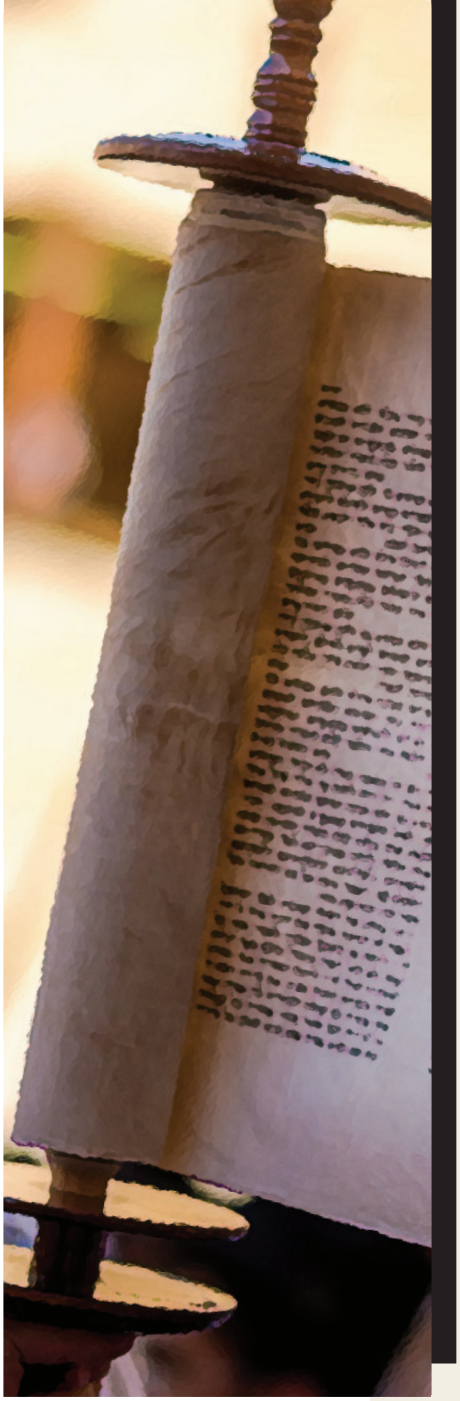


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

TIME AND PLACE FOR EVERYONE

This week's *parshah* begins with the words "*Eileh pekudei*—These are the numbers of..." referring to all the materials used to build the Mishkan. In his *sefer Likutei Torah*, the Rebbe R' Mottel Chernobyler *ztz"l* explains these words to mean, "*Eileh*—the Jewish People, *pekudei* (from the *lashon "v'lo nifkad"*)—those who are lacking something," and notes that it is those Jews who are constantly aware that their service of Hashem is lacking and insufficient who will be motivated to improve and become part of the Mishkan.

Our homes are our Mishkan, and a husband and wife who see their own faults and are ready to try and improve will be able to build a Yiddishe home where Hashem's Presence can dwell. In any relationship, no matter what the other person is doing wrong, there's always something you can do to improve matters. Even if the only thing you're doing wrong is allowing the other person to get away with their unacceptable behavior, you can still change yourself and influence the outcome.

Recently, I encountered someone who told me that listening to my *shiurim*, especially those that stress how a person can always do something to fix things, has made a huge difference in his home life. Whereas in the past he had been inclined to find faults in his wife and children, now he looks at himself, instead, and tries to see what he can do to improve matters. Sometimes it means calming down a cranky child; at other times it means giving his wife a compliment. At the end of the day, he as well as everyone else, is happier knowing that he can always find something to do that will be helpful.

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Parshas
Pekudei
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Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for all your *shiurim* which I enjoy very much. I recently started learning with a *chavrusa* at six o'clock every morning. This means that I have to go to bed early. My wife admires my new *seder hayom* very much.

However, it's happened a few times that I made preparations to spend connecting time with her and let her know in a subtle way — but she stayed up late, regardless. She is a night-person in general — she likes to stay up late, and she often sleeps in the afternoon. She doesn't work outside the house, and we don't have children at home, so she can make her own schedule.

The last time this happened, I made preparations and let her know with a hint, as I usually do, but then, around midnight, she told me, "Later." I said it's not an option, that I can't stay up so late and if I go to sleep, then even if I get up again later it won't work. She said it could work even that way, but I repeated that it's not an option and I went to bed.

I feel very upset by this, and I'm worried that we're going to get into a fight about it. I feel that she acted inappropriately. She wanted to cook a meal for a family who were sitting *shivah*, and she only started cooking at half-past-eleven, and finished at three in the morning. Is that more important than making time for her husband?

This wasn't the first time she's done this, and I get really tense and upset. I made myself ready for her, but then she just left me hanging.

