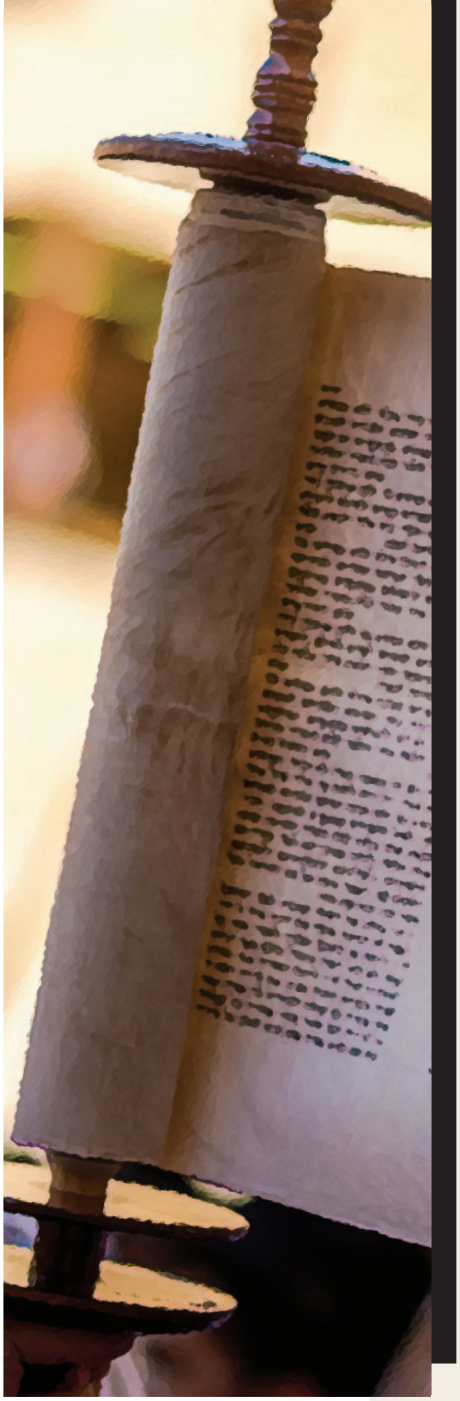


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

MAKE TORAH MARRIAGE GREAT AGAIN

Shavuos, the Yom Tov of Kabbalas HaTorah, is not just the time when we receive the Torah. It's a time of bonding with Hashem, when we become one with Him, as in a marriage. Many details of a Jewish marriage ceremony are actually learned from the marriage we have with Hashem, which goes back to the receiving of the Torah. The concept of marriage is also invoked when we refer to Hashem as the third partner in our home with His Shechinah present between man and wife.

Just as we need to be reminded of the sanctity of our relationship with Hashem and the obligations it entails, so too do we need to remind ourselves to treat our marriages with sanctity, and respect their holy foundations.

This doesn't always come naturally, especially as today's culture and society opposes virtually everything the Torah teaches about marriage. This makes it that much more important to keep learning and reviewing the laws and *hashkafos* that make us exceptional, Hashem's holy people, so that we remain committed and inspired.

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Dedicated by

The Joseph family

in memory of

Yeshaya ben Dovid Tzvi A"H

Shavuos

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Lichvod Harav Gruen,

Thank you very much for your *shiurim*. I am gaining tremendously and am slowly putting many of the concepts to work.

In one *shiur*, you discussed the role of the wife and her obligations towards her husband. *Baruch Hashem* I am happily married, but I definitely don't see my position in the marriage in the way you described. For example, you mentioned that the reason why women are not obligated in *mitzvos asei shehazman grama* is because if her husband asks her to do something at that time, she would have a conflict. I never saw my husband asking me to do something as an obligation similar to having to do something my parents told me to do. But I was learning the story of Shimshon's mother and how she was *machnia* herself to her husband and I know I have a lot of work to do in this area. This is especially hard for me as I sometimes feel like I have more *seichel* in certain areas than my husband, and he agrees with me...

If my husband does not picture himself in that role and would never think of telling me what to do, how does that *avodah* play out? He even got annoyed when I talked to him about being *machnia* myself to him — he's not comfortable with the idea at all and never thinks of himself as someone I need to be there for.

But at the end of the day, I want to change in this area, not in order to make my marriage happier (as I am quite happy already) but because that's the way Hashem wants my marriage to be and I know it will be good. And so I need more *chizuk* from a Torah perspective to make this concept (that is unfortunately very new to me) something I can appreciate and do.

Thank you



The concept of a wife being queen to her husband as king isn't just foreign to you. In our day and age, the kind of *hachna'ah* of a wife to her husband that existed until around a hundred years ago in frum circles, is barely to be found.

I once heard an elderly Yid recall how his grandfather, an old European Yid, came home one day and told his wife and children, "That's it. We're moving away from here." What happened next? Everyone started packing. Perhaps the questions came later and that's fine, but back then, there was an ingrained sense of "what the father and husband says, goes." His judgment was not questioned, even if the wife "knew" she was smarter than him.

Today, while people know that things were once like that and some even accept, in theory, that things might be better if they went back to being like that... in practice, it's just a different world. It reminds me of the *badchan's* joke: "There are two types of wife: the type who is totally devoted to her husband, respects his opinions, never questions his decisions, and generally supports him in every

way — and then, there's the kind of wife we all have." Sadly, it's almost "normal" that women no longer accord their husbands respect as head of the family.

