RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS TERUMA

MOVING ON

This week's Parsha teaches us about building a Mishkon, a place for Hashem's Shechina. Each home is a *mikdash me'at*.

Before building the Mishkan, Moshe Rabbeinu told the people to bring donations; *"Me'ais kol ish asher yidvenu libo* – from each person, what his heart donates." The Torah stresses that this was a voluntary donation.

There was a meeting of many great Roshei Yeshiva in pre-war Europe. They met in Warsaw to discuss the financial plight of their institutions and the difficulty they were having in paying their staff. They invited the media to gain publicity for their cause. After one of the *Roshei yeshiva* spoke, one of the reporters got up and asked, "Rabbi Meir Shapiro from Chachmei Lublin is abroad, successfully raising huge sums for his new building. It seems like it isn't all that difficult to raise funds.

Harav Zalmen Sorotzkin of Lutzk Z"l who was present, addressed the questioner and explained: When building the Mishkan, there were several *terumos*. There was the *beka lagulgoles* for the *korbonos*, there was a donation for the *adonim*, and there was also the *terumas haMishkan* for building the actual structure. For the *terumas haMishkan*, each person was told to give as much as he wanted. In one day, they had all the money they needed and more. But when it came to the *machatzis hashekel*, though, the reality was very different. There are Halachos on how to collect this debt of Machatzis Hashekel from unwilling participants. But why would they be unwilling? All they had to give was a half-coin. They gave much more to build the mishkan.

Reb Zalmen explained that when it comes to building something new, people get very excited and give generously. But when it comes to the general upkeep, which was actually the point of the *mishkan* – the korbanos - people are not as interested. "Rav Shapiro is collecting for a building now and he's being successful. But you'll see, when it comes to upkeep, things will get much more difficult." And sure enough, that's exactly what happened.

We often fall into the same trap. We invest so much in our houses, buying, renovating, and even maintaining them. But often it ends up being like those who build buildings but forget what they're made for. A house is nice, but only when it is then turned into a home; a place for a family to grow together happily, where *shalom bayis* exists and children thrive. It's normal to get upset when something in the house breaks, but it's important to try and remember what you need the house for. At the end of the day it's only a 'container' for the people who need to thrive there.

We need to learn from the Mishkan, where the entire purpose was to be able to turn it into a Dwelling for Hashem and serve Hashem in that place. It wasn't just a one-time building, it was a preparation for an ongoing relationship. So too, saying "*Harei at mekudeshes"*- and certainly not building a house! - is not the end-goal; it's the starting point. From then on, you have to build the home you want to live in. It requires constant investment. It's not about the house. It's about the home.

This week's essay is sponsored anonymously, in appreciation
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and

לזכות האשה זלאטא זהבה בת פרידא מלכה
ללידה קלה בשעטו"מ אכי"ר

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for your weekly shiurim on Torah Anytime!

We had a lot of issues in the beginning of our marriage, mostly because my mother-in-law was too involved and mixed into our daily lives. Because of that we had no trust or privacy between us, as well as other issues. We went for help and she was advised to back off. Baruch Hashem, we're in a much better place now.

However, I still have very hard feelings against my mother-in-law. Any time my wife mentions something about her mother, and every time we go visit, my blood boils up. Automatically, this causes issues in our marriage. I'm always looking for excuses not to go, etc. How can I bring myself to let go of the hardships she caused and make my marriage even better?

Answer:

I'll start with commending you for asking how *you* can get over these feelings and improve your marriage, as opposed to discussing or hearing about what others should be doing differently. A constant refrain in all of my classes is that you can only control and work on what *you* can do. It's not about what your mother-in-law or your wife should be doing. Taking this responsible and mature approach is not only more correct and realistic, it actually usually brings about the desired outcome much sooner.

The story you relate makes sense. When in-laws mix into their children's lives, it can cause a lot of problems, problems parents may not be aware that they're causing. Of course this is something parents of married couples should be more aware of, yet married couples should also be aware that allowing their parents to meddle in their affairs is extremely damaging. Don't wait for someone to point this out to you and don't wait to see the damage. Take care of this as soon as possible. There are respectful ways to deal with this and I hope all such stories end as well as it did by you, but that's not our topic here.

Dealing with the residual resentment of such a relationship is not all that different than dealing with resentment you have towards any other person. It's not an easy thing to get over the pain someone caused you, and it's something most people struggle with in some area. Regardless of how wrong your mother-in-law was, your goal should be to get over your resentment.

It might sound simple, but people often get stuck in relating stories of the past, not so much because of *how* they're feeling now, but to justify to themselves why they still feel the way they do.

Rationally, they may realize that it's time to move on, that things have gotten better, that there's no point staying stuck, yet it's still too hard. Instead, they'll say, "This person did

this and that. It was painful. I want to get over it." They know they have to say that they want to get over it, but it's still too hard for them. The more they obsess over what happened, even if just by repeating it to themselves, the more they justify to themselves why they aren't yet past it.

