RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS HAAZINU

WHEN WE ALL PULL TOGETHER

The *passuk* in this week's *parshah* famously reads: *"Ki chelek Hashem amo Yaakov chevel nachaloso."* The Rebbe R' Moshe of Kobrin *zy"a* explains that just as a *chevel* consists of a large number of thin strands, with each individual strand too weak to support any considerable weight but all together forming a strong rope, so too *Klal Yisrael* consists of a great number of simple Yidden (as use of the term "Yaakov" rather than "Yisrael" implies) who have almost no power as individuals but have tremendous powers when they join together with one another.

At the current time of year we are reminded of this lesson with the *arba minim*, where each single component alone is worthless but when all are taken together, one can fulfill the *mitzvah* with them. Even the odorless and tasteless *aravah* is vital – that's the power of unity.

On a practical level we find a similar concept when families build a home together. While running a home is not easy, and it would seem that doing so successfully would require a lot of talent and intelligence, we often see simple people getting it right while sometimes, very capable people can't seem to make it work. Often this is due to the ability simple people have to form an effective unit, whereas the brilliance and "correct" methods of much smarter people fail to produce results if they're not working together.

Synergy in a married couple's life – when each complements the other – makes the sum of their power much greater than their parts. The opposite is also true. Even if each spouse has great potential as an individual, failing to work together with others weakens their power considerably. People with lesser capabilities can accomplish much more if they work well and join forces.

Sponsored by **Rabbi Shlomo and Rochel Gruen**

In honor of our son Rav Shimon Gruen Shlita

On the occasion of his being tested on Hilchos Shabbos

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שלי ושלכם שלהם

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I appreciate you sharing your email address in order to allow people to submit questions that they have no one else to ask. I listen to your *shiurim* on TorahAnytime, and I find them very helpful. I appreciate how well you understand women, and at the same time provide insight into a man's perspective.

I have a fundamental question. I have a wonderful, kind husband, and I really appreciate that. Yet, there's something that keeps coming up that bothers me. My husband is always mentioning "*halachos*" in regard to marriage and other household situations. For example, if I'm busy and I ask him if he could change the baby's diaper, he says, "*l'halachah* that's the woman's responsibility, but I'll do it anyway." I know I should appreciate that he does it, but I find it demeaning and hurtful. And, is that really the *halachah*? Does the woman have to do all the housework herself? How is that fair?

Another example: A friend told me that on days that are very hectic at work, I should make it easier for myself and buy takeout or something similar for supper. When my husband heard, he commented that the Gemara says that one of the most valid complaints for a *get* is if a wife doesn't prepare food.

There are other situations where he tells me such *halachos*. Is he right? Is it normal for me to get extremely upset when he talks this way? And above all, what is the best way for me to deal with it?

Answer:

Thank you for your kind words. Before addressing the gist of your question, I want to mention that while I appreciate all questions that are sent in, it's very important for every person to have someone to ask personally. Listening to classes, and reading articles or books can really be helpful, but relying on a public answer to an emailed question is not the right way to get clarity in your life and to find guidance in practical situations. My lectures and articles don't take the place of having someone to ask.

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The most important question you ask is the last one, about the best way to deal with your situation. Deciding who's right and who's wrong is far less important than figuring out what to do. So let's get some perspective here.

There are many *halachos* that come up in marriage and in the Jewish home. Almost every situation that arises can be discussed and clarified in *halachic* terms. As a matter of fact, there are many topics that I discuss with a *dayan* to learn the halachic perspective before addressing them, and I'm often surprised by the insights I gain. *Halachah* doesn't only mean the *Shulchan Aruch,* although there are many *halachos* there that anyone who isn't well-versed may not be aware of. *Shulchan Aruch* definitely delineates many obligations *l'halachah* for both the husband and the wife. But there are other, related *halachos* too that while not directly addressing situations pertaining to the home, nonetheless inform the way we relate to each other within the home. And there are guidelines established

by Chazal that should influence our behavior. All of these should be taken seriously, and this includes *halachos* regarding speech, *ona'as devarim*, being careful with others' feelings, etc.

Some *halachos* may seem to benefit the husband more; others seem to be more in favor of the wife. Ultimately, though, all *halachos* and Torah ideas in general are for the benefit of both and simply show us the best way to go about our lives. I can understand that it may not be pleasant to have these *halachos* mentioned often, and not always is it a good idea to try to educate your spouse. However, preferring to remain ignorant regarding such *halachos* is not the right way to go either.

One *halachah* that I happen to mention often (in my classes, not my home...) is that it is a woman's obligation to honor and respect her husband in the same way she would respect her father. This is always true and she should never have to be reminded of it. That said, a husband is also obligated to honor his wife.

