RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Beha'aloscha

Near but Far

In this week's Parsha, we learn about Pesach Sheini and how we always have the chance to make up for a missed opportunity. The Ruzhiner in his *sefer Irin Kadishin* relates a story that some of his *chassidim* once asked him to be *mispallel* that it should always be easy for them to travel to see the Rebbe. The Ruzhiner responded with the Gemara on this week's Parsha. The *passuk* says that when a person finds himself far from the Bais Hamikdash on Pesach, he can make up for it and bring his *korban* on Pesach Sheini.

The *passuk* uses the word "far", but Chazal teach that he can actually be pretty close, just outside the Azara and still be considered far. And especially if a person was not able to bring his *korban* due to being impure, as close as he would be, it wouldn't help him, as he still he wouldn't be allowed to enter the Bais Hamikdash. It seems that the *passuk* doesn't mean far in the literal sense. The "distance" from the Bais Hamikdash was not something that was measured physically, rather spiritually. The Ruzhiner explained to his chassidim that they can be close even though they're physically distant.

In marriage, the relationship of a couple does not necessarily demonstrate how "close" in proximity they actually are. Sometimes couples can spend a whole lot of time together, yet be miles away from each other in spirit. Then there are people who don't spend that many hours a day together, and yet they have a wonderful and really "close" relationship. This is because the connection between a couple does not depend on the amount of time spent in each other's presence, as much as to how they relate to each other.

It's normal to want to be in each other's company. Some people like it when their spouse is near them because it gives them comfort and security. But holding their spouse "hostage", so to speak, will not be effective in fostering closeness between them. Give some breathing space and instead invest more in *how* you connect; in the emotional connection.

However, if you notice that your spouse is seeking your company often, realize that it might be a sign that there is a distance between the two of you that he or she would like to close. If you can show more care and concern for them, even if you don't actually spend more time near them, they might not need you to be around them so much. See the request for more time together as a sign that something is lacking, and instead of resentfully giving more time, and accomplishing less, give more feeling, care and heart, and you'll accomplish more with both of you being happier about it.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for your Shiurim on TorahAnytime, both Yiddish and English. They are always full of insight and helpful information.

I have a question that has been bothering me for a while.

We are BH married for over six years and have a few children. My husband is BH busy with a full-time job and often comes home late at night. I feel like our marriage has lost the excitement it used to have.

I want to know how we can become closer. I think it's necessary for us to go out on a "date night" every week, but my husband does not seem to think so. I've expressed to him many times that I would appreciate something like this.

He is a good person, but I think that he never saw this type of closeness between his own parents, which might be why this idea doesn't resonate with him.

Thank you in advance for your advice.

Answer:

The first thing I would like to say is that I admire the fact that you don't see your husband's lack of cooperation as a major problem or wrongdoing on his part, and you're able to simply move along and look for a solution. It is so common for people to take one problem and generalize it. "We have no connection." "He doesn't care for me." "It's up to him to make things change, I'm done with offering solutions". It's important not to take one detail that we don't like and turn it into a general problem.

While I certainly don't intend to make light of your problem, it's important to keep in mind that the problem is not huge or terrifying. You've been married for a couple of years, you got busy, and you feel like your marriage can use a boost. That's definitely not an uncommon issue, and certainly not something unresolvable, so let's give it a try.

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I gave a shiur once at a Keiravtuni weekend called "The 10 Mistakes in Marriage" (it was later printed up, and can be obtained by email request). One of the first

mistakes people make is that they think that a marriage which isn't all that fun, pleasurable, and exciting is a failure. If they don't enjoy every minute of their relationship, they think that they're in a failed marriage. On the other hand, an opposite mistake people make is when they view marriage as something they're *supposed to* and *expected* to do. These people don't expect anything out of their marriage other than a list of responsibilities and a cadre of little children.

Both of these approaches are wrong. If your goal is fun, you're mistaken, because real life is real. Real life is serious, and full of responsibilities that are often not all that enjoyable, and at times downright stressful. While there are many opportunities to have a good time, we are not in this world just to live the good life. Marriage and family building comes with realities and responsibilities that cannot and should not be taken lightly.

On the other hand, if you look at marriage as ONLY a chore and an obligation, that is also a mistake. We're told right away in Bereishis that "it's not good to be alone", so we understand that the institution of marriage was created by Hashem as a means of providing us with "good". Shlomo Hamelech tells us "*Matza isha, matza tov* - when one marries, he has found goodness". It's important to find some enjoyment in it all, in order to enhance your relationship and to give you the fortitude to be able to shoulder the responsibilities you now have.

