Torah Lessons for the Home

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| Parshas Vayakheil |

Primacy of Closeness

Most Beloved by Hashem

As Sefer Shemos winds down, we're finishing with the parshiyos regarding the construction of the Mishkan. If we were to ask someone which donation was most valuable, his answer would give us a clue regarding his priorities. To someone who appreciates material value, the heavy pieces of gold or silver would be his pick. To another person, the answer would be the most expensive item, the rarest materials, or the object that was donated with utmost mesiras nefesh.

So what was Hashem's 'favorite' *terumah*, so to speak? Which object meant most to Him, which tells us what He perceives as most important? Rashi enlightens us on this: it was the *maros hatzovos*, the copper mirrors that the women brought, that were most cherished by Hashem. In fact, when the women initially brought their donation to Moshe Rabeinu, he was repulsed by those mirrors. After all, these were mundane objects through which the women beautified themselves. Understandably, Moshe did not deem their usage in the Mishkan as appropriate.

However, Hakadosh Baruch Hu thought otherwise. He said to Moshe, "Accept them because these are more beloved to Me than anything else." Hashem chose these mirrors over all the gold, silver, copper, and other valuable materials. Why? These were the mirrors that the women used in Mitzrayim to make themselves attractive to their exhausted, despairing husbands. It was thanks to their dedication toward their marriage and the sanctity of their home that they merited to perpetuate the existence of *klal Yisrael* despite the dire circumstances. Through these mirrors, the women aroused the warmth in their husbands, the hope and happiness that they yearned for. Indeed, those beloved mirrors were used to fashion the *kiyor*, which was used to bring *shalom* between husband and wife.

It seems that there was a rational element in Moshe's disgust. Yes, there is a part of this that could be used inappropriately. But on the other hand, Hashem says, when a woman's *kochos* are used appropriately, as they were in Mitzrayim, they are more beloved to Hashem than anything else.

Doing our duties in our marriage is not the mundane act that it appears to be. In this context, we understand the importance of *shalom bayis* and being close to one another. Not only is it something we must do, but it is actually most beloved by Hashem.

Our Most Important Endeavor

In the times of the Gemara, newly married husbands were asked "*matza o motza*?" If you found *chein* in your wife, you found *tov* and if not, you found death. Most concepts in life are not so black and white, but when it comes to marriage it's of paramount importance to Hashem that we find *chein* in

one another's eyes. It's either we have *shalom bayis* or we have no life at all.

Being alive is not only about being able to inhale and exhale. Real living is being happily married. If you're not happily married, you're not really living.

Even before understanding why *shalom bayis* is the most beloved thing in Hashem's eyes we must see what it means for us.

A wise *Yid* once told me that a person's biggest problem is when he doesn't have *shalom bayis*. As someone who's been talking to people on a daily basis for a few years on this topic, I can attest to how true this is. Why? This *Yid* explained that if an individual is struggling with financial issues, for example, he will struggle and he may even get some white hairs as a side effect, but at least he will have a wife to console him. Hashem created us in a way that we need companionship, we need to go through our challenges with someone at our side. If we don't have that, we're in the greatest trouble of all. A small trouble that one goes through alone can be far more difficult to bear than a great trouble shouldered in harmony.

But shalom bayis is not only about having someone to lean on in times of trouble. As Chazal tell us, the world is not set up in a way for us to be alone. Period. *Lo tov heyos adam levado*, irregardless of whether he's experiencing troubles or not.

Even more, when someone struggles at home, if they can't connect with their spouse, they're in a 24-hour struggle. It plagues them at work, in shul, even in their sleep.

It's true that some people who don't have *shalom bayis* get used to living in that sorry state. But that's not a reason to let it happen. Unfortunately, we see people getting used to a lot of unpleasant circumstances. If someone loses their eyesight they might get used to it. They don't look like they're dying, but the Gemara tells us that a blind person is considered like a dead person. The same holds true for poverty. Just because someone gets used to it doesn't detract from its terrible effects. Someone could get used to living with a missing limb. The fact that someone could get used to something unpleasant doesn't make the situation okay, and certainly not favorable.

Marriage as a Spiritual Endeavor

Now, this was all said from our perspective, but we have to know that from Hakadosh Baruch Hu's perspective, working on your marriage is purely *bein adam laMakom*. It's a spiritual endeavor. When the Chovos Halevavos writes about the importance of *bitachon*, he doesn't harp so much on the verses that obligate us to have *bitachon*, such as *bitchu baHashem adei ad* etc.. Rather, he focuses on the fact that without *bitachon* you can't serve Hashem.

