

Were they wise they would comprehend this, they would discern it from their end. (32:29)

There are some things that we only seem to comprehend at the end, after we have had the bad experience, and everything good that we believed would occur does not materialize. Only then do we realize our foolishness for not listening to the voice of reason, to those who discourage us from making a bad choice. The worst part is that, even after we have supposedly learned our lesson, it does not serve as a deterrent from performing the same foolish acts over again. The **Kaf HaChaim, zl**, offers a powerful analogy to explain the *pasuk*.

A man was married to an exceptional woman. She possessed superior intelligence as a result of her sharp acumen. She was exemplary in her *middos tovos*, positive character traits. Indeed, she personified the *eishes chayil*, true woman of valor, as characterized by Shlomo Hamelech in *Sefer Mishlei*. Her husband was acutely aware of this most wonderful gift with which he had been blessed, and he made every effort to show her his appreciation.

Once, he was on a business trip which took him to a small town where he enjoyed the hospitality of the local Jewish innkeeper. It had been a long – but successful – trip and he saw no harm in relaxing from his tensions with a good hearty shot of whiskey. One shot led to two, and, before long, the man was in a state of total inebriation. The innkeeper saw an opportunity to benefit from his guest's present "relaxed" state. It seems that the innkeeper had a daughter who was neither blessed with exceptional physical looks, nor was she unusually bright. These deficiencies (in the eyes of the beholder), coupled with her living in a small out-of-the-way village which precluded her contact with society, created a situation in which she was challenged with regard to *shidduchim*, marriage. Being not overly intelligent, not overly appealing in appearance, her father was climbing the walls in search of a young man to marry his daughter.

The innkeeper saw before him a solution to his problem. He approached the inebriated guest and proposed his daughter to him as a wife. "But I am already married", the guest countered. "Nu, so what is wrong with a second wife?" the innkeeper asked. Back and forth, they talked, until in a moment of total imbecility, the guest agreed to marry the innkeeper's daughter. Quickly, the father called two witnesses and made a makeshift *tenaim*, binding engagement. Voila! His daughter was practically married!

The guest stepped out into the cool night air, and, after a short time, his head began to clear. He suddenly realized what he had done. Now what? His wife would probably be furious with him. On the other hand, if he were to renege on the marriage, he will have lost a good friend and hurt the feelings of an innocent girl. He had only one course of action. During all the years of his marriage, whenever a difficult decision came before him, he would discuss the issue with his wife. Her clear, common- attitude to the various problems was a breath of fresh air. She would surely advise him regarding to his present predicament.

The man came home and, meekly, he began to present the entire debacle: how he became drunk and betrothed to this other woman. She was well aware of the other woman and her reputation. She looked at her husband and said, "I think you should keep her as a wife." He looked at his wife incredulously, "Do you know what you are suggesting? Her father expects me to marry her within the month!"

"Why wait a month? I think you should get married this week", his wife answered. The husband thought that he would lose his mind. "How can I get everything ready within a week?" he asked. "I do not have an apartment, furniture and the various accoutrements that go with setting up a house."

"Do not worry," his wife replied. "You can use our house. We will all live together as one happy family. I will leave the day of the wedding and live with my father for a month. I will return home after the month. This will give you the opportunity to get to know your bride. There is, however, one condition: during the month that I will be gone, you may not contact me. Under no circumstances may you reach out to me during this time – regardless of the situation!"

Reluctantly, the husband agreed to his wife's advice. He did not understand her reasoning, but who was he to argue with her? He was the one who had created his own problem. He would have to live with it. He notified his *kallah's* parents that he wanted to get married the following week. His wife helped prepare the dinner and even decorated their home to welcome the new bride.

The wedding took place, and he brought his bride home with him. Now that he was stone sober, he looked at her and saw a different woman than the one he had seen in his inebriated state. Well, looks are not everything. Perhaps her *seichal*, common sense was her strong point. He asked her, "What is today?" She replied, "Wedding." "I know that. What day of the week is it, Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday?" "Wednesday," she repeated. "What was yesterday?" "Wednesday" she repeated – again. "What is tomorrow?" he asked. "How should I know?" she replied. "We will wait and see and when tomorrow arrives, we will know what it is."

Seeing that he had really fallen in, he figured that maybe she might at least be proficient in the kitchen. He asked her, "Can you please bring me a glass of water?" "From where?" she asked. "From the kitchen," he replied. "Where is the kitchen?" she asked. This went on for a while until the husband realized that this woman was clueless concerning anything. She obviously was physically and mentally challenged, which was far from appealing. He immediately returned with his new wife to her father's home and petitioned for a divorce. He had been duped into marrying a woman who was not for him.

The man sat at home for an entire month – lonely, depressed, and miserable. Oh, did he miss his wife! She was so special. Now he realized even more how fortunate he was to have such a special wife. He now understood why she had readily agreed to the marriage. She knew it would not work. She was acutely aware that he had to discover for himself that such an arrangement was doomed.

Had she told this to him, however, he would not have believed her. He would always wonder: Perhaps she would have been good for me. Maybe the marriage would have worked. He had to find out for himself the hard way that such a relationship was not for him.

The *Kaf HaChaim* sums up the *mashal*, analogy. The Torah is compared to a faithful wife without peer. It guards over us and protects us from harm. Along comes the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, and attempts to push “her,” the Torah, aside. It tempts us with another spouse. We defer to our desires, falling into the trap of blandishments set for us by the king of guile, the *yetzer hora*. We follow our heart, falling prey to its passions, until we realize too late that this is a poor imitation of Torah.

Lu chochmu yaskilu zos, “Were they wise, they would comprehend this.” They would realize that absolutely nothing can replace the Torah. There is no wisdom like the Torah’s wisdom, no lifestyle like the one prescribed by the Torah. Too many have wandered off to chase their dreams, only to wake up to a bitter nightmare. They thought that another spouse, a life detached from Torah observance or one in which they could inject a little modernity, some progressive thinking, would add to their *geshmak*, enjoyment of life. *Yavinu l’acharisam*; ‘They would discern it from their end.’ In the end, they have lost everything. Their past is gone; their present is filled with frivolous foolishness, nothing of enduring value; their future is likewise gone, because the decisions they made earlier in life took their toll on their children, who are now completely divorced from Judaism. Thus, the sooner they realize the folly of their ways and come to their senses, the better are their chances of salvaging their present and future.