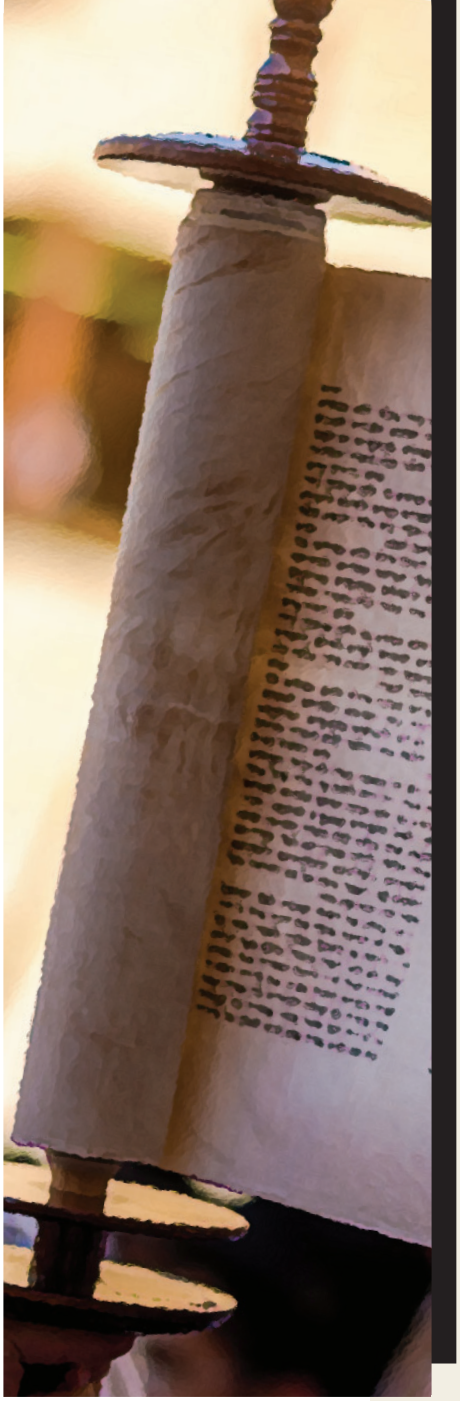


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

ALLOWING OTHERS TO CHOOSE

This week's *parshah* begins with a choice between blessing and curse, between obeying Hashem's commands and turning away from the Torah path. Hashem gives us that choice and trusts us to choose well. To this day Hashem trusts us with these choices, and we are constantly being given opportunities to embrace Torah and life.

The *tzaddik* R' Moshe Pshevorsker *ztz"l* explains this by pointing to the example of a master and slave where the relationship is not one of trust. Although the normal practice is for a master to lead and a slave to follow behind, if the master fears that the slave could run away, he will tell him to walk first so he can keep an eye on him. Only if he trusts the slave will he allow him to walk behind him.

So too should it be in our relationship with Hashem. Hashem shouldn't have to hold a stick over our heads in order to ensure our compliance. He should be able to trust us to remain loyal Yidden, which is why He allows us to choose, and trusts that we will willingly make the right choices.

Similarly, the Torah teaches that in a marriage, the husband leads and the wife follows. This too implies a great deal of trust between them. The husband should be secure in the knowledge that his wife is loyal, so much so that he allows her to walk behind, allowing her a great deal of freedom within the boundaries of their *shalom bayis*. Both spouses need to find the right balance, avoiding the extremes of obstinate independence and inflexible control.

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Parshas
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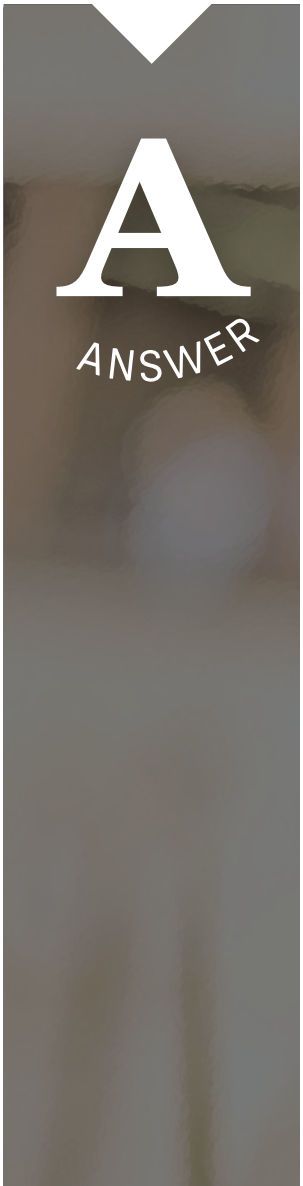
Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you so much for your clear and guiding speeches which I look forward to listening to every week.

