



Exclusive
Early Preview!
Compliments of
Keshet Nafshi

RAISING A LOVING FAMILY

Torah-Based Guidance Drawn from the Talks and Wisdom of
Rabbi Shimon Russell, LCSW

Z A L M A N G O L D S T E I N



Dear Rabbi Russell,

Allow me to congratulate you upon the forthcoming publication of your long-awaited book, *Raising a Loving Family*, which contains a treasure-trove of Torah-based guidance on *chinuch*, based on your years of experience in counseling, guiding, and advising parents around the world.

This work, masterfully assembled and written by Zalman Goldstein, will fill a serious void and allow many thousands of more parents to benefit from your powerful insights into effective *chinuch* in our generation.

As the founder of *Keshet Nafshi*—a resource and support center for parents of struggling children—I owe you a personal debt of gratitude, for “adopting” our organization and always being there for us. You have been an integral part of *Keshet Nafshi* since our very first event in December of 2017, and haven’t missed a milestone since. You have always graciously graced our dais as a keynote speaker and lecturer, setting the tone and sharing with us all a piece of your heart and soul.

Rabbi and Mrs. Russell, you truly are the face of *Keshet Nafshi*, the “first and last resort” for hundreds of struggling families, helping them find the *menuchas hanefesh* and guidance they need.

May your book, *Raising a Loving Family* be *zocheh* to inspire and guide *K'lal Yisroel* during this challenging era, and may you continue to be a source of comfort and *chizuk* as we await the *geulah sheleimah*, when all our pain and challenges will melt away.

With respect and admiration,

Gedalia Miller, Founder & Producer

Chesky Kauftheil, Executive Advisor

Mendy Eder, Hainech Korman, Shloimy Litzman, Gingy Markowitz,

Hershel Rosenberg, Moshe Hersh Rosenfeld

EXCLUSIVE EARLY PREVIEW



Drawn from over 25 years of research, talks and teachings of the world-renown parenting and educational expert, Rabbi Shimon Russell, *Raising a Loving Family* is a rich repository of foundational parenting psychology and practical down-to-earth guidance that will help you build and nourish deeply loving and lasting connections with your children, while guiding them toward positive and meaningful living.

Applicable for parents of children of all ages and stages, Rabbi Russell’s knowledge, advice, and irresistible anecdotes will help you successfully navigate the challenges of parenting in today’s turbulent times, train your thinking so that your emotions and reasoning are sound when your family needs you most, help you master a healthy balance between indulgent permissiveness and effective limit-setting, and create a deeply loving marriage from within which to do so.

Raising a Loving Family also includes a comprehensive section for parents of At-Risk children, providing the latest knowledge and tools for guiding, nurturing and fostering long-term emotional and spiritual health and success.

Real-life vignettes from people who share their own struggles and successes will further enlighten and inspire you along your own parenting journey.

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In this booklet you’ll enjoy several “sneak-peek” excerpts from the upcoming book in development. We invite your comments, feedback and suggestions, send them to Zalman@JewishLearningGroup.com.

Don’t forget to sign up at www.RaisingALovingFamily.com for book release information and an exclusive discount.

See also inside the back page of this booklet for dedication opportunities and **become a supporting partner** in the *zechus* or memory of a loved one!

Zalman Goldstein

Teves 5782/December 2021

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EXCERPTED NUGGETS

(Early Draft)



The Essence of Parenting

From a Torah perspective, the essence of parenting is the unique partnership parents have with *Hashem*, who in His infinite wisdom, matched each child's unique needs with the strengths and potential of the parents who will raise them. *Chazal* note that even though the way each child turns out is ultimately *min ha'shomayim*—including any challenges and detours along the way that may be beyond our understanding—*Hashem* only asks of us to do our best.

It would therefore seem that what *Hashem* expects of us is to make a reasonable effort to do our best, with all of our strengths and weaknesses, to raise our children in the healthiest and most effective manner possible. When we have the will to do what *Hashem* seeks from us as parents, all our weaknesses and insufficiencies fall away and become insignificant. Instead, we gain access to the fortitude He lovingly imbues us with to face and grow from any challenges along the way.

We often see this dichotomy play out where some parents do everything “right” and end up with children who struggle. Other parents do everything “wrong” and wind up with the most successful kids. The lesson is clear: at the end of the day, we shouldn't judge either ourselves or others. We need only to try to do our best and leave the rest to *Hashem*.

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: “Before he passed away, the *Chofetz Chaim* confided to his close disciple Rav Moshe Schneider, about his worries over the *chinuch* of his younger children. He had young children who were not yet married and was worried about their future. After a thoughtful silence, the *Chofetz Chaim* answered his own question. He said that while success with one’s children is certainly the result of *Siyata Dishmaya*, as parents, we must simply do our very best. The rest is up to *Hashem*.”

A Different Parenting World

Those who grew up thirty or forty years ago may remember a world where children had a lot more deference and respect for elders. In those days, if a child at school was talking with friends and a teacher walked by, the child stopped talking for a moment. Children stood up when an adult came into the room. At home, a child sat at the table quietly during meals until they were excused. There was a lot more control and limitations on children’s behaviors. That’s just the way the world was.

Rabbi Russell suggests that up until the 1960’s there appears to have been a lid on societal behavior called “deference to elders.” This “lid” helped moderate children’s behavior, especially those challenged with impulse control. Sometime during the ensuing years that lid came off. The result was the beginning of an equalization in status between adults and children. The societal forces that caused the lid to come off continue well into our times. It is now common to hear the lament of grandparents when, upon visiting their married children’s homes for a Shabbos, they’re quite shocked to see how disrespectfully their grandchildren relate toward the adults around them.

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: “I was in *shul* one Shabbos, and there was a Bar Mitzvah boy trying to say his *drasha*. Just outside the main sanctuary there were a bunch of young kids making lots of noise, and it was almost impossible to hear the Bar Mitzvah boy. One of the congregants went out to quiet down the kids, but instead of listening to him, they scolded him that he should mind his own business!”

How did we get to a place where such *chutzpah* is possible? What happened to the world that was? And how are we to understand the explosion of behavioral and emotional disorders many of our children and adolescents seem to be suffering from?

A Wake-Up Call

Over the past few decades, medical and psychological experts have developed a deeper understanding of human psychology and can thus diagnose and treat many more nuanced issues. In particular, much attention has been given to the destabilizing impact of various impulse disorders and trauma on our young children. But this alone doesn’t explain why. Rabbi Russell’s rebbe, the famous *mashgiach* Rabbi *Matisyahu* Salomon, *shlit”a* offered a penetrating insight into how we should look at this phenomenon.

