Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Metzora |

Curing Egotism

A Dose of Humble-Grass

This week's parsha begins with the *metzora's* purification process. "And the *kohen* shall take some cedar wood, red thread and hyssop". Rashi comments that the cedar wood is taken "because this man was haughty, like the tall cedar". The hyssop is taken to teach him humility "So that he may learn from the humble hyssop grass".

Everyone knows that *nega'im* are a punishment for speaking Lashon Hora. But now we're learning the source of the problem; why was this individual disparaging others in the first place? Chazal tell us it comes from haughtiness. All interpersonal problems are rooted in arrogance, and thus the *metzora* is punished - "Alone he shall sit; outside of the encampment".

The punishments of the Torah have to be understood not as acts of vengeance by an angry god, but as a natural consequence for our sins (this is not our subject now but is discussed at length in the Shela Hakadosh). If someone is haughty and constantly looking down on others, he simply *cannot* live in the company of people. "Alone he shall sit". It is not the Torah that forces man into isolation; *his haughtiness* isolates him from the rest of mankind. Since he may not notice this, however, the Torah takes the step of physically removing him from the company of man. This drives the point home to him. "You are separating yourself in your arrogance!"

The Great Humble Bachur

Most relationship problems disappear with a bit of humility. While we may think humility is reserved for the truly great; such as Moshe Rabeinu, humility is actually a necessary component in any relationship.

A *bachur* once went to meet with a *shadchan* and began enumerating all his great virtues. The *shadchan* wasn't so impressed and told the *bachur* that no one will want to marry him with his arrogant attitude. Accepting the *shadchan's* criticism, the *bachur* returned to *yeshiva* and began an in-depth study of the subject of *anavah*. After three weeks the bachur returned to the *shadchan* with a request "Please only *redt* me girls with millionaire fathers who can support a treasure like me for life"! The *shadchan* was shocked, "Didn't you go work on your humility??" "Yes I did! And now, besides

for all my other qualities, I'm an *anav* too!"

Who is Humiliating You?

While the above is a cute story, it is absolutely necessary to do the intrapersonal work on gaining a humble attitude, before embarking on any interpersonal relationship. I once heard the following gem from Rabbi Manis Friedman: "It's either 'humiliation' or 'humility'; which one you will experience is your choice." Everyone experiences humiliation, only that if you're humble, it doesn't affect you!

The humble person is happier; his life is much less complicated. He doesn't constantly get hurt by others. He is able to admit mistakes, acknowledge and learn from them. You must be able to apologize. Some people are ready (after much convincing) to admit they erred. But I should admit it to you too?!

In the midbar some yidden declared האם תמנו לגווע, "Are we all completely doomed to death?" (Parshas Korach). Tzaddikim put an interesting twist on this passuk "Are we complete, and ready to die"? If one is complete and without flaw, there is no reason for him to live any longer. We all have flaws, and as long as we're here, humility means to recognize them, acknowledge them, and correct them.

The Root of Everything

"Humility is the source of all good character traits!" (Iggeres HaRamban). Ego stands in the way of everything in a person's relationships. אין אני והוא יכולין לדור במ־דור אחד - "Hashem cannot be together with the arrogant" (Sotah 5a). We all know that the *shechina* comes to dwell between a couple who live together peacefully. But in a home where there is arrogance there is no *shechina* and no *shalom*.

An arrogant wife finds it impossible to express gratitude. "*I* should be grateful to *him*? You mean Big Me needs something from *him*?" Izzy* once boasted to me about the extended business trips/vacations he constantly took. Did you ever thank your wife for allowing you to go on these trips?" I asked him. "Thank *her*?" he responded, "If not for my business trips she would have nothing, no shopping, no home decorating, nothing. And you're saying I should thank her for allowing me to go? "

Dig Down

In order to build a home you need to dig down first. When you build a house it needs a foundation, and a home too, needs to be founded on good *middos*. The first good *middah* is acquired by digging down and becoming humble. Now, no one needs to be a *schmatte*, you don't have to cease to exist as an independent entity. You don't always have to be right, but you don't always have to be wrong either.

Boruch's* parents sent him to me immediately after he was engaged. They were concerned about his extreme selfishness affecting his marriage. Boruch* candidly admitted that he never took his roommate's feelings into consideration. After all, if Boruch has an opinion does anyone else's matter? His parents were very wise in being concerned about such an attitude.

Practice Makes Perfect

Only a humble person has the necessary skills of being honest, accepting blame, learning from mistakes and apologizing. Only someone with humility can truly appreciate his spouse. It is only the humble who are respectful, caring and sharing.

Although you may not be Moshe Rabbeinu, try to *act* humble. At the end of *Shemoneh Esrei* when you pray ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה "Let my spirit be like dust to everyone", think about how you can accomplish that. Try not to answer back in the heat of the moment, try to *act* humble and you'll attain the humility which is so necessary for relationships.

Someone once added some words to the *shemoneh esrei*, he said, "*Nafshi k'afar lakol t'hiyeh* - but they shouldn't step on me!" Let's not be like that. Let us not be like the *metzora* who was forced into isolation to learn this lesson. Let's work on humility before we drive everyone away from us and let us join the happy company of the truly humble.

Chinuch: Am I the Only One?

Humility is necessary in parenting as well. Sometimes parents get upset with their children, because they're emotionally blinded. Their only consideration is "how will this child's behavior affect my image?" But it is so important to see things objectively. Especially as a child grows older it is very important for a parent who wants what is best for his child to honestly consider what is best *for the child*.

A lack of humility and concern for image also complicates matters between parents and educators. Some parents immediately bristle with defensiveness when a teacher phones them about their child's behavior. Instead of seeing things objectively and working with the teacher to resolve the issue, they immediately turn defensive and blame the teacher. Who gains from such an attitude? No one.

A humble parent can admit to their own child that they made a mistake. You can teach the child that it is wrong to correct a parent, but that doesn't make you right. If you were truly mistaken, admit it to the child, that in itself is good chinuch for your children!

-Q&A-

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

Question: My wife and I had a serious altercation last night. This morning I sent her a long text expressing my feelings of pain. Instead of an apology she texted back "I have feelings too", what's wrong with her?

Answer: What is wrong with her having feelings? That's a good question. You just admitted to being hurt, and you would like for your wife to take your feelings into consideration. But why should she if you're not willing to take *her* feelings into consideration?

She may be wrong for not giving you the apology you want right away, but you may be wrong too! You're not apologizing to her!

This question is such a good illustration of our essay this week. Here we have a woman who is in pain, and is not ready to hear her husband's viewpoint until he fixes her pain. Yet he is in the exact same predicament and cannot see her point of view. In marriage it is so important to take a step back and try to see things from someone else's perspective, and as the Ramban ends off his *iggeres*: "With humility you will succeed in all your endeavors and merit the World to Come…"

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