RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS NOACH

COMMUNICATE TO CONNECT

The *possuk* says about the *Dor Haflagah*, *"Vayhi kol Haaretz safah achas..."* they all spoke the same language. Reb Pinchas'l Koritzer in Imrei Pinchas makes an observation. They spoke the same language and Hashem saw that they were getting along too well and becoming too ambitious. Therefore, Hashem mixed up their languages. Rashi explains that their common language had been *Lashon Hakodesh*, but because of their actions, Hashem made them use seventy individual languages.

Reb Pinchas'l is troubled by this. Why would the *Eibershter* make a miracle and create seventy languages overnight? He explains that actually, all languages had already been created - but *Lashon Hakodesh* was their common language and they were able to work together. When Hashem took away their common language, they couldn't communicate anymore.

I find this *pshat* very interesting. We say that people have their own languages, whether a personal language or what is referred to as a "love-language" (a way of expressing or taking affection). Often, people think that to be in a relationship, you have to lose your personal language and find a common one. A wife may think she must give up what speaks to her personally in order to get along. This causes many problems and much confusion.

The Imrei Pinchas teaches that the Dor Haflagah already had their own languages. They had their individuality. Yet they also had a common language that enabled them to communicate with each other. When people share a common language and communicate well, they become so much stronger.

How great this lesson is in our most important relationship. If we can master understanding our spouses, and communicate well, getting on the same page [talking *to* our spouses and not at them!] we can break many barriers.

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Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I don't know if I'm right, but I feel my husband's lifestyle is not working for us. He leaves to davening and work before the kids get up. I have no help in the morning. He works in a small store until late in the evening every day. But he doesn't even make a lot of money. After work he goes to two shiurim then to Maariv and comes home late at night for supper. He doesn't get to learn with my boys, either because they are sleeping or he has no patience anymore. The girls don't either have much to do with him and I don't get to talk to him because I'm busy at that hour.

He takes supper on his own and is usually exhausted by then, so he goes to bed and listens to shiurim on the phone until he falls asleep. My daughter, who is recovering from a difficult period in Yiddishkeit, says that she wants to marry someone who will have time and patience for his family. She doesn't want a yeshiva boy who will always be busy learning. She claims that a lot of her difficulties had to do with the fact that her father was always busy and she needed his love.

Our whole marriage is suffering. My husband is a depressed, quiet person and I'm the exact opposite. I have a bunch of younger kids that still need his time, and I also do. It's hard to stay upbeat, but I try my best. Hashem knows what's best for me and I'm trying to accept it. Is it right for me to tell him that his learning is his yetzer hora and that one day it will come against him? Is there anything that can be done to change this situation?

Answer:

This is a very tough situation. A general public answer can be part of the solution, but you may need help and ongoing guidance to implement it. Still, discussing this topic from various angles can benefit the public.

I will start with one of my common disclaimers, and that is that you can be sure that if your husband would be asking about such behaviors I would very clearly share with him what I think the right behavior for a father/husband should be. I hope that no men (or women in similar positions) will take advantage of my answer or take the wrong lesson from it.

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You started off saying that you're not sure if you're right. I commend you on that. In general, people are convinced that they're right. They see things from their own perspective and feel right, so admitting that you may not be completely right says

something about your character, it will also make it easier for you to get your message across.

But it's not necessarily all about *being* right, but about how you can make things better, your effort can make the situation better, regardless of who is right.

Some food for thought: think about what your husband would say if he read this question? I don't think he would say, "She's right, I'm a bad guy and avoiding my family." He would probably justify himself. He shouldn't convince himself that he's right and I'm not suggesting that you're wrong. But taking the time to think what he would say and realize that there may be something behind it, can be eye-opening. Maybe it's not his fault, or his yetzer hora, and maybe there isn't even something he can do about it. In order to reach a solution, it's important to consider the other side.

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With that said; let's explore what happened early on in the marriage or when your husband used to come home early. This may not be the case, so please don't take my speculations personally, but perhaps he didn't feel comfortable at home. Maybe he didn't feel good being near you. Maybe you weren't aware of how to treat him, maybe he felt ignored. Again, this may be wrong, but others in this situation might benefit from thinking about these possibilities. These questions aren't to make you take blame, but to add perspective.