He remarked on one of the *pesukim* in *Eicha* that describes the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*. *Yirmiyahu Ha’novi* laments, “*Tishtapeichnah avnei kodesh b’rosh kol chutzos*,”—the holy gems [of the *Beis Hamikdash*] are strewn out on the street corners (*Eicha*, 4:1). *Rashi* there offers the comment, “*avnei kodesh, eilu habonim*,”—these holy gems, they are our children who shine like precious stones.

In considering *Rashi*’s commentary, Rabbi Salomon asks whether it appears to be out of context since the imagery of the *posuk* clearly

refers to the rubble from the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*. What is *Rashi* saying, he asked, by telling us that these “holy stones” refer to our children?

The *mashgiach* suggests that one reason we lost the *Beis Hamikdash* was to awaken *Klal Yisroel* to do widespread *teshuvah* and improve our *avoda* and *d'vekius* to *Hashem*. Therefore, *Rashi* is foretelling that if there comes a time when we see *Yiddishe* children—*Klal Yisroel's* sacred gems—strewn about on the street corners, struggling with staying *frum*, struggling with their lives, it is a clear wake-up call from *Hashem* for us to reexamine our ways and to return to Him.

Making Sense of Confusing Messages

The puzzlement parents face in how to respond appropriately to today's challenges stems to a degree from the confusing and seemingly conflicting direction offered by experts and psychologists on raising children.

On one side are those advocating for using a “tough love” approach, seemingly supported by the dictum from *Shlomo Hamelech*, “*Chosech shivto, sonei es beno*,”—he who holds back his rod hates his son (*Mishlei*, 13). This method appears to imply that effective parenting requires parents to be quite firm and provide strong discipline. Indeed, a lot of us grew up with this type of parenting.

Then there are voices exhorting parents to follow the “love will solve all” approach, which posits that if parents would just be extra loving to their children, all issues they'll encounter will work themselves out on their own.

The messages sent by these two opposite approaches can leave parents feeling quite confused. Which approach should be followed? Should we be working to integrate the two approaches? And is that even possible or desirable?

What Children Need from Parents Today

Rabbi Russell suggests that it's becoming evident that most children today need something different from their parents than what has been traditionally offered. On the one hand, applying the “tough love” approach to children runs the risk of us “losing” them. However, if we adopt the “love will solve all” approach, we run the risk of our children growing up feeling self-centered and entitled, unable to navigate relationships and the world around them in a constructive and healthy way.

How can we resolve this dilemma? The *Gemara* in *Kiddushin* (30a) discusses two opinions regarding the age that parents should exert forceful authority over their children to set them on the right path. One says the age is from sixteen until twenty-two, and another says it's from eighteen until twenty-four. Notice that both refer to teens and young adults, not young children. Why is that?

Rashi explains that while parents may be advised to exert their parental authority and direct critiques at their sons and daughters who are sixteen or older, younger children don't have the intellectual capacity to understand and endure such discipline. Parents should therefore not overburden them with punishments (“*yisurim*”) and criticisms (“*tochochos*”) during their formative younger years.

Rashi is offering parents a valuable insight: younger children don't benefit at all from a “tough love” approach. Yet much of the time, we can find ourselves doing the exact opposite of what *Rashi* advises, directing too many punishments and criticisms toward our children in their earliest years. Then, when our children reach sixteen, we find ourselves wondering, “Where did our authority go?”

Of course, it's legitimate to ask if there is a role for a “tough love” approach in parenting at all before children reach the age of sixteen. If there is none, what then did *Shlomo Hamelech* mean when he wrote “*Chosech shivto, sonei es beno*”? (*he who holds back his rod hates his son*). Was he referring to children over the age of sixteen? Does he agree with *Rashi* that until then parents should follow a balanced-*Chesed* approach?

In truth, there's no conflict—at their core, both agree. The key lies in effectively balancing *Chesed* and *Gevurah* appropriately for each child at each age and stage. But how is this done on a practical level?

Different Kids, Different Needs

Fortunately, we have guidance from *Gedolei Yisroel* on this very question. For example, the *Maharshah* writes that the Torah's obligation of “*v'ahavta lere'acha komocha*,” applies toward one's children too. It's possible that when a parent gets overly angry at their child and the child responds with *chutzpah*—ignoring his or her obligation to respect their parent—that *aveirah* may well be the parent's because of the prohibition of “*lifnei iver*”—not putting a stumbling block before the blind. Along these same lines, Rav Shteinman writes in a *teshuvah* that when there's even a slight risk that criticizing a child can lead to distancing them from Torah and *mitzvos*, parents are forbidden from doing so.

Thus, clearly our children's feelings matter and need to be considered, and each requires a deliberate approach that is tailored to their unique personality. This is the essence of “*Chanoch l'naar al pi darko*”—educating the child according to their needs.

On a more general level, Rabbi Russell explains how he often hears parents describe their children as one of two groups, which he labeled APKs or non-APKs.

APKs are “auto-pilot kids”—those magical children who go through their early years relatively drama-free, requiring only minor adjustments and reminders along the way. They generally come out at the other end just fine and headed in the right direction. They don't have any underlying disorders or difficult learning disabilities. They also have not experienced serious traumas.

Then there are the non-APKs—those children who always seem to need a lot of help just staying on track. Parents of non-APKs often report having a loving and meaningful conversation with this type of child about their challenging behaviors. They further report that at the time of the conversation, they felt that their child seemed to have understood and absorbed the message they were imparting.

Nevertheless, almost immediately afterward, they observed more of the same challenging behaviors from their child, as if their previous conversation never happened. This can challenge even the most patient and loving parents.

Parents of APKs will be able to risk leaning into being firm when appropriately called for. Such a child might be angry in the moment but then quickly gets back on track. They seem to understand that the parental criticism and firmness was in their best interest, and thus its negative effects don't fester and do lasting damage. However, the story is entirely different for non-APKs, who require a completely different approach.

Seeing the Whole Child

Let's look at a non-APK child who, for example, consistently misses their school bus or carpool, and no matter what you try, you just can't get them up and ready on time. This kind of child might not get out of bed on Shabbos morning to go to *davening*, and by the time they finally head out the door, it's already halfway through *Mussaf*. They often respond to our reminders with, “I'm coming, I'm coming...” yet just turn over and pull the covers higher over their head instead. Are they being lazy or defiant and displaying poor *middos*, or are they perhaps suffering from an emotional disorder or issue?

Rather than getting angry and frustrated, Rabbi Russell advises parents to pause and look at the whole child, instead of looking only at their behavior in the moment. Is it possible they have some type of emotional struggle that is churning inside them and getting in the way of their facing the world? Perhaps they are being bullied in school or are suffering from an undiagnosed anxiety disorder?

