

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

A WOMAN LIGHTS UP HER HOME

In this week's *parshah*, Sarah Imeinu's name is changed from Sarai to Sarah. Rashi explains that the name Sarai implied that she was only Avraham's wife and her influence was confined to her immediate family. The switch to Sarah signifies that Sarah Imeinu had become a mother and an influence to the entire world, just as Avraham Avinu became the "*av hamon goyim*—the father of a multitude of nations." As Avraham's wife, Sarah naturally shared in his role of spreading Hashem's light to the entire world.

The Chiddushei Harim suggests that this shared role applied during times when Avraham's *middah* of *chessed* was revealed — during times of clarity and harmony. However, during times of *hester panim*, when things did not go smoothly, Sarah could not rely on joining Avraham in his work; rather, she was able to chart her own path and continue to exert an influence on her surroundings.

This is the reason that Esther Hamalkah was *zocheh* to rule over 127 nations — in the merit of Sarah's 127 years of life, as the Gemara teaches. Esther's influence was felt most strongly during times of *hester panim*, just as Sarah (and not Sarai) was specifically able to exert an influence during hard times.

This is a special ability that all women have, in the merit of the Imahos — to follow in their footsteps and surmount difficulties. Women possess the ability to support and strengthen their families not only when things are going well but also when challenges arise. This is the true *chachmas nashim bonsah beisah*—the wisdom of women builds her home.

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Mazel Tov to the

Schlesinger Family

on the birth of an Einikel!!

יה"ר שיזכו
לנחת לרוב מכל יוצ"ח!

Parshas
Lech Lecha
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Question one:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you so much for your *shiurim* on TorahAnytime. I've gained so much knowledge and awareness from them.

I recently married a wonderful husband, *baruch Hashem*, who is kind and devoted to me. For the first few months after we were married, everything was amazing. He was completely immersed in learning, a real *masmid*. He wasn't interested in anything else, to the extent that he didn't even take his phone with him when he left for *kollel* in the morning. Even on Yom Tov he'd find time to learn; he'd literally use every spare moment to shteig in Torah.

But it all changed the next Yom Tov on Chol Hamoed. I suggested renting a car, as he had just gotten his license. We went on a few trips, and things haven't really been the same since. His *kollel* closed down, and although he found a *chavrusa*, he decided to find a part-time job as well, as he claimed he needed the stimulation. I was okay with that and told him that I understood and he thanked me for being understanding, but things just went downhill from there. He started staying home instead of going to his job, watching "kosher" videos. He didn't always learn with his *chavrusa*. Days would go by without him opening a *sefer*.

I just don't understand where all the *sipuk* and *simchah* he had from learning disappeared to. I wonder if he himself knows. Maybe it's my fault for not encouraging him enough? But then again, I'm not supposed to be his *mashgiach*. It's more complicated, perhaps, because he's home so much and I get to see exactly how much time he's just killing.

On the other hand, I feel stupid for complaining because he is such a good and kind husband. Maybe my feelings are more due to societal pressure?

I'd appreciate your advice so much, thank you

Question two:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for your *shiurim*, which I enjoy a lot.

I'd like to ask: In our chassidish circles, when is it "permissible" to leave *kollel* and go out to work? After two years? We all know what *kollel* means, but for the women, it's their whole life.

If I'm already feeling fed up from sitting there, can I leave even though my wife will feel bad?

Thank you



Question three:

Thank you for your wonderful *shiurim*.

I have a few questions and would really appreciate your advice.

I've been married for a few years to a great husband with excellent *middos, baruch Hashem*. We have very good *shalom bayis*. There's just one thing that bothers me.

We both come from very *ehrliche* backgrounds, and when we got engaged, I was under the impression that my husband was a serious type of *bachur*. However, after we got married, it didn't take long for me to realize that things weren't what I'd thought they were.

I don't want to give the wrong impression — my husband is *ehrlich*. But it's just certain things. He went out to work after the first year, for example. He started to trim his beard and he got a phone with internet, even though we'd discussed that before we were engaged and ruled it out. He says he only uses it for things like paying bills and that there's nothing wrong with that.

But he can also miss a *minyan* here or there, and other things too. It hurts me that things worked out like this, and I keep wondering what our lives would have been like if he had been different.

