בס"ד

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS

FOR THE HOME

PARSHAS
TZAV

ENJOYING AND ENHANCING THE DAILY GRIND

When a kohen entered the Beis Hamikdash to serve for the first time, he brought a korban minchah. Rashi notes that a kohen gadol brought this korban every single day — the minchas chavitin. The Chiddushei Harim explains that a kohen who becomes nis'chanech to the avodah goes up a level in kedushah, which is why he brings a korban. A kohen gadol, however, ascends in kedushah every day and therefore, he must bring a daily korban.

The Chiddushei Harim also stresses that the korban brought by the kohen gadol did not just reflect a general ascent in kedushah, but rather an ascent so significant that it paralleled the ascent of a kohen hedyot when he first began to serve. (He adds that one of the reasons the Yid Hakadosh was referred to as such was because every day, he ascended in kedushah as much as a person when becoming a Yid. Another reason is that he was called "Yaakov Yitzchak," the same name as his rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin, and calling him the Yid Hakadosh served to distinguish them from one another.)

It's relatively easy to rise up once and make significant progress in a single leap. It's a lot harder to engage in constant growth, to make positive changes on a daily basis. There are some situations in life that seem to require only one-time change or growth. But in general, we should be constantly growing, and as we get older, it can become harder to find the motivation. At the time when a person gets married, for instance, there's a lot of personal growth and people don't usually find it so hard to make changes. But as the years pass, maintaining that growth requires the dedication and commitment of a kohen gadol. The good news is that there's a kohen gadol in all of us, and all we need to do to access it is invest thought and energy and have a genuine ratzon to grow and keep on growing.

Rav Shimon Shkop zt"l taught that the kiddushin of a chassan and kallah is ongoing — it's not just beneath the chuppah when the chassan gives the kallah a ring. (It's said that when Rav Shimon Shkop said this in his shiur, one of his talmidim said: "Rebbi, mazel tov! According to this the Rebbi just got married!") In truth, the marriage relationship requires an ongoing commitment and a higher level of self-work. Life can often become boring and routine, especially when there are many responsibilities, and it's harder to keep the excitement up. There are ways to renew the excitement of a fresh beginning once in a while, whether with a vacation or time out to do something interesting. But if we don't constantly work on becoming closer to our spouses and growing together, it won't happen. It takes the dedication of a kohen gadol to prevent a long-term relationship from becoming stale.

THIS WEEK'S ESSAY IS DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
RABBI MOSHE SHEINER
BY AN APPRECIATIVE "TALMID", WISHING HIM LONG YEARS OF HELPING KLAL YISROEL!

QUESTION

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

Thank you so much for all the classes full of wisdom. They are so helpful and I appreciate it.

I'd like to ask a question that I and other women have, especially these days when it has become common for husbands to work from home. Many men have computers at home and don't have 9-to-5 jobs outside the home like in the past. My husband is home many hours of the day and it takes away from my serenity and space. It's something that's not easy and has been going on for many years. The question is, how do I change my feelings on this? I am happier when he leaves than when he comes home. There is no sense of happiness when my husband walks through the door, and nothing refreshing about seeing each other. This is a big blockage in my relationship. How can I change my perspective if I can't change the situation? Thank you.

ANSWER

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

Many couples go through times when they are home together more than usual. Some still remember what this was like during the recent coronavirus pandemic. Others struggle with this during a Yom Tov like Sukkos or Pesach, bein hazmanim or on vacations. And for other couples, this is something they deal with on a more consistent basis.

Deciding what approach to take may depend on whether it's a short- or long-term situation. If it's a temporary situation, it's usually easier to deal with. You know it will pass and you can either make the most of it, finding ways to connect better and appreciate each other's company — or you can decide to just tolerate each other until time's up. However, when it's long-term, it can be a bigger challenge.

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Wanting to change your perspective is a great approach when a situation truly cannot be changed. However, very often people resign themselves to situations and simply tolerate them when there's actually a lot that can be done to implement change. That said, shifting perspectives can bring about improvement in all cases, regardless of whether the situation can be changed or not.

As with many other issues, it's often how you communicate and discuss both the problem as well as any suggested solution that's key. It's so important not only to use the right words and tone of voice but also to choose the right time and place, so that everyone is left feeling good. Getting communication right doesn't mean the other person has to enjoy hearing what you have to say; it means you are saying it the right way. There's always a nicer way of saying something which can help the other person take it better.

Communication sometimes requires bravery. Leaving elephants in the corner, allowing issues to remain unspoken, seems easier, but usually doesn't help anyone. Lack of genuine communication can place tremendous strain on a relationship, in addition to the stress of the problems that are left unsolved.

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All too often, people don't say anything until they snap. Instead, choose a calm moment — not the heat of the moment when your husband is already getting on your nerves — and discuss the issue responsibly.

What I would suggest is that you start by telling your husband how much you enjoy having him around, and how much you appreciate his presence with all the benefits it brings. Without killing that message by continuing with the word "but," clarify that there are times when you feel that you could use more space. Make sure it doesn't come across as anything personally offensive, nor as something you think he should have figured out by himself. Needless to say, don't make the mistake of comparing him to anyone else, even if any of your friends have been unwise

enough to tell you that they would never put up with it. You don't want to earn points in a debate only to lose them in your relationship.

These are all general pointers about how to address issues without turning them into disputes. Presenting an issue as something that bothers you (even referring to it as your own personal meshugas) rather than as something the other person is doing wrong, is often the best way to avoid putting the other person on the defensive. In this case, it's not about him, it's your own claustrophobia, etc. and you would really appreciate it if he could be understanding and tolerant of it.

