

## Matza or Motzei? The choice is ours

By: Dr. Leah Adams

In this article we will reorient our physical and spiritual selves in terms of person, place and time. In reference to person, we will analyze our relationship with others. In terms of place, we will analyze how we can change ourselves at home. In terms of time, we will link ourselves to our weekly connection to the Torah, the Sedrah of one of the recent weeks, and the start of the month of Elul.

In Parshas Re'eh Hashem says, "*Re'eh Anochi nosain lifneichem hayom bracha uklala*". Behold I have put before you today the blessing and the curse. Hashem sets forth the premise of choice, *B'chira chofshis*. In other words, our lives, and our happiness, are up to us. The Sfas Emes asks, what does the word "today" add to our understanding of this pasuk? He reminds us that every day we reaffirm our belief in Hashem's continual renewal of creation when we say in davening, *Michadesh b'chol yom tamid maaseh beraishis*. That means that, every day, although we may have sinned in the past, and our inclination has been soured because of sin, in reality we start off with the fresh opportunity for good choices every day. Let us see how this understanding of the pasuk impacts our daily lives. As an Orthodox Psychologist I am always fascinated with the insights that Chazal have in regards to human nature. Years before the popularity of Self-Help books, the Chachamim generated advice that has proven true and useful time and time again in my work with individuals and couples.

The well known acronym for Elul-*Ani LiDodi ViDodi Li* reflects the reciprocal relationship we have with Hakodosh Baruch Hu. As we invest more into this relationship, *Ani Lidodi*, so too Hashem returns the favor, *ViDodi Li*. Rabbi Avrohom Pessin, Zatzal, often spoke of the parallel relationships that exist between the physical and spiritual worlds. One is a *Dugma*, or template of the other. Our relationships here were deliberately crafted by Hashem to create a model on which to base our relationship with Him. All of our human relationships, including boss/worker, have the same intended goal of teaching us this point however, the parent/child and husband/wife relationships play the most important roles in terms of serving as these templates. As we approach Elul and use this as a time to nurture our relationship with HKB"H, let us use this time as well to enhance our parallel relationships, with our spouses.

In Mishlei (18: 22) Shlomo HaMelech writes "*Matza isha matzah tov, vayafek ratzon maHashem*". In the Feldheim edition of Mishlei the pasuk is translated as "he who finds a wife has found goodness and obtained favor from Hashem." Unkelos explains "*Dimashcach isisa tovasa, maschach umikabel reusei min Elahka*." He who has found a wife, has found a good friend from Hashem. What is this wonderful find? How is it that man sees this as wonderful or how does he earn this prize?

The Ibn Ezra reflects on the man's role of choice, or *B'chira*, in obtaining or creating this wonderful situation. "*Shehu yivakesh lihiyos ezer kinegdo vayimtzaeha*." He actively seeks an *Ezer Kinegdo*, (a woman who encourages minyan attendance and discourages Wednesday night poker that stands in the way of a good shiur), and so, "*hu yimtza tov!*" He will find good because "*Hashem yimtzaeihu tovaso baavur hidavko bameh shegazar alav Hashem*." Hashem is pleased that he has sought out what Hashem destined for him to do. The Ibn Ezra states this as a certain corollary. If man's intentions



are noble, if he is searching not just for a “Yes (wo)man” but for a woman who will help guide him and support his spiritual growth, (even at the moments when he is not inclined to do so), *then* Hashem repays him by providing him with a good wife.

The Metzudas Dovid interprets the pasuk in terms of Acts of Commission (Mitzvos Aseh) and Omission (Mitzvos Lo Saaseh). He divides the first and second half of our original posuk from Mishlei into two parts. “*Matza Tov*” he says refers to having a wife who helps a man with his “toiling”, his involvement in Mitzvos Aseh. The word used for toil here is the same as the word commonly used for toil in reference to learning Torah, “*Ameilus Bitorah*” Once he has this woman who actively pushes him to do what is right then “*ki matzilaso min hacheit*” she saves him from sin, from committing the Lo Saaseh. All of this sounds wonderful. So far Shlomo HaMelech is saying that a wife is “good”. Those of us that are the wives already know this.

