

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

ALWAYS KEEP TRYING, BUT KNOW YOUR LIMITS

In his *sefer Daas Moshe*, Reb Moshe of Kozhnitz cites R' Elazar Lizhensker, a son of the Rebbe R' Meilech, on the *passuk*: "*Lech-lecha me'artzecha umimoladt'cha umibeis avicha el-ha'aretz asher arecha* — Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." There, the Torah continues, Am Yisrael will become a great nation.

Sometimes, R' Elazar notes, we approach *avodas Hashem* from the perspective of "my country, my birthplace, and my father's house," and rely on what these factors have to offer Each country has its own qualities. For example, there are some countries that seem to naturally produce very strong people, while other countries produce good people. But even if a person lives in a country that seems to naturally produce good people, he shouldn't rely on that and consider himself assured of being a good person.

Similarly, if for example, a person has a naturally kind disposition, he shouldn't rest on his laurels and rely on his natural instincts to guide him toward becoming an *ehrliche Yid*. In the same way, a person should not think that because he comes from a "good family," with parents and grandparents who are *ehrliche Yidden*, he is assured of becoming an *ehrliche Yid* himself.

Rather, in order to attain heights in *avodas Hashem*, a person has to invest a tremendous amount of effort and not rely on anything external. Even in the best of circumstances, with the "ideal" characteristics, family, and community, there are no guarantees.

This is a general lesson about not relying on the environment, and can be applied to our responsibilities with the *chinuch* of our children. Often, people assume that if the background is basically okay, things will turn out fine. If the marriage is stable, the family lives in a good community, and they send their children to good *mosdos*, then their children will surely grow up just fine. Sometimes it does work—at least for some children in a family, but not necessarily for all of them. Parents need to know that they must invest the required *hishtadlus*, and most of all, heartfelt *tefillah*, if they want to see their children grow up to be *ehrliche yidden*.

The Rebbe Rashab of Lubavitch would say that a person should set aside fifteen minutes a day to be *misbonen* about *chinuch habanim; to think deeply about ways* to guide his children to the right *derech. He* should invest as much time as he does to lay *tefillin*. *Tefillah* and the right *hishtadlus* are absolutely vital, and are not meant to be resorted to only in problematic situations.

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Parshas
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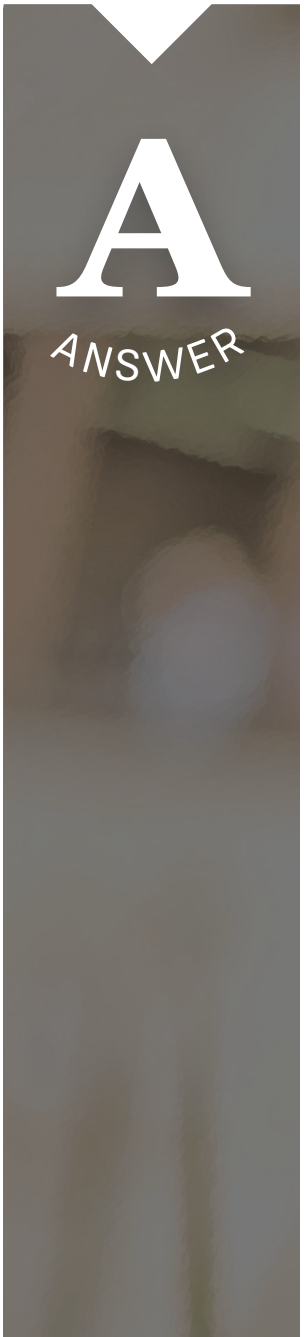


Q QUESTION

Thank you for your *shiurim*—I find them very helpful. My question is about having patience for my children. Usually I am quite patient, but there are times, such as now when my fourteen-year-old son is about to come home from camp, when I find things very challenging. Out of all my children, he's the one who talks the most and gets into the most arguments—what's more, all the children are going to be home for the coming week, fighting, making noise...

Even though I try hard, there's a limit to how much I can take, and sometimes it gets so noisy that I can't hear myself think. I get so frustrated; I feel like I'm going to explode. Perhaps you've already dealt with this in a previous *shiur*? Please can you give me some advice?

Thank you



A ANSWER

I'd like to start by agreeing that there's no question that children can be overwhelming at times, and that's totally normal and to be expected. I actually have discussed a similar idea in a previous *shiur* (Parshas Terumah 5779), where the topic centered on loving one's children, and how building on that love can contribute to having more patience.

That is not to suggest that a parent who lacks patience automatically loves his children any less. But in addition to the love, developing an understanding of how children's minds work and what they really want from us as parents can definitely help in having more patience for them; so let's explore the topic.

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Having children is what we all *daven* for—*banim u'vnei banim oskim baTorah u'vamitzvos*. A family with just one baby and a cat is much quieter and more peaceful than one with eight or fifteen (or even four children), no question. But this peace and quiet doesn't give anyone the *sipuk* or *simchas hachaim* or *simchas hanefesh* that a Yid strives for. It's the peace of a *goy* who wants a nice, quiet, easy life, with no one bothering him.

The noise and the mess and even the fighting is part-and-parcel of having a family. The problem is that we don't always see it that way. If you look at a child's coloring book, you'll see all the family seated around the Shabbos table, everyone listening nicely as the father gives over a *dvar Torah*; or all the children sitting on the floor playing together and then tidying up the toys... That isn't real life, and I can assure you that most families don't look like that.

The only real and beautiful thing in these "picture-perfect" pictures is the children themselves, representing *nitzchiyus*, the mesorah of Torah and a life of *mitzvos* from generation to generation. But there's so much that the

coloring books don't show, mainly, the effort that has to be invested in *gidul banim*.

