RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Naso

Taking Responsibility

In this week's Parsha, we learn that the Nazir is to abstain from any potential impurities. For example, he is not to be in the presence of the dead, even if they are his close relatives. If he does find out that he was unintentionally in the vicinity of a dead body, he needs to bring numerous *korbanos*. Why, though? Is it the Nazir's fault that he was in a room with a dead body? He didn't even know it was there!

The Bnei Yissoschor in his *sefer* Agra D'Kallah explains that a Nazir is a person of great spiritual stature [as the *possuk* states: "*Nezer Elokav al rosho - The crown of Elokim is on his head!"*]. As such, he should have merited Divine protection against *tumah*. If he didn't merit this level of protection, he needs to do some soul searching to find out why. Perhaps there is something he needs to rectify. This is the reason he was required to bring all of these *korbanos*.

As human beings, we tend to slip up in our behavior, both in our *Avodas Hashem* as well as in our interpersonal relationships. We are often quick to defend ourselves by thinking or saying that what we did was unintentional. We didn't want to, we didn't mean to, we forgot... But sometimes, Hashem is sending us a message. While we might not be held accountable for unintentional wrongdoing, it might be a good idea to consider why these things keep happening to us. Perhaps there *is* a way for us to be more careful in the future?

In marriage especially, we see this very often. You slip up, you don't keep a commitment , and you honestly didn't mean to! You really forgot! While that might be true and you were entirely blameless, if it happens repeatedly, you would be remiss not to consider what lies beneath those constant errors of judgement. Much like the *rebbi* asks his young *talmid*, "You didn't forget to bring along your snacks for the trip. How come you keep forgetting to bring your homework?"

As always, I'll add a disclaimer that I'm talking to *you*, not your spouse. If your spouse is the one who slips up often, it would do you well to give them the benefit of the doubt. It could be that you're right, 'if only they would have cared about you more, it wouldn't have happened', but it could just as well be that it would have happened. They certainly didn't *intend* to hurt you. You should definitely never retaliate against a

spouse for slipping up, because then *you're* hurting them intentionally and that surely has no excuse.

It's common practice for people to justify their actions with all sorts of excuses. I yelled because I was exhausted, I was late because I was busy, I forgot because I was on an important call... While all of this might be true and even understandable, be aware that you still hurt your spouse. Even a justified wrongdoing is still a problem. Make sure to sincerely apologize and, when feasible, come up with a plan to prevent such things from happening again.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen

First, a huge thank you! I enjoy listening to your shiurim; they give me hope and improve my marriage and I am very grateful for that. I find your answers on target and your advice very practical.

I have two questions, one leading to the next.

My husband is a great guy. We are blessed BH with a beautiful and loving marriage and he gives me everything I need. We are married for several years and have a number of children.

Ever since we got married, I noticed that my husband isn't as mature as I'd like him to be. He doesn't have all that many friends and can sometimes say comments that appear silly. People often disregard his advice or anything he has to offer because they know who he is, and that hurts me a lot. He is settled and has a good job BH – where he is respected, probably because he made a new and better reputation for himself.

I often find myself running away from people I know when I'm with my husband for fear that he will say the wrong thing.

What advice can you give me on this? I know I can't change him and, although I've tried hinting, I cannot tell him directly that I think he's immature because that will just hurt him. I realize that this is who he is and he either won't change or it will take a while. Is there anything I can do to make this better?

The second question I have is that my parents seem to dislike my husband. They never said it, but I can feel it. I suspect that it is due to his lack of maturity. At my parents' Shabbos table, when my husband shares his opinion, he's always mocked or told that he's wrong and doesn't make sense. My brother-in-law, who is sitting right there, would not be told that even if he would have said the same thing! That hurts me even more. My parents are smart people and they know I'm onto them. Why do they have to hurt me like this each time I come? I love going to them for meals, and my husband doesn't mind it either, but I want to tell them that they are hurting my marriage!

I worked on myself to accept things as they are. I truly love my husband. He is a "super amazing young man", but there's just this one small issue. I'd love to hear from you: what is in my control to help my husband?

I'm looking forward to your response.

Answer:

I would like to divide your question into two parts. First, I will talk about your perspective on your husband, and then your parents' possible role in this.

From your letter I gather that you are a true *Aishes Chayil*, and your husband married well. I can also see that you married very well, too. Let's list the positive attributes that you yourself mentioned in your letter: A great guy, who gives you all you need, shares a beautiful and loving marriage with you, is settled, has a good job, is respected at work, made a good reputation for himself, and is – in your own words – "super amazing". There may be many more positive things to say about your husband; I only lifted the things you said in your letter so you can see them. In fact, in most cases, if a person would be paid for every positive thing he or she can say about their spouse, the list would go on for a long time. You are very blessed.

