RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

PARSHAS BOI

THE SMALL THINGS IN THE BIG PICTURE

Chazal tell us that there are certain *aveiros* that are so serious that *"Ain maspikin beyado la'asos teshuvah*—A person is not provided with the means to do *teshuvah*." The Yismach Yisroel, in the name of his father, the Rebbe R' Yechiel of Aleksander, stresses that this does not mean that the person *can't* do *teshuvah*. After all, the *seforim* teach that there's nothing a person can do for which *teshuvah* won't help. However, in certain cases, Hashem will not help a person to repent — but even then, if he puts in the effort himself and repents with a broken heart, he will always be able to do *teshuvah*.

In this week's *parshah,* although Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart, he was still able to allow the Yidden to leave Mitzrayim. Hashem made it harder for him to do the right thing, but all the same, with enough effort on his part, Pharaoh could have done it. Just a little bit of *hachna'ah* and contemplation of Hashem's greatness would have gone a long way. Instead, Pharaoh said, *"Mi Hashem asher eshma bekolo*—Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice?"

So, while there are some *aveiros* for which Hashem clearly states that we won't be helped to do *teshuvah,* if we are a little *machnia*, or give one more *krechtz*, Hashem will still forgive us. Even the person who sins with the thought that, "I'll do *teshuvah* afterward," can return to Hashem if he is truly honest and determined to do so.

Hashem's relationship with us can serve as a paradigm for our relationship with other people. People sometimes fall into the trap of holding onto resentment and refusing to put wrongdoings behind them. When they say, "I'll try to forgive you," they don't actually intend to forgive (although they won't say that outright). What they really mean is that they'll hold onto the pain in case they feel hurt again in the future, in which case all their past grievances will be dug up and revisited.

There are people who hold onto pain for a lifetime, and expect the person they blame to do so as well, reliving what occurred even years ago and continuing to feel guilty. "Do you know how much pain you caused me then?" Yes, people sometimes do terrible things that cause a lot of pain that doesn't just disappear. But insisting that the wrongdoings take center-stage for the next ten years is insane. Have these hurt individuals never hurt anyone themselves? In every situation that I have dealt with where one spouse didn't want to let go of the pain their spouse had caused them, they themselves had caused plenty of pain to their spouses (aside from the pain they were causing due to the way they were dealing with the situation).

From our relationship with Hashem we learn that even if we do something for which there should be no *teshuvah*, Hashem accepts our sincere efforts to return to Him. Furthermore, if we slip up again, it's counted as a new event — Hashem doesn't, so-to-speak, revive the old trauma. This is true even for very serious transgressions. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, we should try to do the same, especially when only minor incidents were involved.

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GEDALIA & SHAINDEL ARNSTEIN IN HONOR OF RABBI GRUEN.

THANK YOU RABBI GRUEN FOR BRINGING US CLOSER TO HASHEM, TO THE TORAH AND TO EACH OTHER!

AND IN MEMORY OF MY GRANDMOTHER, SHAINDEL BAT MOSHE (YARTZEIT, 2 SHEVAT),
AND MY GRANDFATHER, NATAN BEN LEIB (YARTZEIT, 22 TEVES)

QUESTION

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

Thank you for your *shiurim* on TorahAnytime. I really appreciate your deep knowledge and understanding of people, marriages, relationships, and *chinuch*. I also appreciate that you have a forum for asking questions, firstly, because hearing other people's questions can put things in perspective, and also, because I appreciate the opportunity to send in a question myself.

Before I got married, a lot of the *shiurim* I listened to sounded almost like a joke. Many mentioned the classic example of husbands leaving socks on the floor etc. I was sure that I would never get upset over something like that. It was way too petty in the realm of *shalom bayis*.

Now, a few years down the line, things are different. B"H, I am very grateful that my family is growing — and so are the demands. I work full-time and I also have to be on-call in the evenings. I find my job very stressful but I try to be grateful that it brings in *parnassah*. I also have my family to take care of: laundry, supper, and everything else too. At this point in my life, I don't have the most *koach*, and sometimes can barely get through the day without dragging my feet. (B"H, I am anticipating a *simchah*).

