



KI TEITZEI 5785

In our Parsha (24:5), we read how in a couple's first year of marriage - the proverbial SHANA RISHONA - the husband is enjoined V'SIMACH ET ISHTO ASHER LAKACH - "and he shall gladden his wife whom he has taken." On this phrase, Rashi (ad loc) takes issue with how Targum Yonatan ben Uziel understands Targum Onkelos's translation of V'SIMACH ET ISHTO. Targum Yonatan renders Onkelos's words as "he shall be glad with his wife." Rashi objects: The verb V'SIMACH is a transitive verb in the PI'EL and is thus causative, meaning "he shall gladden - not with, but just - his wife."

What, in essence, is the difference between the two translations? According to Targum Yonatan, the husband is obligated to be happy with his wife. That is, they should each be happy in whatever they do. If, for example, the husband and wife are happy together going out for dinner, then the charge of SHANA RISHONA has been fulfilled. Rashi, however, understands Targum Onkelos differently. In this reading, the husband is commanded to make sure his wife is

happy even if he, in so doing, would not be happy at all. In other words, for example, should his wife wish to eat out, and he is exhausted from a hectic day at work and would much rather just stay home, if dining out would make her feel wonderful, then the directive of V'SIMACH ET ISHTO would require him to put aside his own comfort and take his wife out.

Upon reflection, we may suggest that other than the technical grammatical issue raised by Rashi, both explanations as to how husband and wife should relate to one another may be correct. The Talmud (Yevamot 62b) states: "One should love one's wife as himself and honor her more than himself." To love your spouse as you yourself, as Targum Yonatan might explain, would translate into a husband/wife choosing an activity or an attitude-attribute that would equally please both. To illustrate such an attitude-attribute, if I appreciate my spouse being patient with/forgiving of me, which, of course, would make me extremely happy, then I should treat her no less because I know it would make her happy as well.

What, though, does it mean to honor your spouse more than yourself. Here, Rashi's interpretation of the Targum may provide a valuable message. In a healthy marriage, often one partner should be prepared to put their honor aside, to be MOCHEIL

AL K'VODO for the sake of the other. That is, the relationship between husband and wife should be such that each should be ready to declare, in so many words, that "If it really matters to you, it matters to me, regardless of how I feel; that if something is truly important to you, then it will be important to me." In other words, the husband (and, of course, in reverse as well) should be able to climb out of himself - "honor his wife more than himself" - and, in recognizing his wife as a unique individual in her own right, attempt to understand what his wife needs, what can give her comfort, encouragement and joy. And to do so, especially when he, for whatever reason, feels he'd rather not.

That for the sake of marital health and harmony, learning to place the honor of one's spouse above your own is both proper and religiously mandated can be derived from none other than the Almighty Himself. In the Biblical episode of the Sotah (Bamidbar 5:11-31), the suspected unfaithful wife, the Torah states that portions of the Torah with HaShem's Name were to be written on parchment and placed in the "bitter waters" to be erased. Should the sotah trial prove her innocence, the marriage was restored with many blessings (Sifrei 19). On this ritual, the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 9:36) strikingly comments that the Master

of the Universe permitted the sacred words of Torah - which contained His very Name - to be obliterated in order to restore the peace - SHALOM BAYIT - between husband and wife. If then, HaShem was prepared, as it were, to put his honor aside - to be MOCHEIL AL K'VODO, to see His sacred Name literally erased, so that marital bliss could once again reign in the Jewish home, so too, spouses should treat one another no less in sustaining the strength and well-being of their marriage.

This lesson, while specifically discussed within the context of marriage, has a most pertinent and extraordinarily important message for everyone, especially as we prepare to greet the Yamim Nora'im. No year is without its failures and blunders, especially in our relationship with others. We've all made such mistakes: a slight here, and inuendo there, indifference to the anguish of others, stinginess and callousness. True, there may have been times when the negativity may have been warranted. After all, we often get hurt as well. But, it's Elul, and precisely now, when we very much pray that HaShem overlook the insults and offenses we've committed against Him - for who hasn't! - we, on our part, must demonstrate that we are prepared to step back, swallow, if necessary, what we've done wrong, apologize, and repair our relationship

with those whom we may have offended. Only then, may we approach the All-Forgiving Almighty and beseech His atonement and blessings for a New Year. 🙏

Ed. note: Without taking anything away from Rabbi Bienenfeld's words, I would like to add two things of my own.

Personal opinion - the Torah commands the husband V'SIMACH ET ISHTO. It does not say vis versa. This doesn't mean that the wife should not make her husband happy, but the husband shouldn't keep score (if you get my point).

One more point: Rav Shlomo Zalman z"l was known to say that for every-one else, there is a concept of the newly married couple having a special status during the first year. But for the couple itself, V'SIMACH ET ISHO is a forever endeavor.