בס"ד

RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS KEDOSHIM

LEVELING UP BY BACKING DOWN

There is a well-known Midrash on the opening of this *parshah* "*Kedoshim tiyehu* – You shall be holy," in which it says, "*Yachol kamoni?* – Perhaps it means as holy as Myself, *Talmud lomar 'Ki Kadosh Ani Hashem.* – Only I, Hashem, epitomize holiness, your holiness is not as great" The K'sav Sofer here quotes a Gemara that a person shouldn't say that he would never eat *chazir*. Instead, a person should say that he would want to eat it, but resists because it is forbidden by the Torah.

The K'sav Sofer teaches that a person shouldn't say that he doesn't *want* to do an *aveirah*. On the contrary, he should admit to having human tendencies and desires. Hashem doesn't expect people not to have temptations. That's what *Kedoshim tiyehu* means. A person may think, *Yachol kamoni* – that he must be completely elevated like Hashem is. But that's not true. Hashem's *kedushah* is above the *kedushah* of a human being and we are expected to work hard in order to overcome our base desires, and do what's right.

Bachurim often struggle with this; they feel that if they're holy Jews studying Torah in Yeshiva all day, they should be protected from all sinful thoughts. .Many times *bachurim* are truly shocked when they realize that they have what we recognize to be regular human temptations, they think they should be above that and we have to explain to them that it's only normal to be tempted. It is normal and expected for people to be pulled to the wrong things, and our *avodah* is to resist because Hashem commanded otherwise.

This idea gives a lot of clarity in many areas, and there's a lesson for building relationships too. Often, when people are told to work on a relationship, to be more giving or forgiving, etc., it's hard for them because they don't understand why they

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in memory of Rabbi Zechariah Shimon ben Yitzchok Wallerstein ז"ל

A dynamic educator who used his trademark passion, clarity and love, to touch the hearts and souls of thousands of people.

יהא זכרו ברוך

should have to do so. And it's true. Perhaps if you'd calculate the give and take in a relationship, the person you're dealing with doesn't deserve for you to be nice to them. But don't take the fact that something is difficult for you so seriously. Don't expect yourself to feel great doing the right thing. We're all human and as mentioned doing the right thing can often be very difficult. You don't necessarily need to feel great treating others nicely because you want to or it makes sense. You don't have to look forward to doing the next favor for your wife. But you may be expected to behave in a certain way anyway even if you don't feel like it. If you wait until you understand why, it may take very long until you can do the right thing.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

If a child was told he would be punished, is it ever okay to pull back on that? What if there's an excuse to retract the punishment? I told my son I wouldn't take him to a tisch **on Friday night because he kept begging me, but now I actually want him to come. Can I push off the punishment? Is there a way for me to get out of it?**

In general, should a parent be mochel **a punishment if a child acknowledges his mistake? Should a parent encourage a child to acknowledge it?**

Thank you.

Answer:

This situation comes up often in many different forms so let's explore it from a few angles.

Life is about balance, knowing how to behave when. Stubbornness is generally not good, although there are times that the *middah* of *akshanus* can be used for good things. If a person gets stuck with 'because I said so,' and can't ever move past it, his relationships will likely suffer. At the same time, weakness isn't good either. A person should be confident enough to stand by his word. Children know how much they need to tantrum, debate or complain to get a parent to change their mind, and that's not a good message to give them.

It takes confidence to retract, to admit that although you said something, you now realize there's a reason to change what you said. You give the message that you're comfortable with what you said and you're not afraid your child will think less of you for pulling back. In general acknowledging a mistake or apologizing is a sign of confidence.

How do you know if your retraction comes from confidence or weakness? Think what's causing you to retract. Let's analyze a situation: You warn your child that if she goes to bed late, you won't come tell her a story. She goes late, begs for a story, and you give in and tell her one. That's weakness. Your child got you to give in, whether by debating or threatening or some other method. You give your child a message that she can control you through these means.

But if the change comes from you, it's confidence. "When I said that, I didn't realize that you still have homework." Or, "I said I would remind you and I forgot, so I'll come tell you a story." Even if the child clarifies why circumstances may permit you to change your mind, "Totty, I had more homework than usual," that can be grounds to pull back on your words. You may want to clarify to your child that not all circumstances will get you to retract and that they can't keep coming up with excuses to get you to go back on your word.

So in response to this question, if there's a valid reason and respectable way for you to go back on your word, there's no reason why not to, as long as you're not manipulated into doing so, and decided so on your own.

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Some people share with me that their parents "never made a mistake". I've heard people say resentfully, "Oh, my father - he's *always* right." That's a negative message. A father may have 30 years of experience over his child, but that doesn't make him right by default. It's hard for a child to grow up knowing that his father was never able to be wrong. On the other hand, apologizing to a child for making a mistake is a very healthy lesson. "I had a very hard day so I reacted more harshly than I should have. You didn't deserve that *potch*. I'm sorry."

Of course that shouldn't happen every day, and certainly not - as mentioned - when the child is the one demanding it. The child shouldn't be the one to tell a parent when they're right or wrong. But if you apologize when it's called for, your child will subconsciously learn to respect you because of your ability to make (and admit to) a mistake.

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It's important to mention that before you tell something to a child, you actually thought it through so that you don't get caught in a situation that will make you appear weak or inconsistent. Nor do you want to be stuck having to implement a consequence just because you were angry earlier. If you tell a child that he won't be able to go out to play all afternoon, regardless of whether he deserves the punishment or not, you'll be stuck with this child inside all afternoon. If you threaten not to take your kids on a Chol Hamoed trip, your choices will be either to back out and appear weak, or to stick to your word and deal with the fallout. But you must stick to your word.

I remember a situation where a mother told her son to buy himself a new hat. He didn't do it. She told him that if he doesn't take care of the new hat before Pesach, he wouldn't get one until after Shavuos. He was irresponsible, but now he looked like a clown and she had a hard time finding a respectable way to back out.

If you want your son to go to shul or to tisch, don't tell him you won't take him. It will work against you. In general, you'll never regret

taking a few deep breaths before reacting to a situation.

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I want to mention another point. Consequences shouldn't be a first-choice method. Although consequences are okay and can be healthy, you can accomplish so much more through incentives and making a child want to do the right thing. The Rambam discusses rewarding a child to make him want to do what he should. It's okay to make it more geshmak for a child to do something he has to do anyway. It's not bribing.

If it bothers you when your child keeps begging to go to the tisch, you can tell him that you know he wants to go and if he doesn't keep reminding you, you'll give him something when you come home. How's that for an incentive? And you get your objective too.

Your last point about being *moichel* on a punishment if a child acknowledges his wrongdoing goes along the same lines. It doesn't portray any weakness. On the contrary, if you don't give your child the opportunity to discuss what went wrong, you're not giving the opportunity to learn how to do better or show you that the lesson was learned. In fact, as you tell the child what the punishment will be, you can leave an opening for them to apologize. "The way you're behaving now, I'll have to do XYZ." This alerts the child to the fact that if he changes the way he's behaving now and owns up to it, you'll be able to back off the punishment.

That's the power of *teshuvah*. We want Hashem to allow us to acknowledge and better our ways and, on some level, we can offer the same to our children and bring out the best in them.

Wishing you all the best,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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