And you don't have to look too far, as a healthy marriage can, in and of itself, be a source of tremendous satisfaction and enjoyment. The best is when you can take pleasure simply in being in each other's company and in the joy and security of your relationship.

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But not always is that so easy, and especially as life moves on, I see people neglecting an important part of their relationship, something every healthy marital relationship has; an ongoing and balanced give and take.

Sometimes, couples live together as roommates. One is in charge of taking out the trash, one is in charge of turning off the lights, but they don't share or connect with each other on anything substantial. This can turn a relationship stale very fast. They're not fighting or disagreeing, but they're missing an essential part of what would make it a healthy, satisfying marriage. Often, when this aspect is addressed, the entire marriage is transformed.

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"Give and take" is not about scorekeeping or waiting for the other to get his turn to give. You can start out by being the giver. Find opportunities to give to your spouse: a compliment, a favor, a smile.

Don't do it only as a way to see if they will reciprocate. Remember what we are taught that "honor pursues those who run away from it"; only if they don't stop to look over their shoulders to check if it's already in pursuit. So too with good feeling and respect, if you get too stuck on what was given and what you'll get, you may become burnt out too soon and not get anything.

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But it's not all about "giving". "Taking" is also something that many need to work on. Very many of us are wired to be self-sufficient and independent and don't feel comfortable being vulnerable and accepting help or kindness from others. Others might rebuff offers of assistance, thinking that they are sparing the giver his effort, but they are in fact pushing away someone who is trying to establish a relationship with them.

You need to learn what to take and how. Sometimes, you need to ask for that something so that you can then receive it graciously. It's not about demanding your rights or putting in an order; it's more about spelling out what you would like to receive in order for both of you to benefit. Even if you don't get it after asking once, don't be afraid to ask for it again! This is how you build a connection with each other! Of course, remember

to show appreciation when you do receive what you asked for.

Sometimes focusing more on what you give, and then on what you take, can enhance a relationship gone stale. It often happens that after several years, a couple falls into a sort of comfortable routine. She cleans up; he pays the bills. She does homework with the girls; he learns with the boys. The relationship becomes technical and dry. Sometimes all it takes is the renewal of a healthy give and take to bring the excitement back.

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Now to your idea. You believe that a weekly date night is what will renew your marriage. While it's a very good idea, bear in mind that it might not be wise to be too specific with exactly how you want things to change. If you insist on what it is you want, or even more, on it happening on precisely the day and time and in precisely the venue you envision, it might be difficult for your husband to acquiesce. The less specific you are, the higher the chances of it actually taking place.

You might also want to consider if there is any other way that you can accomplish what you wish to accomplish through date night. It's the goal and the result that's important, not the means or method. Be flexible on that and you can get to your goal quicker. Maybe your husband isn't comfortable with exactly your idea, but perhaps there are other ways for the two of you to reconnect that won't make either of you uncomfortable.

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Another idea worth considering is your husband's resistance to something that seems so simple. Anytime you find that your spouse doesn't take you seriously or doesn't give you something that he or she knows you really want, it's a good idea to think about why that is. Maybe you didn't state your needs clearly? Maybe you only hinted about it in a general way? Maybe you only asked for it once or twice and he forgot about it?

Maybe you asked with short notice, not giving him time to prepare or process the idea in advance? Maybe he thought you meant more than or less than you intended? Maybe he is against going out on principle? Maybe he is so busy that it isn't realistic to expect him to give you so much of his time on a weekly basis? Perhaps he feels he can't afford so much babysitting? Find the reasoning behind his resistance. While it's possible that in your case it is simply because he never saw this by his parents, as you assume, maybe there is something else as well.

By figuring out what is really bothering him, and adjusting your expectations and requests accordingly, you might be able to find the clarity you are looking for. Perhaps you need to find a different plan, or ask for it a different way.

The main thing is to remember the lesson of our parsha, that closeness and connection doesn't depend solely on proximity; it is much more about an understanding and respect between you that comes from trying to do what is best for each other as often as possible. And that sometimes you give before you get, or you allow yourself to get in ways that aren't really what you wanted, and slowly build from there something very meaningful, substantial, and sustainable.

Wishing you all the best,
Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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