Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Chayei Sarah 5780 }

Finding The Blessing

Blessing Was Found

In this week's *parsha* we read of Rivkah's marriage to Yitzchok, and the *passuk* compares Rivkah to Sarah. Rashi (24, 67) explains: There were three constant miracles as long as Sarah was alive. ומשמתה פסקו וכשבאת רבקה חזרו But when she passed away the miracles were no longer, until Rivkah came, and then they began once more.

One of these miracles, was היתה ברכה מצוייה בעיסה – "There was a blessing found in the dough". The simple meaning is that Sarah's food was blessed; it was always fresh and tasty. But we can say a bit of a *derush* based on the literal translation: Sarah *found the blessing* in her dough; whatever it was that she did at home, she found the blessing in it.

The Penniless Tzaddekes

The story is told of a certain *tzaddekes* whose husband was a great Rebbe. One week he complimented her profusely on the *challah* saying that it tastes of Gan Eden *mammash*. He asked what she did this week that was so special?

So the *rebbetzin* explained: "Usually I add something to the *challah* dough, some salt, some oil, some eggs. This week there was nothing in the house. So I *davened* that the simple flour and water should have a *taam gan eden* and that's what you tasted."

We're not on the level of infusing simple ingredients with a *taam gan eden* through our *tefillos*. But we *can* infuse Gan Eden into our everyday interactions with our spouse by finding the *bracha* in the simple everyday things that we do for one another. Your wife may have prepared a simple dinner, but you can make ברכה מצויה בעיסה by seeing the blessing in that, and thus bring *bracha* into your relationship.

When Money Falls From The Sky

The story is told of a man who was stranded on the roof of a great skyscraper. Desperate to get people's attention, he began throwing dollar bills down to the street below. To his great disappointment, no one looked up. He began throwing larger bills; still no one seemed to care. People pocketed the money, but no one looked up. Only when he began throwing down heavy bricks, did he finally get acknowledged.

Basic human nature is to avoid acknowledging favors

we receive. The *gemara* (Avodah Zarah 5a) says that Adam Harishon was ungrateful and that all of his descendants are כפויי טובה בני כפויי טובה –"ingrates descended from ingrates". It is difficult for us to acknowledge when someone does us a big favor, how much more so when the favor that they do is seemingly insignificant.

It is hard to acknowledge the little things that your husband does for you, but it is so important. A recent study found that the number one cause for dissatisfaction in a marriage was individuals feeling underappreciated.

"But I Said 'Thank You'!"

Sometimes when I tell husbands to be more appreciative towards their wives, they protest: "But I said 'thank you' so many times!" "Finding the blessing" is very different from "saying thank you". Acknowledging and appreciating your spouse has nothing to do with saying a specific word or taking a specific action.

Acknowledging and appreciating means that you embrace a feeling of appreciation – you feel indebted to your spouse. When you think about everything that your wife does for you, you feel a deep wellspring of appreciation open up inside of you. This brings you to love your wife, and כמים הפנים לפנים –"Just as your face is reflected in water, your feelings are reflected in your fellow's heart" (Mishlei 27, 19). Once you really appreciate your wife, there's no need to *say* 'thank you'. Your relationship has already been upgraded.

Occupation: Stay At Home Mom

There's a lot to appreciate if you take the attitude of ברכה מצויה בעיסה. Stay at home mothers work hard. Between laundry, cooking, wiping noses and changing diapers, there's hardly a moment to breathe! If you would have to hire a babysitter, a housekeeper and a personal secretary to do whatever your wife does for you, you would have to pay out quite a nifty salary!

Same holds true for your husband, who is working tirelessly to support the family. Day in day out, rain or shine, out of loyalty to you and the kids he goes out there to bring home *parnassah*. He would enjoy some more vacation days, but he responsibly supports the family. Did you ever stop to acknowledge and appreciate it?

When Ordinary Is Extraordinary

Someone once said that the difference between ordinary and extraordinary is the "extra" you add in. I disagree. You can be "ordinary" and have a seemingly ordinary marriage, without glamor, gifts and vacations. But if there is an underlying feeling of appreciation – that's extraordinary. The attitude of gratitude is what turbocharges your marriage and makes it something special. You don't have to have an especially "blessed" marriage. You can "find the blessing" and have an extraordinary home; a home of ברכה מצויה.

If you look at people who are truly happily married, you will note that there is usually nothing extra in that relationship. Their day-to-day interactions are simply infused with appreciation and caring for one another.

Loading Up On Love

Some people need more acknowledgement, and some less. But even people who don't need to be praised constantly, appreciate a compliment every once in a while. Every relationship is enhanced when accompanied by feelings of appreciation. The husband appreciates his wife, and the wife appreciates her husband.

If you ever encounter someone who is truly confident and doesn't seem to need compliments, there's usually a reason for it. Usually this individual gets so much love and appreciation at home, that he doesn't need to go looking for it anywhere else. Wherever he is he knows that his wife admires him to no end. Wherever she is, her husband's effusive compliments ring in her ears. That's why it seems that these people don't need recognition. But in truth, everyone needs recognition. Everyone needs to feel acknowledged and appreciated.