There are plenty of adults who can't get out of bed because of anxiety issues. In fact, today we know that nearly sixty percent of adult anxiety and depressive disorders began in childhood and went undiagnosed. Perhaps there is something deeper going on with this child than laziness and poor *middos*? If we as parents don't ask this question, we can miss out on some important clues that can help us chart an effective path forward for this child.

If the child's negative behavior is indeed due to deeper emotional or mental health issues such as anxiety, depression or an impulse disorder, then lectures and criticism will definitely not help. Responding as if their behavior is due solely to poor *middos* can hurt them more and damage our relationship with them. In such cases, using punishments and criticism to try to get children to modify their behavior risks adding to their distress and further postpones a resolution—precisely at a time when the child needs our empathy and a delicate approach the most.

Indeed, *Gedolei rabbonim* have advised that unless we've clearly identified the root of their concerning or negative behaviors—whether it's poor *middos* or due to an underlying emotional or medical issue—we must first approach it as if it's the latter, and seek professional diagnosis and care. Only once underlying contributing emotional or medical issues are ruled out, can one consider alternate reasons.

Blending Love and Discipline

In order to succeed, every child needs to feel that their parents understand and respect them. This doesn't translate into parents always having to agree with their child, nor does it mean that parents must be overly permissive. What it does mean is that children feel that their parents take the time to hear their point of view and try to truly understand how they feel. As Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch writes in his *Teshuvos Vehanhagos*, parents need to develop a relationship with their children built on gentle, caring love and understanding. A relationship centered on criticism and anger can lead a child to hate their parents, *chas v'sholom*.

In his *sefer, Tiv Hatorah*, Reb Gamliel Rabinowitz writes that after working for many years with struggling children who became involved with all sorts of inappropriate behaviors, he discovered that many have fallen into these traps because they didn't feel heard, respected, or understood by their parents. He added that it's only through a foundation

of deep caring, understanding and respect that parents can ever hope of reaching and connecting with their child.

The type of gentle love and understanding that both Rabbi Sternbuch and Rabbi Rabinowitz are referring to are neither indulgent nor permissive parenting styles, where parents give in to their children to stop their nagging. Studies have shown repeatedly how this type of permissive parenting feeds a greater sense of entitlement and narcissism in children and fails them miserably on the long run.

As parents, we need to powerfully demonstrate our caring love for our children at every possible opportunity—especially today when they are faced with an unimaginable array of temptations and negative choices. Children need rules, structure and discipline if they are to thrive. In this day and age, compared to previous generations, those rules, structure and discipline will only work if they are delivered with love and respect. The days of withholding love as a means of motivating children are gone.

In fact, during times when children are misbehaving and struggling, they feel very insecure. That is when they need the love and support of their parents the most. To withhold care and love at such junctures, tears at the very bonds between parent and child. It not only delays resolving the issue at hand but undermines the parent's ability to truly help their child.

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: “Many years ago, one of my clients sent me a cartoon clipping about family life. It showed a busy mother trying to put her house in order before bedtime. She's trailed by her two-year old undoing everything she's trying to accomplish. The mother eventually snaps, takes the toddler firmly by the hand and puts him into bed. As she walks out of the room, she exhales deeply as if she just vanquished a monster. Over her shoulder she hears the child say, ‘Mommy, aren't you

going to give me a kiss goodnight?’ Still agitated, she fires back, ‘After the way you’ve been behaving today!’ and continues to walk away. But then she hears the little voice again: ‘But Mommy, that’s when I need it most...’”

Fragile: Handle With Care!

When a person wants to ship a delicate glass vase across the country, and wants to ensure it arrives in one piece, they’ll usually wrap it carefully and put it in a sturdy box, and fill it with protective foam peanuts. Then they will place a big red sticker on all four sides, proclaiming for all to see, “Fragile: Handle with care!”

Similarly, *Hashem* sends *neshamas* into this world for their *tikkun*. Frequently, some children with these *neshamas* begin exhibiting edgy or risky behaviors—for example, in their conduct, clothing, hairstyle, or choice of friends. Rabbi Russell suggests that it’s crucial for parents to view these behaviors as a big red sticker that tells us something important about their *neshama*: “Fragile: Handle with care!”

Just like the above delicate glass vase, where we hope the delivery driver takes care not to toss around the box and possibly break the vase, parents should similarly be careful to consider what their child’s divergent behaviors might actually mean. Perhaps these behaviors are *Hashem’s* way of notifying parents that there may be a deeper problem at play with their child, eating away inside of them that the parents need to delicately attend to. Criticism and over control can break such a child.

Interactions That Empower

Over his decades of working with children, Rabbi Russell found that parents who embraced a carefully blended loving-discipline approach, discovered that their children were less defiant because they felt loved on a deep level. These parents were likewise able to be firmer with their children without their discipline turning into a huge battle.

On this point, Rabbi Russell points to a multi-decade study that tracked the types of communication between parents and children from birth to eighteen years old. They discovered that *ninety* percent of interactions between parents and children were negative based, such as, “No, you can’t do that,” “Don’t touch that,” “Why did you do that?” and the like.

If you find yourself nodding and recognizing these patterns in your own interactions with your children, and are wondering if it’s even possible to change this dynamic, the answer is a resounding yes!

The shift from sending mostly negative-based messages toward our children to primarily positive ones, begins by paying attention to the words you say and how you say them. Then consciously make a point to reinforce your children’s positive behaviors and compliment them for the good things they do.

In Rabbi Russell’s own words, “You don’t have to get the *shtender* out and give a whole speech about how amazing it is that they’re playing Lego nicely. Just a small comment that you’ve noticed how nicely they are playing with their siblings—nothing fancy or overblown. This subtle shift grows exponentially over time and spawns lots of positive change in many areas for our children.”

To understand some more about how our interactions affect our children and how we can begin to improve them, let us explore two sub-types of communication.

Verbal and Meta Communication

Social science distinguishes between two types of communication. “Verbal” communication is the actual content of the words we say. “Meta” communication refers to everything else we communicate, such as through our facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. Our meta communication is often revealed on our face or by what we’re doing with our hands while we are talking. When there’s a contradiction between the actual words we say and what our meta communication is saying, the meta communication always wins out. Our children are remarkably astute at picking this up.

We can say the words, “I love you,” all day, but if our body language says, “I’m frustrated with you,” then that is the message the child will hear.

Therefore, a crucial consideration for successful communication with our children is looking at our meta communication. What do they see when they look at us while we speak to them? For example, it’s common for a parent to enter their home distracted and troubled about issues that have nothing to do with their kids. Yet when younger children see their parent’s moody face, they may well think that they somehow caused their parent’s unhappiness, or that their parent is upset with them for some reason.

A child often has only one thought on their mind when a parent walks through the door, returning home after a long day, “Am I loved? Am I cared for?” Children want to know that their parents unconditionally love them. They aren’t old enough to realize that their parent may be struggling with paying the mortgage, helping an elderly parent who’s ill, or dealing with a problem at work. A parent could have many different things challenging them. However, seeing the frustrated, anxious look on a parent’s face, and picking up on the tension in their body, a child may well blame themselves.

