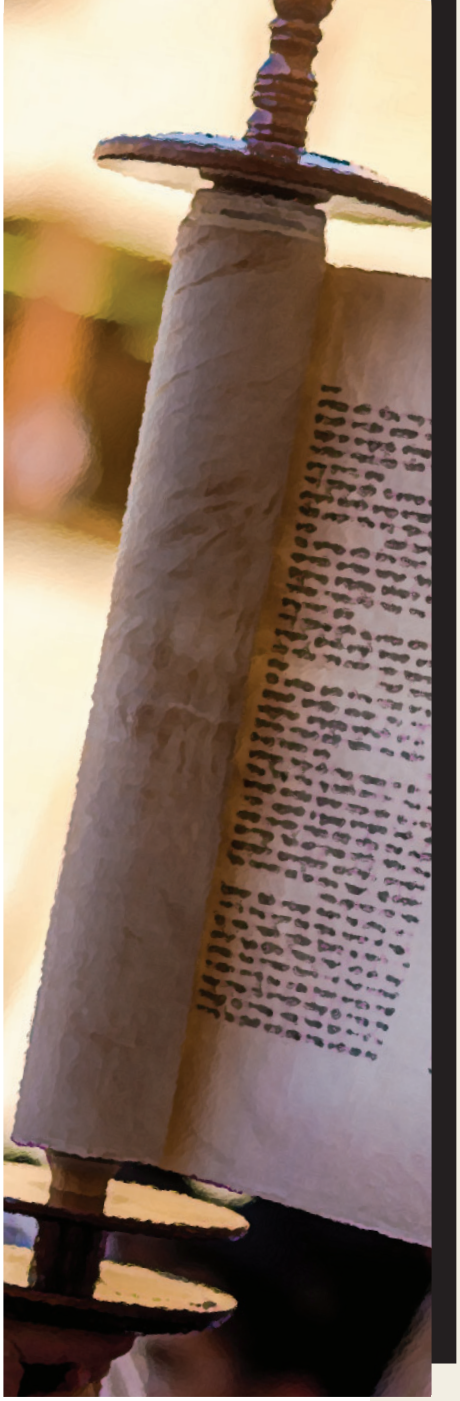


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

TAKING THE TORAH'S ADVICE

This week's *parshah* opens with the word "*vehayah*," which Chazal tell us hints at *simchah*. What is the *simchah*? "*Vehayah*—and it will be, because you will listen to these laws and keep them and perform them, that Hashem your God will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers."

The Bnei Yissachar, in a *drashah* on *chodesh* Elul, notes that the *passuk* can also be understood as saying, "And it will be in the end [*eikev*] that you will listen..." What is the *simchah* in that case, he asks, if we only serve Hashem at the end, when time is running out at the end of the year and we can sense the impending *din* in the air? Shouldn't we have served Hashem right from the beginning, as last week's *parshah* instructed us: "*Hayom la'asosam*—to do them today"?

He answers that even, and especially, in such a case, there is cause for *simchah*. Even though we waited for the *hisorerus* of Elul to do *teshuvah*, Hashem still "keeps the covenant and the kindness" with us. Even though it would have been far better to do *teshuvah* long ago, it's better late than never, and Hashem accepts our efforts and even rewards us for them. That's certainly something to be happy about and appreciate.

This is so relevant to our relationships as well. It's never too late to fix things. If someone approaches us genuinely wanting to make amends, we should never reject them. If Hashem, who knows our thoughts, can accept our *teshuvah* even after yet another year of going down the wrong path, how much more so should we be ready to do so for those dear to us. We cannot understand other people's motives and challenges, and should certainly judge favorably and accept those who want to repair things and start afresh.

