Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Toldos |

Aseh Lecha Rav: Finding a Guide

PARSHAS TOLDOS: GOING TO ASK

In beginning of this week's parsha, Rivkah imeinu faced an extreme difficulty, a difficulty so severe that it caused her to question her entire outlook on life. She questioned her entire life up until that point אם כן למה זה אנכי "Why did I strive so hard for this?" she said. And so how did she deal with these extreme feelings? ותלך לדרוש את ה' – "She went to inquire of the man of G-d".

We can learn from here the importance of having someone to turn to when faced with a difficulty. And going to someone doesn't mean that you're deficient in any way. Chazal tell us אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורין, "A prisoner can't get out on his own" or "A surgeon can't perform surgery on himself", that's just the way it is. In life, everyone is faced with difficult choices that are just too great for them to bear on their own. As great as Rivkah was, she recognized that she couldn't resolve everything. Many times, we are faced with difficult situations, and often we just need an objective voice to clarify matters for us.

FINDING THE RIGHT ONE

For some people it's not easy to humble themselves and ask someone for guidance. But one of the healthiest things you can do for yourself is to accept that you're not the smartest person in the world; that you can't fix every situation. There is only a certain amount that you're capable of, so be aware of your limitations.

ותלך לדרוש את ה' Rivkah didn't go to a necromancer or to a therapist, she went to a navi of Hashem. This is not to say that you should never go to a therapist, only to the biggest Rosh Yeshiva you can find. Chances are that the biggest rosh yeshiva doesn't have time for you. But we learn from here that we need to go to someone who is solidly grounded in Torah ideals, someone who is a yarei shomayim.

Many people are influenced by the secular world and are willing to trust anyone with letters after their name. This is often problematic as they are then guided to do things that are not aligned with Torah values, and often, just plain wrong. So it is very important to find someone who gives advice based on the Torah.

DON'T ARGUE OVER THE MEDIATOR

When you get married, it's very important to realize that there are two people getting married here. Yes you're "a couple", but you have two minds, two desires, two backgrounds. Disagreements are inevitable. I'm not saying

that bloody war is inevitable, but there are disagreements in every marriage. That's why it's so good to choose a mentor from the beginning. I've seen cases where a couple couldn't agree over something minor, and then the schism started widening. By the time they wanted to go for help, they couldn't agree over where to go!

It's always a good idea to have someone whom the couple respects. If a wife belittles her husband's rosh yeshiva, and he belittles her father's rov, so how will they ever agree? It's a good practice for a couple to agree from the outset that "in this home we follow the guidance of a certain Rov, Rebbe or Rosh Yeshiva". So many issues get cleared up when there's a Torah authority who is the leader of the home. We know what to expect, we have standards to conform to and we have whom to turn to.

PRESERVING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In every marriage, certain decisions must be made. These decisions belong to one of three classes: Mine, Yours and Ours. Boundaries are extremely beneficial and actually necessary for the health of your relationship. Decisions that are "ours" should be made by the two of you, not by one of you. Sometimes it's one person that is the decision-maker, period. Mine, yours, ours – she doesn't discriminate; the decisions belong to her. But actually decisions that are "mine" or "yours" should be made by each of us respectively, while taking the other person's feelings into account as well, and decisions that are "ours" should be made together.

But what do we do when we can't come to a decision? Each of us feels very strongly about the choices and we can't seem to give in on this topic. So what do we do? In such a case we recognize that simple discussion is not working, we're both too emotionally invested here, and we go to our guide, we go to seek advice.

Now here, some people get cold feet. Here they are, feeling so strongly about this topic, and they're expected to just give it up into the hands of some stranger? What if he says that my wife is right?

And the answer to that question is that this is precisely the reason you should give up making the decision. If you can't envision your wife being right, then you're not the one to make the decision on this matter.

