RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Terumah

When there's a will…

The Rebbe, Reb Pinchas'l Koritzer zatzal says that there's a reason why the *mishkan*, which was in essence a temporary structure, remained intact for generations, whereas the Bais Hamikdash, which was of sturdy build, was completely destroyed during the Churban.

The *mishkan* was built through the generous donations of Klal Yisrael. As the passuk tells us at the beginning of our parsha, "*They should set aside donations for my name… take it from whosoever's heart tells him to do so graciously*". Rashi elaborates that this is another way of saying that they did it out of goodwill.

Moshe is gematria "*ratzon*", because the donations he collected from the Bnei Yisroel were done willingly. They happily brought of their belongings to help fund and beautify the *mishkan*. The structure endured because it was based on the positive contributions of the people.

Hundreds of years later, when the Bais Hamikdash was built later by Shlomo Hamelech, he taxed the people. He forced them into contributing to the building of the Bais Hamikdash. While there were certainly many Jews who gave enthusiastically, the Mishkan was built entirely out of the goodness of their hearts, with the spirit of enthusiastic volunteering. According to this, Reb Pinchas'l explains, that's why it's taught that had Moshe Rabbeinu been the one to build the Bais Hamikdash, it wouldn't have been destroyed. Something built on willingness and enthusiasm lasts forever.

Our homes are our *mikdash me'at*, where the Shechina comes to rest among us. When a new *chassan* and *kallah* get married, we bless them that their new home should be a "*binyan adei ad*". How can we make sure that this new edifice is indeed forever? When we make our homes a place of goodwill and grace, when we're enthusiastic about building our homes.

When we know of a way to make our spouse happy or we're aware of something that they need, why not do it for them before they ask? When we do things before we are asked, it is so much more appreciated. It comes across as so thoughtful and magnanimous.

When something you want done doesn't happen on its own, there is a way to ask for it, that can help it happen willingly. When we ask for things respectfully and humbly, it will

be given to us so much more gladly. Of course, by showing immense appreciation, we then give our spouse the good feeling to want to do for us again.

When things don't go our way and we try to force the issue, it will often backfire. When we force someone to do something for us, it will likely not endure. Furthermore, not only will the action not have staying power, but it will also have a negative impact on the atmosphere in our home.

Let's build wisely. Let's make our homes a place where we are always looking to give with a full heart and an eager spirit.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I have a very short question, yet it really affects every part of my Chinuch Habonim. It's not something I'm proud to say, yet I wonder if I'm the only one who's feeling this way, or simply the only brave enough to admit it to myself, and present it in an anonymous forum.

I honestly find it difficult to like my children. I find them annoying and bothersome, and not at all enjoyable or likeable. I once heard someone mention the difficulty of liking the people you love, and I can really relate to it. Of course I love my children, but so often I have this feeling of them being so unlikeable, if you know what I mean. Is there anything you can tell me that will help me out?

Maybe there are others who will benefit from hearing your response on this as well. Thanks in advance.

Answer:

I will start by affirming your letter, you are definitely not the only one who sometimes feels this way. While others may experience such feelings, many people wouldn't address it and therefore leave these negative feelings resolved. As unfortunate and sad as this might be to acknowledge, it is still important to be aware of our feelings. Trying to deny them or bury them won't be helpful to anyone. Knowing the problem is half the solution.

Additionally, when we are open about the way we feel, we often learn that we are not the only one experiencing an issue, and we might find support and/or help from others who are going through, or have gone through, the same thing.

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It's interesting to note that we have quite a bit of autonomy when it comes to choosing certain people that we are surrounded with. We get to pick friends, vet neighbors, and choose country-mates. In fact, in some sense, we even have a choice when we decide upon a spouse! But when it comes to our kids, we have no choice. That is because as much as we'd like to enjoy our children and see *nachas* from them, that was not what they were made for.

As much as we *daven* and plead for *nachas* from our children and that we should be able to take pride in the way they turn out, it is not something that we can always acquire. In fact, many people never get to be proud of their children, no matter the efforts they pour into them!

Raising children is a responsibility, and while we hope and pray that it will be gratifying and fulfilling, it isn't about the profits or the gains. It's about putting in the work. The outcome isn't up to us, and doesn't even matter, because the whole point of being a parent is to perfect our *middos* and become better people. This might sound a bit idealistic, but it's the truth.

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Often, when a parent feels negative emotions towards their child, it is because the child failed to live up to the parent's expectations of him. We expect to see returns from our hard work, and when they fall short, we love them less.

Remember that you are not spending time with your child so that you can enjoy yourself. Even if you find every moment agonizing and annoying, it is still part of your job. It is your responsibility to build your child up and give him a good atmosphere, and your interpretation of the experience doesn't even factor into the equation.

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But it generally doesn't end at fulfilling your obligations. Giving breeds love, and the more you give to your child – selflessly – the more you will come to like him. It doesn't mean giving in to your child's every whim, but it does mean giving away from yourself.

We sometimes might wonder why we love babies so much. We don't realize that babies take a lot out of us, and we give to them without expecting much in return. After all, they're just babies! Because of the selfless nature of our giving, it is so easy to love them. As kids grow up, they need us less and less as they learn to be more independent, and thus, we have less opportunities to give to them.

We can see this a lot by parents of special needs children. They will often admit to loving their special needs child more than they have ever loved any of their kids. Why is that? Because they don't expect anything from these kids. They have complete clarity over what their role with this child is and so they give and give and give. It's also possible that they don't blame themselves for their child's deficiency, whereas when there is a different kind of disappointment, some parents do blame themselves.

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When a person is looking for ways only to gratify himself, he will find many things difficult. But if he lives his life in the context of serving Hashem, his lifestyle will be completely different. If we would sit inside the *succah* for our own pleasure, we can find 100 reasons to complain. It's hot, it's cold, it's cramped, it's wet. When we go inside the *succah* because we want to serve Hashem as He has commanded us, we enter feeling privileged and excited to be able to do this *mitzvah.* It isn't about attaining super lofty *madreigos*; it's just about a mindset switch. What am I doing here, and why?

When you understand that your children were given to you as part of your *avodas* Hashem, and not as "*nachas* machines", raising them will turn into an entirely different experience. Children help us work on our middos, teach us to be givers, help us practice our patience. The Gemara says that a parent is an "*oseh tzedakah b'chol eis*" – one who does good deeds all the time. Giving a bottle to a child, listening to a long and winded report of his day, or driving him to a friend's house, all of that is part of our exalted *avodah*. When our goal is to give, not to get, we develop a newfound appreciation and love for our children.

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Another way to accomplish this would be to focus on our children's attributes. Don't make your affection dependent on their good qualities, but do yourself a favor and remind yourself often of what it is that makes your child special.

Of course, all this is often easier said than done, especially when we are granted children who are especially challenging. We need to be very careful, though, never to be ashamed of our children. Children should never feel like their parents are disappointed in them or that they're constantly being compared to others. They are not equipped to handle such feelings.

Moreover, the ones that you think cause you the most embarrassment, might be the very ones that need you on their side the most and the ones who will help you reach your ultimate *tachlis*.

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If you sit around waiting for your child to bring you nachas so that you can then finally find it in your heart to love him, you are essentially killing the messenger. Most kids can only grow into their best selves once they feel accepted and loved by their parents. When you are willing to put in the work, no matter what the outcome will be, you will often be surprised by the positive results.

When we will view our children through the lens of our *avodas* Hashem, it will help us approach parenting the right way. With Hashem's help, we will then merit to see much *nachas* from them *gezunterheit*.

With best wishes, Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: TERUMAH 5781

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