Sitting in the past keeps us stuck because it makes us feel better about not moving on. When someone makes a strong resolve to move onward, and remembers their ultimate goal, that's when they can consciously decide to stop rehashing, talking about, reliving, and using the past experiences, realizing how counterproductive it is in moving ahead in life and reaching their aspirations.

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People sometimes think that in order to move on they have to convince themselves that what happened wasn't really painful. People often ask me to help them get over a certain feeling so that they should be able to do things differently. In other words, you want the feeling to pass to be able to do what you think you "should". But with that mindset, you can stay stuck for a long time. It's not easy to resolve emotional difficulty, although there are ways to do it. Waiting for it to resolve completely is usually a mistake. That's not what moving on means. It's an acknowledgement that it is simply time to move on, it's time to walk away from it.

Nobody can decide this for you. Nobody can tell you when it's time to move on and no one can be responsible for helping you get past it. But if *you* feel ready to get over it, great choice. Here's an important thing to think about: You are looking to get past your feelings of resentment towards your mother-in-law *in order to improve your relationship with your wife and to be able to visit your in-laws more easily*. It's all self-interest, and a good one. Not necessarily an obligation (which might depend on if and how someone asked you for forgiveness), or something you're doing for your spouse etc., simply for yourself.

How do you do that? By looking 'past' what happened in the 'past'. Those experiences have to remain in the past and you have to be ready to really move on. You have to start to behave differently and do things differently *now*, even before you're fully past it. Acting as if you've gotten over the feeling is what helps you actually get past it. The work on the emotions and the actions have to happen at the same time. This should be easier in a situation like yours where things are already better than they were.

Additionally, the fact that the subject here is your wife's mother, makes getting over it more worthwhile. Even before you're fully okay with it, doing the right thing will make your relationship with your wife even better.

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When it comes to actually getting over resentment, we have an advantage as Yidden. While others may never come up with a valid reason to actually forgive and forget, we understand that the mother-in-law is only a setup, directly sent by the Ribono Shel Olam.

The same is true in every situation. The Chovos Halevavos teaches that Hashem sets us up with the circumstances we need to work on ourselves or as a *kapparah*. While this doesn't justify anyone's wrongdoings, it gives us a perspective on how to look at anyone who has caused us pain. It may be difficult to feel that while you experience the difficulty, but when you look back to process it, it's clear that Hashem sent it for your benefit.

It can also be helpful to understand your mother-in-law's perspective. While it doesn't justify her behaviors, realize that she probably didn't have bad intentions. She does love her daughter after all. She was probably just uninformed about how to parent married children. She certainly didn't mean to hurt you.

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You can also try to analyze your situation as if it applies to someone else. Detachment can be an important part of dealing with emotional pain. This goes along with different therapeutic approaches: Try to see which part is emotional and which part does make sense logically, and slowly notice where the emotions and logic contradict each other.

It's easier to do this for others than for ourselves, but sometimes considering how you would advise another person to act in such a

situation, can be helpful. To the person who isn't experiencing this emotion now, it makes sense to move on. Sometimes that is actually the right thing to do! You can try to advise yourself as well, and maybe try mastering a technique that is helpful in resolving emotional stress, some of which are actually quite user-friendly and may not even require a professional practitioner. [I give some suggestions in my book Get Along With Everyone, chapter 14]. You can of course reach out to someone who might be helpful in resolving these feelings too.

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Aside from the effect a difficult relationship with in-laws has on a marriage, it can also have negative consequences for the children. Children pick up on a parent's feelings towards a grandparent – whether the parent's parents or in-laws. This is not a good message to give your children. It causes insecurity, lack of stability and lack of respect in the home. Besides, the *seforim* teach us that when children see parents respecting the grandparents, they will be more respectful of the parents. It's worth working on getting over it even if just for the children.

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The truth is that Avodas Hashem is all about doing the right thing even when your emotions pull you away. This is how we work on our *middos*. We know and believe that everything comes from Him and that He, not we, controls everything that goes on in our lives.

Of course, there are steps to this *avodah* and methods for dealing with emotional difficulty. But it starts with seeing an opportunity for growth instead of a battle. Part of growth is realizing that when someone hurts us in some way, it's an opportunity for us to become better.

This can be done gradually. Don't expect to build a new relationship overnight. You can start working on being comfortable in the presence of such a person. Slowly, start thinking more positively about them. Later, realize that they may not have meant to intentionally harm you, and may simply be a bit limited in their understanding of how to be nice and considerate toward you. At the same time, push yourself to act and behave the way you want to even *before* you're ready to do so. These will be the small steps towards building up the new relationship you're looking for.

Wishing you all the best,
Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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