RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# Torah Lessons for the Home

## Parshas Korach

## Actions Speak Louder

Rashi brings some of Korach's arguments against Moshe Rabbeinu with regard to following the exact letter of the law. For example, he argued that a garment made entirely of *techeiles* does not need the thread of *tzitzis*, and that a room full of holy scrolls does not need a tiny *mezuzah* scroll on its doorpost.

In the *sefer* Siach Sarfei Kodesh, this Chazal is explained as follows: Korach was asking a metaphorical question. He argued that a person who is full of *yiras shamayim* and *middos tovos* didn't need to perform actions to demonstrate his love and devotion to Hashem. His *pnimiyus* is enough!

But Korach was sorely mistaken! Even if you feel that you are a perfect *eved* Hashem, when Hashem tells you to do something, you do it. While the *mitzvah's* official purpose might be to make you turn into the person that you already think you are, your *ahavas* Hashem will only be sufficiently demonstrated if you negate your own will in favor of the Will of the Almighty, and actually do what needs to be done.

This idea is very applicable to marriage and childrearing. I see many people who are confused by their spouse's or their children's claim that they don't care enough about them. "*Why is my wife making such a big deal that I forgot to call?*" "*Why is my husband throwing such a fit that I made something for supper that he dislikes*?" Doesn't my spouse know how much they are cared for?? Does this little thing make them think otherwise?

Sometimes, a little mishap seems to be the catalyst for these major accusations. Usually, it is because this incident is not really the main thing. . Most of the time, this one hiccup in the relationship is indicative of how much your spouse feels cared for as a whole. They might feel like you don't take their desires or wishes seriously.

I always feel responsible however to remind you of the flip side too, and not sound like I'm validating these incorrect assumptions that can even lead to conclusions. If you are the one who thinks that your spouse doesn't care for you, realize that people do forget, and it's always best to give them the benefit of the doubt. In fact, if you think about it, you have probably also made a similar mistake in your lifetime. Don't let your entire relationship go sour because of one thing.

However, both of you should keep in mind that it's sometimes a little thing that makes it or breaks it. We can't always rely on the big picture.

The same can be said about children, as well. It would be wonderful if our children would understand how much we love them and the distances we are ready to go for them. We don't have to spoil our children or give them everything that they ask for, but sometimes, it's those little things that will really show them how much we care.

On the other hand, it's sometimes a tiny thing that gives our children the idea that maybe we don't love them. With their limited, childish perspective, they see this one action – or lack thereof – as a microcosm of your entire relationship with them. Therefore, whenever possible, do try to give your child the little things that can show him how much you care for them.

Sometimes, it all hinges on the little *mezuzah* hanging on the doorpost of a room full of *seforim*.

# Question:

**Dear Rabbi Gruen,**

**I listen to the weekly Q&A on your hotline and I find it very informative and eye opening. I would greatly appreciate your words of wisdom in answer to my question.**

**I have a very busy house ke"h. I have two teenage daughters who help me a ton, but when I want to show or train them how to do a new task, they get frustrated. They are afraid that if they learn how to do it, it will become their responsibility, and while I understand their fear, I feel like my girls are capable of doing additional tasks, albeit not necessarily more work. When they were younger, incentives worked. But now that they're 13 and 15, they openly reject my incentives. How can I motivate them to do more tasks?**

**I assume your answer will include showing them appreciation. While I do feel like I owe my girls a lot, I struggle with expressing appreciation. I try hard, but it often feels awkward to me. Interestingly enough, I don't have a problem writing down words of appreciation to my husband or kids. I only have a hard time verbalizing it. Can you explain this? Maybe, if I would understand why this causes me such discomfort, it will be easier to overcome. Do you have any thoughts on this?**

# Answer:

You start by saying that your girls are afraid of learning new tasks because they think it will become their responsibility. You also say that it actually won't necessarily mean more work. Did you tell them that? If in the past, learning a new skill meant a new chore, they are right for being afraid that this will be the case now, as well. They might not realize that this newest task will replace something they have been doing, which can be passed down to a younger sibling.

Children are not mind readers, and we have to make sure that we let them know what our thoughts and intentions are – especially when we think they are mistaken. This is such a common issue and parents tend to not realize what a child is thinking or how they're perceiving something.

Another thing you might not realize is that this *can* actually happen. You might *think* that it won't become their responsibility, but then, once they learn how to do

it, you will subconsciously come to rely on them to do it for you, and not realize that their fears have been realized.

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It's always a good idea to do some introspection to figure out why kids harbor negative feelings about helping out. Sometimes, the reason is simply that your child is lazy and would rather not help out. And why should she? Very often, the chore that she is given is something that you are looking to give away because you don't particularly enjoy doing it, and neither does she!

