RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS VAYAKHEL

ACCOUNTING FOR A SPOUSE

Parshas Vayakhel continues to describe the *Binyan Hamishkan*. Each step of the way can teach us something about how we can build our *mikdash me'at*, our own homes.

Harav Chaim Rappaport explains in *Shu"t Mayim Chaim*, that everything was counted and accounted for when building the Mishkan. Yet, Chazal teach us that *berachah* gets lost when something is obviously visible or when it's counted. Why? Because as soon as something is counted, its finite end is evident. *Berachah* can apply only up until that point. But by the Mishkan, even though everything was carefully counted, Hashem made a miracle that the *siman berachah* was still manifested.

We see this from the words of the *passuk*, *"Vehamelachah haysah dayam ... vehoser* – there was enough [material] for the building ... and more." The words "enough" and "more" are a contradiction. But we learn that there was enough according to the calculations, yet there was a *siman berachah* and there was more than enough – which was an incredible miracle.

This is such an important lesson to remember when building a home. We can't rely on a miracle that accounting won't take away from the Berachah. People often fall into the trap of accounting at home. A favor for a favor. "I did this so you do that." Or, "I gave in three times and you didn't give in at all." But keeping score of anything is a pitfall for *shalom bayis*.

If we want *berachah* in our homes, we have to give up on the accounting. Be giving and forgiving without tallying turns. Ask for what you need without explaining why you have a right to ask or why someone is obligated to comply. Your giving should be complete without any demands, this causes Berachah *b'ezras Hashem*.

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Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I would like to ask for your advice about the following:

My wife created an Instagram account and uses it on a daily basis for searching as well as following various people. Additionally, she uses some of her spare time to surf YouTube and watch a TV cooking show. This has also turned into watching inappropriate videos, etc.

She once opened up to me and told me that she was challenged by these things and when she has an urge to view inappropriate material, she tries to "let it out only on the cooking shows".

What can I do to help her with this? She comes from a family that has a lower standard in this area, and Instagram has become relatively common among certain groups in our circles. This makes it challenging to point out what's wrong with it, if I can make her realize it at all.

When it comes to relationships, is this something that's "hers, mine or ours"? *[Ed. Note: Rabbi Gruen has spoken and written extensively about the "Mine, Yours, Ours Boundaries" in marriage and relationships. When two people are in a relationship, although they mesh in certain aspects (Ours) which need to be dealt with mutually, they still retain certain independent facets which are "Mine" or "Yours", in which each person should be able to decide for themselves in matters relevant mainly to them. The other partner should be mindful of this and respect the others' rights (See Rabbi Shimon Gruen, The Basics of Shalom Bayis, chap. 6).]*

Thank you.

Answer:

Unfortunately this has definitely become a widespread issue which needs to be addressed. The first thing that's important, as you point out, is knowing who you're talking to. You mention that your wife comes from a background with a lower standard in this regard. Before discussing right or wrong – in any issue – it's important to know that different people have different perspectives, and while some can be outright wrong, it's still important to know who you're talking to before trying to clarify anything at all. What's acceptable to one person is questionable to another and off the charts for a third. I've seen many people dealing with these issues, but it's often coming from different points on the spectrum.

There's no simple answer to such a question and it's an unfortunate situation. Anyone who is objective will acknowledge that technology obsessions in general, and inappropriate usage in particular, cause great challenges when it comes to building a marriage and a home. Those who are sucked into it may not want to hear it and can become passionate about it and even see the benefits of it, but that doesn't make it any less problematic.

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Before addressing whether this issue belongs to you or her, you can certainly begin by trying to discuss this with your wife. Perhaps it will be taken well and solve a large part of the problem. There's nothing wrong with testing the waters first. It would be a shame to not even try having a nice talk about your feelings on the

subject if it can be taken well. I like to remind people of this, because I've seen situations where people were afraid to bring something up when there wasn't anything to be afraid of at all, and it resolved itself pretty quickly with some open talk.

I do know however that in many cases it will be taken wrong and cause her to become defensive. As a matter of fact, usually, by the time someone asks such a question, they probably have tried to say something and realized that it didn't work. If that's the case, I think it's obvious that you don't just keep trying to push something that's not working. Instead, it's important to focus on why it's not working. The Instagram account may be a cover for more fundamental issues, something personal, a deep sensitivity, or not being able to handle being told what to do, etc.

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According to the Torah, it is a husband's responsibility to set the standard of the home and to make sure his wife and children do the right thing. In today's liberal world people don't like to hear that, but it's true. Remember, though, that just like it's a mitzvah to give *mussar* that will be accepted, it's a mitzvah to refrain from giving *mussar* that won't be taken well – not because it's not your responsibility but because it won't work. Not saying something doesn't mean you tolerate or accept it. Whatever you plan to say, make sure it will work and won't aggravate the situation or damage the relationship.