You can also ask if he could perhaps come up with a suggestion of his own. If he does, thank him and take it seriously. If he doesn't, and even if he isn't thrilled with the "problem" you've presented, you can gently suggest your own ideas — as suggestions, not as orders. Again, don't give him the impression that he should have thought of a solution himself.

Here are a few ideas which may work for you, either to try out or to help you brainstorm and come up with your own more practical and applicable ones: You can suggest that your husband work in a quiet corner, or in a room in the basement where he won't be right near you all day. Perhaps he could even rent an office. Some people feel that if they're working online, renting an office is an extra and unwarranted expense. But sometimes it's worth it. If you explain that it would be easier for you, he may see your perspective. Maybe he had already thought of this option himself, but wasn't sure how to justify the extra expense to you.

People sometimes skimp on expenses that could add to their serenity. I often tell people that many of these things are cheaper than therapy. If you can spend an extra $10, $50, or maybe even a little more every week on something that could help you avoid needing therapy, it might be worth it. This can be anything that will help your relationship (whether with your spouse or your children) and make everyone happier and more content. So, if renting an office could make your relationship work better, it might be worth the couple of hundred dollars it would cost for the month.

If you both decide against that, then another option could be for your husband to choose a work area and for the two of you to stay apart during his work hours, possibly meeting up for lunch. It could make things easier for you if you know that he won't be, for example, wandering into the kitchen while you're cooking. Another idea is for you to take a walk every day, creating your own space outside rather than inside the house.

You may not be able to implement any of these "bigger" suggestions I'm mentioning, but other, smaller changes could also make a big difference. Don't decide that if things can't be as good as you want then it's not worth doing anything. If you communicate nicely, you may not have to settle for an ongoing situation that you find so challenging.

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On a separate note, you mentioned that there's nothing refreshing or exciting about seeing each other. That may mean that you have to become more creative in building the excitement. That doesn't have to mean anything exotic — it could be as simple as going for a walk together or eating on the porch once a week so it becomes something different that you can look forward to. Scheduling a date-night also works for some couples.

If you treat this as a separate issue unrelated to the fact that your husband is working from home, you might find that solving it makes the other easier to accept. This advice applies to many areas of life where issues that appear to be huge can be broken down into smaller components that can be solved one-at-a-time, creating gradual improvement in situations where huge changes simply can't be implemented all at once.

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All the same, what if you genuinely can't change the situation? And what if you can change the situation but you still want to change your perspective? There are always several possible ways of looking at things and changing how you feel.

You mention that other women also deal with this issue — and it doesn't just apply to spouses. Many people, for instance, have a hard time being with their children for extended periods of time. Now that's a situation that isn't likely to change quickly where only a shift in perspective can help.

The first way to change your perspective is to work on seeing the berachah in it. I once encountered a man who was afraid to get married because of the restrictions that it would entail. Those of us who are married know that the restrictions are far more preferable to the freedom of a single person. There's a tremendous berachah in the restrictions.

Similarly, in your case, when things get stressful, you have to remind yourself that this is the much better option... It's better than not having a spouse, or losing one chas v'shalom, or being childless, etc. or having a spouse who hates coming home. It's not easy when there's tension in the air and relationships are complex, but it's much better than not having the

relationship at all. It might be nice to be able to fly off to Florida on a whim, but the fact that I can't is a sign that I'm a blessed person.

When a person is with their spouse all day long, it can be harder to find and focus on the good. In every relationship, you want to focus on the good, respect them and see the good in them, but the stress of being too close can make it harder. You have to keep reminding yourself how much there is to respect in your husband. Find all the things you can respect. That can make it easier to be with your spouse all day because you're with someone you respect.

In general, it's good to work on developing an "attitude of gratitude." Thank Hashem that you have a husband. Imagine how you'd feel if you no longer had a husband R"I, and how you would long for these days. Be thankful that things aren't worse. Thank Hashem that even though he's home all day, he tries not to make it harder for you. Thank Hashem that he's keeping busy. Thank Hashem that you're not living in a studio apartment and that your house has separate rooms. Thank Hashem that when you need to run out to the grocery, your husband can take the children off the bus. If something breaks, you can just call him. You don't have to be afraid to be home alone. Thanking Hashem that things aren't worse can also help shift your perspective. There are a lot of things to be thankful for.

You can be grateful for the accountability that comes with having your husband home. You can't say whatever you want because you know your husband might overhear you. You might prefer to be able to say anything, but you can be grateful that he's saving you from saying things you might come to regret. Perhaps you're less likely to waste time because you know someone's around. Again, you might prefer to have it otherwise, but you can still be grateful for the benefits. You can even be grateful that your husband has to be more careful with how he uses his time because he knows that you're always around.

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There's a next step. When a situation is challenging, some decide to change it, others decide to accept it. But perhaps you can actually embrace it. Sometimes we have opportunities but our perspective blinds us to them. Maybe you can embrace your husband's presence. Embrace the fact that he can do things for you, which you didn't realize or allow because you were busy trying to run away from being together. Maybe your husband can be more helpful because he's home more. If so, your appreciation of the help can make both of you feel more positive about the situation.

Can you schedule a coffee break together? If you're both home, you can take a few minutes to spend pleasant time together. It may make the rest of the day easier.

People often find themselves in situations which could be truly beneficial — but they pass up the opportunities. When you're not in the stress of the moment, think about what benefit this could be bringing you. In every situation, you can survive or thrive. When you survive, you remain limited. It's hard to stay in survival mode for long without becoming embittered. But when you thrive, there's always more you can accomplish.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS
FOR THE HOME

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Thank You & Tizku Lmitzvos!