RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS

FOR THE HOME

PARSHAS BEHAALOSCHA

INVEST IN HAPPINESS FOR THE GREATEST RETURNS

In this week's *parshah*, Hashem commands Moshe, "*Kach es haLevi'im besoch Bnei Yisroel vetiharta osam* — take the Leviim from among Bnei Yisroel and cleanse them." Rashi explains that "take the Leviim" means to talk to them, to take them using inspiring words, telling them about their privileged tasks.

The Imrei Yosef explains that this is also a general lesson that applies to anyone looking to influence others to Torah and serving Hashem. Hashem is instructing every leader and indeed anyone in a position where he can influence others, to use that influence to inspire others to do better. And the way to achieve that is by making it easy for them, by telling them how fortunate they are to be able to serve Hashem.

You can tell people that they *have to* do something. Or you can tell them how *lucky* they are to be able to do it. Both methods may work, but the latter is preferable, and usually brings longer-lasting results too.

When it comes to *shalom bayis* or *chinuch*, you also want to "take them with inspiring words." You can command or threaten, or you can talk nicely. Tell your spouse how happy they can make you if... or your child how lucky he is to be able to... You'll be able to accomplish so much more.

This doesn't only apply to *ruchniyus*. There are so many things that could be accomplished more easily by arousing a good feeling in the other person for doing whatever it is, rather than demanding or debating about how right you are for asking or expecting it.

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THIS WEEK'S ESSAY IS DEDICATED TO THE LOVING MEMORY OF
SHLOMO ELIEZER BEN CHAIM GOLDMAN, YAHRZEIT CHOF SIVAN
BY HIS PROUD AND LOVING CHILDREN

QUESTION

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

Thank you for your *shiurim* and for putting things in the right perspective.

I want to clarify that my question is about a "small problem" compared to what people go through. I am grateful for what I have, and do not want to complain. I just want to know how to go about this the right way.

My husband is very generous by nature. One of the ways it comes out is by buying presents often. He does it all the way, buying the most expensive and best of whatever he's buying. He also buys "little things" like a cake for Shabbos, or a big flower arrangement for Yom Tov. He will also sometimes buy fancy food when I am on a diet.

Again, I am not trying to complain. I know it's coming from a very good place. However, my husband is in *kollel*, and I work VERY hard for *parnassah*. Because of that, and because by nature I am stingier and more careful, I don't usually *fargin* myself any of these things. I find it very hard when he takes all the hard-earned money to buy lavish expensive presents!

For example, I once complained about finding some aspects of housework difficult and said, "I wish I could have an appliance that would do it for me." I did not mean it seriously! We live on a *kollel* budget and it would be an absolute luxury. Besides, my apartment is too small for it. My husband researched what would be the best appliance to help me and one day it arrived at my house.

While I greatly appreciate that, it is an utter luxury for someone living on our budget. If I had bought it, I would have tried to find the smallest and cheapest one.

Maybe, since my husband isn't the one working for the money, he deals with it more liberally. Is there any way that I can tell my husband, without hurting him, that I really appreciate it all, but perhaps he shouldn't spend so much money, since we can't really afford it? Is it okay to ask him not to buy expensive food when I try to buy healthy and on sale?

I do not want to crush my husband! I do not want to tell him to stop buying presents, and I also buy him presents! While I appreciate it, and it does help for *shalom bayis,* sometimes I feel resentful that I'm working so hard for the money, and now I have to spend it because I don't want to insult my husband!

Is there any way to do this without crushing him? I know that a husband needs to be a *mashpia*, and I don't want to take that away.

Thank you very much!

ANSWER

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

The writer is actually acknowledging that her problem isn't all that big, yet I feel it definitely deserves to be addressed responsibly. Each person's difficulty is a problem to them, as I have mentioned in the past. When something is emotionally challenging in a relationship, it's not petty. This doesn't mean that you should make a big deal out of everything, and it's something to be admired when a person recognizes that while the problem is real to them, it's not a major issue and they can still thank Hashem for what they do have. But we should never look at other people's challenges through that lens. In the past, I've shared the joke about the man who responded to his friend's complaints with: "It could have been worse... it could have happened to me..."

