RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Re'eh

Trust in Relationships

This week's parsha begins with a choice. Hashem sets before us two options: Bracha and Klalah, life and death, and Hashem exhorts us to choose life. It is mentioned in the Seforim that the existence of Bechira - our power to choose - is *the greatest miracle* after the creation of the universe! Bechira means that Hashem is, so to speak, entrusting His universe into our care and He trusts that we will make good use of this opportunity.

When someone is caught speeding on the highway and he tells the state trooper that he's speeding because he has an emergency, the trooper may agree to provide an emergency escort with lights and sirens. But if the trooper turns on his lights and sirens and speeds ahead of this individual, he shows that he really trusts that this is a true emergency and not just a reckless driver trying to get away, because with the police car in front of him, the person now has the option of pulling off at the next exit, with the cop flying ahead.

This idea can be found in sefer Ateres Tzvi on this week's Parsha. On the *possuk* "Achrei Hashem Teileichu - go after Hashem", the Ateres Tzvi brings an explanation from Reb Moshe Pshevorsker zt"l that a king wouldn't allow a bodyguard of questionable loyalty to walk behind him. Maybe a concealed weapon will come out and mark the end of his kingdom. A faithful servant, however, will be trusted to follow behind the king. So, when Hashem asks us to follow Him, we take it as a compliment and a sign of His trust in us.

In our relationships, when we give people a choice or ask them to do something, we should show that we assume they are loyal and trust that they will do as we asked them to. When we constantly hover over them and keep reminding them of what we want, it conveys distrust and can cause resentment or even subconscious rebellion. It's sad when the distrust alone is what causes a subconscious resistance within the people we love and care for.

By showing our spouses and children that we believe in them and in their inherent goodness, it will inspire them to live up to that belief and actually follow through on their promise.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I find your shiurim on Torah Anytime so valuable. All of them are relevant and real and scream "*emes***". I like your Dvar Torah at the beginning from Sifrei Chassidus and I love how your advice is so strongly based on** *Torahdige* **values and basic** *avodas hamiddos***.**

My wife and I both listen to your shiurim, even though we B"H don't have any marriage issues. We just like to hear your advice on how to improve things.

My question is: I don't really get along with my in-laws. I have a civil relationship with my mother-in-law, although I find myself refraining from saying certain things in order to keep the peace. I don't fight with my father-in-law either, but after a good number of years married, I have to say that I still have no relationship with him. Unless a conversation interests him very much, which is infrequent because we don't have much in common, he keeps to himself. A couple of years ago, I asked a Rav about it and he told me that I should not expect a relationship from my father-in-law, and so I have tried to keep to that advice.

The problem is, that since we got married, my wife's relationship with him has also all but disappeared. She admits that she didn't do much to keep it up, but she also felt as if he was doing his parental obligations out of a sense of duty and now that she was married, he was more than happy to pass it on to others. He doesn't show any interest in our life or ask her how she's doing.

My wife's relationship with her mother was never too great. It is not so bad anymore, except that my mother-in-law has a habit of stating her views, even though they might be hurtful or offensive to my wife (for example that women shouldn't be working and should be home with their children, while she knows that my wife works). Her sisters are complicated, too, and they might also say things that are uncomfortable for my wife to hear. She then comes to me to complain about the unpleasant conversation she has had with them.

Whenever there's trouble, I always support her, not just because she's my wife, but also because I believe that they really do mistreat her.

Is it right for me to have her back and agree with her that they are wrong in their behavior (especially with *Kibbud Av v'Aim* **being an issue), or would it be better if I instead ease her out of her difficult feelings by telling her to forgive them and judge them favorably?**

I would very much appreciate your advice.

Thank you again for your amazing work and HKB"H should continue to allow you to positively impact Klal Yisrael.

