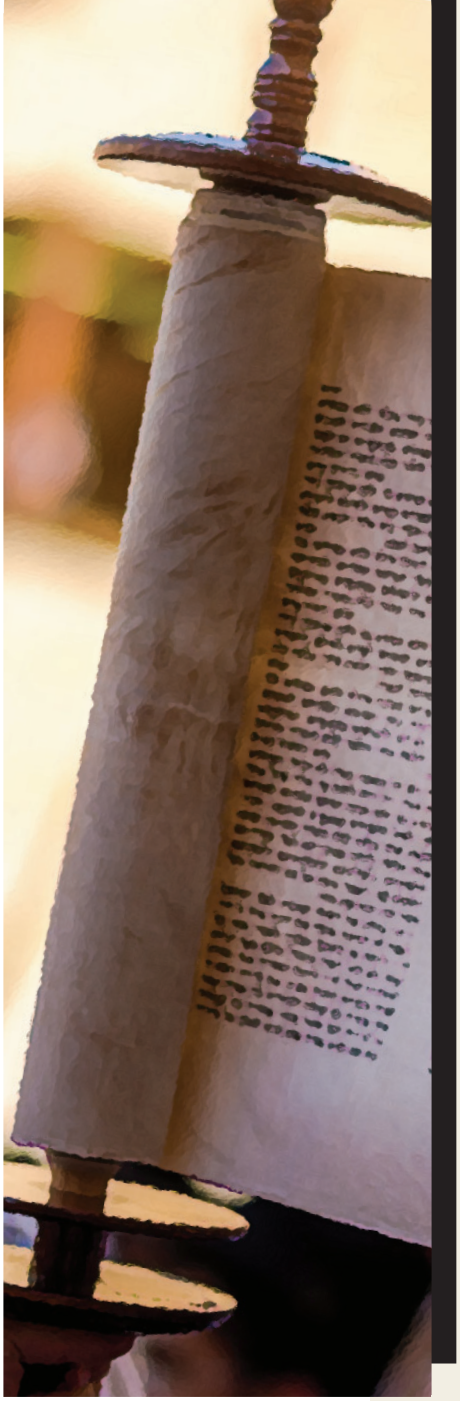


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

HELPING EACH OTHER SHINE

There were two types of olive oil used in the Beis Hamikdash and the Mishkan. There was pure olive oil (*shemen zayis zach*) that was produced solely from the first drop pressed out of each olive, which was used to light the *menorah*. And then there was lower-grade oil that was produced by crushing the olives after that first drop was extracted, which was used for the *menachos* offerings.

The *passuk* stresses that the pure oil is to be "*kasis l'maor*—crushed for lighting." The Beis Yisrael of Ger comments that this shows us that even when we feel that it's justified to "crush" someone, either by rebuking them or teaching them something they're unaware of, we need to ensure that the result will be "*l'maor*," that the outcome will be to light up that person. The goal of any criticism must be to inspire someone to greater heights, not to depress or humiliate them.

Criticizing another person is easy; making the criticism genuinely constructive is far more difficult. For criticism to be productive, it's not enough for the behavior under scrutiny to be genuinely wrong, or for the comments to be valid. Words spoken cannot be retracted; therefore, before we open our mouths, we need to be confident that what we are about to say will not only not crush that other person but actually help them achieve their full potential. We need to know when and how to speak, and to take all likely outcomes into account, before going ahead with our comments.

