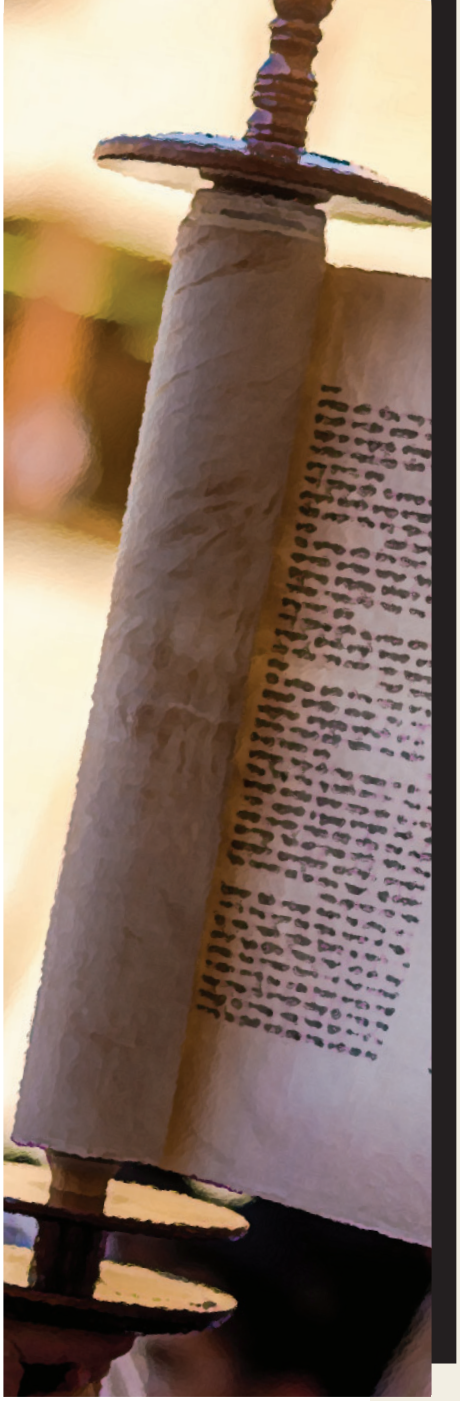


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

FINDING TIME FOR WHAT'S IMPORTANT

In this week's *parshah*, we are told to step in and support someone struggling before he collapses entirely: "If your brother becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall support him..." The Imrei Yosef discusses the Baal Shem Tov's interpretation of this *passuk*, which focuses on the understanding that the person "struggling" is having a hard time with a certain *aveirah*. Why would we even notice someone doing something wrong, the Baal Shem Tov asks? After all, we don't notice everything everyone does. He explains that whenever we do see a defect in someone, it's a prompt to examine our own deeds.

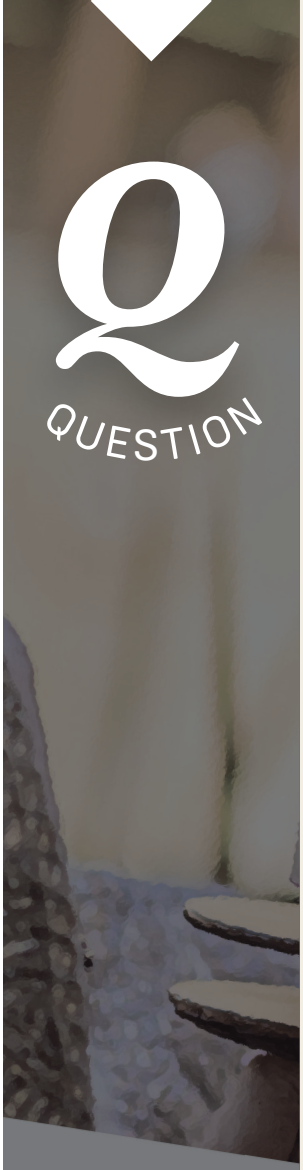
The Baal Shem Tov recounted an incident in his own life when he saw someone being *mechallel* Shabbos. Upon reflection, he realized that he only noticed it because he had recently witnessed someone disparaging a *talmid chacham* (who we are taught is compared to Shabbos) and hadn't protested the slight to the Torah.

It seems that the link is not always direct or easy to detect. It's not as simple as, "I also have this issue and therefore I see it in others," although that could also be true. It also doesn't mean that we are to blame if someone else is acting wrongly. But sometimes, it could be something as subtle as our response to someone else's actions and behaviors that needs to be corrected, which is why we have to be alerted to the issue.