There are certain keys in life without which we cannot serve Hashem. Only when we have the tranquility of being *boteiach beHashem* can we fulfill His will properly. I believe the same can be said about *shalom bayis*. If we want to serve Hashem right, we must first be happily married. We can't possibly build a Mishkan without that.

Furthermore, healthy *shalom bayis* is an integral component of *kedushas Yisrael*. When an individual feels deeply connected to their spouse, they find happiness and fulfillment in this relationship. Hashem set us up in a way that we need a certain *shemirah* in order to resist inappropriate connection. What looks mundane and almost inappropriate is actually most beloved to Hashem, when channeled correctly.

The *Yidden* in Mitzrayim were not only in a low place spiritually, but they were also depleted physically. They were sapped of their energy, poverty-stricken, and overworked. Pertaining to *kedushas Yisrael*, how did they manage? This is not my question. The nations of the world asked this, as we see in Parshas Pinchas. They would mock the *Yidden*, "Who do you think you are? Are you really the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov you tout yourself as? Look what the *mitzrim* are doing with your women." Thus, Hashem added His name to every family name, to serve as evidence that yes, the *Yidden's* descendants were pure and holy.

How were they able to stick together and build kosher Jewish homes in times of such immorality and depression? We find the answer in this week's *parsha*. The women were dedicated to this cause. They knew what they had to do to make it work.

The Torah tells us, don't assume it'll happen on its own. We must do our *hishtadlus*, each spouse with their part, to maintain this holiness in our home. Being attractive to a spouse is not only

about jewelry and makeup. Let's not forget that the Jewish women in Mitzrayim were severely overworked too. I also can't imagine that their wardrobes and cosmetics collection were very extensive. They had enough challenges and excuses to neglect their responsibilities to their husband. They did it anyway. Perhaps that's why those mirrors were most beloved. Those women were either expecting sextuplets or recuperating from the multiple births. What were they able to see in those mirrors? Perhaps it was just a smile, an expression of affection. Through investing their energy despite the trying circumstances, they merited not only for Hashem to value their mirrors above all other donations, but also to build the beautiful families that would later be *mekabeil* the Torah.

The Best Gift for Your Child

The beauty of a healthy *shalom bayis* doesn't only affect the couple itself. As parents, when we raise our family together with love and respect, we're setting up the home that Hashem envisioned for us. Those mirrors, the *maros hatzovos*, were what helped the couples in Mitzrayim bear the *tzva'os rabbos*, legions of *Yidden*, servants of Hashem. The way spouses interact affects their children so closely.

When children see their parents getting along they're automatically in a state of calm which gives them a sense of security. And if we want our children to take our words seriously, they must see that it's coming from a team. It's vital for children to see that their parents are united for their favor.

-Q&A-

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

Question: I don't like my husband's job. He's doing work that is below his dignity and I know he could do so much better. It doesn't help that my parents aren't happy about what he's doing either. How can I get him to see that he's really cut out for something more dignified?

Answer: It's always wise to be honest with ourselves in dissecting what is really bothering us.

Is this about my own dignity or am I truly concerned about him? If you care about him, it might very well be that your husband is very happy with what he's doing. This is not to say that your feelings don't count, but when you approach the issue from the angle that bothers you, you can deal with it right.

If your husband is happy about this, this is his decision. If you can't come to terms with this, that's another angle in the circumstances. It can even be that you and your husband are really both satisfied and you're just worried about your parents' opinion. This should certainly not be a factor affecting the dynamics of your marriage.

In the *megilla*, we find three marriage dynamics: Achashveirosh and Vashti, Haman and Zeresh, and, *lehavdil*, Mordechai and Esther. One of them buried the husband, one of them buried the wife, and one of them got along. What was the difference between them? Achashveirosh was on a quest to promote his own *kavod* using his wife, and Zeresh wanted to promote hers through Haman. If we want to promote ourselves through our spouse the love for the spouse is not real.

Esther and Mordechai, on the other hand, were concerned for one another. When there's that kind of mutual respect for one another, both husband and wife can respect the choices one another makes.

If the children see that their mother is proud of her husband, that he's an honest person and works hard to provide for his family, they grow up respecting both parents. If *shalom bayis* is the most beloved thing in Hashem's eyes it should be our priority, as well.

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