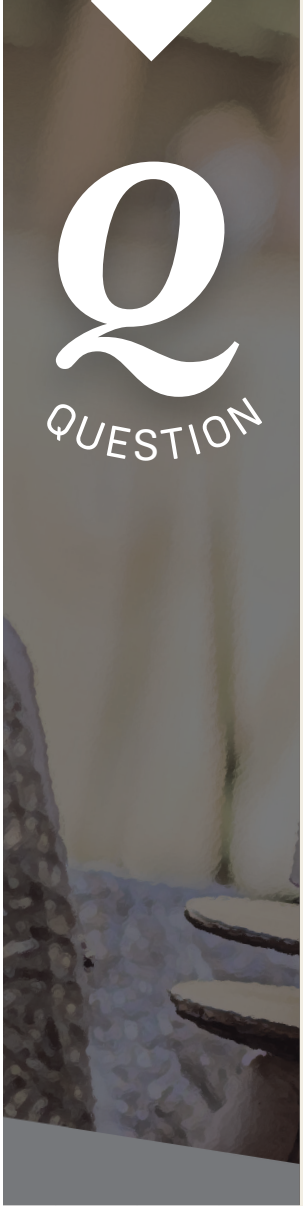
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Parshas
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Q QUESTION

Le'chvod R' Gruen,

I want to start off by thanking you for your *shiurim* on TorahAnytime. I have gained so much insight and clarity by listening to your *shiurim* and greatly appreciate them. I have never been exposed to such true Torah wisdom about marriage and how the only way for a Yid to act in marriage is through the *daas* and *chochmah* of Torah.

I have a question that I am hoping you can answer.

While I have always been a very frum Bais Yaakov girl, I have unfortunately been exposed to the secular ideas and ways of marriage. Whether through videos I used to watch, ideas my friends have exposed me to, reading material, or such, I now have this distorted view in my mind of dating and marriage. In comparison to some friends I am perhaps the most sheltered, but I was sadly exposed enough to make me feel uneasy at this point in my life. *Baruch Hashem* I have learned to move away from those influences but like all things of this nature, it still remains in the back of my mind.

I am currently in *shidduchim* and am wondering how I can be sure that when I get married, that I only bring in a Torah culture of *kedushah* and *taharah*. I do not want to bring goyish ideologies and fantasies into my marriage. But being that I have been exposed to that I am worried it might infiltrate into my interactions with my husband and into my home.

I would appreciate it if you would be able to provide some insights on this matter.

Thank you

A ANSWER

I commend you for seeking advice in this area and recognizing the issues you are dealing with. It's unfortunately common today for people to assume that only "religious" matters need to be referred to a rabbi and that one can consult the relevant "expert" or make up one's own mind in other areas. People ask financial consultants questions related to *parnassah*; motivation coaches questions related to career guidance; therapists questions related to *shalom bayis*; educational experts questions related to *chinuch*... and never stop long enough to realize that the Torah's wisdom encompasses all these areas, and more.

Being committed to living according to Torah means that one accepts the Torah's guidance in every area of life, even when that guidance seems foreign and even if it doesn't necessarily "feel" right. It means accepting that if there is a conflict between what we want to do and what the Torah says, the problem is in us, not in the Torah, *chalilah*.

Naturally, the more secular ideas infiltrate us, the less the Torah will "resonate" with us. But this challenge is also faced by those who have had little to no exposure to secular ideas. Sometimes, we hear advice from a Daas Torah that "feels right" or "makes sense" to us and we implement it gladly — and we don't realize that subconsciously, we're following along because we agree, not because that's what the Torah says we must do.

The danger of not recognizing this way of thinking is that when we hear Torah advice that we don't think makes sense, we reject it or look for loopholes or try to explain it away somehow. Even when we are wholeheartedly committed to following the Torah's guidance in every area, we still need a great deal of *siyatta diShmaya* to remain objective and recognize true Torah ideas as opposed to distortions.

Sadly, it's not unusual for people in positions of influence to distort Torah ideas in order to provide cover for their very non-Torah views. Sometimes, they don't realize what they're doing, but this usually happens when people not learned in Torah attempt to understand it according to their own limited insight and knowledge.

For instance, there are those who distort the Torah idea of the husband being the *mashpia* and the wife being the *mekabel*, drawing conclusions that have no basis in Torah. I've seen this concept used to condemn a husband for not being "masculine enough," or to encourage a wife to only take and not give. Certainly not a Torah approach.

Others take openly secular ideas and present them using Torah terms to disguise their origins. This is just one reason why one should never consult with any expert who lacks *yiras Shamayim*.

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You mention a few reasons why you, specifically, need to be so very cautious about the ideas you introduce into your home, being that you were harmfully exposed. It's so much better never to open one's mind to secular influences, but it's never too late to do what we can to overcome them.