This effort can be seen as the "price" that we pay to achieve genuine *nachas*. Some call this *tzaar gidul banim*, while others say no: it's just regular *gidul banim*, the normal challenges of bringing up children. Either way, there definitely are challenges, and finding things challenging is normal and not something to feel bad about. People have different levels of tolerance to noise and mess, but in general, it's absolutely normal (and to be expected!) that things can feel overwhelming at times.

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Okay, so it's normal to feel overwhelmed at times, but what can a parent do to avoid exploding?

I recently spoke to someone who works as a driver, and one of the people he drives around is a *rosh yeshivah*. The driver told me that in general, he doesn't try to make conversation with his clients unless they initiate it themselves. However, one day, this *rosh yeshivah* turned round to him at the end of the journey and thanked him for his silence. He explained that throughout his busy day, those ten minutes of quiet time, in a car where no one disturbed him, are all the quiet time he has. At home he has *ka"h* a large family, and in his *yeshivah* he's busy with *bachurim* and answering *she'ilos* all day long; even during *bein hazmanim,* things don't stop. Those ten minutes of peace and quiet in the car each morning give him the breather he needs to gather his *koichos* for the day ahead.

It's normal to need quiet time. What happens if a person doesn't have it, or enough of it? They're going to reach a point where they feel like exploding or running away. That could mean it's time for a vacation, just a few days away from all the pressure, to restore your energy levels and your *simchas hachaim*.

Some people feel guilty at the idea of "abandoning their family." While of course a vacation can be taken in a selfish way, without taking other people's needs into consideration, or by spending too much money and so forth, it doesn't have to be like that. Sometimes a person is doing the greatest good for their family by going away to refresh themselves. People aren't machines that can always be switched on. And even machines sometimes need an overhaul.

Even if a vacation is not an option, there are mini-vacations a person can take to refresh their *koichos*. Sometimes it's as simple as a quarter of an hour, or a half hour, a day. It also doesn't have to be anything fancy. Not only does the time-out itself renew your energy, but just knowing that "soon I'm going out for a walk" or "after my nap I'll feel better" already helps.

To think that one "can't" take any kind of break is a big mistake. Sometimes, parents think that everything will disintegrate if they let go of the reins for even a few minutes. Try it, relax, and see that things won't all fall apart without you for a short period of time. It's not easy for a person who feels the need to always be in control to sit back and let things happen, but it is something that can and should be addressed.

Sometimes, a husband will tell his wife, "You look wiped out! Go lie down for a while," and the wife will resist, claiming she doesn't need it, or that it's impossible right now—she can manage fine. That can happen for a number of reasons. Perhaps she feels that everything will collapse without her. Perhaps she thinks that if she lies down for ten minutes, then he'll have an excuse to lie down for an hour. Or perhaps she's worried that once she's had her breather, she won't be entitled to feel frustrated or exhausted anymore, and certainly not to express her feelings.

Right or wrong, she's only losing out by deciding not to take that time-out to reenergize. The specific issues that may be making it hard for her to take a break can be dealt with separately. However, neglecting the needed self-care will often be at the expense of the family and the peace in the house. What a terrible shame.

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There's another way of dealing with overwhelm, and that's by deleting items on your "to-do" list. Whenever necessary, you can certainly make things

easier for yourself, for instance by baking one kugel less for Shabbos, or not doing a certain chore that isn't absolutely necessary.

If you have four children and you are in general just-about keeping your head above water, and then your sister has a baby and you volunteer to look after her six other children, what are you expecting to happen? If you don't make changes to make things easier for yourself, of course you're going to be overwhelmed. Maybe you can buy some of the Shabbos food, or ask for more help from your husband, or simplify things some other way. If you continue to make the same demands of yourself even when things are harder, you'll probably feel like exploding soon enough.

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There is also another approach that can be helpful for some people, one which involves training your mind to see things differently. I realize that it's a very idealistic approac, but even making a small amount of progress using this method, is a very great accomplishment.

We know from the practice of hypnotherapy that it's possible to change the way a person perceives things, such as making a person see a cigarette as a tube full of worms, turning something addictive and tempting into something totally unappealing. You don't have to go to a hypnotherapist to change your way of thinking, but some people do have success in reframing noise and mess and so forth, training their minds to actually enjoy it. Just like there's "white noise" that people use to relax and focus their thoughts, a person can train himself to find the noise made by his children relaxing and refreshing.



In *ruchniyus'dig* terms, there's a certain truth to this, because if you remind yourself that having *lebedige* children who are healthy, energetic, and full of ideas and initiative, is a wonderful blessing, you can learn to see the accompanying noise and mess as part of this blessing. Even if you only make a little bit of progress in this area, it can still make a big difference.

Yidden who survived the war, for instance, often feel such joy in seeing young children playing and making noise. It can be a *madreigah* to see every Yid as a child of Hashem and not be irked by anyone, but with your own children it's important to remind yourself of the blessings of your situation. Everyone can learn to feel some pleasure at the *lebedigkeit* of their children—and to appreciate that while this is a genuine *nisayon*, it could have been much more challenging.

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At the end of the day, we have to remember that we're only human. Sometimes we get impatient and frustrated and that's completely normal. Aside from taking the needed break when we're feeling overwhelmed, and trying to avoid getting to that point, it's also important—even as we ask Hashem for the *koichos* and wisdom to bring up our children—to remember to thank Him for all the blessings in having children, to see the good, to notice when they're behaving nicely, and to let ourselves enjoy the *nachas*.

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