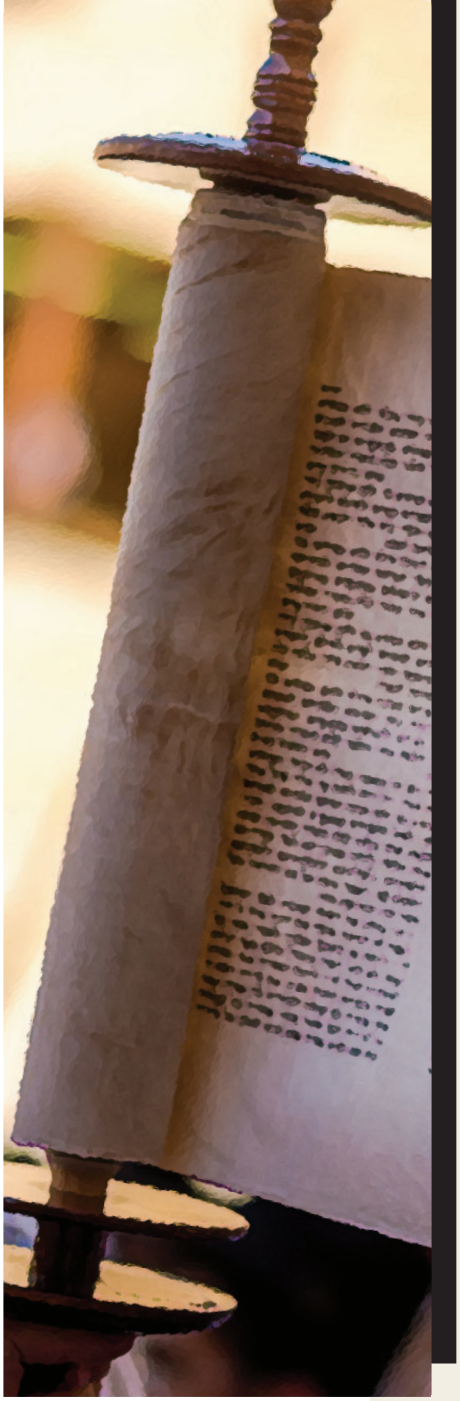


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

SEEING THE GOOD AND BELIEVING IN IT

As Moshe Rabbeinu prepared to send the Meraglim into Eretz Yisrael, he instructed them to discover "how good it is, or bad." The Chiddushei Harim explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was telling the Meraglim that Eretz Yisrael is indeed a very good land, even if it may appear bad at times. The essence of the Land is good and holy, always — however, the goodness may be covered up and thereby skew our perception.

As Rashi notes in his commentary on the *parshah*, the Meraglim were taken in by the apparent negative aspects of Eretz Yisrael and interpreted the constant funerals as a sign that the Land "ate up" its inhabitants. Had they reminded themselves that the Land is absolutely good, they would have been able to see beneath the surface and realize that the funerals were directly from Hashem, to ensure that the Kenaanim would be too busy to notice the Meraglim's presence.

When we remind ourselves of the goodness in everything Hashem has in store for us, we can overcome our skewed perceptions and see things for what they truly are. This is particularly true regarding every single Yid we encounter. As the *Sefer HaTanya* explains at length, the essence of every Yid is absolutely good and pure, as it is a part of Hashem Himself. Anything that appears bad is simply covering up that good essence.

It's relatively easy to remind ourselves of this when we look at Yidden in the abstract. It's when we live with others — our spouses, parents, and children — that we are more challenged because the "bad" is in sharper focus and affects us too. That's why it's actually even more important when it comes to those close relationships to remind ourselves of the essential good in those around us, to notice it and believe in it, reminding ourselves that anything "bad" is just a challenge to be overcome.

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Parshas **Shelach**

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Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you so much for answering people's questions in this format. It means a lot to me and many others.

I have a certain question about something that has been bothering me for many years, and lately I've been feeling that I just can't bear it anymore.

Baruch Hashem my husband and I are very happy together. We respect each other and have good *shalom bayis* that we both work on. There's just this one blockage that I have, which is that I can't trust my husband in the area of technology.

My husband has a smartphone, and because he's very good with technology, he knows exactly how to remove a filter because he used to work with something related. I know that he doesn't intend to do anything bad with his phone, but at the end of the day, he's a regular human being with human weaknesses and it's hard for me to trust him.

