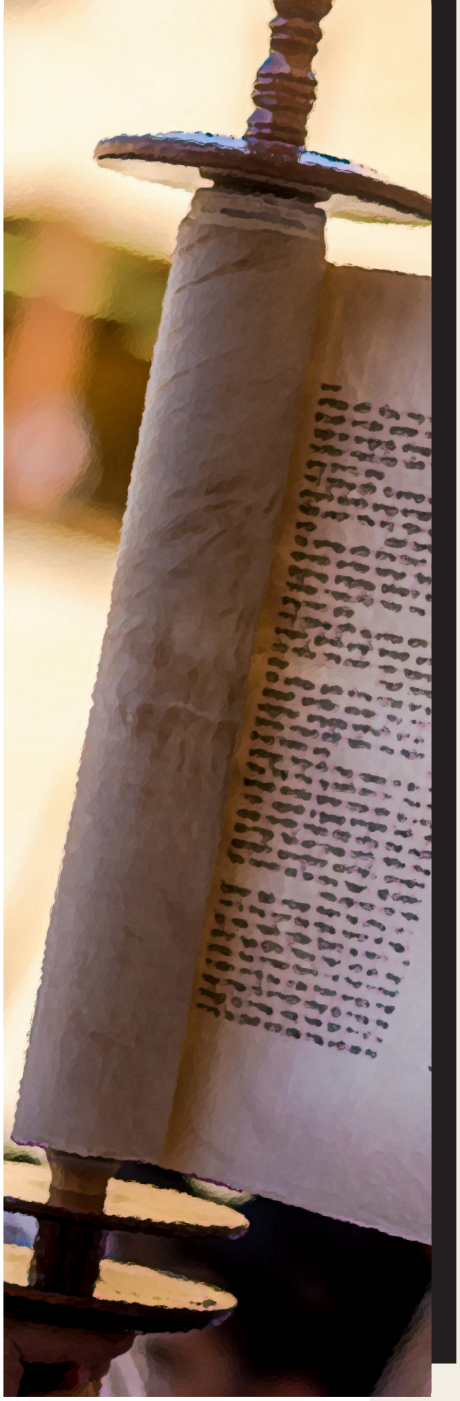


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

GOOD INTENTIONS GOOD RESULTS

Noach had good reason to build the *teivah* and save himself and his family from the Mabul. Nonetheless, the *passuk* tells us that "Noach did everything according to what Hashem had commanded him." The Agra d'Kalla explains that this implies that regardless of his personal interest, Noach's sole motivation was to fulfill Hashem's commandment.

That's a level most of us can only aspire to. Nevertheless, we should aspire to align ourselves with Hashem's *ratzon* rather than our own. Meanwhile, until we reach that level, it's important to have enough self-awareness to realize when our own interests are taking precedence. So many disputes arise due to lack of awareness of the root of the problem.

Take the example of a husband who decides he wants to excel in the *mitzvah* of *hachnassas orchim*. He starts enthusiastically telling his wife about the greatness of the *mitzvah* but she responds with hesitation, given that she really doesn't like having guests. If his response is to "better explain" how great the *mitzvah* is, he's missing the point — two points, in fact.

The first point is that she isn't hesitant because she doesn't appreciate the *mitzvah*. She does, but she gets really shy around guests and feels uncomfortable in her own home. The second point is that while he truly does appreciate the *mitzvah*, he also really loves having guests, which may (unsurprisingly) be why he pitched on *davka* this *mitzvah* to excel in. It's often not a question of right and wrong; it's a question of how to respect both of their preferences.

Self-awareness, as well as honesty, are essential in all our relationships, especially in marriage, through which we build a dwelling place for Hashem.

Mazel Tov to the

Weissmandel family

on the marriage
of their children

May they have only Nachas and Simchos iyH for many happy and healthy years to come!!

Parshas
Noach
VOL. 9 | ISSUE 2



Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I don't know if there's a good solution for this but in case there is...

I grew up Litvish-Yeshivish and married Chassidish, which is what I wanted, but I wasn't looking for *this* Chassidus, though I am mostly happy with it.

Around a month after I was married, I was finally told that Chassidim do things a certain way with regard to personal matters, which explained a lot that I hadn't understood beforehand. It took me a while to get over that, but eventually I accepted it. I did tell my husband that it shocked me and is hard for me.

Then, a few months later, my husband started behaving in a way that felt to me like he was distancing himself, and I didn't know why. I felt that this was affecting our closeness or at least the way it was expressed. In the end, I asked him, and he said, "I was told it's better like this." I suggested trying it for a while to see if it works for me, but he just replied, "But I was taught this..." Over the coming months I tried hinting a few times that I really didn't like things this way, but it didn't help. I also didn't want to pressure him because he'd only feel guilty and I would too.

