Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Sukkos 5780 }

Getting Along with Others

Combining The Different Types

ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר כפות תמרים וענף עץ עבות וערבי נחל (Vayikra 23, 40). The Midrash famously comments on this *passuk* that there are four types of Jews. There are those that can be compared to the Esrog, who possess both Torah and good deeds. Then there those who possess only Torah, and those who possess only good deeds. And then, all the way on the other end of the spectrum, stands the "Aravah Jew" who has nothing at all; No Torah and no *mitzvos*. Yet Hashem commands us to take all four species and bind them together.

Some Jews are like this, and some are like that. Like they say: "Two Jews- three opinions!" Yet on *Sukkos* Hashem expects us all to get together. We take the four species באגודה אחת, we tie them together, and only then do we fulfill the *mitzvah*.

Your Wife Is A Jew

The *midrash* also compares the four species to Hashem. The *seforim* explain the reason for this; קודשא בריך הוא וישראל חד –"Hashem is one with the Jewish people" and so it follows that if some Jews are compared to the *aravah*, then Hashem is compared to the *aravah* too. And Hashem's four-letter-name is only complete when all four types of Jews live harmoniously together. So the *seforim* use this *midrash* to teach about *ahavas Yisroel*.

Now what most people don't realize is that *ahavas yisroel* is not just a nice term to be bandied about. *Ahavas Yisroel* is something that we must strive to live with. And we must try to implement it with the Jews we know best – our spouses! You may not think about it this way, but actually, the *passuk* ואהבת לרעך כמוך is mentioned several times in the *gemara*, and almost always it is written in relation to loving your spouse!

It may be a great *chiddush* to us, but our sages clearly understood that the *mitzvah* of loving your fellow Jew applies first and foremost to loving your spouse.

Different By Design

Many people get frustrated and disappointed when they realize that life isn't all peaches and cream. They realize that their spouse may be

very different than what they had originally envisioned. You married a man and then you discover that his core personality is completely different than yours. Not something minor. You and your husband don't see eye to eye on a single subject – nothing! You're an *esrog* and he's an *aravah*. No matter how you look at it, you can't find common ground.

So on *Sukkos* we learn that it's not some kind of mistake. Sometimes we think that everyone is meant to be a Rosh Yeshiva, but people mess up. The *midrash* teaches us that it's not so. Hashem created different kinds of people, and it's not an accident! He wants the world to have different types of people. And He wants them to be bound together; He wants us to get along with each other.

Getting Along With Yourself

The *midrash* also compares the four different species to four different body parts. The *esrog* is compared to the heart, the *lulav* is the spine, the *hadassim* are like eyes and the *aravos* symbolize the lips. Perhaps we can utilize this to learn an important lesson in the art of tolerating other people's differences.

It's not only your husband that's a *lulav*; you have a bit of *lulav* yourself within you. While everyone has a dominant personality type, aspects of different personalities make their way into everyone's character. Everyone has a heart, spine, eyes and lips, and everyone has the traits that come along with them.

If you find your wife too relaxed, there is an area where you yourself are also a bit too relaxed. Every person is a collage of different attitudes and manners. And every character trait can be found in everybody – to some degree. So if you can find it within yourself to forgive yourself in those areas- try to make room for accepting your spouse's shortcomings as well.

Accepting The Differences

A young boy once asked his mother: "Why is it that Zeidy married Bubby, you married Daddy, and only I must marry a girl that I don't even know?!" When you get married there's a period of adjustment. You both need to learn to get to know each other's personalities. And then - you'll each have to bend a little. That's just the way it is. If your parents seem like they were molded perfectly for each other, it's only because they molded themselves many years ago, and now it's your turn to bend a bit towards your spouse.

It may be that you wanted your husband to be the richest man on the block, but he's not. He's the jolliest man on the block. Isn't that something to appreciate? Find the good in his personality. You thought you would marry the perfect homemaker whose house would always be spic and span, but that's not the case. Instead your wife is a great conversationalist. So? Enjoy that, appreciate that! Harping on your disappointments, and what you expected will not change your spouse's personality. Every personality is important to Hashem, and He gave you this husband, so appreciate it.

