

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# Torah Lessons for the Home

## THERE'S ALWAYS A NEXT-BEST MOVE

A year after Yetzias Mitzrayim, Klal Yisrael was about to celebrate Pesach in the Midbar and offer the Korban Pesach. A number of men were *tamei* and appealed to Moshe Rabbeinu for a solution, saying: "Why should we be excluded from being able to offer Hashem's *korban* at the right time, together with all of Bnei Yisrael?" Moshe Rabbeinu was then told by Hashem that for these people, an additional opportunity would be provided, a month later, on what became Pesach Sheini.

The previous Lubavitcher Rebbe *ztz"l*, the Rebbe Rayatz, comments on these *pesukim* that they teach us a valuable lesson, that "things are never irretrievably lost." True, the initial opportunity was missed and can never be regained, but a new opportunity always opens up instead, if we really want it.

This is a lesson that applies in all areas of life, including our interpersonal relationships. Even if we made a mistake — even a serious one — there's always a way to fix things and we should never despair and give up. Certainly there's no way to turn back the clock, but it's a waste of time and energy to worry or be angry about the past. The focus should be on asking Hashem for opportunities in the future to fix things, and moving forward, always forward.

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Parshas
**Beha'aloscha**
VOL. 6 | ISSUE 35



## Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Last week I went out with my wife and engaged a professional nurse to look after our three-month-old baby while we were gone. It was just for a few hours. My two older children were also at home at the time.

The nurse, I found out later, spent the time showing the children pictures on her smartphone and using them to describe her nursing job. She told them about how she looks after babies, and also how babies grow each month until they're born, and the pictures showed this too.

I know she didn't mean any harm — as a non-Jew, it wasn't a big deal for her. I wasn't aware of this until my son let a few words slip and then I went to check, as we have a camera in the house, so I rewound the film and could see and hear exactly what happened.

I told my son that she's just a silly goy and that only goyim believe all that garbage and that it was just stupid lies. But afterward I wasn't sure if what I did was right. Now I don't know what to do. Should I just drop the whole thing and hope that my children forget what she said? Or should I bring up the subject again — and tell them what?

Thank you



## A ANSWER

Without any introductions, it's important that we take a lesson from reading such an episode. No well-meaning Jewish parent intentionally exposes their children to the material and ideas described in this letter, but this situation clearly brings to light the very real dangers of bringing foreign influences into our homes. The person asking the question is probably right when he says that the nurse didn't mean anything wrong in showing the children the pictures and telling them what she does — she simply lacks the sensitivity to the issues that we are careful about, and that's something we as responsible Yiddishe parents, entrusted with *heilige neshamos*, must take into account.

The story also shows why having a camera in one's house doesn't really help. If the question had been related to a *she'ilah* in *kashrus*, then perhaps reviewing the film and seeing what

happened might be useful, but in many other areas, once the damage is done, it's often too late once we find out about it.

Even the "best goyim" can have an extremely damaging influence, especially on children, robbing them of the innocence we work so hard to preserve.

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There are different Torah opinions about how to introduce various ideas and concepts to children. Unfortunately, in this day and age there are people who think that innocence is no more than naiveté, and that since children eventually find certain things out anyway, we should introduce the ideas ourselves. While there are certain limited things that we should tell our children so that they recognize dangerous people for what they are, there is generally no need to introduce the ideas mentioned by this nurse to children at any age.

It's true that most children do eventually figure certain things out — at an age when they can understand them to a degree, and not simply become confused. But at the same time children generally also figure out, from the way we relate to such issues, that these are things we just don't discuss.

This isn't a new idea at all. The Gemara discusses this in Maseches Shabbos: "Rav Chanan the son of Rav said: Everyone knows why she [a *kallah*] goes to the *chuppah*, but regarding someone who debases his mouth [by mentioning it], even if a decree of seventy good years had been sealed for him, it is turned for him to the bad..." This applies even when the subject matter is something everyone knows. We simply don't discuss certain things, and children need to learn this over time too.

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Once certain ideas have been introduced against our will, however, we have to do what we can to ensure that they cause as little damage as possible. Brushing off the incident by telling a child that the nurse is silly and/or a liar is unlikely to help. Even though a young child will accept his parent's words over those of an outsider, the memory won't disappear, and a few years along the line when he finds out that part or all of what the nurse said is actually true, he may become confused and lose trust in his parents.

Here the problem is greater, as well, because of the pictures which speak louder than words. Hoping that the incident will be forgotten is unrealistic and unwise.

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Generally, after the fact, as in this case, a parent should bring up the topic himself and not wait for the child to do so. It would be silly to assume that because the child isn't bringing it up again, he must have forgotten all about it. When the parent does reintroduce the topic, he can tell the child that while parts of what the nurse said were true, she got a lot of things wrong, because goyim don't understand these things properly. It would make sense to add that yes, babies do come from the mother — and clarify that it says so clearly in the *pesukim* that children learn in cheder, even if they have clearly not absorbed the idea when hearing it the first time.

The parent saying this should show his child that he's calm about mentioning this and confident in what he's saying, so that the child doesn't gain the impression that there

is anything bad or secret going on, which would only confuse him, make him feel bad about bringing up the topic, or make him even more curious.

Then, the next step is to impress upon the child that while he was right to mention what the nurse said, these are things that we don't talk about, not because they are wrong or bad, but because Yidden are refined and very careful about what we discuss. We don't discuss going to the bathroom, for example, even though there's nothing bad about it, and the same applies here.

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It's very important not to give the child any sense of having done wrong in confiding in the parent, to ensure that in the future, he will also feel comfortable coming to his parents with things that have happened that he doesn't understand. True, such an incident with a non-Jewish nurse should never have come to pass, but once it has, children need to know that they can feel free to come to their parents with questions and that their parents will answer them in a satisfactory way. In fact, whenever a child does come to a parent with something similar, we should tell them how proud we are of them for being so responsible and telling us. In general, whenever children approach us with a question, regardless of whether they heard it from someone else or came up with it on their own, they should not be made to feel guilty for thinking of it or mentioning it, lest they go elsewhere in their quest for answers and clarity.



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It's not always easy to know what to say and how to say it, and we always need to ask Hashem for wisdom and for Him to put the right words into our mouths. It's generally fine to stall before answering, and to say that a question is great and you'll come back with an answer.

We certainly need Hashem's *shemirah elyonah* constantly; we need to ask that our *mitzvos* create *malachim* to protect us and our children. Especially today, so much *siyatta diShmaya* is needed to keep our children pure and innocent and to protect them from exposure to the terrible things going on in the world.

May Hashem help us all to bring up our children to be *ehrlich* and pure and give us true *nachas*.

**TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME**: BEHA'ALOSCHA 5784

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