Besides, she doesn't care if the floor isn't swept or the sink is full of dishes; she'd rather run outside and play with friends. Know that this is totally normal. That's not to say that it's right or good, but it is completely characteristic of young girls and fully expected. It's not about you, it's about your child's inborn tendency to not look to overexert herself, something to be expected with children, and not to get too nervous about.

On the other hand, your child might be very helpful and not lazy at all, but you might be expecting too much of that child – sometimes because of their helpful nature. While you might not always see it that way, realize that from your child's perspective, she feels that you are expecting too much from her.

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You might argue that you did even more as a child, but it is not really relevant. First, we can't be sure your recollection - based on your biased and childish perspective and memory - is accurate. Second, it could be that you disliked it just as much, and that it didn't seem all that fair then either, and not something to duplicate.

Trying to make your child see things from your perspective is an effort in vain. Right now, you need to consider why your child is feeling like you're asking too much of her and you need to work with it. While of course you might be in the position where you can be tougher and more demanding, and you can get what you want done regardless of how much they do or don't want to help you, I don't think that's what you're looking for. And sometimes the first step to getting anywhere with children is understanding things from their perspective.

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It's important to remember that there are all types of children, and each child comes with his or her own unique temperament. There are children who love helping out and there are children who'd much rather not. There are kids who will lend a hand happily, and then there are kids who will help gladly – as long as you don't tell them what to do and it comes from their own volition.

It is often simply about working with your particular child's nature. Your girls are older now. Maybe it's time to upgrade your methods. With a few well-placed words, you can make it easier and more pleasant for them to come to your assistance.

It could be that if you tell them that they only need to do it once, or periodically, or that you would appreciate it if they do it when they see the need, they might be more inclined to agree. There are also those who respond better to choices, whether about how to help or when. And then of course, the amount of appreciation and the way it's expressed goes a long way in motivating children, adults, and everyone in between too.

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In regard to expressing appreciation to a child, I am aware that there are those who oppose the idea of a parent thanking a child. They feel that parents don't have to thank children for helping or just complying to what they're told to do. So let me address this first. Does a parent *have* to do it? No. Can a child refuse to help a parent because he or she wasn't properly thanked? Also no. However, showing appreciation to those who help you is a basic obligation that can only benefit you. Just like you give them food, clothing, and shelter, they will thrive when they will feel needed and appreciated.

If you wait until you feel comfortable expressing your thanks, you end up depriving them of what is rightfully theirs. And aside from any long term effects of having your daughters grow up with positive feelings, as well as learning to be more appreciative themselves, in the short

run, it can definitely make your child feel good about being helpful and more motivated to give more of herself.

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Don't make the mistake that your child doesn't seem to care for the good word or the thank you. Even if someone doesn't look like they need your appreciation, and even when it's outright rejected, you still need to do your part. At the end of the day, as an *ehrliche* Yid with *middos tovos*, how can you take from another person without showing appreciation?

I once heard about a *yungerman* who saw how hard Rav Shteinman Zatzal had to work to get from place to place every day, and so he offered to take him wherever he needed to go. He ended up being the Rosh Yeshiva's personal driver for twenty years! He related that while driving the Rosh Yeshiva on a daily basis for all those years, the Rosh Yeshiva never once forgot to thank him, even if he was busy on his way out of the car! This goes to show that being grateful and expressing our thanks is a sign of *gadlus* and a level that we should all strive to attain.

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Sometimes the difficulty people have with actually "expressing" their appreciation isn't that they don't think they should be thankful, it's more the difficulty to actually go ahead and say it.

Some might assume that because they know something, and it seems obvious, everyone else knows it, too. Let's say, your spouse bought you a gift. Of course you're grateful! Who wouldn't be? *"You mean, I have to TELL him??!!"* The fact that *you* know you appreciate something, doesn't make the other party aware of the same. In fact, all they know for sure is that *you didn't say thank you!* In your specific example, your daughter might not know how much you appreciate her unless you tell her. Never be shy in expressing just how thankful you feel.

Another reason might be that it can feel awkward to look into your child's eyes and tell them thank you. It takes a certain vulnerability to express feelings of indebtedness, and people make every effort to evade uncomfortable feelings such as these. You might not realize that it really isn't all that uncomfortable, and how much better you will feel after saying it. Additionally, even if you *are* feeling ill at ease while saying it, your daughter might be so thrilled with the fact that you thanked her that she won't even notice.

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As with any good thing in life that is uncomfortable, the solution is to do it anyway. The more you flex your muscles, the stronger they get. Even if they don't do much, your children need compliments and praise from you. They want to feel needed.

Don't mince words in telling them just how thankful you are, especially if it is going to become their new responsibility, or if you want them to help you instead of chilling on the couch.

Being a grateful role model will not only make you a better parent, but will also make you more of a mentch. As an added benefit, your child will be a more willing participant in your household responsibilities.

**Wishing you much hatzlacha,**
**Rabbi Shimon Gruen**

## **TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME:** KORACH 5781

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