RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS MISHPATIM

MY SPOUSE AND MY FRIENDS

The Rebbe Reb Bunim of Pershischa brings a *passuk* from Hoshea, *"Vehaya mispar Bnei Yisroel kechol hayam asher lo yimad v'lo yisafer,* - And the number of Bnei Yisroel will be like the sand of the sea, which shall neither be measured nor counted." The Gemara in Yoma says that this is contradictory. With enough effort, the sands of the sea are countable. Will Bnei Yisroel be countable like the sands or will they be incalculably numerous? The Gemara answers that when the Am Yisroel won't fulfill Hashem's command, they will indeed be countable. When they do *retzono shel Makom*, it will be impossible to count them.

The Rebbe Reb Bunim teaches a valuable lesson from this. When a person does *retzono shel Makom*, he doesn't count. He doesn't count exactly what he does and feels like he's never done enough. He feels like *he* doesn't count. His actions are never enough. He feels like he's not *yotzei* with whatever he did.

On the other hand, some people 'count' everything they do, even when they're not necessarily doing what Hashem wants from them. He feels like he's doing fine. He counts and he's counting. "I daven three times a day. I have one shiur every day." He's *yotzei*. When it comes to our service to Hashem it's important to drop the "counting" attitude, and let Hashem keep score. A person should always have the feeling of underperforming for Hashem, instead of counting his good deeds.

With this he explains the Possuk in our Parsha, where Hashem promises us: *"Es mispar yamecha amalai* – I will fill the number of your days." One of the methods of calculating *gematria* is called *milui* – filling up. Hashem will "fill" the number, the *mispar*, is a remez to the 'filled' gematria of *mispar* which is equivalent to the gematria of *"lo mispar."* Most often the people who shouldn't really count feel like they have a *mispar*, and those who *should* count feel like they don't. When you feel like you're not doing enough, it may be a good sign.

These attitudes are actually something we see often. Sometimes a person comes for help and says, "I feel like I'm not doing enough. I have to be more tolerant... I have to learn to give more..." They feel they can do more when in fact they may be doing quite a bit. They're not 'counting' everything they're doing.

Then there are people who come and say, "My spouse feels I'm not doing enough. But I make sure to be home at these times and to do certain things." They're counting.

Of course, there's always room for improvement. And sometimes a spouse will complain that you're not doing enough when you really are. But often it's the ones who don't do enough who feel like they already reached the sum total, and those who do so much feel like they don't amount to much. This is important food for thought for self-introspection both for those who should be doing more and those who should realize they're doing enough.

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הרב בנימין דוד ב"ר יעקב ז"ל ואשתו מרת מאטיל בת ר' זאב וואלף ע"ה

תנצב"ה

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I listen to your shiurim on TorahAnytime and find them to be insightful and innovative. Thank you for filling the need.

My problem has been bothering me for years. Maybe you can provide some guidance. I used to have a very friendly relationship with my cousin. We grew up together and have been close for many years. Unfortunately, she is married to a man who can be blunt and critical. He's said some pretty offensive things to my husband. After one incident too many, my husband would have nothing more to do with them and will never step foot in their home. Really, he is justified for being offended, but my way of handling criticism would be to forget and move on. My husband cannot get past it.

It's already been a while and my relationship with my cousin is more-or-less over. We don't visit or invite them. If my grandparents invite us for Shabbos, my husband will only go if they won't be there. I tried to smooth things over by encouraging my husband to ignore them and focus on the rest of our wonderful family, but I found this only heightened the tension, as my husband felt I was siding with them instead of him.

My husband is a caring, devoted and attentive spouse and isn't controlling or abusive. He's fine if I have a relationship with my cousin, as long as he doesn't have to see him. But things became very strained between us anyway.

Fortunately, our Shalom Bayis has greatly improved once I stopped fighting my husband on this issue. I see that he feels more secure now that I support him completely. However, I still feel resentment at having to miss out on family gatherings and trips because he can't get along with this cousin's husband, although we still go to family *simchos*.

