



INBOX

Dear Editor,

I find the recent column by Dr. Yael Respler (*Conversational Lessons*, 6-20) and the letter by Harold Marks (*Jubax*, 7-25) deeply disturbing. The suggestions lower the marital relationship to one of competition and gamesmanship, presuming that people see their spouses as constantly under review for potential exchange, foster a lack of communication among spouses and friends, and encourage husbands and wives to manage their relationships out of fear that any positive opinion of a member of the opposite sex will drive spouses away.

M.G. states that competition “has no place in marriage” and yet suggests that wives limit praise of other women due to the competitive threat that those women might represent in the shallowest of relationships. M.G. counsels that a wife be careful when speaking of a single friend or of another friend’s weight loss. Although sometimes maintaining *shalom bayit* may require holding back some thoughts (e.g. God’s withholding details from Avraham about what Sarah said, per Rashi Gen. 18:13), this is the exception, not the rule. Full description of the single friend might help find the right *shidduch* and might also show a wife’s sense of security with her husband. A woman’s comment about someone else’s appearance might be a helpful signal to her husband to provide emotional support for his wife, who may be struggling with her self-image. A spouse should not have to walk on pins and needles in conversation with his or her spouse, who should be a trusted confidant. Undermining robust communication can do far more damage than should result from the favorable mention of a friend.

M.G. suggests that a woman not share her exhaustion with her sister because the sister might share what her own husband has done to help. The supposed “lesson” is not to start this dialogue, lest you imagine

that your sister’s husband cares more. Once again, the suggestion to close off dialogue is alarming. Can a woman not seek her sister’s support and advice in regard to life’s challenges? Besides, learning ways that one’s spouse might provide additional support hardly seems to be a negative result for either husband or wife.

The column also promotes a path to painfully insecure relationships. Dr. Yael suggests that a wife avoid interactions that include her husband and anyone who might be attractive to him. The fact is that there will always be someone whose surface beauty outpaces one’s spouse’s (my wife is a notable exception). If simple interactions with members of the opposite sex lead a spouse to think he or she would be better off with another person, the solution is not to avoid such interactions but to build a more meaningful understanding of marriage, which should not be compared to relatively superficial interactions with people over *Shabbat* lunch or even more extended social interactions. Additionally, avoiding the panoply of potential social interactions, including gatherings with mixed groups, could lead to the kind of isolation and boredom that can threaten a relationship.

Marks’s response notes that there is always competition and therefore husbands and wives should try to remain attractive to each other. Indeed, it is important to remain attractive to one’s spouse, and “what’s out there” might affect what our spouses find attractive. But our interest in attracting our spouses should be a matter of keeping a relationship strong, not about insecurely looking over our shoulders. Marks states that “a husband and wife have to be fools not to understand that competition is always close by.” No, they just have to have reasonable expectations for a committed relationship, and to be secure enough not to believe that their partners are always shopping around. It is that kind of relationship that will allow for healthy interaction between spouses and among spouses and their peers.

Rabbi Noah Gradowsky

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TORAH & HASHKAFAT

*Who does not want to get close to Hashem?
Yet, how do we do that?*

YESHIVA NER BARUCH - PTI

BY RABBI BORUCH BODENHEIM



The Way To Cling

In Parshas Re'eh, we have the mitzvah of "Uvo TiDbakun - and to Him you shall cleave" (13:5)

How does one cling to Hashem? Rashi quotes the Gemara (*Sotah* 14a) that asks: Is it possible to follow G-d who is infinite? The Gemara explains that cleaving means you shall emulate Hashem's qualities - just as Hashem clothed Adam and Chava, so too we should ensure people have clothes to wear. Just as Hashem visited Avraham *Avinu* when he was sick after his *bris milah*, so too we should visit the sick. The way to cleave to Hashem is by incorporating the characteristics of the Almighty in our daily life, to act with compassion and to care for others.

Why does Rashi use this Gemara to explain this mitzvah of clinging to Hashem when clearly the Gemara is talking about the mitzvah of following Hashem? Rav Aharon Kotler z"l (late Rosh Yeshiva and founder of Beis Medrash Govoha - Lakewood Yeshiva) explains that Rashi is giving us an entirely new

perspective on caring for others. "*Kirvas Elakim li Tor* - Closeness to G-d is what's good for me," says David HaMelech.

Think about it. Who does not want to get close to Hashem? Yet, how do we do that? Initially, we might think of *tefillah* or Torah study, which is true. When it comes to *chesed*, we view it as a very important mitzvah, but not a mitzvah that unites us with Hashem Himself, as Torah and *tefillah* help us do. Yet, from this Rashi, we see that simple mundane acts of caring for others constitutes clinging to Hashem... literally. Even small talk that makes a person feel important and cared for, picking up an item at a supermarket for your neighbor, visiting the sick or listening to what's bothering someone - all of these are clinging to Hashem Himself, just as much as Torah and *tefillah*. This is precisely why Rashi quotes

this Gemara on the mitzvah of clinging to Hashem, because by performing the mitzvah of following in Hashem's ways, we are then clinging to Him.

As we are now entering the month of Elul, I am reminded of a story.

It was the eve of Yom Kippur. The whole town was in shul. The Rav concluded his impassioned plea for everyone to do *tshuva*, and the Chazzan was ready to start Kol Nidrei.

Unexpectedly, the Rav turned to his *shamash* and says, "Come with me." They left shul and walked until they reached a home at the far end of town. The Rav knocked on the door.

A weak and ill-looking 12-year-old girl answered the door.

"How do you feel?" asked the Rav.

"I feel weak," said the girl.

"*Refuah Shleimah*. I want to wish you a *Ginar Chasima Tor*. Tell me... did you get a new dress for Yom Tov?" asked the Rav.

"I did, but my weakness is so on my mind I can't focus on the dress," replied the girl.

"Can you tell me what your dress looks

like?" asked the Rav. "Well, it's pink and has ribbons on the sleeves..." The girl continued to describe the dress in great detail. Incredibly, the girl's spirits seemed to perk up, and color started coming back to her cheeks. "I can even show it to you," added the girl. She then ran to get the dress and showed it to the Rav. At this point, the girl looked healthy and well.

"It's beautiful... the perfect Yom Tov dress! I want to wish you a sweet year," and with that the Rav left back to shul.

Small talk. Showing interest. A little *chesed*. That's cleaving to Hashem.

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