As time went on, I started noticing more practical implications of his new *chumros*. Aside from the discomfort, I was really upset and still am, that I had to pick up on hints instead of being told that "this is what we're doing from now on." I felt so stupid every time I did something that seemed so normal to me but his reaction showed me that he thought it was no good anymore, and still he wouldn't even spell it out till I asked him point-blank if he'd found another restriction to add.

I hated all these rules, restrictions, and overly strict *chumros*, but I assumed they're normal for Chassidim so I didn't say anything, even as I got angrier and more annoyed. Then, one day, I was talking to my friend and her sisterwho is a *kallah*, was there. Without going into the details of the conversation, some of her comments were surprising to me. My friend is very Chassidish and this set off alarms in my head. Maybe I shouldn't have, but I didn't know who else to talk to, so I called her up afterward and discussed my issues with her. She was shocked by what I told her, especially when I described how just simple things in daily life became so difficult and complicated because of all the *chumros*.

Other than this issue, I am really happy with him. He's nice, caring, and supportive, and he makes me laugh. We chat together and play games together and I really like him. I got married a little over a year ago in case that matters. Thank you, any advice or ideas would be appreciated.

A ANSWER

As I mention often, many approaches depend on who's the one asking the question. If it were your husband asking me for guidance, I would have plenty to offer him, and I'd probably also try to figure out, together with him, why he has decided to focus on this specific area of life in order to serve Hashem better. No one should be implementing changes without clear guidance and *hadrachah*, especially when they are being imposed on an unwilling spouse. But change can happen even when only one of the spouses is on-board, and since you're the one asking, it's to you that I'll address my response.

You are seeking solutions, advice, and ideas. When people talk about "solutions," they often mean that the issue gets resolved the way they prefer, which obviously is not always possible (or even necessarily the best outcome). Advice and ideas I can

certainly offer, and they may ultimately help you a lot more than having things work out the way you think you would like.

You went into marriage expecting things to be different from what you were accustomed to, so in that sense, your eyes were open. The truth is that any thinking person should go into marriage expecting things to be different from what they are accustomed to. Even two people who grew up in the same *kehillah*, with similar family backgrounds (and even from the same extended family) should expect to have to adapt to a spouse.

At the same time, being married exposes us to a whole new world of ideas and emotions and there's no way to explain them before experiencing them. Most people simply cannot predict not only what things will look like, but also how they will feel about them. So, while you are correct that you knowingly stepped into a new world when you married someone from a Chassidishe background, most if not all *kallahs* go through at least somewhat of a similar process.

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With that said, I certainly don't mean to minimize the difficulties in the situation you describe, and I don't mean to imply that what you're personally experiencing is run-of-the-mill. At the same time, they are part of the "package deal" that is your husband. Everyone finds out, pretty soon after getting married, that there are things about their spouse that they really don't like. Pretty much everyone, given the opportunity, would make all kinds of changes to their spouse — more sensitivity, less intolerance of certain things, more patience, more understanding, less this, more that...

There are all kinds of "reasons" why we end up with the spouse we do. Underlying them all, however, is the unfathomable reason that Hashem willed it that way. Even in situations where a *shidduch* came about for "certain reasons" and wasn't someone's first choice (such as a certain girl "having to compromise" because she was 27 and still single, or a certain *bachur* "having to settle for" a certain girl because he was born with diabetes), when we remember that these "flaws" were given to us by Hashem for many reasons, almost all of which we won't understand until we reach the Olam Ha'emes, we can adjust our perspective and approach our challenges with the right frame of mind.

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None of this means that it's ever valid to hide or "not mention" important issues before an engagement. It could be something in the area you're discussing, or it could be something more straightforward, such as *kashrus* standards. If someone gets married and only afterward discovers that her husband wants her to *kasher* all the meat and chicken herself, and bake and cook everything from scratch, she will justifiably feel deceived and even cheated. Anything extreme or highly unusual, even if it's clearly sourced in the Torah, should be put on the table before anyone makes a commitment.

I've seen many cases of disappointment and resentment that could have been avoided if only people had been upfront about things. People deserve "informed consent" and even if they still end up going ahead with the *shidduch*, the advance notice makes it easier to accept and deal with the situation, including all unanticipated challenges.

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Now to address your specific question. It is complex, mostly because there are many variations on how couples approach such topics, and almost all are relatively valid and well-sourced. What this means in practice is that generally speaking, neither spouse should forcefully impose "their own way" of doing things on the other, if the other has valid objections. At the same time, if the way a person wants to conduct himself is the way in which his *kehillah* or family conducts themselves, it is often part of their identity. Asking them to alter that without a very good reason is usually unjustified, and even if you do have a very good reason, it needs to be a careful and well-thought-out decision that both of you make with full agreement.

