Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Vayeitzei |

Let's Do This Together

PARSHAS VAYEITZEI: JOINING FORCES

In this week's *parsha* when Leah's third son Levi, is born, she exults, saying: "Now that I had a third child, my husband will join forces with me!" (Bereishis 29:34) What happened now? So some say that as long as a woman has two children she can manage on her own. But she only has two hands! So when a third child is born, she needs help from her husband. Others provide an explanation that's a bit deeper: when there are two children, each parent can take care of one child, they don't need to work *together*. When there are three children, finally the parents need to work together.

Regardless of what Leah meant, and I doubt that she simply meant any of the two earlier explanations, it is certain that this *passuk* is teaching us an important lesson. And the lesson is that it's important for a husband and wife to join forces and work together. Leah was grateful for the opportunity to be together with her husband. This is such an important strategy to implement in our marriages; find an area where the two of you can work together.

DON'T BE ROOMMATES

Sadly, some people who never studied the art of relationships, and never worked on their marriages, end up just being roommates, just tolerating each other. Then there are others who understand that marriage is more than a business agreement and are devoted to each other, filling in for their spouse whenever necessary. Thus their marriage becomes "I help you, and you help me". That's better than nothing, but it's still not a marriage.

A good marriage is when two people succeed at becoming one, they succeed at living together. They're no longer two different individuals with things that I need and things that you need; they are one couple who need the same things. They are really living together and sharing each other's lives. Now I can continue doing my things, and you can continue doing yours, but we're looking at it differently, we're seeing it as "our" things.

And even if your relationship is not at that point yet; you're still seeing your wife's problems as "her issues", it is still beneficial to find some sort of project to work on together. One project, one area where it's "ours". For some couples it could be starting a new business together to make some money on the side. For others- being in business together can be toxic. I know of a couple who embarked on a joint fundraising project for a cause that they both felt very strongly about. The husband told me that taking on this project was the best thing he did for his marriage.

THE TOGETHERNESS PROJECT

If you can find something, anything, that you can designate as your 'Togetherness Project', it

would be a great step forward for your marriage. Think about it as the one area that is just for you and your husband to be together. You're not doing him a favor, and he's not doing you a favor, but the two of you are getting together and working toward a common goal.

Now don't sit down with your husband and say: "Yossel, we need to find something to do 'together'." And then he rolls his eyes and accommodates you, he agrees to do you a favor. No, it should be something that genuinely interests both of you. Maybe both of you would like to learn *hilchos Shemiras Halashon*, yet never made the time for it. Or both of you would like to help out your neighbor, and you can sit together and plan out the best way to go about it. Whatever it is, try to find something that both of you are willing to invest in, and work for it *together*.

But remember! It's about being together. So as soon as you see that this project is leading to any type of tension; drop it. If it starts taking more time than expected, or if one of you begins taking it a bit too seriously; watch out. You're taking on this project to improve your relationship, not to introduce any sort of tension.

Some couples don't like working towards a goal, they would rather have fun together. Whatever works. If you can find something that both of you find fun and relaxing, go with that. But whatever it is make sure to reserve an area in your marriage for הפעם ילוה אישי אלי– for 'together time'.

A VISIT TO THE PLANETARIUM

Of course all this is assuming that you and your wife have some common areas of interest, which you probably do. But what if you're from Mars and she's from Venus. No matter what you try, you can't find a single area of interest that unites the two of you. You feel like you come from different planets! In such a case you can always *pretend* that you're interested in something.

Besides for the obvious benefit of being together, and working together; taking on such a 'togetherness project' gives you more opportunities for closeness. It's an opportunity to express how much you enjoy your wife's company and how much you appreciate her qualities. Sometimes your spouse is waiting to hear a compliment from you, she's waiting to hear what you think of her. But people are busy and between the business and the kids, many times a husband never has the opportunity to say such words to his wife. Working together on something gives you that opportunity for positive interaction.

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF IT

Here are some tips to help you make the most out of your new 'Togetherness Project'.

