Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Shelach |

True Strength

Does a Nation Need A Wall?

This week, Moshe Rabbeinu tells the spies וראיתם את הארץ מה הוא ואת העם הישב עליה החזק הוא הרפה - *"Investigate the land and its people, see if they're strong or weak"*. Rashi adds: "He told them to check their city walls. If they live in intensely fortified cities, it's a sign of weakness. The truly strong need not rely on walls and fortifications to protect them."

Let's try to apply this to or daily interactions with others. How do you know when someone is weak, insecure and lacking in confidence? The answer is: when they project extreme strength. You ask your wife, "Why didn't you make that call to the insurance company?" and suddenly you find yourself under attack "I was supposed to call? How about you taking care of something once in a while?!"

Attacked by Weaklings

When attacked in such a manner our first instinct is "Wow, that's a powerful onslaught; I must fight back!" But actually Rashi is teaching us, when somebody is expressing themselves that way, it's a sign of weakness.

Very often we misinterpret the weakness, and as a result we end up "Breaking the broken". Defensiveness is generally a sign of weakness. According to Rashi, the *meraglim* were warned about this, but they misinterpreted it anyway!

Why does your husband get so uptight when you ask him to please take out the garbage? Is it such an unreasonable request? And the answer is because you're hitting him where it hurts. He knows he should do it, he feels guilty for not doing it, and now you're adding fuel to the fire by asking why he didn't do it. So he explodes!

He wouldn't explode if your neighbor asked him to take out *her* garbage, he would laugh in her face! But because he feels you're right, he feels guilty and vulnerable; that's what's causing his reaction.

Can It Be Me?

When we see people protecting themselves, building fortifications and getting defensive, it's a sign of weakness. It's because they're not feeling good about themselves. When they fight back they don't say, "I'm so sorry, you're right". They just get more defensive and it becomes a full blown argument in a short while, with accusations flying back

and forth. "You don't do this, I don't do that." It all begins from misinterpreting a sign of weakness.

By the way, if you feel that every interaction with your spouse ends up this way, it could be due to your attitude. If I see that a person is feeling weak when he's around me, I should ask myself "Why is that? Is it because I'm exuding an attitude of unhappiness with him/her? Could it be that my general way of relating to this person is in an accusatory and blaming manner? Maybe it's something to think about – if they're being so weak, maybe it's because of me. I should actually be empowering them, why am I always trying to break their strength? You have to realize that it is misinterpreted imagined strength, which is really a sign of weakness.

Please Break down the Wall!

Weak people need help, they need strengthening. Because they're so weak they protect themselves by building a wall. Shira* desperately wanted more attention from her husband, but instead of being vulnerable and expressing her need, she shut herself off to him. She was hoping he would invest all his energies to break down the walls she had erected and then she would have the attention she craved. However, sadly, that's not what happened. Her husband came, saw the wall, decided it was too much trouble, and went to conquer a different city!

If your spouse erects a wall, please realize that it's not a barrier, it's not a fight, it's simply a display of pain and a cry for help.

The Other Side of the Wall

It's important to turn the tables and talk about the other side for a moment. Be conscious of your reactions to your spouse. Do you get defensive? Do you erect walls and fake displays of strength? Is it getting you anywhere?

Next time your wife gets under your skin, try this. Instead of getting defensive and snapping back, try to remain calm and say, "You know, I hear how you're feeling, I'm happy you're sharing that with me. Maybe we could discuss this later in a calm moment." Wow! You're not getting flustered. You're not getting irritated. Now *that's* a real display of strength.

Real strength abhorts arguments. Real weakness masquerading as strength, only compounds conflict. Don't build a wall when you get hurt, be vulnerable and communicate. It's easier to say "why should I tell him how I feel – let him 'come get me'." But the truth is that your best chance of getting what you want is by verbalizing and sharing your personal needs with your spouse.

Build Yourself

Instead of looking to our spouses for strength, we should be looking inside ourselves. We should be sharing our strength with others, not our weaknesses. As a rule, it's when you're self-confident, that you will be respected.

The *meraglim* reported that they were like grasshoppers to the mighty Canaanites. The Kotzker z"l says that this was one of their errors. Don't try to imagine what others think of you. Don't try to appear mighty or weak. Just be confident in who you are and do now allow someone else's perception of you, get in the way.

Chinuch: The Obnoxious Child

Unfortunately, so many children who come across as the *mechutzef*; the obnoxious stubborn child, is actually the sensitive child. It's what I call the fragile child – the child that cannot handle criticism, the one who is too weak to accept mussar.

People often say to me, "He's really an intelligent child all around, but I don't know, over here…. it just doesn't penetrate!" If he's intelligent, why is he not getting it? The answer is, because there's nothing to get. We aren't dealing with logic, but emotion. He's getting defensive because he feels a need to protect himself.

If you see him sticking up for himself time and again, instead of explaining to him and showing him how wrong he is, make him feel good. Let him know that when you say something to him, it's not because you're seeing something negative about him, it's simply because you're trying to help him.

But don't say that in words– show it. Make sure he gets it on his own. And with Hashem's help, when you take a fragile child or a fragile spouse seriously, and you make sure their emotions are being addressed, you'll see how things become so much easier. All of a sudden, he/she who looked like החזק הוא, seemed so powerful, was really הרפה הוא, was really weak – and will start becoming stronger and more comfortable around you. So be careful not to break that fragile child. In a short time *b'ezras Hashem*, you'll be dealing with much less negativity.

-Q&A-

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

Question:

My wife's brother, a bachur, bought himself a phone without his parent's knowledge. I'm not sure what he's doing with it, but I'm pretty sure it's not helping him advance in his learning at yeshiva, to say the least. I'm afraid that if I tell my in-laws they will just explode and not deal with it properly. He trusts me and he texts me. Should I tell him his behavior is unacceptable and ignore his texts? Should I reply and stay on his good side? Do I have a responsibility to report his behavior to my in laws?

Answer:

When it comes to things like this, very often, the way to deal with it is to not deal with it. I'm not suggesting you ignore the situation, but unfortunately there isn't necessarily the right way to deal with such a situation and have it 'taken care of'. We have to understand our limitations and know how much we can really accomplish. Sometimes you just can't do anything. It's important to know that.

Just as in-laws should not be mixing into their children's shalom bayis, a son-in-law shouldn't mix into his wife's parents' parenting skills. You can't get too involved in such a situation, but here's what you can do.

You can definitely show your brother-in-law that you're there for him and care about him. Being available to someone doesn't mean answering his texts 24/7. You should probably be a bit passive about the phone. You can't actually take it away from him, but don't give him your approval about it.

But in everything else, give him approval. Show him love, show him encouragement. It is often these kids who project coolness and an attitude of "everything is ok" who are actually the weakest and require the most encouragement.

So if you feel your in laws will do more damage than good, don't tell them about it. But don't give them parenting classes either. As for dealing with this boy, there's no quick fix. Don't approve of his choices, while at the same time show him acceptance and love.

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