RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

# Torah Lessons for the home

## PARSHAS MIKEITZ

## TORAH THERAPY

The following story was told by Reb Meir'l Premishlaner as he heard it from his father, Reb Aron Leib zy"a. Reb Aron Leib related that he once made *aliyas neshama*, his soul went up to Heaven and he was privy to an occurrence. He saw two *neshamos* come to the beis din shel maalah, one of them having passed away young and the other after having lived a long life. Reb Aron Leib was surprised when in the Olam HaEmes, the younger one was referred to as an old man and the older one was referred to as a child. Upon asking, he was told that the younger person accomplished many things in his short life, whereas the older one squandered his years and didn't come up with much and was therefore regarded as a young child (See also Yerushalmi Brachos 2:8 for a Talmudic source to this idea).

Reb Meir'l taught this lesson using the opening *passuk* in this week's parsha. "*Vayehi mikaitz shenasayim yamim* – It was at the end of two years of days..." Chazal teach us that the word Vayehi has a connotation of sadness: How sad is it when at the end of a person's years, they are regarded as mere days, without much accomplishment to show for them.

Interestingly we see something similar going on in relationships. People sometimes tell me that they try to be very helpful at home and make every effort to be present and available, yet it's never enough. Their spouses always want more. On the other hand, they see people who do much less, and whatever they do is appreciated. Less time is evaluated as more time and more time is evaluated and valued as less. Why is that?

The answer often is that when it comes to relationships, so much of it depends on the quality, not on the quantity. Not *how much*, but *how*. You can spend the whole day with your wife, but it all depends on the attitude you project while sitting there. What you say and how you say it. If you're thankful, considerate and caring, you offer help and support, in the end you may not be doing much, but you'll give the feeling that you're there when needed.

Chazal teach us: "*Emor me'at ve'aseh harbeh* - speak little and do much." This can allude to adding the "few words" that make a big difference in how your actions will be taken, and a small deed can be considered doing much! Just something short like: "It's my pleasure to help you...", or "Spending time with you is so refreshing...", can turn WHAT you do into something seen as big. Being expressive and showing positivity accomplish a lot. The words you add, add to the quality and make your actions worth that much more.

# Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I've been working on issues in my marriage and other areas and have seen several heimishe therapists. I was burnt by the wrong professionals many times and I wanted to see someone who can get to the bottom of the problem, not just treat the symptoms.

I did research and came across a professional non-Jewish psychologist. He came highly recommended and I know he treated other heimishe people. I heard you mention the danger of seeing non-Jewish psychologists in a lecture. But here's the thing, I didn't go to him with the notion of separation or divorce or "let's see IF there's hope". My only goal is to make my marriage work. What's the worst-case scenario in seeing a non-Jewish professional?

I'm reaching out to hear your opinion about this simply because I don't have anyone else to ask. (Neither my husband nor I have a *rav*, which is a little unfortunate). I genuinely want to hear what you think about someone seeing a non-Jewish professional when circumstances call for it.

This probably wouldn't be my first choice, but I've seen several Jewish, heimishe professionals, and for whatever reason, they were not able to help us. We needed a different solution. (Moreover, one of them actually told my husband and myself on different occasions that he doesn't see our marriage working out. I promptly stopped seeing him and made a fierce commitment that nobody, no matter how professional, will decide for me whether or not I should stay married).

I also find that when I see a heimishe therapist with general experience, they see a typical couple with typical issues that just need to 'work things out'. People from the box only see solutions from that box. That just didn't work for us. So I ventured a little out of my comfort zone, did some research and got names of a few non-Jewish therapists. Perhaps I'm wrong, but if the issue under treatment isn't about something pertaining to Yiddishkeit, how can seeing a non-Jewish person be a problem? I know that he's aware of the halachic/cultural needs of Heimishe people and I've seen it firsthand in my first session. Still, I know I'm partial here, so I'm reaching out to you to hear an objective, honest opinion.

Thank you.

# Answer:

This is an important and relevant question. Is it okay to go to a non-Jewish professional? Is there a time and place for such a setup? I commend you for seeking an objective opinion since a person cannot be objective when they're dealing with their own situation. I don't know your circumstances at all, and while that can often be a disadvantage when it comes to deciding on serious and sensitive issues, it might just make my ideas even more objective, and even less partial.

I want to start with a fundamental truth. Hashem gave us a Torah, Toras Chaim - a way of life. The Torah is not just a manual to know how many hours to wait between eating meat and dairy and what one is or isn't allowed to do on Shabbos.

True, the Torah has 613 mitzvos, positive and negative commandments, but there's so much more to it. Most of Sefer Beraishis has no mitzvos at all, yet is full of lessons from lives of the Avos. There's so much *mussar* in Sefer Devarim. And there's so much in between. It's not like a user manual you can set aside once you know the instructions. The Torah teaches us a way of life in all respects: relationships, financials, emotions, where to go, when to come, and so on.

