RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

PARSHAS KORACH

NOTHING LOST BY DOING THE RIGHT THING

R' Yerachmiel of Parshischa, a son of the Yid Hakadosh, teaches an important lesson in his sefer *Mei Hadaas*, from the opening words of this week's *parshah*. Citing the *passuk* in Mishlei, *"Bechol derachecha da'eihu* — Know Hashem in all your ways," the Shulchan Aruch writes, *"Shekol ma'asecha yihyu l'shem Shamayim* — Everything you do should be for the sake of Heaven." Even when we do mundane things like eating, sleeping, or earning money, there should always be a higher motive present. It shouldn't be (just) for our self-pleasure. If a person does mundane things with this attitude in mind, the mundane won't distract him during his *avodas Hashem*.

We can also derive this from the words, *"Vayikach Korach*." When a person "takes" for himself and engages in worldly pursuits for his own enjoyment, the result will be *"korach."* Korach can be understood as frozen coldness. Doing things solely for our own pleasure can cool us off when it comes to serving Hashem.

This sounds like a lofty concept and possibly beyond our capabilities. Nonetheless, *sefarim* teach us that simply living our lives *al pi Torah* (eating only kosher and only at times when it's permitted, making *berachos*, eating in the *sukkah*, etc.) introduces the element of *l'shem Shamayim*. A person may be eating because he's hungry and enjoying the food, but if he does so according to the Torah's guidelines, it's still considered somewhat for the sake of Heaven.

In fact, we can learn this concept from Korach as well. Korach had his own ideas for fulfilling *mitzvos*. He felt that a room full of *sefarim* shouldn't need a *mezuzah*. But such a room does need a *mezuzah* because the Torah says so. It's not enough to be a "Jew at heart" and do the right thing based on what we "feel like." We need to be committed to following the Torah and *halachos* as transmitted in Shulchan Aruch. We can't make our own decisions based on what we feel is important or how we believe we should serve Hashem. We need to stick to the rules.

THIS WEEK'S ESSAY IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF

R' SHLOIMA YEHUDA KRIEGER A"H - יאה"צ ב' תמוז

WHO RAISED A FAMILY OF B'NEI TORAH WITH MESIRAS NEFESH IN THE EARLY YEARS IN AMERICA

יהי זכרו ברוך.

FOR MARRIED COUPLES ONLY

QUESTION #1

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

Firstly, I'd like to thank you for all your weekly *shiurim*. I really enjoy them and they help a lot.

This is a personal question. My husband's birthday is coming up and I'd like to do something special. Is *Yiddish-Chassidish* concept of intimacy restricted to when we actually "do it" or is it okay to sort-of play a game that involves being intimate?

Thank you.

QUESTION #2

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

Thank you so very much for the eye-opening *shiurim*.

When I was engaged, I went to a *kallah* teacher. I knew a lot about basic *halachah*, and I also knew that much that I have been exposed to about love between husband and wife is secular. I understood that even though I may want certain things, it's *assur* and that's that. My *kallah* teacher taught me what I'm not allowed to do, a few things that I am allowed to do, and basically let us figure out the rest. As long as I knew that things were *assur* I was perfectly fine not doing them. B"H we live in a very *tzniusdig* community and we don't discuss these things at all.

I consider myself open-minded. I know that there are many fine Yidden that do things differently, but that in our circles, this isn't accepted. However, over the years, I somehow heard from people, sometimes close relatives, that they are more lenient because their teacher was more articulate or better suited to today's generation. I felt really cheated. If they can have certain pleasures, why can't I? Why should I have to miss out just because I didn't know?

Now, after five years of marriage, it's hard to ask for things to change. My husband seems to be satisfied and happy with the way things are, though, to be honest, we've never discussed this. I don't want to be seen as a lustful person.

Once, on vacation I begged my husband to be more lenient with something. He later gave in because his brother told him that "that's how things are done on vacation." The brother didn't tell him any other things he does because thankfully, they don't have such discussions. But I know of other leniencies that are allowed and that other people do.

This may be a petty problem. But I know I'm not the only one with it. I was really hoping you'd give some insight on this issue.

Thanks so much.

QUESTION #3

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

First of all, I'd like to thank you for all your *shiurim* on Torah Anytime. I appreciate that the answers are always first and foremost giving over the halachah and the Torah's perspective.

I am an *ehrliche* woman married for several years and B"H have a good *shalom bayis* and a very kind and devoted husband. After listening to many of the *shiurim* on marriage, specifically those relating to intimacy, I find myself feeling quite confused. I have struggled in this area ever since we got married and am in therapy to hopefully treat it, although it's more of a relationship issue.