I have a question regarding your *shiur* about how obligated a wife is to make her husband feel happy. You mentioned that some men dictate what their wives wear from head to toe. That is my husband in a nutshell. *Baruch Hashem* he's very nice and caring but when it comes to clothing, he dictates everything I wear from asking me to show him an outfit before I order it (and usually nixing it) and even ordering clothes for me, saying that if a wife doesn't know how to dress, her husband has to do it for her.

We've been married a few years and I feel like I haven't really gotten anything new since then due to him saying no to everything I want to get and I barely have clothes due to him not liking most of what I got married with. We've discussed this before but my husband says he was into clothes as a kid and his mother and siblings always come to him for advice so why wouldn't I want to listen if he just has my best interest in mind? How do I go about this?

Thank you



What you describe is actually not too uncommon a problem and one which can equally affect husbands and wives. Sometimes it's a wife trying to dictate what her husband wears; at other times, it's the kind of situation you describe.

What's almost as common is for spouses to experience the issue very differently. Sometimes, a wife complains that her husband "dictates what she wears," but when the husband is asked, he insists that it was only one garment he objected to, or he considered a certain dress not *tzniusdig* enough. Sometimes, a husband complains that his wife is "always nagging him" about his clothes, and when the wife is asked, she explains that last time he bought a new suit on his own,

he came home with something that no one wears anymore and that was two sizes too large — and yes, she has been nagging him ever since to get something appropriate.

Another reason why spouses fail to see eye-to-eye when the underlying issue isn't nearly as significant as one or both think it is, is lack of awareness of how a tone of voice or facial expression impacts how others feel. What one spouse calls "dictating," the other may see as nothing more than suggesting or offering advice. It's quite possible that your husband doesn't fully appreciate how much you're bothered by what he sees as his helpful suggestions.

Furthermore, in your letter, you describe your husband "dictating" your clothing choices and yet it's clear you don't always follow along. Instead of purchasing the items he wants, you choose not to buy anything at all. I assume that neither of you are happy with the current arrangement. Let's see if we can come up with better alternatives for both of you.

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The Torah is very clear that a wife should find favor in her husband's eyes, and it's important that women take this seriously. While a wife should certainly enjoy the way she dresses herself, when it comes to impressing others, ideally, the

person she should really care about making an impression on is her husband.

I often discuss the three categories in a relationship of "yours, mine, and ours." How a person dresses lies firmly in the "mine" category. Obviously, the way a wife or husband dresses "affects" their spouse, but this is only an indirect effect and it doesn't entitle them to play a part in the decision-making process. Although a husband is entitled to tell his wife if he doesn't like a certain color or style and ask her to minimize wearing it if she wouldn't mind, he shouldn't forbid her from wearing anything unless it breaches the laws of *tznius*. Similarly, a wife may mention to her husband her feelings regarding a particular jacket, pair of shoes, and so forth, but she is not entitled to "tell him" what to wear.

Respect for boundaries is one of the fundamental ingredients in *shalom bayis*. Too many people get married with little to no awareness of where they stop and the other person starts. Many receive flawed guidance that gives them the impression that once they are married, everything is "ours," and many people misunderstand what "ours" actually means... but that's not the topic here. In any case, correcting imbalances is vital, and in general, the greatest resistance to correction occurs in marriages where the concept of boundaries has been most distorted.

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Another common misconception is that submitting to control is a good way to keep the peace. It's true that things can appear more peaceful for a short while after one spouse backs down and allows themselves to be controlled, but it's usually a very temporary reprieve. Often, things simply escalate with the demands becoming greater and more frequent; eventually, the other spouse will be pushed so far that they will either stop being able to comply, or they end up obliterating themselves to such a degree that any semblance of a healthy relationship is lost.

It can be easy to spot "control" if you're an objective observer, but from the inside, it's not always so easy to detect. Plenty of spouses feel perfectly justified in controlling their "other half," and really do believe that they only have good intentions, as you write of your husband — he claims to have your best interests at heart, and honestly, I have no reason to doubt that he feels that way.

It can often take an outsider to reset the couple's perspective and enable them to see that even if a problem exists, directly controlling the other spouse isn't the solution.

To give a different example: If a husband worries that his wife doesn't know how to cook, the best solution is not for him to write a weekly menu schedule, type out shopping lists, and call her every hour to make sure that she's on top of things. If he really wants to help, he might consider gently and respectfully suggesting that she discuss it with her mother or come up with some other way of figuring things out on her own.

