

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

KOSHER ANIMALS AND KOSHER JEWS

In this week's *parshah*, the Torah relates the laws defining which animals are kosher to eat and which are not, and the signs that enable us to distinguish between them. A kosher animal is one that has a cloven hoof—*mafreses parsah*, and that chews its cud—*maaleh geirah*. An animal that has only one of the two signs is not kosher; it must have both.

The Rebbe R' Meir Premishlaner *zy"a* uses the Torah's language describing kosher and non-kosher animals to teach us an important lesson.

Welcoming guests into one's home, the Gemara tells us, is greater than greeting the Shechinah. People have all sorts of ways of welcoming guests, some better than others.

One type of host sits down to a hearty meal and offers his guest only a small portion of food. Clearly that's not an optimal way of "welcoming" someone, and the guest will be left feeling hungry and unwanted. Another type of host serves his guest a large meal but takes only a small serving for himself. Although this guest technically has enough to eat, he too could be left feeling so uncomfortable eating in the host's presence that he'll leave hungry as well. It is far better is to serve a large portion to one's guest and then take the same for oneself, so that the guest feels perfectly comfortable eating his fill.

Using a play on words, R' Meir Premishlaner compares the host who eats a large portion but gives his guest only a little, to the animal who is *maaleh geirah*—fills his stomach, but is not *mafreses parsah*—does not extend his food to others. Conversely, the host who eats a little while serving a lot is like the animal which is *mafreses parsah* but not *maaleh geirah*. In order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of welcoming guests in the kosher way, a host has to offer a nice portion to his guest and also eat well himself.

This does not only apply to *hachnasas orchim*. Helping and caring about others is central to Yiddishkeit, and it must be done in a way that is not only about what we offer, but also about how it's taken. It's wrong to just want to give on your own terms, not caring about how the other person feels about it. Sometimes, it's also important to make sure that both of you come out feeling good, ensuring that neither the recipient nor the baal chessed feels abused or taken advantage of. Giving in a way that the needs of both people are satisfied is an essential part of doing it right. Getting the balance right, often demands some creativity, as well as enough imagination. You must put yourself in the other person's shoes in order to show genuine care and concern and provide people with what they need.

This week's essay is dedicated in honor of the upcoming Chasuna of

Eliezer & Jaquelin Esther Harari

And a special Mazel Tov to the Rosh Yeshiva

Rabbi Yakov Harari Shlit"a

Parshas **Shemini**

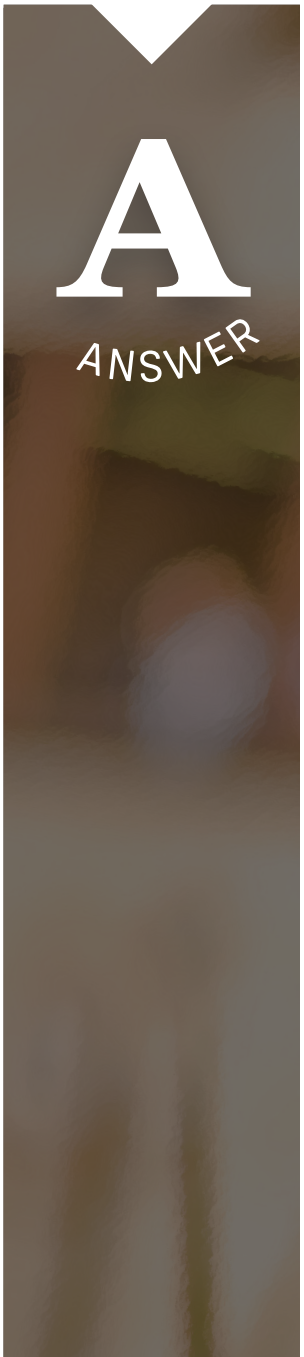
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Dear Rabbi Gruen, thank you for your weekly *shiurim* — they're really inspiring. I'd like to ask a question if that's okay.

***Baruch Hashem* I'm a *kallah*, and at the engagement celebration, one of my grandmothers told everyone present that she was going to give me a certain very special and expensive gift. When the next Yom Tov came around, however, my *chassan's* grandmother sent us that exact same gift — what's more, it was engraved with our names. Knowing my grandmother, she's going to take it very personally if she finds out, and she'll be so upset. Can you please advise me what to do?**

Thank you



This question obviously comes from a good place in the person's heart. Of course we should all feel upset at other people's distress and want to make others happy. At the same time, it isn't always possible to achieve that, so what then? Before we address this specific situation, I would like to address the attitude that brings it about.

It's important to distinguish between feeling bad at another person's troubles, and feeling responsible for solving them. Feeling responsible for another person's feelings, or obligated to resolve their difficulties, is sometimes overdone to a point where it becomes what's known as codependency, and can lead to additional problems. People generally have more than enough to worry about in their own lives without taking on worries about other people too. Codependency is extremely stressful, especially as solving someone else's problems is often so hard to do, and particularly if you're intent on not just solving their individual problems but actually fixing *them.*

The truth is that it's impossible to fix another person. You often can't directly change another person's feelings, and being that it's our feelings that make situations problematic or not, our efforts to change another person will very often fail. What's more, our efforts will also make it harder for that other person to fix himself, because he has become accustomed to the idea that "someone else" will take care of the problem for him.

In short, codependency doesn't do anyone any favors.

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As a side note, when people are only trying to do whatever they can to protect others from encountering difficulties or distress, it's worthwhile to remember that not only might you not be responsible for protecting them (or able to do so), but also that maybe, the distressing

event was actually meant to happen, and is good for the person. This is a delicate subject that isn't for us to determine, and people should certainly not come away with the impression that they should simply let others suffer because it must be *bashert* for them. However, I have seen many cases where codependent people try to protect others from experiencing the consequences of their mistakes and bad choices, or to satisfy their unrealistic desires for things that aren't good for them at all, thereby only making things worse.