In many of your *shiurim* you have reiterated the importance of sticking to the ways set up for us by Chazal in regard to the technicalities of how to be intimate (times, frequency, and other details), and how a person will never gain anything by doing things differently. I wonder if there are ever exceptions. Will it always be better to stick to Chazal's prerequisites for me too? Perhaps in situations like mine where there is a real issue there are exceptions? (I do not refer to doing anything against *halachah*, just less frequency.)

My question really stems from the deep guilt I feel for not being able to provide for my husband in the way I should be despite the fact that I know I am trying my best. I truly hope you can provide some insight and clarity.

ANSWER RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

These are intense and sensitive questions that are important to address. I have been guided by Daas Torah in how to address this topic responsibly and correctly.

Our Torah is a Toras Chaim and teaches us the way to live. It was, is, and always will be relevant. *Lo sehei muchlefes*. To assume that something was only relevant until 50 years ago is not just *kefirah*, but also stupid. Torah is relevant to all marriages, all situations, at all times, in all places, and it will always remain that way.

I'm not a *rav* and it's not my job to tell people what is allowed or not. I'm addressing this topic because it falls under my purview as someone who deals with *shalom bayis* and relationships. Maybe people will have an easier time hearing my perspective on this topic because of that. They may think that a *rav* or *posek* doesn't understand their day-to-day relationship issues (although that is in most cases a misconception).

We know that there are *halachos* of *niddah* and *harchakos* and we don't change any of those for *shalom bayis*. In the same way that the Torah teaches us when and how to be distant from each other, the Torah also tells us when and how to be close to each other.

A *gadol* once said that if people only used their *esrogim* at home, they would take a small, lemon-like specimen and be okay with it; whereas were they to eat the *kezayis maror* in shul, they would take the biggest *shiur* and the sharpest *maror*. But we take our *esrogim* to shul, so we buy big and beautiful ones. The *maror,* on the other hand, we eat at home. So we take the smallest amount of the best tasting kind that we can get away with.

Because there's an aspect of the relationship between a husband and wife that exists only in complete privacy, we sometimes let down our guard and do things because no one will ever find out. However, Chazal teach us that, *"Kol hamechalel Shem Shamayim baseser nifra'in mimenu begalui* — A person who desecrates Hashem's name in private will be held accountable in public." There are consequences for doing things the wrong way even when no one knows about it.

However, there is another principle involved as well. Even within our own four walls, where there's nobody to impress, we should not lose our sensitivity and assume that whatever is technically *muttar* is *lechatchilah* something we should feel free to indulge in. The commandment of "Kedoshim Tiyhu" is explained by the Ramban to mean that a person should not be a *"naval bireshus haTorah* — a disgraceful person within the Torah's boundaries." We shouldn't do despicable things just because they're not explicitly prohibited. Some things are absolutely *assur*, but even within the area of what is *muttar*, there are ways of doing things that do not befit a holy nation.

Any uncertainty here should be clarified with a *daas Torah*. Sometimes, people simply aren't aware how close they can get to the red line once they take the approach that "if it's technically *muttar*, it's fine." And the opposite extreme is also important to clarify. If people are led to believe that certain *chumros* are in fact the entirety of what is *muttar* and later discover that this is not the case, it can lead to disillusionment and cynicism. Whatever the background to this, a person remains responsible for his own actions and for finding out exactly what the Torah requires of him.

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When we understand the goal of intimacy and the point we're trying to reach, it's much easier to accomplish it than when we just follow the rules. (For more about this, listen to the *shiur The Intimate and the Sacred* on TorahAnytime.) When it's all about pleasure, lust, and self-absorption; when it's about what you're getting out of it rather than about building the love and connection in the relationship, it's harder to stick to rules. The rules don't contradict the goal of what the personal relationship is meant to accomplish.

This is a very sacred topic. However, because it's not discussed often, we may end up talking to the people we feel most comfortable with, sometimes a sister, a neighbor, or anyone else, who may not be the right person for this. This is a private and sacred topic that should be discussed with people who are both qualified and have the clarity to know what to take into consideration.

This is not my restriction, it's a Gemara! Chazal teach in Maseches Shabbos that everyone knows why a *kallah* goes under the *chuppah*, but those who talk about it are *menabel es piv*. We just don't talk about these things.

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The common misconception, however, is that the restrictions involved make things more difficult and less enjoyable, or even give the impression that it's inherently bad. None of this is true. The Torah simply provides us with a technical layout for how and when things are done. The more connection, pleasure, and happiness it brings, the better.

Some *sefarim* compare this to eating. We eat at certain times and in certain amounts, and we can and should enjoy our food. There's plenty of flexibility within this structure, but some people, especially children, think that eating whatever they like whenever they like would be much more pleasurable. Mature people, however, recognize that this, like many areas in life, involves a trade-off between short-term benefit and long-term loss.