I am personally unaware of a mention in *halachah* about changing diapers, although there definitely is a *halachah* about a woman preparing food for her husband. You mention, though, that things can be hectic at work. Earning a livelihood is the husband's responsibility so if the woman works, it may change the status of some of her other responsibilities; just another good reason to get practical guidance from a Rov who knows your personal situation, and can guide you – and your husband – accordingly.

A certain young man I know didn't want his wife to take an epidural when giving birth. He believed that since painful childbirth is a woman's curse, she shouldn't try to get out of it. He went to ask his Rov, who told him that since his wife worked to help with earning a livelihood and supporting the family, thereby taking some of his curse (the curse of earning one's bread through sweat and toil) upon her, she was allowed to relieve some of her own curse.

If a woman is overwhelmed at work, it may alter the balance of her duties at home. If a husband doesn't want his wife to work, and she works anyway, he may be entitled to demand certain things. It's important to discuss this with a Rov.

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You ask if it is normal to feel hurt when your husband mentions halachic obligations. Feelings are relative, and we each feel things differently. Most people do feel hurt when comments sound cynical or condescending, although I don't know exactly if that's what you're dealing with. The bigger question though is how to deal with it.

Stop and think for a minute. What could be causing your husband to keep mentioning *halachos*? Is he trying to tell you something aside from the direct message he's conveying? Does he feel like you're demanding things from him? Try to figure out what's behind his resistance.

Let's discuss your example of changing diapers. While it sounds like you used a respectful tone of voice when making your request, I still want to stress how important it is not to sound demanding or like you feel it's a given. Even saying, "The baby's diaper needs to be changed," or "The garbage is full, are you going out?" can go over wrong regardless of whose responsibility it is. It's better to ask, instead of hinting, implying, or "just saying." You're probably better off saying something clear like "Can you please change the baby?" or "Would you please be able to take the garbage with you on your way out?" Phrasing it this way allows your husband to understand that you *don't* feel it's his responsibility, and might tempt him less to point out to you whose responsibility he thinks it is.

Similarly, explaining yourself helps too. "It's hard for me to do it now. Can you please do it? You don't have to but it would mean a lot to me." Usually, he won't feel the need to reinforce the fact that he doesn't have to once you make it clear yourself. Manners of phrasing makes a big difference.

When you address the underlying issue causing a problem, often things resolve themselves. I'll mention a simple example I recently came across. A father asked me for advice regarding his teenage son. The boy had lost his *tefillin* and suddenly decided to *daven* at home. The father tried pushing his son to go to shul but didn't get anywhere, and he didn't know what to do. I asked him if it was possible that his son was simply embarrassed to show up in shul with a *tefillin* bag that had someone else's name on it, and I suggested placing the *tefillin* in a plain bag instead. Similarly, when you avoid doing whatever it is that causes your husband to defend

himself with the *halachos* he mentions, he may stop doing so.

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Another general point about disagreement and difference of opinions, is to avoid debating. Your husband keeps mentioning *halachos*, but it doesn't matter whether his issues are really based on *halachah* or not. Don't try to prove him wrong; it won't help if you demonstrate that he's interpreted the *halachah* wrongly. You *should* know what your obligations are, but the reason is not to prove to him that he's wrong.

In a calm moment, you can have a conversation with your husband about these comments in general. "You often bring up different *halachos*. I know you don't mean to make me feel bad, and I'm sure you know these things better than I do, but I don't appreciate hearing about how obligated I am, if I wasn't implying otherwise. When I ask you for help, it's because I know you care for me, and that you're kindhearted, and not because I feel that you have to do what I ask for." This might clarify your feelings without debating the topic. You can have a productive conversation without having it turn into an argument.

A word to the husband: I understand that it makes you feel better to clarify that you're not obligated to help, but unless it's relevant, and you're actually trying to discuss why you aren't available for something, I don't think it's smart to keep on reminding your wife how she should be doing things better. In general it isn't good to imply that someone is ignorant or uneducated – especially when it's not relevant.

This is especially true regarding sensitive comments regarding what is grounds for divorce. Of course there's a time and place for sensitive conversation too, but if this is a comment you use often it can really cause a problem. Be sensitive with your speech, and be respectful to your wife who runs the home, and helps support the family too.

It's clear that there are *halachic* obligations for both a husband and a wife, as well as obligations we have towards Hashem. We should always focus on what *we* are supposed to be doing. It may sometimes be necessary to point out, in the right time and in a healthy way, what someone else is supposed to do. But for the most part, we only need to take care of ourselves.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME
HAAZINU 5782

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