Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Vayishlach 5780 }

Gift-giving

The Power Of Gift-giving

"Yaakov prepared a gift for his brother Esav". Rashi teaches us that Yaakov prepared for his encounter with Esav in three ways: He prepared for war, he prayed, and prepared a gift.

When faced with an enemy who is out to take your life, it is understandable to pray and prepare for war. But can a gift – even the most elaborate one – help save you from such a fearsome foe? Can a gift really extricate you from such a sticky situation?

Yaakov Avinu is teaching us that gifts possess the power to transform interpersonal relationships. A gift, when delivered properly, can accomplish amazing things.

Benefits of Gifting

A gift is something concrete; it's something you can point at. It is obvious that smiling, complimenting and healthy communication form the bedrock of your relationship. They can be compared to the foundation of your relationship. But gift-giving is what supersedes that, and it's something tangible that can always be relished and enjoyed. When your grandchildren come and visit they can't necessarily remember that you smiled at them six months ago. But they can proudly show everyone the gift you lovingly gave them.

If you bought me a gift, you're showing that you invested time researching what I like and finding it. Smiling and being pleasant is great, but it doesn't take that much extra effort. Breindy* came to Leha'ir; she was in a great marriage. Her husband was perfect in every way. But in the 19 years that they were married he never once bought her a gift. She was incredibly frustrated, and rightfully so. People deserve to be shown appreciation, not just through words but through gifts as well.

Gifts can transform an occasion. "I got a promotion at work" can be transformed to "I got a promotion at work and my wife bought me this incredible new office chair". Instead of just another birthday, your gift can turn that day into something more meaningful: The day the gift was received.

Getting It

Giving a gift is not about swiping a card and getting something delivered. Write a note along with your gift. Actually, write a *detailed* note with the gift. Tell your wife how much you appreciate and cherish her. Let her know exactly why you feel that she deserves a gift and how much more you feel she deserves. Gift giving is an opportunity for increased closeness through the ensuing conversation. Don't be shy. Present the gift with the card. And when your spouse says thank you; say: "No, thank YOU."

Part of the reason we appreciate gifts so much is because we feel that someone is looking out for us and anticipating our needs and wants. So if you always wait to get asked for something, you lose out on being the caring person that anticipates the needs of your spouse (friend, child, etc.). Be ahead of the game, and give thought to the items they may want, before they have a chance to request them.

The Thought Counts

It's the thought that counts, really. So only give a gift if you can make the recipient believe that you really care for him. Dovid* is a young client of mine who is frustrated with his parents. They're very rich and were always too busy to show him love. Dovid is not impressed by the constant gifts that they shower on him, because he doesn't feel the love behind them.

Another case: Mr. and Mrs. Lowenstein* were hurt in a family feud. Their pain was exacerbated when their grandchildren sent over an expensive gift instead of visiting and offering a decent apology. Again, gifts cannot replace love.

Expensive Gifts

If giving an expensive gift will mean that you can't afford dinner for the next week, it's probably not worth it. Expensive gifts are really something that need to be judged case by case. Sometimes the extra and unnecessary expenditure will hurt your spouse. Other times, that extra effort to buy a gift even during financial crisis will demonstrate more love. So it really depends on the individual case.

But...

A common refrain is; "But I don't know what he likes! How can I get him a gift?" Again, it's really the thought that counts. So even if your husband isn't delighted by the pattern on the tie you got him, he appreciates the time and effort you invested to pick it out.

Another objection people raise; "But, we're in the middle of a fight!" You're right in objecting to getting a gift if you're just going to dump it in front of your wife and say "There; do you forgive me now?" But Yaakov and Esav were in the middle of a fight too, and he sent a gift anyway. Yaakov sent his gift along with words of flattery and appeasement , and that's what made his gift successful. Learn from him, and maybe the fighting will subside!

Some people just don't know how to be on the receiving end and accept gifts graciously, and that's a problem. But it's not your problem. So while your wife is obligated to be grateful, it's your job to give the gifts. Just keep on giving, and let her work on her reactions.

Chinuch: Gifts for Children

It's hard to get your kids gifts because they're so demanding. Kids are always asking for this and that

and the other thing. You can't keep up with all their demands as it is , so how can you possibly suggest getting extra gifts?

Once again, it's the thought that counts. Make sure your children understand that you can't get them everything that they demand. And make sure they understand that when you get something extra for them, you got it because you love them and think about them.

In a similar vein; parents often promise children a prize if they do x, y or z. It's important to realize that in your child's eyes, these aren't gifts, he earned that prize. A gift is something that you got your child for no particular reason; it's just to let him know that you thought of him and love him.

Let's increase gift-giving to our loved ones, increase the love in our homes, and build a dwelling for the shechina.

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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 wife is very unforgiving, whatever I do is never enough, and she always demands more of me, what do I do?

Answer:

So first, a word to your wife, or people like her: *Allow yourself to forgive.*

Chazal praise one who is רך לרצות - quick to be appeased. In *hilchos Yom Kippur* [siman 606] the *poskim* discuss the importance of granting others forgiveness, and the Mishna Brura writes that Hashem is unwilling to forgive one who is unwilling to forgive others. And bear in mind that while your husband is asking your forgiveness, it's quite probable that you hurt him as well, so if he's being nice enough to ask your forgiveness, grant it to him. It's not healthy to bear a grudge, both in this world and in the next.

But let's answer the questioner. First of all, don't argue with someone's pain. Everyone experiences pain differently and it is possible that your wife is simply a bit more sensitive than you are. Arguing won't help. You do your part and she'll come around eventually. Enough warmth can melt an iceberg. If you truly want to make things right again and do your best, you'll get good results, you can be sure of that.

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