

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ NASOI 5780 }

BYGONES

A CLEAN SLATE

In the Parsha of the Sotah, we learn about the actions that were taken in the case of a woman suspected of adultery. If it turned out that the accusations were baseless, the *passuk* states, she will be rewarded that she will merit to give birth even if she had experienced difficulty in the past, and many other blessings are described by Chazal.

Now, it's important to note that a woman who could be accused of indecent behavior was obviously not the most pious woman in town. And yet, once she was proven innocent, she was completely exonerated and was even rewarded.

What's more, even if the same woman was suspected

twice, it doesn't say anywhere in the Torah that she should be dealt with any differently. It's as if it was a first offense. Her previous deeds were not to be brought up ever again.

There is a powerful lesson in this for all of us.

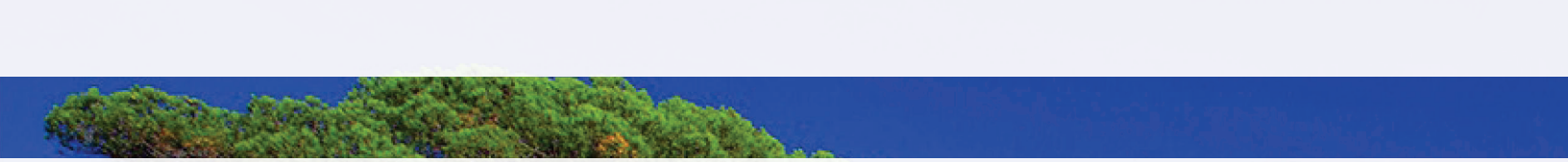
MOVING ON

The ability to move past previous misdeeds - or perceived misdeeds - is such an important attribute for any relationship. It is especially vital, though, in the marital relationship. When you can tell your spouse, "From now on, let's pretend this never happened. Let's forget about it," it can be a real turning point in your marriage. And if you adopt that attitude without saying anything, that's even better!

Hanging on to your spouse's offenses might give you the illusion of power. "I have an accusation ready in my pocket and I can bring it up anytime I feel the need to one-up you!" But if you're honest with yourself, you know that it will only succeed in dragging you down. Staying stuck in the past has never proven helpful to anyone.

SELECTIVE FORGETFULNESS

Hashem is referred to as the "*zocher kol hanishkachos*", He who remembers all that is forgotten. What does that mean? Satmar Rebbe ztz"l would explain that when people recall all of the wonderful things they've done, so Hashem says, "You got that covered? Great! I don't have to remember them



for you and he ‘forgets’. You lose some of your *schar* when you’re conceited”.

On the other hand, we tend to forget any misdeeds or sins that we have committed, so Hashem says, “Oy, you forgot? I’ll remember... You can be certain it won’t be overlooked.”

While we should all aspire to emulate Hashem; it’s His *middas horachamim* we should emulate, not His *middas hadin*. And yet this is how we tend to be with other people.

We make sure to remind them about all of the infractions that they committed over the past decade, but conveniently forget all of the nice things that they had done. Conversely, you only remember the nice things you’ve done in the past and mysteriously forget all of the times that you messed up.

IMAGINARY MEMORIES

Someone once mentioned an interesting way of looking at life. Imagine that you just came into existence. The past never happened. But Hashem has put this whole story about past experiences into your head. You live in the

present *informed* by the past, but not *shaped* by it.

When you view your life this way, as if the past is just a figment of your imagination that may or may not have actually occurred, it can help you orient yourself, discard any negative memories, and enjoy the present. It is very difficult to truly experience the present if you keep reliving the past.

NO ADDENDUMS

If your husband constantly forgets to pick up the groceries you asked him for, broach the subject calmly and kindly. “It is very hard for me when you forget to pick up the groceries, because then I have to bundle up all the kids and go get it myself.”

Even if it happens again the next day, refrain from saying, “I already told you a thousand times! Just yesterday we had this conversation! Can you please for once remember already?!” Once again, kindly ask him to make an effort to remember. He remembers quite well that you said the same thing yesterday, and shaming him will not further your agenda.

When he does remember, thank him, and forget about

all of the times that he didn’t. Don’t bring it up again.

If the problem happens repeatedly, you need to respectfully communicate your needs. It’s not required of you to “grin and bear it”, while you silently stew in indignance and resentment. In the parshah of the Sotah, when the husband suspected wrongdoing, he didn’t just let it slide. He dealt with it!