My question is, if my husband doesn't get along with them, do I also have to put a stop to that relationship?

Thank you for taking the time to address this.

Answer:

Before addressing the actual issue, I want to point out something important. If your husband would tell you that you can't continue your relationship with your cousin, we'd have to approach this differently because it would become an issue of control and boundaries. While there may be situations where this is appropriate, the facts would need to be assessed differently.

While this isn't the case here, it's important to mention that if someone is controlling or even just trying to

control your relationships, (unless there's an objectively justifiable reason), it's often a sign of something unhealthy that should be dealt with properly.

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The first part I want to address is the issue of telling a person to 'get over' or 'get past' a feeling. Telling a person not to take something so seriously is almost never the correct approach.

If someone is going through an emotional challenge, especially if he was offended by a "blunt and critical" person, their way of reacting versus your way of reacting may be completely different. It's important to respect a person's reaction and pace in dealing with their emotional challenges. Especially when that person is your spouse.

Just because you'd be able to get over it doesn't mean he has to. Besides, when you're not personally affected by a situation, it's easy to fool yourself and think you'd deal with it differently. It's important to keep in mind that you don't have the ability, nor responsibility, to control or channel his emotional reactions, and it's best to leave that to him.

Recently, a man was asked to speak at a Sheva Brachos, and became quite overwhelmed with anxiety. He told his wife how anxious he was and that he couldn't sleep at night. He probably just needed some validation and Chizzuk, but instead she responded: "What's the big deal? Just get up and say what you have to, that's what I would do." This is an example of someone seeing someone else's issue as trivial, without realizing that *she* never spoke at a simchah. She can't *know* that she would have been able to do it easily. And even if she would be able to, he's still entitled to find it difficult.

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You mentioned that your husband broke off after "one incident too many." I don't know, but maybe he was right for severing the relationship. Some relationships should be ended. It could be very difficult to get along with difficult people. Perhaps if we'd hear the details, we'd be surprised that your husband was able to put up with it for so long. Unhealthy relationships sometimes need to be avoided.

It is possible that in this case, you can get the other party to apologize to your husband, which may or may not work with a blunt and critical person. But as long as the other party doesn't see the error in his ways, your husband does not have to put himself into situations where he'll be hurt.

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There's another aspect here. Besides for not validating his feelings, your husband felt that you were siding with your cousin. "So he said something. Big deal." It's hurtful to hear that your spouse doesn't think you were wronged. Especially when you admit that this cousin can be critical and offensive. Don't challenge his reaction and don't challenge his evaluation of the situation. Validate. Empathize. Understand.

The fact that your husband isn't naturally more forgiving should not be used against him. And he surely shouldn't be told that he's being too sensitive. If he really is so sensitive, this comment will be very hurtful. If he's not sensitive and was rightfully hurt, be understanding of it.

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You note that your husband isn't stopping you from having a relationship with your cousin. It often happens that if a person doesn't get along with someone, their spouse won't either. But it doesn't have to be that way.

It's alright for you to call your cousin, go out with her, and enjoy her company. While, you shouldn't make it out to be the elephant in the room, where you can't mention where you were or what you did, but at the same time you should be sensitive around it. You might even be creative enough to actually thank your spouse for allowing you to continue your relationship, thereby both acknowledging that it's appreciated and maybe slowly making it a bit easier for him too.

Of course, the relationship will be different since your spouses don't get along. But that's the balance of life. If you were to move out of town with your family, it would certainly change your relationships with those who don't move. But you won't *not* move because of that. A happy marriage may come at the expense of parts of another relationship with a cousin. When you can't please both equally, your spouse definitely comes first. You should maintain your relationships, but in a way that's respectful of your husband's feelings.

In any case, whenever doing something like this that can be challenging to your spouse, you might consider investing just a bit of extra energy to reassure your spouse that you aren't disregarding his feelings. You might look for unrelated added ways of showing general care and respect for his opinions and feelings. Many people could use some emphasis in this area in general, so it's important for someone who is in a situation like this to take it seriously.

Wishing you all the best,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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