My husband also works in the morning, but he has a low-pressure job. He learns in the afternoon. I find myself getting very frustrated with him to the point that I feel resentful. He leaves his stuff lying around and barely helps around the house. If I point out to him that I'm exhausted and really need his help, he'll try, but after completing a simple request like wiping the table, he feels like he did his share. Sometimes I feel like I should quit my job (to teach him a lesson maybe?) but I know that's not realistic, as his salary doesn't even cover rent.

I know that it's a shame to get so upset, but it's really affecting my feelings toward him. I feel like a *shmatta* sometimes and I feel taken advantage of. I've tried to have a conversation with him, but nothing ever changes. I don't want to let this ruin a time in our life that should be filled with gratitude and excitement. How do I handle this situation?

P.S. On another note, many times I wish I could speak to someone regarding aspects of our relationship, but I haven't found feasible options. What can people do when they are barely making it financially without outside support? This is something that bothers me a lot, especially in a generation where there are organizations for virtually everything. There are people who are willing to pay to take special-needs children on trips, but when a couple needs help, they say, "It's worth spending any amount of money on a relationship." What happens when there *is* no money?

Thank you again!

ANSWER

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

Part of the benefit of these essays is giving people the opportunity to read the questions. It can help when we see that we're not the only ones dealing with certain issues; it can also be helpful to see things from another person's perspective. So, before I address the questioner directly, I want to mention that if you're reading this letter and finding yourself wondering whether your own wife could have written it, perhaps start thinking about what you can do to improve the situation. Don't try to justify whatever you might be doing or claim

that there are more important things to worry about. A bit of honest introspection has helped many a tough situation.

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There's a good lesson in the first part of the question. We should never trust ourselves. Sometimes, we're convinced that something would never affect or bother us, but when circumstances change, that same thing can start bothering us very much. Some of the ideas presented in a *shiur* may not be applicable now, but down the line the advice could become more meaningful. It's also important not to judge what another person finds difficult or painful. Even if you can't relate to it now, there may come a time when the very same thing will be hard for you too.

The Yesod Ha'emunah states that a person has to be able to accept the fact that he doesn't understand everything. Problems start when people insist that they can only agree with things they can clearly grasp. In such cases, the Yesod Ha'emunah advises us to think back to something we didn't understand a year ago, something we couldn't accept as being true — yet a year later, we became wiser and suddenly it all makes sense. We can apply this lesson here too. Even if something doesn't seem relevant now, remember that it may become relevant at some point in the future.

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As a busy mother with a family and a full-time job, the most important thing you can do is prioritize. Some of the things you were able to do and some of the standards you were able to maintain in the first years of marriage are no longer possible now that life is so much busier. It's important to have a clean kitchen and toys put away, and so forth. But it's also important to figure out what's *most* important for your family at this point in time. If certain things are causing frustration and resentment, it might be time to reassess your priorities. It's very satisfying to be able to check off everything on your list, but you have to understand the effect on the bigger picture.

This is especially true when you're anticipating a *simchah*, but it's also true at other times such as when you're not feeling well, or it's Erev Pesach. Whenever the physical realities change, you have to reevaluate your priorities. The famous allegory about trying to fit rocks, pebbles, sand, and water into a jar illustrates this point well. The only way to get everything in is by putting the biggest priorities in first and juggling the others accordingly.

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Once you've decided where you truly need your husband's help, the next step is to figure out how to achieve that in the most effective way. Unfortunately, it's not realistic to assume that after telling your husband something once, you'll never have to say it again. Taking the example of the socks, *you* don't need to be reminded to pick up socks, because socks on the floor bother you. But they don't bother your husband. He picks them up because you've told him that they bother *you*. That's why simply seeing the socks on the floor won't serve as a reminder for him. It's okay for you and your husband to be bothered by different things — just remember that it means that he's going to need regular prompts in these areas. Seeing you annoyed won't remind him either; all you need to do is ask. This is not to imply that it's okay to leave your socks on the floor. We all need to learn to be more considerate, but when we're trying to get other people to change, some strategies work better than others.