Similarly, if a mother marries off her son and worries that he needs ongoing emotional support and "needs" to unburden himself of all the trials and tribulations of married life, she'll suggest that he remain in contact with his *chassan* teacher or a rav or mentor, and then let go and *daven* for his *shalom bayis*. If, instead, she calls him every day to ask how things are going and offers unsolicited advice, however much she wants to portray this as "only for his benefit," the truth is that she wants to remain the one in control.

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Knowing how to resist feeling or being controlled while still showing respect for one's husband is crucial. There's obviously no sense in replacing one problem with another. Fortunately, there are many ways of communicating your discomfort with your husband's behavior in this area.

I would recommend that you take the initiative rather than waiting for another disagreement. Since you are already partially acquiescing to your husband's wishes by not buying or wearing clothing that he doesn't like, you really have nothing to lose and a great deal to gain.

Taking the initiative enables you to choose a relaxed time to introduce the topic. More importantly, it gives you the chance to demonstrate to your husband how seriously you take this. If you suggest areas where you're happy to go along with what he prefers, without any pressure from him, he's more likely to meet you halfway and acknowledge that while his preferences are important, so are yours.

When you do so, stress how much you want him to be happy with your clothing choices and enjoy the way you dress. Add that you also want to feel happy about what you wear, and that you know how much he cares about you and wants you to feel happy too.

Then, you should allow him to express his feelings, reiterating that you want him to feel happy with your choices. Without being too obvious about it, make it clear that they are ultimately your choices. There's no need to be aggressive or overly insistent; you'll make your point more effectively if you are calm and confident.

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When you try this different approach, you might be pleasantly surprised at your husband's reaction. Often, simply recognizing that the other person has good intentions while simultaneously remaining confident with your own position helps tremendously.

But don't be surprised if your husband needs some time to absorb the new reality you're trying to craft. Meanwhile, have patience and don't back down. You might also want to suggest that your husband discuss this with someone he respects, such as his rav.

It's also possible that your husband will respond to pushback with statements such as, "Why is it such a big deal for you? Why can't you just… ?"It's fascinating how people who expect others to accommodate them often fail to apply that same reasoning to themselves. In many cases, this stems not from a conscious desire to impose their will on others, but simply from a lack of self-awareness. We see this, for example, when parents want to enroll their child in a particular school while simultaneously objecting to or disliking the school's dress code. "Why does my son have to wear *davka* this kind of *yarmulka*?" they might protest. The obvious answer is, "Why do you *davka* object to that kind of *yarmulka*…" If it's not a big deal, that cuts both ways.

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For whatever reason, people tend to get very passionate about their choice of clothing, and this is true of both men and women. It's unusual to find someone willing to dress differently for a job or a *shidduch*, even when their refusal to accommodate someone else's wishes can mean losing out on something significant.

It's told that a person once asked the Chazon Ish for advice on where to purchase *tefillin*. "The first *sofer* I'm considering is truly an expert," he said. "The second one is just as much of an expert," he added, "and the truth is that I can't tell the difference. Where they *do* differ is that the first *sofer* charges more — I guess he has a reputation for being more *ehrlich*, probably due to the way he dresses, with a longer jacket. The second *sofer* wears a shorter jacket and his *tefillin* are cheaper. So I should purchase the cheaper *tefillin*, right?"



The Chazon Ish shook his head. "No, you should purchase the more expensive *tefillin*," he ruled. When asked why, he explained that if the second *sofer* was just as skilled, and the only reason he couldn't charge more was that he wore a short jacket, that meant that he had some objection to appearing more *ehrlich* — and is that someone one wants to purchase *tefillin* from?

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It's clear from the Torah that the way we dress is extremely important. Rabbi Yochanan would call his clothing "*ma'ani michabdusa*—garments of honor," because a person is honored according to how he dresses. Furthermore, a person who dresses in a dignified manner demonstrates that he respects himself as a Torah Yid and *eved Hashem*.

Similarly, we honor a *kallah* by providing her with elegant and high-quality clothing for Shabbos and Yom Tov, as stipulated in the *tenoyim*, and we certainly don't tell poor *kallos* to suffice with cast-offs. A husband is required to provide his wife with sufficient and dignified clothing as well as a new garment for each Yom Tov. This is for both of their pleasure, as the gift is designed to bring her *simchas Yom Tov* even as he enjoys seeing her dressed well, in a manner befitting a *bas Yisrael*.

B'ezras Hashem you and your husband will find a solution in this area that both will find satisfactory, a true middle path of respect for each other's wishes, trusting each other to genuinely have each other's well-being at heart.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: RE'EH 5786

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