

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ TAZRIA-METZORA 5780 }

## HUMBLE AND HAPPY

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### THE CAUSE OF ILLICIT SPEECH

In this week's Parsha, we learn about the Plague of Tzaraas that came upon someone who spoke *Lashon Hara* and how the afflicted person could be cleansed of his impurity. The Kohen is instructed to take several items for the cleansing: "... and a branch from a cedar... and a grass that is called *eizov*" and to bind them together using a thread of "*shani*" - a pigment produced from a small worm.

Rashi explains that these items were particularly appropriate for correcting the mistakes of the *metzora*. The *nega* came as a result of the *metzora's* tall opinion of himself, like the cedar, which is very tall. Only someone with an overgrown ego takes

pleasure in belittling others and hurting them with his slanderous tongue.

The tiny *eizov* and the *tola'as shani* teach him to lower himself down from his haughtiness like the *shani* worm and the lowly *eizov*, and thus he shall be healed. This is the purification process for the *metzora* once his *tzara'as* begins to recede. However the first step for a *metzora* is being banished from the camp. He must reside outside the *machane yisroel*. Since he considered himself above everybody else, he is no longer allowed to live amongst them. Perhaps now he will learn how much he truly needs his fellows.


When we try to be different from the *metzora* and live peacefully with

others, we attempt to find ways to please those around us and refrain from hurting them. Working on your humility is a sure-fire way to assure that you will be easy to live with. That's easier said than done, but let's explore why this is worth the effort.

### WHAT IS HUMILITY?

A shadchan was trying to *redt* many *shidduchim* to a boy, but none of them were good enough for him. The shadchan, at his wits end, told the boy that it seemed he needed to work on his humility before he was ready to hear *shidduchim*. The boy agreed to try it.

Several months later, the shadchan called again, and *redt* him one of the *shidduchim* he had mentioned previously. "I



don't understand!" the boy exclaimed, "If she wasn't good enough for me *before* I was humble, what makes you think she will be good for me *now*?" This is what humility is not.

Humility is not only a beautiful attribute, but also extremely essential to a happy marriage.

Nobody expects you to consider yourself a piece of dirt. But you cannot raise yourself up too high.. While you might have some really great character traits and some remarkable talents, are you really the best and the greatest?

Rabbi Manis Friedman once aptly explained the difference between humility and being humiliated. Humility is when you don't think highly of yourself, and humiliation is when you realize that *others* don't think highly of you. There is no greater form of humiliation than being shunned by those around you. You can avoid that crushing humiliation by being humble on your own!

### **MESSING UP AND FESSING UP**

A humble person has it so much easier in all areas of his life, but none more so than

in his personal relationships. There are so many ways this plays out, and here are some examples:

When a humble person makes a mistake and he's called out on it, he won't immediately get defensive and try to shift blame onto others. He realizes that he's not perfect, and that everyone can make a mistake.

When he acknowledges that he made a mistake, he can then learn from it and not do it again. Life is a great teacher, but when we're too haughty to heed its lessons, life becomes more difficult not only for us, but also for those around us.

Someone who is humble will have an easy time apologizing to those he hurt, while saying the words "I'm sorry" will be physically painful for someone who isn't. Even when he does finally realize that he might have messed up, admitting it openly to others is way beneath his dignity. People might erroneously think that by admitting that they made a mistake, it will make them seem like less of a person than whoever he is apologizing to. That false belief makes it even harder for them to do so. But the

truth is, that this is not the case. A person who can find it in himself to admit that he made a mistake and to honestly apologize, is always the bigger man!

### **GRATITUDE AND RESPECT**

It's very difficult for someone who is haughty to admit that he needs anybody else's favors. So, when they are the recipient of benevolence of any kind, they don't feel like they need to show appreciation. After all, they didn't even need it, and besides, they had it coming to them! I once spoke to a businessman who had to travel a lot for work assignments, and he really enjoyed himself doing so. I asked him if it ever occurred to him to thank his wife, who held down the fort and cared for his family while he was gone. He could not for the life of him fathom why that would be necessary. "But why do I need to thank her? I provide for her! She *has* to do it for me!!" One might think that by showing appreciation it will show that you don't need their favors anymore. But of course, being thankful will do the exact opposite. It will make it that much more pleasant for others to continue doing for you.

Humility translates into respect. Usually, when we're being disrespectful in our relationship, it comes from the attitude of "Who does he think he is??" But when you're humble, you realize that respect is warranted simply because he is another human being. It's not necessary for either one of you to be "under the table" so to speak. Both of you can be seated at the same table! You both need to acknowledge the other's right to exist, and respectfully work out your differences like two adults.

