

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ VAEIRA 5780 }

WHEN GIVING ADVICE IS NOT THE SOLUTION

THE PROMISE TO LISTEN

In the beginning of this week's Parshah, Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu:

I have revealed myself to Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov and promised them to bring the Yidden to Eretz Yisrael, and now, when I am also hearing their screams, I remember my promise and will rescue you from your slavery.

The above seems like a bit of a contradiction. Hashem had promised our forefathers that He will take us to Eretz Yisrael. Why only now, when we're crying, is He remembering that? Is He taking us out because He promised, or because we're complaining? Imagine a father telling his child who just fell to the ground and is crying, "Oh! I promised you a treat for getting a good mark and now you're crying, so I'll go and get it for you." Is the father buying him a

reward because of his promise, or is he doing so because his son is now crying about something unrelated to the deal they had?

There is a valuable lesson inherent in this seemingly ambiguous statement.

We're all familiar with the advice from our sages: "*Daagah b'lev ish yesichena l'acherim*". When you're troubled, discuss it with others. Who are those "others", though? A doctor? A psychiatrist? An advisor? When there's a sick patient in the house, we know what we need to do, but who is that "someone" we need to talk to when we have a problem? And what do we stand to gain by just talking about it?

When a person has a dilemma or a concern, very often just talking about it to someone who actively listens to him and empathizes with him is enough to calm him down and ease his distress. It's very likely that the

listener is not in a capacity to actually help him, or solve his problem, but just by listening he can be tremendously helpful. We assume that we need to look for the magic solution to our problem; in reality all we need is someone who is willing to listen to us unload.

I had a friend who called me often to schmooze, and I didn't always have the patience to listen to his stories. I would also interject or argue his points while he was trying to make them. Once, I made a conscious decision to just listen to him. We spoke for a while, with me listening quietly and acknowledging what he was saying. Towards the end of the conversation he said, "You know, Shimon? You've become smarter lately!"

Hashem promised salvation to the Avos, and is telling them that the listening itself will play a big part in our Exodus. As part

of His promise He lets them know that when the Yidden will complain, when they will cry out in pain, He will be there to listen to them.

A SHOULDER TO CRY ON

So often in marriage, one spouse will constantly complain to the other. They whine so much, it can get tedious. The husband comes home from a day of work and his wife is kvetching about her headache again. He gets annoyed. This is such a solvable problem! Take painkillers, go to the doctor, take a walk! What he fails to understand is that his wife does not want a solution. All she wants is someone to listen to her and give her the time of day. Every healthy person needs someone to talk to, someone who will really listen to what he has to say. If they are not granted this basic human need, they will go so far as to pay money to have someone else listen to them.

Don't underestimate how therapeutic and soothing empathetic listening can be. When we read stories of tzaddikim we often see that people didn't just go to them for help or advice or even for the *yeshua* they pined for. These leaders of Klal Yisrael offered brokenhearted Yidden a shoulder to cry on, and sometimes that was all they needed. Moshe Rabbeinu, the very first Rebbe of Klal Yisrael, was appointed because of his ability to empathize with the plight of others.

ADVICE THAT HURTS

A fellow was telling me that every day when he came home, his wife would complain incessantly, and any solution he offered was always rejected. She just wouldn't calm down! Until someone enlightened him that she doesn't want his advice; she just wants him to listen to her. Thankfully, he has heeded this smart man's words and calm has been restored in his home.

We often make the mistake of coming up with defenses as our spouse is complaining. If your husband complains that he's hungry, you're mentally busy coming up with a list of reasons why you couldn't prepare food on time that day. If your wife complains that the kids misbehave, you're telling yourself that she's really trying to hint that you need to help out more.

At times, offering unsolicited advice can actually be hurtful. When someone complains to you and you immediately provide a solution, it can make them feel like you think their problems are insignificant. "What's the big deal?!" It can also make them think that you feel superior in intelligence, like "Duh! Do this, that or the other and your problem will disappear!" And then the vicious cycle sets in. She complains, you try to fix it, she rejects it and complains some more, you try to fix the newest problem and there's hurt and frustration all around.