If there's nothing we can do to prevent another person from experiencing *agmas nefesh*, while we should feel bad for them, we also have to accept that this can be the best thing for them right now.

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With that said, let's acknowledge the flip side; refusing to take responsibility for someone else's problems, does not mean that we should simply turn away. If with a bit of creativity and intelligence one can find a nice way to help someone out of a difficult situation, of course that's what we are expected to do.

I remember a situation involving two *bachurim* who were both getting married on the same day, but they had a problem. Each one wanted his rav to be *mesader kiddushin*, but they also knew that it was fitting to offer the *Roshei Yeshivah* that honor, and they were concerned that the *Roshei Yeshivah* would be offended if the *bachurim* did not do so.

The *bachurim* knew each other, and it so happened that they each learned in a yeshivah headed by the other one's rav. So they came up with an ingenious solution. Each of the *bachurim* invited his rav to serve as *mesader kiddushin*, and both *rabbanim* accepted. Then, each *bachur* invited his *rosh yeshivah* to serve as *mesader kiddushin*, and since both were already engaged for that night, in different cities, both had to regretfully decline.

Sometimes, all one needs, is some *chochmah* and creativity to make sure people are spared aggravation. If that's all it takes, why not? The attitude of, "Well, it's not my problem" isn't a Yiddishe approach.

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That story was an example of a relatively easy way out of a dilemma. In other cases, there is no easy way out. In the situation described in the question, one can imagine "well-meaning" relatives advising the *kallah* to "have *mesirus nefesh*" and accept the same gift from both grandmothers and then cover up for the rest of her life, making sure neither grandmother ever finds out.

That's not a very easy "way out" at all, especially as it's very likely that the truth will eventually emerge. Furthermore, we're not discussing accepting a gift of a second lokshen kugel with a smile, and then going out to buy the potato kugel you still need. The *kallah* will be forgoing another, probably valuable gift that she would have use for, and will be left with two of the same item, when she only needs one.

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It's possible that there isn't really a "solution" here that will leave everyone happy, and that in itself can cause people to feel resentment. However, it's important not to fall into the trap of obsessing over who's "right or wrong," whether or not the *chassan's* grandmother did the wrong thing when she bought a gift that another grandmother had already "reserved" for herself. Perhaps she didn't hear the other grandmother announce her intentions. Perhaps for whatever reason she felt that this was "her" gift and everyone knows that. There could be all sorts of reasons why she acted as she did, but what the *kallah* needs to keep in mind is that it's not her problem, and there's no reason for her to get bogged down in the silliness of figuring out who's at fault.

In a situation where you're not part of the problem, you're most often not obligated to find a solution. Of course if there's something you can do to help, you should, but when a person doesn't first take a step back, out of the picture, and

instead allows herself to get emotionally involved and feel the other person's distress almost as her own, she'll often be so upset at the situation that she won't be able to see her way out of it.

In this case, without knowing all the relevant details, I'd assume that the best course of action is simply to phone the grandmother and tell her what happened. Of course the *kallah* should express how much she would have loved to get this gift from her grandmother instead, as well as how she understands how hurt the grandmother may feel. She can add how happy she was when her grandmother told her that she was going to purchase this gift for her, and how much it meant to her... but things turned out differently and she feels so bad.

Feeling bad is not the same as apologizing. It's when a person starts apologizing for something that isn't their fault, that they convey the message that essentially it is their obligation to fix things, which is often misleading. If there's anything practical that can be done to help, one can certainly offer, but without taking any responsibility for the problem.

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While I don't think there's any need to go into what exactly happened (and why) in this particular story, there are situations where it's important to realize that elaborate explanations can actually make things worse, because they take the focus off the person who should be dealing with the problem, and placing it where it doesn't belong.

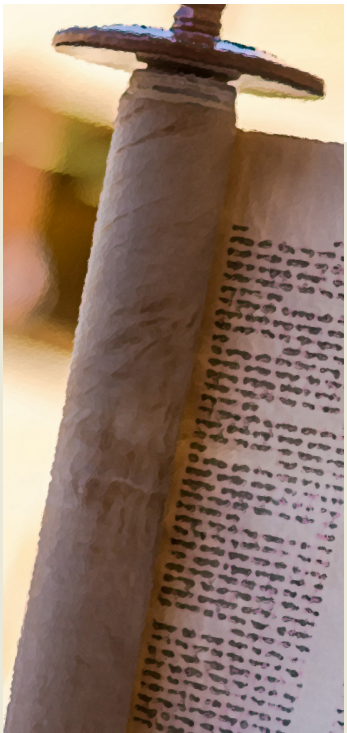
Trying to explain too much is also not advisable if it means that you start trying to persuade the other person that they should feel a certain way about what happened. Many people resent being told what they should or should not feel, and the truth is, it's not our business what other people think or feel about anything. We're only responsible for our own thoughts and feelings.

It's also not vital to be one-hundred-percent honest about what happened, if that's only going to make things worse. Sometimes, people get extremely stressed at "having to reveal the truth," but Chazal tell us that it is permissible to bend the truth a little in order to maintain harmony between people (and not in order to avoid facing an uncomfortable situation).

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Aspiring to increase *shalom* in the world is a very worthwhile goal. Sometimes, when it's just not possible to make peace in a difficult situation, we have to just focus on making peace within ourselves, and that's already enough work to keep us busy.

It's only when we are at peace within ourselves that we can look at other people's issues objectively enough to be able to help in a level-headed, yet still empathetic way. May Hashem help all of us see the world with the right perspective and be truly "kosher Jews".



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