Sometimes people are embarrassed to talk about their problems because they know people will think they're being petty. Don't be ashamed. It's okay when something feels very real to you. Moreover, if you get into the habit of dismissing things you're going through because "it's really not such a big deal," the results are unlikely to be positive. Ignoring our feelings is not usually a good idea, especially when they end up exploding in any case when a spouse does that thing that "shouldn't really bother me" just one more time and we lose it.

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Before I address the specifics of this question, I'd like to mention something that applies to every question

addressed in a public forum, which is that missing information can affect how appropriate or helpful the advice is. In this case, while the writer has described her distress at the situation, she hasn't mentioned the practical side of things — are they in debt due to her husband's spending? Are there times when she doesn't have money to buy basics because her husband bought something she feels was unnecessary? If the answer to either of these questions is "yes," the advice I would give would be different. For the purposes of my answer here, however, I'm assuming that's not the case.

Let me also throw in a word to the many people reading this who may be thinking, "If only I had a husband like him, someone who tries to make me feel good and splurges on gifts for me." It's definitely more common for people to be dealing with "not enough" gifts than "too many," and it's important for people in such situations to reflect on the reality this woman is describing and to recognize that what they're imagining as an ideal situation may not actually be so ideal at all. According to *halachah*, a husband is required to provide *what he has to* for his wife. He is not required to provide her with whatever she wants *even* if "everyone" has it. Recently, a woman sent me a letter complaining that her husband doesn't buy flowers for Shabbos or her birthday or any other occasion. A husband doesn't *have to* buy flowers for his wife. It's not necessarily a Yiddishe idea. It's allowed, and I buy flowers sometimes myself. But it shouldn't be regarded as "that's how it has to be." Therefore, if a woman would like flowers, there's nothing wrong with asking for them. She can even buy them for herself. But expecting them is wrong as well as harmful.

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Now to the letter-writer. One of the things you wrote is that you don't want to crush your husband because you know he needs to be the *mashpia*. That's a very good point. It doesn't mean that you should deplete your bank account, but allowing your husband to feel good about being the *mashpia* is *worth* money. You might have preferred him to find a different way of being a *mashpia*, but doing your best to accept that this is his way of doing things will help you to appreciate it and in the end, it's worth it if it makes him feel good.

When people ask me whether they should buy something a child wants, I often tell them that it's cheaper than therapy. Of course, I'm not talking about spoiling children or buying anything detrimental. But sometimes, you may be making a child feel deprived and resentful and you could end up sending him for therapy for $250 an hour when the "something" would have cost you far less. This idea applies to marriage as well. If spending money on something will reliably make your husband feel good and improve your *shalom bayis,* it's a good investment, even if the "something" isn't what you would have chosen yourself. If you look at the purchases as "buying *shalom bayis*" or "buying self-confidence for my husband," you may be able to see them in a different light.

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I also want to point out the Torah perspective that when a wife brings money into the home, it belongs to her husband. When your husband is spending "your" hard-earned money, he's really spending his own money. A woman doesn't *have* to bring in money. It's the husband's obligation to provide, and if the wife doesn't feel up to working, they should discuss it, because it's his obligation, and his responsibility. That means that he's the one who should be concerned about using the money wisely, not you.

In theory, just as it's not your business to make sure that your husband is using his time well in *kollel*, it's not your business to make sure that he's spending money wisely. Of course, if you are worried, it's something to discuss, but from the correct perspective.

You mention that you're working "VERY hard" and that you're "stingier and more careful" by nature. There's nothing wrong with being more careful. You don't have to justify your nature. You're allowed to have a different nature. It's okay to see things differently and express how you feel about it. Don't start to rationalize about your nature and your upbringing. It won't change anything or anyone. Simply state how you feel about it, while being flexible about understanding other people's tendencies.