Let's continue with this line of thought. What's going on now? Do you live in a small apartment so that when he comes home there's no place for him to sit down and relax? Maybe he feels that no one is interested in him or has *derech eretz* for him. Maybe he feels like he's the victim and not that he's the one making others suffer. Sometimes hearing one side of a story can make you feel very strongly one way, until you hear the other side. And you yourself may not even be aware of this other side.

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Let me mention another thing I picked up in your letter. Sometimes a man stays out for technical reasons; he's making a lot of money, or he's working hard to earn enough to cover their expenses. If so, a wife should be supportive and appreciate what he's doing, difficult as it is. But you mentioned that he works in a small store and doesn't make much money. So what *is* making him stay out? Think: Is it where he feels safe? Is that little store his comfort zone?

And not because you're doing anything wrong or are even necessarily responsible to make him feel differently, but can you make him feel comfortable, more attracted, more wanted and needed at home? Regardless of whose fault or responsibility a given situation is, it's always good to get used to thinking "what is there that *I can do* to make this better?"

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You said that "he takes supper on his own" and you don't get to talk because "I'm busy at that hour."

Of course. You have a house and children to take care of. And maybe it's just fine for him to take supper on his own. But perhaps when he takes supper on his own, he feels like no one cares. Maybe, just to show him how much it means to you when he's home, unbusy yourself for this time. For one week, put everything aside when he comes home as chaotic as it may be. Show him that it's his time.

The little things that you can do to make him feel wanted and appreciated, *even if you don't have to*, may attract him to be home more, or at least prepare him better to take it well when you express how much his presence means to you, thereby causing a different attitude in him.

When you feel ready, communicate nicely and clearly what it is that you'd appreciate. After a week you can tell him how much it meant to you to spend time together and that you did it at the expense of other things at home. Then ask him if you can do it earlier. He may feel so wanted, he'll do that on his own. Don't hint at it. Don't just mention it. Be very clear, "It would mean so much to me if you're home more." However, make sure you lay the groundwork first so that this statement can be taken well.

Sometimes, people look at a challenging situation and think "My husband is the problem and I'm the victim." But that makes you feel bad about your husband and bad for yourself. It makes you think that "at least I'm not the problem," and maybe one day, "someone will knock sense into him." But it's a lot healthier to look at an issue, even one that you're not responsible for, and say, "My husband may be the problem, but I can be the solution. What keys do I have in *my* hand? What small steps can *I* take?" Communicate with your husband. Tell him what you need from him. Be nice and make him feel good about it. Make sure he doesn't feel blamed or challenged. Make him want to be there.

It then becomes easier to stay upbeat. See yourself as the solution even if you're not to blame. Try to make him feel more comfortable and see the changes that can bring.

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You seem to connect your daughter's issues with your husband's behavior. I don't want to sound like your husband's lawyer, but it's possible that her issues are not entirely his fault, even if he didn't handle them correctly. When pointing fingers, the blamed person isn't always the *only* one to have caused the problem, and often he'll just notice the other causes of a problem, making "blaming him" very unproductive.

People who deal with kids at risk emphasize the fact that these children are suffering, which is true. But it's important to remember that the parents also suffer. We may expect parents to be more mature and understanding than their children, but your husband may also be recovering from that traumatic time.

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Just to touch upon another point you mentioned; I doubt mentioning that his yetzer hora is making him learn - regardless of how true that is or isn't - will help or make him feel better. I believe that being nice to him and telling him how much his presence is appreciated will get you a lot further. But as I said in the beginning, you may need someone to guide you through the steps to become closer and communicate better. Communication is key.

Last year in Torah Lessons for the Home on Parshas Noach, we spoke about patience. Hashem expected Noach to have 120 years of patience as he repeatedly shared Hashem's message of teshuva. Since you have different personalities, you have to allow more time to overcome these differences. If he's naturally very shy, you're asking him to make a big change and suddenly turn over his life and method of communication. That takes patience and consistency on your part, while being careful not to give the wrong messages, but with Hashem's help, you can achieve the close connection you're looking for.

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TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

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