Often, by listening attentively, and giving the complain-

er the feeling that we're here for them and support them, without offering any advice, they will come up with a solution all on their own! At other times, after listening closely, we might be better off offering them the solution the next day or the next time we meet. When the need for a listening ear is not so great, the person might be more receptive to your suggestions.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

When we converse with others, we sometimes mistakenly believe that by finishing their sentences for them we exhibit shrewdness and intelligence. In fact, waiting for the person to complete his thought and letting them get to the point is a much smarter way of conducting a conversation. Firstly, although you might think you do, you often DON'T know what they're about to say, and second, it's a sign of basic respect and human decency and will only work to enhance your relationship for the better.

I myself made this mistake while learning with a *chavrusa* of mine. Before he finished his sentence, I would come up with a counter argument to what I thought he was about to say. And he would get offended and challenge me, "Yeah? What did I want to say??" More often than not, I had actually not correctly anticipated what he was about to say.

When we pray for understanding, we say *lehavin ul'haskil lishmoa* – to understand

and comprehend, and to listen. We might think that we need to hear first, and only then can we understand. But no. We need to be smart to know how to listen. Sometimes we think we know what we're hearing or learning, but because we didn't listen closely enough, we actually don't. Hashem says about Avraham Avinu, *eikev asher shama bekoili*. He listened to my voice! Of course, He praises the mitzvos that Avraham did, but the fact that he listened is perhaps mentioned, so that we can learn how important it is just to listen.

With hard work and diligence, we can all develop the sensitivity to know when we should stay quiet and listen well.

CHINUCH: CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL HEARD

When it comes to parenting, it is so important to listen to our children patiently. We need to give them the feeling that we have all the time in the world to hear what they have to say. By repeating back to them what they just said, you're making them feel valued and heard. Kids can sometimes be annoying because they feel like nobody is there to listen to them, and if they make enough noise the people around them won't have a choice. When you show them that you're interested in what they have to say, before they come begging you for it, you will see the difference it makes in your entire relationship.

My mother is a veteran teacher with years of experience, and she was once called upon to intervene when a former student of hers was misbehaving and disrespectful. When my mother spoke to him, he was perfectly behaved and agreed to everything she asked of him. "How come you're listening to me so nicely when everybody else is complaining that you never listen?" my mother asked him. "Because you're the only one that listens to me!" was the boy's plaintive response. When a child feels unheard, it makes them believe that they are not important to you, and therefore they make no effort to please you. Listen to your children, and they will feel your love and reflect it back to you.



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

Q: My son refuses to daven. I take him to shul, I try to encourage him with prizes and treats, with consequences and threats, and nothing seems to work. I tried everything! How can I get him to daven?

A: First, as I've mentioned in the past, if you tried something – especially if you tried it more than once – and it hasn't worked, chances are it won't ever work. Don't try it again. We often get more frustrated from trying an ineffective solution than by the original problem.

Next, you would be wise to ask yourself: What is the goal here? Do you want him to daven today? He is not yet bar mitzvah and he is not *Mechuyiv*, so why do you care if he davens or not? But since you can't wake up the day after his bar mitzvah and make him daven, you need to try to be *mechanech* him now. *Chinuch* means "to teach". If your goal is to "teach" him to daven, your approach will be different than if you just want him to daven here and now. It is possible that your methods up until now were geared for the short-term goal of just getting him to daven. Perhaps at this point he needs gentle encouragement, to be told that a little bit is fine. If you keep your eye on the goal, you will be more successful.

While you're in shul with him, it is not the right time to lecture or cajole. Take a calm moment to discuss it with him and ask him how much he feels ready to daven, and really listen to what he has to say. Don't forget that for him davening can be a drag. He is just a child! For the most part he doesn't even comprehend what he's saying! It's like telling an adult to say complicated *slichos* or *yotzros* on a daily basis. Take it slow, give him space, and help him slowly but surely develop a feeling and connection to his davening.

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