RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS METZORA

BEING HAPPY OR BEING RIGHT

Part of the purification process for a *Metzora* included the offering of two birds. One bird was slaughtered and the other was set free. Rashi explains that since the *Metzora's* sin involved improper speech, his korban consists of birds who chirp continuously.

Sefer Aperion, (by the author of the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*), raises the question of why the Torah requires two birds, especially since one is simply set free. He brings a passage from *Gemara Chulin*, where Rav Yitzchak explains from the *passuk* in Tehillim, *"Ha'umnam eilam tzedek tedabairun* - Were You silent about righteousness that You should have spoken...?" that a person's mission on Earth is to pretend he is mute. Rav Yitzchak adds that this does not include *Divrei Torah*, "Righteousness you should speak". For worldly matters, we should be mute, but we should definitely use speech for words of Torah.

We know that the purpose of a *korban* was to help a person do *teshuvah* by realizing that the animal or bird was being slaughtered instead of him. Were we to bring only one bird as part of the Metzora's purification, the person might think that he should 'slaughter' his speech (represented by the chirping birds) entirely. Since speech can cause so many problems, perhaps a person should make himself truly mute. But by allowing the second bird to go free, we understand that only *some* speech is to be eliminated, but there are types of speech that are not only allowed, rather actually required. The right words have to be said. In fact, the Zohar teaches that it's worse to refrain from saying what should be said than to say what shouldn't be.

This concept is very relevant in every home. Almost every difficulty that arises in a relationship can be attributed to the spoken word. It's usually not so much the action, as much as something that was said wrong, or at the wrong time. By contrast, almost every aspect of improving relationships is connected to the spoken word. It's not enough to do the right thing; it has to come along with the right words. If a husband comes home late one night *and even later another night*, it's the night when he apologizes that will go over better, not the night when he's home earlier. And if you buy a gift but give it over with the wrong words, it can actually even be damaging.

The Chafetz Chaim explains that *"Hachaim v'hamaves beyad halashon* – Life and death are in the hands of the tongue." A person is not meant to refrain from speech. On the contrary, a person's life depends on proper use of speech, just *as much as* death, may depend on improper speech. That's the balance. A relationship which can be jeopardized with words cannot exist without words.

This week's essay is dedicated by **Rabbi Issamar Ginzburg**

In honor of the birth of a baby boy to our dear friend

Mr. and Mrs. Yosef Sherman

May they be Zoche to see much Yiddish Nachas from all their children!

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for your beautiful classes on Torah Anytime. I listen to the English and Yiddish class every week and I feel like they really improve my life. My question is about finances: Is a wife obligated to help her husband with finances if she works and earns nicely? What about if her husband is in debt and struggling to pay the bills, as is the case with many families today because of the rising cost of living?

My wife believes that since she works very hard to earn the money, she is not obligated to help out financially and she wants to keep all the money she earns for herself. She wants to spend it on whatever she thinks is important, instead of helping out with the bills. She does not want her hard-earned money to cover daily expenses. She claims it will make me become lazy and unmotivated, (which I don't think is true). She says that she spoke to other women who work and they told her that they keep the money they earn and spend it on extras and vacations. They don't help their husbands with bills or debt. My wife also claims that her mother once asked this *shailah* from her *rav* if she can keep and hide all her money she earns, and the *rav* said that it's okay. In fact, she claims the *rav* said that the Gemara which says that the money a woman earns belongs to her husband only applied during that time and is not relevant today.

It's possible that there is a deeper shalom bayis issue here, or maybe a communication problem. I'm not ruling that out. Since this is a very sensitive topic, I'd love to hear your advice and opinion on this subject.

Thank you.

Answer:

You point out at the end that your question is possibly indicative of a deeper *shalom bayis* issue. Your observation is most likely correct. It may look like it's the finances, but chances are there is something underlying here as well. This is true not only for yourself but for almost everyone who finds himself in similar circumstances. I say this both because in general whenever there are serious disagreements that get challenging and personal, there's usually more to it, and because specifically in this topic, it's quite accepted and normal for women to help out with finances these days, which could definitely make one wonder why your wife is challenging that.

