RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# Torah Lessons for the Home

## Parshas Bamidbar

## Unchanged Observance

The Possuk in this week's Parsha says, Kaasher Yachnu kein Yisau, Klal Yisrael was told that their positions when marching should be the same as when they are camping. In Parshas Vaeschanan, the Yetev Lev repeats a thought he heard from his father on this *passuk,* that no matter where a person finds himself, his level of observance should remain the same. The fact that one is away from home, shouldn't make him comfortable doing less than when he's in the routine and comfort of his home.

Sometimes, a person makes sure to follow *halachos* stringently and to do *mitzvos* with the proper care. However, when he needs to travel, he might not be as careful. There might not be easy access to a *minyan*, or a proper washing cup for *netilas yadayim,* for example. And so, he may end up slacking off.

The Yetev Lev reminds us that no matter where we are, we should keep our Yiddishkeit on the same level as when we are at home. Hashem is everywhere and our *kiyum ha'mitzvos* should reflect that.

Ironically, when it comes to Shalom Bayis, we often see quite the opposite. When around friends or away from home, many people are super mindful to stay on their best behavior. They speak respectfully to their spouse, they speak softly to their children, and they hardly forget to say thank you. As soon as they get home, however, the gloves come off. Here, on comfortable turf, they feel like they can say and do exactly what they please.

It is a very human thing to want to be our best selves when we are around strangers. In fact, we learn that our fear of Hashem should be like our fear of our fellow man! But that doesn't mean that when not around strangers, and seen only by those that are most important to us, that we should indulge in our egotistic or self absorbed tendencies. Let us remember that Hashem is present inside our homes as well, and so we should conduct ourselves in the most respectable fashion with those around us.

Just as our behavior in Avodas Hashem should look the same at home and when away from home, so too our behavior toward our loved ones should be the same away from home and at home!

# Question:

**Dear Rabbi Gruen,**

**I have heard many of your shiurim and I have a question:**

**By nature, I am a very clean, well-dressed and put-together woman. My husband, on the other hand, is not.**

**I feel like the cleanliness and hygiene of a man are a reflection of his wife. When he can't keep his belongings clean and orderly, it may seem like his wife is not a "*baalebusta*". This makes me feel really embarrassed, but there is only so much I can do! I can't quite go out and buy him a new Tallis or ashoes!**

**My question is: is it right to think that his appearance is a reflection of me and if I ask my husband to wear something else, is it considered overstepping boundaries?**

**This is a daily struggle for me, and I would so appreciate your insights.**

# Answer:

I'd like to first point out that I appreciate the fact that you attribute your orderliness to nature, as opposed to taking credit for it. When you understand that you were simply born with a more organized temperament, it is easier for you to understand that your husband's lack thereof is also not his own fault, but a part of *his* genetic makeup. This knowledge can put things into perspective for you a little bit.

Additionally, being that he is "wired differently", there's a chance that your husband either doesn't think that he's all that sloppy, ("*If you think this is dirty, you should see my friend Shlomo's pants*!") or he feels that caring too much about his looks goes against his principles.

In either case, when you realize that he isn't doing it out of malice, or immaturity, and it can simply be something he was born with, it might make it easier for you to understand him, or at least tolerate better. Even if it doesn't actually make it easier to bear, it can at least shed some light on why it is happening, and offer you a new understanding, helping you be more accepting.

This advice is not exclusive for orderliness versus slopiness. This is such

a basic and fundamental idea pertaining to most relationships - if not all - and can be applied to any conflict of temperament within a relationship. Instead of getting into an argument with your spouse who's a chronic latecomer, for example, take a moment to realize that he or she is simply of a different nature than you and deserves your respect nonetheless.

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In answer to your question about your husband's appearance being a reflection of your housekeeping skills, I would like to assure you that very often this is not the case. Just like you understand that you can't possibly go shopping for your husband – he needs to do it himself – the people around him probably understand that, too. They see your husband for the adult that he is, and the way he dresses and carries himself is his own responsibility. Many wives think the same way as you do, but any sensible person knows that the wife is not responsible for the husband's looks.

