RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Tzav

The Greatness of Repentance

In this week's Parsha, we learn that the Korban Asham, and the Korban Chatos, both brought to atone for sins transgressed, were considered "Kodshei Kodoshim", whereas the Shelamim, which was brought for other purposes, was considered just "Kodesh". The Abarbanel explains that this distinction brings out the greatness of a Baal Teshuva.

Someone who once committed a sin, is not intrinsically less than a Tzaddik. On the contrary, after bringing the proper *korban* his sin is wiped out. Not only that; because this person had already tasted sin, and still he was able to abandon it, he is on an even greater level than a Tzaddik, who had never even tasted the allure of sinning.

In a similar vein, Reb Ahron of Belz Zatzal brings a midrash from the Gemara that a Yid never slept through the night in Yerushalayim while bearing any sin. There were Korbanos in the morning and Korbanos in the evening every day in Yerushalayim, and those served to atone for any sins committed in the twelve hours prior. As soon as someone committed a sin, he was able to bring a Korban and repent. However, this does not explain how it is possible that no one ever bore sin overnight. After all, they had to wait until the next morning to bring their atonement. Reb Ahrele explains that after a sinner brought a Korban, his sin was eradicated. Completely erased retroactively. It was as if it never occurred. And that is why it was considered *as if* they never spent a night bearing any sin.

This is the power of repentance and atonement. You get a clean slate.

For our homes to be a *mikdash me'at*, our relationship with our spouse should be similar to our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It would do us well to take a lesson from this Parsha. If Hashem can forgive us for a transgression in a way that completely eradicates it, we should certainly try and do the same for our families. Whether it's a spouse, a child, or even just an acquaintance, learn to forgive and forget.

We tend to hold onto others' offenses and repeatedly bring it up to them, especially if it happens again. But once that person apologizes to us or otherwise makes it right, we have got to *move on*. Even if they repeat the wrongdoing, that does not deem the first offense unresolved. Do not bring up the previous ones ever again.

This holds true for children as well. Once they say they're sorry, let it go. They apologized. This case is closed. Don't prove that they're not sorry, or harp on the other times it happened and

how past apologies didn't help. You can talk about the future, how you're certain it won't happen and even what you might have to do if it does repeat itself, but don't make the past episode seem like it's forever ongoing. If they do it again, deal with just that instance and do not bring up the previous time they messed up.

While this is not an easy feat, it is something that will be very beneficial to us and those around us. We would be in big trouble if Hashem carried around the baggage of all our previous transgressions and mishaps. Let's not do that to others, either.

•

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen

Thank you so much for all your useful tips and ideas.

My wife is a very sensitive woman and she gets offended very easily. Every other day there's a new "world war" in our house, because I – the husband – am not so sensitive and I don't even realize that I said or did something that will set her off. She immediately overreacts, and because she is hurt so deeply, she can't forgive me no matter how many times I apologize to her and explain myself.

I feel as if I'm in a deep abyss with no way out. We went for help, but the results were the opposite of what we would've wanted.

I think we both know that I'm not trying to hurt her, but we can't seem to get along, I feel like we're in a gridlock. Please provide some insight to help us snap out of this constant pattern of recrimination.

Answer:

Some people, when they encounter such a question, will be quick to assume that this is the case with all women. That is not true. Hyper-sensitivity is not exclusive to women, although women do tend to be softer than men (see Bava Metzia 59a). There are more men than you would imagine who are ultra-sensitive to things their wife says or does, to the point where their wives don't know what to do with them! I

actually wrote a book about sensitivity and fragility, and how it impacts relationships all the time, it's called "Get Along With Everyone". You might benefit from reading it, but I'll try to briefly guide you here with some pointers.

The truth is, that it isn't so much about the sensitivity itself, as sensitive people aren't necessarily hard to live with at all. It's most often more of a personality clash between the couple, where one is simply not naturally sensitive enough to the hyper-sensitive needs of their spouse. Differences in personality are a completely normal part of marriage. In fact, you wouldn't have wanted both of you to be ultra-sensitive! I've seen couples like that and it tends to make for a very volatile situation. So it isn't about "fixing" either of you, as much as finding a way to make the relationship work for both of you.

•

Couples often have different perceptions of things and genuinely do not realize what their spouse is going through. You really don't mean any harm, and yet your wife constantly takes offense by your well-meaning criticism, or what you perceive as harmless comments.

Well, you have your work cut out for you. You need to learn more about who your wife is, what ticks her off and why. At the same time, she needs to learn about *your* thought processes and why she shouldn't take offense so easily. Learning someone else's thinking patterns isn't easy, and certainly not natural, but it's easier than living with conflict, and it's a shame to not learn from the experiences.

