



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ VAYECHI 5780 }

TRUE KINDNESS

DYING WISHES

In our parsha, Yaakov sees that his dying day is approaching and he summons Yosef and says to him: “Please be truly kind toward me; don’t let them bury me in Egypt” (47, 29). What does it mean to be “truly kind”? So Rashi explains that when kindness is done to the dead, it is considered more “kind” than a kindness done toward the living. When you’re kind to someone who is alive there is always the chance that you will be rewarded. But when you’re kind to someone who is no longer alive, there is no hope of any reward.

Yaakov wanted to teach Yosef how a kindness should be done; and it pays for the rest of us to pay attention to this lesson. If you want to be truly kind, imagine that your recipient has no idea that you are the one being kind to him. Just be kind for the sake of being kind.

SELFLESS GIVING

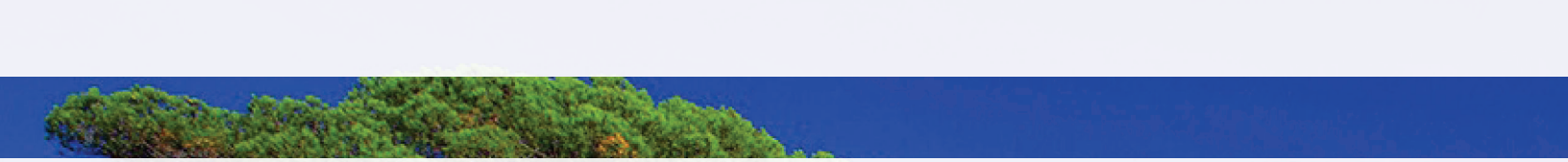
Many times people are reluctant to accept favors because it’s just too complicated. “Every time my husband does something for me, I need to thank him a million times and for the next three weeks I have to go out of my way for him. It’s easier to just do things myself!” Don’t do that to your spouse. Try to be kind without expectations of anything in return. And watch how much easier it becomes for your spouse to accept your favors.

When people are truly kind to one another, a feeling of goodwill follows and it causes their relationship to flourish. It is the selfless giving and gracious accepting and returning of favors, that make a relationship great. So let us try to learn and apply the ideal of True Kindness and grow in our relationships.

DO IT FOR YOURSELF

Some people don’t understand True Kindness, or doing favors without expecting anything in return. Isn’t it only right to expect something in return? Isn’t a relationship about give and take?

So the answers to those questions are; yes and yes. You are right that you *should* get something in return and that a relationship *should* be reciprocal. But what about yourself? What about being kind for yourself? Everyone wants to develop his character; the Gra writes that a person was created only so that he can rectify his character. That’s our purpose in life [Even Sheleima 1:1]. So if you want to fulfill your purpose in life, you want to be kind. But holding the door open for a stranger at the library won’t make you into a kind personality. If you want to change your character, you need to work on True Kindness,



kindness that no one but yourself knows about.

Your husband will never realize what you did for him, and he'll never thank you. He won't reciprocate in any way. But you have become a better person. You are not the same woman as you were when you married. Now you're a woman of True Kindness.

THE BENEFITS

It's ironic, but it is usually the things that you do purely for the sake of others, without hoping for anything in return, that actually bring the greatest returns. You reap the greatest dividends from doing favors of True Kindness.

Some people are very business-minded, it's all about what I did and what you did, 'he said', 'she said'. It is sad that these people never get to reap the benefits of a happy marriage, "these are the hours that I watch the kids, these are the hours that you watch the kids". A home can function very smoothly under such circumstances, and everything can work out just right. But it's not a marriage.

The hallmark of a marriage is watching out for your spouse even when you get nothing in return. Marriage is not a business partnership; when you go under the *chuppah* it is with the understanding that you will take care of this woman even when she's old and grey. And in order to do that you need to start training yourself in True

Kindness when you're both young and able bodied.

Nobody wants to be close with someone who is always demanding and exacting. You want to be close with people who are easygoing and nice, people who will do favors for you without expecting anything in return. So be that person for your spouse, let your spouse want to get close to you. You'll usually be the one to reap the dividends.

TOOTING YOUR OWN HORN

Being kind is a great way to improve yourself, but it's also a great way to improve your marriage. So although it may be a truer kindness if you keep it a secret, it may be good for your marriage to point out to your spouse that you did him a favor. Don't do it in a way which implies that you want to be repaid. But you can do it in a way that your spouse sees what you're doing for him.