On this note, Rabbi Russell wryly suggests that parents carry a small pocket-mirror in their purse or pocket and to take a quick look at their facial expression before walking into their home. He says, “If you’re smiling, go ahead and enter the house. If you’re not smiling, start smiling. If you can’t start smiling, turn around and take a short walk around the block to restore a positive frame of mind, and only then make your entrance.”

The same is true for when children come home from school and we are there to greet them. At that critical juncture of the day, they need our warmth and love that is expressed with words and is also experienced by them through our meta communication, by how we welcome and receive them.

When a child is having a bad day, parents should give them a hug and a smile, while telling them, “Don’t worry, I love you and trust you

can work this out.” The combination of supportive words and congruent body language gives children the strength and support they need to work out their problems.

Love Equals Time

Children crave our attention and want to feel that their parents enjoy being with them. While occasionally giving them gifts and rewards is wonderful, it can never satisfy the deep need in their hearts for the individual time and attention of their parents. In fact, substituting *things* for *time* can lead to children becoming demanding, indulgent, and leaves children with a deep emptiness inside.

Spending time with children is the best reward any parent can give them. Going out together for a private walk, a drive, shopping, or a slice of pizza are simple activities that can nourish their heart and communicate love more than any physical gift.

Rabbi Russell Shares: “On the topic of *time* vs. *things*, let’s have a look at *Chol Hamoed* trips. Many parents feel compelled to spend a fortune to take the family to an amusement park or the like, usually a long drive each way of course. At the park, you and your kids run from one ride to another and seem to be having a marvelous time. Then your time is up and you have to leave. When you finally get back in the car to go home, the kids are all cranky and crying about how they had a miserable time, upset about the rides they missed, upset with who bothered whom, and the like. Usually, the father is steaming mad while driving the car home, wondering why he went through all the trouble and expense in the first place, since everyone seems so miserable. The mother is frantically handing out snacks to the kids in the back seat to keep them quiet. Well, I’ve

got news for you. There's a much cheaper way to enjoy *Chol Hamoed* together that's more memorable and enjoyable. One *Chol Hamoed Sukkos*, we went fishing together as a family. We brought home what we caught, cleaned it, cooked it together, and then sat down in our *Sukkah* to eat it for dinner. It was a full day of family time together. It had since become a family *Chol Hamoed* tradition, and my kids will tell you that it's the most enjoyable memory of our family's *Chol Hamoed* trips. Consider packing a picnic and taking your kids to a nearby park to play ball or to just be together. Remember *time*, not *things*, help children feel truly loved and cared for."

Respecting a Child's Individuality

We all know that children need to show respect to their parents. As the Torah says, "*Kabeid es avicha v'es imecha.*" At the same time, we parents need to help our children feel respected as unique people too. This means that we convey to them that we recognize that *Hashem* made them a unique individual, and that their feelings, thoughts and opinions are as real and important to us as they are to them. As the *Gemara* tells us about people, "Just as their faces are different, so are their minds" (*Yerushalmi, Brochos, 63b*).

When our children feel our respect and honest appreciation for their individuality, it nourishes their self-esteem and helps them build a stable and healthy self-image. It will make it easier for them to turn to us for help and guidance, when they discover they have a feeling or attitude about life that they might find scary or confusing.

However, if during their formative years they felt that we didn't understand or see them for who they really were, they may well grow up feeling confused or ashamed about themselves. This can lead to them closing up and turning away from us, becoming less likely to turn to us for guidance as they mature.

To be clear, when we talk about respecting a child as a person with their own feelings, thoughts, and opinions, this doesn't mean that we as parents must approve of and agree with everything they say and feel. What it does mean is that we are careful to convey to them, in a deep and truthful way, that we hear and understand what they are saying. This kind of accepting and appreciating of a child's individuality fosters respect and trust, allowing them to open up and dialog with us about their lives in a meaningful way.

A simple and common example about understanding and respecting our children's unique individuality can be seen in how we relate to the way they keep their bedroom. Some children are very tidy by nature and keep their room reasonably clean. Other children aren't bothered at all by having a messy bedroom. One of them is not "better" than the other. It's just who they are.

While we can try to teach the more messy child how to be more organized, we'll never succeed if we do so with anger and if we imply that there's something inherently wrong with them as a human being for being disorganized. We must respect them for who they are and work with their unique personality.

The shame and embarrassment a child feels when being criticized—especially when done in front of their siblings or friends—can be terribly damaging to them. Today's children will often fight back and defy their parents when shamed like this.

If you slipped up and criticized your child too sharply, especially if done publicly, it's important to apologize as soon as possible. Take them aside and tell them, "I'm really sorry. I see I embarrassed you, and I shouldn't have done that."

It's never a weakness for a parent to apologize to their child when they've hurt or wronged them. In fact, it's a function of respecting them as a person. It demonstrates how much you love them, and inspires them to care the same about their own relationships. What we earn through showing respect for a child doesn't diminish our ability to influence and educate them—it actually enhances it.

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: “We were finishing up a meal at home with some special guests and were about to serve tea, proudly laid out in our finest China set. I asked one of our daughters to bring us some milk in the matching China jug milk pourer. There must have been a mix up in communication, as she came out with a plain milk carton and plunked it down on the table next to all the fancy China. I gave her a sharp look and said, ‘No, no, no, no...in the matching milk jug pourer!’ No sooner than the words had left my mouth, she turned bright red. I realized that I’d embarrassed her in front of the guests and I felt terrible about it. Later that evening, I took her aside and apologized for what I’d done. I said to her, ‘I just want you to know that I recognize I embarrassed you, and I was wrong to do so. I’m so sorry.’ I know she appreciated my apology because the next day, I overheard her tell a friend that she wants to one day marry a man like her father—someone who can apologize when they did something wrong. By the way, she did!”



The Healing Role of *Sholom Bayis*

There is no greater gift that parents can give to their children than a home infused with loving and peaceful *Sholom Bayis*. It’s the gateway to everything. Before we can expect to make meaningful progress with raising our children, we must shift our emphasis from ‘fixing the kids’ to ‘fixing ourselves,’ primarily through working on our *Sholom Bayis*. Rabbi Russell repeatedly emphasizes that our children’s resilience and emotional health derives from experiencing healthy *Sholom*

Bayis in the home. He goes on to say that investing efforts into maintaining and enriching one’s marriage is *guaranteed* to have a deeper and longer-lasting positive effect on our children than any other parenting intervention.

