RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS

A BLESSING AND A CHALLENGE

In the sefer Chashava Letovah on our parsha, the Rebbe Reb Henoch of Aleksander z"l discusses the relationship between the two leaders of Klal Yisroel, Moshe and Aharon. Every child needs a father and a mother, and Hashem's child, the Am Yisroel is no different. Moshe, the teacher of Torah, is the father, representing the Middah of Daas while Aharon represents Binah, and was beloved by Klal Yisroel as their mother. The Rebbe of Aleksander discusses how the desired state of consciousness is only attained when the faculties of Daas and Binah, the heart and the mind, are fully in sync and working in tandem.

It would be very helpful if people's minds and hearts were more connected. Often, what people experience and express is strictly from the heart; a result of their emotions with almost no connection to their intellect at all. I recently sat with someone who told me his story, and as soon as I repeated his words back to him to confirm that I understood, he suddenly realized why his feelings didn't make all that much sense after all. There was almost nothing logical about how or why he was feeling the way he felt, it was all just emotional.

Emotions are very strong, and can "hijack" a person's thinking process. So he may think he's using his mind and not his heart, thanking rationally, while there is actually no logic there. Even when it does "make sense" for something to bother a person, it still may not be logical to act on those feelings. Which is why if he'd see someone else come to a similar conclusion or behave in the same way he's doing right now, he would probably understand why it can be totally wrong, uncalled for, and downright irrational. But when a person is able to connect his heart and mind, his logic and emotions, he may realize that some of his feelings are not so logical and won't necessarily bring about the results he really wants.

When it comes to building a Jewish Home, it's especially important to work on bridging thoughts and feelings. If we wish to be successful we must try to not let our emotions overtake us, or dictate how we behave. Even when we are frustrated, unhappy, or hurt, we need to try and remain in control of how we behave, and when needed discuss any aggravation with someone who can give the logical and objective perspective we can't seem to attain on our own.

This week's essay is dedicated

by G. B.

as a Zchus for Yeshuos and Refuos for Klal Yisroel!

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for your practical and helpful shiurim on TorahAnytime.

My husband and I are expecting our third child. The trouble is that my husband is absolutely dreading it. He keeps mentioning how calm life is now and how much he enjoys it. He feels that we don't need to have loads of children. He feels that it will be hard after the baby is born. These feelings come out even without my prompting a discussion. I find this difficult on a personal level. I feel we are so blessed. Also, most of the things that are hard fall on me, not on him. The physical side of it, the lack of sleep and the responsibility of housework and food is all mine. Yes, he will need to step in, but this attitude frustrates me as I think it comes from a place of laziness and negativity. It might be worth mentioning that we don't have much family support to rely on after the birth and he mentions this too. I'm beginning to feel anxious about after the birth, even though he keeps promising he will help. Really, I don't even expect so much help from him around the house. In fact, I'm often quite surprised by what my friends ask their husbands to do. If so, why is he so worried?

Besides for that, it really concerns me that he doesn't seem to have a clear hashkafa on why we have children altogether. I know he doesn't have any bad intentions; I just think he doesn't have any understanding. He keeps repeating that we won't be having another child for a long time after this. To me, it feels very negative to talk like this before the baby is even born! It's important to say that he is an amazing father to our children and he means well. He wants to help. He is just being honest about his feelings when he says these negative things.

I hope you can help guide me/us. He is open to understanding more.

Thanks for your time.

Answer:

There are many angles to this question. I want to address as many as possible to help this questioner as well as the many other people who struggle with this and similar issues.

I notice that a lot of what you write is about how you feel (note the wording: "I find this difficult on a personal level... I feel... it really concerns me..."), as discussed in the Vort we began with. You're not necessarily dealing with a technical difficulty or challenge, nor something that needs to be "fixed". The situation is what it is (at this point at least) regardless of how you *and*your husband *feel* about it. It's important to differentiate between feelings and practicality in order to see what you can or can't do about this on a practical level.

Please don't get me wrong. The fact that much of your question is about how you feel, doesn't make the question – or the right to have such emotions – any less. Your feelings should be taken seriously. But part of taking them seriously is recognizing them for what they are; perceptions, not facts.

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You mentioned several times that your husband doesn't intend any wrong and that he's just being honest about his feelings. He's honest

that he's enjoying the peace now. He's honest in noting the stress and difficulties that come along with another child. It's good that you realize that he doesn't mean anything bad, and hopefully, you believe that on a deeper level too. It's also important that *he* should understand that *you* realize that.

Furthermore, it's important to let him know that it's okay for him to express his feelings. By making him feel inferior for harboring and expressing those feelings, you probably won't get him to change his attitude. You'll just make him afraid of expressing himself.

