Jewish Tribune – Ki Seitzei

**The Key to a Happy Marriage**

It is a set of statistics that you almost have to read twice to fully digest: one third of footballers get divorced within 12 months of retiring.

Wider research suggests that this figure rises beyond 70 per cent within three years. That would make eight out of a starting eleven.

The particular issues confronting a newly retired footballer are many. He struggles because he misses his team-mates, the camaraderie, the training, the routine. Many players become institutionalised. And of course, for the vast majority, there is no longer the adulation or the hefty pay that fuels a financially lavish and carefree lifestyle.

The transition, often unplanned and sometimes due to career-ending injuries, create mental health pressures that don’t just affect those on the pitch. Families and loved ones are impacted too.

What has this to do with Parshas Ki Seitzei?

Our sedrah speaks of the sad topic of divorce. Frankly, it is an uncomfortable subject to discuss. We have witnessed a sharp rise in the percentage of frum marriages ending in divorce in recent times and I am aware that it is a complicated and painful area.

Nonetheless, our sedrah deals with this topic and there is an idea of Rav Pam that I would like to share with you which gives an important perspective.

The Torah gives a man special exemptions in the first year after his wedding.

כִּי יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה חֲדָשָׁה לֹא יֵצֵא בַּצָּבָא ... נָקִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵיתוֹ שָׁנָה אֶחָת, וְשִׂמַּח אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר לָקָח (כד,ה)

When a man marries a new wife, he should not go out to the army,

he should be free for his home for one year, and he should gladden his wife who he has married.

Rashi says the Targum of this possuk is וְיַחְדֵּי יָת אִתְּתֵהּ, *he should gladden his wife*. But, adds Rashi, one who translates the words as וְיֶחְדֵי יָת אִתְּתֵהּ, *he shall be glad with his wife*, is mistaken, because this is not the translation of וְשִׂמַּח, but rather וְשָׂמַּח.

Many of us learn this Rashi and as it seems a bit grammatical, our brain freezes, our eyes glaze and our fingers move quickly to the next Rashi.

But not Rav Pam ztl. Rav Pam notes a vital message in Rashi’s comment, which contains critical advice for successful sholom bayis.

Many young men go into marriage and forget Rashi’s message. They think that marriage means that he should be happy together with his wife. But Rashi warns that this is a mistake. Rather, in order to have a happy marriage, a husband must make his wife happy.

And if she will be happy and treated with dignity and respect, she will be delighted to please him and the marriage and the home will flourish.

But if he thinks that the purpose of marriage is that *he* be happy, that she must cater to his every whim and desire, and if she does not do so, he walks around with a thunder cloud over his head or explodes in anger and berates her for her lack of middos, then that is a recipe for disaster.

As Rav Pam notes, even the most exceptional baalas middos will not be able to tolerate continuous verbal abuse, selfishness and inconsiderate behaviour.

Most of the berachos in Sheva Berachos are directly related to marriage. But one beracha stands out as being a little out of place. The very first beracha is “shehakol bara lichvodo – Who has created everything for His Glory.”

What does Hashem creating everything for His Glory have to do with marriage?

Rabbi Frand quotes a brilliant insight of Rabbi Abraham Twerski ztl and shows us that it has everything to do with marriage.

If the couple go into marriage with a selfish perspective of “what’s in it for me?”, that is bad news. But if the couple go into marriage realising that everything in this world was created for Hashem’s Glory, including marriage, then the marriage will succeed.

If the couple have a common goal of fulfilling Hashem’s Will, that common aspiration will guide them through life and sustain their shalom bayis. If each spouse focuses on their own glory, the marriage is doomed.

I can’t comment on divorce rates amongst retiring professional footballers and it needs people who are wiser and more experienced than me to guide in this complicated area. But in my very humble opinion, Rashi’s message as well as the first beracha of Sheva Berachos, hold the key to a happy marriage and a peaceful home.

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