Consider the powerful effect of raising children in an environment of loving *Sholom Bayis*, the safety and security they experience watching genuine love and acceptance flow between their parents. A home where family members are loving and accepting of each other, and put each other’s needs first, is a place that children will want to be part of and always come back to.

A home flowing with loving *Sholom Bayis* also creates an environment where children will want to work on themselves as well, emulating the love and acceptance they see and experience at home in their own lives and future relationships. Conversely, a home where there’s fighting, dissonance, disappointment and sadness, robs children of the emotional safety they need to grow and develop emotionally, and drains them of the will to overcome their own struggles. Such a home environment can also have grave implications for their view of marriage and even *Yiddishkeit*—since from their point of view, if this is the life that marriage and/or *Yiddishkeit* offers, why would they want any part of it?

Indeed, when parents walk around miserable with each other, they are in effect telling their children, “I am not happy with *Hashem*, I feel He cheated me and let me down.” When children see that, why wouldn’t they say the same about their own challenges?

When children see their own parents approach their various challenges in life with an acceptance that *Hashem* gave them the ability to draw close to Him while working through these obstacles, this helps them emulate that approach in their own lives. Healthy *Sholom Bayis* is the crucial platform on which this type of healthy resilience is built.

While this ideal may sound straightforward, Rabbi Russell emphasizes the importance of giving ourselves a compassionate space in which to be realistic about our strengths and limitations. *Hashem* grants us all unique abilities and areas in which we need to personally change

and grow. This growth and development is a process, not an event, and we need to be patient with ourselves as we move along our journeys toward *shleimus* in our marriage and in ourselves.

A Match Made in Heaven

Rabbi Russell often teaches that marriage should be seen as a vehicle that's meant to take us somewhere. Consequently, if we are to get there, we have to know the destination. He laments that many people get married simply because someone says to them, "It's time to get married," without giving much thought to the question: Why do we get married?

It's crucial to have a value system—a map—that informs us about the true purpose and goal of marriage. Fortunately, the Torah offers us clear guidance about both the destination and the map.

Let's explore this idea a bit more. The *Gemara* says, "Forty days before conception, a Heavenly voice proclaims, 'The daughter of so-and-so, to so-and-so'" (*Sotah*, 2a). When we examine this statement, it seems to be talking about the groom, and that forty days before he is conceived, he is already matched to his future wife. Let's try to understand the implications of this.

Imagine there is a young couple who is getting married forty days from now, and on the night of their wedding, they'll conceive a child. From the perspective of Heaven, they may well already have a baby boy forty days before their marriage, and this baby boy's future match was already made with the daughter of so-and-so. Who are this girl's parents?

Let's say that the future bride is three years younger than the future groom. Where indeed are her parents three years, plus forty days, before the groom's conception? If she was a first child when the Heavenly voice announces for the groom, "The daughter of this person is marrying that person," her parents are likely still teenagers, and possibly still in high school. Yet in the Heavens, they are already married with a daughter, who is engaged to the son of this person—who himself

isn't married yet either, since it's forty days before his wedding! When spelled out this way, we can't help but wonder what's going on. What is the *Gemara* trying to teach us?

Rabbi Russell explains, *Chazal* is teaching us that *Hashem*, in His infinite wisdom and kindness, saw exactly which *neshama* fits with which *neshama* because it was part of His master plan for this world. We simply play it out in the physical world. *Hashem*, who is not bound by time, already saw these individuals belonged to each other, even though their parents weren't even married yet!

In essence, this teaches us about the perfection created by *Hashem*. There are no accidents; each person is created precisely by *Hashem* to help them reach their purpose and *shleimus* in this world, and He crafts the perfect *Shidduch*—with all its merits and challenges—to help both spouses attain this goal.

Marriage as a Path to Refinement

One important purpose and destination of marriage is to help us refine ourselves and soften our selfish ego, so that we can properly connect with *Hashem* (*"L'dovka bo"*). From a Torah perspective, marriage gives us the opportunity to get our ego out of the way in order to achieve a true connection with our spouse. The marital relationship then becomes the vehicle through which we can experience true *d'veykus* with *Hashem*.

Indeed, to properly connect with our spouse, we must give up much of our ego, because the only thing that gets in the way of a great marriage is ourselves.

Another purpose and destination of marriage is *shleimus ha'adam* and *tikkun ha'middos*. A healthy marriage compels work on both. Let's go back in time and look at the creation of *Adom HaRishon*. The Torah tells us that he was literally *one* with his wife—"du partzufim," both man and women combined. You can't get more *dovuk* with a spouse than *Adom HaRishon*.

Nevertheless, *Hashem* said, “*Lo tov heyos ha-adom levado,*” and separated them from each other and then told them to figure out how to reconnect together in harmony. The result of working jointly toward that harmony brings out a holiness in life. It’s where we develop our ultimate relationship with *Hashem* and reach a level of “*dveikus bo yisborach.*” The fact is, it’s impossible to live in harmony unless we truly refine and work on ourselves.

This may help explain the well-known *Midrash* that says that when a Get is given, *rachmana litzlan*, the *Mizbayach* cries (*Gittin*, 90b). What might we learn from this *Midrash* in this context?

Rabbi Russell notes that *Chazal* introduced many *halachos* designed to reduce arguing and fighting between people—for example, instructing that smaller communities shouldn’t have two different *minyanim*, one in which the men wear *Tefillin* during *Chol Hamoed* and the other in which they don’t. *Rashi* explains that this is to avoid unnecessary squabbling. There are many similar *halachos* that are concerned with enhancing the peace between people in daily life and helping diminish opportunities for strife.

Now, imagine a couple who couldn’t work things out in their relationship, got divorced, and now they are no longer fighting. Shouldn’t the *Mizbayach* be dancing for joy since now there’s a little less fighting in the world? Why then does the *Midrash* tell us that the *Mizbayach* sheds tears over a divorce?

Rabbi Russell suggests that the *Mizbayach* is crying over the lost opportunity of the couple fulfilling their potential for their personal self-development and *shleimus* inside the marriage, as laid out for them by *Hashem* before they were even conceived. And it’s specifically the *Mizbayach* that cries because it singularly represents the concept of sacrifice, devotion and coming close to *Hashem*—all key ingredients for a successful marriage.

It goes without saying that when a marriage collapses due to external factors outside of one’s control, such as with abuse and mental illness, the opportunity for a successful long-term marriage may never have existed, and was thus never lost. In such cases, divorce, and hopefully

remarriage at the right time, may be that person’s preordained path for their personal growth and *shleimus ha’adam*, for reasons best known to *Hashem*.

A Harmony of Equals

It takes much work and effort to achieve meaningful and lasting harmony in a marital relationship, and achieving it is truly *dveikus bo yisborach*. At the same time, we need to accept the fact that *Hashem* created men and women in such a way that they can’t get along naturally. Starting from that understanding, we can face any challenging relationship issues in our marriages with curiosity, without feeling like a failure, and with a willing attitude to explore how to make things better.

