RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

PESACH

DIFFERENT, NOT DIVIDED

The *minhag* is that before *bedikas chametz*, we hide ten little pieces of bread. The Kozhnitzer Maggid explains that this is because *biur chametz* symbolizes getting rid of the *yetzer hora*. Putting out the pieces of bread symbolizes our recognition that we still have a *yetzer hora* and that there's still plenty of work to do to eradicate it. Anyone who feels he's perfect and has already gotten rid of the last traces of bad hasn't even begun to serve Hashem and has the most to fix. On the night before Pesach, our homes are probably the cleanest they are all year, and we may feel that we've done everything there is to do. It's precisely then that we put out pieces of bread — because there is always more to work on.

This is one of the lessons of Pesach — to focus on what still needs to be done, not what was already completed. When we hear someone trying to raise awareness of a certain topic where most people need improvement but we personally don't, the instinctive reaction is to feel quite self-satisfied. While there's nothing wrong with getting some *chizuk* and being aware of one's strong points, the next step should be to see what *does* still need to be fixed.

This is true both in *bein adam laMakom* and *bein adam lechaveiro*, but in relationships, the challenge is sometimes even greater, because while we're never entirely perfect, neither is the other person, and it's all too easy to use the other person's imperfections as an excuse to avoid working on our own. But that's what looking for *chametz* teaches us. Yes, you did a lot of cleaning already, but there's always something more for you to do, more progress to make, regardless of whether the other person is cleaning as well. Search for the untouched *chametz*. It's there, and you'll find it if you're really looking.

When we sit down with our families on Pesach, it's not only between us and Hashem. It's everyone, all of us together, each one acknowledging that he has faults and areas to work on. Recognizing this can help us become more tolerant of our loved ones' shortcomings.

WISHING ALL OUR READERS AND FRIENDS
A KOSHEREN FREILICHEN PESACH!

QUESTION

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

Thank you for your weekly *shiurim*. I listen to them on TorahAnytime and I find that your answers are insightful and eye-opening.

I have been married for seven years and I am very happy with everything, except that I feel my husband is light years ahead of me spiritually. Both of our families are pretty much the same: open-minded but still sticking to healthy boundaries. My husband is very different from them, learning full-time and generally a lot more restrictive.

As a principle, there are places my husband would never go with me, even if no one would know about it. He is strongly against technology, even though everyone around us is flaunting all the newfangled gadgets. His family thinks he is the nebby yeshivah guy who doesn't know how to have fun. He doesn't participate in certain family events, on principle, and they resent him for it, although I think that privately they respect him.

Oftentimes, I appreciate this side of him because I know I can trust him with my eyes closed with anything related to Yiddishkeit. But other times, it can bother me. Still, I always try to support him.

However, I am afraid of what may happen when my kids grow older. He may feel that some things that they do or wear are not appropriate, and since I am not on that level and am not even interested in getting there, I'd be openly opposing his view. How will we be able to stand as one unit in front of the children?

I want to know what kind of work I could be doing in order to fix this part of my marriage.

Thank you.

ANSWER

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

Before addressing the parts of this question that are more practical and personal, I would like to pick up on one point you mentioned about your extended family. You write that you suspect that your husband's family respects him in private, although they don't necessarily show it. I believe you're right, as there is a great deal to respect in a person who tries to do the right thing. In fact, although you didn't state it explicitly, I suspect that *you also* respect your husband, and for good reason. You *should* respect a husband who is *ehrlich* and sticks to his principles. If you can assume that your extended family respects him, then I can assume that you do too.

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In general, finding a balance is something many people struggle with. I'm not an advocate of extremes, and when behaviors or opinions go too far they can be a challenge, but I would just note that people tend to gradually go one way or the other, and that we're usually better off erring on the side of caution. If a person isn't sure what the correct balance is, it's generally best to be cautious, and certainly with the examples you mentioned.

I frequently talk to parents of children who are struggling, but every so often a parent will complain to me that their child is "too frum." When you're dealing with something uncomfortable, it can be hard to see the blessing in it. We all like to think that we're striving for the perfect balance, but we also need to remember that it's harder to deal with someone who isn't frum enough than it is to deal with someone who is too *ehrlich*. I believe this is something to appreciate in your husband.

This reminds me of the story about a woman who went to see the Ahavas Yisroel of Vizhnitz, complaining that her son had become a *chassid*. "Rebbe, he gets up early, goes to the freezing *mikvah* every day, would walk to the other end of town rather than miss a *minyan*, and spends most of the day learning and davening… " The Rebbe answered calmly: "It's okay, I do all that too," but the woman wasn't appeased. "Rebbe, you're doing it for *parnassah*," she retorted. "My son really means it!"

