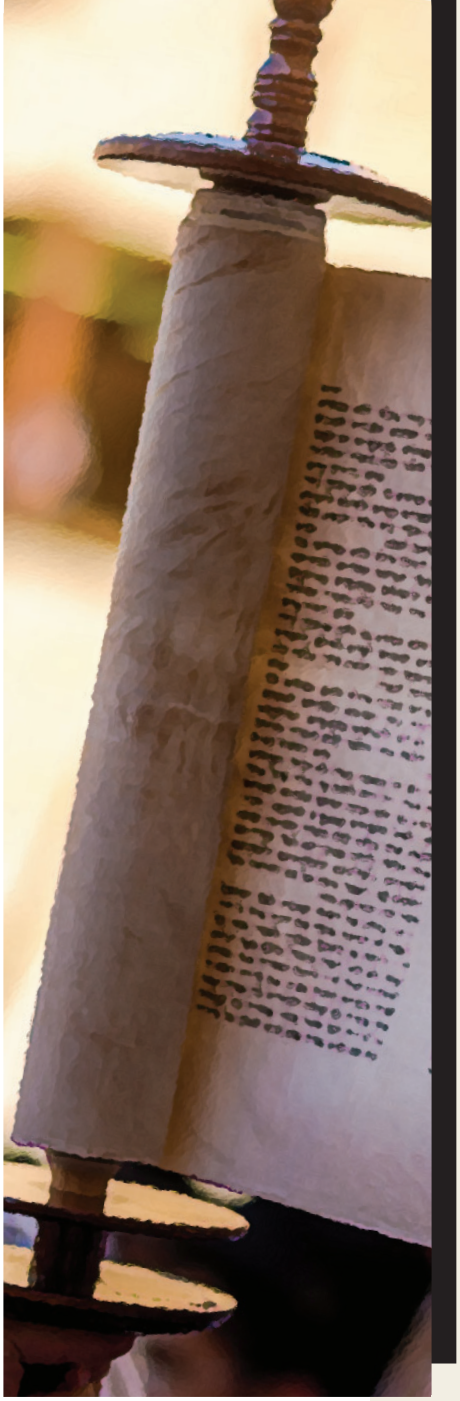


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

LESSONS FROM THE SUN AND THE MOON

According to the Medrash, after Korach challenged Moshe Rabbeinu for the leadership of Klal Yisrael with his argument that "everyone is holy," the sun and the moon both interceded before Hashem on behalf of Moshe, threatening that they would no longer illuminate the heavens if Hashem did not defend Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Maor v'Shemesh asks why it was *davka* the sun and the moon who intervened, and answers with another Medrash which recounts the events that occurred during Sheshes Yemei Bereishis, when the moon complained that "two kings cannot wear one crown." Hashem's response then was to accept the moon's argument and diminish its brightness. Now, both heavenly lights having learned the lesson, they appreciated the idea that "two leaders cannot wear one crown." There could be only one Moshe Rabbeinu, only one *gadol hador*, regardless of the fact that all Yidden are holy.

This is relevant in every Jewish home. The secular idea of total equality has no place in our homes, most fundamentally because it simply doesn't work. That doesn't mean to say that anyone is "less than," and indeed, Hashem gave stars to the moon as "compensation," but husband and wife (like sun and moon) cannot have equal and identical roles and positions. The husband is the *mashpia* while the wife is the *mekabel*; the husband is "king" and the wife is "queen." Each one is important and worthy of respect, and each one has their specific sphere of influence and particular role to play.

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Parshas **Korach**

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Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

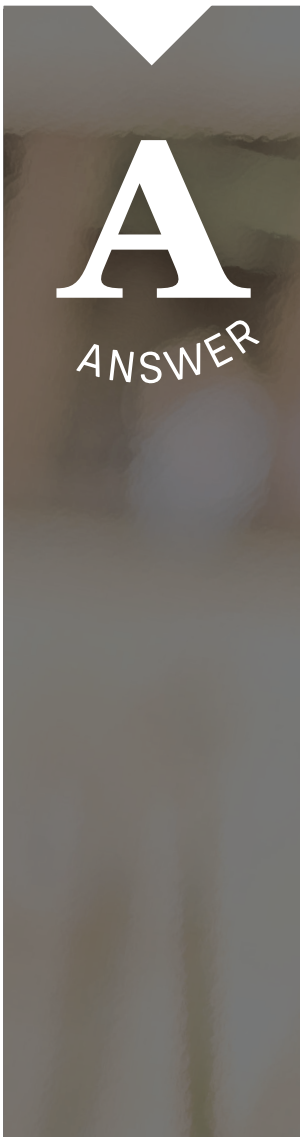
I'm a *kallah* soon to be married and have listened to lots of *shiurim* on *shalom bayis* and *chinuch*, because I'm a teacher and I want to help my students become the best people they can — and also because I want to be prepared for marriage.

