

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

LETTING HASHEM IN

Many commentaries ask why, when Moshe Rabbeinu is told to go to Pharaoh's palace, Hashem says "come to Pharaoh" and not "go" to him. The answer provided by the Kotzker Rebbe *zy"a* is that one never leaves Hashem's presence; the entire universe is full of His glory and wherever a Yid goes, Hashem is there with him.

This is true not only regarding where we are, but also regarding what we are doing at any given moment — because we are in Hashem's presence no matter what we are engaged in. Anything we do can be elevated as a *mitzvah* if we have the right *kavannah*, to do *ratzon Hashem*. Intention is such a big part of determining whether what we do is right that even something that is ostensibly a *mitzvah* but is done without the right *kavannah* (or worse, with the wrong *kavannah)* could be considered an *aveirah*.

A person can eat and drink in order to serve Hashem and his eating and drinking become *mitzvos*. A person can also serve his parent delicious food but with a sour expression on his face and while making unpleasant remarks, and his "*kibbud av va'eim*" becomes an *aveirah*, as the Gemara explains. This is what makes Yiddishkeit unique; everything depends on *kavannah*, on having the right intentions. It's not only what you do that counts; it's why and how as well.

Similarly, even when doing *mitzvos*, we must take great care that they should not come at others' expense. If you want to help your neighbor, fine — but check first with your wife to make sure she's also fine with it. If you want to do a *chessed* for a local *gemach*, no problem — but first make sure that your husband doesn't suffer for it. Whenever you're considering doing something, remember to take the broader picture into account.

"*Bo el Paroh*" means finding Hashem everywhere, even in areas where you weren't expecting to find *mitzvos* and *ma'asim tovim.* It also means making sure you are really finding Him there — by ensuring His will is being carried out correctly. When your aim is to enhance your *shalom bayis* and bring Hashem's presence into your home, that is truly a fulfillment of "*Bo el Paroh*" wherever you are and in whatever you do.

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Parshas
Bo
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Dear Rabbi Gruen, I wonder if you can help me with a certain question.

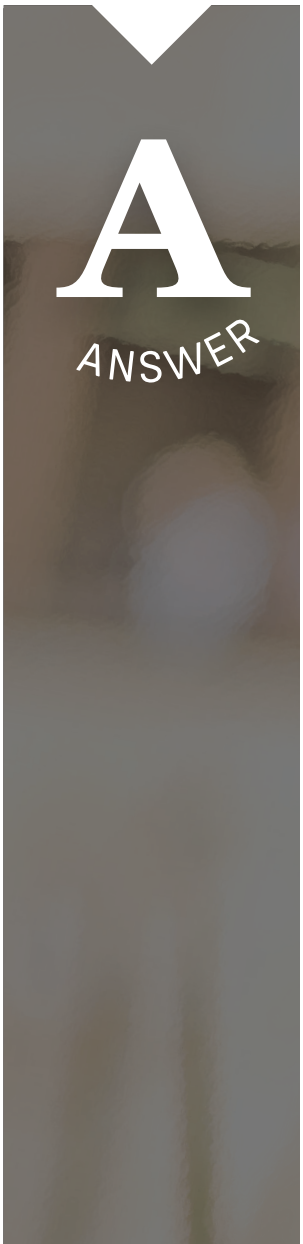
I learn all day long in *kollel*, and I need a lot of sleep to be able to function properly during the day. However, the baby wakes up a lot in the night and needs to be held and comforted.

My wife often goes to bed very late in any case, and sometimes she's still up when the baby starts to cry and she sits with him and holds him until he calms down and goes back to sleep. Very often, when this happens, she says, "Why do you get to sleep while I have to stay up with the baby?"

I would like to know what the right thing to do is. I can't get through the whole day if I don't get enough sleep. Is this something we should share or is she more responsible for this since she's the mother? (In fact, usually she does take care of the baby during the nights.)

Also, since I learn all day, I'd like to know, when it comes to sorting out paperwork, paying bills or ordering a passport etc., whether she should be the one to take care of such things because I'm learning, or is that not necessarily the case?

Thank you



Before answering this specific question, I would like to make a general point. Most of the questions I receive only present one side of the story, and I try to account for that by examining the question from various angles. Even so, I often get comments and feedback from people who either know more about a situation than I am privy to, or who are in similar situations with crucial details that differ. Obviously I can't give practical or appropriate guidance without hearing a complete story, which is why I try to use these essays to share ideas and offer suggestions, rather than to promote a specific course of action or give one-on-one advice.

