RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Tetzaveh

Nurturing the Hidden Talent

In this week's Parshah, Hashem instructs Moshe Rabbeinu to speak to *"those who have a wise heart in whom I have imbued a spirit of wisdom",* and they will be the ones to craft the clothing for the Kohen Gadol.

The Chasam Sofer points out that there is a likelihood that these talented individuals were not even aware of their potential. Hashem said to Moshe, "I have given these people a talent, now go and tell them about it". Once they were made aware of the powers within them, they were able to create the most beautiful garments.

Some people have within them a tiny seed of potential, which, if not brought to their attention, withers and dies. However, if there is someone who can just make them aware of it, it grows and flourishes into something beautiful.

When we notice that someone close to us seems to have the ability or potential to do something great, we must let them know. Otherwise, they might never learn of their powers! It's a frightening thought that people might go through their entire lives completely unaware of their strengths.

I was once at a big event, where only people with admission cards were allowed inside. There were throngs of people – without admission cards – swarming outside the entrance, hoping against hope that they will somehow make it inside. At one point, an individual standing inside the door motioned for the crowds outside to approach. Before the guards knew what was happening, people marched into the venue en-masse, breaking through the door and sending the doormen running for cover.

What they did was obviously wrong, but the lesson resonated with me. Here were tens of people who thought that they had no way to get in, yet all they needed was one person to beckon them to approach and they were able to tap into this previously unacknowledged power they had all along.

We have this responsibility, especially as parents, to make our children aware of their strengths and talents. This can be true for a spouse as well. Sometimes, we recognize a certain ability in our spouse that they don't know they have, or maybe are simply afraid to address or believe in. By telling those around us how much we believe they can accomplish, we can build up their confidence and their capabilities. Who knows? We might end up being the ones who benefit from it the most.

Question:

Shalom Rabbi,

I am an avid listener of your shiurim, and now I have a question for you.

My wife and I have completely different views on life and on Judaism. While both of us are *frum* **and** *chassidish***, I consider myself more open minded. I am of the opinion that those of "the far right" who tell us that something else is** *assur* **every other day are just out to make our lives miserable.**

My wife is an innocent, if somewhat naïve, woman, who has the right intentions but she falls for every poster on the street. I feel that she is being manipulated and her naivete is being exploited by those behind them. However, she will not relent on her positions.

When it comes to *ruchniyus* **we have differing views on just about everything. Otherwise, we are an excellent couple.**

This obviously causes a huge problem in our marriage, because we are constantly passionately disagreeing. Can you offer any advice for how I can deal with such a situation? I'm quite sure I'm not the only one who can use some ideas.

Thank you so much for everything.

Answer:

Before I begin, I'd like to make it clear - as I often do - that my answer is addressed to you, as the questioner. It is very possible that if your wife would've been the one asking the question, my answer would be quite different. There is really no right or wrong answer here; it simply depends on who is the one asking for advice. It takes strength and maturity to realize that enacting change in your situation is up to you, and that you can't make anyone else change.

I'd like to add another point, if I give advice to one spouse, the other spouse should not use that advice to prove that he or she must have been right, after all, someone suggested for *their spouse* to be the one to do something about their situation. When advice is given it can only be given to the one who asked for it, it's not at all about proving who is right or wrong.

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You end your letter by saying that you believe there are many others in your situation. That is quite true. In general, 99% of marital problems are universal. It simply manifests in different ways. To some it's Yiddishkeit, to some it's spending habits, to some it's eating habits, to some it's hygiene! The fact is that when you bring together two separate indi-

viduals, from two different backgrounds, there will be conflicts, disagreements, and misunderstandings.

Most of the time, this does not constitute a crisis or disaster. In a small number of cases, the problems are so terrible as to require something drastic to be done. In a majority of marriages, though, this is all par for the course and completely normal – expected, even.

Furthermore, there is often no way to predict any of this in advance. Every couple has their own path to success, but they need to find the tools that will work for them as they go along. There is no knowing beforehand what the couple's financial, physical, mental or emotional state will be like down the line. If you enter marriage with the mindset that you are ready to give this your all and put in the work, you have a path to success.

This is true for business as well. Even with the best business plan and the most solid investors, there is no way to predict for sure how and if the business will be successful. You prepare as best you could, you get yourself ready to work, jump into it, and then hope and pray for the best, with a commitment to try and deal with challenges that may come your way responsibly.

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It takes some couples a while to acknowledge and accept that merging into a single entity takes time, effort, and patience. There's the story I like to tell about the young, innocent bachur whose parents took him to his *beshow*. Before going inside, he panicked. "Totty, I don't understand!" He lamented. "Zeidy got to marry Bubby. You got to marry Mommy. And now you want me to go and marry this strange girl??" It is hard for us to imagine that the happy, established couples we have come to know and rely on also went through their initial phase of getting to know each other and finding their groove.