In fact, those who know who you are and how you normally look, can plainly see that it isn't your doing, and those who don't know who you are, can't judge you because they don't know you! It's usually more your own self-consciousness that makes you think that others are viewing you disparagingly because of it.

It reminds me of a story I once heard of a little boy who was born in his parents' old age. Being ashamed of his parents' aged appearance, he decided that he will walk far behind them, so that nobody will associate him with them. To be perfectly sure, he crafted a big placard that he carried around that said, "Those two are not my parents"... We sometimes think that everyone notices or thinks something about us that we are conscious about, but the truth is that they almost never do. And even when they do it's most often not in the context as we interpret it.

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Generally speaking, it really isn't the wife's obligation to be in charge of her husband's appearance. You are not his mother. Although a housewife is usually the one doing the laundry, every other aspect of her husband's dress and demeanor is up to him. It might be ideal if he were more responsible, but remember that he is an adult and might have his own way of doing things.

Sometimes the best thing is to say nothing, even when you're bothered by something your husband is doing. Someone once mentioned a cute piece of advice to married women, whenever they want to criticize their husband, they should jump on the scale and see if they're at their ideal weight. If not they should acknowledge that the real reason they aren't is because real change is hard, and get a feeling of understanding awakened within them.

However, if you care too much about it to just let it slide, you can gently mention it to him. However, when you do, make sure you don't come across as exasperated, or put him down for it. Say it gently and with compassion, and understand that he's a work in progress and it might be something that goes against his very nature. He likely won't change overnight, so try not to repeat yourself a million times. That will be frustrating to both of you. Patience is key when looking for real change.

Remember to compliment and acknowledge any step in the right direction, even if it's something minor. Be mindful that for him it's a struggle, so even if to you it is only a drop in the bucket, to him it might be a major deal. When you notice and thank him for it, it will encourage him to keep trying.

Another idea is to ask him directly if he would like to be reminded, and/or if he wants you to assume responsibility for certain things – so long as you're okay with it, obviously. He might actually appreciate it! But if he tells you that it bothers him when you interfere, then doing so would definitely mean overstepping his boundaries and you will just have to let it go.

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I often see mothers overstepping these boundaries when it comes to their children, as well. You might think that as long as they're kids, they need to listen to you and follow your orders. But the truth is that they are people, too. As much as you would like for your kids to match every day, or for your child to wear something specific at a certain time, if they don't want to wear it or do it, you should respect that! (People often ask me: you mean, I'm not allowed to tell my child what to wear?? I respond, you're allowed, but why *would* you?) They are people, too, and imposing your own obsessions on them is generally considered exerting unnecessary control and a crossing of boundaries. Other people are entitled to have their own tastes, styles, and clothing preferences and they need to be respected.

Furthermore, sometimes a wife doesn't necessarily have an issue as fundamental as hygiene or cleanliness. She just doesn't like what her husband chooses to wear. It could be a specific type of clothing that he has to wear for work, or it can be something that he likes and she doesn't. Here, too, imposing your will on him is an infringement of boundaries. He gets to choose what and when he wears and just like you don't want him instructing you on what to wear, he deserves the same consideration.

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Let's end off with a word to the husband: If your clothing is torn or worn out or dirty, or your shoes are scruffy, or your hat is faded, know that your wife isn't crazy. As much as I would love to tell her that she has nothing to be embarrassed about, it is perfectly normal that she feels this way. Just like you might feel embarrassed if your twelve year old comes to shul with you in yellow crocs or an unbuttoned shirt, she feels self-conscious to be associated with someone who couldn't be bothered about his appearance.

It is true that your wife should try her best to accept you the way you are, but you need to realize that when she worries about how you look it is because she cares about you and she knows that it isn't *b'chavod* for an *ehrliche* Yid such as yourself to look this way.

If you can both come to an understanding of each other, and try to bring out the best in each other, you will be able to feel comfortable in each others' presence at all times *b'ezer Hashem*.

**All the best, Rabbi Shimon Gruen**



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