Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Vayechi |

Lessons of Yosef and His Brothers

PARSHAS VAYECHI: LESSONS FROM YOSEF AND HIS BROTHERS

After the passing of Yaakov an interesting incident is recounted in the Torah. It's a lot of *pesukim* (50:15-21) but it pays to read them and see what lessons we can gain. The Torah tells us: "After Yaakov passed away, Yosef's brothers were afraid that perhaps Yosef would take the opportunity to avenge himself for all that they had done to him. And so the brothers sent a message to Yosef telling him in the name of Yaakov to forgive his brothers. When Yosef heard their message he cried. Then the brothers came and offered themselves as slaves to Yosef, if only he would forgive them. Yosef reassured them that they had nothing to fear. 'Am I G-d?' he asked them. 'You intended ill, but G-d intended it for the good' and then he continued to comfort them." Let us examine these *pesukim* and see which lessons we can glean.

LESSON 1: DON'T LET BYGONES BE BYGONES

Yaakov passed away after living in *Mitzrayim* for seventeen years. This means that the brothers were already living in close proximity to Yosef for all of these years, and we can assume that they shared in family *simchos* and coexisted peacefully for quite some time. By the time Yaakov passed on, forty nine years had already elapsed from the day a seventeen year old Yosef was sold by his brothers. Yosef was now sixty six years old and the past thirty six years of his life he had known only comfort, glory, and power as Egypt's prime minister. Why would he still seek revenge for what his brothers had done to him so long ago? Why were his brothers afraid?

But the *passuk* is teaching us something very important here. When you have wronged someone, *never* think it's ok! If you've taken all the steps to rectify your misdeed, and the person you have wronged says he forgives you; then it's fine. But as long as the person you have wronged hasn't clearly said that he's gotten over it, you can never assume that it's ok. Don't think that the other person is making mountains out of molehills, or should really learn to let things go etc. you have to take care of your part. Don't delegitimize another person's pain. It could be that when *you* were in a similar situation you got over it, but that doesn't affect your spouse's emotions in any way. If you inflicted pain, you can't assume that it disappeared. As far as you're concerned, the pain is still there.

In the beginning of this week's *parsha* (48, 7) Rashi tells

us of how Yaakov apologized to Yosef for not burying his mother Rochel properly. Here too, the Torah teaches us this lesson. Did Yosef really accuse Yaakov of being unfair to his mother? Certainly Yosef understood that Yaakov was justified in his behavior. But if we caused someone pain, we can't assume that the person was not pained by our actions. Of course it's easy to understand and accept this when pain was inflicted on you, but the trick is to do so when it's the other way around. It is our responsibility to own up to whatever it is that we did and to ask for forgiveness.

LESSON 2: INVENTING STORIES FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE

There's another lesson here that we already discussed at length last week (*parshas vayeishev* 5778) so I'll just mention it briefly. Yaakov never instructed the brothers to tell Yosef to forgive them, it was an invention on the part of the brothers. But this is another example of the Torah attitude towards dishonesty. Dishonesty is a tool that may be used if it will promote peace and goodwill. Of course the Torah tells us מדבר שקר תרחק – distance yourself from dishonesty, but if the lie is necessary to restore harmony, then it may certainly be used. (For more on this topic listen to the abovementioned *shiur* which is available on TorahAnytime.com).

LESSON 3: EMUNAH – THE ANTIDOTE TO TEARS

When we look at how Yosef responded to the brothers we learn yet another powerful lesson for our relationships. As hard as we work to be nice and to be good spouses, it is simply inevitable that we will hurt our spouses once in a while or that our spouses will hurt us. "And Yosef cried when they spoke to him". There are many reasons given for his tears at this junction, but it is possible to say that Yosef cried simply because he was reminded of the pain that he had experienced all those years ago. The brothers had inflicted terrible pain on Yosef and he wept at the memory.

But Yosef knew how to deal with hardship, he knew how to deal with pain; and he said: "Am I G-d? Who cares what you did? G-d had a wondrous plan for me, and He is the One that brought me to *Mitzrayim*!"