But when you do bring up your grievances, make sure not to attach any old sins that were committed. It never helps in terms of getting your message across or motivating your spouse to change the offending behavior.

Hashem demands that for ten generations, we should not remind a convert of his past. Even if he commits a sin, you take him to Bais Din or you give him *mussar*. But you are never to tell him, “Oh of course you did that! You were once a *goy!*” This is not only hurtful, but by dragging him back into his past, you are also discouraging the *ger* from trying to do his best. Be like Hashem, who is a *marbeh lisloach*.

LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND

At times you go through a difficulty that lasts a long time, but, with some hard work and perseverance it gets better. Your marriage may have been very difficult for the first ten years. But then, you finally got help and really worked it out together. You've had seven wonderfully happy years together.

And yet, any time your wife loses control and starts yelling, or any time your husband forgets to pay a bill you shout, "For ten years I suffered!! Hasn't ten years been enough?!"

Why are you bringing it up? You've been living so happily together for so many years, why do you feel the urge to remind your spouse of his old habits?

When you don't allow yourself to trust your spouse or accept their kindness because of previous faults, you are denying yourself the pleasure of enjoying today.

Sometimes, you go to a therapist, and he hands out a label to your spouse. He's a narcissist. He's borderline. Whether the diagnosis is

accurate or not doesn't matter. In any case, your spouse gets treated for his disorder, or otherwise gets better. Yet, for some reason, you won't let go of that label. Any time they mess up, you will grab that dusty, vintage diagnosis off your top shelf and shove it in his face. For what? How is that helping anyone?

It doesn't matter if those old habits were terrible and harmful; it's not about forgiving. It's about embracing the present moment and dealing with what is happening right now.

A NEW LEAF

Forgetting about the past isn't easy. If it was, we would be in big trouble. Like that old man who complained to his doctor that he has been suffering from memory loss.

"Oh, no!" the doctor commiserated, "Since when has that been going on?"

"Since when has what been going on?" the old man asked him, confused.

Forgetfulness is not our friend. But hanging on to our pain for dear life is not

our friend, either. If you find yourself unable to move past old infractions, go get help. There is a way to overcome your pain and trauma so that you can continue into the future with a clean slate and a positive state of mind.

CHINUCH: THE HERE AND NOW

In *chinuch*, it's dangerous to generalize. "You *always* get up late." "You *never* put your laundry in the hamper." There is no need to keep reminding your child about previous sins. Your son hit his little brother? Deal with it. Don't feel the need to bring up the fact that he also hit his cousin four years ago.

When you constantly berate your child for past misdeeds, he will start identifying with them, and that can badly damage his self-esteem. If you want to carry memories of his actions with you into the future, why not make a point of remembering all of the nice things he did? You don't want him to remember every parenting mistake you ever made with him, do you? Make it a point to deal with present scenarios as they come up and let bygones be bygones.



Q&A

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



QUESTION:

I send my son to a cheder with somewhat lower standards than what I practice in my home, and my son has been bringing home friends and ideas that are not consistent with the values I try to teach. How can I effectively deal with this predicament?

ANSWER:

First of all, before you send your child to a *moisad*, you need to make sure that it is run in accordance with the value system you are trying to imbue in your home. When you choose an institution with conflicting standards, you have to be ready to deal with the inevitable fallout of your decision.

I once read a story of a man who came to America after the war and, like most immigrant parents, he chose to send his son to university to study medicine. When his son came home a while later, without a beard, the father was beside himself with anguish. When he poured his heart out to a friend, the friend wisely told him, "I don't understand. If your son would come home from a European Yeshiva without a beard, I would be concerned. But you sent him to university! What exactly did you think would happen?!"

Picking a fight with your child every time a conflict comes up or telling him off for every little thing, will only serve to confuse him. He sees these things all day and as far as he can tell it's okay. But then he comes home and you tell him unequivocally that it is *not* okay. In an ideal situation, you will convince him that you are right. But there is also the very real possibility that he will write you off as his crazy, fanatical dad who has yet to get with the times.

It's okay if you mention your point of view once or twice, but if you see it isn't working drop the issue. He will learn much more from your own behaviors and demeanor, and what he hears you say to others.

You can try weaving your messages into your Dvar Torah at the Shabbos table; not in a derogatory fashion or in a way that will offend your child, but just general ideas. He might not immediately show signs that he picked up on your message. He might even openly defy you. But if it is delivered properly and if you are a positive role model, as he matures, he will come around and follow in his father's footsteps.

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