

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

SHARING HAPPINESS AND SUCCESS

Collecting money to support the Volozhiner Yeshivah was a grueling job involving long weeks of travel through towns and villages. One day, one of the *yeshivah's meshulachim* arrived back in Volozhin and was received by the Rosh Yeshivah, R' Chaim Volozhiner *ztz"l.*

"Many people donated generously," he reported. "However, a certain *gvir* categorically refused to give me so much as a ruble. He told me that of course he wants to support the *yeshivah* — however, he'll only give to the Rosh Yeshivah in person. He won't give via a *meshulach* who takes a cut of the donations."

"If so," replied R' Chaim, "I don't want his money. You can tell him, next time you pass that way, that only the *goyim* behave like this. When they donate to their churches, they give their money directly to the priest. We Yidden give *davka* via a *meshulach*, enabling other Yidden to benefit from our *tzedakah*. It's a n*ebach* that he can't appreciate this."

This story is brought down in the *sefer Pardes Yosef,* who adds that we can learn the same idea from the *korbanos* brought in the Beis Hamikdash. Yidden could bring voluntary *korbanos* of various kinds, including the *korban shelamim*, so called as it "brings peace" between Hashem and people. The *korban shelamim* were eaten by the *kohanim*. However, *goyim* could only bring a *korban olah* which was totally consumed by the fire on the *mizbe'ach*. One reason for this is that *goyim* are incapable of reaching the *madreigah* of *ayin tovah* where they are happy that other people can benefit from their *korbanos*. While it may sound to them like a higher *madreigah* of wanting their entire sacrifice to go to Hashem, in fact it is a sign of their lack of ability to *fargin* others. It's noteworthy that no other language has a single word expressing this concept.

Developing an *ayin tovah* is, for most people, the work of a lifetime. Sometimes, it's actually harder to *fargin* those closest to us, strange though that may seem. Chazal tell us that parents naturally have an *ayin tovah* where their children are concerned, and freely rejoice when their children succeed in life. The fact that Chazal do not make a similar statement about spouses is instructive.

It's not uncommon for a husband or wife to feel conflicted at seeing their spouse succeed where they have failed, for example. Even though logically a husband or wife would only gain from joining and rejoicing in their spouse's success, without working on oneself, reaching such a *madreigah* can be a challenge.

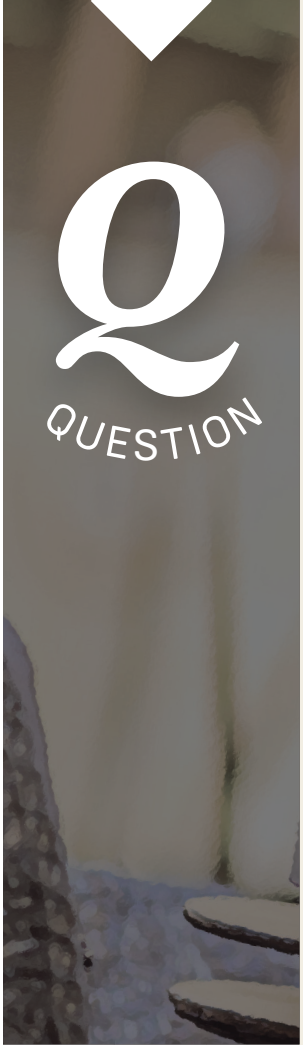
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Parshas **Vayikra**

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Dear Rabbi Gruen,

First I'd like to thank you tremendously for all the *shiurim* you give! It's amazing how your classes are delivered with such patience, clarity, and deep insight! Your lectures are inspiring, powerful, and a pleasure to listen to! May Hashem repay you for all you do!

I would like to ask a question and I'll give some background information too. My husband and I have been married for five years. We have a good, strong *shalom bayis* (including the usual ups and downs), with open communication and a lovely relationship.

My husband is a wonderful person who loves to give and usually does things all the way. A few months ago, he started a new job that he loves — it's like a hobby for him, and he thrives there. So much so that I started feeling like he doesn't need me anymore, which is such a painful feeling, and I keep hoping things will change and getting disappointed all over again.

We've discussed this a few times and he's promised to try being there fully for me and the kids more often but it looks like it's too hard for him.