And another thing; in marriage there is no "right" or "wrong", there's only "good for the relationship" or "bad for the relationship". It's better to be wrong twenty times and have a happy marriage, than to be right all the time and miserable. Even if you believe that your guide has it all wrong, still, following his advice is a success for you.

YOU'RE NOT SURRENDERING

Allow me to clarify for a moment. This isn't about surrendering your decisions to a cult leader, or about having a third party in your marriage. However when disagreements come up that are irreconcilable, it's often because someone, or two someones, is being led by his emotions and can no longer see things logically. In such a case it's good to have a third pair of objective eyes, to look at the situation and see what would be the best step for the couple to take.

As similar as you are, and as much as you love each other; there will be situations where you won't see eye-to-eye. So what will you do? Finding a guide for yourself and accepting his decisions, is one of the healthiest things you can do for your marriage.

WHEN IT'S TIME TO LIE DOWN

Some people take this message very seriously, a bit too seriously. They're always looking for someone to guide them, not because איזהו חכם הלומד מכל אדם, but simply because he feels that no one has the qualifications to help them. This man has been to seven therapists already, but none of them understand… There's an old saying: "If everyone says you're drunk, lie down."

If no one understands you, perhaps you're right, but then again perhaps you are not understanding them. Perhaps it's time for you to try and see the other perspective. So I'm not saying that your mentor or guide can't be wrong, or that you can't switch guides. But someone who sees that he's

consistently disregarding the advice of others, probably has a problem.

CHINUCH: YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE THE ANSWERS

If you see that you and your child are constantly coming to an impasse, the same advice applies. Seek help. It's true that you're smarter, more mature and you're the parent. But why is it that disagreements are constantly popping up? Maybe the fact that you're emotionally invested in this child is influencing some of your decisions. Ask someone. Maybe an objective outsider will see that you're a bit too tough on your child or that your demands are unreasonable.

Another point to consider; even when it is absolutely clear that you're right, sometimes it's beneficial to give your child that validation of double-checking. "Let's ask Zeidy what he thinks". Or, "This is a very big issue, let's discuss it with your principal". Once you've validated your child's feelings, things get much easier.

When we're in a home all day long it seems hard to see out of the box. That's why it's so beneficial to learn from Rivkah imeinu ותלך לדרוש את ה', going to ask for advice and counsel.

-Q&A-

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

Question: My daughter is very awkward socially and has had many issues because of this. She does things for attention etc. I've just heard a very distressing piece of information. One of my friends said that he saw my daughter being mechallel Shabbos. How am I supposed to react to this?

Answer: You're absolutely right, this is very distressing and disturbing. I want to point out that B"H this is not something that parents deal with on a daily basis, and so it's a good idea that you're reaching out for guidance.

Ignoring negative behavior is not an option, because it further enables the behavior. Jumping the gun and criticizing is not an option, because it won't get you anywhere. This has to be addressed, but in a positive manner.

Now, chillul Shabbos is not something that you can be positive about. You can't say "Look I know you were mechallel Shabbos, but I love you anyway". Shabbos is not something to be trifled with. But you can find some sort of justification for her and make it seem like you understand. You can tell her that you assume she only did it because she was with her friends. That you think very highly of her and that she's not the type of kid that would reject her family, her religion and Hashem.

So this conversation is one that should be had, however without any dwelling on criticism, and with a positive message. You should also end off with something about the future, that you're sure that it will never happen again. But end off means end off. Don't discuss or argue, talk to your daughter, and communicate these points, but leave it off afterwards. You addressed it, you said what has to be said, and that's it.

The fact that you're giving your child a message in a positive way is enough to bring the child over to your side. Now your daughter knows that Totty and Mommy aren't out to get her, that they're on her side. That alone can be the impetus for her improving herself.

And another thing, if you believe that the cause of your daughter's issues are her social difficulties, they should be addressed. Don't say: "Oh, now I see that you have social issues, let's send you to a therapist". But feel it out, see if there's anything you can do behind the scenes to help your daughter find that happiness that is so elusive to her.

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