I feel like it will be very hard for me to make myself so vulnerable again in the near future; I feel resentful and also degraded. I know it's not good for me to feel like this, but there's nothing I can do about my feelings. I'm hurt and I feel that she acted wrongly, and I would like to know what I can do to avoid feeling like this.

It's a sensitive issue, so although we speak about other things, it's hard to discuss this with her. Another thing is that she has a much livelier personality than I do, which also complicates things.

I would appreciate your advice, thank you



A ANSWER

This is a sensitive topic and I hope my words will be understood and taken well, and applied properly.

Let's start with the positive aspects of this situation. The husband is getting up early to learn every day and his wife is in general supportive. Getting up early, having a *seder hayom*, a responsible daily schedule, is so important for everyone, and in general has a positive impact on people's personal and interpersonal life.

It's also wonderful that his *eishes chayil* admires her husband for this. Unfortunately, there are wives who distort even the good things their husbands do (and vice versa), complaining that (for instance), "Now that you're getting up early, you're too tired to help me later in the day," or even, "You're getting up early because you care about yourself — but what are you doing for me?"

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In any relationship between two people, there are areas that belong to just one of them and not the other, and areas that they share. Getting up early to learn (as long as it doesn't directly affect the spouse) falls in the husband's zone. Other things, such as mealtimes, are in their shared zone. The wife can choose when to cook and how to cook, but when it comes to deciding when to serve and eat supper, it should be a joint decision.

Regarding the issue presented here, a couple's connecting time definitely falls in the shared zone. That means that both spouses take each other into account; there's no such thing as one of them making the decisions and the other having to just go along with it.

It's a sensitive topic, of course, and that means that one has to be careful how to discuss it. However, there does have to be communication, even if it is hard (as the husband in this letter writes). Finding it difficult to discuss any topic is not an excuse for avoiding it.

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In general, the best way to approach any area of dispute is by focusing on one's own feelings rather than what the other person is "doing wrong.".

In the situation described, when the wife says, "Later," the husband could reply: "I hear you. I know you're in the middle of cooking and don't want to stop things here. I do have to get up early tomorrow and I would really appreciate it if you could take that into account." While no spouse should have to ask for something that the other should be doing for them anyway, if the husband addresses his wife in such a way, all he is doing is expressing his feelings, not asking for a favor.

What happens if she refuses to be considerate? Then he could tell her, "I'm so sorry that it's worked out like this. I won't force you to stop what you're doing," and then go to sleep. If things remain calm, the wife will generally feel the need to make amends — and will hopefully realize that she was only thinking of herself and not acting correctly.

By contrast, using phrases such as, "It's not an option," tends to drive the other person away — even if the husband is completely right and his wife is acting wrongly.

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The husband also mentions that he and his wife have quite different natures — he is more of a calm person, whereas she is more lively. That can also make things harder, but most marriages involve two people with different natures, and that has to be accepted and addressed to collaborate and connect, not fought over.

That said, differences in nature should not be used to justify behavior that is beyond what is considered relatively "normal." It's important to acknowledge the difference between extremes and the middle ground of normal, which isn't cookie-cutter specific. In this particular case, getting up at six a.m. is within the bounds of normal and even if the wife sometimes feels inconvenienced by it, as long as it's not causing her significant difficulty, she shouldn't intervene. If, however, the husband was to get up at two a.m. and go to bed at seven in the evening, and demand that she adapts her schedule to fit in with his, that would no longer be considered normal by most standards. It should only be implemented if that's possible, without inconveniencing others, or with their consent.

In this situation, I would certainly say that a wife who often or regularly demands that her husband wait up till three a.m. (if he doesn't want to), is not doing something that he's expected to tolerate and feel comfortable with, regardless of when he wants to get up. It's not unusual in a relationship for one spouse to fall into a pattern of doing things and not realize that they are being inconsiderate. In such cases, the other spouse should step in and try to reset the balance. If they find it impossible to come to an agreement between them, then it's often a good idea to involve an objective third party.

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Unfortunately, there is sometimes a lot of confusion in marriages today regarding obligations and how to address them. In this area particularly, neither the husband nor the wife should have to ask for the other to meet their obligations. And if either husband or wife is not acting as they should, even if the other spouse lets it go, that doesn't excuse their behavior.

A recent case I dealt with involved a couple where for years the wife had been behaving in a clearly non-Torah'dig way (for lack of a better term) towards her husband, and her husband said nothing, because he didn't know how to relate to the idea of not connecting at all. Eventually, however, he did speak up, and instead of listening and trying to solve the problem, the wife told him how hurt she was that he had said nothing about the issue for years!

They ended up going to a therapist, who backed up the wife and told the husband that it was his fault for not having the *seichel* to raise the issue earlier. While speaking up earlier could definitely have helped matters, I was shocked to hear that an ostensibly frum therapist was so lacking in clarity and the Torah *hashkafah* that he didn't even mention to the woman that she had been doing the wrong thing all along.

