Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Bamidbar |

Killing Comparisons

Flags and Colors

In this week's parsha we learn about how the *shevatim* camped in the *midbar*; "with signs according to their forefathers". Rashi explains this in two ways. The first pshat is; each *shevet* had a uniquely colored flag, similar to that *shevet's* stone in the *choshen*. Rashi adds another *pshat*: They were arranged 'according to their forefathers'; "In the manner their forefathers were assembled around the bed of their father, Yaakov".

The first *pshat* introduces an interesting idea. We understand the purpose of different colored flags in a camp; so that when someone from outside would approach, he would know exactly who was where. But what purpose did the different colored stones serve in the *choshen*?

To Each His Own

Together with the second *pshat* in Rashi, this teaches us a remarkable lesson. Each *shevet* has their own identity, everyone has their own mission. When Yaakov Avinu was giving his *brachos*, each *shevet* received their own *bracha*, each *shevet* had their own strength. Yissachar was learning Torah and Zevulun was supporting him. In parshas Vayechi we find all kinds of different ideas and life missions for the various *shevatim*. Similarly, in Vezos Habracha we see that Moshe Rabbeinu also gave different *brachos* to different *shevatim*.

This is such an important lesson in life: Everyone is unique! Unfortunately, people suffer so much from unhealthy comparisons. But we each have our own place. We each have our own mission. We're not here to compare. We're not all here to be *shevet* Levi.

Some of Us Just Need Our Sleep!

When I speak to people, I see this all the time. So many people are hurt and suffering today, due to comparisons. So many people lead such complicated lives, and struggle with so much pain, because they compare themselves to their friends. "Ah, just look at that guy. When I'll be like that, everything will be good" – it's a killer. You can't live like that!

Somebody was just telling me last week that he was traveling somewhere with a bunch of friends. They were all having fun, sitting around and schmoozing, and he was totally exhausted and had to go to sleep. And it bothered him; why am I so tired? How

come everyone else has so much *koach* and I can't keep up? How come they can keep going and going and I have to recharge? Am I a loser? Am I supposed to push myself to keep up with them? Maybe I can also do it? Maybe I can't? Maybe they're just more capable than I am?

Who am I?

Luckily, there was someone there who noticed the way he was feeling and went over to him and said, "It's fine. Some people need a bed and some don't. What's your problem?" It's was so comforting for him to hear that it's okay. If I need to go to sleep now, that's fine. Maybe the other guy needs less sleep than I do. I am I, and he is he.

There's the Kotzker saying, "*Az ich bin ich veil du bist du,* – If I'm myself because you're yourself, *un du bist du veil ich bin ich* – and you're yourself, because I'm myself." It means: my self image is dependent on another. "*Bin ich nisht ich un du bist nisht du* – then I'm not myself and you're not yourself." I am me because that's who I am, you are you because that's who you are. Comparisons are unhealthy, and when it comes to relationships and *shalom bayis*, it escalates to a whole new level of unhappiness.

The Package Deal

There's the general problem of jealousy; it's one of the *aseres hadibros* - Lo Sachmod. You shouldn't be jealous of what someone else has וכל אשר לרעך, anything he possesses.

Actually some seforim explain this passuk as follows: if you're jealous of somebody because they have that אשת רעך or whatever it is that you're looking for, it could be somebody else's *husband*, it's the same thing. Remember - וכל אשר לרעך, it comes with a package. You'll never be happy being someone else. There's always something that comes along with it that you don't know about and probably would not need or want.

Your Home Looks Rosy Too

When you do feel jealous, I'd like to suggest two things for you to think about: First of all, remember that it's just an illusion.You never really get to see the whole picture. Maybe they don't get along behind closed doors, or are dealing with a challenging issue that no one is privy to. In fact, funny enough, it's very possible that it's *your* home and marriage that looks very rosy to them!

Secondly, it's not a good idea to compare because different people have different challenges and different dynamics. There are just so many myriad components and characteristics that make up a successful marriage. What works for someone else, might not work for you. Being unhappy about something unattainable isclearly pointless.

The Accountant is Dissatisfied

Ruchi* thought her neighbor had the perfect husband. "I'm not jealous," she said, "I want only the best for my neighbor. I just wish I could have it too!" First of all, that's also jealousy, it's still Lo Sachmod. But along with the *issur* - the comparison alone will cause you unhappiness.

An accountant can be making enough money to support his family, yet if other accountants are making more money, he may feel dissatisfied. While it's not being jealous of anyone in particular, the comparison can clearly make him feel inferior and despondent.

Your Spouse Is Best

I saw an interesting *vort* once. כיצד מרקדין לפני הכלה, Beis Shammai says; כלה כמות שהיא – "Don't lie about her, describe her as she is". Beis Hillel says: כלה נאה וחסודה, Always say that she's beautiful.

In truth, there is no *machlokess*. When you focus on the person, and you don't look at anyone else; she is the *kallah* now, so she's *na'eh*,

she's *chassudah* – she has everything, is truly beautiful and has positive qualities. The same holds true for every relationship which has its strengths and its qualities. It's only when you start comparing it to other people, and looking around, that you're bound to encounter a problem.

