RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS TAZRIA

ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS WHAT?

The *passuk* says *"Adam ki yihyeh be'or besaro se'ais oi sapachas oi baheres* - If a man will have on the flesh of his skin a *se'ais* or *sapachas* or *baheres*, *vehaya be'or besaro lenega tzaras* - and there will be on the flesh of his skin a lesion of *tzaras*..." We note that the *passuk* mentions the three types of lesions and then repeats, "and there will be ... a lesion."

The Harei Besamim explains by quoting the Arizal that a person's *neshama* emits certain *oisios* which are visible to those who have the spiritual sensitivity to see it. If a person deserves a *nega tzaras*, the first place to be affected will be these manifested *oisios*. If a person is sensitive enough to be aware of that and does *teshuva* right away, there is no need for the next level of a physical *nega*. However, if he doesn't correct the problem on the spiritual level, then indeed the second part of the *passuk* will become necessary and he will have to go through the procedures prescribed for a physical *nega tzaras*.

We learn from here that problems don't usually manifest all at once. At first faint signs appear and then they become stronger and stronger until they're obvious to everyone. This is often true in situations of *shalom bayis* and *chinuch*. Sometimes people wait to go for help until their issues are intense problems that need intense intervention. People sometimes wait and end up dealing with a crisis because they didn't realize they would end up with a crisis.

A little leak only needs a small bowl to catch the water. But if you suffice with placing a bowl under it, and don't find the cause and fix the leak, but keep placing a larger bowl to catch more water, you'll likely end up with a very large bill for emergency plumbing services. It would have been easier and cheaper to address the issue when it was still a small leak. Nip it in the bud.

Not every little sign is a major issue and not every little issue has to be addressed. It is a shame when people make "an issue out of a tissue". But it's often good to discuss the issue with someone to know if it's something to be concerned about. Being on the lookout (without becoming overly obsessed) can help you avoid more major issues in the future.

This week's essay is dedicated in loving memory of a proud Abba and Zeidy

ר' שלמה יהודה ב"ר אליעזר טסלר ע"ה

נלב"ע כ"ז אדר ב' שנת תשמ"ו לפ"ק

Who survived the Holocaust and rebuilt a family of בנים ובני בנים עוסקים בתורה ומצוות

תהא נפשו צרורה בצרור החיים, עדי נזכה לקיום הפסוק יקיצו וירננו שוכני עפר בביאת משיח צדקינו

Question:

This week, I will once again make an exception and address more than one question at a time. These two questions came in at around the same time, and I hope that discussing them together will be helpful and benefit many readers, be'ezras Hashem.

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Hi. I listen to your shiurim on Torah Anytime and find them informative, enjoyable and helpful. Thanks a lot.

I hope you can help me as this is probably the most unusual problem you've ever heard. My husband is a little overweight, but like many people today, he thinks he's morbidly obese. He decided that he wants to do the sleeve procedure to help him lose weight. I think that it's a drastic thing to do especially for someone who isn't so overweight. I've seen too many people do the sleeve and suffer afterwards, which is partly why I'm so against it. My husband, on the other hand, is determined to do it and can't understand why I'm so afraid. He thinks I'm selfish for protesting but really it's only because I love him so much and want to protect him from something I have seen is detrimental.

We have had many discussions about this and just can't come to a decision. I am reaching out to you not to ask if he should do it or not (although I wish there was such an option...) but rather to know whose decision this ultimately is. My husband argues that it's his health and his life and therefore his decision. While I feel that he's my husband and life partner and he shouldn't do something that might affect his (and my) life for the worse.

Please advise us on whose decision this ultimately is. Thanks so much.

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

You speak often about boundaries and talk about the importance of understanding "mine, yours and ours," in a relationship. I have a problem understanding that when it comes to a marriage. Isn't it a contradiction? Wouldn't such clear separation of "mine and yours" simply make it two people living in the same house? What's so beautiful about marriage if most of it is "I wash the laundry and you bring the money?" How is that a healthy marriage? Shouldn't it be 99% "ours"?

Thank you.

Answer:

I'll address question number one first which will lead us to address the second more general question.

First of all, your problem isn't as unusual as you think. Many people think that whatever issue they're dealing with is unique and that

few people deal with the same thing. It makes it harder for them and, most of the time, isn't even true. Anyone dealing with people can attest to the fact that people in general deal with similar problems most of the time.

In regard to the topic you mention; many couples have different opinions about what's considered healthy or overweight. This is often in opposite situations, when a husband disagrees with his wife's perception of her weight, but it is the exact same case. And what about when a person is overweight and their spouse wants to help them lose weight, and they don't want to? It's quite typical for one spouse to take issue with the other's health concerns.

