

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

GREAT EXPECTATIONS, GREAT REWARDS

Parshas Shemini opens with a description of what was to happen on the eighth day after the *kohanim* began preparations to conduct the *avodah* in the Mishkan. "This is what Hashem has commanded," Moshe Rabbeinu tells the *kohanim*; "do it, and Hashem's glory will become visible to you." The Shem Mishmuel quotes the Kotzker Rebbe *zy"a* who points out that Klal Yisrael had already merited to see Hashem's glory. Why did the *kohanim* now need to earn that privilege all over again?

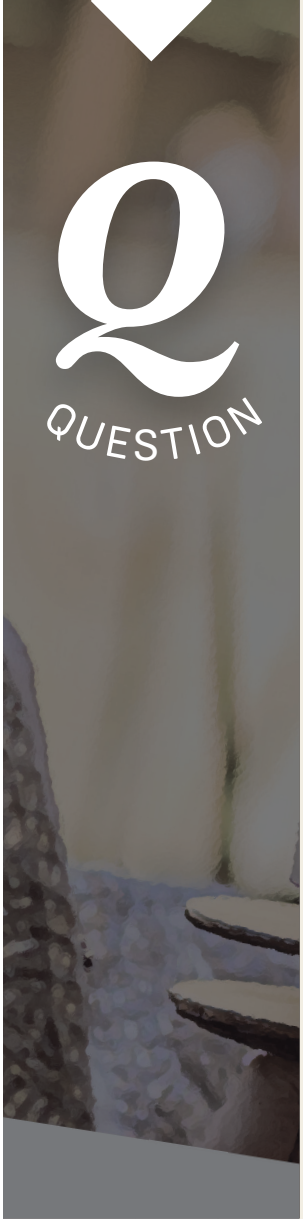
The Kotzker Rebbe explains that Hashem does not require as much from a simple person serving Him to the best of his relatively low ability, as He does from a great *tzaddik*, of whom far more is expected. And, being that people don't remain static in their *avodas Hashem*, as a person succeeds in becoming closer to Hashem, his challenges become more difficult and he has to do more in order to merit Hashem's blessings. Therefore, now that Klal Yisrael had moved beyond the *chet ha'egel* and done *teshuvah*, more was required of them in order to be *zocheh* to see Hashem's *kavod*.

The story is told that one year on Rosh Hashanah, as the Chozeh of Lublin *zy"a* was on his way back from Tashlich, he met up with his *talmid* the Ropshitzer Rov, who was heading back to the river although he had already been there earlier. The Chozeh asked him why. "I'm going to gather up the *aveiros* the Rebbe cast into the water," the Ropshitzer replied. Hashem is far more *makpid* with *tzaddikim* such as the Chozeh, so much so that what would be considered an *aveirah* for him is like a *mitzvah* for someone on a lower level.

As people move up levels, they are not only expected to achieve more — they will also feel a need to strive ever further. Surmounting a challenge the first time may give us great satisfaction; repeating the same behavior won't result in the same amount of *sipuk* because now, the demands on us are greater and the rewards will be, too. Sometimes, the challenge is simply to see a problem where we didn't recognize one before. Becoming aware of where we're going wrong and gaining sensitivity to the issues we may be creating, means that we are now obligated to do something about it — and thus become *zocheh* to even greater *brachos*.

נתנדב לעילוי נשמת
מרת פרידה לאה
בת ר' מאיר צבי ע"ה
נלב"ע כ"ט ניסן תש"ן לפ"ק
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Parshas
Shemini
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Thank you so much for your *shiurim*. I am really gaining from them, and I have a question of my own.

When we got married, my husband agreed that I would take care of most things in the house. Lately, however, I've been working on "relinquishing control" and letting him take charge. A little while back, I bought a certain item but we aren't using it anymore, and my husband asked me if he could give it to his friend. I wanted to say "yes" and I did, because I want my husband to be/feel like the boss in the house, but it was hard for me for a few reasons.

Firstly, I am protective of my things and I am afraid I might need this item in the future and will have to buy it again. Also (and this isn't so nice of me), this friend makes me "nervous." I get very anxious about the kinds of ideas he puts in my husband's head. He'll say things like, "You should learn to drive because it's your wife's job to do errands so if you can drive you'll be able to learn more." I also find it very hard to deal with situations such as when I'm schmoozing with my husband and this friend calls. I know my husband thinks very highly of him and I don't like it when he praises him to me.

Going back to the item: My husband realized that I'm not 100% comfortable with the idea of giving it away and he doesn't want me to feel bad at some point in the future, so he keeps asking, again and again, whether I'm sure it's okay or if he should just forget it.

How should I respond? I want to say yes and I hope I won't regret it one day in the future... Should I explain how I feel or will that take away from saying yes? I don't want to control my husband, but if I explain, he might say forget it. He keeps asking (to be nice) but it's getting hard to say yes again and again and I'm afraid that in the end, I'll just say no.

I hope I am making myself clear. I apologize for shlepping out the question; I guess it's emotional and not just logical.

Thank you in advance.



My aim in writing articles based on a Q&A format is not to tell people what's right or wrong but rather to answer people's questions. If someone is asking a question, they deserve an answer, and can often benefit from it. Others in similar situations may also benefit — or, they may not feel the need to ask in the first place, and may essentially have the right to decide on their own how to deal with their issues, and that's fine too.

There isn't necessarily always a right and a wrong way to go about things, because so much depends not only on the specific details of a situation but also on the level of understanding of those involved in it.

