RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Acharei-Kedoshim

Warmth and Feeling

Our parsha begins with instructions given to Aharon hakohen after the passing of his sons who died "...*when they came near before Hashem...*". The Divrei Yisroel explains these instructions as a missive to Aharon to serve Hashem with the Ahavas Yisroel he was famous for. He says that some people come before Hashem in prayer with the loftiest *kavanos* and purest intentions. While that is indeed admirable, when someone stands in supplication before Hashem simply because he feels the pain of another Yid and wants to pray for him it's even more impressive.

This reminds me of a childrens' book I once read: It tells the story of a king who fell to the ground during a parade. Instantly, his baker rushed over with the tray of freshly baked bread and his tailor came running with the beautiful garments that he sewed, all while the king remained lying helplessly on the ground. Finally, a little boy from the audience made his way over to the king and offered him a hand to help him up. The king was quite pleased that someone was able to determine what it was that he actually needed.

We sometimes hear individuals complaining that even though they do so much for their families, their efforts are still not recognized. What they might not understand is that the biggest "*kavanos*" and "*madreigos*" don't hold a candle to a little bit of heart and feeling. A little patience, a kind word, or even just your time might be worth much more to your family than a sparkling house, a fancy meal, or matching outfits.

So many parents go out of their way for their children, but fail to realize what their child really needs at that moment. It might not be something major; it might just be a little bit of your time or attention. When we infuse our actions with the right intentions, and try to be in tune with what our family's needs are, they will be so much more appreciative.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen, please address this question in an upcoming shiur:

There are certain things about my wife's *tznius* that bother me. At this point, I feel like it's having an effect on my daughter as well. She is twelve years old, and while she was very stringent about her *tznius* before she was *bas mitzvah*, I see that she is starting to become lax about it. Being that my daughter is on the heavier side, my wife buys her clothes that she feels will be more flattering for her figure, but it compromises my daughter's ability to cover her knees when she sits down. My question is: do I need to constantly tell my daughter to cover her knees? And about my wife: is it my responsibility to make her aware of the things she does wrong, and to what extent?

Thank you for taking questions and for reading this email.

Answer:

Before I address the question, I want to mention that while this particular questioner has an issue with his wife, it is just as common for wives to have similar issues with their husband's *davening* with *minyan,* or *limud haTorah*, etc.

Whatever the case, it can be a very hot button, sensitive topic and each situation needs to be carefully considered before taking action. My response will therefore address the question in a broad sense. How do we approach someone else's spiritual obligations or perceived lack of commitment to our Torah ideals.

One more introduction, is that there's a difference between your issue with your wife and your daughter. While with a wife, it's more about your responsibilities and obligations, and less about telling her what to do, or making her decisions, when it comes to your children, however, aside from any Torah obligation, there's another whole subject of who has a say over how children are taught to do. They are definitely as much yours as they are your wife's, and both parents need to feel comfortable to have a say as to how they would like to raise their children. If a parent feels too intimidated to voice their opinion because they're afraid of their spouse

or child, that's a problem. There's more to say on this topic, but for now I'll continue on with the question you asked.

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Essentially, everything that happens inside a home – especially *ruchniyus* matters – is the husband's responsibility (Shabbos 54b). However, he is only obligated to say anything if he feels that his words will be accepted and heard (Shabbos 34a). If saying something will only make things worse, it might be advisable for him to refrain from mentioning it. Not because it isn't his responsibility, simply because it might end up doing more harm than good.

While it is important for men to be mindful that they cannot ever grasp a woman's difficulty with adhering to *tznius*, it is still not an excuse for a woman to not heed her husband's requests or to ignore his recriminations. We have a Torah and a Shulchan Aruch that we are all obligated to follow.

With that in mind, if you can find a way to say something to your wife without hurting her feelings, then you most certainly should. Perhaps there is a way for you to demonstrate your discomfort and disapproval without actually confronting her about it. The most important thing is to operate with chochma. A good word and a compliment go a long way.