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There are situations that are more severe, where a spouse suffers from a spending problem, although this doesn't seem to be the case here. There are all kinds of help for people who are chronic overspenders, and the issue certainly needs to be addressed responsibly. However, in most cases, when a husband spends money on his wife, he simply wants to make her feel good.

Maybe "buying gifts" is your husband's love language. I mention love languages quite a lot, and it definitely speaks to people — although much of the time, they're focused on, "What's my love language?" rather than, "What's his?" Again, there's nothing wrong with asking your spouse for what you would like, as long as you do it the right way. But it's even better if you're also trying to figure out what your spouse's love language is, and learning to appreciate it when they "speak" in that language.

If your husband's language is about specifically spending *a lot* of money to buy you gifts, you can discuss that with him. But it's also possible that what he really wants is appreciation, warmly expressed, and that's something you can give him. You can also be more proactive. You can ask him for small gifts, and tell him that more than anything, you appreciate the fact that he's thinking about you.

Often, when I help people dealing with challenging situations (whether with a spouse or a child), I recommend that they ask the other person in the difficult relationship for a small favor. It sounds counterintuitive, because

people find it hard to believe that asking even more of someone who is already acting in a problematic way is going to be the answer. However, even when someone isn't contributing positively to a relationship, subconsciously, they still want to feel needed. You can accomplish so much by saying, "Would you please do this for me? You don't have to, but it would mean a lot to me." This works much better than saying, "This needs to be done. Please do it." In your case, you could say to your husband, "I appreciate so much that you like buying things for me. If you're passing the store, maybe you could get me an ice cream? It will mean so much to me." The most expensive ice cream only costs a few dollars. And if he buys it for you and you express your appreciation for it, you'll have given him what he needed, you're getting what you needed, and it's not costing so much.

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Going forward, you can have a discussion about this. Don't try to discuss budgeting right after he's bought you a gift. Find a calm moment and let your husband know that you would like to discuss something with him. Open a discussion about the idea of budgeting. Budgeting is not personal. It's not about him being irresponsible. You don't even have to aim to agree about the importance of budgeting. It also has nothing to do with the fact that you're earning the money. It's simply about you and your husband as a couple and how to utilize the income you have. You can and should express your feelings about it — but make sure it's your *feelings*, and not "what's right" or "what everyone else does."

There are many ways of introducing the subject. "On this idea of budgeting and saving, it would mean so much to me and make me feel comfortable if..." "I would feel more secure about the future if we could..." There are many possible ways to budget and put away money and feel good about it. You can even say, "I do appreciate the expensive gifts you've given me. I hope we'll always be able to do that. I would feel so much better if we could budget and know how much we'll be spending and when." These two are not a contradiction.

When a person is a spender by nature, any money they have in their pocket will be spent. Part of budgeting is deciding how much money should be in that pocket. Make sure you discuss this, without becoming condescending or critical about your husband's spending habits.

You can also hint about your working hard for the money without making him feel stupid. "I work hard for the money, and that's probably why it would make me feel so much better if we work with a budget and some of it gets put away."

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However you go about this, remember that the conversation you have shouldn't even be about the gifts. It's simply a conversation you're entitled to have, expressing how you feel and accepting that he feels differently and that both ways of seeing things are valid. Involve your husband in the conversation by asking him for his budgeting ideas without imposing yours on him. If following his lead in money matters is going to result in a happier and more confident husband (which will indirectly result in a happier and more confident wife, in most cases), see it as a *shalom bayis* expense. If he wants to save 25% while you want to save 40%, the 15% difference may be worth it for a better marriage.

Your husband has a need to spend money and that gives you many opportunities to express your appreciation. You can still gain the security you need by calmly discussing the idea of budgeting. And if he does start to save money, don't take it for granted. It's a big challenge for him and you should realize that — and if you show your appreciation, you may find that he'll get the good feeling he's looking for in another way.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

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