RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS TETZAVEH

THE MISSION OF MARRIAGE

This parshah speaks about the *Bigdei Kehunah,* and last week we learned about the *Klei Hamishkan*. It's interesting that only some parts are counted among the *Taryag Mitzvos*. One of them is the *passuk, "Velo yizach hachoshen me'al ha'efod* – and the choshen shall not move off the *efod*."

The Degel Machneh Efraim explains that although this is only applicable to the kohen gadol, we know that each mitzvah also has a message for every Yid and for all time. So even though there is no *choshen* or *efod* today, there still must be a practical application for us.

The *choshen* was placed on the heart. The *gematria* of *efod* is the same as *peh* – mouth, (both equal to 85). This teaches us that the heart should not move away from the mouth. A person's mouth should not say things that are not in harmony with his heart. Chazal teach us this about the *Shevatim* who "could not speak pleasantly to Yosef" because they had hard feelings in their hearts; so they didn't talk at all. It seems that it's better not to be on speaking terms than to talk in a manner that contradicts one's feelings. Still, we try to work on the right feelings so that it *should* be possible for people to talk to each other.

People often ask me what to say in delicate situations. Yet you'll find that some people say the right thing and the results are anything but good, and in other situations people may say the wrong thing and the results are fine. Why? Because it doesn't always depend on *what* you say. It often depends more on *how* you say it. If you say the 'right thing' nastily, or you say the right thing but your heart isn't really there; you don't mean it or you don't follow through, then you probably won't get the results you're looking for.

Relationships depend on proper communication. Not only *what,* but *how* you say it and how you follow through. *Velo yizach hachoshen me'al ha'efod* – teaches us the proper method of communicating. "Put your heart where your mouth is."

This week's essay is sponsored by a good and special friend, R' Y. S.
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ויה"ר שהזיווג יעלה יפה וירווה לראות מהם רב נחת דקדושה לאוישט"א
אכי"ר!

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I am a big fan of yours and I listen to your lectures through Torah Anytime. I am married for a year now, *Baruch Hashem*. [I have been married before. My past relationships were not healthy, but I want you to know that I am not new to being married]. My question is, what are the goals of marriage? What are we trying to accomplish by being together?

Thank you.

Answer:

This is a very general question, and a general question usually gets a general and vague answer which is usually not very helpful, but we'll try to talk about things that people will find useful and hopefully be able to apply as well.

Simply talking about the ultimate ideal of marriage might be fine when talking to people preparing for marriage, so that they can have the right aspirations and goals, but when talking to those who are already married this is sometimes counterproductive, as people start comparing their current situation with what the ideal should be. In general it's important to realize that all you can achieve is *your* ideal marriage. Each marriage is individual and there's no one-size-fits-all approach or goal that can work for everyone. With that said, let's try to provide a certain general perspective and discuss ideas that can help people - each in their own situation - move in the right direction.

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Before we talk about marriage, let's take a step back and talk about the purpose of life. What are we trying to accomplish? There can be hundreds of answers and all of them can be true, yet, one thing that's important to remember is that our "purpose" and "the things we want"(especially those we want right now) are not always the same. Not everything that's good is pleasant. Not everything that's sweet is beneficial. Not everything that we want is what we really need.

The rebbe Reb Elimelech writes in *Tzetil Kattan* that the entire purpose of a person's creation is for him to break his nature. This means that we're all here to do things that are very difficult. But that's not necessarily what we want to experience in this world. Nobody asks for hardship. Our *tefillos* are full of requests for bounty and grace and kindness. It's still true though that there might be other things that are really better for us.

It's a basic truism that "We want one thing and might need something else". And it's not a contradiction. Hashem wants us to ask for *chassodim* and good things and to believe at the same time that even things that *don't look good* are for our benefit. He wants us to deal with challenges and believe in *gam zu letovah* while at the same time we know that *Ha'adam lo niva ela lehisanag al Hashem* – the person was created to enjoy Hashems world. But we are here to overcome challenges. We have to absorb these contradictory messages.

So what *is* the purpose of life? The answer is that it is to accomplish that which Hashem wants of me.Although I might want only the best, and to be able to choose what I want to accomplish, there might be a more accurate answer which has nothing to do with my preferences.

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So, now back to your question, what's the point of getting married? There are the general answers and ideals of building a home, raising a family, breaking one's ego, and learning to accommodate another person. And we hope all that will be enjoyable. That's what we wish for every *chassan-kallah*. It's a pleasure to see two people getting along and enjoying each other's company. It's a joy to see good-natured children and people enjoying financial success. *Der Eibershter zol veiter helfen* and we should all be *zocheh* to that.