With your daughter too, you definitely should say what needs to be said about her *tznius*, but keep it sensitive and kind. Tell her you have a *mitzvah* for her, and gently remind her to cover her knees. And don't forget to compliment her when you notice her sitting modestly, even if she should be doing it anyway. Make her feel good for doing the right thing.

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Of course, there's a point where you can't tell your child anything anymore, either because they're already married or because they're too old to listen to you. As Rashi says in Maseches Kiddushin, "*As long as your child is young enough to listen to you, that is when you should marry him off*". Chazal understood that there's a time when our words do not have as much effect on our children as we would have liked. That does not mean that a child is absolved from listening to his father. Not at all! But it does mean that a father needs to be aware of where he's at (see also Moed Katan 17a) and he should make sure to utilize whatever time he has to make an impression on his children and be them *mechanech* in the right way. Teach your child while he's still young. Don't wait for issues to straighten themselves out.

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When you discuss this issue with your wife, try to minimize your disagreement with her. Don't tell her that your daughter will look fine with bigger clothes, or that looking good isn't all that important, or anything that undermines her reasoning. Instead, admit that she does have a point, and [notice how I avoid the word "but"!] while you appreciate her concern for your daughter and her impeccable taste, you still feel that *tznius* should not be compromised.

Keep your ego out of the picture, and don't tell her anything about how this affects your image, indeed it's something to consider - is this all *l'shem shomayim*, or is your ego at play here? Also refrain from coming across as judgmental or holier-than-thou. Just express your concern about the *halachic* infractions, without dragging other details into the conversation, such as the style or color or price.

Make sure to also refrain from mentioning your disapproval of your wife's way of dress while discussing your daughter. Be careful not to mix topics and imply that which is really on

your mind. By bringing up how much it bothers you that your daughter's *tznius* is compromised, your wife might get the message that her own lack of *tznius* bothers you as well. There's a saying in Yiddish: "M'zugt far'n tuchter uber m'meint der shnier - You say it to the daughter while your target is the daughter-in-law".

So much depends on timing and tone, both when you speak to your wife and also when you address your daughter directly.

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Keep in mind that there will be times when even if you do everything right, you will still not be successful in making a change in someone else. There's only so much you can control in terms of someone else's decision. However, when addressed softly, sensitively, yet firmly, even when not as successful as you would like to be, you might still manage to prevent it from getting any worse.

There's a story about the Trisker Maggid that illustrates this point. Someone once came to him to ask for a blessing, because he wanted to travel to America. The Maggid tried to dissuade him with this story: There was a Yid, a *talmid chacham*, who could only afford a very thin siddur with only the basic *tefillos*. While *davening*, he noticed the *am ha'aretz* in town davening from a really big, impressive *siddur*. He went over to him after *davening* and asked him if he would like to switch. The *am ha'aretz* turned down the offer and said, "If I lose a couple of pages from my *siddur*, I can be sure that I'll still have plenty left over. But if any pages fall out of your *siddur*, I will be missing entire parts of davening." The *maggid* pointed out to his *chassid* that when he will go to America, if certain things fall away, he won't have the spiritual support system in place to carry him through difficult times. If he stays in Europe, among pious Jews, then even if something falls away, there will still be plenty for him to hold on to.

When it comes to *chinuch*, you might be tempted to let things slide. First it's the style, then the color, then the width and the length, and it might just keep going downward from there. But if you mention your displeasure once or twice, while it might not change what has already happened, it might prevent further decline. Just make sure to do it in the right way, as outlined above.

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It's always important to have a *rav* with whom you can discuss these types of issues. When you bring it up with your wife, instead of proving or assuring her that you are right, tell her that it feels off to you and you would like to gain some clarity by asking your *rav*. When you discuss it with someone you both respect, you might be able to reach an amicable agreement without getting into a fight.

May Hashem help that your intentions bear fruit and you should be able to raise your family *al taharos hakodesh*,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM 5781

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