

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ MISHPATIM 5780 }

UNITY AND HAPPINESS

ANOTHER LEVEL OF CONNECTION

In this week's Parsha, we are instructed on the proper treatment of slaves. "If he comes alone, he leaves alone and if he has a wife, his wife leaves with him".

Although the Torah is referring to slaves, it would serve us well to apply the lesson inherent in this particular passuk to our personal lives. If a person comes into his marriage thinking only of his own needs, then he is bound to remain essentially alone. If, however, he retains awareness that he has a wife who depends on him, then he will truly be a happy, married man.

It's fairly normal for a person to think about his own needs, his own comfort, his

own happiness. And although it's not an easy feat to push ourselves out of our innate selfishness and make room for someone else in our life, it is a very necessary component of a happy and healthy home.

Man is instructed to "Let go of his father and his mother and become one flesh" with his wife. Why is it necessary for him to let go of his parents? Furthermore, many children do not live with their parents even before they get married, yet they are not instructed to sever the connection with them until they do. Why is that? A connection with a spouse is unlike anything you have experienced up until then, and in order for you to be able to fully tune in to your spouse's universe, you need to let go of all previous connections that you have had.

YOU + I = WE

Back in Parshas Bereishis, the passuk tells us "Lo toiv heyois ha'adam levadoi - It is not good for a person to be alone". The Skulener Rebbe z"l wanted to remarry in his later years, and his talmidim tried to dissuade him. "Rebbe," they pleaded, "We will find you a hardworking, dedicated bachur to help you out!" The Rebbe thanked them for their suggestion but told them, "Lo toiv heyos ha'adam levadoi! We will be two levadoi'niks, instead of one. What kind of help is that?!"

There are people out there who are technically married, but they are not one with their spouse. They live together, they have kids together, they even have a joint bank account! But they are not really united. They

are not working on becoming closer and more connected to each other. The husband does his thing, the wife does her thing, but truly, they are merely two levadoi'niks living together.

When marriage is about “me” and “you”, it can end up becoming a competition. Today we do things “my” way, tomorrow we do it “your” way. Things can get sticky when we start to feel that one of us is getting things done their way too often. However, if we think of our marriage as “we”, rather than two separate entities, we can work together and accomplish our mutual goals.

THE CONNECTION WE CRAVE

Years ago, it was possible for two people to exist as a married couple their entire life without much connection between them. These days, because we are much more in tune with our emotions, we crave the connection and satisfaction that Hashem has put into all of us. We are no longer satisfied living a mediocre existence. And that's a good thing!

In a sad twist, though, there are some individuals who get married just so that they can have someone in

their life to take care of them. They like the idea of someone being there at their beck and call and catering to their every whim. Such people might find marriage very disappointing! If you want your significant other to consider your needs, then you need to do so for them as well.

IF NOT ME, THEN WHO?

One might worry that if he doesn't take care of his own needs, then who will? But the truth is, if he is the “baal isha”, if he understands that he now has a wife to take care of, then “v'yatza ishto'i imoi”, his wife will be there for him and with him.

There is no need to become totally enmeshed with each other. You should each have your separate interests and hobbies. But there has to be a connection between the two of you - a mutual respect and understanding, as well as shared areas of interest.

Even when your wants or needs seem to be at odds with each other, it is possible to reach a mutual agreement most of the time. It's important to remember that compromise does not mean sacrifice. You can usually find a solution which would make you happy and still satisfy both of you.

THE BEST PATH TO HAPPINESS

The right way to live is the best way to live, even if it looks a bit more difficult in the short term. You will realize very fast, that even from a self-serving perspective, this is the easier and more comfortable track to take. It pays for you to work towards a solid connection because your life will be that much better.

Think about what your spouse wants, her likes and dislikes, what makes her tick. Try to be there for her, and make her life more pleasant and comfortable. Show him that you care and think about him, and you will be pleasantly surprised by the reciprocal effect this will have.

You might think that this is something your spouse will benefit from reading, but know that the onus is on you! “When you find a wife, you find [the] good”. Your wife is the one who has the ability to bring out the very best in you. But that can only happen if you are the “ba'al isha”, if you can find it in yourself to connect with her and to think about her needs, so that she feels like an integral part of your life.

Nobody is strong enough to go through life alone, but

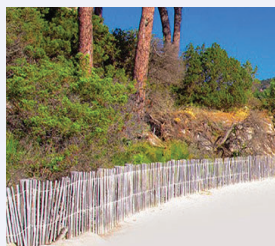
getting married, in and of itself, is not enough. If you fail to make room in your life to accommodate your spouse, together with his wants, needs, and even his idiosyncrasies, then not only will you be living alone; you will be sharing living quarters with another person who is living alone! That is not an enviable situation, at all.

Hashem wants us to be connected, because He wants us to be happy. It is, after all, the cornerstone of a strong and happy home.

CHINUCH – RIDE TOGETHER

In a way, as parents, it's easier to connect with our children and give them what they need, because we truly know and want what's best for them. On the other hand, unlike interacting with another adult, it's sometimes difficult to see eye-to-eye with them. You are just not on the same wavelength or channel. Still, it's important to find an area of mutual interest and connect with them over that. Rather than giving your child the feeling that you are merely traveling on parallel lanes, show him that you are actually in the same vehicle.

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Q&A

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



QUESTION:

Are we supposed to convince our children that they can accomplish “everything”, so that they know how much we believe in them, or should we be more realistic and teach them that not everyone is good at everything?

ANSWER:

Shmuel* approached me one day, very distraught. He had been trying to accomplish certain things in his life for a long time, without any success. The constant struggle of trying and coming up short was making him feel inadequate. The fact that he couldn't master what he set out to do bothered him so much, that he went to seek advice from someone.

Shockingly, that person told him to just give up! “This is not something you are ever going to achieve, so just accept that fact and move on.” At first, Shmuel says, he felt relief. He was happy that the fight is over. But soon enough, self-doubt set in again.

The truth is that nobody is happy to plateau. We all want to become more, better, smarter. When Shmuel asked me for my thoughts, I said to him, “Who says that you must succeed or else you throw in the towel?” If you don't succeed at first, that is in no way an indication that you never will! Instead of focusing on what you still have to accomplish, focus instead on what you have already achieved.

Never just give up! Perhaps you need to reach for your goals in smaller increments, but you will get there! The most important thing is not to forget to celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small or insignificant they seem to you.

The same can be said when it comes to children. We never want to tell them “This is not something you can ever accomplish”, or “You don't need to try so hard for that.” You also shouldn't admonish them for not doing more. What you want to do is encourage them, praise them, and show them how much they have already attained, thereby helping them reach their full potential.

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