The same could be said for helping out around the house. When you feel too good or too proud to pitch in and lend a hand, you are causing those around you to suffer.

### **HUMILITY IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Marriage is a tall edifice, and thus needs a solid foundation. How do you build a solid foundation? By digging down into the ground. When we can lower our ego just a little bit, we can pour a solid foundation for our marriage.

How humble do you need to be? Just humble enough that others should be able to live peacefully and happily

with you. How do you know if you passed the test? Easy. Ask yourself this: When you are between people and a conflict comes up – say, should the window be open or not – who gets their way? If it's always you, no matter how good your explanation for that is, there's a good chance that you're not easy to live with. Haughtiness causes selfishness to the point where you really don't see that other people have needs too.

### **WELCOME THE SHECHINA**

We all want the *Shechina* to reside in our homes, but when our egos are inflated so much as to take up the entire space, we leave no room for Hashem (Sotah 5a). How can we attain a level of humility that won't crowd Hashem out of our midst? Being humble is really hard work but we can *pretend* to be humble. Doing what it takes might just turn us into the real thing. Or we can take a moment to realize that there are other people around us, and that we're not the only one there.

Even if you think your spouse is the one who is haughty, it does not absolve you of your responsibility to remain humble yourself.

We each receive our own separate instructions. The Rambam specifies that a man is supposed to honor his wife, and a wife needs to heed the will of her husband. While we can't control the actions of others, we must make sure that we are our best selves. Let us not be like the driver who shifts into cruise and refuses to turn, reasoning that "Everyone else around me will move!" We all know where that car will end up – with his nose in the guardrail.

While we shouldn't let ourselves be stepped upon or used, we must learn how to stick up for ourselves in a way that doesn't dismiss the needs of those around us. When we make room for others in our life, it doesn't only make it more pleasant for them, but also far easier for us.

### **CHINUCH: HUMILITY AS PARENTS**

Some parents care more about what others think when they see their child acting out, than taking care of whatever I. It's impossible to help our children if it's all about us and our image. The only way we can be successful in our parenting, is if we leave the "I" and

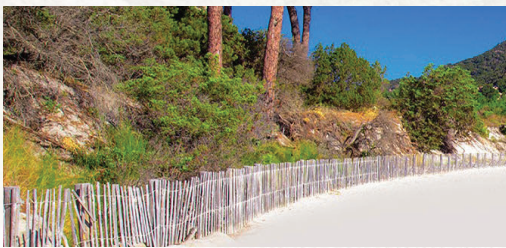
the “me” out of the picture. When we allow our egos to dictate our parenting, we end up hurting our most precious possessions.

When a teacher or *rebbe* calls with an unpleasant report, it might make you immediately jump on the defensive and think to yourself (or say) that perhaps the teacher is at fault here? It’s a fairly normal reaction. You feel personally attacked. You think the teacher is

judging your parenting. But this thought pattern stems from your ego. Once you shove your ego aside, you can listen to what the teacher is saying with an open mind, and you might then be able to work together to help your child.

Despite the fact that you are a parent, you don’t know everything and you are liable to make mistakes. If your kid calls you out on one, don’t jump down his throat for it.

“Who are you to tell me I made a mistake?!” You might need to take the child aside and explain to him how to respectfully say something like that to a parent, but just because you’re older and stronger doesn’t mean that it’s always your child who is at fault. There’s a chance that you are the one who has a problem, and when you’re humble enough to admit it, you will do a favor to your entire family by addressing it.



## Q&A

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SEND ANY QUESTIONS, ON THIS TOPIC OR ANY TOPIC TO [RABBIGRUEN@LEHAIR.ORG](mailto:RABBIGRUEN@LEHAIR.ORG)



### QUESTION:

I had a disagreement with my wife, and my feelings were badly hurt. When I gently explained to her how I’m feeling, hoping that she will say she’s sorry, she immediately retorted that she has feeling too and hers were also hurt. How can I get her to apologize for her actions if she’s not even feeling remorseful?

### ANSWER:

A: When someone is in pain, it is impossible for them to see that they’re hurting others. When both are stewing in their own angst, it’s a dead end and nobody gets helped. View this as an invitation to discuss the matter. Take a few moments to bring up your wife’s troubles with her. Address her concerns. Apologize for any wrongdoing, real or imagined, that you might have done. You can even thank her for bringing it up! Once her bruised ego is assuaged, you can try broaching the subject again and explain to her how she has hurt you as well.

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