RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Vayeishev

Know Your Competition

In this week's Parsha we learn that "*Yosef brought up their negative behaviors to their father*". Reb Mendele Vurke'r notes that it doesn't say "Yosef *spoke* ill of his brothers". Reb Mendele explains that Yosef was a *tzaddik*; he would never speak ill of others.

What *did* he do? He behaved in a way that was starkly different, on a greater level than his brothers. He was so unique in his *avodas Hashem* that his father couldn't help but notice the contrast.

So why was Yosef punished? Because he should have concealed some of his behaviors. He shouldn't have behaved in a way that would. He shouldn't have behaved in a way that would attract attention from his father and jealousy from his brothers. In other words, he should have been aware of his 'competition' and acted accordingly.

There's a lesson for us here: when we relate to our spouses and children, we need to be aware of the competition.

Our children are exposed to so many flashy, exciting, and alluring sights and sounds every day. We must make sure to make our homes and our classrooms as compelling and rewarding as possible. We want them to feel attracted to the safe confines of their homes and *batei chinuch*. Obviously, we must try to shield them from any of the outside influences, but we can never protect them enough. The only antidote we have is to counter anything that they can possibly be attracted to outside our homes by radiating warmth and positivity and being an inspiring role model.

Similarly, in our relationship with our spouses, we need to be aware of others in our spouse's circle who give them more than we do. If your spouse feels more respected or validated by a coworker, sibling, or friend, they might not be inclined to invest as much in their relationship with you.

Of course that's not how it should be, and the fact that someone else is giving more or better attention doesn't justify their preferring that relationship over yours, yet it pays to be mindful of your spouse's needs and desires and, within a healthy framework, try to fill that need for them. The result will be a mutually satisfying relationship B'ezras Hashem.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

As far as I know, Hashem created Man and Woman with physical, emotional and spiritual differences. I have learned that men have a strong need for respect, while women have a strong desire for love and acceptance. The goal is to live in harmony by each spouse providing the other according to their emotional needs.

Can you please explain what "respect" means to a man? Is it the same for all men? I really want to fulfill my *tafkid* **as an** *aishes chayil***.**

I married a man with a difficult, emotionally abusive background, which has caused him to bury his feelings. Despite his claims that he is content with the state of our marriage, I feel like we relate to each other in a very superficial way, almost like familiar strangers. We don't have any meaningful discussions past the weather, the food, or his work. My husband also has no clue what a woman's needs are. Even if I were to explain it to him, I don't think he will understand.

Maybe the Rav can talk about validation and how it is oxygen for most women? My husband has two *chavrusos***, but he doesn't listen to** *shiurim***. Would it be pushy of me to ask him to listen to the Rav's** *shiur* **on this very important topic?**

I thank you in advance.

Answer:

Your question has two parts. There's the question of how you can give your husband what he needs, as well as how you can get him to give you the things you need. Both are very good – albeit separate – questions, and they're also related to each other. However, it's important to differentiate between the two.

Giving and taking are both very important parts of a relationship. Being a giver exclusively, isn't a healthy approach, everyone must give *and* take. An acquaintance once shared a fanciful illustration of this concept with me. There are some people who live in "Nemevitch" and some who live in "Gebevitch". Those who live in Nemevitch are here to take, take, take. Give me, bring me, make me. They never visit Gebevitch, because they are so busy thinking about their own needs

that they don't have time to think about what others might need. Characteristically, they are also never satisfied with what they have. The residents of Gebevich give and give and give. However, they must remember to sometimes pay a visit to Nemevich, lest they burn out and have nothing left to give.

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While giving and taking both need to happen in a marital relationship, they don't necessarily always take place at the same time. You need to give unconditionally. When you give solely for the purpose of receiving something in return, it can quickly lead to resentment - especially when the desired results don't happen as soon as you would have liked. When you give wholeheartedly, expecting nothing in return, your recipient will most often eventually give back – at least to some degree.

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Now that we've separated the two parts of your letter, we can discuss each one.

You start off by saying that men and women are innately different, but I'm not convinced that the specific differences you mention are true across the board. A lot of what a person needs depends on their inborn personality, rather than their gender. Everyone wants to feel respected and accepted. You need to find out what the individual person that you married needs – regardless of what you already know to be true about men or women and their different desires. What does *your* husband like? What makes *your* wife's eyes light up?

Sometimes, a wife can argue that of course she respects her husband! She sets out his clothes and serves him his food and greets him graciously when he walks through the door. But when I ask them, "If I ask *him* if he feels respected, what would he answer?", many women don't know the answer! Respect and love depend on your receiver. What will make *them* feel those sentiments? It is often not the same thing that makes you feel that way.

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The notion that respect is crucial for a man is not a new concept. It is rooted in many Torah sources. Respect can be accomplished in many ways, and as mentioned, it all depends on your husband and his particular personality type. For some men it might be telling him how much you admire his attributes, for others it might be celebrating his accomplishments. The main thing is to appreciate him for who he is, not whom you would like him to be. Take an interest in the things that excite him, and make them important to you as well.

If you were to ask your husband, "Who respects you the most?", what would his answer be? As previously stated, your husband might find that people outside your home respect him more than you do. If that is the case, don't panic. Find out what those people do, and why your husband thinks that, and then imitate them! You can apply this formula to *chinuch* as well. If you find your child relates better to your spouse, or a grandparent, or uncle, find out why and follow suit. Now that you know that in order to give your husband what he needs, you need to find out what his needs are, we can segue into your needs and how to get your husband to give them to you.

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A woman's needs are no less important than her husband's, and it is clearly delineated in the Torah, as well. A man is commanded to make sure his wife has everything that she needs and more.

You mention that you don't think that your husband will understand what you need, and therefore you would like him to hear it from me. But a question begs to be asked. What will he hear from me that he can't hear from you? Why don't *you* tell him what your needs are?

You know your own needs better than anyone else, and you are the one who can best explain them to your husband. Being open and honest about your desires is a sign of strength. By being vulnerable and sharing with him how he can make you happy, there is a greater chance that he will. Don't make the mistake many make, assuming that once you have to say it, and even ask for it, it won't be meaningful. It's very possible that your husband really means it sincerely, and helping him express it the right way is doing both of you a favor.

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Clarifying your needs, takes not only vulnerability though. It also takes healthy and pleasant communication. Many people express their needs by complaining and kvetching about what they aren't getting. Others talk about it while making their spouse feel stupid for not getting it on their own.

Yet others make the mistake of comparing their spouse to others who get these things and treat their spouse better. And then there are those who generalize, about how not only is this area not good, but nothing is, or was, or will be. These methods of communication are not only hurtful and not appreciated, they don't produce the results you're looking for. Not only that, they often backfire. That's why some people can complain that they already said what they need a thousand times and still aren't getting it.

You can communicate almost anything you'd like in a nice way and it'll bring about much better results. Start with a compliment. Go on to clarifying that you're sure there are no ill intentions. Maybe even be vulnerable enough to take blame for not being clearer in the past. Then go on to say - not what you demand, or expect, or is expected, rather - what it is that you'd appreciate. I believe with a message worded like this you'll get quite a bit further.

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So often I hear people say "If only my husband listened to your *shiurim*", or "I wish my wife would read this", but that is not how it works. When you want to get along with others, the only person you can change is yourself. You can change how you treat someone else, as well how you communicate your needs and feelings to others. It's not always easy or instantly rewarding, but it is the only way to ultimately get what you want.

Be the change that you want to see in others. And then watch that take effect in others too.

All the best, Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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