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So, when you describe this idea as "new," what you really mean, most likely, is that you never fully internalized the idea that the Torah's blueprint for marriage is actually something that can work in the here-and-now. It's no different from many of the other lessons we teach to *chassanim* and *kallos* that fire them up with such enthusiasm... and then they get married, and feel like what they learned has no relevance to their daily living experience. And isn't that the same with so many ideals and values we hear about in lectures or read about in a *sefer*?

But with relationships in general, and marriage in particular, the reason why this happens is that learning how to be a good spouse is not like learning how to be a good kosher cook. Once you know the laws of *kashrus* in the kitchen, you're ready to go. You'll only relearn the laws if you forget them. Otherwise, they swiftly become natural and there's no need to review how to do things you're already practicing. With marriage, however, it's different. If you open a *sefer* describing how a woman should behave toward her husband, you (and many women) will likely react with, "Oh, this? I know this already." And that's the problem, because you don't really know something until you're doing it.

It's only when we start implementing the Torah's instructions on marriage that we experience the tension between what we have absorbed from the outside world and what we know is true and right. Each day brings new challenges and we need to keep learning and reviewing in order to know how to deal with them. It can take years of practice for the instinctive response to a normal-sized *nisayon* to be the Torah one.

In the meantime, it feels new and strange and unnatural and sometimes even impossible. It's not impossible, but one needs a great deal of patience and determination, as well as a deep-seated appreciation of why the struggle is worth it.

This is true, in fact, of many other areas of Torah that are harder to define than daily *halachah*. Are people born with *emunah* and *bitachon*, or do they have to work very hard to acquire them? We experience daily challenges to accepting that Hashem is running our lives in the best way possible and it takes years for this acceptance to become the natural response to adversity. Until then, it feels strange and sometimes even inconceivable that a person can go through a terrible *nisayon* without even once crying out in protest. While learning about *emunah* might bore you, as you already know it and have heard the ideas so many times, you may have never even begun to practice them.

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Another reason why these marriage concepts can feel so foreign is the way they are often packaged. People assume that it's one or the other; either men and women are equal and alike, or women are second-class citizens. The truth is far more nuanced.

Is a queen of lesser status than a king? Yes, and no. It depends on where we're looking. In fact, we see this from the very birth of Am Yisrael, when the Torah tells us that "Avraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women." Clearly, Avraham and Sarah were operating in separate but equal spheres. Even within the home, Hashem told Avraham to listen to Sarah's voice, to respect her judgment. And certainly the Torah accords the greatest of respect to the mother of children who brings them up to a life of *avodas Hashem*, often praising the mother rather than the father for having made the significant contribution to a child, on an exceptionally high *madreigah*.

Nonetheless, between themselves and in their home, the husband is king. This doesn't mean that the other spouse has no say at all. But, for the smooth functioning of the kingdom that is the Jewish home, the husband has to be king and the wife queen.

This is such an unpopular idea today, to the extent that in many families, couples have separate bank accounts and wives talk about their "right to decide how to spend the money I earned." Aside from being halachically problematic, unless done willingly with mutual understanding and consent, this is so often a recipe for relationship disaster.

No one would ever suggest that a king should treat his queen as his slave. The Torah is clear that a husband must respect his wife and love and cherish her and concern himself with her welfare, and he may not be abusive or controlling. But two people cannot wear one

crown, and when they squabble over it, the results are not pretty.

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You write that your husband doesn't feel comfortable in the "kingly" role and I have no reason to doubt that. There are such husbands. It's no different from parents who feel uncomfortable at the idea of having their children stand up in their honor when they enter a room. But it could be worth considering whether this is something of a chicken-and-egg question. Perhaps the reason why the notion of being king in his home is so discomfiting to your husband is precisely because it seems so strange, just as you find the idea "new" and unsettling?

Imagine a home where children were brought up to address their parents using their first names, where all family decisions are communal affairs, where there's no sense of hierarchy at all. One day, they discover that the Torah has a very different set of instructions and they start to implement them. Certainly it will feel very strange at first and the parents will feel very odd at suddenly being addressed with respect, at being deferred to, and so forth.

It's sad, in a way, that there are husbands who feel more "comfortable" playing second fiddle to their wives.

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Moving to the practical side of things, I commend you for being willing to change even though you know it will be hard and it doesn't come naturally. Of those people who are willing to stretch beyond their comfort zone, (many are motivated by some kind of crisis) at least they're responding appropriately.



But doing so "because that's the way Hashem wants my marriage to be," as you write, is tremendous.

Changing the atmosphere in your home to the one you're seeking is unlikely to happen overnight. It will probably be a process made up of little actions, performed daily; of gradually changing the way you speak to your husband and deferring to his decisions; of asking for his input before making up your own mind even when you don't have to, and more.

Be subtle about it so that he'll find it easier to accept. Don't draw unnecessary attention to the fact that you're trying to be *machnia* yourself to him. Just quietly, without fanfare, crown him as your king in small deeds, day by day.

Every once in a while you might want to say something like, "I'm really trying to defer to you because I respect your opinions and want you to set the tone in our home." You can also tell him, occasionally, how it's a bit of a struggle for you as you're not at all used to doing things this way. And it's fine to let him know that you'd appreciate *his* appreciation for what you're doing. But even better is if you can give yourself *chizuk* in private. It would be a shame to make him feel like nothing more than the means to the end of your goal of being a wonderful wife.

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You end your letter by stating that you "know it will be good" and you're right. So many couples are missing happiness in their homes simply because they don't follow the Torah's guidelines. Hashem always exists in our marriages — He is the third partner. But we need to keep inviting Him into our homes every single day, and when we do, all blessings will follow.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: SHAVUOS 5786

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557** or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**
To subscribe to receive the weekly essay, please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org