I want so much to build a *bayis ne'eman be'Yisrael* with my husband, a home for the Shechinah. I've listened to so many *shiurim* in *hashkafah* and have learned a ton about marriage and everything, but people keep telling me that however much I think I'm prepared, I'm not really prepared at all as I can't imagine what it will be like once I'm married.

People also tell me that I shouldn't think that it will be all fun and enjoyable — that it's lots of hard work and not always easy at all. But I still think that because I'm such a giving person and also really easy-going, and determined to give everything for the sake of *shalom bayis*, surely all that makes a difference? I'm really ready to give EVERYTHING for my husband.

And even if all those people do have a point, I still think that preparing for marriage is important and I'd like to ask you what the most important messages are for *kallos* like me, to remember in the first months and years.

Thank you!



A ANSWER

It's a wonderful thing to listen to *shiurim* on *shalom bayis* and *chinuch,* and many people who listen to or read such material benefit and grow from what they learn. However, many *shiurim* are simply not appropriate for everyone. Children and young adults shouldn't listen to *shiurim* on *chinuch*, for example, and very often, *shiurim* for married couples are not suited to *chassanim* and *kallos* or anyone still single, (sometimes due to information that is inappropriate for them at this stage of life). Even a happily married couple may not benefit from hearing a *shiur* pertaining to those in problematic marriages or crisis situations.

This isn't because there are necessarily big secrets being divulged in any of these *shiurim*. It's simply that a *shiur* is always aimed at a certain segment of the population: those who need the information, and are in a position to relate to it and use it. People who aren't in the situation being discussed may think they understand the messages being given over, but they really can't, until they find themselves in that situation.

So, those people telling you that you can't understand till after you're married may actually be right, to an extent.

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You mention that you're easy-going and that this should make a difference to building a relationship after you're married. I wish you all the best and it certainly could be true that your personality type will make everything a breeze. Your confidence that you'll be able to build a strong relationship with your husband hasn't stopped you from learning as much as you can before your wedding, and I'd like to stress that it shouldn't deter you from continuing to learn after you are married, as well.

Everyone should prepare for marriage, and most people do. However, what a lot of people miss is that the preparation should be followed up by follow-up. This is most

easily achieved by maintaining contact with your *kallah* teacher, or by finding someone you connect with better, soon after getting married. In fact, I often say that the ratio between advice and guidance before and after should be something in the region of twenty-eighty.

That doesn't mean that right after *sheva brachos* you run off to the *kallah* teacher with a list of questions. However, as soon as you need help or guidance, ask for it. Don't wait for things to mount up until you feel like bursting; don't wait till you simply feel lost.

As much as you prepare, you can never be one-hundred-percent prepared. Knowing this helps newly-married couples not to be devastated when they run up against their first issue, and gives them the humility they need to ask for guidance so that they don't stumble through marriage making avoidable mistakes.

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This is why continuing to listen to *shiurim* after you're married is so important. Listening to one *shiur* a week, for instance, will keep your focus on *shalom bayis* issues and give you *chizuk* and advice along the way.

Once things are practical, you'll find that your way of listening changes. Unfortunately, there are people who listen to *shiurim* as an intellectual exercise or who read "therapy columns" such as those in frum magazines in order to find out about all the different problems that exist, and this only makes them anxious and depressed.

Listening in order to put ideas into practice, however, is something else entirely. Once you're married, you'll be able to appreciate much of the advice you heard as a *kallah* far more, including things that sounded illogical or strange before you were married.

You may also find that plenty of the advice and ideas you heard as a *kallah* will become irrelevant or unhelpful once you find out who your husband actually is. Sometimes, *kallos* are taught not to get upset when the husband throws his dirty laundry on the floor — and then, after they're married, it's the husband who complains that they're not a good-enough housekeeper. It's only after you're married that you will know which ideas you'll gain from and which aspects of your relationship can use fine-tuning.

Keeping in contact with your *kallah* teacher and continuing to listen to *shiurim* will give you the ongoing support and advice you need.

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I would also like to share with you a concept I often mention to *chassanim*, both in groups and one-on-one. Frequently, a *bachur* will tell me, "I'm a really easy-going type of person — I have lots of friends and get along with everyone. Why should I expect to have difficulties relating to my wife?"