I don't want to discuss it with him as I don't want to hurt him, and also because I don't know what my role should be. Should I just resign myself to the way he is? Or can I somehow encourage him to improve but in a way that he doesn't figure out that I'm trying to make him change? How can I be *be'simchah*, and what about the *chinuch* of the children? How can I show him enough respect when I'm feeling so let down?

Thank you



I'll start by clarifying that while the two longer questions related to disappointment in one's spouse are written by wives, they could equally have been written by husbands. I receive many such questions from disappointed husbands who discovered after getting married that their wives were not quite what they had imagined. While the Torah gives men a broader ability to make demands of their wives in certain areas than vice versa, most conflicts in the area of relationships relates not to demands and obligations but to clashes of individuality and knowing how to come to terms with reality.

Disappointment is a feature in very many relationships. As a *badchan* famously joked: "There are two types of wives. There are those who are understanding, kind, loving, giving, patient, and wise. And then there's the type we all have." I don't think it's accurate to say that *everyone* feels let down, but many people get married with big dreams and hopes and are disappointed when they face reality.

Interestingly, when it comes to being disappointed in ourselves, we're quite good at getting over it. We know quite well (perhaps too well) how to forgive, be understanding, justify our actions, and move on. Disappointment in "things" is also relatively easy to deal with. If it rains, and the trip we planned now has to be postponed, it's not the end of the world. If someone's sick *cha"v*, then it's no one's fault and most people don't get angry at having to adapt and make adjustments.

It's only where the disappointment involves another person with free choice that we find it so hard to deal with. After all, "They could have done things better but didn't." Perhaps, even, "They promised they would... and now look what they're doing. They cheated me."

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A great deal of disappointment and resentment results from having the mindset of: "They could have..." but could they, really? Maybe they couldn't. "But they promised!" Maybe things didn't turn out the way they expected and they are no longer able to fulfill what they promised, even though they had honorable intentions. Maybe being married itself presented them with challenges they didn't foresee and they aren't as able to suppress their own individual desires as they thought they would be.

"But I don't want this, and I never signed up for it!" The question then becomes: Whose decision is it? If it's a matter that falls in shared territory where both husband and wife are equally involved and affected, they must make the choice together.

Then there are the choices made by one spouse, and although it may distress the other, still belong in the territory of only one of them. The other spouse doesn't necessarily need to suppress their feelings and remain silent; it's okay to voice an opinion or make a request, as long as it's done gently. And it's only natural to be affected by anything one's spouse does. It's also natural and desirable to want one's spouse to be *ehrlich* and to daven for improvement. However, being bitterly disappointed to the extent that resentment builds up, even if it is never openly expressed, is wrong, as is making the spouse feel guilty and responsible for "ruining the *shalom bayis*."

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I don't mean to imply that the spouses asking the questions that are presented here, have chosen the wrong approach. I commend the wife who writes: "I feel stupid complaining because he's such a good and kind husband." Not that she should feel stupid in any way. It is wonderful, that despite her disappointment, she can still see her husband's many good qualities.

Too often, people are filled with so much resentment that everything is colored black and they become simply incapable of seeing any glimmer of light in the darkness. But there isn't a person in the world who has a spouse with all the positive qualities they want in them, and none of the negative points they wanted to avoid. Part of being a mature adult is dealing with disappointment and growing from it. Finding the good in a person who, like ourselves, is a mix of good and less good, who is facing challenges and not always surmounting them, is the only path that will lead to *shalom bayis*.

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Reading the letter by the man sitting in *kollel* and feeling frustrated and unproductive may provide some insight into what this can look like from "the other side of the table." I commend him too, for being considerate of the potential impact on his wife if he goes out to work. A man is within his rights to simply face up to the situation, tell his wife that it's not working out, and do something

else instead. Sitting in *kollel* and not learning is certainly not the optimal way to live.

On the other hand, he does write, "*If* I'm feeling fed up…" which suggests that there's still room to reconsider. He knows how much it means to his wife, hence his seeking advice. Perhaps, for the sake of his wife's happiness, he could give *kollel* another try and really invest in making it a productive experience? Perhaps it is worth it to build *shalom bayis* based on concern for another person's feelings? This applies especially if it was expected to be the initial setting for their married life.

I'm not advocating for anyone, husband or wife, to remain in *kollel* or make any other life decision solely because their spouse demands or expects it of them. However, wanting to make one's spouse happy should be the foundation of every marriage and is a very worthy goal in itself.