Rabbi Russell Shares: “I sometimes give a *Chosson shmuess* to my friend’s children before they get married. I tell them, based on something I saw in the *Maharal*, that a husband and wife cannot live in harmony naturally. It takes work. Lots of work. Living consistently in harmony with your spouse without working hard at it is truly supernatural! They think I’m crazy. So I tell them, call me up on your first anniversary and tell me if you still think that I’m that crazy. Sure enough, some did call and told me that at the beginning of their marriage they felt that, even if no other couple in the world gets along naturally, they’re going to be different. Yet by their first anniversary, they’ve been truly humbled. It’s fine, I told them, this is just the way *Hashem* made the world.”

Rabbi Russell identified four areas where men and woman are very different and shows how these differences are part of *Hashem’s* plan for our own self-refinement and *shleimus ha’adam*.

Difference One: Physical Intimacy

The first difference is that men and woman have very different needs in the area of physical intimacy. Women can sometimes feel pressured, while men often feel frustrated. This inevitably creates a dissonance and tension in the relationship.

However, it's logical to wonder, if the world is built on *Hashem's* kindness and compassion, why didn't He equally balance the intensity of male and female biological needs? What is the meaning of all the discomfort and awkwardness around this issue in the first place?

This is one proof, explains Rabbi Russell, that men and women were made by *Hashem* deliberately differently. It's, in fact, out of His ultimate *chesed* to us because it forces us to be sensitive to our spouse and tune into our spouse on a very deep level regarding one of our deepest needs. It means we put our own needs aside for the other person—to set the ego aside and show love and caring for their needs. When viewed properly, this imbalance is a profound gift from *Hashem* to help us reach our true refinement and fulfillment.

Difference Two: Outcome Vs. Process

The next area of difference is how men and woman approach life. Men are mostly outcome oriented, and woman are usually process oriented. For a simple example, many women love to window shop as an activity in itself. For men, this same activity can feel like a waste of time.

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: “There was a couple I knew who, after they got married, decided to live in *Eretz Yisroel* for the first few years of their marriage. They used to go home to the States for *Pesach*, yet one year they decided to stay in *Eretz Yisroel* and make *Pesach* themselves. By this time, they had several kids and making *Pesach* in a small apartment wasn't the easiest thing. On *Erev Pesach*, the wife noticed that the cabinet beneath the sink was leaking

water. That cabinet was filled with *chometz keilim* that her husband had stuffed in there earlier in the day and that likely dislodged the drain-pipe. She asked her husband to help fix the pipe. There he is, under the cabinet, struggling to get everything out of the cabinet, and duct-tape the pipe so it can hold until they could get a plumber after *Yom Tov*. The whole debacle eats up the last remaining hours of the day, and he barely had time to change as he left for *shul*. Meanwhile, the wife was able to finish prep in time, and they had a lovely Seder. During *Chol Hamoed*, they visited with the wife's grandmother. She was having a blast telling the bubby the story of the leaking cabinet with all the minute details of how it was fixed just in time, and the bubby is laughing and clearly having a great time. On the way home, the wife noticed that her husband is steaming mad. “Why did you embarrass me in front of bubby? You made me look like a doddering fool!” She defended herself by saying she was just telling the story—it was funny and there was nothing to be embarrassed about. But her husband remained very hurt. The next day, they went visit his cousins, and the same thing happened again. She retold all the details, and again her husband was fuming on the way home. Fast forward three years later, they went to visit bubby again and she says to them, “Do you remember your first *Pesach*?” The wife says, “Yes! the plumbing, the leak, the *chometz keilim*!” and they laugh and revel in the memories all over again. At this point, the husband just leaves the room and busies himself with something else. The wife will be a bubby herself one day, and I'm sure she'll tell her grandkids all about her first *Pesach* and the leaking cabinet. To her it's enjoyable, she's not trying to be hurtful.”

As in the vignette above, the wife delights in the processes and stories of life. For the husband, the pipe is fixed, end of story, why are we still talking about it? And yet his wife is itching to have a conversation about it all over again...and again.

He wants her to respect that it's difficult for him to listen to or have long conversations about process—especially more than once. And she wants him to understand that it's part of her nature. She's not trying to be difficult; the joy in her life is equally in the process as in the outcome.

This is proof again that many of the differences between husband and wife come from *Hashem's* true kindness. It's through both of them working on tuning into each other that they can reach their true fulfillment in *avoda*.

Difference Three: Culture

Another tricky area where differences can emerge between men and women is in culture. The chances of two people in this day and age growing up within the exact same culture and sharing the same tastes is quite unlikely. Take the case of a young couple married for a few years. The well-off parents of the husband decide it's time for the couple to buy a house and refurbish it appropriately. So, the couple buys a house and begins fixing it up, only to find themselves in marriage counseling halfway through the renovation over disagreements.

Why were they fighting? Because she came from a European background and was accustomed to ornate and lavish designs. He came from a traditional American home where simple is beautiful. Unsurprisingly, they soon begin to judge and argue with each other. The wife would complain, "We're finally building our home, let's make it look nice!" But each has their own conception of what nice looks like. Culture, therefore, often comes between couples and can get in the way on many levels, including clothing, socializing, vacations and the like.

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: "I was born and grew up in England where the culture is very different from America. I married an American girl and lived in the United States for most of my life. I grew up in a home where we had a meal called supper. I found Americans don't know much about this meal. "What's supper?" they ask. This is where all the children sit down with their father and mother around the table and eat dinner. I had no clue that in America the mother eats with the little kids, while the father either has a meal at the office, grabs something on the way home, or eats at home after everyone has finished. In America, it's rare to non-existent to have a slow three-course meal at a set time every weekday night. Back in England, my mother—may she rest in peace—made such a meal every night. My father walked into the house at 6:00 p.m. sharp and we sat down to soup, a main dish and dessert. That's how it was when I grew up. Likewise, my mother laid the table for all of us for breakfast. Now, I'm nearly positive that no one in America ever heard of a formal breakfast. I remember my poor wife looking at me mystified when, soon after we were married, I wondered out loud when breakfast would be served. Why she stayed with me is a miracle, because who serves their husband breakfast? No doubt, she thought I was nuts!"

Culture is such a fascinating thing. There's no right or wrong between two different cultures—they're just different. Nor can you convince someone that their culture and taste about things is wrong—it simply doesn't work. Yet the chances of two people coming from the same culture are very slim, and that affects everything. It determines

how we run our Shabbos table, what kind of *zmiros* and *niggunim* are sung, and who sings them; what kind of *divrei Torah* are said, and who says them and when; are they short, are they long; do you have to be quiet the whole time, or can you ask questions?

