

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ BESHALACH 5780 }

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

THE LONGER ROUTE

In the beginning of this week's Parshah, Hashem does not lead the Yidden through the shorter route via Eretz Plishtim, "Because Hashem said, 'Lest the nation reconsider in the event of a war and return to Mitzrayim'".

The Yidden, in a fabulous show of Hashem's mercy and love, were just rescued from hundreds of years of brutal slavery in Egypt through His direct emissary, Moshe Rabbeinu. Who, in their right mind, would even entertain the notion of returning to the place of their oppression even when confronted with something as frightening as a vicious war? Yet, Hashem understood that it was a challenge and He did not want to test them with something they would not be able to withstand.

Hashem is our benevolent Father, Who understands that even when a person is at his pinnacle of existence, when there is no doubt in his mind

that he is the "Chosen One" and he gets to clearly see the *Hashgacha* in his life, he is still only human and liable to fall. Normally, Hashem does not reveal his "thought process" *k'viyachol*; rather it is inferred from context. Here, however, He gives us a glimpse by explaining why He deviated from the normal route. He understood that we may not be able to withstand this *nisayon* and therefore he led us through the longer, but ultimately easier path.

THE CHALLENGE EXISTS

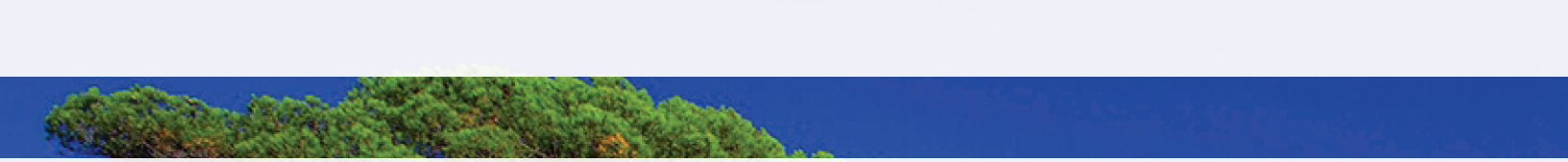
Only Hashem knows when we have the capability to overcome a *nisayon*. When He sends one our way, He expects us to overcome it. But, as we can see from the above referenced *pesukim*, He does not deny that the challenge exists. Therein lies the powerful lesson for us.

When we see one of our fellow Yidden struggle with something that we don't find particularly difficult at the moment, we tend

to get indignant. "What is wrong with this person?" We might smugly think. "How can anyone have trouble with something so simple, or so insignificant?!" If it's a person of a particular stature, either physically or spiritually, we might get even more judgmental. How can someone like him not have mastered this particular area of his life?

We need to remember two things. First of all, although our own challenges seem very real to us, they seem just as baffling to other people who know us and they look at us the same way. Second, as we are reminded by Chazal, "Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death". You never know when you will be tested similarly, or suddenly find yourself incapable of withstanding the very same challenge!

In the World to Come we might be surprised to see people whom we thought were simple folk being treated like



royalty, and vice versa. We never know who merited to triumph over their challenges, and we also never know how low even the greatest people might fall when presented with a test of their own. We see this in a story told in the Gemara. When Menashe Hamelech was tested with the *nisayon* of Idolatry he fell through, and there was an announcement that he thus forfeited his part of the World to Come. Rav Ashi asked his *neshama*, “How could you have done that? How could someone as great as you stoop to such a low level?” Menashe Hamelech replied, “Had you been there, you would’ve failed even worse.”

THIS IS NOT MY STRUGGLE

We shouldn’t be condoning anyone’s foibles, but neither can we judge them for them. We need to empathize with them and realize that this is their very personal and very real struggle, even while for us it seems quite elementary.

It’s like telling a child who declares that today’s supper is “*eeeewww*!” that it is not proper to speak this way about food. Instead, we tell the child, he can say “This chicken is not my taste.” When you witness someone grapple with something that is incomprehensible to you, think “This is not my struggle.” Be mindful that it is impossible for you to grasp their hardship.

In a marriage, it often happens that one spouse does not have an easy time withstanding temptation for

something that the other spouse finds reprehensible, or even an actual transgression. Rather than denigrating them, and making them feel like a terrible person for even having the struggle, feel for them! This might come easy to you, but for them it’s really difficult!