The greater the *gadol baTorah*, the more sensitive he is to non-Torah influences. Harav Moshe Feinstein *ztz"l* would say that he knew his rulings were Daas Torah because never in his life did he read or learn anything secular. Few people are able to direct all their questions to someone on his level, but we are still required to make the effort to take advice only from Torah sources.

Some of those sources — *rabbanim*, *chassan/kallah* teachers, and so forth — may have developed some of their ideas using wisdom from non-Jews, which does exist as we know: *chochmah bagoyim ta'amin*. It's still preferable to seek out guidance via them rather than going directly to the non-Jewish teachings they learned from. In his laws of Kiddush Hachodesh, Rambam writes that he was forced to seek out some of the knowledge necessary for his rulings from non-Jewish sources, given that the *sefarim* of the Jewish astronomers have been lost over time. He adds that now that he has done so, no one will need to learn astronomy from non-Jews anymore.

Today, this idea applies in virtually every area in life; there is rarely any excuse for someone to learn directly from non-Jews as one can almost always find a Jewish source for similar ideas. If someone has already done the work of taking the wheat and leaving behind the chaff (and worse), there is no reason to go and do the sifting for oneself, thereby exposing oneself to a very great deal that is not only worthless but also harmful.

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Of course, the non-Jewish world also has many ideas to offer that aren't compatible with Torah. And many non-Jews seem to live perfectly happy lives. The reason is simply that non-Jews live in and for this world, while Jews live for eternity. Fundamentally, this means that non-Jewish advice pertaining to relationships, fulfilment, tranquility and so forth doesn't necessarily have any relevance to Torah Jews, because our goals are diametrically opposed.

Even if one only compares short-term to long-term goals in this world, this is obvious — everyone knows that it's worth investing now for greater dividends later, whether it's a question of finances, health, or relationship success. That doesn't mean that it's easy to live with the longer-term goals at the forefront of one's mind, but that does have to be our

aim. Therefore, if you ever hear relationship advice from a non-Jewish source, stop and consider whether it will really be to your eternal benefit to implement it.

Sometimes, implementing Torah-true advice means short-term discomfort and even pain. When we're secure in the knowledge that we are doing *ratzon Hashem*, we'll be able to overcome that; when we lose sight of the real goal, we're likely to slip. Building a *bayis ne'eman* and raising *ehrliche* children involves a great deal of hard work. The non-Jewish world tells us that if we don't see quick returns, or at least returns that we like and can measure with our senses, it's not worth it, but we know better.

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You mention things you have seen and heard that have introduced foreign ideas into your mind and it's great that you are aware enough to be looking for ways to avoid introducing them into your home. The truth is that we all need to have that awareness, as no one is immune to secular influences. Fooling ourselves that we live sheltered lives and that any idea that pops into our heads is okay is a huge mistake. The *yetzer hara* doesn't lack for ways in which to make us stumble.

The only way to overcome all the false messages is by doing what you're doing — reaching out for Torah-true advice. More specifically, everyone needs to have a *rav*, as the Torah tells us, whose advice we commit to accepting even when it goes against our deepest heart's desires.



Chazal teach us "*Asei lechah rav*," which means one *rav*, as that is the only way to maximize the chances that we are following objectively good advice and not merely putting a kosher stamp on our own subjective desires. This does not mean to "go rabbi shopping," finding a *heter* for whatever we feel like doing from anyone willing to give it.

There may sometimes be exceptional circumstances in which the Torah's advice is to do things differently. Sometimes, we may need to lie for *shalom*, be *mevater* on something important in order to achieve something even more important, and so forth. It's vital to remember that these leniencies are both individual and temporary. They don't become the rule.

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Some people in your position would be looking to make exceptions the rule, "explaining" that since they were exposed to all sorts of things, the Torah should, so-to-speak, make allowances for them. It's wonderful that you phrased your question as you did, making it clear that you aren't looking for allowances but rather to build a home based on "*kedushah* and *taharah*."

As I mentioned, of course it would have been better if you had never been exposed to the ideologies and fantasies of the outside world. But it is still possible to find your way and get it right, as long as you remain committed to living according to the Torah—even when the world around you tells you that true happiness can only be found by choosing another path.

Keep reminding yourself that only the Torah's path is time-tested and only Hashem knows what's good for us and truly wants us to live and thrive.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: EIKEV 5786

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