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: “I grew up in a home where everyone was quiet before *kiddush*. My Fathers simply sat and waited until we were all quiet before starting, which happened almost immediately. Once I got married, I gave that up since that’s not what my wife was used to. I learned to just start making *kiddush* and everyone would get quiet once I began. Before this, I used to wait for everyone to be quiet before I started. It was frustrating. But I gave it up for the greater good. And guess what, as soon as I started saying *Kiddush*, everyone quieted down on their own.”

The chance of husband and wife getting along naturally is quite low when the cultures they’re coming from are different. But this very dissonance forces the couple to grow internally. When viewed in this fashion, their differences are the greatest gift from *Hashem*.

Being able to tune into someone else’s culture, overcoming our resistance to change, and drawing closer together as a couple, is all part of *Hashem’s* plan for our self-refinement and *shleimus ha’adam*.

Difference Four: Personality

What are the chances of a husband and wife having similar personalities that blend and flow together—at least past the dating and courting period? The *Rambam* writes that just as people’s faces are different, no two personalities are alike. In truth, the chance of a couple having similar personalities and getting along naturally is statistically zero.

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: “I have a brother who is a bit of a mathematician. One time, we were talking and I asked him, based on the *Vilna Gaon’s* comment about there being 70 different qualities to personality, what are the chances of people ever getting along? He ran the math: Assume that each of the 70 qualities differ from each other by two features: frequency and intensity. For example, with anger, one could be intensely angry or just a little upset. Furthermore, these anger bouts could happen frequently or rarely. If we only calculate the possibilities of half the total number of qualities differing in just two ways, even then the number is enormous—2 to the 35th power equals 34,359,738,368. That’s almost 35 billion people, or more simply, more people that have lived since the creation of the world. Now imagine 2 to the 70th power? That’s likely more than all the grains of sand on all the beaches and oceans in the world. So if there are 70 different qualities to people’s personality, and each may vary by two or more factors, what’s the chance of two people ever having similar personalities?”

Indeed, no two people and their personalities can be exactly the same. Yet, as Rabbi Russell explains, we all float around in the bubble of our own personality, happily thinking that everything inside our bubble is true and everything outside is not. While that may be all fine and good when we are single, when we get married, we have to confront someone else’s personality. Suddenly and painfully, you discover that the person you married has personality traits that aren’t like yours—and that they’re as equally convinced as you are that their way of doing things is the right way.

We tend to forget that everybody else has their own personality bubble, with different feelings about life that are distinct to them. So the chances of a husband and wife possessing two completely different personalities, getting along naturally is statistically zero. What then was *Hashem's* intent?

Yet again, these differences are meant to force us to work on ourselves. They are the home gym for our *middos*. To get along and have *Sholom Bayis* means learning how to tamp down our ego and fully and lovingly accept the other person with their own culture, personality and needs. Indeed, *Hashem* created marriage as the perfect vehicle to *shleimus ha'adam*.



The Four Levels of Intimacy

When talking about intimacy between couples, Rabbi Russell describes four ascending levels that one can achieve within marriage, each higher and more meaningful than the other.

Level One: Physical Intimacy

On the first level of intimacy, the husband and wife are looking to meet their own physical needs. This is a very low level of intimacy because it takes people further into themselves, instead of redirecting them to be sensitive to the needs of their spouse.

For most couples, this level of intimacy may go on for a while, but eventually it fizzles out. On this simple level of intimacy, the sole connection between them is the physical benefits of the relationship, there's little else for them to connect over. When such couples rush to counseling to figure out what's going on with their fading relationship, one of the first questions they are asked is, "Can you tell me something about your spouse beyond the physical?" They often struggle to answer.

Physical intimacy can only take a marriage so far. To restore and save their marriage, couples in this dynamic need to grow emotionally by advancing to the second level of intimacy.

Level Two: Emotional Intimacy

Emotional intimacy in this context means that the couple genuinely likes and appreciates each other—beyond the physical—and values the other because of who they are as a person. In essence, emotional intimacy means finding aspects of our spouse we can admire. To be able to say, "I appreciate you for who you are."

Most couples stop here and spend the rest of their lives with one eye closed to the perceived faults of the other, because they don't know what to do about the feelings that such faults bring up. They suppress their negative feelings because they don't know how to deal with them.

It's tragic if couples remain on this level because they never get to truly know each other on a deep level. Couples in this dynamic need to grow psychologically by advancing to the third level of intimacy.

Level Three: Psychological Intimacy

Above the level of emotional intimacy is psychological intimacy. This involves deeply connecting with your spouse with your eyes fully open, aware of their shortcomings that you have a hard time living with. Instead of ignoring such faults, you willingly embrace them, just as you hope your spouse embraces and accepts your own shortcomings. You both honor and understand each other and accept that neither of you is perfect.

At this level of intimacy, you don't need to hide from your spouse but can be fully present with each other. Such intimacy takes a lot of work, but it's profound and engenders an amazing level of honesty and safe vulnerability.

On this level we can say to our partner, “I’m not proud of my shortcomings, and I intend to keep working on them. Just as I hope you’ll lovingly see me as a work-in-progress, I honor and accept you in the same way. I won’t hold the things I perceive as your imperfections against you, even if they hurt me at times. I fully love you *despite* the flaws I think you have.”

This is a deep and profound level of intimacy, where two people join together to grow, utilizing the vehicle of their marriage to come closer to each other and to *Hashem*. Yet while this is a very special level of personal development and growth, it’s still not the highest and most fulfilling level of intimacy possible.

Level Four: Spiritual Intimacy

The highest and most profound level of intimacy is spiritual intimacy. Spiritual intimacy moves from, “I love you *despite* the flaws I think you have,” to “I love you *because* of them.” It means recognizing that *Hashem* brought this person and their flaws into my life as His gift to help me become a better person.

It means recognizing that, at times, my spouse may be difficult or frustrating to live with—just like me. However, working out how to live together in harmony is going to make me into a better person, and draw love and holiness into our home. It means recognizing that my spouse helps me grow in my *dveikus* and *shleimus*, to truly know myself, to see my flaws, and to become a better person.

Reaching this level of spiritual intimacy is one of the main destinations and reasons why we get married. It means living from a perspective where I am able to embrace and harness everything about my marriage—the benefits, the disadvantages, the struggles, the joys—without being afraid, because all of those things *together* make me a better person and connect me more deeply to my spouse and, ultimately, to *Hashem*.

In a marriage with this level of spiritual intimacy, I am able to honestly and vulnerably share who I am with my spouse because I’m

humble and working to overcome my shortcomings. I use the disappointed and hurt look on my spouse’s face to tell me I’ve still got work to do on myself. I use my spouse’s feedback to make myself a better person. That’s true greatness, and that’s what spiritual intimacy is all about.