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I understand that initially, you didn't think there was anything to discuss, as you thought your husband was simply following what you'd call mainstream Chassidish *minhagim*. Even if that were the case, you still should have felt free to discuss anything you found difficult or disturbing in your marriage with someone trusted and responsible, and it's a great pity that you weren't encouraged to do so as a *kallah*. Even if a Rav or Rebbetzin were to tell you, "Yes, this is simply what some Chassidim do," that doesn't mean that you can't reply, "I accept that, and yes, I did want to marry someone Chassidish. But I'm still struggling with this and I'd appreciate help with it."

While I understand that you were well-meaning in your discussion with your friend, and didn't even realize what that discussion might lead to, it brings up an important point worth mentioning. Talking to a friend about personal matters, unfortunately, is generally unlikely to help — it's more likely to make things worse, for all kinds of reasons. Sensitive behaviors between husband and wife shouldn't be discussed with friends or family. It is a breach of *tznius'dig* behavior, and can also cause jealousy and grave misunderstandings. In any case, what works for one couple has no bearing on what might work for another. Each couple needs individualized guidance from someone *ehrlich* and experienced.

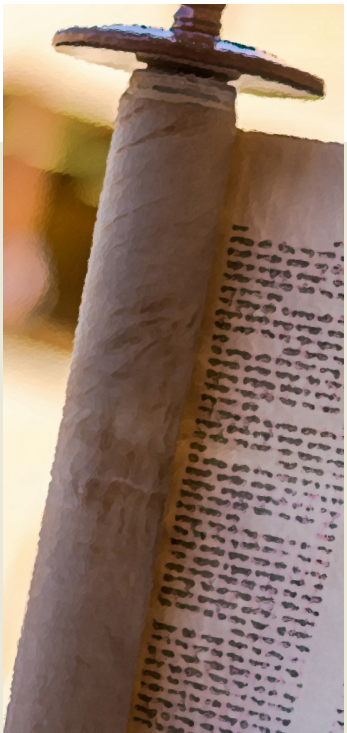
I understand the additional difficulty that came about from the fact that your husband didn't prepare you for the changes he wanted to make, or explain them to you in any way. A couple needs to have open communication in this and every other significant issue in their marriage. You should definitely stress, repeatedly if necessary, that you need to be involved in the decisions about what your relationship looks like, and that you're entitled to express your feelings and have them taken into account.

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At the same time, regardless of how things progress in that area, don't disregard all the other aspects of your marriage that you are happy with, or consider them insignificant in comparison. You freely admit that your husband is "nice, caring, and supportive," and such things are not to be taken for granted. A caring husband who places many restrictions on the physical relationship is infinitely preferable to an uncaring husband who places fewer restrictions.

It's also very important to remember that this isn't something personal. Your husband isn't choosing this way of conducting himself because he loves you less. If he were to ask me how to present things to you, I'd tell him to stress that he does love you and wants to make you happy. At the same time, this is the way he has chosen to live and he truly believes that it will benefit your relationship and bring you both to higher levels of *kedushah*. It's not that he's setting his preferences above yours — rather, he's trying to do *ratzon Hashem* together with you.

The truth is that even if he isn't acting one-hundred-percent *l'shem Shamayim* and has chosen this path because it's what feels most comfortable to him and brings him closer to feeling like an *oved Hashem*, that is also a valid reason to act that way. It doesn't necessarily entitle him to override all your objections and it certainly doesn't entitle him to ignore or belittle your feelings. But, just as you want him to take your thoughts and emotions into account, so should you.



With all that said, it's never too late to have open communication about something that's bothering you. If you feel something is too much for you, you can, very respectfully, initiate a discussion about it. I'm not sure how open and clear you were in the past about this, but sometimes people hint things and communicate indirectly because it's easier. Doing so is usually less effective than being open and honest about how you feel. As long as you're careful not to turn it into a personal attack and you don't trivialize something that your husband believes in, there's a good chance that he will show understanding of how this is affecting you. Even if he does give a vague answer of, "But I was taught this..." it's fine to ask if the two of you can discuss this with somebody that you both trust, to make sure that what he's asking of you is something genuinely meaningful and not a mistaken understanding of what he was taught "preferable" means.

Life is about choices and it's important to know when to keep quiet and when to raise an issue and try to address it. Choosing to accept something doesn't mean being quietly resentful and slowly becoming distant. It means acknowledging that the way things are now might be the best for you and your spouse, and that you are choosing to focus on all the good in your spouse and your marriage. Choosing to address something is also a perfectly valid option, as long as you remember it's not a choice to have a confrontation or launch a personal attack. It's simply a decision to put something on the table, address it responsibly, and find solutions that work for both of you.

B'ezras Hashem through open communication, more self-awareness, and a great deal of honesty and desire to do the right thing, you and your husband will find a way to move forward that brings you closer to each other and closer to Hashem at the same time.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: NOACH 5787

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