their parents – will handle it.

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In the case of your question, where these actions have been recurring, it can be very risky to assume that your son will simply outgrow this habit. Without blowing it out of proportion, realize that this might be the onset of an undesirable trend. When you choose not to deal with it, it might send a message to your child that it isn't really so bad. This might encourage repetition of this behavior. You need to find a way to deal with it properly, so that the problem doesn't get worse.

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When you approach your child, don't attack him or label him. As with all critique and rebuke, criticize the action, not the child. If your child gives you an excuse for his action –

as preposterous as it might be – try to hear him out and show him that you are taking his excuse seriously. At the same time, you can point out that you will not accept such excuses in the future.

Obviously, if this action keeps repeating itself on a regular basis, you need to deal with it differently. But at least at the outset, allow your child to save face and think that his excuse - *this time* - was justified.

Never tell your child that you can't or won't trust him anymore. Remind him that you have confidence in him that in the future he will not do anything similar, even if "you thought Totty let" or "it was only a small thing" or "your friend told you to". You can tell him that if this ever happens again there will be a consequence, but convey your trust and confidence that this will not happen again.

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As a general Chinuch rule, I think it's important to mention here as well the following. Remember to keep the end result in mind. If whatever you tried last time to correct this situation didn't work, don't try it again. Switch up the tactics. It's not so much about "exactly how" you teach your child that stealing is wrong, it's about doing so in a way that actually gets the message across.

Additionally, Chinuch is about teaching and not imposing or forcing. Try to find occasions to ingrain this concept into your children, without referencing a particular child or incident. The less challenging the message and the timing the easier it can be well taken. During the Shabbos seudah, or when telling your children a story, make sure to mention to them that fear of Heaven is paramount and there's reward and punishment from Above. You can also talk about how when someone is meant to get something, they will get it, and there's no reason to resort to shady means to acquire it themselves. These lessons should be imparted especially when it isn't relevant, so that nobody is on the defensive and they can properly absorb what you're saying.

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I am pleased that you consider your son an easygoing child. From his behavior he seems like what I call "The Fragile Child", a child who is sensitive and requires a delicate approach. They are calm and easygoing, but generally only when things go their way. Disciplining such children requires a gentle, cautious manner.

Look out for instances where your son does respect other people's property or return their belongings to them on time, and praise him for his trustworthiness and honesty. Build up his belief in himself and his ability to control his impulses and desires.

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Hashem should grant you the clarity and direction on how to deal with this situation, and the ability to guide your children on the right path while building them and their self image.

All the best, Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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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