You can take over one of his responsibilities and tell him that you're doing it because you care about him. You can tell her that you want to watch the kids in the morning just to treat her to an extra hour of sleep. You can tell your spouse that you're doing the kindness purely for the sake of kindness, so that they don't feel the need to reciprocate. You gain by this; you made your spouse feel good, and at the same time you made it clear that you expect nothing in return.

REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN

In the tefillos of the Yamim Noraim we say *כי זוכר כל הנשכחות* אתה "You remember all that is forgotten". The Berditchiver Rov z"l once explained that Hashem remembers only what we forget; if we do *aveiros*, but we constantly remember them and repent, then Hashem "forgets" about them. But if we do *mitzvos* and "remember" them, we become arrogant because of them, then Hashem "forgets" them and we receive no reward for them. It is those *mitzvos* that we do and forget about, that Hashem "remembers" and rewards richly.

Similarly, if we want to reap the rewards of the kindnesses we do, we must learn to forget about them. Your wife will remember the kindnesses that you forgot about. But if you remember everything and are focused on keeping the tally, your wife will conveniently forget everything you did for her.

When the atmosphere at home is already somewhat strained, you may be adding to the strain by being "nice". If your "kindness" is all about getting recognition, then maybe it's best for you not to offer your kindness. Sometimes people "give" in such a "taking" manner that it is destructive. So learn to forget.

Let's just mention briefly another type of damaging kindness; being involved in *chessed* at the expense of

your family. This can be very damaging and was actually partly the subject of our essay last week. Very often you can avoid that simply by checking in with your spouse before you jump to your next chessed project.

HOW TO GIVE

It's important to be able to give on your own terms. If your spouse is the type to take advantage of your kindness and manipulate you into things that make you uncomfortable or are extremely inconvenient; don't do it. Don't be kind in a way that will break you down and preclude you from being kind in the future. Part of being Truly Kind is knowing when and how to give.

Don't give because of what you will get. It's like the person

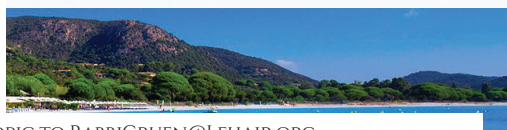
who learned the *mishna* "Run away from glory and it will pursue you". So he asked his *rebbe*, "Since I'm running from *kavod* for so long, how come no one is honoring me yet?" the *rebbe* replied, "It's true that you're running away, but you keep turning around to see if you're being chased!" Giving brings benefits to the giver, but if you're looking for the benefits, you're *taking* rather than giving!

Another way for you to use what we're learning here to take rather than give, would be to project what we're discussing onto your spouse: "When will my husband do a True Kindness for me already?!" When learning *shalom bayis* it is important to remain focused on what you can learn and not on what others can learn.

CHINUCH: BE KIND

Some parents have never learned to be kind. It is so important for a child to feel that the love his parents have toward him is not conditional. There's no "I did this for you now you need to do that for me". Be Truly Kind to your children, it is essential for their healthy upbringing.

It is not a bad idea to consciously perform True Kindness towards your children precisely at the time that they don't deserve it. On a day when your child gave you a particularly hard time, that's the time to give him extra attention. Let your child know that there's no "business" side to your relationship. the relationship you have with your children is one of kindness and it is marked by true kindness.



PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SEND ANY QUESTIONS, ON THIS TOPIC OR ANY TOPIC TO RABBIGRUEN@LEHAIR.ORG

QUESTION:

How do I enforce the rule of "not sitting on Totty's chair" in a small apartment where there aren't enough chairs to begin with?

ANSWER:

First of all - always be realistic, don't teach your children a rule that you can't enforce. But once a rule is made it should not be violated. So if your child learned this *halacha* in school, perhaps you can explain that Totty doesn't really have his own seat, everyone shares seats in this house. Totty only has a seat on Shabbos, or something like that. But never say "Yes there's a rule, but it's okay, you can sit here". This will only generate confusion for a child.

The best thing is to avoid preaching about rules you can't enforce. But once your child is taught, you should explain to him clearly why the rule doesn't apply. You can never flaunt a rule "just because". That's why it's important to keep these things in mind when actually making up rules, (the ones that aren't mandated by Halacha), because once you make a rule you shouldn't go back on it.

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call 718.841.6557 or e-mail rabbigruen@lehair.org
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