Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Vayeishev |

Keep It Up!

VAYEISHEV: THE QUEST FOR PEACE

In the beginning of this week's parsha (37, 2), Rashi tells us of how Yaakov Avinu's hopes were dashed: בקש יעקב לישב בשלוה, מיד קפץ עליו רוגזו של יוסף –"Yaakov desired to live a peaceful life, and then the problems with Yosef began". Yaakov had been through a lot up until this point. He didn't get married until the age of 80, he was deceived countless times by his trickster uncle; his beloved wife, whom he was forced to pursue for 14 years passed away. And finally he settles down in his homestead after narrowly avoiding a vicious attack by his brother's army. Yaakov is already an old man and all he wants is to serve Hashem in peace. So what happens? Boom! Yosef, his favorite, the eldest son of Rachel is eaten alive by some wild animal and is never to be seen again!

We're feeling very sympathetic towards Yaakov, but Chazal tell us that this is the way it must be. אמר הקב"ה, לא דיין לצדיקים מה שמתוקן להם לעוה"ב, אלא שמבקשים לישב בשלוה בעוה"ז "It is enough for the righteous to have peace in the Next World, they can't expect serenity in This World." Peace and Bliss are unattainable in This World. So in case you wanted to relax and have a blissful marriage, here's a Torah lesson for this week; you're not getting it. Everyone wants their relationships to just cruise along and feel like bliss, but relationships take work; there's no cruise option.

THE ABC'S OF MARRIAGE

I'm going to assume that if you're reading this, you have knowledge of the alphabet. The alphabet is something that we learned in first grade and it was lots of hard work, but that's it, the work is done. We are now set with our knowledge of the ABC's for life. Some things are like that, you learn it once, and you're done; now you get to enjoy the fruit of your efforts. But marriage is not like the ABC's; having good relationships requires ongoing work.

Self-improvement is a lifetime work and you're never done with it. One of the great rebbes once said: "I'm not perfect. When I perfect myself and complete my mission in this world, I die". Even if you think you finally reached the peak, you still have more work ahead. Even if you paid last month's bills, there are fresh bills to pay this month! So suppose your wife has been bugging you to give up smoking for five years, and finally you do it, you stopped. You're still nowhere near perfect! There's so much that we need to be constantly working on, and we need to continually invest in our marriages and relationships.

PUMPING GASOLINE

Avi is a client of mine; as we were talking to each other it became clear that he wasn't treating his wife with enough compassion. He wasn't giving her the time and empathy she deserved. When I asked him if he ever considered showing some more patience towards his wife he said "Sure. I used to be more patient and indeed we didn't have

so many problems. But how much patience can I have already?" So, there you have it, in his own words. As long as he worked, it worked. Once he stopped working, it stopped working. That's how it is.

If you have a car, you fill it up with gas. You don't say, "Look, I filled it up with gas last week and it stopped working, so obviously gas doesn't work." You understand that you have to keep refilling it. You can't say I was patient last week and it stopped working. Like many other areas of life, relationships require constant work.

Another client, Baruch, was very conscientious about his marriage, reading books and attending seminars. His relationship was truly successful. After seven years of a blissful marriage he started his own business. This was a stressful time for him and every waking second was spent in pursuit of growing his business. After three months his marriage was in shambles, everything was a struggle and he and his wife were constantly at war with each other. He came to me wondering what had happened. The answer is בקש לישב בשלוה, he expected his marriage to run on cruise control, to go automatically, but that's not realistic. That's not real life.

THE GARDEN OF MARRIAGE

In Shir Hashirim a garden is used as metaphor for the husband and wife relationship באתי לגני אחותי כלה (Shir Hashirim 5, 1). You need to tend to your garden. A garden is not a garden without constant gardening. So if you don't tend to your marriage because it's supposed to be "a garden of bliss", it is quite obvious that you'll end up with weeds and thorns. Even if you attended a seminar last year, a garden needs to be tended to every year!

There's a lomdus to this as well. Rav Boruch Ber z"l once explained in a shiur how the concept of kiddushin does not end under the chuppah. Rather, he explained, kiddushin begins then, under the chuppah, and continues on until it is terminated by misah or geirushin. After the shiur someone approached him and said "Mazel tov! According to what Rebbi just explained, Rebbi is getting married anew every second, so I'm wishing Rebbi mazel tov". It's a cute story, but it's true. Your marriage is constant and it needs that constant infusion of renewal to keep it fresh and happy.

Some relationships are more difficult than others. Some people are higher maintenance, they need more. So don't ask me why you have to do XYZ for your husband and your friend Leah does not. Every marriage is different, and every relationship requires a different type of work. Besides, you can never really compare any marriage, like we've mentioned many times before. You never know what goes on inside of someone else's home. So be happy with your own spouse and invest your energies towards strengthening your relationship.

