Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Naso |

Be Proactive!

Two Gifts; Two Reactions

A large chunk of this week's parsha concerns itself with the korbanos of the *nesi'im*. Upon the completion of the Mishkan the *nesi'im* volunteered to bring *korbanos* and Hashem accepted it from them.

For us to do *shnayim mikra* seems endlessly repetitive. The same *pesukim* over and over, twelve times. It seems that Hashem was *k'vayachol* very excited by these korbanos as He describes them over and over again. Despite all of their korbanos being identical, each Nasi gets his own space in the Torah where his korban is related in detail.

It is interesting to contrast the Torah's description of this gift of the *nesi'im* with a different gift, described in parshas Vayakhel והנש(י)א(י)ם הביאו את אבני השהם ואת אבני המלאים - *The nesi'im brought the expensive stones that were necessary for the bigdei kehunah*. The word nesi'im there is spelled without a *yud*. Rashi explains this as follows:

"While the *nesi'im* were the first to bring *korbanos* when the Mishkan was being dedicated, they were not first when donations were being solicited for its building. At the building of the mishkan their attitude was 'let the people bring donations and we will bring whatever is still needed at the end'. However it turned out that the only thing left for them to bring was these expensive stones. So once the *mishkan* was built they jumped in to be the first to bring *korbanos*. But since they were lackadaisical in the beginning and didn't jump in with donations in the beginning, their title here is missing a *yud*."

So we see that when the nesi'im brought valuable gemstones for the mishkan, they are sort of 'snubbed' for waiting until the end, but when they all brought a korban, there was nothing special about it, they each brought identical korbanos, the Torah praises it greatly. What can the Torah be teaching us here?

What is Value?

In relationships, very often it's not about *what* you do, but *how* you do it. You can buy your wife an expensive bracelet - like the gemstones the nesi'im brought - but if you're getting it because it's absolutely necessary at the moment, its value is debatable. If you bring home a ten dollar bouquet of flowers for no special reason, you accomplish more than when you order a hundred dollar bouquet to mitigate some crisis.

It's not what you do. It's your attitude, how you do it, and why you're doing it. When did you bring those expensive gemstones? Were you in crisis

mode, trying desperately to salvage a difficult situation? Or did you buy it just to be nice? When you're proactive you often accomplish much more than when you're reacting to a situation.

The *nesi'im* reacted very nicely, they saved the day by providing the missing stones in Parshas Vayakhel. They do not get recognition for that. It is only in our parsha when they weren't trying to save the day, but they jumped in and said, "we would like to be the first to bring korbanos", that Hashem appreciated their efforts. Actually Rashi says that they all wanted to bring their korbanos on the first day, but Hashem was so enamored by their gift *k'vayachol* that he requested for each one to be brought on his own day.

What is Shalom Bayis?

Many people fall into the trap of coasting along in their marriage. There is a certain perception out there that "Shalom Bayis" means 'the absence of fighting'. As long as my husband and I are not at each other's throats, we're okay, we have shalom bayis!

But, as many people find out once it's already too late, this is false. One must be proactive in a relationship. Don't say "I'll provide whatever you need". Be proactive, find something you can add to the relationship when it's *not* in crisis mode.

Some people go on expensive vacations, purchase expensive gifts, and then wonder why it's still not helping. By the time you're up to the stage where expensive gifts are *necessary*, they may no longer help! Of course your spouse should work on himself and 'get over it' more easily, but life becomes so much smoother when we take the little steps before the big steps become necessary.

You Can't Get Too Comfortable

Sometimes "good *shalom bayis*" is what causes problems. I was just dealing with a case like that. A couple had undergone some serious issues and were separated for five months. Baruch Hashem, after a lot of work the issues were ironed out, they got back together and life was good. They coasted along for ten months and slowly, old patterns began to resurface. Each party became somewhat self-absorbed again, and they slowly began drifting apart, all while under the impression that they're "happily married" once again.

The husband suddenly found himself in my office again wondering "What happened? We had such a good ten months! I thought everything was okay now". And that's the answer. There's no such thing as "a good ten months" without putting in any effort. Relationships need constant work, and if it's not going up, it's going down. It may not seem that way to you, but that's how it is in real life.

Don't Avoid Problems

Some people think this means we have to be on guard to avoid problems. But that's missing the point again. I'm not saying one should avoid problems. Stop focusing on the negative! What we're talking about is being productive, creating positivity - not avoiding negativity.

Obviously when there are problems there is no *shalom bayis*. But shalom bayis is so much more than a mere lack of problems, and it is something that requires work and effort.

You don't put gas in your car to avoid getting stuck on the highway. You fill up your car because that's what you need to do. In a relationship you should always be a step ahead. Not because you're trying to avoid a breakdown in the middle of the highway, simply because that's what you need to do.

An Ounce of Prevention

I often get "emergency" phone calls: "Rabbi Gruen, I must see you; right now. Maybe you can squeeze me in, maybe late night, maybe early morning".

If you're in a rush to get immediate help, chances are that there was something you've been overlooking up until now. "An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure". Stop overlooking things and going into crisis mode when it bursts in your face. Be proactive and enjoy your relationship

instead of fixing the holes that suddenly appear.

Chinuch; Don't Neglect Your Kids!

Parents are busy, we have large families *kein yirbu*, and a lot going on in our life. It is common to let matters slide, and just hope things will resolve on their own. We often neglect warning signs in our children, and then we wonder why they turn into full-blown problems. But children need to be tended to, we need to invest in them regularly.

It is very valuable when a parent reaches out to a child's teacher to tell her about his child. "My child responds better to this method", "This doesn't work well with my child". There are many little ounces of prevention we can give that are worth many a pound of cure. Even more valuable than that however, is learning the lesson the nesi'im learned. Rather than being the "savior" who comes in once there is an issue, let us be proactive and be the first to jump in with our gift.

-Q&A-

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

Question: We're going away for a week and my wife insists on making a good impression over there. She says we need to take along four sheitels, each one in its own box, and they can't be put in the luggage, we need to carry them onto the plane. Obviously, I told her we can't do that. What is she nuts? Four sheitels? Who does she think is going to be shlepping this? Anyway, the conversation quickly went sour and I'm not sure where I went wrong. Wasn't I right?

Answer: This is a typical scenario that expresses the need to learn proper communication. It's not about what you say, but how you say it. This isn't about how many sheitels to take along, or whether they belong in the luggage or not.

Whenever your wife (or your husband!) asks something of you, your first step is to listen. What is she saying? She's saying that she feels like she needs four sheitels; accept that. You can't argue that she would like to have four sheitels on the trip with her.

Once she feels validated you have room to express your feelings "I think it would be hard for me to carry four boxes onto the plane. You'll be holding the baby, and I need to take my tallis and tefillin too. It's not going to be easy". If you feel too intimidated to express your feelings, there's something wrong.That is something you should always be able to do. This has nothing to do with whether schlepping four sheitels is right or wrong. I accept that you would like me to schlep this, however, please understand that it is difficult for me to do it.

By the way, you can even leave the choice open. It's not a bad idea to say: "I'll do it if you really want me too. If there's a way you can work around it though, I'd appreciate it". So often when one feels validated and understood, when she doesn't feel challenged by you, it is very possible that she will accommodate you. It's important to know that often, all people want is to be understood, to feel validated.

I just want to add, you don't *always* have to express your feelings. Often it's better to just let it go, and accommodate her, by next week you'll have forgotten about it, so why make an issue of it? But when it's difficult for you, there is nothing wrong with expressing your feelings, provided that you have first accepted and validated your spouse's feelings.

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