

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ BAMIDBAR 5780 }

## INTIMATE CLOSENESS

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### MOSHE'S PREDICAMENT

In this week's parsha Moshe Rabbeinu was tasked with taking a head count of the Jewish people. Rashi tells us that Moshe asked Hashem, "How can I enter their tents to find out how many children they have?" Hashem responded, "You do what you need to do, and I will do My thing." And Moshe went, and stood at the doorway of the tent (he did not enter), and a voice came out of the tent saying, "Such and such is the number of children in this tent."

We learn here about the need to guard our own and our family's privacy and refrain from disclosing personal information, or prying in the personal lives of others.

### PRIVACY ON ANOTHER LEVEL

The number of children one has is hardly a secret. Every Bais Hamedrash knows the amount of its congregants. Every school

and cheder knows the number of children that are enrolled in their institution. The easiest way to find out how many kids someone has is actually to ask the person himself. So why was Moshe Rabbeinu so flustered? He could have just asked!

But, no. That was not the way things were done between the Yidden in the Midbar. When Bilam, who meant to curse our nation, saw the holy people encamped in the wilderness, he could not help but exclaim "Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov!" Their doors never faced each other, and nobody knew what was going on in the neighboring tent.

### DIRE CONSEQUENCES

So much unnecessary strife is caused by excessive sharing of personal details. The dangers of too much conversation is actually mentioned in Parshas Emor in the story of Shlomis bas Divri. Because she would not stop talking to everyone

about everything, she was lured into sin.

Sometimes, even if we are careful not to allow others and/or their opinions into our home because of the damages it might cause, we might sometimes be the one to cause the damage ourselves by allowing private details about our life to be exposed.

We often don't even realize just how disastrous our statements might be. While sitting in the bungalow colony circle, while standing outside at the bus stop, or in the produce aisle in the supermarket, or in shul, we casually drop intimate details about our life.

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT HELP

A Jewish home is a private affair. Peace between husband and wife exists only when it stays between husband and wife. What's going on inside your walls is nobody's business. That is true especially if you

are experiencing hardship, and you choose to unburden to someone who was not professionally trained to help you and will not know how to react or how to guide you out of your predicament.

Even when you do find a professional to talk to, it's extremely important to ascertain if this is the person who will be able to help you. If all he or she does is "open your eyes" to how poorly you are being treated and how terrible your marriage is, you might want to reconsider if they're actually being helpful.

A professional should be like Aharon HaKohen, with one goal: to create peace between spouses. Even if someone advertises that they can help repair your marriage, even if they have a really fancy business card and a very posh office, if they don't empower you to make your situation better, then they are not the right address for you.

### **THREE WRONGS**

When oversharing happens, three things happen:

1. It damages relationships. You might become less happy when hearing about other people's adventures (and forget to remember that they are sharing only what they want you to hear, while conveniently omitting less desirable details). What's more, the reaction of unrelated people to your story might alter your entire perception of the incident, to

the detriment of those close to you.

2. Damaging or not, sharing personal details is just plain WRONG! Even if you married your spouse, you still don't own them! Sharing details that pertain to them, even if you are involved also, is a breach of their privacy and a lack of respect, and you have no right to do that.

3. Then there are the things that are inappropriate to share, as clearly delineated in Halacha. Some subjects are not meant to be discussed with others at all.

Most of the time, when you share personal details, all three things are involved somehow.

### **LIVING FOR OTHERS**

It looks like so much fun to share intimate anecdotes with friends. It feels good to be a part of the crew. It feels great to show off your success. But it is never the right thing to do, you're going to be the one suffering the consequences. Listening to everyone's take on your life, and hearing all of their suggestions, will make your life so much harder to live! After all, it's much easier to get along with one person - your spouse - than with the tens of others you choose to involve in your life.

Besides for making you doubt your own happiness, it makes you live your life for others. If your sister or friend isn't impressed with the outing you had last night with your husband, you quickly start

thinking of where you can go next so that they will be impressed. If your buddies don't think you spent enough on the jewelry piece you bought your wife, you quickly start planning how you can exceed their expectations next time.

That was why Moshe Rabbeinu waited to hear Hashem's Bas Kol. What's happening inside someone's front door is nobody's business. If there is any reason for you to know, Hashem will make sure you find out.

### **A TIME TO REMAIN SILENT**

I know someone who came to shul every day, schmoozed with his friends over coffee, and could crack a good joke too. But nobody could tell he was married. Never once did he mention a word about his wife, his home, his children, or his private life.

There's a beauty in a person who respects his own privacy and family, a man who knows when to talk and when to remain silent.

The Chofetz Chaim's greatness wasn't that he was a shy and quiet person. Actually, he was a great conversationalist! And yet, he never spoke a word of Lashon Hara. True greatness is a person who *does* talk, who *does* enjoy socializing, and yet he is aware of his boundaries.

### **A SAFE HAVEN**

It is so tempting to share our success with others, or

unburden our troubles and be pitied for them. But the cons far outweigh the pros.

There is no need to be extreme. If you get an obvious gift from your spouse, and someone asks you where it's from, it's okay to mention who got it for you. But to go around and gloat about it, or show it off to everybody, might be detrimental and insensitive. You never know whom you might be hurting by bragging about your wonderful spouse or sparkling clean kitchen.

View your home like a fruit or nut, safely ensconced in its shell. While the shell remains unbroken, the fruit inside can

thrive. But once the shell is cracked, the fruit within begins to rot and die.

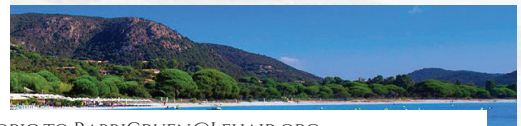
### **CHINUCH: RESPECTING OUR CHILDREN'S PRIVACY**

As parents, it is so important to remember that even if we gave birth to our children, they are still not our property. Even when they're young, we owe it to them to protect their privacy and not share their personal details with just anyone.

Sharing someone else's story might be hurtful to them, even if that someone else is your child.

If one of your kids is going through a challenge, deal with it discreetly. Don't make loud statements about it or bring it up when that child is between his siblings. It might bother them that you are disclosing their private struggles, even if it's only to their immediate family. In fact, some kids are bothered when you share their information with their own grandparents! It's important to be mindful of that.

When we see children as miniature humans, it will be much easier for us to respect their privacy and help them feel secure in our confidence.



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

**Q:** My wife said she would do something for me, when I called her to check up on her progress, she got upset and yelled at me that I'm not her father, and I can't be on top of her like that. How should I handle this?

**A:** Technically, a husband has more of a right to ask his wife questions than her father. Once a woman gets married, her father loses the right to ask her any personal questions, and that right is transferred over to her husband.

With that being said, fighting the issue and pushing her to answer will obviously not help. But neither do you need to apologize for asking, nor do you have to back off from your request. That will only condone this wrongful behavior.

The right thing to do would be to wait for a better opportunity to explain to your wife that you don't mean to be on top of her - as she calls it - rather to see where things are holding and where you can be of assistance.

You can also tell her that if asking a question will trigger such an aggravated response, it will make it very hard for you to ask something from her again in the future, and you might be forced to make decisions by yourself.

It's important to show her that you're not afraid, but also that you're not trying to force anything onto her. By calmly and confidently assuring her that you're just trying to communicate with her, and by repeating it as many times as necessary, the issue will eventually resolve itself over time.

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