In Koheles, (7:26) Shlomo HaMelech takes a very different tact in his understanding of women. “*UMotzei ani mar mimaves es ha'isha asher hi mitsudim vacharamim liba. Asurim yadeha. Tov lifnei Ha'elokim yimalet mimenah vichoteh yilached bah.*” The Artscroll translation is as follows: “And I have discovered more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets; her arms are chains. He who is pleasing to Hashem escapes her, but the sinner is caught by her.” The Medrash explains, what is this that she does that she is described as such a Femme Fatale? How is it that she leads to the painful and torturous downfall of her man? Is she an idol-worshipping vixen that leads him to idolatry? No, answers the Medrash, it is “because she demands of him things which are beyond his power she ultimately kills him with a bitter death.”

As powerful as the earlier message is to search for a spouse who will help us materialize our spiritual potential, and to be the spouse who supports our mate in avoiding the pitfalls of poor choices, is the message to have a realistic understanding of where our spouse is at and to where they are headed. Let's try to understand this by using a real life example. I am purposely bringing up a scenario in which there is no objective “sin” but rather just a difference of opinion. Imagine you are married to a kind man who you enjoy because of his capacity to focus on you. Now the Shul is asking for volunteers to run for Shul president. You have decided that your spouse should be president! He, however, is not capable or interested in being president because his personal strength lies in his quiet demeanor and he is not comfortable in a leadership role. As you argue the point you are becoming angrier at his inability to handle a situation that YOU created and he is feeling more and more inadequate. He begins to feel that nothing he does is good enough and, after a while, stops trying to please you in ways that you both used to enjoy. Would this not be “more bitter than death” for both of you? Returning to our idea of parallel relationships, would we want Hashem to expect seemingly insurmountable expectations of us?

Using the two pesukim from Mishlei and Koheles, Harav Chaim Dovid Adams, Zatzal, gives us marital advice. In the pasuk “*Matzah Isha*” where woman is described as good, the term for woman, Isha, is worth 306 in Gematria, or numerical value. In the pasuk from Koheles, where this finding a wife hasn't turned out too well, the term for the woman, “*HaIsha*” is worth 311. The gematria for man, Ish, is 311. When we have a relationship where one spouse puts the other spouse above them in terms of respect the



Isha (305) in the first pasuk who respects the value of her husband (311), then we have a happy couple. When a spouse looks not to raise the value of their spouse in their own eyes but rather to raise themselves in relationship to their spouse then they have missed their chance for a “good” marriage. The term “HaIsha” is translated as THE woman. When I put myself as number one then we have a competitive relationship devoid of respect. When each of us puts our spouse as number one, then we have two winners who are tied for first place!

In the book “Right From the Start: A Torah guide for Shalom Bayis” by Rebbetzin Chaya Heyman (available at the Feldheim warehouse) the author shares with us vignettes to make her points. Here is an edited version of one such story which shows us the extreme to which a good spouse goes to maintain happiness in her home. (Reprinted here with the author’s permission.) After 60 years of what friends described as a peaceful marriage, the wife got sick and asked her husband for a favor. “ ‘A favor, anything. . . ’ he said. ‘Dear, please bring me a little box. . . In the chest in our bedroom. . . ’ ‘Of course’ (he responded). ‘She slowly began, ‘On our wedding day my grandmother begged me never to fight with you. . . And when the going got rough, to run quickly to my room. . . And crochet doilies. That would calm me and the storm would subside. Please open the box now’ she said. He did and was astonished to see two neat white embroidered doilies lying there next to a wad of cash. ‘The two doilies I understand’ he sputtered, ‘But what is this \$25,000 doing here?’ ‘That’s from all the doilies I’ve sold.’”

The Gemara in Berachos, 8. brings down an interesting custom. When a young man got married, the others would ask him after his marriage, “Matza?” alluding to the pasuk in Mishlei where woman is extolled as good, or “Motzei?”, alluding to the pasuk in Koheles with a very different slant. As we approach this season of introspection and growth let us ask ourselves, do we choose to find or be cause for “Matza” or “Motzei”?

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