Just addressing the finances will probably not solve your problem. It's important to figure out what these issues are so you can address them. And addressing them always means nothing more than trying to find out what *you can do* to make things better. That's not to say that you caused this issue necessarily, but there's always something *you can do* to change the situation.

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The first question is if you have open and healthy communication in general and about finances in particular. Do you discuss things openly or do you only talk about technical issues? Is your communication clear? Do you understand each other? When and how do you communicate? Do you bring up the financial issue while looking at the bills and your wife is putting kids to sleep and both of you are tense?

Furthermore, does your wife *feel* that you care about her? Does she feel that you care about her vacations? Does she feel that you care about her things? The question isn't *if* you care; the question is if she *feels* your care. Another question: Does your wife *feel* that you appreciate what she does? If she's like most wives, I'm sure she does a lot for you. This may be daily responsibilities or even working and earning money. (And even if you feel she doesn't, or she really does not, she might still very strongly feel that she does)! Often, such miscommunication happens when people feel underappreciated. You're asking her to care about something that's important to you, to forgo her extras for something that means a lot to you. In order for that to happen, she has to feel cared for and appreciated, and it has to be communicated correctly.

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Now that we have established the criteria, let's look at your situation. Like many people, you're struggling financially, and it seems like the easiest solution is for your wife to give you the money she earns. But maybe there's something you can do differently to make ends meet. The solution to your financial issues isn't to send your wife, or even your daughter, to work.

You mentioned that your wife is afraid that you'll become less motivated to earn money if she shoulders some of the responsibility. You don't agree. She may be wrong, but it's worth contemplating why she thinks so. Is there something you'd do differently (or have done differently in the past) if/when your wife wasn't working?

According to the *Gemara* and *Shulchan Aruch*, your wife is obligated to give you her money and I don't know of a halachic authority that says this isn't relevant today. (This should be discussed and clarified with *Daas Torah* though, just to make sure your situation isn't different.) However, she is not obligated to work. In fact, if you make her give you the money she earned, it is completely within her rights to stop working. It is very probable that she will do that, after all, if she can't spend it, she may not feel the need to earn it. She may be wrong for not giving over the money, but she is not responsible to provide for you. In the *Kesubah*, *you* undertook to provide for *her*. Your parents may also have a lot of money, or maybe you have a rich uncle, and perhaps they should help you out, but like your wife, they are not obligated to do so.

At this point, it seems like you're arguing about the situation and whether she does or doesn't have to give you the money. But maybe you can communicate openly, validate and address her concerns. Present the facts: "These are our expenses, this is my income, this is what I'm trying to do to cover, and I'm motivated to do more. Right now, I need a bit more. It would mean a lot to me and would be greatly appreciated if for the time being you

can help me. Would you do this for me now?" Harping on her obligation is not going to help you. She may be obligated to, but that's her concern. Your concern is how to be successful and make her feel good about helping you. It's a choice between being right or having *shalom bayis*.

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While I'm not a financial coach, I want to mention a general guideline about money matters. You don't always need to figure out how to earn more money to sort out financial difficulties. You may need to learn how to budget and allocate differently. You may want to figure out how to prioritize expenses. If you look into those angles, you may see that you don't actually need your wife's money to cover your expenses.

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There's another important issue here, and that is the problem of not following one specific rabbinical authority. What your wife's mother's rav said, or what her friends' rav said is irrelevant. When you have a *kashrus* concern, you shouldn't rely on someone else's *psak* nor even your own *psak* from another occasion. Each detail can make a difference in the final *psak*. It's the same here. A ruling from someone else's rav has no bearing on your situation. If you and your wife want to know what her specific halachic obligation is, you have to ask *your* rav. In general, it is helpful and beneficial for you to have a family rav, and if you don't, you may have a bigger and more general problem than just about finances.

You may want to ask your wife if she's okay with asking a *shailah,* not because she has a choice not to, but because you want things to work out in the long term. In this case, it's not the halachic *psak* that will make your marriage better. Effective communication and appreciation will get you much further.

Wishing you much *hatzlacha* and *parnassah b'revach*!

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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Thank you and Tizku Lmitzvos!!

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METZORA 5782

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