I used to ask him to switch to a regular phone but I stopped asking because I don't want to be a controlling type of wife. In any case, I don't want him to make the switch for me — I want him to do it because he wants to, and it really bothers me that he doesn't want to.

I'm also always worried about what he's looking at on the phone. He tells me that he watches news or sometimes science videos and that if it happens to be a woman presenting it then it's not a big deal because he's not watching in order to look at her. But I don't see things that way and I don't understand how it can be that a *chassidishe yungerman* doesn't feel repelled by seeing such things.

Our oldest child is only five so I'm not worried about him at this point seeing things on the phone, but I do feel bad for him that his father could be spending more time with him if he wasn't on the phone the whole time.

And it also really bothers me that my husband goes to places like a gym where there are *goyim* there, including women, and they're not probably dressed in a modest way. Isn't it an *aveirah* for him to look at a woman who isn't dressed properly?

Thank you



I appreciate hearing that people appreciate and benefit from these essays. Having questions is good and never something to be ashamed of. Often someone without questions is simply lacking awareness.

You mention this question that's been bothering you for a while. It's much better to address questions as early as possible and not let them build up inside us until we feel we just can't bear things anymore. Although I address many issues in my *shiurim* and articles, everyone ideally needs to have someone who knows them, and can answer their questions when they need an answer, instead of waiting for them to be addressed in a public forum.

You mention that you and your husband have good *shalom bayis* in general, that you respect one another, and that you're both constantly looking to work on improving your relationship. Working on a relationship is a long-term project. Aside from addressing specific issues that arise along the way, the big picture always should be attended to. Don't expect to be able to either achieve instant success or stop working hard and letting things just "coast along." A couple that approaches *shalom bayis* with willingness to improve things and the patience to achieve improvement will *be'ezras Hashem* have a lot of *siyatta diShmaya* in achieving this.

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You write with a generally positive attitude toward your husband. He knows how to bypass the filter on his phone, but he doesn't plan on doing that. Although you're worried about his general use of the phone, you don't assume the worst, but at the same time you're realistic about the dangers — not because your husband is a bad person *chalilah*, but because he's simply a human being.

When a woman can see her husband as a good person with challenges (as you do) rather than a bad person who slips up, this makes a tremendous amount of difference in the relationship. In any similar situation, it's important to distinguish between everyone's challenges with the *yetzer hara* in general, and not being able to trust an individual person confronted with a specific challenge. Recognizing everyone's challenges includes our own challenges and gives us humility and a willingness and ability to be *dan lechaf zechus*. Distrusting a specific person, however, will generally lead us to looking down on that person — and they'll sense it.

Between husband and wife (or parent and child), losing trust is a very serious matter. Many people assume that letting the other person know that they're under suspicion will keep them on their toes, but the truth is that the opposite usually occurs and the person may simply give up trying — "You don't trust me anyway, and you won't believe me if I say I've changed, so why should I bother?"

In addition, as long as someone believes that they still have the other person's trust, then even if they slip up, they know they can pick themselves up again and keep going, without risking the relationship. They're more likely to try and repair things than they would be if the other person knew they had slipped.

This rule doesn't always apply, and at times it can be better for a child, for instance, to know that their parents do know what they're up to and that they can't keep things hidden. But even then, the message should still be that the underlying relationship and respect remains intact, regardless of what might have gone wrong temporarily.

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Part of being *dan lechaf zechus* is recognizing that even if a person fell, they are more likely than not, to turn around and improve themselves. That doesn't mean, however, that we can't help them along the way.

In this case, you would so much love for your husband, of his own accord, to throw out his smartphone. However, he isn't doing it. You may have to accept that he isn't going to make that move without some outside pressure, but that doesn't mean that you can't encourage him to do it for your sake.

It's understandable and commendable that you don't want to be a controlling wife who tells her husband what to do and nags him until he does it. But there's a big difference between trying to control him and asking him nicely to do something for your sake, as long as you recognize and make it clear that he's not obligated to do it for you — and that it remains his choice.

We have many examples from Chazal of how *chochmas noshim bonsah beisah*—the wisdom of women built the home. We know, for instance, that Rabbi Akiva only went to learn after his wife gave him tremendous encouragement and we can assume that otherwise, he would not have become what he did.

I don't know the extent of the issue described or how your husband feels about this, but there are such situations in which the best option available is for the wife to ask her husband to give up his smartphone and for him to do it for her. Perhaps he'll actually appreciate that you gave him that push to do so.