Here, however, not even one entire side is being presented, as there are so many essential details missing that it's really impossible to give more than the most general advice. Relevant and necessary details to accompany this question would include whether the wife works or is at home all day; whether there are other children at home as well; whether she gets the opportunity to take a nap during the day; how many years this husband has been in *kollel*; her attitude (enthusiasm, resentment, acceptance etc.) regarding his being in *kollel* full-time; and more. Without these details, the most that can be said conclusively in answer to this question is that in general, learning in *kollel* all day long is not sufficient justification to refuse to help out on occasion with a baby who cries at night. Furthermore, unless a wife explicitly confirms that she is happy that her husband doesn't help out at home, he should indeed be helping where and when necessary.

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When discussing a problem, it's very common for a person to present it as a fact to be dealt with rather than a question to be debated. We are constantly rationalizing our weaknesses and justifying problematic behaviors: "I have to stop off at my mother's on my way home from work every evening to have a snack. If I'm too hungry when I get home then I get angry with my wife. I know she doesn't like me coming home late but…" or, "I need a cleaning lady to come every day even though we can't really afford it. I can't take it when the floors aren't sparkling — my mother's just like that too."

What a person often doesn't realize in such cases is that his explanations are only excuses. People also tend to assume that when they present things this way, the person listening is nodding along in agreement. If no one is suffering as a result of

such behavior then perhaps one can get away with it, but if other people are suffering, or even just unhappy with the way things are, then often the right thing to do is change and correct the situation, not justify it and expect others to accommodate it.

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In this particular case, we have a *kollel yungerman* who needs a good night's sleep in order to learn properly the next day. On the one hand, he has a point. It's often true that although a person can function adequately at work even after a broken night, learning Torah demands more focus, more alertness, and a more rested mind. That said, everyone needs adequate sleep in order to function, and just because a person can push himself through a day of work on little sleep (even if he can somehow manage to remain calm and good spirits) doesn't mean it's smart to do so, for many reasons. Needing a good night's sleep is hardly a rare trait. We all need sleep, with some variation, and while learning Torah does demand more mental effort than the average occupation, that applies to plenty of jobs too.

Furthermore, specifically regarding *limmud haTorah*, there's an additional point to consider. While it's wonderful to be able to learn Torah with *harchavas hadaas*, after a good night's sleep and with no worries in general, a *kollel yungerman* should be prepared to exert himself to learn, and sometimes that means learning even when he's tired, or has a headache, or has financial concerns. If someone has a *chasunah* until late at night, should he get up late the next day and not learn? Often the right thing to do is to go to *kollel*, drink an extra cup of coffee, and learn while standing up if you're falling asleep. Those people who wait for the ideal conditions before sitting down to learn often don't get around to learning all that much.

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Now, while a *kollel yungerman* should be committed to *limmud haTorah*, a commitment that applies even when he's tired or sick, as a husband and father he has other commitments, too, and they are not necessarily any less important. A *bachur* in *yeshivah* can sit and learn undisturbed — how wonderful — but getting married and establishing a family is certainly wonderful too, and also a huge responsibility.

When a young man gets married, he signs up for a different type of life from what he has known until then. A husband is obligated to bring *parnassah* for his family; a father is obligated to concern himself with the *chinuch* of his children. These are *mitzvos* that cannot be set aside for *limmud haTorah*, in most cases.

There are very few *kollel yungeleit* who learn exclusively and never take time off for *chasunos*, for example, or any other reason, and often such men are the exceptions who have an *eishes chayil* who signed up for complete sacrifice to support a husband whose life is Torah. But if you are a member of the majority who does sometimes do something other than learn, and you also want your wife to accept that you cannot possibly take off sleep time to rock a baby "because tomorrow I have to learn," then you can probably expect your wife to justifiably be somewhat less than happy about your attitude, to say the least.

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Having the right attitude is really what this question is all about, and that applies to wives just as much as to husbands. When a baby cries at night and needs to be rocked back to sleep, that's hard — and it's also part of being a parent. Sometimes, a mother is up late shmoozing on the phone with a friend or listening to a *shiur*, but when the baby cries, it's still frustrating because we all like to have things on our own terms.

It can be even more frustrating when you're rocking a baby for ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, half an hour... and meanwhile your husband is fast asleep. It's very easy and perhaps even natural to become resentful; much better than becoming resentful is simply asking for help before difficult feelings overcome you.