Practically Speaking

Most of the time, when I explain this idea to men, they just stare at me blankly: "So now I have to tell my wife thank you for every little thing that she does?" And the answer is, "No". It wouldn't be a bad idea to try, by the way – it can't hurt to thank your wife constantly! But we're not talking about speaking thankfully, we're talking about *feeling* thankful.

Yes it's about time you spend a minute or two thinking about this woman that you married. "Do I recognize everything that she does for me? Where would I be without her?" The whole dynamic of your relationship changes. As you delve into the details of everything that your spouse does for you, your appreciation and connection will definitely deepen and widen.

In every relationship there will be disappointments. There are always certain things a woman wants from her husband, or that a man wants from his wife, that will simply go unfulfilled. But if there's ברכה מצויה in their home, if they have an attitude of finding and acknowledging the good – then all the resentments and wrongs will ultimately diminish.

Chinuch: The Blessing That Was Never Found

One of my clients, a young man, told me that he is an extreme overachiever. He can never go to sleep at night unless he has accomplished something great that day. He explained that when he was a young child he never felt acknowledged. He only heard his name when he did something really good – or really bad. Until this day he is attention-starved, and he always feels that in order to be worthy, he must accomplish.

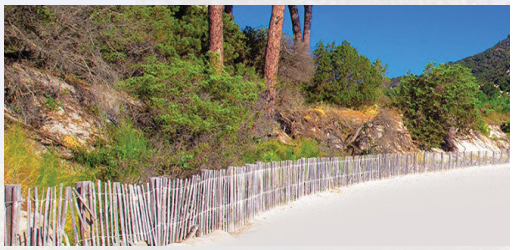
Of course a person must try to accomplish in life. But you don't accomplish the extraordinary every day. Accomplishments are a buildup, the result of long and hard work. If someone constantly feels that he must accomplish, that's very unhealthy, and simply impossible. Life is not a ramp going up, there is a גלגל החוזר בעולם - life is full of ups and downs.

This is very important when raising children, make sure that you notice your children. Let them know that they are worthwhile, even when they're not the best in the class or the winner of the game. Let's try to have ברכה מצויה in our homes, to consistently find the blessing even in the simple עיסה, our everyday interactions.

Lowering The Highs

If you feel that in your relationships you need to hit a certain "high" in order to feel happy, then there's something wrong. If your day to day life is too "boring", if you can't find happiness and you don't see anything to appreciate unless it's something special, then something needs to be fixed. Life is not about racing from one excitement to the next.

A person should be happy simply living life, being שמח בחלקו, being happy with what one has. It is in the simple interactions that the real blessing can be found



Q&A

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



Question:

Last week I mentioned that I believe certain secrets can and should be kept from a spouse. This comment drew a lot of feedback and ire from different people, as I assumed it would... I would therefore like to explain it some more.

Answer:

It is true that ideally spouses should discuss and share things with one another – in fact, that was the subject of last week's essay. Moreover, when a man hides something from his wife, a certain impasse arises in the relationship. A certain distance is created by the mere presence of an unshared secret. However, I repeat, certain things should not be shared. The only thing you will accomplish by sharing them, is inflicting unnecessary pain on both sides.

I've seen this happen time and again. People destroyed relationships by saying the wrong thing. I didn't make this up, it is explicitly stated in the *braisa* of Avos D'rabbi Nosson, so we'll quote it here: אל תרבה שיחה עם האישה כיצד – What does the *mishna* mean when it states "Do not speak with your wife too much"? בזמן שאדם בא לבית המדרש ולא היו נוהגין בו כבוד – If you felt slighted when you were at shul, או שעירער עם חברו - or if you had a disagreement at work. אל ילך ויאמר לאשתו: כך וכך ערערתי עם חברי - Don't come home and tell you wife "This is what happened to me today" כך וכך אמר לי, כך וכך אמרתי לו –"I said this to my friend and he said that to me..." מפני שבוזה את עצמו ובוזה את אשתו ובוזה את חברו - If you do that you're simply humiliating yourself, your wife and your friend. ואשתו שהיתה נוהגת בו כבוד עומדת ומשחקת עליו - And any respect that your wife had for you vanishes!"

Chazal are telling us: don't demean yourself in front of your wife. You had a hard day and you want to discuss it with someone? It's "therapeutic" and you need to get it off your chest? Find someone else, don't share it with your spouse, don't dump your negativity on the person you love the most. Yes if your boss gave you a promotion, then certainly you should tell her. If you finished a *masechta*, then by all means, let her know! But don't share anything that will bring pain and humiliation to either of you.

Everything in this world was created for a purpose, so why did Hashem create שקר –"untruth"? We would think that in a perfect world there is no room for anything but the truth. But here we see that sometimes we need to use the *middah* of *sheker* for good (Chovos Halevavos). It doesn't always pay to be one hundred percent honest. A person must weigh his words before saying them. Most of the time it pays to be honest, but not always. The important thing is to make sure you don't hurt anyone in your efforts to be totally open and honest.

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