

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ SHELACH 5780 }

## SEARCH FOR THE GOOD

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### THE SALESMAN METHOD

When Moshe Rabbeinu sent the *meraglim*, he instructed them by which route they should enter the land. The mountain they were told to climb was a less desirable area of Eretz Yisrael. Rashi explains that this is how salesmen work. At first, they show you the least admirable attributes of whatever it is they're trying to sell. Then they keep showing you nicer things, until, as the products get commensurately better, you can actually envision yourself closing the sale.

This method is used when suggesting a *shidduch* to someone as well. You start out by saying, "I know you're looking for *yichus* and this boy is from a simple family, but let me tell you about how he was *mesayem* Shas." Or the *shadchan* might tell you, "I know you didn't want someone from overseas, but they're looking into moving as soon as the father finds work nearby."

### THE NEWNESS WEARS OFF

Ironically, once the couple is happily married, things proceed quite differently. At first, the newlyweds can't stop raving about each other's greatness. There is nobody as perfect, as handsome, as gracious as their brand new significant other.

As time wears on, however, things crop up that cause irritation and discontent. What happened? Did the new husband or wife just sprout new annoying habits from one moment to the other? That could be. Or, much more likely, the couple has gotten past their initial stage of infatuation that had been blinding them up until then. As you emerge from your newlywed haze, the flaws in your new spouse suddenly become apparent to you.

This doesn't only happen in a marriage. Any new situation, such as moving to a new house, switching to a new shul, starting a new job, comes with a sense of

freshness. New beginnings have a certain captivating allure. If someone would stop and ask you on the first day or week what you think of your new surroundings, you would have a hard time stopping yourself from rambling on and on about the amazing perfection of it all. But as time goes on and the newness wears off, small problems and little annoyances will make themselves known to you. It's safe to assume that you will not be quite as enthusiastic the next time you are asked.

### SEARCH AND YOU SHALL FIND

In the *tefillah* of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk ztz"l, one of the supplications is "We should see the positive attributes in our friends, and not their flaws." Even if we already said the prayer yesterday, we need to pray for the ability to see past their flaws again today. Not because they don't exist, but because we don't want

them to be our focus. Even in the land that Hashem praised as being “very very good” there were some undesirable areas (as Rashi explains)! When we take the time to look for the good in those around us, even if it is not always readily apparent, we will automatically begin to spot the good in people.

Favorable character traits in others usually fly under our radar. Just like we don’t notice our body parts until they hurt, positive attributes in others are often overlooked. They don’t grab our attention like their undesirable counterparts, much like bad news dominates the headlines.

It’s difficult to miss an opportunity to notice someone else’s flaws. When they correct it, though, the longer the positive change lasts, the more we take it for granted – until we fail to notice it at all. It is so important to consistently seek out the good in others, and when we search for it, we will undoubtedly find it.

It might sound a little cheesy, but some people have found it helpful to sit down and compile a “Quality List” about their spouse every couple of days. You don’t have to write it down, but if you don’t sit down and concentrate on your spouse’s qualities, you may not notice they’re there. Worse still, you might begin to take them for granted. “Of course my wife washes my laundry!” or “Of course my husband

brings home a paycheck!” It’s unfortunate that until we’re missing these things, we don’t notice that they were there.

### IT MIGHT BE GOOD ALREADY

The famous saying by the Tzemech Tzedek “*tracht gut vet zein gut*” could be understood as meaning that if you envision a good outcome, it will follow. How about we turn it on its head a little bit and say that the meaning is that when we “think about good” we will see that it is already there!

Sometimes I have people come to me with a whole litany of complaints about what a terrible person their spouse is. When I ask them if everybody else also thinks so, they usually answer in the negative. “No, they think he’s a wonderful person. But I know the *truth!*”

I press further, “What makes them think he’s a wonderful person?”

“Because he is always ready to help anyone who asks.” They grudgingly respond.

“And is that not the truth?” I query.

“Well, it could be true, but that isn’t what I’m looking for...”

