

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

WHEN, WHAT, HOW (AND WHETHER) TO SAY...

This week's *parshah* features one of the three special qualities of Sarah Imeinu — that there was a *brachah* in the dough that she baked into bread. Rashi in Parshas Toldos explains that the *brachah* in Sarah's dough could not be merely that a small amount of dough was sufficient to bake a large amount of *challah*. After all, Avraham Avinu was an extremely wealthy man, and for him, such a *brachah* was insignificant. Rather, Rashi reveals, the *brachah* was that the baked bread always looked wonderful.

The Imrei Pinchas elaborates on the greatness of this *brachah*, and explains that how the *challos* come out depends on the woman who bakes them. When she's happy and fulfilled, the *challos* come out beautiful and fragrant. When she's feeling upset or frustrated, the opposite occurs.

The Bnei Yissaschar mentions something similar, that can be observed with the Shabbos candles: A special Shabbos atmosphere causes the same amount of oil or wax to burn for longer than it would mid-week.

It seems that we can actually notice, if we're looking, how the atmosphere in the home affects not only everyone's moods but even physical objects and the way we experience them.

Knowing how to harness our power to affect our surroundings for the good is essential if we want to achieve great things in the world.

Thank you

R' Abba Weiss

for sponsoring this week's essay!

May you have much Nachas from your children

Parshas
Chayei Sarah
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Dear Rabbi Gruen,

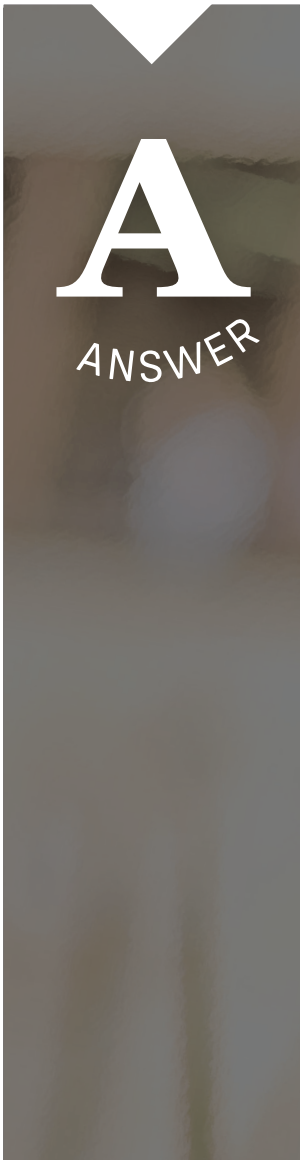
I really enjoy listening to your *shiurim* and the responses you give to the questions people ask you — I gain so much insight and *chizuk*.

This is my question: *Baruch Hashem* I was blessed with a wonderful and supportive husband who is so good to me. However, there are a number of roadblocks pertaining to Yiddishkeit that prevent me from being happy and content in our relationship.

For instance, when my husband doesn't go to *daven* with a *minyan*, is it my place to say something and remind him to go to shul? Or, what about the fact that I think he should get a filter on his phone? On the one hand, I don't want to be his police-lady. On the other hand, I want my husband to conduct himself in an *ehrliche* manner and I want to do my job as an *eizer k'negdo* and bring out the best in him.

Basically, my question is, how should I be the best and most supportive and influential wife without being a police-lady or too stifling that could cause, *chas v'shalom*, my husband to go the wrong way? When do I voice what I think is the right thing to do? And when do I just *daven* and leave everything in Hashem's hands?

I eagerly await your reply and thank you.



Being that you mention that you eagerly await my reply, and since the issues you raise are important, I want to point out that due to the volume of questions I receive, it can take several months for me to answer. It's a shame to wait that long for something important. Aside from that practical consideration, everyone needs to have a rav or mentor who is familiar with their situation and can give them customized advice.

In your case, the questions you ask are variations on a theme that so many people struggle with. This question of whether, when, and how to influence one's spouse is constantly being asked by both husbands and wives.