The Stingy Thief

Sometimes you look around and you think, "My wife spends so much money. My friend is married to a woman who doesn't spend that much, now *that's* a good spouse."

Someone complained that his wife lost a credit card. His friend said, "Did you call in to stop it?"

He said, "No. The person who found it is spending less money than she does!"

It may be a good joke, but at the end of the day, comparisons always work against you. First of all, it could be that her husband is suffering from the fact that his wife never spends money on him or is very stingy with the children. But even if you know that's not the case, what works for one person may not work for you.

When Comparisons Are Ok

Sometimes comparisons can be constructive. If you see a good working relationship, there's something that they're doing right, it's possible you can do it too. If your desire is to find out what can work for you, and what you can learn from them, then you can be successful. It's when you start to compare your relationship with your friend's, that you'll never be truly happy.

I keep on mentioning that; learn what *you* could do. What is that person *doing* that you can emulate and undertake to try to improve your relationship? It's not about copying exactly what that person is doing, because that may not work for you, but discovering , what that person is doing right so that you can try to do it as well.

Who Cares Why He's Buying Flowers?

But please! Don't learn from someone else what your spouse should do! "He buys his wife flowers, why can't my husband buy me flowers?" Such an approach will not get you get you anywhere. Maybe that person is buying flowers because they fought a whole week. Or – maybe they love each other. It's irrelevant. What you should ask, is "What can *I* do?" and if that person is doing something that you can emulate, by all means, go ahead and follow his example!

When you hear a *shiur* about marriage, it's about what a good marriage should look like. It's not about being disappointed or unhappy with what you have. Rather, it's about learning what *you* can do to improve your marriage and make things even better. Understand that we, like the *shevatim*, have different colors, we have different ideas, we have different flags, and we have different things that work for us. There's something beautiful about understanding the way Yaakov Avinu set it up. You're here, that person's there, and everyone has to do what works for them.

Chinuch: Each Child a Gem

All this applies equally to *chinuch habanim*. Again and again, I see children who were seriously affected because they were constantly compared to siblings, classmates or other people.

So many parents tell me, "You know this kid is only *nachas*, but that one…". You know what it does to you when you look at it like that? And your child feels it too, no question about that. Subconsciously, it's all there.

It's the wrong message to teach children – you'll only be good when you're compared to your brother or your sister. Well, not just any brother or sister. When you learn like your brother and you're neat like your sister and you're funny like your uncle, and you're well behaved like your cousin, that's when you'll be the right track. It doesn't work. Each person

in a family has their own strengths and qualities and challenges. Nobody should feel put down because they don't have what someone else has, or a combination of what they all have!.

Klal Yisrael was set up to have different colors, different styles and different life missions. There's the Kohen, Levi, and Yisrael and they're all *shivtei Kah*. Everything was set up in a certain way. It's fine for each of us to have our own strengths and our own *hatzlacha*.

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-Q&A-

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

Question: Our son is what you term "The Fragile Child" and at the beginning of the school year we explained to his rebbe what you shared with us about this personality type. Now the *melamed* called to say that because he knows that my son needs lots of extra attention, he tries to be nice and overlook his erratic behavior, but he keeps on breaking the rules! What would you suggest?

Answer: First of all I have to commend you for your communication with the melamed. It is always very beneficial to the child. Interestingly, it's often the children who need lots of love and attention, who are the ones who also need a lot of structure. And it should never be a contradiction.

If a child keeps on misbehaving and you keep overlooking it and letting it go, why should he not continue acting out? Just because you love him? He may love you too, but why should he change his behavior? For whatever reason, he wants to misbehave. It could be because he's getting attention, or he's just jumpy or antsy, or just because.

If you keep overlooking something, you can be sure it will happen again. You must show the child that "I love you and I care for you, but this is just not acceptable." Since you're talking about a sensitive child, call him aside where no one is around and tell him, "Today I really want you to sit quietly." Look at him and say, "It means so much to me when you behave, and it's so much easier for me to teach when you're with me. Otherwise, it disturbs me and I lose my train of thought, I might have to send you out. and that is something I don't want to do." And if that child tests you, which he might, you send him out. One must parent with structure, healthy boundaries and strict love. Not tough love – strict love. People sometimes have a negative connotation to the word strict.

Don't send him out and say, "I don't need you here; you're disturbing the whole class." Send him out in a dignified way, and then later tell him that it bothered you so much to send him out. "I really don't want to be forced to send you out again, but if I have to, I will. Please help me out and make sure it won't be necessary."

This is a general lesson in parenting and in other areas as well. If you keep on tolerating something unacceptable, chances are it will happen again. Don't be surprised when it does. So ,to reiterate, don't ever think that tolerating something is what's going to make it stop, and that not tolerating has to come with being tough, mean, and suffocating. The trick is to always remember to maintain a healthy balance.

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