Answer:

I once came across a question that someone asked Rav Avigdor Miller. He wanted to know if it pays for him to cut ties with his father-in-law. Rabbi Miller answered that if his *shver* is wealthy and will consequently cut him out of his will, then it doesn't pay... Obviously, Rabbi Miller was joking. But the point is that your relationship with your parents and your spouse's parents are important and shouldn't be taken lightly.

As I often mention, it's usually not good to see your choices in terms of black and white. As much as parents should be careful not to jeopardize their relationship with their married children by uttering insensitive or unwelcome comments, those children still need to regard them with honor and respect, as delineated in the *Aseres Hadibros*.

When you dislike someone in *shul*, you can distance yourself from that person or choose not to keep his company for very long. With parents, we don't really have that option. Not only are they not disposable – and we usually need them more than we tend to admit – we are obligated to respect them, even in a case where they mistreat us. The Gemara tells us of the great lengths Chazal went to honor their parents, and it doesn't necessarily mention that it all took place before they were married. Of course, in a situation where the relationship is damaging to the married child or their marriage, this needs to be discussed with a competent Rov, but overall, you need to do everything you can to ensure a healthy connection with both sets of parents.

There are times in a person's life, such as during a simcha or a medical crisis *c"v*, when nobody will be able to help you like a parent will. Telling yourself that you don't need your parents is often a sign of immaturity.

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Keeping the peace is important not just with parents, but with anyone else in your immediate circle. There is nothing to gain from treating people with disrespect.

Some people think of relationships as either amazing or terrible, but most of the time relationships come in a host of different flavors. Some are fantastic all of the time, some are okay most of the time, and some are okay only some of the time.

We don't always have a choice and sometimes we have to work on the more challenging relationships we are in. This could be because the challenging relation happens to be a spouse, or a child, or even just a neighbor. It is true that in rare cases there are relationships that are downright toxic and we might be better off without them, but for the most part most relationships are not extremely dangerous.

Just because a relationship isn't a bowl of cherries, and even when it's specifically unpleasant, does not mean that you should immediately dispose of it. The fact that you can't have deep and satisfying conversations with your father-in-law doesn't automatically mean that he is out to get you with his every word or action and you have to hate him for it. So much heartache is caused by blowing things out of proportion

and assuming that people have ill intentions, when they don't.

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When your wife complains to you about how her family treats her, your job is to be there for her and empathize. There is no reason for you to pile on your own sentiments or try to top her story with one of your own. She probably doesn't even need any solutions from you. All she needs is to know that you understand her pain and feel for her.

Furthermore, you need to be careful not to identify with her anguish and make it your own. When you let yourself be consumed with resentment or hatred for her family, you are making it worse both for her and for yourself. Just show her that you understand and acknowledge her feelings, and then leave it at that.

Since there are a lot of emotions at play here, it is often best to let her bring up the subject and to discuss it on her terms. Under normal circumstances your goal should alway be family peace and harmony. If you think that there is real abuse going on, you can discuss it with a professional to find out how to best handle it.

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It's important to keep in mind that parents, in general, mean well. They might make mistakes – big mistakes – but deep down they really are trying their best. When you remember this, it might make it easier for you to forgive them for what they do and say, and move past any hurt feelings.

A word to parents:

As parents, or future parents, of married children, it is very important to understand that when you comment on something your married child is doing, you are interfering.

Some parents think that surely their child isn't realizing that they're doing something that goes against his parents' teachings, and I have to let my child know! Well, let it be known that your child knows full well what you think after growing up in your house for – give or take – twenty years! Whatever his reason for doing things differently, bringing it up with him will likely not be helpful.

If, after discussing it with a wise and objective outsider, you choose to mention something, make sure to do it in a way that does not put your child on the defensive or make him resent your involvement.

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In conclusion, by being open to working on our relationships – even those that aren't immediately rewarding or mutually satisfying - and keeping the peace by not blowing things out of proportion, we will be able to live with each other in peace, harmony, and happiness.

Wishing you all the best,
Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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