

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

UNITING AND WINNING

In this week's *parshah* we find a warning to those who "go and worship other gods ... which I have not commanded." Why is it not enough to warn of the *issur* of idol worship? Why does the *passuk* add, "which I have not commanded"?

The Ksav Sofer explains that among those who worship idols are people who recognize that Hashem is the Creator of the world; they even recognize that Hashem controls everything. Nonetheless, they believe that Hashem endowed certain forces of nature (such as the sun, moon, and stars) with the power to act independently of Him, and gave us the option of worshiping those forces of nature themselves. Therefore, the *passuk* stresses that forces of nature have no power at all; everything they seem to do is simply Hashem acting via them.

While this may seem like an abstract notion in our times, the truth is that we have to constantly be on our guard to stop falling into a similar mindset. When a tragedy occurs, *lo aleinu*, it's relatively easy to see Hashem's hand and realize that He alone orchestrated it; it's when we face the smaller trials and tribulations of daily life that we often fall into the trap of blaming others in our lives for our suffering.

Unlike earthquakes, fires, or tornadoes, people have *bechirah*, and it can be challenging to remember that while a certain person really did have a choice about how to behave toward us, the net effect their actions have on our lives is only from Hashem. Remembering that can often help a great deal in healing relationships where accusations and blame have caused so much grief.

This week's essay is kindly sponsored in loving memory of

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יאה"צ ר"ח אלול תנצב"ה

Parshas **Shoftim**

VOL. 8 | ISSUE 41



Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I follow you on TorahAnytime and I love the *Torahdige hashkafah* and the clarity in how you explain things. I have really benefited from your *shiurim*. Thank you for the tremendous *Klal* work and Hashem should enable you to continue your important work.

I have a question for you. It seems to me that something is missing in my relationship.

Baruch Hashem my wife allowed me to stay in *kollel* for six years. Currently, I am holding down a decent job. Money is quite tight but I try to be happy and keep a positive attitude. After coming home from work I try to help with the kids before going out to learn at night.

To me it seems that my wife is constantly unhappy with me. Maybe it is just a wrong perception that I have, but that's the feeling I have and I want to know how to get rid of it.

I've talked to her about this, and she told me that she has the right to be unhappy but it doesn't mean she is unhappy with me. I have already learnt that she compares herself a lot to her mother who has always held down a few teaching jobs and also managed her house and she also compares herself to her older sister who is a principal in a school and she looks down at herself as she is a stay-at-home mom who sometimes brings in some money from babysitting.

I try to boost her with compliments but I probably forget a lot of the time, which is why I recently made a resolution to give her three compliments a day after a quarrel that we had.

When I have asked for appreciation saying I don't get enough "thank yous" she says I am a bottomless pit and she cannot tell me thank you enough. Somehow it seems to me that I constantly miss the times when she does tell me thank you. Also, when I asked her what she does to show me love she came up with some things she bought me (salads, etc. that she knows I like) and how she made a special kind of kugel for me as I prefer that one even though it's much more trouble to make.

I don't know why I didn't feel appreciated by these gestures even though this is how she is showing appreciation. (Maybe because she only told me after I asked her what she does to show appreciation?)

In short, how can I make myself more comfortable at home? Is it her general attitude towards me that I feel underappreciated and if so what is the (love) language that I am looking for?

Thank you



You're asking great questions that deal with the fundamentals of *shalom bayis* — seeing things differently from one's spouse; giving and getting; and coping with bumps in the road. Let's address these in turn.

First of all, I'd like to commend you for recognizing that while you see things one way, your wife may see them another way. That may sound trivial, but too many couples experience major tension either because they mistakenly assume that "everyone" thinks the way they do, or because they demand that everyone think the way they do.

Getting married doesn't mean that two people with distinct personalities and opinions become one. It's to be expected that many a husband and wife will disagree about a great many things and see things entirely differently. Depending on the issue, they could even both be right, just from different vantage points.