Couples disagree, and that's normal. Sometimes, though, it seems as if you don't agree on *anything*. If you would examine your relationship closely, however, you might realize that you *do* agree on many things. The disagreements are often just so large in your mind, that they overshadow the areas in which you *are* in sync.

It's very easy to overlook the times you agree with each other, because after all, that's how it should be! But when you choose to focus only on those times, you will find that your disagreements don't occupy such a large part of your life anymore. Even if your disagreements *are* huge and fundamental, it's still so important to focus on the little things you both agree upon or enjoy. You need to start *somewhere*!

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You mention that you are otherwise an excellent couple. I'm not sure if you mean that if not for this issue, you would have been an excellent couple, or that aside from this issue you actually are an excellent couple. In any case, if you can put your differences aside, every couple can be an excellent couple. If you don't make your disagreements the defining factor of your relationship, you will have a much more fulfilling marriage. Make an effort to find the things you both enjoy doing or discussing, and do that as often as possible. By doing that, your connection will deepen and you might surprise yourself by getting to a point of understanding each other better!

I was once at a synagogue with a sign outside that read, "Valuing Diversity and Celebrating Unity". Now, they probably didn't have very holy intentions with that slogan, but I felt that this had a huge takeaway for marriages. We need to value the fact that we are two diverse people, who grew up differently and have different interests, but we also celebrate the fact that we joined together in marriage and unity. By appreciating and respecting each other's differences and rejoicing in the fact that you are in this together, you will be able to live in harmony and peace.

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When you're simply disagreeing in theory, then you need even more acceptance. You look at extremists as people who are out to make your life miserable, but realize that other people (AKA your wife) do not quite see it that way. Understand that people look at things differently. Almost everyone can look around and identify those whom they feel are "too extreme" and those who are "too lenient", and identify their own position as "just right".

In general, "frum" people are not out to take advantage of gullible individuals. They often simply believe in whatever they are promoting. And aside from that, being gullible and naïve might not always be a bad thing, your wife might simply be the type who always wants to do what's right. If you make her feel that she is stupid or unsophisticated for being that way, she will feel disrespected and under attack. Making fun of her won't change it.

It is normal for people to get passionate about things they believe in, even if they are not normal-

ly very strong-minded people. Some might believe in certain *segulos* or hold by certain *chumros* or follow certain *rebbes*, and that doesn't mean that they are naïve or uneducated; it just is their belief! There is no point in trying to "educate" them or "enlighten" them about what you think of their beliefs because it will just drive them away from you. This is not only true for your spouse, but for anyone around you that has a different belief/standard/*derech* as you.

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Another point to consider is that sometimes you basically get along fine, but when it comes to the big picture, the main issue, you disagree. In times like this, it might sometimes be appropriate to look away from the big picture for a little bit. Focus on the practical applications and realize that it's not all as relevant as it seems. You can be seemingly in huge disagreement over "being" Litvish or Chasidish, but then you may realize that the practical differences aren't as big or common, and then focus on the parts you actually do see eye-to-eye on, and care less about a difference of opinion not nearly as relevant as one would think.

Of course, there will be things that can really stand in the way, and can't simply be ignored. The question is, what can you do about it? If your disagreements become practical and you need to make a decision that will impact your family, that is a whole other discussion and you will have to technically figure out how you will deal with it.

It's easy for me to suggest that as the husband you have the right to call the shots and make the decisions. And maybe you do. And maybe that's some of what I would suggest to your wife as well... were she the one asking me for advice. But let me try to suggest something a bit more productive, practical and understandable.

Boundaries are an important part of a relationship indeed. In every relationship there is what I often refer to as "mine, yours, and ours". You have to realize that there will sometimes be things that, as much as they might annoy you, are none of your business. You cannot control what or whom your wife believes, or what she chooses to do about it. You can discuss it with her, if you'd like, but you can't force her to change. When it comes to things that pertain to you specifically, or even to both of you, you have to come to a mutual understanding and find a way that works for both of you.

Yet even when something does pertain to you, or affects you directly, and it's fine and often recommended for you to clarify your opinion and to feel comfortable voicing it, it still can and should be done in the most sensitive way. The tone of voice, and the validation of a conflicting view, is often what helps someone else realize that your opinion counts as well, and that your feelings and interests need to be taken into account no less than their own, regardless of how passionate they are about it.

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While this is crucial for every Jewish home, it is especially true for a couple like you, to have a *daas* Torah who you both agree upon and feel comfortable with, who can guide you in making your important life decisions. You both need to be comfortable with the person you choose, so that you will both accept what he has to say.

Aside from getting clarity from someone competent, this is often what helps resolve conflict, when the simple communication, and even offers of compromise don't have the desired effect. This alone can also be turned down, but it's surely something a spouse can - again, in a nice way, of course - be clear about not being okay without it.

Hashem should help that you should be able to respect your differences, shine a light on your similarities and find your golden path to harmony and happiness.

Best wishes, Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: TETZAVEH 5781

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