RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS

FOR THE HOME

PARSHAS VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

LOVE: TOGETHER AND APART

Parshas Vayakhel discusses the building of the Mishkan alongside the *mitzvah* of Shabbos. Chazal teach us why the two are juxtaposed and many Torah commentators derive important lessons from this. The Rebbe of Ruzhin notes that building the Mishkan required using physical items such as gold, silver, and copper, and elevating them by creating the Mishkan itself along with its vessels, to produce a dwelling place for the Shechinah. The Mishkan took the mundane and made it holy.

The same idea applies to Shabbos, which is *chemdas yamim*, the delight of all days. It's not just another day in the week. It's the culmination. The *kedushah* that results from living as one should during the six mundane days are what make Shabbos elevated.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe teaches that a person can achieve the same. Our simple, mundane actions can elevate our thoughts and make us better people. It's hard to find a single person whose every action and thought is truly *l'shem Shamayim*. If you take a group of people, however, each one can be perfect in a different area. Some learn the right way; some daven the right way. Others eat or make money properly. The same applies to middos; it's hard to find any one person with every single good quality and attribute, but when *Klal Yisrael* join together, "*Vayakhel*," between everyone, the members of the group elevate one another.

In Kabbalah, there is the concept of the realms of *olam, shanah,* and *nefesh*, explained as the realms of space, time, and soul. Everything in the world exists in these three realms. The Mishkan existed as a space within which to elevate the mundane. Shabbos is the time that elevates the mundane days of the week. So too, in the realm of *nefesh*, a group of people together can elevate their mundane actions and produce spiritual thoughts.

It seems that while we are obligated to strive to do everything *l'shem Shamayim*, Hashem knows that each individual cannot necessarily always measure up to this ideal. Instead of demanding more than a person can give, we give him the opportunity to join together with others and become elevated with and through them, instead of only being judged by his own intentions and actions.

Sometimes, we expect people to always have only good intentions and do the right thing. The truth is that even just *doing* the right thing at all times isn't easy, but to actually have only pure and noble intentions at all times is something that is unrealistic to demand of anyone. If Hashem is understanding of our shortcomings and knows that we can't always get it right, we should try to do that for ourselves, our spouses, and our children.

• • •

THIS WEEK'S ESSAY IS DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY OF A PROUD ABBA AND ZEIDY

ר' שלמה יהודה ב"ר אליעזר טסלר ע"ה

נלב"ע כ"ו אדר תשמ"ו לפ"ק

WHO SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST AND REBUILT A FAMILY OF **בנים ובני בנים עוסקים בתורה ומצוות**

- תהא נפשו צרורה בצרור החיים עדי נזכה לקיום הפסוק יקיצו וירננו שוכני עפר בביאת משיח צדקינו -

QUESTION

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

I'm an avid listener of your *shiurim* and listen every week. I've gained a new perspective on many topics. Thank you very much. May Hashem repay you for your kindness.

If possible, I'd like to pose a question. I'm not looking to disagree with you, I'm just asking as this is a topic that comes up a lot and I want to understand. Regarding the *shiur* on Parshas Vayeshev, you started out saying that many times, issues come from a lack of *ahavah* between the couple, and that when you have *ahavah,* you're more forgiving and happier to cater to the person you love.

Yet at the end of the *shiur*, you address a question about couples going on separate vacations. There you said that it doesn't mean a couple is not connected and that it's sometimes healthy for each one to do their own thing.

Isn't this a contradiction?

Isn't the reason people want their spouse to join them in their activities or vacation, coming from a need for love? True, two people remain two separate individuals, but if issues stem from a lack of love, isn't it more than understandable that if your spouse won't join you in vacation, that it's coming from lack of love? Why then would you suggest that with this, it's fine to co-exist? Isn't it better to strive toward a relationship where although one spouse may not necessarily want the same vacation as the other, they'll be excited to join because they're going with their spouse?

You advised not to get stuck on the fact that he wants to do his own thing. True, you don't need to join him for Maariv. But if he's going on his vacation, and she on hers, somewhere down the line it's going to explode, especially if either of them is emotionally highly-strung. An emotional person wants to feel that *ahavah* from their spouse, and that won't come from each doing their own thing. The reason it's so bothersome is because "it's not my roommate; it's my spouse."