Dedicated in honor of

Avram Abba's Bar Mitzvah

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Parshas **Tetzaveh**

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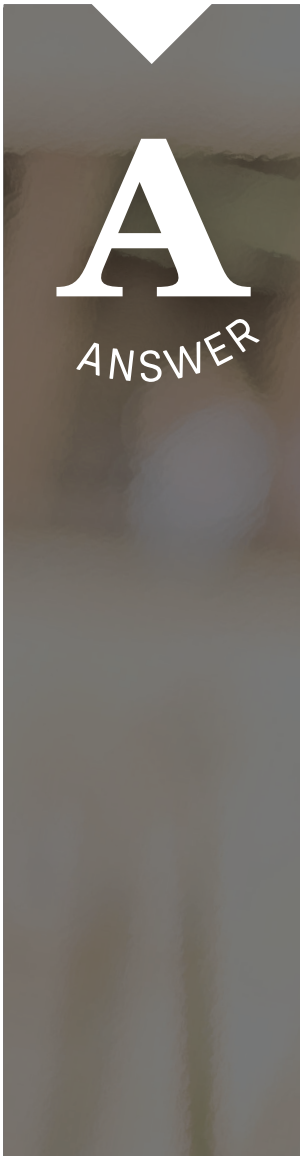
Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I wonder if you perhaps have some advice for me? My wife just doesn't get what *halachah* means, especially when it comes to *davening*. Basically, she only *davens* the parts that she likes and skips everything else. Most days she doesn't even say Shemoneh Esrei.

On Rosh Chodesh, she enjoys saying Hallel so she does, even though I tell her it's silly to be so "into" Hallel when Shemoneh Esrei is more important. But it's an issue every single day when she'll say parts of Pesukei D'zimra and skip the *brachos* of Kriyas Shema, for example, even though according to *halachah* you can't do that.

I don't like bringing this up as it causes fights, but maybe I have a responsibility to do so? Also, shouldn't she be listening to her husband when it comes to anything involving *ruchniyus*?

Thank you.



With regard to any *halachic* aspects of your question, I can only answer that I'm not a rav. If you would like to clarify the *halachic* issues you raise regarding your wife's obligation to *daven* and your obligation to correct her, I recommend that you consult a competent rav. He will likely take your family situation into account, particularly the number and ages of children you have.

I often stress how important it is for families to have not just "a" rav but "their" rav, someone who gets to know them over the years and gains familiarity with their particular circumstances. So many problems can be not only solved but avoided in the first place when both husband and wife defer to a *halachic* authority in relevant areas. So I encourage you to discuss this with a rav whose rulings and advice both you and your wife will respect and follow.

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When it comes to *tefillah*, the *halachah* is far clearer for men than it is for women. Men are obligated to *daven* certain *tefillos* in a certain order regardless of what they enjoy or whether it inspires them. Different communities have different *minhagim* and *mesorah* when it comes to women's *davening*. While this does allow for more flexibility than for men, that doesn't necessarily mean that women can simply *daven* whatever they please.

Yes, one of the underlying purposes of *davening* is to "connect" to Hashem. That doesn't mean that it's a free-for-all and that each person

can decide for himself what "connection" feels like and what contributes to it. How we feel about *davening* is not the only factor to take into account.

We see this idea in action when it comes to the building of the Mishkan. Even though one of the main purposes of the Mishkan was for us to benefit from Hashem's presence among us, Hashem still gave us precise and highly detailed instructions for how it was to be built. He did not say, "Here's a nice *mitzvah* for you, to build Me a house. Utilize your creativity and figure it out for yourselves. Do it in a way that makes you feel My presence most strongly." We serve Hashem on His terms, not ours, and this idea applies to every single area of life, not just *tefillah*.

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But let's suppose your rav tells your wife, "You should be *davening* x, y, and then z, in that order." Should you now supervise her adherence to these instructions?

She may find it challenging to do so and that is more her business than yours. Making sure that she gets it right is no more your responsibility than it is to make sure that she serves Hashem properly in any other area of her life. The general rule in Torah that we don't give *tochachah* to those incapable of receiving it correctly applies here too. In fact, the example Chazal give for this concept is refraining from admonishing a woman for failing to add minutes to Yom Kippur at its beginning and end. Although this is a clear *chiyuv*, Chazal tell us that if a woman does not comply, it is better to remain silent and not issue a reprimand. In other areas, it's not always clear where such flexibility is in order, and that's exactly why I suggest that you consult your rav, something that is always a good idea.