I took a marriage workshop and then another one and I'm trying to do everything possible to be a better wife. I did see some improvement but things are still far from what they used to be. My husband really feels for and understands me but he just doesn't have time to do more than that.

So I'm very confused, thinking that perhaps I'm too needy (as someone suggested). Is there something I can do that wasn't tried yet? Or should I just get used to our new way of life? How often can I ask him for more time? Should I back off and wait for him to come forward?

I hope you can give me some *chizuk*...

Thank you



It's wonderful to hear that you have good *shalom bayis* and have enjoyed five years of a strong relationship with your husband. You and your husband have built a solid foundation for your married life, which is probably why he "feels for and understands" you, as you write. This is not something to be taken for granted.

It's also excellent that you've discussed your current challenge, several times, with your husband, as communication is key to solving problems. Even if it hasn't yet produced the results you were hoping for, keeping the channels of communication open is so important, as long as it's done respectfully and with consideration for both of your wants and needs.

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Communication almost always achieves something, even if it's not precisely what we wanted. When the results fall short, it's worth considering why and what we can do to make it more effective. Sometimes, it could be the timing — for instance, trying to start a conversation when the other person is busy or exhausted. It could be the tone of voice used which puts up the other person's defenses as they feel criticized or attacked. Communication also tends to fail when it focuses only on the needs of one person who expects the other to do things their way, "or else."

Learning how to communicate with love and respect is key to any relationship. This means choosing a calm, relaxed moment and keeping the needs of both parties in mind and in the conversation. It also means asking for consideration rather than demanding change, and being willing to meet the other person half-way.

Since all I know about your situation is what you have written, it could be that you have already implemented these ideas (perhaps learned from the workshops you attended). You note that your husband understands your feelings and add that this hasn't helped... so let's see what else might be going on under the surface.

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Your next question was: "Perhaps I'm just too needy." The real question here is: Who gets to define what "too" is? The truth is that no one knows how much is too much. Feelings are what they are and nothing is achieved by labeling them "wrong" or "excessive." It can be convenient to dismiss people's feelings as the real source of the problem, as that absolves others of taking action, but feelings don't go away just because no one validates them. They are part of your marriage just as much as your husband's new job, and need to be taken into account.

In any case, the fact that you've already attended two workshops gives a clear indication that you aren't simply demanding that your husband accommodate your feelings regardless of his own. You are clearly dedicated to improving the situation from your side no matter how cooperative he is, and you should commend yourself for this. Being willing to step forward without waiting for the other person to make the first move is amazing and quite rare.

We all need to be constantly trying to be "better." I would just caution you against blaming yourself too much for the situation. Introspection is a wonderful thing but criticizing oneself relentlessly is not. We can only do our best; the results are in Hashem's hands. We can't directly control the outcome of anything, and sometimes, when we blame ourselves for not getting it "right," what we are really doing is expecting to be the one in charge and getting disappointed and frustrated when it just doesn't happen.

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So, what can you actually do? The first thing to try is altering your perspective.

Yes, your husband's new job presents various challenges for you. It reveals his personality as one that thrives on being busy and feeling fulfilled (which isn't unusual) and in "doing things all the way." You knew this already and gained immensely from his generous and expansive nature when it was expressed within your marriage. It's only natural that he expresses his personality beyond your home, as well.

All positive personality traits have their "flipside." There's the responsible husband who is diligent about setting money aside for a rainy day which is wonderful... until he "stingily" refuses to approve a certain purchase that he sees as unnecessary. There's the fun-loving husband who takes his wife on day-trips every few weeks which she enjoys immensely... until it's the end of the month and their overdraft has grown to immense proportions.

Your husband is generous and giving and it's only natural that he gravitated toward a job that suits his nature. It's important that you realize that he's not choosing his job over his wife. He's choosing the flourishing of his own personality and there are no bad intentions involved. Furthermore, stifling one's personality in order to cater to someone else's desires almost always backfires and causes tremendous resentment, and this is something you should certainly keep in mind.

Consider also that if your husband had no job, or a job that he disliked, this might affect his mood negatively and would impact your relationship no less. Although he's super-busy right now with a job he loves, it's probably much better than being super-busy with job-hunting while dealing with the anxiety of not being able to pay the bills.