In fact, you took things a step further than most people do, as you actually checked in with your wife to ask whether the way you perceived things was the same way she did. Often this alone can help avoid problems, when people develop this level of awareness instead of jumping to conclusions and then acting on them.

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In your case, your wife told you clearly that she's not upset specifically at you, which is great. Even if she had blamed you for her distress, that doesn't necessarily mean that you are to blame. But she isn't blaming you.

You provide several possible reasons for why she is feeling unhappy. While you could be right, it's helpful to keep an open mind and also realize that even though it seems to make sense for her to feel inferior to her mother and sister, it is possible that she is unhappy for reasons that you can't fathom. Maybe she herself isn't consciously aware of the reason. After all, plenty of other women in her position don't feel inferior at all.

If you're right, and she feels bad as she constantly compares herself to others, there may not be too much you can do about it other than what you're already doing. Of course you should care about her and want to ease her suffering. And of course if there are other things you can do to help her feel happier, you should do them.

But what you can't do and shouldn't even try to do is "make" her happy. Firstly, that's impossible. You can't make someone feel something. And secondly, even attempting to achieve that will lead you into a very unhealthy codependent relationship. You can and should be nice, show caring, and try to lift her spirits, but what you should avoid doing is taking responsibility for how she feels as a result. There are ways for your wife to feel happier, but fundamentally, her state of mind is her responsibility and not yours.

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Your resolution to give your wife daily compliments is great. In fact, this is advice I often give to people. It's important, however, to make sure it doesn't become obvious that giving compliments is something on your daily to-do list. It's easier to make it come across as natural when one varies the type of giving, as well as the timing.

Aside from compliments, you can express appreciation for things your wife did, or ask for her opinion on various issues, showing her how much you value her input. You can also ask her for small favors, helping her to feel needed, and then thank her for doing what you asked.

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Going back to how we all have different perspectives, you should also try to understand how things look from her vantage point. Accept that when she claims to be giving you certain things in order to demonstrate her love, she really feels that those efforts express her feelings

toward you. Tell her how much you appreciate the time and thought she invested, and set aside the fact that had she first asked you what you wanted, you probably would have requested something else entirely.

This doesn't mean that you can't go ahead and request other things — the two approaches aren't contradictory or mutually exclusive. Just take care not to dismiss what she gives on her terms. When we learn the various "love languages," we need to keep reminding ourselves that we're doing so in order to perfect ourselves and give happiness to others, not in order to perfect others and get happiness for ourselves.

In fact, appreciating all the things your wife already does, including those that she hasn't mentioned as doing for you specifically, may help your wife not only to feel happier, but also more inclined to continue investing thought into ways to show her love for you.

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And although I'm responding to you, I'll take the opportunity to commend your wife, for making it clear that she doesn't blame you for her low moods. And that's great advice for anyone who is feeling down, for whatever reason.

Best would be to set a depressed mood aside when interacting with close family members. That's much easier said than done, but even something as simple as putting on a smile can work wonders — and even lift your own mood, if only temporarily. But if you do feel the need to share your feelings (which is often necessary and understandable), there's no need to wait until you're asked whether you're angry "at" them — you can take the initiative and reassure them that although you're feeling blue, it's not their fault and you don't expect them to deal with things on your behalf.

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There's a message in every mood, straight from Hashem, if we're ready to hear it. It can feel so compelling to blame someone instead, especially if we assume that if they would only change their behavior, our problems would be solved. But they wouldn't, because then, Hashem would only have to find another messenger.

Instead, we all need to follow advice similar to an idea I often cite from the Beis Aharon *ztz"l*, who said that while many people bind themselves to their *yetzer hara* and scream to Hashem for help, he takes a different approach — he binds himself to Hashem and screams at the *yetzer hara*. It's so important to remember who your allies are and who or what you are uniting against. Bind and unite with your spouse against the moods, the issues, the problems, instead of uniting with your problems against your spouse.

Remember that you and your wife are on the same team and that when you love, appreciate, and care for each other, you are so much better equipped to deal with all the challenges that life throws your way.



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