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The fact that Chazal recommend added caution when it comes to making specifically women aware of something they are getting wrong is instructive. There is also another *ma'amar* Chazal that seems very relevant to your situation, one that is often quoted but whose full meaning is not always appreciated: "Just as it is a *mitzvah* not to say [what will not be heard], it is a *mitzvah* to say [what will be heard.]"

The first half of this saying implies that if you know that your wife will take direct criticism badly (as is the case with most people…) then don't do it. Many people stop there and remain silent instead of offering criticism, even congratulating themselves for holding back. They often miss the second half of the same saying which seems to be encouraging us to find a way to say something positive that *can* be taken well.

In your case, the methods you have used so far have not been successful which suggests that they should probably be abandoned in favor of something more promising (and certainly something that won't provoke fights). Even if your rav does suggest that you raise this issue again, you must take great care to do so in a way that can actually accomplish something and bring about the desired results.

First and foremost, it's crucial that you avoid any appearance of an attack. Whatever you say, make sure your wife does not hear it as a personal criticism, not on the way she *davens* nor on herself as a person. If she does, she will likely only become defensive and your words will not only not accomplish what you want, they will probably just make things worse.

If your wife is very sensitive on this point, you should take that into account and modify your tone of voice and only raise the subject at a calm time of day. I truly believe that one can say almost anything to almost anyone as long as one gets the timing, the words, and the tone of voice right. Being able to do so is a skill well worth developing.

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I would also like to point out that it's commendable that your wife is *davening* at all and that she actually enjoys *davening*. That's tremendous and sadly, not nearly as commonplace as you might think. I think that this could be a great starting point for a conversation. Tell her how grateful you are that she loves to talk to Hashem,

and about all the *brachah* she is bringing into your home through her *tefillos*. Tell her how inspiring you find it that she won't be *mevater* on *davening*, even when she's busy, and how your children will learn to love *davening* through watching her.

Then, you can suggest that the next time she has a chance to *daven* Shemoneh Esrei, you'd be grateful if she had you in mind when she reaches the *brachah* where we ask for *parnassah*. Remind her of the sick person she could mention when she says "Refa'einu." It will take time, but gradually she will internalize this new way in which you see her, and her behavior is likely to adapt in turn.

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I hope you will view my ideas and suggestions as applicable in any area where it seems necessary to bring something to someone's attention. It's easy to become fixated on a single thing that someone does that really bothers us and could even be wrong in absolute terms. But even then, we need to keep the bigger picture in mind. Will telling them be productive or destructive? Will it crush them or encourage them?

There's a story told of the Beis Yisrael of Ger who was at a *simchah* and happened to notice a little boy who was making a *brachah* before every bite of food. The boy's father kept trying to get him to stop, concerned at all the unnecessary *brachos*, but the Gerrer Rebbe stopped him and told him that it was far better for the boy to become accustomed to making *brachos*, even if they were unnecessary, than it was to become accustomed to eating without a *brachah*.



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Having a wife who enjoys connecting to Hashem with *tefillah* of any kind is a *brachah* that you should appreciate. You don't mention any other areas in which you find her behavior problematic in *halachic* terms, so I'm assuming that the way in which she chooses to *daven* is what bothers you most. Having a wife who is genuinely lax in all her *halachic* observance is a far greater challenge that you should be grateful you don't have to address. Thank Hashem that she loves to talk to Him and allow yourself to be inspired by her enthusiasm. It's wonderful to enjoy reciting Hallel, to want to praise Hashem and see His blessings. When you let your wife know that you see *her* as one of your blessings, you may find that your life lightens up until you want to sing His praises, too.

A wife should in general look to her husband for guidance not only in *ruchniyus* matters but also in *gashmiyus*. However, if his way of guiding her ends up crushing her, nothing has been achieved. It is for her to look to him for guidance and not for him to enforce it. In fact, it is precisely this concept of her subservience to him that makes her *patur* from so many *mitzvos*, formal *tefillah* included (according to many authorities).

Hashem should help us find the ways to inspire each other to shine, and to bring out the best in one another, in every area of our lives, especially in our service to Him!

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: TETZAVEH 5786

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