Emunah is such a powerful tool for dealing with distress. Of course one must do *hishtadlus* and try to improve his situation. Of course it doesn't mean that one should just accept abuse and blame it on Hashem. But it so important to have something to fall back on, no matter how difficult things get. In the midst of every difficulty we can take the cue from Yosef and realize "I am not Hashem. Hashem loves me and is doing what is the very best for me."

LESSON 4: YOU HAVE THE KEY

The *pessukim* end off, telling us of how Yosef continued to comfort the brothers and how he promised to continue supporting them financially and to be nice to them in general. This is another great lesson for us: always work to improve your relationships. If your husband wronged you; don't wait for him to take the first step and ask forgiveness. You go ahead and be nice to him. It is only right for you to wait for your husband to make it up to you. It is only right that he should be the one to apologize. It's true, it's right. But remember that you hold the key to your relationships.

You can always salvage the situation by making the effort on your end. Here we have ten brothers who made Yosef suffer, yet he is the one comforting *them*. So while it's nice when people do the right thing and apologize when they're supposed to, don't think that your relationship must suffer just because your spouse hasn't worked up the nerve to take responsibility and apologize. There is always something you can do to improve your relationship.

CHINUCH: ALL OF THE ABOVE

Some people don't like that I constantly compare *shalom habayis* to *chinuch habanim*, but what can I do? I feel that they're really very similar. For instance, when you hurt a child's feelings don't say "Nu, come on, snap out of it already". You hurt his feelings and now you have to apologize; you can't pretend that nothing happened. Don't suffocate his emotions, don't tell him when he should have gotten over it. Just like Yosef's brothers didn't assume that just because forty years had passed

everything was okay now; they had hurt him and they took responsibility. Same thing for you; if you hurt someone, whether your husband, your wife or your child, you must own up to it and take responsibility.

Next lesson: אלקים חשבה לטובה, as much effort as we put in to raising our children to the best of our abilities we must remember; Hashem is running the show. התחת אלקים אנכי – Are we G-d? We can only do our best, but ultimately everything is in Hashem's hands. So if your child does something that gets you upset, don't agonize over it. Of course you must do your best as a parent, but ultimately, just as your destiny is in Hashem's hands, so is your child's, and you must remember that.

And finally: You have the key; and this is especially true when dealing with children. Don't let negativity linger. Keep showering your child with kindness, even when he upset you. Even when your child broke the rules, you keep following your rules, being the best parent you can be. Even when your child is wrong, you be the mature one and take the proper steps to mend the situation.

-Q&A-

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

Question: In your book The Basics of Shalom Bayis, you have a chapter called "10 Mistakes People Commonly Make in Marriages". One of the mistakes that you list is "It doesn't pay to expect anything in marriage". But is that really a mistake? Don't expectations just set you up for disappointment? Please elaborate.

Answer: The *seforim* tell us that even in *avodas Hashem*, one must be a שמח בחלקו, one must be content with what he has. On the one hand you always have to strive for more and aim higher, but on the other hand you have to be happy with what you have. It's a fine balance but ultimately, that's the way it is. If you're not proud of your accomplishments, chances are that you'll stop accomplishing. But then again, if you're too proud of your accomplishments, you won't be driven to seek more. So it's a tough balance to keep, but it's healthy to be in balance.

It's actually interesting that you're asking this question, and I'm going to assume that you didn't actually read my book, because in that chapter I don't really discuss ten mistakes. I discuss five topics, wherein the attitude should really be balanced, but people tend to take one polarized extreme. Each extreme is a mistake. So actually both angles are explained in that chapter: Mistake #9 is "You should really expect a lot, marriage is great!" while #10 is "It doesn't pay to expect anything, Marriage is a disaster." And the error in both of these extreme attitudes is explained there at length.

Just like the general example of *avodas Hashem*, there is a balancing act to be accomplished in life. Yes, expectations for your wishes to be carried out will set you up for disappointment and unhappiness. But just to give up and expect nothing at all leaves you with no incentive to work on your marriage. "My spouse is anyway no good", "I'll never get anything out of this anyway"… So as mentioned I think that we both agree that having specific expectations and being unhappy when they are not met, is very wrong and can be very disappointing. At the same time, it is healthy to understand that any difficulty can be resolved, any miscommunication can be corrected, and any relationship can be enhanced.

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