Well, what ARE you looking for? Is it possible that he gives you everything you want, and there’s just this one thing that he doesn’t, and you’re coloring your entire relationship by one imperfection? Are you 100%

perfect that you’re demanding perfection of your spouse?

### A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

Sometimes, what you see as a negative can actually be viewed as a positive! Perhaps your husband is too laid back for your taste. But maybe if he would have a more exacting nature, he would also be more critical of you! When the *meraglim* came back from Eretz Yisrael they said, “*eretz ocheles yoishveha..*” It is awful! People are dying in the streets! And yet Yehoshua and Calev praised the land to no end. Rashi says that even “*eretz ocheles*” was an advantage, because the citizens were so busy burying their dead, that they didn’t have time to notice that their land was being scoped out by foreigners. So what seemed bad was actually good.

Nobody’s relationship is perfect. We have to practice seeking the good in everyone around us, if only to make our own life a more pleasant experience. Now, focusing on the good does not mean suffering in silence. If your spouse exhibits behaviors that are hurtful or bothersome to you, it is imperative to communicate your feelings in a healthy way. But when it is just those little annoyances that get on our nerves, we must focus on the big picture and try to see past our partner’s flaws, just like we would want them to do for us.



## **CHINUCH: BELIEVE IN YOUR KIDS**

I spoke to a friend of mine about his son - a wonderful, hardworking boy. I was telling him how proud he can be of his son's stellar reputation and remarkable academic achievements. His response? "You know, you're never really satisfied from your own kids' accomplishments. You might think he's amazing, but I would like to see more from him."

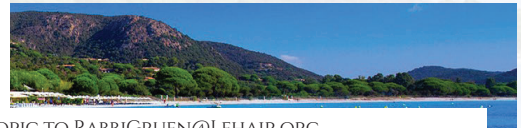
We must remember that just as our children are flawed, as humans tend to be, they also have some really amazing qualities. The question is, where

is your focus? What do you see the most? Your children feel when they make you proud, and they can also sense when they don't. It's extremely important to give your child the feeling that he is enough, even as you encourage him to grow.

A person tends to see his own positive attributes, and other's flaws. Children, too, tend to see themselves that way. So if they think they're doing okay, but their parents are constantly berating them, it ends up being detrimental to their self-esteem. "I have so many good parts to myself! Why are they only focusing on my embarrassing flaws?"

Much like my conversation with my friend, sometimes when others tell us nice things about our children, we dismiss it. "Eh, it's because he was embarrassed to show you his true colors." Or, "Humph! You should have seen her last night when I asked her to help me clean the kitchen."

But truthfully, your child may not be the problem. Maybe something inside of you is triggering this negative dynamic? Maybe if you make it a point to also see the things that others see, in your children and in your spouse, you will come to realize that they are not the ones who were wrong.



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

**Q:** I am going to buy a car, because I need it for work. My wife has been pestering me about which type of car she prefers. Honestly, I don't think she has a say in the matter. The car is mine! She gets to come along with me when I take her to places, but why does she get to have an opinion on what it looks like?

**A:** It depends. If you feel like your wife is controlling you, she's *demanding* that you follow her opinion and you're constantly being manipulated into her preference, then it's a control issue. In such cases it is sometimes recommended that you take a stand and show her that you're not going to unilaterally accept her decisions, so as to prevent any unhealthy patterns from forming.

However, barring such a situation, a husband and wife living together will always run into differences of opinion. Whose car it is makes no difference. Your wife's opinion counts even if the car doesn't belong to her. If a man likes a specific car very much but he knows that his wife will be embarrassed to be seen inside of it, and he goes ahead and buys it anyway, then he is disregarding her feelings. Even if the car is technically yours, there must be a way for you two to find a compromising make and model that both of you will be happy to use.

What's more, if you choose to get hung up about what you want now, and ignore your wife's opinion, it might come back to bite you one day when she will refuse to budge about something that is hers and you have strong feelings about. There is usually a way to find a happy medium where both of you can be satisfied without anyone feeling like their opinions were disregarded.

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