He may not have to like the foods I eat, but shouldn't we try to reach some resolution in the way we want to raise our kids or in the way we relate to all things connected to Yiddishkeit, or yes, even on the vacation we go on? A couple that keeps going on their own vacation won't have a significant relationship.

Perhaps I'm asking this because I know of a couple that's married for more than 30 years and they're still going on their own vacation. They are nothing but roommates. Neither one of them is a very emotional person, so I guess for them, it can work. But this won't work for emotional people when the root cause is a lack of love.

When there are two different people who want to strive for that *ahavah*, won't it be better for them to push themselves out of their comfort zones and get into the spouse's space to try out their vacations? Their opinions? Even if they wouldn't do it for themselves, shouldn't they do it *because* it's their spouse and they want them to feel loved?

ANSWER

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

The first thing I want to comment on is that you seem to feel that you can't disagree with me, or that I'll have an issue with any disagreement. I have no problem with anyone disagreeing with me. I share my personal opinions based on my own understanding of the issues. If I thought that I was sharing the ultimate truth and that I was able to provide the perfect answer to each question, it would take a lot more time and preparation on my part. I am here to suggest ideas and discuss topics, and everyone is welcome to disagree or suggest otherwise.

• • •

When it comes to *ahavah* vs. individuality, it's important to remember not to go to either extreme, and that generally speaking these two ideas aren't contradictory. They simply need to be applied correctly. Perhaps we can say that this

is a typical example of the well- known rule of the Rambam that we always try to find a middle path. Doing *everything* together out of perceived love is usually not the way to go. Neither is it right to do *everything* on your own in the name of expressing your individuality or giving each other space.

Furthermore, not only isn't love and "giving space" a contradiction, rather it's often precisely because you love someone that you give them space. The need for individuality and space can come from a true *ahavah*.

Just as it's understood that love for children isn't just not a contradiction of the discipline we give them; it's actually the force behind it, so too love for anyone isn't only about sharing, giving, and accommodating; it's about having the healthiest balance that makes you and the person you love feel good and take each other seriously with mutual respect and consideration.

Furthermore, there are many more factors involved in a relationship than love or a need for space. Differing standards, time commitments, financial constraints, tastes, and interests can all be good reasons why spouses might take separate vacations, even if they love each other and would otherwise want to share the experience — sometimes, it just isn't practical.

• • •

You mentioned a couple you know, and how they behave. While it's generally not a good idea to look at what other couples are doing, we do sometimes notice things and want the same for ourselves. What people don't always realize is that things aren't always the way they seem. For example, the fact that a couple always goes on vacation together may not always be because their level of *ahavah* is better than yours. Maybe they simply have very similar tastes when it comes to vacations. It's also possible that one of them is forcing the other one to comply. Comparisons are very often invalid or irrelevant, and there's rarely anything to be jealous of.

The idea of going on separate vacations may sound extreme to some people. If you go away once or twice a year, wouldn't you want to go with your spouse? Of course there are people who don't see it as extreme at all and always go separately; she with her friends, he with his business associates, etc. Nonetheless, even if that's not the case for a particular couple and they do see it as extreme, if for whatever reason it's advisable to go on separate vacations, it can still be done with good feelings.

There are actually many things that spouses do separately, without thinking twice, even if many of them are technically possible to do together. Some of them are obvious and readily understandable (like going to Maariv) whereas others are less so but still don't raise eyebrows. I don't mean to suggest that going on vacation together or separately is a minor matter, simply that the list of things spouses do alone isn't all that short, and in the majority of cases, it's based on needs and specifics.

You can love someone and need space, or love someone and give space. And there can be many other factors involved.

• • •

I recently spoke to an older single who expressed hesitation about getting married because marriage would come along with "too many restrictions." It's sad when people see normal, healthy restrictions as problems. In many areas it's specifically restrictions which help a person to lead a healthy life and learn to be considerate of others. It's good to have a schedule for mealtimes and to recognize that finances are limited, just to give a few examples. On the other hand, it's also true that there are stereotypical restrictions in marriage that could be unhealthy. You shouldn't be doing only what someone else wants and only because they want it. It's okay to remain an individual and have your own thoughts even when you're married. If a person's experience of marriage has been one of excessive control and an imbalance in accountability, however, then it's not hard to understand why they may fear such a relationship for themselves.