The essence of what you're asking is, "When I see someone doing something that isn't right, how should I react?" In fact, we encounter this question a great deal with our children, and the approach isn't so different when it comes to a husband.

The first and most fundamental answer to this question is that you should certainly "care." No one should ever be apathetic when seeing another Yid, no matter who, heading in the wrong direction. *Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh* is a principle that should guide us in all our relationships.

Therefore, if anyone ever suggests to you that you should try to care less about how your husband behaves, don't heed their advice. We should care about everyone, and care most about those closest to us, not less, even if that causes us pain.

Furthermore, the person closest to yourself is actually you. We are not only permitted to care about ourselves — we *should* care about ourselves. You should not discount your own feelings and the impact that the behavior of others has on you. It's natural to want to feel good, and even to want to be perceived well in the eyes of others. It's unrealistic to try not to care about one's image.

This doesn't mean that we should be solely guided by our feelings. In any situation, we need to accurately assess what's going on and take all factors into account. Sometimes, we need the help of an objective third party to do this.

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In your letter, you mentioned two issues that are quite dissimilar. Not *davening* with a *minyan* is far from ideal, but it could be due to laziness and just a temporary phase. Unfiltered internet usage is potentially far more damaging. These are probably just examples of behaviors you are concerned about; my point is just that lumping everything into a single category of "no good" can cause confusion regardless of whether you decide to take action or ignore things. It's important to distinguish between what needs addressing urgently, what can wait, and what shouldn't be addressed at all.

Another point worth examining is where all this is coming from. There are many possible causes of such issues and knowing which applies makes a big difference when deciding whether or how to respond. Is your husband simply too apathetic about *Yiddishkeit* to make the extra effort to get up early enough to go to shul? Or is he quietly but actively rebelling against *Yiddishkeit*, and resenting what he feels are unpleasant restrictions on his life?

Sometimes, one spouse who seems to be going downhill has actually "changed lanes" and attached himself to a different *kehillah* and approach to life. That doesn't necessarily mean that you have to simply accept this, but understanding what is motivating him can give insight into what's happening and what to be concerned about.

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It's also important to differentiate between issues that affect others, and those that are mostly between your husband and Hashem. An issue that involves or directly affects your children falls into the first category and in most cases, you are not only permitted but actually obligated to address it, even if you would prefer not to.

Regarding issues that are entirely in your husband's province, not only do you not have the right to intervene, but doing so will only cause damage. While not going to shul consistently does impact children, issues such as which shul to go to are generally not the wife's "business." After all, he's the one who's going.

If a spouse feels especially troubled by something the other is doing even though it doesn't directly impact him or her, there are ways of dealing with this, but one must tread very carefully in order not to make things worse.

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With all that said, you're right that you shouldn't be your husband's police-lady or *mashgiach*. That's not your role; it's not what Hashem requires of you. Moreover, it won't work. Even if you feel intensely that, "I have to make sure that my husband…" this doesn't mean that your best efforts will have a positive outcome.

Even when it comes to our children, we can only do our best to be *mechanech* them, pointing them in the right direction and *davening* that they reach their goal. We can't actually pick them up and carry them there.

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And, it's important to remember that it's not your responsibility. Your husband has to make his own decisions in life. If he makes the wrong ones, he is responsible, even if someone else encouraged him to do so.If you're not encouraging him to make poor choices, you have no reason to feel responsible for what he freely chooses to do—especially if you're doing your best to influence him positively.

Therefore, if there's something you can do that you know *will* positively influence him, then you should certainly do it, while remembering that the converse is also true — just as there is a *mitzvah* to say something that will bring about a good outcome, there is a *mitzvah* to refrain from saying something that will not.

In fact, the Torah takes this idea even further. At times, when our well-meaning words will not have a positive effect and the person will persist in wrongdoing, it is better to refrain from correcting them — "better that they sin unintentionally than intentionally."

