Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Vaeschanan |

Self Sacrifice

Making Choices

In this week's parsha we find the pesukim of *krias shema*. Rashi explains these famous words ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך, as follows. ואהבת, *and you should love* means that you should serve Hashem out of love. Because when someone serves out of fear, then if it's too difficult, he runs away. בכל לבבך means that your heart should be 100% dedicated to Hashem, and בכל נפשך means that you should be willing to give up your life for Him. On בכל מאדך however, Rashi says something interesting. "With all your money, (and though we already spoke about giving up your life), for some people their money is more precious than their body."

How can someone value his money more than his life? If he isn't alive anymore, how does his money help him? It seems that Rashi is talking about something that we find people doing, and that is risking their life for money. Not that they prefer their money more than their life, rather they understand that they can't always have everything. Life is about choices and people choose to risk their lives, or make themselves uncomfortable, in order to achieve money or fame.

This is really what life is about, knowing what's more important to you and making the right choices. What are you willing to sacrifice, and for what? In *krias shema*, Hashem is telling us that our love for Him should be so important, that we would even give up our money and our lives for Him.

You Can't Have it All

When it comes to *shalom bayis*, Chazal tell us אוהבה כגופו, *he should love her like himself*. There is something very strong about the *ahava* that you are supposed to have. Your wife should be more important to you than other things, and that love should be so essential that you're willing to sacrifice whatever you have to for it.

Difficulty with *shalom bayis* sometimes comes from not understanding that in order to live peacefully with another person you have to give up certain things. Some people don't want to hear this, but the truth is that you have to be willing to sacrifice, to have a healthy and happy relationship.

It really comes down to one rule which would make people's lives much easier and happier if they could accept it, and that is: you can't have everything. People suffer so much because they can't give up one thing for another. They are indecisive, afraid that by choosing one thing they are missing out on the other option. Realizing that

no one has everything would allow them to make clear choices, and accept that they're giving up on something less important in order to get what they really want.

An example of this is in making the decision about where to live. You might have a bigger house with a lower mortgage in Lakewood, or be near friends and family, with better shopping, in Borough Park. Each one has pros and cons and the key to making the right decision is about choosing to have the benefits and accept 'paying the price' of the disadvantages. If you make a decision by default, without coming to terms with what your 'losing' you'll never be happy.

Compromise or Sacrifice

There is a difference between compromising and sacrificing. When you really want something, and you only lessen your request in order to get what you want easier and faster, that is compromising. Sacrificing means giving up and being OK with it, so that you can get something else that you want or need more.

The truth is that Yiddishkeit is also a sacrifice. There are certainly things that we are giving up, and that we would like to do, but we can't. We feel restricted on Shabbos, and on Yom Tov, and can't wait for Chol Hamoed to do all the things that are muttar . However, the reality is that we *want* to give up on the things that we can't do, in order to have the pleasure of being a Yid, a *shomer Torah u'mitzvos*, and of having the zchus of having the *shechina* in our home.

Single Benefits

Marriage also has big sacrifices. When you're single you can go where you want, when you want and how you want. You're not tied down or obligated to anyone. You have a lot of freedom and you get to make all the decisions yourself. Then you get married and all of that stops. But you aren't losing anything, you're sacrificing those conveniences willingly, for the much bigger gift of marriage.

It's a very smart thing to get married; people are not happy alone. We want to be married, and we want all the benefits of a happy marriage. We just need to realize that it means giving up the things that a single person enjoys, and to be OK with that. In order to be happily married you need to be able to say, "This is worth more to me than everything I may have given up."

Your Sacrifices

Besides the general sacrifice of choosing marriage over being single, everyone has their personal sacrifices in their own marriage. Maybe it's not living where you would like, having difficult in-laws, or a spouse who is messy, lazy or lacking some other trait. No one is perfect, and there is always at least one thing you possess in which you surpass your spouse.

Even if it's not something specific, marrying one person means giving up on marrying anyone else. Being happily married means being able to say "I don't have that, but let me enjoy what I do have". If you understand that this is the person that you chose to be married to, and you're OK giving up everything else – then you will be happy!

This doesn't mean that you have to give up on your own personal life, to the point where there's no place left for you as an individual. Having your own space and taking care of yourself is certainly important. However, there will be certain needs, time for yourself, and personal space that you will have to compromise on.

Accept it! Willingly!

Sacrificing becomes difficult when you don't have a clear vision of what you are gaining. Not seeing the benefits of being married, sharing goals, building a home, and a family together, will make you resentful about anything that you have to relinquish. On the other hand, having a clear idea of the bigger picture of what you would like to have, enables you to sacrifice willingly in order to attain it.

Many people complain about how restricting their marriage is. "When I was single I could do this and that, and now I'm so limited". The truth

is that maybe you can do those things if you would approach it together with your spouse in the right manner. However, sometimes it's true - you may not be able to do those things. Accept it willingly, and that will allow you to tap into the benefits that you do have in your marriage.

Some people can't give up on things and unfortunately that causes them to stay single *chas veshalom*. People feel subconsciously that by not giving up they're holding on to more options – it's not true. If you can't give up, you have no options. Knowing that you will have to give up on some things and accepting that you will do that willingly, is a powerful idea that can really help people.

Chinuch: Sacrifice of Parenting

Being married and having children is the best thing that you can do, but you have to know that being a parent means sacrificing. You lose out on your personal time and your private space. Nonetheless, if it means something to you to raise children and have a happy and healthy home, then you will be ready to make that sacrifice.

Raising children is a responsibility. It is very time-consuming and often accompanied by stress. Parents can become resentful towards their children for taking away their space, sometimes even feeling a momentary flash of envy towards someone 'unburdened' with children. However, being a parent means accepting your children for who they are, and sacrificing willingly because that's what you *want* to do. Doing it with acceptance changes the whole thing and makes it all worthwhile!.

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-Q&A-

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

Question: "My son comes home from Yeshiva and I would like him to help in the house, but he always says that he needs time to relax. It's not bein hazmanim now, and I'm just not sure if he actually needs it or if he is even really relaxing. And doesn't he know that I need his help? How should I approach this?"

On this question we get both perspectives, because I received a question from a bochur on the same subject, but from the opposite point of view.

"I come home from putting in a full day of learning in yeshiva all tired out, and I would like to rest and listen to some music. Then my mother comes and she wants me to help her in the house, but I really want this time to relax a little bit."

Answer: It's important for parents to realize how the child perceives things. A child isn't dealing with anything close to his parents' workload and responsibility. Yet he may still rightfully feel that he worked hard and needs to relax. His mother feels that he finally came home after a whole day in yeshiva with his friends. Now it's time for him to help out a little bit. But it's important for her to see the child's perspective as well.

This doesn't mean that he should be on vacation. He should make himself available for some help If his mother needs it. However, first take his feelings seriously and give him validation. Give him some time and space showing that you understand how he feels, and maybe offer him a drink or something that he likes. Then he will feel, "My mother realizes that I worked hard and I need some time to relax when I come home". Feeling understood will make it much easier for him to help afterwards.

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