I give you credit for noticing these, and I hope you understand that you really lucked out. Nobody on this planet has everything, and you seem to have gotten a very admirable package there! So many people would be thrilled with only half of this list!

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So many people spend years looking for the "perfect *shidduch*" for themselves or their child. They don't realize (until they do) that such a thing does not exist. Every human being will have parts that we like and parts that we like less. It's a package deal. Just like we don't have every positive attribute known to mankind, we can't expect others to have them.

While your husband's seeming lack of maturity can certainly be a challenge, I would ask you to reconsider the extent of the problem. You might not be wrong, but I wonder exactly to what extent someone with all of those qualities you list in your letter is actually lacking maturity.

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Having said that, it is normal human nature to focus on the things we don't have. That's why, I don't judge you for seeing, and feeling challenged by your husband's "problem". However, shifting your focus to the things that are going well will make you so much happier and put you in a much more positive frame of mind.

I do see from your letter that personally you do accept and love your husband for who he is and that is a smart choice on your part. I'm wondering if most of your struggle, if not all of it, stems from the fact that you are somehow self-conscious about how others will perceive him. And on top of that, while I can be very wrong here, there's a chance that they don't actually think so and much of it is in your head. It could be that *you* are the one who perceives his comment as silly and quickly rush to brush it over so that others won't notice his supposed blunder. It could be that others might never have thought of it that way, and that his comment wasn't all that silly to begin with.

A lot of what we feel is transmitted to the people around us and can often create the very problem that we are trying to avoid. If you can focus on how lucky you are to have landed someone like your husband and realize that he might not be all that immature, those feelings might then dissipate and your problem might go away, too. Also, by feeling blessed and privileged, and counting your blessings and knowing that others are not as lucky as you are, you might care way less about things that have really irked you in the past. A change of perspective, and a shift in focus is not all that easy as it may sound, but it usually does pay off, and helps one remember what the important things in life and in a spouse are.

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In regard to the second half of your letter, I understand that you do seem to have some point about how your parents view your husband. It could be that if not for the way your parents seem to be treating your husband, you wouldn't have had such an issue with it. Remember, though, that your parents' feelings might also be a reflection of your self-consciousness. It could be that they treat your

siblings-in-law the same way and it only seems disrespectful to you.

I was recently talking to someone who was telling me things that he knows "for a fact!" He didn't realize how much of the "facts" were built around his emotions. I don't think you're being delusional, but you need to be aware of the role your feelings might be playing here. When you place your pinky finger right in front of your eyes, you will not be able to see anything else, even though those other things are so much bigger. That is because when something is really close to your line of vision, it obstructs your view of everything else. Your feelings are like that. They can sometimes take over your entire perspective so that you are unable to see anything else.

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Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that parents are jealous of their own children. It could be that your parents see what a beautiful relationship you have with your husband and they are jealous! They might not even be aware of it, but subconsciously, this envy is making them act that way towards your husband.

It could also be that your parents have nothing against your husband and they simply don't realize how their interactions are affecting you. How about broaching the topic with them? You don't have to be confrontational or defensive. You can simply tell them that you love and respect your husband for who he is, and you feel like they don't feel that way. You can tell them that by the way they act towards him, they are - obviously unintentionally, not a question - hurting you deeply. Be sure to tell them that you might be mistaken, but that you would appreciate it if they could be more mindful of this in the future. If you say this confidently, it will probably be heard.

If you don't find this effective, or if you are made to feel stupid for thinking this way, then you might have to come up with an alternate plan. If, after changing your mindset and bringing it up with them, you still don't see any significant change on their part, you might want to consider asking *Daas Torah* to what extent you are obligated to continue subjecting yourself to such uncomfortable behavior.

The best thing you can do is unite with your husband as a team and support each other. Find a *rav*, who is experienced, who can advise you on what you are to do. Certainly, do not forfeit your wonderful marriage and relationship in order to please your parents.

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Finally, a word to parents of married children who are reading this: Under all circumstances, your job is to foster respect between your married children and their spouses. The greatest gift you can give your married child is to give them your full confidence and support and let them know how happy you are with the person they married, even if you would have liked to have a frummer son-in-law or a smarter daughter-in-law. If you notice a *Torah'dige* or fundamental problem, speak to your own Daas Torah for guidance. Otherwise, DO NOT INTERFERE!

Talking to your kids against their spouse, or disrespecting your children-in-law is tearing your children apart. Talking negatively about them will never help and only cause extensive damage to both the couple's relationship and to your relationship with your child.

Hashem should help that we should be able to see the good in each other and to have the clarity to differentiate between emotions and fact, so that we can make the best decisions for ourselves and our families.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: NASO 5781

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