Rabbi Russell Shares: “Western secular psychology sells us a bill of goods about marriage and relationships. I was once on a panel at a Shabbaton, and someone asked me to define the difference between secular and Torah psychology. I said, ‘Secular psychology seeks to help you be the happiest, most fulfilled person you can be, while causing the least harm to people around you. Torah psychology says we’re going to help teach you how to be the ultimate giver to everyone around you, while preserving the ability to be happy and fulfilled yourself.’”

From a Torah perspective, the emphasis in relationships is grounded in the needs of the other person and not on ourselves. *Hashem* gave our spouse to us custom-made for our growth. Their flaws aren’t *in* the way—they *are* the way. We are meant to learn how to live according to this ideal, while still retaining the ability to be happy and fulfilled. This is the *avodah*.

Two Pathways

Consider the following scenario. A wife has been at home with the kids on a long summer Shabbos day. She’s looking forward to getting out with her husband once the children are asleep.

After *havdalah*, she turns to her husband and says, “I need to get out for some fresh air and downtime together, let’s go to the pizza place that recently opened nearby.”

Her husband says, “If we’re already going out, let’s go and get something hearty, maybe *Shawarma*?”

She looks at him and says, “After all the food on Shabbos, I’m not really up for *Shawarma*. Pizza is perfect, however.”

He says, “But that’s not going out...”

She sighs and says, “Never mind, forget it. I’ll just go to sleep.”

He says, “Why are you getting so upset? I said I’d go out!”

She says, “You’re complaining that I’m upset? I tell you I want to go out and you hijack it all...it always has to be *your* way.” And she storms out of the room in a huff.

Now, consider a second version of the same scenario where gentle, caring love is present. The wife says to her husband, “I’ve been with the kids all day and I really need to get out. Can we go and get pizza?” And he says, “Sure, we can go out, how about *Shawarma* instead?”

This time she says, “You know, if you really want, I would.” But before she even finishes the sentence, this time he says, “No problem—we’ll do pizza. It’s my pleasure.” And she says, “No, no, no...I know you aren’t in the mood for pizza tonight, we can do *Shawarma*, it’s fine.” And he says, “No, no, no...we’re going for pizza...”

The second scenario is clearly the path that leads to connection and *shleimus* through our marriage. And it’s worth noting two additional points. It actually doesn’t make a difference whether at the end they had pizza or *Shawarma*—what matters is that they got out and had a loving time together. That’s what the wife really wanted anyway. Notice something else as well, *because* the two sets of needs were in conflict, they were able to put the needs of each other first. Had they fought for their way exclusively, both would’ve ended up feeling miserable, unloved, and unappreciated.

The Definition of Love

Rabbi Russell defines love as the emotion, experience or feeling that occurs when husband and wife are able to put the other’s needs before their own, when the two sets of needs are in conflict. Love is embracing and greeting that challenge with a full and generous heart.

We need to keep in mind that the challenges of marriage are for our personal growth and benefit. By remembering that dissonance is opportunity, we keep the end-goal in mind. Since *Hashem* put us where we are, with this spouse, it’s in our power to work toward and achieve the goal of true loving *Sholom Bayis*, which ultimately leads to *shleimus ha’adam* and success with our children.

Imagine how inspiring it is for children to grow up in a home seeing their parents truly working on themselves. Imagine what it does for our kids’ *neshamas* when they see us engaged in the real work of setting aside our own egos and refining our *middos* to make our spouse feel loved and cared for. Imagine what this creates for their own future as spouses and parents. Why would they want any other type of life growing up in a home like that?

Rabbi Russell Tells a Story: “I once had a conversation with a leading *Rosh Yeshiva* about a certain issue to do with a client of mine, and we spoke for a long time. At one point, he asked me to describe my view of the therapeutic process. I thought for a moment and then explained as follows: If we were to ask someone what’s the right attitude about life, they’ll often say that life is essentially meant to be enjoyed, such as having *nachas* from children, *Sholom Bayis*, a nice job, a comfortable home and the like. And that every now and again, various difficulties and challenges arise that throw us off from this enjoyment, and it’s our responsibility to deal with those challenges in a mature and healthy way, so that we can grow from the challenges and move on with enjoying life. However, I explained to the *Rosh Yeshiva*, that for me, success with my clients means that I’ve helped them see it’s actually the other way around—true happiness is found within our problems, by working on ourselves to learn and grow from

and through them. And *Hashem* gives us the *nachas* and *simchas*, a happy relationship, a nice job, and the like, to help us have the strength to face the challenges of life in the most productive way possible.”

Growing Through Parenting

Just as we can see the imperfections of our spouse as *Hashem's* way of helping us shed our ego, we can likewise frame the struggles and trials that our children put us through—the *tza'ar gidul bonim*—as a gift from *Hashem* meant to help us grow and become closer to Him. Put more succinctly, our “*gidul*” is through our “*bonim*.” Shifting our perspective on this gives meaning to it all.

Rabbi Russell Shares: “In some sport competitions, they have a 400-meter dash where the athletes run incredible sprints in a very short amount of time. They also have the same race, but with hurdles set along the way, which takes about two seconds longer. One might wonder who is the stronger, better athlete—the one who finished soonest without the hurdles, or the one who finished two seconds later despite the hurdles? Of course, it’s the one who had to jump over hurdles the entire way to the finish line.”

There are generally three approaches to facing obstacles along the road of life. The first approach is to see a problem, throw our hands up and say, “I can’t deal with this,” and climb back into bed. The second approach is to go around the problem, sometimes taking a long detour, but eventually coming back to the road of life and continuing on. The third approach is to look knowingly at the problem and smile, and then

like the hurdler, run like crazy and leap, using the problem as a catalyst to overcome any challenge, and to grow higher and higher.

This third approach is within the reach of every person, by harnessing the uniquely tailored strengths that *Hashem* imbues us with to overcome and grow from all of our challenges. We can then look back on life, knowing deeply in our hearts that we gave it our very best shot.

The rest we leave to *Hashem*.



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RABBI SHIMON RUSSELL is a psychotherapist in private practice in Jerusalem, Israel. His expertise is in working with parents and children on issues relating to marriage, struggling adolescents and their families, and treatment of a variety of traumas. He is a popular author and speaker who has presented on mental-health related topics around the world, and considered an authority on the challenges of "At-Risk" teens and young adults.



ZALMAN GOLDSTEIN has been writing and publishing for more than thirty years. He has authored over a dozen books on topics of Jewish interest, such as *Jewish Living Simply Explained*, *Going Kosher In 30 Days!*, *Talking Divorce*, and *The Shabbat Table Companion*, combining meaningful education and guidance with passionate sensibility and clarity. His works have won several prestigious awards and enjoy a broad worldwide readership.

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