

Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch Yom Kippur Class 5782 "The Critical Element in Successful Relationships"

1. Just as a person's merits and sins are weighed at the time of his death, so, too, the sins of every inhabitant of the world together with his merits are weighed on the festival of Rosh Hashanah. If one is found righteous, his [verdict] is sealed for life. If one is found wicked, his [verdict] is sealed for death. A Beinoni's verdict remains tentative until Yom Kippur. If he repents, his [verdict] is sealed for life. If not, his [verdict] is sealed for death. (Mishneh Torah Teshuva 3:3)
2. If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when? (Avot 1:14)
3. Aveilut/mourning is the foundation for nechama/consolation. The word aveilut derives from the Hebrew word *aval*, which has a double meaning: definitive acceptance, and but/however (used to transition from one idea to another, as in "point A, but/however, point B"). When we go through the mourning process, we have both objectives in mind: first, to definitively accept the loss of our family member, with the purpose of beginning to put the loss behind, and second, to transition (but/however) into moving on with our lives... This first stage of definitive acceptance helps us achieve the second stage, transition, which naturally leads to the following stage of nechama, a word with multiple related meanings: consolation, regret, changing one's mind and changing the way one thinks in general. The stage of nechama teaches us that the greatest consolation we can receive after the death of a loved one or a terrible loss is to use the experience as a vehicle for genuine change in our way of thinking. So aveilut, the experience of acceptance and transition, and nechama, the process of changing one's mind, leads to Teshuva, which as we explained in our discussion about Rosh Hashana, is all about redefining ourselves in our mind. (The Book of Life Part Two Yom Kippur Chapter 1 "Failsafe")
4. The Rambam begins the Laws of Teshuva with a peculiar sentence structure: All the mitzvot in the Torah, if a person transgressed one of them, when he does Teshuva and returns from his sin, he is obligated to confess before God.... By awkwardly placing the subject (the phrase all the mitzvot in the Torah), at the very beginning of the first sentence of the treatise, the Rambam is expressing that God's reality of the Torah and all its commands is the premise for all that follows. That is why the first topic the Rambam covers in his Laws of Teshuva is viduy/confession, which is a part of the Teshuva process, before he even explains Teshuva... (The Book of Life Part Two Yom Kippur Chapter 2 "Wiped Out")
5. The mitzvah of the confession of Yom Kippur begins on the day's eve, before one eats [the final meal], lest one choke to death in the meal before confessing. (MT Teshuva 2:7)
6. According to the Talmud, after a wedding, a young couple would be greeted with the question, *matza oh motzay?/found or finding?*, a phrase based on two contradictory verses authored by the sagacious King Solomon. The first verse, written in Mishlei/Proverbs, states that one who has found/matza a spouse has found something wonderful. The second verse, written in the melancholy book of Kohelet/Ecclesiastes, cynically states, I find/motzay marriage to be more bitter than death. At first glance, this greeting seems to be asking the couple an appalling question – are you happy with one another or are you miserable? The Talmud expresses no qualms about this greeting, but what could possibly justify such a crude query? And how could the astute King Solomon contradict himself so blatantly in his opinions about marriage?

However, it becomes clear that the greeting was not meant to be a question at all; it was actually a way of communicating subtle but sage advice from King Solomon about the key to a successful marriage. Surprisingly, the words Matza and Motzay originate from the same root; the only difference is that Matza represents the past tense and means One who has found..., but Motzay is in the present tense and means I find [marriage].... Therefore, the advice is as follows: Once you're married, if your attitude is that you have found the right person, meaning, you have accepted your spouse regardless of faults, that attitude will lead to a happy union. However, if you persist in the process of finding out if your spouse is right for you, that attitude of non-acceptance will lead to a life of misery. During dating and courtship, it is quite sensible to consider the important qualities of your potential mate, in order to give yourself the best shot at a happy marriage. However, once you have committed to someone special, it is vital to immediately shift focus from finding mode to found mode. Your partner must never feel that you are constantly monitoring and evaluating their worthiness. In the inimitable words of King Solomon, living under such scrutiny is a fate more bitter than death. (The Book of Life Part Two Yom Kippur Ch. 3 "The Power of Love")

7. We are instructed to seek out God when He is to be found/b'himatzo. As we mentioned that phrase refers to what occurs during the 10 days of Teshuva, which culminate on Yom Kippur. It is certainly no coincidence that this instruction uses the same root word, matza, as the greeting to newlyweds in ancient Israel. The message is that we must not only seek out God at this time, but also acknowledge that we have found Him. (ibid)
8. A love that is dependent on something when the thing ceases, the love Also ceases. But a love that is not dependent on anything never ceases. (Avot 5:16)
9. One who serves [God] out of love occupies himself in the Torah and the mitzvot and walks in the paths of wisdom for no ulterior motive: not because of fear that evil will occur, nor in order to acquire benefit. Rather, he does what is true because it is true, and ultimately, good will come because of it. This is a very high level which is not merited by every wise man. It is the level of our Patriarch, Abraham, whom God described as, "he who loved Me," for his service was only motivated by love. (Mishneh Torah Teshuva 10:2)
10. That is why Yom Kippur is such a precious gift. God does not expect us to measure up to Abraham. He asks us only to devote one day – Yom Kippur - to restoring our relationship with Him. In this spirit, it is related that the Berditshever Rebbe would sit down prior to Yom Kippur with a list of "transgressions" he felt that God had committed against him during the year. He would declare to God: If you forgive me for my transgressions against you, I will forgive you in return! I do not believe he was being blasphemous or making a deal with God. Rather, he was expressing the mutual acceptance which characterized their relationship, a bond he considered unbreakable because it was unconditional. It was a mutual acceptance, of God being found, b'himatzo, during the time when he is to be found. In other words, the Berditshever looked at our relationship with God in the same way King Solomon viewed marriage – a relationship of acceptance and love. (The Book of Life Part Two Yom Kippur Chapter 4 "Unconditionally")