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Another fresh way of looking at things is one of change rather than stasis. Nothing in life stands still. I'm sure your relationship with your husband was quite different before you had children. In fact, it's not uncommon for husbands to feel sidelined after their first child is born, seeing the new mother so utterly absorbed in the baby. You may have moved through this transition without it consciously registering.

As children grow up, things change again — and again, this is totally normal. Gone are the days when you could sit at the supper table and chat with your husband with no interruptions. In the earlier years, it could be a crying baby that disrupts your quality time; later on, you may find that the needs of your older children take precedence.

What this means is that you need to be flexible and adapt to change. You can certainly aim for a return to the close and loving relationship you once enjoyed, but don't expect it to look precisely the same as it once did. Be creative and look for opportunities to make little oases of tranquil time with your husband, times that both of you will look forward to and enjoy. It won't be the same as before — but it might even be better...

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You're most likely to succeed in this if you have a clear idea of what could help. You write that you want your husband to "be there" for you and the children, but what does this mean in practice? He can't literally be there all the time; when do you want him to be there most? In what fashion? Would you like a weekly "date night"? A monthly mini-vacation? Ten minutes of uninterrupted conversation every evening? It's a shame to wait for him to figure out something you're unclear about yourself — a common

mistake. Decide on something clearly within the realm of the possible and ask for it.

Naturally this means that you will have to work with his schedule rather than against it. Don't measure his devotion to you by the extent to which he sets his own needs aside. Why would you want him to suffer? Once you accept his job as one of the facts of your married life, you'll hopefully find it easier to think of ways in which to make it work for both of you.

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Until now, you haven't seen much change as the result of your discussions with your husband. It's possible that once you develop clearer ideas of what you would like to change, you'll be able to see things moving in a positive direction. It's very hard to measure how much someone "is there" for you. It's much easier to notice how your husband sets aside time each week to take a long walk with you, leaving his phone behind. It's measurable and tangible.

Don't make the mistake of disregarding those things as "technical" or "not emotional enough," or waiting to "feel the difference." These mistakes tend to leave people seeing less change and more unhappiness.

So, when your husband does implement a practical change, appreciate it and tell him so. Appreciate also his long hours of work that support you and your children. Even if he enjoys his job, it is still a job that he has to go to every day and he deserves credit for that. Even the pleasantest job involves chores that one would rather not have to do, long hours when one would rather go home, dealing with people one might not enjoy dealing with, and more.

In the right time, and in the right tone, you certainly may tell him how much you miss the days when his attention wasn't so divided. As long as you do so without any expectation of those days returning any time soon, it's fine to share how you feel. Don't ever wait until things get just "too much" and your emotions spill out in a way that only creates argument.



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Another idea that could help a great deal is finding an interest of your own, something that allows you to express your own enthusiasm and gives you a feeling of fulfilment. It is possible that seeing him so fulfilled has awakened in you a sense of lack, where you start to wonder why you can't thrive too. If that's the case, restricting his enjoyment will achieve nothing. What you need to do is find a way for you to flourish as well.

If you don't feel any lack in your life, but still feel shut out of your husband's life now that he's so involved in his job, another option is to show more interest in his work. He might even value your input, and you might find that it interests you much more than you thought it would.

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For any husbands (and wives too, though this is rarer) reading this who may have started wondering whether their preoccupation with their jobs has gone a bit overboard, I would like to stress one last point: Listen to your wife while her tone of voice is still loving and respectful; don't dismiss her feelings in the vain hope that they will somehow disappear if you refuse to validate them. It's so much easier to deal with problems while they're still small.

Being kind and considerate of your wife is part of your set of obligations to her; you can't absolve yourself of this basic responsibility by claiming that she is "too needy," "too emotional," or "too" anything. While there certainly are spouses who exhibit a great deal of neediness and make objectively unreasonable demands, don't brush off a reasonable request that stretches you beyond your personal comfort zone with the excuse that they shouldn't feel the way they do.

B'ezras Hashem when we all work on having an *ayin tovah* — wanting what's best for each other — we'll begin to see how *fargining* others is the best recipe for all-round happiness.

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