Knowing when each approach applies can be tricky and you should certainly consult with your rav or mentor. You need to know not only what you can realistically achieve, but also how to step back and not feel responsible for the outcome.

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Practically speaking, if, for example, you know that your husband responds well to a gentle reminder to *daven* with a *minyan*, and is more likely to exert himself if you give him a word of *chizuk* with a nice smile, then that's what you should and must do. Withholding the necessary encouragement and praise is wrong, even if your husband should do the right thing without it.

You also shouldn't give up without trying in areas where you believe or assume that your words won't help. For example, have you ever simply asked your husband (gently, of course), to put a filter on his phone? It's surprising how many people don't even take such a basic step, thinking that "it won't help anyway." Who knows — maybe your husband assumes that you don't care either way and would respond positively to a gentle but direct approach in this area.

But more often than not, it's not what you say but how, and that starts not with the message itself but with how you package it. First, you need to set the scene and enhance the atmosphere. You describe a basically strong relationship with your husband, which is wonderful. Now you can build on that and strengthen the emotional bond between you. This will naturally give you more influence over the outcome.

Then, finally, when you do make a direct approach, make it with a smile, with a gentle tone of voice, with genuine caring for his and your entire family's wellbeing. Don't be afraid to tell your husband how you feel, but do it in a positive way. Instead of telling him how terrible it makes you feel when he *davens* at home, or scrolls on his unfiltered phone, tell him how proud you feel when he goes to shul, and how happy and secure you'll feel knowing that he protected his device.

Over time, you'll learn which types of approaches and which words and gestures are most appreciated and have the most impact. Even if it's only a smile, then that's what you'll do.

And, keep going, even when, *b'ezras Hashem*, the issues are resolved. Your warmth and encouragement should be given freely and constantly. Don't turn your smiles and good words into tools to manipulate your husband into doing what you think is right — even if you *are* right.

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Remember that the atmosphere in your home is affected by you as well, not just your husband. Therefore, you have to be *ehrlich* in all areas pertaining to you. Don't overdo it in order to put pressure on your husband. But be the best Yid you can be, and do it happily.

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Sometimes, what's right can seem obvious and is. Other areas are more complex and we need to consult Daas Torah on how to proceed. I can't stress enough how every family needs to have someone grounded in Torah to consult with. It should be someone who knows them and their individual circumstances and can guide them in the way that suits them best.



It might be a way that doesn't suit others, and that others find strange or altogether reject. That shouldn't bother you. Daas Torah is uniquely individual, and when it is given, it should be embraced with complete sincerity.

On the *passuk*, "*Lech lecha*..." the Beis Avraham notes that each person needs to go in his own direction. Even the question of what is a *mitzvah* and what is an *aveirah* is individual.

Sometimes, your rav will tell you that contrary to what you might have thought, *shalom bayis* is more important than pressuring or persuading a spouse to do something differently. Only someone firmly based in Torah can know where a *minhag* or *chumra* should give way, and where a different approach is needed.

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Above all, don't give up. Believe in your husband's potential and focus on helping him to attain it. The Torah tells us, "*Chachmas nashim bonsah beisah* — women's wisdom builds her home." Your genuine caring for your husband enables you to have a profound impact on him, when you direct your efforts with Torah clarity, *middos tovos*, and warmth.

Remember that your husband is far more than the composite of his challenges. You describe him as "wonderful and supportive and so good to you," and that remains true regardless of how he behaves in certain areas. Keep them in a separate compartment in your mind, and focus on the person he is, not the few things he does that trouble you.

Do what you can to build him and to build your home, and feel good about the efforts you are investing. Your efforts, your smiles, your encouragement are bringing light into your home, a light that will *b'ezras Hashem* illuminate you all and guide you to a genuinely *ehrliche* and wonderful life.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: CHAYEI SARAH 5786

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557** or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**
To subscribe to receive the weekly essay, please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org