Approaching things with a more constructive attitude instead of hinting or complaining is likely to lead to a more positive outcome: "I know you need your sleep, and it makes me so happy that you're in *kollel*. It's just that I'm really tired after a long day; perhaps you could rock the baby just for half an hour while I get some sleep? If she's still not settled then, you can wake me up."

There's no need to feel guilty about asking for help when you need it. As noted above, very few *kollel yungeleit* do nothing but learn; similarly, very few *kollel* wives take care of absolutely everything so that their husbands can exclusively learn. That said, the general pattern of a *kollel* family will usually include a slant toward the wife taking care of most aspects of household life — happily and willingly.

Reaching the point of being genuinely happy to let your husband sleep while you yourself go without is not easy. After all, to *fargin* someone is a very difficult thing to do, so difficult that it's a *middah* only available to Yidden — there isn't even a word for it in English.

No one is obligated to *fargin* another person, but it's wonderful if you can. If you're struggling to keep your eyes open as you rock the baby for what seems like forever in the middle of the night, how amazing if you can *fargin* your husband his sleep, regardless of whether he's learning in *kollel* or going to work the next day.

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Of course, it's much easier to *fargin* another person when you understand why. Having a husband who learns Torah all day is a tremendous *zechus*, and if a wife can keep this in mind while letting her husband sleep, it will make things easier for her. It's such a shame when *kollel* wives, who make very real sacrifices, don't fully appreciate the

value of what they and their husbands are doing. In almost all cases, Gedolei Torah had supportive wives behind them, wives who had *mesirus nefesh* so that their husbands could learn and who appreciated the value of this particular way of life.

Maybe your husband isn't a *rosh yeshivah* or *maggid shiur*. It really doesn't matter, because simply learning Torah supports the entire world and the *zechus* is for both husband and wife, equally. When one keeps that in mind, it's easier to rock a baby and let your husband sleep.

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Just as a wife's appreciation for her husband's learning will go a long way to smoothing over the difficulties, a husband's appreciation for his wife's *mesirus nefesh* will make a huge difference in her ability to meet the demands of this way of life. A *kollel yungerman* should never assume that since his wife knew he was intending to learn full-time when they got married (and even wanted that), it's only natural that she should take care of everything else. If a husband sees that his wife is becoming resentful, this should be a warning sign for him that he needs to show more appreciation.

No one enjoys being taken for granted, even for a good cause. Even if you are learning Torah all day long, it still doesn't entitle you to anything; in fact, it obligates you even more to be an embodiment of *middos tovos*. So, if you notice that your wife is looking exhausted, you don't have to wait to be asked — you should offer your help. "I can rock the baby for a half hour if you like; I can see you're tired."

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The question of who should be doing what is a big area of contention in many families. There are very few things the Torah actually specifies as the responsibility of either husband or wife, but plenty of couples have all kinds of ideas about how to divide up tasks, often derived from what they saw in their parents' homes. This can lead to a lot of confusion and frustration.



For instance, while many husbands do take out the garbage, it's not written anywhere that this is the way things should be. Nonetheless, plenty of wives will insist, "Of course my husband should take out the garbage! My father did too, and so do all my brothers. The garbage pail is heavy and it smells terrible..." If you want your husband to take out the garbage, fine. But ask him nicely. Don't expect it of him, don't take it for granted, and try to remember to thank him. The same applies for all the things husbands assume wives should do, such as waiting for the children to get off the bus (when both parents are technically able to do so). Where does it say it *has* to be the mother?

Sometimes, it can be hard to thank another person for doing something for you, if they don't do it exactly the way you like it. There are mothers who will criticize the way their husbands learn with the children: "That's not how my father learned with my brothers..." "That's not the right way to do it..." There are also husbands who are critical of the way their wives keep house: "You should have soaked that stain first before washing..." Whenever someone is doing something for you, don't criticize, especially if it's in an area which you see as their responsibility in any case. Let go, appreciate, and see the good. If it's truly necessary to say something, be sensitive about how you phrase your request, and remember (and make it obvious) that you're asking, not demanding.

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Married life is full of details that we didn't necessarily anticipate, and full of challenges that seem to demand of us to be *mevater* on what we think is more important. There's nothing more important than building a Jewish home and transmitting Torah and *avodas Hashem* to the next generation. Don't get stuck on the details. When we work on consciously bringing Hashem into our homes, we start to see things differently and realize that it's easier than we thought to create a place of *hashra'as haShechinah*.

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