When we invest genuine effort in figuring out why our relationships are faltering, we can merit *siyatta diShmaya* to see what needs fixing.

נתנדב לזכוי הרבים
לע"נ ר' **נפתלי צבי**
ב"ר משה שמואל ע"ה
יאה"צ כ"ו אייר

Parshas
Behar-Bechukosai
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Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen

I just discovered your series on TorahAnytime and searched through your archives to see if you answered the question I have, and it seems not. I've been struggling with this issue for a long while, and am feeling very stuck.

During the first year of my marriage, I was head-over-heels with my husband. I couldn't see a single flaw in him, and marriage all in all was bliss despite some rocky *shanah rishonah* moments.

I'm not sure what changed, but I no longer feel the same spark. We've been married for almost ten years, and I secretly view "private time" as a chore I have to check off so I'm a good wife, as I really don't enjoy it.

I also find it hard to be encouraging and supportive, while it used to come naturally. I find myself fighting annoyance about minor things my husband does, and while I do put in the effort to be a good wife (for instance, I help him with his work when he wants me to, cook the meals he likes etc.) it's not coming from the same place of really wanting to please him because I love him. Instead, it's more because it's my responsibility as the wife.

Just to be clear, I'm married to an unbelievably good person, who goes out of his way to give to me and make me happy. He is also an incredibly talented and successful person. I don't deserve him. I feel guilty that I can't naturally love him and give him what he deserves.

Aside from my guilt and my natural desire to enjoy my marriage with the intensity I used to, I also feel terrible because he's very in-tune emotionally and often mentions that he feels like he loves me a lot more than I love him. He sometimes asks me if I really care about him, and I don't know what to answer. He clearly feels the difference.

Possibly, the way I feel is because we have very little time to spend together and during pregnancy and nursing, certain aspects of our relationship are often painful. I also run a business which takes up a lot of my headspace.

I tried reaching out for help with this from a therapist, but we didn't actually get anywhere.

What can I do to reignite my old feelings (or create new strong ones)?

Thank you and *tizku l'mitzvos.*

A ANSWER

The first thing I want to note is that my response to you is addressed to anyone dealing with similar issues. Therefore, I will be drawing attention to commonly-made errors even though you yourself are not making them. As I analyze the general dynamics of this situation, it will become clear that you are already dealing with things in an exemplary manner and that it shouldn't take very much work to turn things around for your and your husband's benefit.

In fact, all the questions I deal with in this public format are ones that are applicable to a great many people—there is little point in publicizing issues that most people never experience. While I may not have addressed a question exactly like the one you pose in any of my classes over the years, the issues you raise are normal and commonly experienced. The initial excitement and enthusiasm of being married does often wane, simply because the novelty wears

off. Especially after years have passed, years during which both of you have been fully occupied with raising small children and adjusting to all kinds of demands, it's to be expected that you no longer feel the same "spark."

This is not a reason to feel guilty and no one should blame themselves for needing advice in this area. It's also not a sign that something is very wrong or that intensive effort needs to be invested to turn things around. Anyone in such a situation needs to know that it's totally possible to create new strong feelings that are appropriate for the later stages of marriage. It's commendable that you aren't waiting for anything dramatic or terrible, *chas veshalom,* to seek help. All marriages need investments of time and effort if they are not to grow stale or descend into conflict. It's a shame when couples resign themselves to a lack of "spark" or assume that this is just the way things are and make no effort to climb out of the rut or to improve things.

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In the majority of cases, restoring the relationship doesn't require any special intervention or even the involvement of a third party. While there are couples who may benefit from a therapist's advice, it's not always so simple. Unfortunately, some therapists seek deep-seated causes for problems where none may exist, and couples may find themselves being encouraged to waste time "understanding" the roots and causes of their challenges when all they really need is simple and practical advice for the present.

The first step to improving a situation, whether through someone else's advice and help or on your own, is seeing the situation for what it is, neither minimizing the issues nor blowing them out of proportion. In many cases, just taking this step can be enough to start turning things around.

Believe it or not, many "issues" are relatively simple and can be resolved by consulting with a *kallah* teacher or mentor. There's often no need to involve a therapist who may assume and try to persuade you that a simple technical issue must be masking something more complex.

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You mention that you deal with everyday annoying occurrences. It's understandable that spouses feel frustrated by anything ongoing, no matter how small or trivial. Sometimes, during the first few years when everything is so new and exciting, those small things go unnoticed. They may be small, but that doesn't mean that they should be ignored.