Sometimes, a certain course of action is "right" because the questioner has enough awareness to perceive the issue on a deeper level and therefore they deserve the clarity and the guidance that I can try to provide. But many people are simply not aware of what they are doing wrong or how they are subtly hurting or controlling others. Telling them often will not help as the concept is, at that point in time, above their level of understanding. And,

since that is the case, they may not be obligated to do anything about it, until they gain sensitivity.

In your case, you mention how you started out in your marriage doing things one way and only later came to recognize that there is a better way of doing things. It's wonderful that you have gained this awareness and, more importantly, that you are acting on it, because together with awareness comes the responsibility to do what you can now see is really right.

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I would also like to commend you for ending your letter by distinguishing between emotional and logical (practical) issues. There is a big difference between the two, but many people muddle them and justify imposing their subjective way of seeing things on others by presenting it as fact.

This results partly from a misunderstanding of the role of emotions. There's nothing wrong with having emotions. Our feelings are important and should never be ignored. Pretending they don't exist doesn't make them disappear. In fact, they often become more complex and harder to address if they are denied. It is only when our actions are solely guided by our emotions that things become problematic.

We can and should discuss our feelings with others when needed, but the discussion itself should be guided by our minds ("logic," as you express it) rather than by our hearts. When people relate to others according to how they're feeling at that moment, a great deal of damage can be caused. It's easier said than done, but as responsible adults looking to do what's right, we must try to behave correctly regardless of how we are feeling.

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You mention "relinquishing control" after having taken care of most of the things in your home. There's nothing wrong with taking care of most of the things yourself, if you and your husband are in agreement about it. That's very different from "controlling" the home and making all the decisions yourself, which is wrong regardless of which spouse is doing the controlling. Even when the other spouse "allows" this to happen, it's generally wrong. But almost all types of situations are perfectly fine as long as both spouses genuinely agree on how things are being done.

Problems usually arise not because of the situations themselves, but because of the feelings people have about them. If you started to feel that you were taking too much control and are now drawing back, that's wonderful.

But then the test comes when you find yourself in a situation where your "new way" of doing things isn't experienced as pleasant anymore. There's an item that your husband would like to give to his friend and he's asking for your permission to do so. I don't know the nature of the item, nor what it was intended for in the first place, but in many cases the idea of a husband "asking for his wife's permission" isn't just a matter of her relinquishing control. Often it's the more basic concept that you're not his mommy and that he doesn't need to ask in the first place.

You have the right to have feelings on any subject and to express those feelings, in a respectful and considerate way. Your husband should pay attention to your feelings and take them into account. However, the dynamic where he comes to you asking to be allowed to do something isn't a healthy one for either of you.

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I can understand your hesitation about revealing your feelings, your concern that if your husband hears that you don't want this friend to have the item, he'll change his mind and not give it. That's a choice you have, like all others. If you can make peace with the fact that he might give it away even if you may not feel comfortable about that at first — but you're going to take a step back in order not to be controlling, go ahead, and good for you. And if you can't make peace with that, then that's okay too and you are entitled to feel that way and to tell your husband how you feel, especially as bottling up your feelings might just be counterproductive. What he decides to do after hearing your thoughts on the matter, remains up to him.

When you do discuss your emotions, the main thing to remember is that they are feelings and not facts. That means that you won't be debating whose emotions are "right" or "wrong." What is "right" is for both spouses to take each other's feelings into account; what is "wrong" is for either of them to discount or ridicule the other's feelings.

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Your discomfort with this particular friend of your husband is also understandable and you may certainly tell your husband how you feel. Your dislike of having private conversations with your husband interrupted by phone calls from this friend is reasonable, and there's no reason why you shouldn't tell your husband how much this upsets you. You can also ask him to set aside a period of time each evening when neither of you answer calls or interrupts quality time together, and that's a very reasonable and normal thing to request.

When you ask for such a thing, stress how much it will mean to you if he can accommodate you. So many relationships would be so much better if only husband and wife learned how to communicate properly — which involves knowing what to say, when to say it, and how to say it.

If you notice your husband taking the friend's advice in areas that affect you directly, you should certainly raise the issue. In areas where you're not directly affected, recognize the issue for what it is — emotional rather than logical. That doesn't mean that your feelings are wrong or inappropriate but it does mean that you have to adjust your expectations of what your husband might do after discovering how you feel.

Here, too, you can ask for certain reasonable things such as for him to discuss advice the friend has given with you before making a decision. You can also ask for more reassurance from your husband that he respects your views and feelings more than those of his friend.

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Aside from these communication issues, let's discuss the item you feel so conflicted about. This could simply be a problem with hoarding which is very common. In most cases it isn't harmful, but in this particular instance it would be such a shame to let it get in the way of your relationship with your husband. If you don't need the item now and it would make him happy to give it away, you can see it as putting the item to good use right there!

It's true that you may come to regret it. That's not the end of the world. We regret many things in life, some more important, some less. If you tell your husband how much you don't want him to give the item away, you may come to regret that choice, too.

Think of this: Hoarding items isn't terrible; it's when people hoard feelings that damage can be done. There are people who hoard up all their old resentments, and are ready to drag them out at a moment's notice as soon as they need to "make a point": "I still remember how you..." "I can never forgive you for..." This is one reason why it's so important to discuss our feelings rather than bury them. Sometimes, we convince ourselves that we'll forget but instead, the emotions simmer away, ready to explode at the slightest provocation.

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Learning how to let go in a relationship and stop trying to control the outcome is hard and takes great effort as well as wisdom and sensitivity. It also demands a great deal of trust in Hashem that He will guide matters toward their right conclusion.

As we grow in our awareness of our shortcomings and challenges, we are expected to simultaneously grow in our sensitivity and change course for the better. And, as we do so, the rewards become immeasurably greater.

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To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557** or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**
To subscribe to receive the weekly essay, please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org