When it comes to connection between husband and wife the stakes are far higher. Part of connection is feeling love and pleasure and the guidelines are not there to restrict that. But just as eating should ideally be elevated to an experience that is at least partially *l'shem Shamayim*, so too here, and to a far greater extent. The goal is not to enjoy oneself. And the Torah guidelines are not to restrict us — rather, they channel the experience in the correct direction so that it becomes a vehicle for something far greater than instant or self gratification. It's also important to realize that just as the guidelines restrict excess, they prohibit abstention. In fact, if connection does not occur at the times when it should, this is one instance when divorce would be justifiably sanctioned.

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So, what about exceptions? Do they exist? In fact, the Torah does discuss things that are to be taken into consideration, one example being when a husband is about to travel away from home, where this affects various *halachos*. If whatever circumstance a person is dealing with isn't explicitly mentioned, then just as in any other area of *halachah*, this is the time to ask a *she'ilah*. This could be an emotional problem, a physical difficulty, a special occasion, or anything else.

But, just as in any other area of *halachah*, being "in the mood," or not, is not something that we take into account. No one would ever dream of asking a rav if it's okay to have a milky coffee after a fleishig meal because "I feel like I need it." This would even apply if we were seeking out a lenient and legitimate

opinion such as eating dairy a full hour after meat. We live and thrive on structure and *kabbalas ol*.

This is even more applicable in this area, because we're not acting in isolation. One spouse's "mood" affects the other spouse, but the Torah's guidelines remain clear. Even for the person who wishes that they were not obligated when they "don't feel like it," it's unlikely that they would want to give their spouse carte blanche to do the same.

This of course doesn't at all mean that we simply act as automatons and lock our feelings away. Problems with emotional states should be discussed and hopefully resolved. To the extent that we can control our moods, we are obligated to do so, and our spouses should help out. (In fact, the Torah makes this quite clear.)

I want to mention another very important thing about exceptions, one that I heard an Adam Gadol cry out about on the related topic of "family planning." If you are dealing with an exception, even with the guidance of *daas Torah*, don't share that with anyone. This topic is not meant to be shared with others. If you were given a *heter* for something and share the fact with other people, you're eroding their sensitivity. If they have a very loving and meaningful relationship in a Torah way, let them.

And if *chalilah* you "found yourself a *heter*" for something, *kal v'chomer* you should keep quiet about whatever you're doing. R' Kalman Krohn says that worse than people making their own decisions about birth control, is the fact that they share doing so with others. If you're doing things right, be proud of it. If your husband is doing things right, be proud of it too — and of him. If you're not doing things right, keep quiet and don't be so proud of it.

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Unfortunately, sometimes people think that their *shalom bayis* is suffering because they're sticking to the rules and not able to have whatever they want when they want it. It's not true. I can tell you from my experience having worked with people who got the wrong advice from people who weren't *ehrlich*, IT DOESN'T HELP! You can quote me on this. I saw so many people who were misguided or experimented on their own. It doesn't help!

If not having rules for intimacy was helpful, then anyone who isn't leading a Torah life should be happier. But we know that's not the case — far from it. (I know people question that statement, but I know it to be true.) Worse still, going beyond the Torah's guidelines in this area can lead to a lack of respect between husband and wife. In all my years of experience, I've never once seen a situation that improved when people started doing things differently from what the Torah says.

That's not to say that we follow the Torah's guidelines because we gain from them. We do so because that's what the Torah says. All the same, it's important to be aware of the very real benefits. If you're not doing things according to Torah guidelines, you may want to work on getting yourself onto a healthier track. It might help you in *many* areas of your relationship. If a husband and wife are brave enough to discuss with each other whether they're on the right track according to *halachah*, it could lead to vast improvements in their relationship.

Once a couple decides to take that step and clarify exactly what they should and shouldn't be doing, it's so important to make sure that the source of their guidance is one-hundred-percent *daas Torah* (just as they would if they were asking a *she'ilah* about anything else).

I once read a Q&A column in a paper that didn't have proper oversight. A person had asked why we don't make an *Al Hagefen* after making *Havdalah*. (We actually do say *Al Hagefen* after *Havdalah*.) Whoever it was wrote a multifaceted answer explaining why *Havdalah* is different and doesn't require the *berachah*.

Another example: A man once told a rav that he would never eat *matzos* that were baked Erev Pesach. He felt that it wasn't possible to be careful enough at such a busy time. The rav told him, "If not for the fact that the Shulchan Aruch says otherwise, you would have a great point!"

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To summarize my answer to the three questions: Being intimate is sacred and not a game. Doing things the right way is commendable and shouldn't make you feel cheated in any way. Always ask a *she'ilah* when in doubt, and know and internalize that treating this area as sacred will only benefit you. And for those who don't know, diminishing frequency is a violation of *halachah*. If you ever have to deal with an exception, discuss it with a Torah authority.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557**
or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**

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please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

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Thank You & Tizku Lmitzvos!