Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Behaʼaloscha 5780 }

Finding the Flaw

Why Was He Better?

This week's parsha opens with the mitzvah of Aharon's kindling of the Menorah. Rashi points out that this follows immediately after the Torah's lengthy account of the lavish korbanos donated by the nesi'im. Aharon was pained because he did not participate in this great show of Kevod Shomayim. In order to appease him, Hashem told him "Yours is greater than theirs, because you get to light and glorify the Menorah."

Yet this needs to be understood; why did Hashem feel it necessary to comfort Aharon by making him more than the others? So we note that Aharon was not jealous or resentful of the Nesi'im. He was disappointed with *himself* for not participating. When he thought about the fact that he wasn't among them, he realized that it was his own fault.

Perhaps this is the reason he was deserving of Hashem's appeasement. Instead of being jealous or resentful of those who "surpassed" him, he did some introspection, and assumed responsibility. When someone looks inward and finds his own fault, someone like that is deserving of comforting words. Because he was brave enough to realize that he was the problem, Hashem calmed him down. "Don't worry, you're still better than them."

Even if you're not perfect, you can still win out and succeed at your relationships if you master this little trick. Openness to noticing (and maybe even working on) your flaws.

The Survival Kit

They say that to survive, a human needs: food, shelter, and someone to blame. "Someone to blame" will be the person closest to you. Namely, your spouse.

But actually, it is never just one person's fault. Maybe the fact that you have someone else there gives you someone to *share* the blame with, so that you can both deduce where each of you is responsible for the mess-up. But he is not there just so you can shove the entire blame onto him each and every time something goes wrong.

Consider that if you wouldn't have been there with your opposing opinion, there wouldn't have been an argument at all. So, it's not that the other person started up with me, and that's why we are now in conflict with each other. No! You *both* came into this conversation with opposing views, and therefore you are *both* fully responsible.

What's My Part?

When someone approaches me, complaining incessantly about their wives' wrongdoings, I always ask him, "Is there even the tiniest chance that this might be due to one of your own faults, rather than hers?"

Normally, the person will just wave away my question. "Of course I'm not perfect! We all have flaws! But now we're talking about HERS!"

To claim that you're perfect is remarkably vain. Every self-respecting individual will admit that they have shortcomings. They just won't admit it when those shortcomings are causing them discomfort. Then, it will always be the "other's" fault.

When you have a quiet moment, think about it honestly. What is it about the other person that's bothering you? Is it his constant lateness? Is it her annoying nagging? ORRR... Maybe if he wouldn't come home to a kitchen that looked like a tornado just ripped through, and a sulking, bedraggled wife, he would happily come home earlier? Maybe if you would call the plumber the first time she mentions that the drain is clogged, she wouldn't have to nag you about it three times a day?

Of course, this does not excuse your husband's lateness or your wife's nagging! But if you can admit that you are at least *somewhat* part of the problem, you might have found the first key to the chamber of marital bliss.

Whose Fault is it?

This is true even if you are consistently unhappy. You might think that it is entirely your spouse's fault that you are so down in the dumps; and even if it isn't, they should at least have helped you out of it.

But maybe there's a void inside of you that is causing your unhappiness, unrelated to your spouse? It is entirely possible that they could have helped you, but placing the blame squarely on them without giving your own contribution to the problem a fleeting thought, would be doing yourself a disservice.

If you find that no matter in which situation you find yourself, you are always mistreated and nobody ever gets you, it might be time to take a good, hard look in the mirror. Ask yourself, "Why does this keep happening to me? Do I help others? Do I try to make others happy?" The answer to these questions might give you some invaluable insight into the root of your problems.

I once interviewed someone who had a whole rap sheet about every single employer he had ever worked for. They all conned him, they were all a bunch of crooks, and he was left practically the only normal person alive. I made the colossal mistake of hiring this man and, wouldn't you know it, I made the list! Now I, too, am one of the many crooked employers he has worked for.

Who am I?

Knowing yourself intimately is not only helpful to Shalom Bayis. It is the foundation of being "You". Once you are aware of both your strengths AND your weaknesses, the benefits to your relationships – both personal and business – will be sure to follow. You don't even have to immediately correct your faults. It's enough that you know that they're there. That way, you won't be inclined to constantly blame those around you for everything.

A Chelemer merchant once chanced upon a shul in Warsaw, and went inside. He saw the people gathered around the Shamash, who was regaling them with entertaining stories. "Who is my father's son but not my brother?" He asked of his rapt audience. "Who??" They all wanted to know. "Me!!" The Shamash delivered the punchline with obvious gusto, to the delight of those around him.

The Chelemer arrived home later that week, and figured he will try his own hand at a comedic performance. He got right up there to the Bimah and announced to all and sundry, "Who is my father's son but not my brother?" When he was rewarded with a bunch of blank stares, he promptly took the cue. "The Shamash from Warsaw!" He gleefully announced.

This joke shows us what we look like when we don't know who we are. In "Who, What, When, Where" the first question is "Who?". "Who am I?" is the first question we need to be able to answer.

Sharing, but not Owning

Once you figure out where your shortcomings lie, there is no need to take blame for every single thing that goes wrong in your household. You must remember to also look at the big picture. A fellow, who had no issues with anyone besides for his wife, once told me that his troubles at home are all his fault. It bothers him when people in shul make a joke at his expense, so it must be that he is haughty and arrogant and that's why it bothers him when his wife yells at him in front of the kids every day.

When being disrespected hurts you, it doesn't make you haughty. It makes you human. You might want to see if there is something that you are contributing to the problem, but there is still a chance that you will find out that even after you address your findings, the problem persists. In that case, it might be time for additional intervention.

When you are willing to share the blame and admit to your own faults, you are opening yourself up to deeply satisfying relationships. But that's all you have to do; *share* the blame; it's not all yours.

Chinuch: Is it Only His Fault?

When your child does something wrong, it's very easy to say that he's the one to blame. Obviously, he's young and stupid, while you are so much older and wiser. But in the dead of the night, when you have a moment to think clearly, take the opportunity to consider: Am I in any way contributing to the problem? Is there something that I can change that will cause the situation to improve? Maybe it isn't ONLY the child's fault.

Being aware of your own defects, and we all know we have those, can give you the keen insight you need to be the best parent that you can possibly be.



Q&A



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

Q: My wife insists on wearing clothing that are below my standard, and even though I have asked her to change that, she refuses. I have a strong suspicion that the reason for that is that she wants to please her mother. This is very hurtful. How do I deal with this situation?

A: Of course, when it comes to sensitive topics, we always need to examine each one on a case by case basis. But as a general rule, barring any *halachic* infractions, a husband really can't make his wife do anything just to please him. He does not own her, and therefore he cannot make demands of her.

He can definitely bring something up and tell her that it's bothering him, but he can't force her to do something against her will just because he would like it. Just tell her that if she would make an effort to change, it would make you very happy.

But then there's the issue of her being afraid of her mother. When it comes to decisions within a marriage, nothing should come between the couple. Nobody's opinion matters. It should be only between a husband and wife. If she does not want to change, and it will *also* bother her mother, she needs to understand that her mother's opinion cannot be a factor.

There needs to be balance and respect. He needs to know that he can't make demands of her, while she needs to understand that she can't allow others' opinions to inform her marital decisions.

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call 718.841.6557 or e-mail rabbigruen@lehair.org
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