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I would also like to clarify another point that the husband makes, when he writes that his wife seemed to think that cooking for a family sitting *shivah* was more important than making time for him. His wife isn't cooking for the family because she thinks the family is a higher priority than her husband. She's cooking for the family for herself — because it gives her a feeling of fulfillment, because she feels good and happy contributing in this way. This misconception is very common and it's important to remember that, for example, the husband who comes home late because he was helping a friend with his car wasn't putting his friend before his wife — he was putting *himself* before his wife.

It's not always right to put oneself before one's spouse, and if what you're doing seriously inconveniences your spouse, you should stop and discuss it. If this man's wife was cooking all afternoon for a family, then that would be her issue in her time, and the husband would have no right to intervene. In this case, however, she is impacting him directly and so she must take him into account when deciding how to spend these evening hours.

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All the suggestions I have presented so far relate to trying to fix things within the current set-up. From my experience, however, I know that there is one very effective method of virtually ensuring that disputes in this area don't arise in the first place. What I am referring to is making a schedule. In today's world, it's common for people to believe that spontaneity in initiating intimate connection is more "authentic" and that routine is old-fashioned and lacking feeling. My response to such reactions is: "Are you also spontaneous with your mealtimes?"

When it comes to something like when to eat supper, most people realize that it won't work out if the wife feels like cooking early one day and serving a meal at four p.m., and the next day she doesn't feel like cooking at all, and the next day she switches breakfast with supper... It also won't work if the husband comes home at ten p.m. and demands his supper within ten minutes, because "that's what he feels like." It might be more authentic, but the fact that it has to work for two people makes it clear that it's not a plan. If that's true of meals which technically *can* be eaten separately, how much more so with regard to something that specifically does involve two people at once, and even more,

is something that people get sensitive about, as it's quite a bit more personal than mealtimes.

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I'd like to present four reasons why schedule is important in this area, in order of ascending importance.

The first reason is that it's important to be consistent, especially in this area where it is a *mitzvah*, not something optional. If there is no set time for it, then it will inevitably be sidelined by all kinds of things that come up — a *chasunah*, a vacation, a sick child, a long day at work... Furthermore, once there is a set time, husband and wife will feel an obligation to set the scene. If they have quarreled, they're more likely to make up. In general, everyone knows that we schedule the important things in life and that other things have to be worked-in around them. This certainly applies here.

The second reason is that spontaneity, if one isn't careful, can end up being selfish. It's quite unusual for two people to spontaneously feel the same way. Even if the spontaneous person makes the effort to coax the other person to feel the same way, the spouse may have something else planned or be too tired or feel unwilling for any number of other reasons, and may feel pressured to comply.

The third reason is that in this area of a marriage, spouses should be equals. There shouldn't be any sense of one being the giver and the other, the taker. To use the example of supper, if suppertime is six p.m. then the wife knows to have the food ready and the husband knows to be home in time to eat. That's their schedule and neither of them is doing the other a favor, or making a great sacrifice, or imposing on the other. (Refusing to give or take and withdrawing entirely, or using this area of marriage as leverage, is a terrible error, aside from being disastrous for the relationship.)

The fourth — and by far the most important — reason for making a schedule is that this is the Torah approach (as is clear from the word the Torah uses for this *mitzvah*). It is quite clearly spelled out in Shulchan Aruch. That doesn't mean that there can't be exceptions, but when there is a clear *seder*, it's the healthiest way to live.



In my experience, as long as the concept is presented properly, this is what works best for most people and helps them avoid the many problems that couples encounter in this area. Once the concept is implemented, it's unusual to find either spouse unhappy with the new arrangement.

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With regard to the last issue the husband raises in his letter — I commend him for realizing that his hard feelings are not doing him any good. Too many people justify their anger and frustration ("Of course I'm furious! It's all her fault...") and do nothing to find a solution. Other people think that if enough time passes, the hard feelings will somehow melt away.

Feelings don't usually just melt away, however — often, they become entrenched and only make things worse. The best approach is to deal with them as soon as possible, using the right method of communication.

Introducing the topic with something like, "This is hard for us to discuss, and I know you didn't mean to hurt me. Let's see if we can talk about this and figure something out," will often help the other spouse be less defensive and more open to looking at things in a new light.

Chazal also stress that a husband should use *divrei piyus*, to try to appease his wife and make things up, rather than let problems fester.

In every area of life, using Torah'dig methods to address the issues we face is the healthiest and most productive way of getting unstuck and moving forward. Even if it is your spouse who is in the wrong; even if your spouse doesn't realize that she's in the wrong, there's still so much you can do to improve the situation and restore tranquility to your home.

May Hashem help us all to see our own deficiencies and be brave enough to address them, and may all Yidden be *zocheh* to build a Mishkan Me'at, a home where the Shechinah can dwell.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: PEKUDEI 5784

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