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From what is described it sounds like you're still within your rights to ask your husband nicely to consider giving up his phone, and in the meantime, to use it less in general. Even if he were using it only for totally kosher purposes, it's fine to ask and suggest using it less and spending more time with you and the children.

Of course the way you ask for this makes all the difference. You should take great care not to demand and not to belittle him. The focus should be on how much you would appreciate it — "It would mean so much to me if you could, for instance, put the phone on silent for the first hour after you come home at night. I really enjoy spending time with you, without interruptions — it makes such a difference."

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With regard to what he's looking at on the phone, while it is hard for a wife not to intervene, telling him that he shouldn't be watching certain things is unlikely to help, especially if your attitude is one of, "How can you not be disgusted at seeing that?"

The Lechovitcher Rebbe *zy"a* would say, "The *yetzer hara* isn't ashamed to suggest the worst *aveirah* to the greatest *tzaddik*." Even the biggest *tzaddik* has his challenges and nobody should be surprised to discover that no one is immune to the *yetzer hara*. Certainly the *yetzer hara* has a harder job with someone who is learning Gemara from early morning till late at night, but that doesn't mean that he stops trying.

So, instead of looking at your husband and thinking, "How can you not be revolted by this…?" you can try to have *rachmanus* on him for facing the challenges he does, and simultaneously remind yourself that there are plenty of challenges that he has overcome in the past and *be'ezras Hashem* he will overcome this one too.

This reminds me of the time I was walking home from shul with my young son one Shabbos evening and he asked me, "Tatty, you're taking me to the *shalom zachor* later, right?"

I said, "No, of course not. It's late at night — it's only for Tatties."

My son was really confused and I couldn't figure out why till he said, "But I saw all the jelly beans and candies set out on the tables, so who's going to eat them?"

Just as children often assume that adults have grown out of a *yetzer hara* for eating *nosh*, we often assume that "*chassidishe yungeleit*" shouldn't have a *yetzer hara* in some or other area, when really, many people are far more challenged than we realize.

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That said, I certainly don't want to give the impression that I'm condoning wrong behavior. It absolutely *is* an *aveirah* for a man to intentionally look at a woman — any woman, no matter whether she is a *goy* or a Yid, and even if she is perfectly *tzniyusdig*. The Torah doesn't change, and even if people struggle with this, that doesn't mean that we lower our standards or change the rules.

Your husband should and probably already knows that he is not doing the right thing. But you are certainly not responsible for his wrong choices. You're only responsible for your own actions, and the predictable effects they have on others.

If a wife in such a situation has clarified her feelings about such behaviors, in a respectful and non-judgmental manner, and it hasn't helped, it's often best for her to try to build a respectful relationship based on the way things are right now, in the hope that it will become easier for her husband to choose better in the future. If, however, you haven't yet mentioned your feelings about this, and it's possible that your husband doesn't know how you feel, that's a completely different story. A wife who gives her husband the impression that she's okay with any choice he makes might be making him feel comfortable with wrong behavior, and that alone can be a very unhelpful message.



Certainly if any husband or wife is acting in a questionable manner, the other spouse is forbidden to ignore the behavior and must take action. I'd certainly suggest first consulting with *daas Torah* to better understand what is or isn't acceptable, and how it should best be addressed.

While this particular situation is sadly not uncommon, nonetheless, you as the wife do have a certain level of responsibility to not resign yourself to what your husband is doing. It's only human nature to care about what other people think of us, and in general, a husband wants his wife to think highly of him. If he sees that she really is bothered about his smartphone use, or his choice of gym, perhaps that will impel him to change his behavior. If, however, she shows him that she's not bothered at all, then she could be considered partly responsible if he doesn't mend his ways.

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Be'ezras Hashem you and your husband will find a way to overcome your challenges and build a stronger *shalom bayis*. In general, it's important that whenever a wife sees her husband making a move in the right direction, she mentions it and shows her admiration. When doing so, she should take care not to make it sound like she's "encouraging" a child — she shouldn't lose her respect for him, and this should be clear. If she comes from a place of humility, recognizing that just as he has his challenges, so does she, then she'll find it easier to be genuine and give him the respect that he needs to keep doing the right thing.

And if she can remember and keep reminding herself that her husband's essence is essentially good, then she'll find it easier to see the good and realize that the bad is just superficial dirt that needs cleaning away. It's harder to overlook the tough aspects in close relationships, but the rewards are so much greater when we focus on the person beneath.

May Hashem help us all to see that each Yid is "very, very good" and to enable each other to shine.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: SHELACH 5784

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