Since I've never seen your husband and I don't know whether he is or isn't truly obese, and since I'm not a medical or nutritional authority in any way, it's not in my place to weigh in (pun intended) on this part of the issue. All surgical or medical decisions should be made after consulting with a competent doctor.

◇

But let's use this opportunity to discuss perception. By definition, perception is not factual. If a person *feels* that he isn't confident, it doesn't matter how confident he appears, he still doesn't feel confident. And if someone feels like he's a great speaker and clearly considers himself one, even if everyone rolls their eyes during his speech, you might not be able to change his perspective. You generally cannot disprove perception or feeling.

So let's get more personal. If someone feels "ugly", does it make them ugly? It doesn't really matter what the world thinks of this person, they still don't feel good about themselves. (There are cases of distorted perceptions which require different interventions, but trying to prove to them through physical means that their perception is wrong will usually not be helpful. A person with an eating disorder who is severely underweight may still see themselves as fat when they look in the mirror. Taking a tape measure and proving how skinny they are isn't usually the best way to help them.)

In many situations, denying a person's feelings – even if those feelings are negative – can be hurtful. Here you admit that your husband is "a little overweight," but he feels *very* overweight. We need to leave room for people to have their own ideas and feelings and not contradict them. We can try to tell them how we feel about them and encourage them in that way, but directly contradicting them doesn't usually end well.

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In regard to whose decision this is, I think it's important in situations like these, where the effects are quite broad ranging, to narrow it down and realize which parts or details actually affect you personally.

If your husband ends up doing the sleeve and then expects you to cook special meals for him, or he can't eat at certain times which inconveniences you and the family, that affects you. In that case, you can discuss those effects with your husband, ask him to explain what it will mean for you and tell him what you are or aren't ready for. Because *his* weight issue starts to impact *your* workload.

At the same time, try to show him that you do care and you want him to be happy. On the other hand, as long as *he* wants to do something because of how *he* feels and it only affects *him*, it's generally well within his boundaries to do so.

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People often try to pull out the "But It's My Spouse" card. "It's *his* health", is countered with "but it's *my husband's* health". "It's *his* choice to smoke, but I don't want to be *the wife of* a smoker", etc. People try this in so many areas, and sometimes it's used to control almost every aspect of their spouse's life. Most of the time, though, people who use this card and "believe" in this "right", will only use it to their advantage, but won't let their spouse say, "but it's my spouse," about things *they* want to do that make their spouse uncomfortable.

Proper boundaries, on the other hand, means that you can respect your spouse's individuality and allow them to make their own decisions on things that affect them.

Having said that, a smart person will not want to hurt their spouse even in those areas that do apply only to them. If you know it bothers your spouse when you say, do, or wear something, you may be fully entitled to say, do or wear that, you can recognize that you'd be hurting your spouse and

your marriage by doing so. That's the balance: We each have to respect the other person's right to make their own decisions, but at the same time, we should take the other person into account when making our own decisions. If you have a choice which can make your spouse feel good, why not do so?

◇

Yes, if I'd be addressing the husband in this question, I'd probably suggest that because his wife is not comfortable with the idea of surgery, maybe he should consider going for a second opinion. No, you don't *have to*, but it will show your wife that you're taking her seriously.

Again, it's the balance of figuring out whose decision this is and allowing that person to make the decision, while taking the feelings of the other into account.

If a woman does the grocery shopping, it should be her decision where to shop. What if she chooses a grocery that's far and she can't go often enough to keep the house well stocked? That affects her husband and he can weigh in on it. It doesn't become *his* decision, but they should work out a system so that he isn't affected by her choice.

It should be a man's decision which shul he goes to. But if his shul of choice finishes davening late and *seudos* start later, that affects his wife and they should have a discussion about it.

◇

To address the question about marriage being "99% ours," I don't think it is. The home is ours. The children are ours. A big part of the "shared" schedule is ours. But nowhere close to 99%.

Two of the mistakes people make in marriage are (1) thinking that once they're married, they become one, and (2) thinking that although they're married they remain two separate entities.

Both are mistakes. We have to take each other seriously. We have to leave room for individuality. In all cases, though, we have to be considerate of each other. We remain two people in one marriage. We share opinions. We encourage each other's choices even when we don't necessarily like them. We respect our spouse's choices and hope they respect ours. That's a healthy marriage. That's the beauty of marriage.

Wishing you all the best,
Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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Thank you and Tizku Lmitzvos!!

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME
TAZRIA 5782

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