Besides, he even has a point here. You mentioned that there won't be much outside help. Things will be stressful in the house. And just because you, as the mother, will bear the brunt of the stress, doesn't mean it won't be difficult on him. The fact that a mother will be busy with another child, while being sleep deprived and running the home, *is stressful on a husband.*

It may be far from the same stress as the woman endures, maybe even incomparable, but that doesn't change the fact that it's stressful. It's hard for a husband to see his wife stressed out. A husband doesn't appreciate seeing his wife suffering from fatigue even when it's because of the baby. This doesn't necessarily give him the right to complain, nor does it make her less validated to express her own stress, but it gives you an understanding of where he's coming from and can help you to make him feel understood.

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This understanding may offer you a new approach. If you can approach your husband in a gentle, non-confrontational manner, and tell him that you understand that he doesn't doesn't have any wrong intentions and that he has a right to feel the way he does, and that for the most part, you don't disagree with what he says; you can then share with him how this makes you feel. This way, it's not about being right or wrong, or *who* is right or wrong. This may make him more open to understanding you and not want to hurt or make things more difficult for you. Once you're not arguing anymore, he won't want to make you worry that he's not taking this well.

This is the essence of communication: validate what he's feeling and express how you feel without either of you being critical or getting defensive. It's like the old story about the Rabbi who met with a quarreling couple and after hearing the husband he said: You're right, after hearing the wife, he said: You're right, and when the Rebetzin came in and said, how can you tell each of them they're right?? he answered: You're right as well! When one person is "right" it doesn't make the other wrong. There's room for opinions, and more so, for feelings. Nobody deserves to be shut down or invalidated for expressing themselves honestly.

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You also mention that he is an amazing father and that he helps a lot right now. Many people get a drive to do more when they feel very appreciated for what they're already doing. Some people are 'lazy and negative', still, when they feel extra-appreciated, they want to do more. The appreciation may override the laziness. Subconsciously, they don't want to 'do,' but they do want to be appreciated.

If you want your husband to do more, giving him appreciation may be the biggest motivator for that. As an aside, don't compare him or what he does to what other men do or don't do. That is never helpful.

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Your letter ends by saying that your husband is open to understanding more. Appreciate that. Even before he understands more, tell him how much you appreciate that he's *open* to understanding more. Tell him how much it means to you. It's a big thing.

There is a hashkafa to why we have children and as much as possible, husband and wife should be on the same page with it. But even if you have a certain clarity that your spouse doesn't have, it usually won't work to *'explain* your side to him,' or even to have the *rav* explain why your feelings or outlook are correct. The approach is that "we" want to get educated. "We" want to gain clarity. "We" want to hear a shiur on this. Nobody is winning or losing. You're both learning together.

In every marriage, it's important to have a *rav* or *moreh derech* that you both respect. In this case, you can approach this mentor for clarity on this topic.

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Since you asked for my take on this topic, I'll briefly share some of my own understanding about this. I feel that children are a blessing – no question on that. Children are the biggest *beracha* possible, yet at times, the biggest challenge possible too – not much different than we may have been to our own parents!

But there's a higher purpose that makes it worthwhile. If we were here to eat, drink and be merry,

why would anyone want to be challenged ever? But people usually feel that they are here for a higher cause and that they want to accomplish something in this world. That's what makes a challenge worthwhile. The more we are focused on something higher, the more we are willing to give up for it. But it's not always easy. And different things are challenging for different people. Your husband's challenge is not the same as yours.

Also, every challenge is an opportunity and every opportunity is a challenge. When Leah Imeinu had her third child, she said, *"Hapaam yilaveh ishi eilay* – now my husband will be closer to me." Yet we see people who are afraid that more children will make the couple have less time for each other. They're both right. Having another child can be a challenge *and an opportunity* to become closer and raise this child together. Leah focused on the fact that she now had the opportunity to become closer to her husband. Some focus on the difficulties involved.

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It's important to realize though, that it's difficult to change feelings and attitudes. Having such a discussion may change the behavior and your husband may stop complaining, but you still may not see the attitude change. But realize that you're asking for something that is not easy.

Also, turning this into a serious conversation may not be the best approach. Sometimes, a bit of humor and lightness can accomplish a lot more. A mother once told her married daughter that she was having too many children. She said, "I think you're right. Which one should I give away?" That's a great, humorous response that (when, and only when, said at the right time in the right tone) deflects the tension and communicates that you love all your children and that you're happy with your family as it is. Maybe, when your husband brings it up again, you can say something like, "You're right. It will be too difficult. I arranged for someone to take the older one so we should be able to make room for the new baby." Of course, you have to be careful not to say this in a hurtful or cynical manner, but you can find the bits of humor that can work in your situation.

If you are able to validate and understand your husband's feelings and you're ready to express your feelings with humor and clarity, your communication can yield the results you want.

May you have lots of *nachas* from all your children and be zocheh to build a beautiful family with the tranquility and happiness your husband and you want.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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Thank you and Tizku Lmitzvos!!

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