When a man feels that his wife thinks he’s a lazy good-for-nothing because getting up on time is a struggle for him, or, conversely, when a woman feels that her husband thinks she’s lacking in *yiras shamayim* because she can’t bring herself to wear longer skirts, it can be terribly demeaning and disheartening. The pain of the rejection and derision might in itself make it more difficult to withstand the challenges they face. If, however, they feel that the other supports them, and understands that this is their struggle through no fault of their own, it can give them the strength and wherewithal to overcome temptation the next time around.

HELPING AND GUIDING

It’s not always about spiritual matters. Sometimes the challenges can be pretty pedestrian and mundane. Suppose your wife has a problem calling your mother or consider your husband feels intimidated when he has to visit the condo management office to complain. The resolution to these scenarios is not important so long as they don’t get the feeling from their spouse that they

are overreacting, immature, or dysfunctional for having trouble with whatever they’re dealing with.

Sometimes we think that by criticizing our spouse’s reluctance, or making light of their reservations, we will make them change. Usually they won’t, but even if they do, think about what has just happened to your relationship. Being judgmental and dismissive of our spouse’s struggles causes untold damage to our *shalom bayis*.

If you’re ready to be brutally honest and take a long, hard look at yourself, ask yourself this question: Is it possible that I am making my husband/wife’s struggle more difficult? Sometimes, we can inadvertently be exacerbating the problem. So, instead of blaming his less-than-ideal upbringing, or her faulty genes, try to consider how you can possibly make it easier for your spouse to be his/her best self.

What we need to do, is learn the lesson from this week’s Parshah. Instead of judging our perceived inability to withstand temptation, Hashem acknowledged that we might find it a struggle and so He held our hand and led us on the path we were meant to be on.

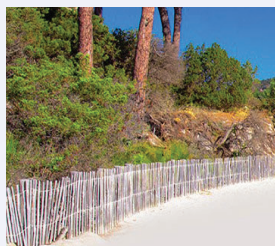
CHINUCH – THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH YOUR CHILD

When it comes to parenting, the same principle holds true. So many struggling children refrain from sharing their angst

with parents or other authority figures, for fear of being judged as bad, inept, or even undeserving of respect. While we should never condone any improper actions, we need to let them know that their struggle is real and normal, and we think no less of them because of it. They need to feel secure that they're still worthy of our love and acceptance. When they have that strong foundation, it is much easier for them to find the courage to overcome their challenges.

A simple example to demonstrate this point: when a child mistakenly turns a light off on Shabbos, do we yell at him, "You're a *mechalel* Shabbos! How could you do something so abominable?!" Of course not! Will he now go ahead and turn off more lights on Shabbos because he was let off lightly? No, he won't. Why? Because the child knows that this is a mistake that has unfortunately happened to most of us at one point in time, and although he regrets his mishap, he gets the feeling from us that this is a very normal gaffe and from now on he will be more careful that this should not happen again.

Similarly, even if our child struggles with something a little less universal, we should still not label him as bad or judge him harshly. He should feel that it is okay for him to have this particular hardship and you are confident that he will find the resources to fight it and win.



Q&A

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



QUESTION:

What can I do if I feel like my wife is trying to control areas of my *Yiddishkeit*? One example would be when I get so tired during the meal and just can't muster up the energy to stay and *bentch*. When my wife notices that, she rebukes me in a very derogatory manner which I find extremely hurtful. Or when I have trouble getting up in the morning to go daven. I am so tired and I don't have the energy to rush and catch the minyan, so I just daven at home. My wife gets annoyed and yells at me that I have to get out of the house and I'm a bad influence to our children. I feel like if I give in to her it will show her that she can intimidate me to do what she wants, and I don't want her to think that she's my mother and she can order me around.

ANSWER:

It seems that what is really bothering you is the way she offers her criticism, and not necessarily what she is talking about. And that's definitely something you can very nicely point out to her. Do not speak to her about how or why she's wrong, just share with her how you feel when it's said in such a derogatory manner and especially if it's said in front of the children. It would be nice to add that you know she's saying it for your benefit as well as the good of the children, (so that she doesn't have reason to get defensive), but you would appreciate the added sensitivity.

At the same time it's important to realize that because you don't really have the option of "just not giving in" as this is not something you're doing for her, rather something you're actually obligated to do, I think you'll really feel best by actually preempting these situations and doing your best as much as possible. I know it can be a struggle to always do the right thing, and the small steps you take in the right direction are extremely valuable, and something you can share with her – at the same time it's important to keep in mind that you're doing this for yourself and not for her, thereby avoiding much of the resentful feelings about being controlled.

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