There are people who are *ehrlich* and restrictive because they really mean it. Regardless of what anyone else thinks, your husband is coming from a pure perspective. And that's a good thing and something not only to respect but to be happy about.

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Another thing that I'm sure you're aware of but is still good to stress is that being "happily married for seven years and appreciating everything about him, except this one thing" is also something to be very grateful for.

Often, in times of crisis, we realize that a great many things that bothered us really aren't all that important. In the days leading up to Pesach, we're all intent on crossing off items on long lists and we get very nervous if anything's missing. But if we think back to Pesach during the Covid lockdowns, many of us couldn't get all the things on our lists — but uppermost in our minds was that we were grateful just to be alive. It put all those little things into perspective. Similarly, having an *ehrliche* husband and being happily married for seven years are not things to sneeze at. A husband who's too *ehrlich* can be a good kind of problem.

Rabbi Dr. Twerski would often relate how, after he got married, his grandfather gave him and his *kallah* a *brachah*, "You should have a lot of problems." Seeing their bewilderment at this "*brachah*", he explained that when a person has a major problem *chas veshalom*, he doesn't pay attention to small nuisances. If someone has "a lot of problems," it means that they're all small ones with nothing larger to overshadow them. This doesn't mean that you have to resign yourself to small problems, and certainly a person is entitled to pursue happiness in every area, but it's important to have the right perspective.

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In every Yiddishe home, there should be one person who is "responsible and reliable" for the spiritual wellbeing of the entire family, and ideally this is the husband, though many couples struggle with this issue. I think you can appreciate that in your home, your husband is happy to fill this role and you can rely on him in this area. Even if you don't always see eye-to-eye with your husband one hundred percent, if you're looking ahead at raising growing children, you can be grateful that he's concerning himself with their spiritual welfare.

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My impression from your description of the situation also suggests that you could be underestimating your own spiritual level. You write that your husband is "light years ahead" but it doesn't sound like your aspirations are the equivalent of going to the theater while his are the equivalent of joining *kollel chatzos*. My intuition tells me that in theory, you agree with many of his principles, even though they might be hard for you in practice. Your biggest difference of opinion might be on what qualifies as an excuse to bend standards, and I'm not sure that you are right in calling this a difference measured in "light years." Recognizing this could make it easier for you to deal with the situation, and could even give you a new perspective from which you can visualize yourself

gradually moving toward your husband's way of seeing things, once you realize it's not actually so far from your own.

Although I wouldn't say it's a rule, often if something is hard for you to do, but it's right in theory and better for your husband and children, you may be best off going along with it. This is especially true regarding the *chinuch* of one's own children. I once heard that a certain man was advised to do something for the sake of his children's *chinuch*. His friend wanted to know if he was really on that level. The man replied, "I'm not, but I can't deal with my children's *yetzer hora* from *my* level."

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You ask about you and your husband "standing as one unit" before your children, and this is certainly a worthy goal. As much as I encourage communication and a unified approach to every area in life, it's always good to remember that according to the Torah, your husband is the king of the house. Aside from extreme situations, the right thing for you to do is to resolve to back your husband and go along with what he wants. Even if your children are still young and it's not so relevant yet, you can make that decision in advance, and it could be easier that way.

As always, it's important that you and your husband come to an agreement regarding a Rav or Daas Torah who can guide you both. You can then tell your husband that you respect him and his opinions, but since you sometimes have a different opinion, it's important that you sometimes get guidance from your Rav. This is a healthy way of doing things for all couples. When you do consult Daas Torah, you might both be surprised by what you hear. You may be surprised to hear that some of your husband's "restrictions" are really nothing beyond what the *halachah* demands. And your husband may be surprised to hear that some things that are important to you are perfectly okay or even the right thing to do. Having a Rav can be the best way to ensure that both of you remain balanced.

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I do want to point out that there *are* situations in which a person may abuse their spouse in the name of the Torah. There are people who go to extremes that contradict what the Torah wants, and such situations need to be dealt with responsibly. If that is the case, although it didn't seem so from your letter, you should reach out to someone who can help you and guide you.

In general, when couples understand one another and acknowledge that they always have something to fix and are trying to do what's right, they can find a way to present a united and healthy front to their children and build a happy and healthy home.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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Thank You & Tizku Lmitzvos!