The answer I usually give points out the differences between a class in *yeshivah* and a wife in a home. Let's say there are 30 *bachurim* in the *shiur*. Even an easy-going *bachur* who "gets along with everyone" will get along better with around 10 of those 30; he probably doesn't spend extended periods of time with the other 20. Then, out of those 10, there are probably two or three (possibly more), who count as close friends — he probably only discusses more personal issues with them. And even with those two or three, there are times when he gets frustrated with them, or wants to be left alone...

With a wife, however, there's just one. You have to be committed to her, always — including when you're having a bad day, when you would prefer to "just be alone," as well as when *she's* the one having the bad day. It's not always easy even if you're an exceptionally easy-going, outgoing, friendly, flexible person.

But all of this is hard to understand and absorb when it's still theoretical.

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None of this means that you should approach marriage with a highly pessimistic outlook that it will be one long and miserable challenge — *chas ve'shalom*! Marriage should and hopefully will be enjoyable, fun at times, and satisfying for both husband and wife. It's something you should look forward to. It generally isn't *only* fun and enjoyable, and realizing this in advance is important. But expecting to be bombarded with constant challenges is just as unhealthy.

In the early days of marriage, by and large, things *are* more light-hearted and enjoyable, before the couple have huge responsibilities. Instead of just coasting along during this period, use the opportunity this time presents to set the tone for the years ahead. This means, for example, coming up with ideas to help you connect with each other, as well as routines for spending time together regardless of what may be going on inside and outside the home, and so forth.

Establishing firm foundations during the first months will make it easier for you to get through the busier and perhaps tougher times ahead. Couples with no set routine for doing things often find everything thrown into turmoil the minute something from the outside upsets the calm. It's a shame to allow this to happen.

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You write that you're "ready to give everything" for your husband, and you certainly mean only the very best in this, but a marriage in which one spouse only gives and the other only takes is a very unhealthy set-up, even if both spouses truly believe they're doing so for the right reasons. From the beginning, establishing healthy foundations means both giving and taking, listening to one another, and compromising. Hashem never intended any person to obliterate his or herself, even "for the sake of *shalom bayis*." While the husband is the king and the wife, the queen, this is very different from the husband being the lord and the wife, the slave. It's not just unnecessary or non-obligatory to sacrifice oneself for the sake of a spouse, it's simply not good for either of them.

A marriage in which each spouse is independent of the other is also far from ideal — as is a marriage where one spouse is too dependent on the other, or where one spouse is codependent and has assumed responsibility for the other spouse's issues. So too, a marriage in which one spouse demands that the other effaces himself entirely is very unhealthy, and no one should ever comply with such a demand. Similarly, no one should voluntarily deny his own needs "for the sake of *shalom bayis*."

The ideal relationship is one that is interdependent, where each spouse needs, relies on, and trusts the other.

What the Torah envisages is a marriage of two individuals, each with a different personality, who work hard together to merit *siyatta diShmaya* to build a harmonious home. This is what invites the Shechinah in.

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Finally, you ask for the most important pointers to keep in mind as you go into marriage. I would say that the three most important areas to focus on are: flexibility, communication, and boundaries. These are topics that can all use their own elaboration, but I'll try to briefly summarize the main ideas. I have elaborated on each of these in different classes and essays in the past.



Being flexible means recognizing that there is more than one way of approaching things, more than one right way of doing things. It means trying your best to understand and respect the other person's perspective. When a couple, or even just one of the spouses, is flexible, almost all issues can be resolved.

Communication is something I stress so often, because it's so important, and without it there's nothing. Hashem created us with the ability to speak in order that we should communicate with one another, and learning how to communicate with respect, with humility, with gentleness, is fundamental to building *shalom bayis*.

Understanding boundaries is also fundamental — the difference between "mine," "yours," and "ours." Giving your spouse the space and freedom to deal with what's in his domain is so important — and understanding where you should step in and provide your own perspective on an issue that affects you both is just as important.

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The most fundamental lesson to take with you to the *chuppah*, however, is the lesson of the *chuppah* itself, which symbolizes Hashem above both you and your husband. Even a marriage between two flexible, humble, easy-going, and dedicated people needs the recognition of Hashem above both of them to succeed.

When you approach your marriage with the awareness that building a home is for Hashem, as you write — to create a place for the Shechinah to dwell — you will *be'ezras Hashem* have the *siyatta diShmaya* you need to succeed in this greatest project of all.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: KORACH 5784

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