STRENGTHEN THE POSITIVITY

The Chofetz Chaim is quoted as saying that one must study the subject of Emunah for two full hours every day. He explained that it's not because it's such a complex matter that one needs to devote so much time to its study, rather simply because of the ubiquity of its detractors. Wherever we turn we are confronted with proofs against emunah, and so we need to work hard to strengthen it. The fact is that wherever we turn we see people accomplishing, but we never see Hashem accomplishing anything. So it takes a lot of study to get used to the idea that it's not really us and that everything is Hashem. (He then added that davening with kavanah can be counted as the two hour study period, because davening is actually an exercise in emunah).

It could be that marriage is the same. By default people goof up in relationships. People are selfish by default and it's difficult to fully devote yourself to someone else. So if it weren't for that default setting of ours, then yes, perhaps a marriage wouldn't require so much work. But because we constantly revert to selfish mode, we need to keep busy reverting to giving mode. So it's exactly like the gas analogy we used earlier. If you put in gas and don't drive the car, you can use it two years later without a problem. But because we're constantly driving, we need to continue adding gas. Because negativity will inevitably come up, we must constantly strive to counteract that and strengthen the positivity in our relationship.

If you don't want trouble, if you're not looking for רוגזו של יוסף, then it's important not to be בקש לישב בשלוה, you can't rest on your laurels. Your marriage needs constant work, and you should be ready to invest in it.

CHINUCH: MAKING FRUIT GROW

If marriage is compared to a garden, raising children is compared to producing fruit trees, בניך כשתילי זיתים and פירותיך מתוקים. One must continually invest in his children. It's not enough that you complimented your child last week; you must constantly strive

to bring positivity into your home and bombard your children with positivity. Only through constant and consistent nurturing will your young saplings give forth precious fruit.

Yaakov had 12 children. Yosef whom he treasured most, was finally seventeen years old; a young adult. בקש לישב בשלוה, he thought it was finally time to rest. So the Torah tells us that no, קפץ עליו רוגזו של יוסף. Parenting is a process and we must continually invest our energies into being the best parent we can possibly be. There are no shortcuts.

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Q&A

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

Question: I have one child that is just difficult. The whole family is great, everyone gets along well. It's just this one child who is always getting into trouble and I sometimes find myself wishing we had never had him. I'm embarrassed to say it and I know it sounds terrible, but I have to be honest about it if I want to get help.

Answer: This is a very important question to ask and I'm very glad it was asked. Some people have this problem but they're ashamed to talk about it so they end up burying it and pretending that it doesn't exist. This just causes problems because your child feels it, and I know, because when they're 35 years old they come to me! Even if you never express it, it could have an extremely adverse effect on your child. So kudos for trying to deal with it and I hope I can be of help.

So one idea that can be useful to think about is, that you don't get to choose your children. You may get to choose your spouse, but your children are given to you by Hashem. And He knows what's best for you. So whatever issues you may have with a child, it is important to keep in mind that this is the package that Hashem prepared for you. This is your life and Hashem expects you to make the most out of it.

Very often it's the child who is the most difficult and challenging, who really needs you most. Don't say "I can handle my other children but this one just drives me up the wall". The other ones don't need any "handling", it's this one that needs skilled handling, and it's your duty as a parent to learn how to do that.

I heard in the name of several gedolim who were asked whether a child who is struggling with yiddishkeit should be kept home or thrown out of the house. They said that the struggling child shouldn't be thrown out. On the contrary, the other children should be thrown out! The difficult child is the one who needs you most. The healthy children don't require so much effort, but it's the ones who are most difficult that require the most investment.

So put it into perspective, realize that this is really your only child. This is the one who needs your best skills, and this is the one Hashem is using to test you. The others Hashem sent just to give you some nachas, just so that the family picture doesn't look empty. But it's this child who is so difficult that really encapsulates who you are as a parent and an educator. And by the way if you want to brag about your children, this is the one to brag about. The children who were easy and didn't take so much effort aren't the children that you raised. This is the one – you invested in him and he is yours.

Another thing: The more you give, the more you love. This is why a parent feels such an intense love for a newborn baby. Newborns are completely helpless and they take everything from you. You give and give and give, and that's why there is such an intense love. But there's another factor at play as well; a parent has no expectations of a newborn. If you are only giving and have no expectations you will feel the most intense love possible.

May Hashem help us to have the patience to invest, we shouldn't have the בקש לישב בשלוה and we shouldn't need any רוגזו של יוסף to set us straight, rather we should be successful in our marriages and our parenting.

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