Trying to persuade yourself that they're just minor, or that you shouldn't feel the way you do, is unwise as the resentment is likely to mount. There may be annoyances that cannot be easily resolved, where nothing actually wrong is being done and your husband is entitled to prefer his own way of doing things. If you come up against such issues, first admit that you have a right to be bothered by them, and then try just letting go. "I'm letting go of this, even though it bothers me, for the sake of my marriage. Please, Hashem, help me to let go." That's it.

Other things can and should be addressed directly, by asking your husband to alter his habits a little. Sometimes, just being open about what's bothering you and wording your request gently and correctly can make all the difference in how well-received and effective your message will be.

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A common mistake people make in such situations is throwing the responsibility onto the other spouse and expecting them to do all the accommodating. This is neither reasonable nor realistic. People who lack awareness of how much they are demanding of others often can't see this.

I have, for example, heard more people than I care to remember, telling me that their wives are so overworked that they don't have the energy to connect in a healthy way. Of course it depends on the circumstances, but there may be a lot more the wife can do to remedy this than the husband, and if a wife absolutely insists that her schedule is inviolable and that her husband will have to put in extra effort to restore the spark in their marriage within her time constraints, a solution can be hard to find.

While this may not apply to you, it is possible that things would change a little if you weren't as over-extended as you appear to be. You definitely have a lot going on between your job, your home, your young children, and also helping your husband with aspects of his job. Lack of attraction and interest can often simply be due to exhaustion. Consider it.

Finding time is a challenge, understandably, and so is removing items from your to-do list. However, it's often a question of priorities. You wouldn't be writing if you didn't realize how important your *shalom bayis* is. It's important enough to compromise in other areas and make time for your spouse, *and* to ask your husband to make time as well.

Many spouses deal with "little things" for years and successfully push them under the carpet, believing that they just don't have time and it's not a priority. Then,

when a crisis hits, they simply *have* to make time—and discover that it is, after all, possible. What a shame to wait for a crisis to find time to improve things before they deteriorate so drastically.

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Until now, I have been mainly addressing the mistake of passively allowing things to deteriorate. However, many couples unfortunately play a more active role in the downhill slide of their *shalom bayis*. This comes from a misconception of the role that emotions play.

You write that while you are going through the motions of being a good wife, "it's not coming from the same place of really wanting to please him because I love him." Many people reach that stage of "not *really* wanting" and rationalize that if they don't really want to, then they don't *really* have to (or, worse, that they actually shouldn't at all, because it would be "hypocritical" or false).

This is a terrible mistake. We don't always have full control over our feelings, but we do have control over our actions, and many times, our feelings will come to align with our actions. Even if they don't, even if we feel that we're going through the motions when our heart isn't in it, those actions are still valuable.

Giving respect to one's spouse, keeping the home running, even smiling when you don't feel like it should all still be done even if you don't feel a "spark". Yes, it is your responsibility as the wife to do much of what you're doing, regardless of how you are feeling about it at that precise moment, and it's commendable that you are not looking for ways to shirk your duty.



It should be obvious, but often isn't (because people allow their emotions to blind them) that when one spouse stops investing because they don't feel like it, the situation will only get worse. People claim to be, and believe that they are, seeking solutions while they are actively contributing to the problem.

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I would just like to focus on one area where it's possible that you have allowed things to get out of balance. It appears very much from your letter that you have taken upon yourself a great many responsibilities and that you're feeling quite overwhelmed. While your relationship with your husband does not seem to be codependent (where one spouse feels obligated to cater to the other's emotional needs and assumes responsibility for their emotional state), it's possible that your marriage needs to be more interdependent.

Ideally, a marriage consists of two independent people who join together not only to give to one another but also to take from one another. Telling someone, "I don't need anything from you," or showing it without words can destroy a relationship even if the intentions are only good.

You're clearly a very capable person and that's amazing, but for the sake of your *shalom bayis,* try to take a step back and ask for your husband's help even if you don't technically need it. Ask for his help and his time, and thank him and be grateful, and you may find yourself starting to feel differently toward him.

Your marriage has all the ingredients for a wonderful *shalom bayis*: awareness, willingness to take responsibility, desire to invest, and most of all a real appreciation of how important it is to do the right thing. With Hashem's help, when you create space and time to look at things with fresh eyes, the spark you once felt will reemerge and burn brighter than ever.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: BEHAR-BECHUKOSAI 5785

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