1. No stress allowed. Make sure that you don't get stuck on the details, and that you're not introducing any new stress because of this project.
2. Enjoy the moment, and vocalize it. Make sure you enjoy what you're doing [or at least pretend to enjoy it] and talk about it. Tell your husband just how much fun you're having, and how you wish you could be together more often.
3. Bring up the "we" aspect. Keep talking about how good it is that "we" are doing this. Make sure it sinks into both of your minds that you're a couple, and you do things together, you'll gain a lot from this.
4. Give your spouse the credit. Thank your husband for the opportunity to work on this. Even if you're the one that suggested it and did most of the work. Tell him how you wouldn't have managed without his talent and encouragement. Be specific. Don't worry about giving away the credit – the more you give, the more you get!

REMEMBER WHAT'S OURS

Once we're on this topic, the topic of togetherness, it's important to reiterate once again the importance of working together on the shared aspects of your home. There are certain decisions that belong to your husband; like it or not, he gets to decide which shoes he wants to wear. There are certain decisions that belong to your wife. And then there are certain things that are "ours", that should be shared. Make sure that these issues are indeed shared, and discussed on equal footing. There shouldn't be one spouse always making decisions.

It's great if you can make a joint effort - a 'Togetherness Project' about something that should really be a joint effort anyway. Your husband always takes care of your son's yeshiva issues, for example. You can sit

down with him and tell him that you want to be involved. Or better yet, if you're the husband, you can involve your wife. Tell her that although you usually take care of Binyamin's yeshiva issues, you would like to discuss something with her. As husband and wife you don't need to look for ways to *connect*, you *are* connected.

CHINUCH: LET'S BE A FAMILY

It happens that families are split in two, there are two teams- the parents and the children. The parents need to get the children to help out, and the children need to get the parents to let them have fun. But how about if we could change that dynamic? How about if the parents could work together with their children until their goals become a bit more closely aligned? 'Togetherness Projects' can help parents to attain real closeness with their children.

If you can get your child to work together with you on something, where he really feels like you're helping him and taking his ideas seriously, so much can be accomplished. When the child doesn't feel forced into it, when it's something that he wants to do, he feels very good about himself later. Abba and me accomplished this! It's a great feeling for a child.

For whatever reason, it may not have been necessary to do this years ago. Children were more obedient and they didn't need to be treated as equals. But nowadays we have to do what works. Actually it's not so new, the *chovos hatalmidim* already wrote about this in the early 1930's. He writes that nowadays [almost a hundred years ago] it no longer works to talk down to children. You can't tell a child to improve, he must want to improve by his own initiative. So try to work together with your child, try to find an area in which you can come together and truly connect.

-Q&A-

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

Question: Recently you spoke about "respecting your husband". I would really like to respect my husband, but there's nothing about him that I respect. Forgive me for saying this, but I feel like he's really a lazy good-for-nothing, so what should I do?

Answer: First of all I want to commend you for "wanting" to respect him, in the situation that you're in, and with the way you feel, it's nice that you're even trying. But in short, there are two things that I want to say to you:

1. If your husband is really not doing well, maybe there is something that you can do that would help him do better. Maybe you can offer him encouragement. Maybe you should reach out to someone for advice on this matter. Who says you have to accept that your husband is "a good for nothing"? Maybe there is something you can do about it.
2. And the second idea to take into account here, is that no one is "good for nothing" everyone has some admirable quality, some reason that is worthy of respect and admiration. It may not be the area that you want to admire, but it's still something. You want him to remember all of *shas* and he doesn't. But he does know Jewish music better than anyone else; you can compliment him on that! Your husband is proud of certain of his accomplishments. What are they? What do his friends see in him? See what he boasts about and make sure to compliment him on those things. Who knows? Maybe stoking his ego a bit will give him the confidence to get a hold on his life and make something out of himself.

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call 718.841.6557 or e-mail rabbigruen@lehair.org
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