• • •

You quoted me as saying that many issues stem from a lack of love. While I believe that to be true, I don't mean to imply that if you fix the "love issue," all other problems automatically fall away. There are many things a person can do to increase *ahavah,* but not all problems can be solved the way we want them to be. What I did mean to stress is that sometimes, a person may think that a certain thing is bothering him when the real problem is that he doesn't like the person who's doing that thing. The proof is that when someone they love does the exact same thing, they're not bothered at all. Acknowledging this is often very helpful. Even if there's nothing you can do to change the situation, just realizing that the problem isn't what the person is doing, but rather who's doing it, can ease some of the tension and take the pressure off trying to get the other person to change.

• • •

And finally to the actual discussion about how doing things together enhances or resolves a lack of love. As with many questions, a lot depends on who's asking the question. Were a young man to ask me, "My wife wants to go on a vacation but it's really not something that appeals to me at all. Should I join her?" the answer might be: "Yes. Show her that you care. Use this as an opportunity to make her feel good, to connect, to spend time together, and then find your own personal enjoyment in some other way or at another time."

But if someone asks: "I'm going on vacation. My husband doesn't want to. Doesn't he have to come with me anyway?" the answer could be very different. No, he doesn't have to. And not wanting to doesn't mean that he doesn't love you. He may be afraid of heights and you want to go on roller-coasters. Similarly, if someone says, "My husband wants to go to Lizhensk on his own, or on a Shabbaton for men, with a group of friends — isn't that a sign that he's not interested in me?" then the answer is, "No, not at all, give him his space, let him be, prepare him a nice snack for the journey, and be happy for him."

It's also important to know when to turn the question around, instead of getting stuck on certain "givens" that you never question. Perhaps you should stay home with your spouse rather than demanding that he join you on vacation. Often, one spouse tries to get the other to bend without it ever occurring to them that maybe they could also bend a little.

To sum up: Should you try to push yourself out of your comfort zone for your spouse? You should, at least some of the time, but if your spouse is trying to *make you* do something you really don't want to do, you may not be obligated to comply. Similarly, you cannot *demand* that your spouse push themselves out of their comfort zone for you, although you can ask, nicely, while recognizing their right to say no. In short: Should you be *mevater* on your own individuality? Yes. Can you demand the same from someone else? No!

• • •

Having such issues arise doesn't mean that there's a lack of love in the relationship. Even if there is a lack of love, there's a lot that can be done to improve things — and lack of love is no excuse for behaving wrongly. The opposite is true: Behaving in a loving way will often improve things.

What if you're the one on the receiving end, wondering whether the way your spouse is behaving is because they don't love you enough? The answer is to try to make your spouse love you more! If your spouse is nicer to other people in their lives, try to figure out what those others might be doing right. Are they communicating in a nicer way? Are they more appreciative? While nobody should be acting not nicely, there usually are things you can do that will cause others to behave more nicely towards you and care more for you.

With the right communication, you can generally get people to understand you better. Don't make the mistake of wanting someone to "get it" on his own. It's a shame when people choose to be hurt and resentful instead of finding the right way to help their spouse to understand them.

• • •

A friend of mine, Gedalya Arnstein, used to be a commander in the air force, and he invited my family on a trip to his army base. We saw many interesting things there, but one of the things that stood out was how polite and respectful everyone was to each other and to us. You'd think that soldiers and commanders would be tough guys. I mentioned it to my friend and his response was, "They have to be." There's a certain code of conduct demanded in the military. I thought to myself, "If only people realized that it's the same at home." We are obligated to be nice all the time, not only when we feel loving.

To build a Yiddishe home, you have to be nice and go beyond your comfort zone. It would be easier if we could demand the same of everyone else, but if on your end you can push yourself to act as you would if you were already feeling your most loving, you'll be surprised at how you can arouse those feelings within yourself and your spouse much quicker than you thought.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS
FOR THE HOME

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**

If you enjoy and benefit from Rabbi Gruen's work please consider sponsoring a weekly Parsha essay which is read and enjoyed by thousands of readers, and have a Zchus in the many hours of classes which help so many homes.

To dedicate a week or a month of this newsletter, in honor of a Simcha, in memory of a loved one, or to show appreciation for Rabbi Gruen, please email to parshalessons@lehair.org, and your donation will be most appreciated.

Thank You & Tizku Lmitzvos!