Also according to the Torah, a woman is required to submit to her husband and act according to his guidelines. That's the ideal. However, when it comes to relationships, you may want to consider the practical boundary guidelines of "mine, yours, ours." (The same holds true for children. You may be *allowed* to control your child and yet decide not to control him in order to get better and longer lasting results.)

As much as we'd like our spouse to follow our beliefs, when a certain action pertains only to them, it often goes into the category of "hers" and is not for you to *control*. Just like a man gets to decide when, where, how (and cha"v *if*) he davens, a woman essentially gets to do the same. Again, this is not a "right", it's simply a practical approach to dealing with others, especially in challenging situations. It's simply not productive to try to dictate what someone else does. Especially when it doesn't affect you directly. It's easy to say that *your* spouse and *your* home affect you. But as long as it doesn't affect you on a practical level, it's her thing. For the most part, if your spouse is involved in something you don't like, it will fall into "her" boundary. That's why telling her what to do about it, in most cases, doesn't work.

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Still, this could have more practical and direct effects on you and that's where it's best to focus. Keeping up to date with her Instagram account or surfing YouTube extensively may cause her not to be present, to neglect you and the children, and to be negligent with housework. You can definitely talk about it. Communicate *your* needs. *Your* difficulties. "It's hard for me when supper isn't ready on time. I'd appreciate it if you can be more present when you're with the family." And if it's the children who are affected – or they're the ones involved with technology – it's definitely in the "our" boundary where the decision belongs to both of you.

Be careful, though, that when you bring up the practical effects, you don't mention those parts that *don't* affect you. Focusing on the phone or the standards will probably only cause her to get defensive. It's not the *phone* that's the problem, it's the *neglect* that's the problem. There are many other ways to be negligent without being interested in cooking shows. The more you stick to the relevant points of the problem, the part you have a right to talk about without getting judgmental, the greater your chances of success.

With all that, there is nothing wrong with expressing your opinion in conversation or when it's asked for. Be careful that it doesn't become a personal attack and don't turn it into a debate. Moreover, don't discuss it while it's happening. Keep it theoretical. Still, don't pretend you're okay with it. Although most women know good and well what their husbands thinks, when a husband is afraid to make his opinion known, the woman may misinterpret that as him not caring about it.

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If you're reading this and you're the wife, the lesson for you isn't that your husband shouldn't control you. You should know that you're making a big mistake both by not living up to your husband's standards and because it is extremely disturbing to your husband. This could damage the fiber of your relationship and your home. By the time you want to reverse course, the damage may be irreversible. Don't take the advice to your husband as permission to continue doing what you're doing.

And of course, the same is true if the situation is reversed and the husband is the one doing these things.

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There's another element that's important to mention in such situations. Sometimes people get stuck and paint every aspect of their spouse through this lens. "If she's on Instagram, then she's not so *ehrlich*." Do the opposite. Whenever you see your wife *davening*, involved in *chessed* or doing the right thing, point it out. Make her feel - that you see her as being - *ehrlich.* Make her feel that you approve of her. Giving her the message that you disapprove of her rather than that you disapprove of this specific thing she's doing will hurt her personally and make it harder for her to do what's right. Making her feel good will make it easier for her to please you.

Besides for not letting it affect the rest of your relationship, you should probably work on strengthening your core connection. Learn how to get closer to each other. Learn how to build that bond so that your wife will *want* to do what you ask for. Again, it's probably not the *phone* that's the issue; it's the *connection*.

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I want to mention one more point. I often get this question from the opposite perspective, where the husband is the one going too far with technology and the wife wants to know what to do. Many points we mentioned above apply here too: don't fight him, try to say something nicely, discuss only those parts that affect you personally and don't make the entire relationship about this. But because women are taught to go by their husband's standards, they often make peace with the situation much faster than men do. From there, it's a short path to supporting what he's doing and making things worse. The trick is to not support him *and* not fight him, rather to be clear and caring and loving and connecting while not being tolerant. Most likely, a woman will need guidance to do this.

The Gemara brings a story about a woman who was married to a *talmid chacham* and helped him with his *mitzvos*. Later she married an *am ha'aretz* and helped him to do *aveiros*. Of course it's good and proper for a husband to lead the way and for a woman to follow, but you have to be careful not to get swept away. As a woman, you have to be able to resist respectfully and remain in a stable, confident place. From there, you'll hopefully be able to connect to him and be a positive influence when he's ready.

You should be blessed with *Siyatta Dishmaya* in this and all situations.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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