•

The fact that you don't think what you said or did was wrong, does not mean make it right. People are wired differently and what doesn't even scratch the surface for you might bother her deeply. Sensitivity is an inborn nature, it isn't right or wrong, some people are born with more sensitivity and others with less. Your conflict is not born of the question whether it's more proper to be sensitive, or not. It is simply how the two of you were created.

Keep in mind that feelings are like a dream. It is real to the person who dreamed it, even if you both know that the event didn't actually happen. After all, the dream happened! It can actually have a real physical effect on them, such as an accelerated heartbeat or sweating. Feelings are also real to the person experiencing it, even if they can logically refute it if they try. Denying that their feeling exists or trying to show them that their feeling is wrong can make things much worse.

Address the situation for what it is. When you know that this is how your wife is feeling, learn to understand it. Find a way to deal with her in a more delicate manner. Even if you don't think that you're being offensive or teasing her, if this type of talk or action has ticked her off in the past, stay away from it. Accept the fact that this is who she is and work with it.

•

You might think that it's easier for you to focus on teaching her about *your* style, and proving how innocent your comments really are. Please don't make that mistake. Don't waste your time trying to refute her claims of past transgressions or diminish what she is saying. Trying to explain to her why she is mistaken in thinking that you intentionally hurt her is futile, and can actually cause even more hurt feelings, she may feel insulted because you think she's overreacting! Sensitivity is a purely emotional state of mind, and trying to beat it with logic is an exercise in futility. Instead, own up to it and apologize. You might want to add that while you understand that this isn't a justification, you honestly meant no harm. But only after clarifying that you're genuinely sorry for the hurt feelings. Even if she doesn't accept the apology graciously, do it anyway.

•

In general, going forward, try to keep your interactions with her overwhelmingly positive and shower her with attention, acceptance and sweetness. Usually, sensitive people have greater emotional needs, and feeding those needs will only benefit you.

Once you take the time to understand how a sensitive person functions, it will be much easier to navigate your relationship with her. You will understand where she is coming from, and the fact that you meant no harm does not mitigate her pain. By hyping up the positive, staying away from the questionable, and apologizing when she gets hurt (even if you don't understand it), you will find a way out of your "abyss" and enjoy a mutually satisfying relationship with her.

•

Having said that, it's important to stay grounded and not get sucked into a cycle of constant complaining and blaming. You can calmly hear her out when she gets upset and tell her that you understand how she's feeling, but don't think you must take the whole blame or twist yourself into a pretzel to please her. If you hurt her, you should certainly apologize, but if you feel that she is completely off the mark, let her know that you understand her pain and feel for her, without bending over backwards to apologize or make up for the perceived offense.

It is generally advisable to remember that it often may have nothing to do with you. She might simply be lashing out at you because she's hungry, or tired, or because someone said something negative to her that day. Don't point this out to her, because she will just become angrier. Just know that it may not necessarily be about you, and move on.

Even in the event that you feel that an explanation is necessary on your part, do not explain or justify yourself before validating her feelings and empathizing with her pain. She might not be inclined to listen to you otherwise. Also, make sure your "explanation" doesn't come across as a justification. Be clear about how you felt or meant without necessarily being right, and certainly not her being wrong!

•

In closing, I'd like to share some advice with those sensitive souls who may be reading this:

Learn from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Don't make it difficult for others to apologize to you. When they say they're sorry, accept their apology.

Once you receive an apology, forgive. It doesn't say anywhere that people who are sensitive are exempt from forgiving and moving on.

If you think this letter may have come from your spouse, try to discover if there is anything you can do to make their life a bit easier. Perhaps you might want to politely and non-offensively educate him or her about what your needs are and if there are certain things that he or she should definitely stay away from.

And finally, it would probably be wise for you to try and not get so hurt every time, not by changing your nature but by learning more about why he or she says or does certain things, and realize that they genuinely do not mean to hurt you.

If both of you can spend a bit of time getting to know each other on a deeper level, you will be able to come towards each other in peace and harmony b'ezras Hashem.

All the best, Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: TZAV 5781

TO CONTACT RABBI GRUEN PLEASE CALL **718.841.6557** OR E-MAIL **RABBIGRUEN@LEHAIR.ORG**
TO SUBSCRIBE TO RECEIVE THE WEEKLY ESSAY, PLEASE EMAIL PARSHALESSONS@LEHAIR.ORG

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SEND ANY QUESTIONS, ON THIS TOPIC OR ANY TOPIC TO RABBIGRUEN@LEHAIR.ORG