

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

In this week's *parshah*, Moshe Rabbeinu addresses Am Yisrael, telling them that, "Hashem's portion is His people, Yaakov, the lot of His inheritance." The word used to describe the "lot" of our inheritance is "*chevel*," which can also be translated as "rope." Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu had three different merits, all bound together: the *zechus* of his grandfather, Avraham Avinu, that of his father, Yitzchak Avinu, and his own *zechus*. Like a rope, which is made of three different strands all twined together, Am Yisrael is joined together as one to receive the great inheritance as Hashem's holy nation.

Elaborating on this concept, Reb Moshe Kobriner *zy"a* notes that even if a few strands of a thick rope become a little frayed and worn, as long as they are still connected to the rope they will not fall away entirely. So too, even though some Yidden may not always be acting as they should, as long as the rope holds them tightly bound together and does not unravel, they will not fall away entirely and will remain bound to Am Yisrael.

All Yidden have *nisyonos*, and sometimes our pain at seeing others starting to unravel a little leads us to push them away. However, we must remember that we are one rope and our strength is that we hold together, all the disparate parts intertwined. Even if a person is weak in one area, he has other areas where he is stronger and by focusing on the good and remaining connected, we can give each other *chizuk*.

This is especially true regarding those we are bound to closest to; our dear family members. When we feel united and connected with those that we love most, we can be there for each other, both spiritually and emotionally.

WISHING ALL OUR READERS A KSIVA VACHSIMA TOVAH AND A GUT GEBENCHT YUR!

Dedicated by the
Goldenberg Family
in loving memory of a special Zeidy
ברוך צבי ב"ר אברהם ע"ה
whose Yuhrtzeit is on Rosh Hashana

May he be a Meilitz Yosher for all his descendants!

Parshas
Haazinu
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Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I only recently discovered your classes on TorahAnytime and I'm gaining so much from them. Thank you.

In the past, I've listened to many *shiurim* on *shalom bayis* and I've heard it mentioned that if one spouse does an *aveirah*, the other spouse shouldn't let it get to him but should look away and remember that each person is punished for his own *aveiros*. For instance, if a husband doesn't *daven* or is looking at inappropriate things on the internet, I shouldn't let it bother me as it's not my business.

My question is, since we are one *neshamah* and will be together in Gan Eden, how can I not care how my husband behaves, if he isn't being *ehrlich*?

Thank you

A ANSWER

This is obviously a sensitive question and with regard to specifics, each case must be dealt with individually. However, as a general point I would like to stress that any concept of being unconcerned about the spiritual condition of other Yidden is alien to Yiddishkeit. Of course we are, and should be, very concerned about the welfare of all Yidden, both in *ruchniyus* and in *gashmiyus*.

While this may be harder to achieve with Yidden living in distant places, when it comes to those closer to home it's only natural to feel concern and worry about the welfare of those whom we love, and this is as it should be. It's certainly not something to be ashamed of.

Telling someone "not to take things to heart" or "it's not your business" is not only wrong — it's impractical. Of course it hurts so very much, and is so disappointing, to see one's own spouse or one's child behaving in a manner that is less than *ehrlich*, just as we naturally feel distressed at seeing anyone we love endangering themselves physically.

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Depending on who we are and our connection to the person, that concern we have for someone else's spiritual decline will be made up of various parts in varying degrees. A great *tzaddik* will feel pain, the *tzaar* of the Shechinah, at the knowledge that any Jew, anywhere, is doing something other than what he should. But all of us on some level are capable of feeling this pain, even if it is intermingled with pain due to personal (ego) reasons.

It is natural for most of us to be concerned about how the behavior of a spouse or a child will impact our own lives. Very few of us are on such a lofty *madreigah* that we feel no personal embarrassment if a close relative acts in a less than desirable way and people know about it. When it comes to a spouse or a child, it's also natural to feel something of a failure — if only my *chinuch* had been better; if only our *shalom bayis* was better, maybe this wouldn't have happened...

We can never entirely understand why things happen as they do; we can't even fully understand our own feelings. However, being aware of the complexity of our reactions can help us understand and give us some perspective in a challenging situation.

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Beneath the surface, things are always much more complex than we realize. When discussing someone behaving in a non-*ehrlich* manner it's important to realize that the question of "who is *ehrlich*" is not as simple as we may think. A well-known story illustrates this idea: A man was visiting a different town and was horrified to see men and women greeting each other before entering the shul to *daven* — some even outright inappropriately!

Then, during *davening*, he noticed the *gabbai* call up a man for an *aliyah*. Another man objected: "You're giving *him* an *aliyah*? Yesterday, I heard him tell a lie!"

The visitor was taken aback. Where he came from, a lie was... well, it wasn't good, of course, but certainly nothing that would deprive a person of an *aliyah*. And he had been so quick to condemn the people of this town for what he saw as their terrible behavior between men and women.

This is not to say that being stringent in one area compensates for laxity in any other area — *chas ve'shalom*. However, it is important to remember this concept whenever we see a person doing an *aveirah* that we consider "terrible." Perhaps we do things that the other person considers "terrible"? And yet we see ourselves as *ehrlich* — perhaps that person sees himself as *ehrlich*, too? Perhaps his scale of priorities in *mitzvos* is simply different from our own, for good or for bad?

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Another important aspect that is hidden beneath the surface of what seems obvious is the level of challenge each person experiences in living according to the Torah. What may be a huge *nisayon* for one person is no challenge at all for someone else, who looks at that other person and thinks, "How could he do *that*?" Only Hashem knows how hard or easy it is for a person to overcome his *yetzer hara*.