But what will be with everything you're supposed to accomplish if life is going swimmingly? We're not here to look for challenges, but when they come, know that that's what you're really here for. Which means that the goals in marriage are not necessarily the things we *want*. Marriage develops a person in a way nothing else can. We see for instance, in halacha, that on the *Yamim Nora'im*, the *baal tefillah* should be a married man with children because his tefillos can't be compared to a person who doesn't have these challenges. Again, we don't ask for difficulties, but that's often what life is actually all about. Sometimes these challenges make it feel like we're not managing, or that we're at the end of our rope, but really that's life, and that's how we accomplish that which is demanded of us.

There's an anecdote about two *neshamos* who meet, one of them on the way down to this world and the other on the way out. The new *neshama* asks the other one to tell him about the world he's coming to. "Oh! It's an amazing world! For a few dollars, you can buy a pair of *tzitzis* and do a mitzvah the entire day."

"Wow! So why are you leaving that world?"

"Ah, because earning a few dollars can be so difficult, it takes your *neshama* out!"

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The purpose of marriage is the challenges it places in front of you. It's not easy, but the degree of difficulty is different for everyone. I want to be clear: some situations are harder than others. Not everyone will experience the same degree of difficulty in their marriage.

Sometimes, by the time you learn how to accommodate the other person in the marriage, you're completely depleted. Like the man who wanted to train his horse to work without food or sleep. Every day, he cut back on some food. By the time the horse was almost used to not needing food or sleep at all, it died. "What a pity!" he said, "I almost reached my goal." It's difficult to train yourself to go without "food" it can sap you of your energy. The work we need to put in is not easy. But that's the goal in marriage. It can take everything out of you, but if you can learn to live well with the other person, you should know that you really accomplished something great.

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Because you mention "goals" and the "accomplishments" of marriage, I feel it's important to point out the following: This is a lifelong job with no finish line. We talk about accomplishing and reaching goals, but life isn't like that.

You can reach the goal of Pesach cleaning, or moving to a new home, or even marrying off your children, but when it comes to marriage and life, it's an ongoing project. It's continuous *accomplishing*, not an *accomplishment*. It's taking one day at a time, being respectful, being giving and forgiving, doing the best you can, being understanding, and all that. It can seem to be a daily struggle, but should be seen as a daily opportunity and a daily accomplishment.

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We mentioned that every marriage is unique, but in many cases (intentionally or not) we tend to compare ourselves to others. We see other people happily married and enjoying their relationships. Perhaps they're accomplishing less in the 'goals' mission, but we want the same "happiness" for ourselves.

Often, we only think those people have it easy, when in fact they struggle just as much as we do. But sometimes it's true. Everyone has what to work

on, but some marriages are easier than others. Comparing will take away your focus from what you should be doing. It will make it more difficult to understand what *your* accomplishments are. Comparing yourself to others, as well as comparing to what your expectations were, works against you. We have to focus on what we need to do and to try to be more giving, more understanding and more accommodating.

But it starts with not even comparing yourself to your spouse! The starting point for working on a marriage is you. What *you* can do. What *you* can give. It's not about what your spouse should do or what you and your spouse can be doing together. Each person has to work on their own part and each one has to reach their own goals. Usually, it will come back. But even if it doesn't, it will already be an accomplishment.

It's not easy to apply this, and definitely much easier to talk about, but this is basic and extremely important, and worth trying your best to apply.

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I'm not sure if the questioner is male or female, but I'll address one more point which I feel many can benefit from, in terms of understanding the general idea of marriage. As much as we promote mutual understanding, partnership and being in agreement, it's still important to understand that Hashem designed the marriage relationship to be that of a pilot, (the husband,) and co-pilot, (the wife). In any relationship, having two people share the exact same position will usually be unsuccessful. Even in business, everything functions better when there's a president and vice president rather than two presidents.

Women should embrace their role as co-pilots. But women should also remember that co-pilots are not any less important than pilots. It's not about prestige or dominance but about role. Yes, the husband is the king and that makes her the queen. No, it doesn't mean that she can't make any decisions or has to follow blindly. But it does mean that the husband is the one she respects and the one she wants to please. If each partner knows the importance of their role and what the responsibilities of their position are, that's when you can be successful. That's when you can achieve true *shalom bayis* – one day, one challenge and one accomplishment at a time.

Wishing you much Hatzlacha,
Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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