There is no question you can ever ask, no circumstance you'll ever deal with, for which you won't find guidance in the Torah. You may not find explicit answers in the *pesukim*, but if you consult with *daas Torah*, a person who has a deep understanding of Torah, you'll get answers from the Torah. It's all encompassing.

Anyone who feels that they're dealing with something that doesn't need - or cannot get - guidance from the Torah is already mistaken. Especially when it comes to a marriage: How to be married... How to respect a husband or wife... Obligations to one another. It's all in the Torah. If you're going anywhere else to get guidance on these issues, it's already taking you away from where you should be going.

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Chazal teach us, *"Asei lecha rav vehistalek min hasafek* – acquire a mentor and you will avoid doubt." Why? Because often, we're not capable of interpreting Torah lessons on our own. It's normal to need guidance and *daas Torah*.

You mentioned in passing that 'it's a little unfortunate' that both of you don't have a rav to consult with, but that may actually be your biggest problem. Many people find themselves in this situation and it's more than "a little unfortunate". It's fundamentally unfortunate. You cannot be committed to what Hashem wants if you don't have a rav's guidance. Someone who has *daas Torah* himself also needs a rav to clarify his issues. A person cannot be objective when it comes to their own issues.

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The Chassam Sofer and others tell us that *daas baal habayis* – the opinion of the layperson – is opposite of *daas Torah*. Torah guidelines are not necessarily the ones we would come up with on our own. In fact, listen to a "simple" halacha shiur on any topic – *bishul akum,* the use of air conditioners on Shabbos, etc. - and see how much you don't know. Unless you're extremely learned, whichever topic you'll choose, you'll see that there's a vast amount you don't know. This is why we need to be guided by a mentor and can't rely on our own *sechel*.

As an example, you may ask a rav about something as basic as a vacation destination. What could the Torah have to say about that? You'd be surprised at all the issues that can come up.

This is all the more true when it comes to someone who not only isn't immersed in Torah, but isn't committed to Torah at all. A non-Jew won't make sure that everything he says is in line with Torah ideals. Where are you going from there? How can you get guidance about issues pertaining to a Yiddishe home from someone to whom this doesn't matter? He may be respectful of Yiddishkeit and 'culturally aware', but what does he *really* know? Nothing. And therefore cannot be relied upon.

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Time and again, people share with me the advice they got from non-Jewish professionals in very sensitive areas. These are just a few, but there are many more. Advice regarding obligations and responsibilities of a husband to a wife and vice versa – these are clearly delineated in the Torah and a non-Jewish therapist cannot be sensitive to these nuances; family planning. Advice about withholding certain things from a spouse.

Advice about family planning and children's education must always come from Torah-true sources. Any advice on such issues should always be discussed with a rav. All decisions in a Yiddishe home must be Torah'dig.

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I want to point out that this isn't limited to non-Jewish therapists but can even be true of those that were trained by non-Jews, and are not necessarily entirely committed to a Torah perspective.

There is the concept of *chochmah bagoyim taamin* – there is wisdom among the general population. Jewish therapists who adopted secular ideas can also bring value to the table. But always through a strong filter of a Torah perspective. So either go to a Torah-committed professional, or check everything with your *daas Torah*.

Self-care, physical and mental health are all important, even (and especially) according to the Torah. But our priority is our obligation to Hashem, even when it's not so comfortable. For some people, it can be psychologically draining to keep Shabbos. Still, we have no choice but to fulfill our Torah duties. Self-care is not a non-Jewish concept. Many rabbonim go on vacation. Chazal teach that a pleasant wife and home make a person content. But self-care can never be a contradiction to Torah and when talking to a non-Jew you'll be missing that sensitivity.

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When an issue can only be helped by a non-Jew, make sure to check with your rav if that advice is Torah-true. But in the case of this letter writer, it doesn't seem like only a non-Jew can help. There are thousands of Jewish professionals and their only common denominator is their religion. Why would you specifically need the help of someone not Jewish? Is it possible that you're running away from a certain Torah commitment, albeit subconsciously? My suggestion is that you try to find a Torah-committed therapist to help you out.

But even more than that, I would advise you and your husband to find a rav to guide you. So many issues can fall away when we live our lives according to the directives of our Toras Chaim. When we do things that are against Torah *hashkafa*, even when they seem to bring about desired results, it will not end up working against you. The only way to see long term results is by doing the right thing according to Torah. In the intimate areas of marriage, the most sensitive parts of relationships, the most critical parts of life, will only be successful when lead *al pi Torah*.

If your rav sends you to a non-Jewish professional and guides you in implementing that advice, you'll get much further. Find someone who is knowledgeable, competent and caring, and is committed to guide you according to the Torah.

**Rabbi Shimon Gruen**

## TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

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