Furthermore, only Hashem knows how many times a person actually was *misgaber* in the past, before eventually falling. And only Hashem knows how much a person regrets falling, and how he picks himself up again and tries once more. Even if a person has seemingly fallen entirely into bad ways, no one but Hashem knows if he doesn't sigh and regret and try harder and still fail and sigh again... Only Hashem knows that this person, however low he has fallen, still wants to be the best Yid he can be, and serve Hashem in the most devoted and committed manner.

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Regarding the obligation to be *dan lekaf zechus* where the Torah demands it, Rav Chaim Volozhiner *ztz"l* asks: But what if I actually saw that person doing an *aveirah*? Should I then fool myself and pretend it didn't happen?

He explains that this is not what judging favorably means. Yes, the person acted wrongly. We must not ignore it or look the other way or downplay what happened, as this could cause us to become apathetic to the gravity of the *aveirah*. He explains that being *dan lekaf zechus* means that we recognize how serious it is to flout the laws of the Torah, and that we look at others with compassion for being unable to overcome their challenges.

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Is there something one can do to help a person who's declining? Most often, yes. Judging others favorably doesn't mean ignoring a problem, and whenever possible we clearly should do what we can to prevent the person from repeating the *aveirah*.

If it's the first time that this person is making that wrong choice, by all means we should point it out to him, of course gently and respectfully. Sometimes, a person genuinely needs to be taught the details of a certain *halachah*; sometimes, they are grateful at having something pointed out to them.

A person who was beginning to slide can be stopped from going even further downhill by a gentle comment from someone who sincerely cares about their welfare. It's also possible that a person who sees them beginning to slide and says nothing falls into the category of "enabler."

Even *tochachah* done right doesn't always work, but we may and should try. However, if we try, and then try again, and see that it isn't working (or is making things worse), we should stop and look for a different method.

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It can be easy to fall into arguments over issues that mean so much to us, even if it's clear that it doesn't help and only creates hard feelings. It's important to remember that arguing even over *mitzvos* can be counterproductive and simply is *not* a method to be used. An elderly *dayan* once told me that he knows of many people who have struggled with various *mitzvos* for years and even decades, because of the fighting that took place over these topics during their childhood.

In general, a person who is doing something seriously wrong is aware of it. Confronting him generally doesn't help. But that doesn't mean that you condone the behavior, or come to terms with it. You must always hold on to the knowledge that the "behavior" is wrong, without condemning the "person."

Unfortunately, there is sometimes a great temptation to downplay how serious the situation is, because it's too painful to face the truth. Downplaying things is dangerous not only for the person who is slipping and might have been helped to pick himself up again, but also for the person who is looking on and doing nothing. Gradually, their own sensitivity in this area can become eroded and they can end up slipping as well. Worse still is when a spouse thinks to himself, "Well, if this is the situation and I can't do anything

about it, let me at least get what I can out of it, instead of working harder on myself to stay strong."

It is certainly painful to be in a different place in Yiddishkeit from one's spouse. But pretending that the situation isn't as bad as all that is not the right way to make the pain go away.

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What, then, can be done? Focusing on the good in one's spouse can be very helpful, for both of you. When a person senses that they are valued for the good they do, it's natural for them to want to earn more of that admiration and approval and this may prompt them to change.

It can be very challenging to look at, for example, a husband who isn't *davening* and see the good things he *is* doing. But once one overcomes that challenge, there's generally so much good to be found. Perhaps he does a lot of *chessed*, welcomes guests into his home, and gives *tzedakah* freely? Perhaps he is patient and doesn't lose his temper? While these things may seem insignificant in comparison to serious lapses in Yiddishkeit, only Hashem can really know what is significant for that particular person.

And, even between spouses, there are so many things that each one does and the other never finds out about. Your husband surely does many *mitzvos* that you are not privy to, just as you do many good things that you don't necessarily share with him. As I noted earlier, there is no concept in Yiddishkeit of a *mitzvah* compensating for, or canceling out, an *aveirah*. However, recognizing that a person is complex and made up of so many different components helps to give a different, more accurate perspective of a situation.

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As for husband and wife being together in the World to Come, although I have seen similar thoughts mentioned I haven't found a clear source for this idea. It seems to me that such things are really beyond our understanding. All we know for sure is that Hashem takes everything into account when summing up a person's life, all their own successes and achievements, as well as all their mistakes and failings.

Yes, because this is our spouse we do have a certain special level of responsibility and concern, but that doesn't mean that we can turn that spouse into the person we want him to be. We barely succeed in becoming the kind of person we think we want to be, and that's clearly our responsibility. But we can always *daven*, and then *daven* some more.

Commenting on the *passuk* where the Torah tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu was *niftar* "on that exact day," the Chiddushei Harim says that Hashem stressed the "exactness" of the day to point out that although Am Yisrael was determined to *daven* and *daven* and *daven* and prevent Moshe from leaving them, His will prevailed. This would appear to indicate that without Hashem's specific intervention, *tefillah* can overcome a Divine decree. Not everything is predetermined, and with the right amount of *tefillah* we can clearly have a strong effect even on things which seem beyond our control.

We can't always influence the people we care about, or help them choose better, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't *daven*. Perhaps that is all that is demanded of us in such a circumstance, where we tried everything else and our efforts were futile?

We must also take care not to become despondent or depressed, and to continuously focus on the good in others (and in ourselves). *Be'ezras Hashem* when we do so, when we hold on to the strong rope that binds us to generations and generations of *ehrliche* Yidden who slipped and fell and picked themselves up again — and when we bind other Yidden to that rope and keep them close — we will be *mechazek* each other and lift each other up.

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To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557** or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**
To subscribe to receive the weekly essay, please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org