In the *tefillah* of Rav Elimelech Lizhensker ztz"l it says שנראה כל אחד מעלת חברינו ולא חסרונן –"That we may see the good in our fellows and not their deficiencies". Everyone has deficiencies, but our job is to turn away from them and to seek out the good. The *haddas* has a good smell but

not a good taste – so don't try to taste it- smell it and enjoy it. The *lulav* has a good taste, so don't look for the smell- enjoy the taste! In every person we must aim to seek out their greatness rather than their weaknesses.

What Is Truly Unforgiveable?

One of the perks to seeing different clients in quick succession, is that I can learn from one how to help the other. One of my clients was complaining that his wife just isn't "fun enough" to be around. I asked him about her domestic abilities "sure, no issues at all" she takes care of everything, from the food to the laundry, to the children, she even smiles at him when he comes home; she's a perfect wife. She just isn't "fun" enough "What did I marry, a housekeeper? I want a friend and a partner".

Then I had another client. His wife was just too much "fun" for him. She really was a great companion and a good friend, and he really enjoys spending time with her. But when it comes to housework, she just doesn't have it all together. "I have enough friends in *shul*" he said "We need to run a household! It's not all about friendship!"

"One man's trash is another man's treasure." And sometimes it's your own treasure, if only you would open your eyes. Now that you have, it you think it's trash, only when you won't have it you'll realize what a treasure it really was.

It is so important to see the good in your spouse. Every one of the four species is necessary and important, and every type of Jew is important. Whatever type your spouse is; learn to focus on his loveable aspects, and appreciate him for who he is.

Stop Putting It In His Face

People don't realize how damaging it is to a relationship to keep pointing out their partner's deficiencies. Every time you bring up something that your spouse has difficulties with, you are needlessly hurting your spouse. You're not helping him grow, you're simply telling him "You're not good enough".

Focusing on someone's deficiencies puts tremendous strain on a relationship. If your husband is not good at starting a conversation, and you're always waiting for him to start, you're putting pressure on him and making him feel inadequate. Whereas, if you recognize that starting conversations is your area of expertise and you allow him to focus on his own strengths, they will shine through much brighter. By relaxing the pressure, you're allowing your spouse's true strengths to shine forth. He will feel more alive and confident, and so will you, as you each put forth your best.

Chinuch: The Four Sons

Just as there are four species on *Sukkos*, we read about the four sons on *Pesach*. Every child is different, not just in their levels of *yiddishkeit*, as the *haggadah* seems to indicate. Every child's personality differs, like I've mentioned many times [you can read my book, The Fragile Factor, or Get Along With Every-One, for more on this]. And as parents, it is our responsibility to accept our child for who he is, and to try to capitalize on his strengths and not dwell on his weaknesses.

This child doesn't have the *geshmak* his brother has in *davening*. So what can you do? Can you find an *aravah* whose leaves are *meshulash* like the leaves of a *haddas*?

Maybe your second son will never be quite the *tehillim zugger*, but he may turn out quite a formidable *sevara zugger*. If you don't squash him and damage his self-confidence he may become a great learner, even if he's not that perfect *davener*. Let him grow at his own pace! Let everyone develop their own unique talents.

Concentrate on your child's unique capabilities. Let every child feel that they have some distinction. This daughter is so good at taking care of the younger kids, and this daughter is such a graceful dancer. You're not faking anything. It is absolutely true that everyone is special in their own way. But we must work to find everyone's specialties, and make sure that they know it too. And then we will have capable, confident, and happy children.

But let's not forget that the different types should be tied together. Make sure that it's a happy family. All of your different children feel comfortable with each other, no one is someone else's competition. Everyone is secure in their parents' love and in their own role.

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Q&A

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org



Question: OK, so I know that I have to tolerate my wife's imperfections; but when will she improve already?!

Answer: Someone once asked a great rabbi: The *mishna* says "Who is rich? One who is happy with what he has" But if he's happy with what he has, he'll never get rich, so how could he be happy?!

The rabbi answered: You don't understand. When someone is happy with what he has, he's not happy because the *mishna* said that he must be "happy". He is really and truly happy! Similarly, when we talk about accepting someone, we don't mean that we should accept him while looking at the clock waiting for him to change. We mean that you should really and truly accept him as he is. Because he really *is* perfect the way Hashem made him! It's not just something nice that we say with our lips, we have to believe it.

That inner dissatisfaction really puts a stress on the relationship. Think about your own imperfections and how you accept them, and try to really accept what you can't bear in your wife or child.

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