There's actually no need to have a "conversation" about this (especially as some people understand "conversation" as "argument" and avoid having them at all costs). In fact, it's not even important to be right. Just ask nicely for what you need. Getting used to asking, often, can take a while, but it does get easier once we accept that a person who needs reminding isn't necessarily a person who doesn't care. You can try asking your husband to remember for the whole week. If that doesn't work, just ask him again. But whenever you ask, ask nicely. It sounds like he's taking you seriously, which is wonderful. (Again, if it was your husband asking, I would definitely advise him to put much more thought into this so that he doesn't have to be asked or reminded in the first place.) Chances are, if you make requests in a nice way for a couple of days, he will start remembering on his own. And if he does, comment on it: "Thanks so much for remembering! It means a lot to me." Continue saying thank you every time he does whatever it is, even weeks later. This motivates people a lot more than resentment.

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According to the Torah, it's a husband's responsibility to provide for his family. If his wife wants to and can help, that's fine, but it remains the man's obligation. In your case, your husband isn't bringing in enough money to cover the family's expenses while you are going out to work and also running the home — and also feeling resentful and about to fall apart.

If you want to continue supporting your husband's learning in the afternoon, the two of you, together, should work out how to achieve that. There's no need

for threats or ultimatums. Both of you want to have a happy family that functions well, and there's truly nothing greater. However, if the family functions "well" while resentment piles up and you slowly drift away from each other, all in the name of doing what's "right," what have you gained? This is certainly something you should discuss with your husband. Communicate respectfully about how you enjoy supporting his learning — if you do — and ask him what can be done to make it easier and more doable.

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Your question has highlighted something important for everyone to know, and that's when things should be discussed and when discussion and logic won't help (and could even backfire). If a person (including yourself) seems to have a certain resistance to doing something that you can't understand, they won't be able to adequately explain what the problem is, and you won't be able to persuade them to get over it. Logic doesn't work on emotions, and while there are ways for people to deal with underlying emotional blocks, that's work they can only do themselves and changes don't usually happen overnight. We can all come to recognize our own emotional blocks, and we can also recognize them in others — and when we do, the only effective method of getting around them is directly asking: "Please can you do this for me? I'd be really grateful."

With issues that are less emotionally charged such as how to support the family while your husband is learning half a day, discussion and explanation can help. Just remember that even when dealing with such issues, whenever you feel like you've come up against a brick wall, that wall is likely made of emotions and can't be battered down with logic.

Recently, a woman told my wife about something she was struggling with. She had a great relationship with her daughter, except for one thing she wanted her child to do in the morning — which her child refused to do. She felt her daughter was being "so" unreasonable and that her resistance made absolutely no sense. Every single morning, the yelling and screaming went on for almost an hour. While it's true that a mother may tell her child what to do, is it really worth it when this is the price to pay? While the daughter wasn't "making sense," the mother wasn't making much sense either. Certainly the daughter had an emotional problem with complying with her mother's request. But the mother would also have done well to examine her own emotional issues in this area.

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I want to touch on your postscript about help with *shalom bayis*. Sometimes, couples don't feel comfortable about letting their relatives know that they need help with *shalom bayis* issues and are reluctant to ask for financial help. Going for help is actually a very normal thing and you shouldn't feel like a *nebach*. If you do reach out to a family member with means, you might be surprised at how willing they are to help, and even more surprised to learn that they themselves went for help.

It's hard to find people who offer free sessions — many of those who started out with the best intentions got burned. If you do find a *rav* or someone else who's competent and willing to listen to you without taking money, stick to the practical points and show that you're motivated to make things work and willing to work on what *you* can do. This way, it won't take you so long to see results.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

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Thank You & Tizku Lmitzvos!