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Sometimes, making one's spouse happy can mean doing something one wouldn't do otherwise. At other times, it can mean adapting to things they do that you would prefer they didn't do, because those are the choices they want to make.

That doesn't mean that there isn't a place for discussion, in respectful and kind terms. As I mentioned, a spouse may make requests in areas that aren't necessarily shared territory, as long as it's done while recognizing that they are merely requesting and not demanding or attempting to control the situation.

If the other spouse agrees to compromise, wonderful. If, however, you get the distinct feeling that you're pushing against a locked door, the best response is to stop trying. Attempting to control another human being rarely has a good outcome, even if you think you got the result you were looking for. You may be better off learning how to live happily with another person who isn't precisely the person you wanted them to be.

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This is almost always possible, even though it may feel very hard at times. It's natural to feel not only disappointed but even worried when you see someone sliding downhill before your very eyes. Unfortunately, the challenges in our generation are immense, and examples of people sliding in their Yiddishkeit are all around us. It's ironic (read: sad) that when a person who was once a laid-back kind of guy suddenly gets "all spiritual," people wonder what happened and question whether it's just a passing phase and wonder if it's healthy at all, but when people go in the opposite direction, it's just accepted as one of those things.

We should never resign ourselves to any Jew sliding downhill; we should always care about the other person's spiritual welfare. When it comes to accepting a husband's decline in his success or passion for Torah learning, it's important to remember what the Gemara tells us, "A thousand people devote themselves to learning, but only one will become a *dayan*." Although a thousand people invest in Torah, not everyone perseveres to the same degree, and very few end up achieving their full potential.

In the particular case described here of the *kollel* closing down, there was an added stress on the husband who might have flourished in a different environment — but it was not to be. I don't think the wife should blame herself for not encouraging him enough, but there is just one point that I would like to discuss that might not apply here but does apply in other cases that I have observed.

I've seen quite a few situations where a young couple started off on very idealistic footing. Yet, at some point, spouse A feels a little constrained or perhaps affected by social pressure, and suggests "easing up a little" in a certain area. Spouse B isn't so willing to comply but is gradually won over and does "ease up" just that little bit that was asked of him. And then… the formerly unwilling spouse B starts to slide even more, while spouse A tries to stop the slide, but by then it's out of his or her control…

To give an example: A *kollel yungerman* might start out with a basic phone that only takes calls, and his wife, frustrated that she can't contact him during the day (as it's on silent mode during *sedarim*), keeps badgering him to get at least text messaging. He is reluctant and holds out for months until finally he gives in. Six months down the line and he's coming home late because he was "shmoozing" with friends on whatsapp and even when he's home he's not really home at all...

The saying goes, "Be careful what you wish for, as you may just get it." But it's just as true to say, "Be careful what you daven for, because even when you get it, it might not be what you thought it was." The truth is that it's impossible to control another person. You can never know what the ripple effect will lead to.

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Challenges are part of life and part of every marriage. However, having a husband who learns even just a few hours a day is something to be very grateful for; and a husband who overcomes all the temptations of the world even just for a short period of learning, and who is generally *ehrlich*, kind and considerate, is worthy of great respect.

Giving such a husband respect and appreciation shouldn't be seen as a form of manipulation to get him to become more *ehrlich*, learn more, and do more. It is simply what any wife should do — notice the good, acknowledge it, and appreciate it. A husband who feels appreciated and respected will, in most cases, tend naturally to do more of what brings him that appreciation and respect, as most people look to impress those who are impressed by them already. And they usually know how to do just that. If a wife is not being consciously manipulative, there is no reason for concern that he will feel that she's trying to control him.



You can accomplish this by appreciating all the good aspects of your spouse, not just the aspects you particularly approve of. You'll have even better results if you can overcome your disappointment and accept your spouse — as you accept yourself — as a person who faces challenges and is doing his best to overcome them.

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This is no easy task, even though we do have the ability to overcome our feelings. This is why all couples, both husband and wife, need to have Torah-based guidance to know how to proceed whenever specific issues arise.

Seeking out Daas Torah should not be something one does only in order to find a "professional" opinion to back up one's own and "force" one's spouse to submit to the ruling. It should be something that both spouses do together, in order to find the right way forward for both of them, for their *shalom bayis*.

With the right guidance and mindset and much *siyatta diShmaya* we will hopefully be able to turn any situation into one that we're not just resigned to, but actually happy with.

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