RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Emor

It's all for Hashem

This week we learn the Parshas Hamoadim, the section that expounds on all of the *yomim tovim*. In this Parsha Rashi explains why the Yom Tov Shemini Atzeres was added on to the Chag HaSuccos. He writes: "Hashem said '*It is difficult for Me to part with you*'." He then likens it to a father who spends some time with his children and it is hard for him to bid them farewell when it is time to go.

Succos is a time of family togetherness, unity, and serenity and Hashem is in no rush to take leave of the bond and closeness that we demonstrate. That is why Yom Tov is extended for another little bit, so that we can bask in each other's presence.

The Heilige Ruzhiner takes a lesson from this that in every *mitzvah sh'bein adam lachaveiro*, there's a bit of *bein adam laMakom*, too. Some people have a strong relationship with Hashem, but when it comes to doing something for others, they have a hard time. There are those whose relationship with Hashem can use some improvement, but when it comes to helping others, they do it gladly. It might be helpful to know that every time we perform a mitzvah *sh'bein adam lachaveiro*, we give Hashem pleasure too. That automatically translates as a mitzvah *sh'bein adam laMakom*. Hashem wants us to have a good relationship with each other. In fact, He has difficulty parting from us when we do.

The *possuk* of "*V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*" ends off with "*Ani Hashem*". Why is Hashem adding 'His Signature' – so to speak – to this commandment? Because Hashem's Presence rests amongst us when there is harmony in our midst. With regard to Shalom Bayis specifically, it is stated: "A husband and wife who are deserving, Hashem's Presence dwells among them".

Some people make it their business to get along with their spouses, but others seem unable to be bothered. Perhaps being made aware that getting along with each other is just as much a *mitzvah* as keeping Shabbos or Arba Minim, not just a *favor* for their spouse, would make it easier for some of us to work on our relationship.

Let's all work on this *mitzvah* together and bring much *nachas* to Hashem.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen

I listen to your shiurim a lot on Torah Anytime, and I really appreciate what you have done for us listeners. I hope you can answer my question and give me some clarification.

As women, we are constantly hearing about the importance of being an "*Isha kesheira oseh retzon ba'alah***". As much as I strive to be that, I have been feeling resentful of the idea lately. Sometimes, my husband wants things one way and I want something else, and as the good wife, I give in. But many times, I do not feel good about it at all, and I feel like I am left losing out on my end.**

For example, a couple of years after we got married, my husband wanted me to drop one of the *minhagim* **I was keeping. I spoke to a Rov that we respect and he told me that it is** *halachically* **acceptable for me to do it for my husband. It's been a while, and I am miserable. I am physically and emotionally very uncomfortable about it. However, whenever I bring it up with my husband in a very nice way, I can see he really wants this, so I try to make it work. I don't see a way out of this and it is really hard for me. I truly wonder if there's a solution.**

I feel stuck.

If I continue like this and make him happy, I end up suffering physically and emotionally. If I do what's more comfortable for me, my husband will not be happy, and his happiness is important to me.

This is just one example to demonstrate an ongoing feeling that I have. I want to be a good wife, to trust and respect him, but I'm starting to feel like the idea of *Isha kesheira oseh retzon ba'alah* **is a very unfair deal. I know that it can't be true because Hashem doesn't give us** *mitzvos* **to make our lives more difficult but I am feeling very resentful.**

I hope you can give me clarity on this issue. Thanks so much.

Answer:

I'll start by saying that you are absolutely right. This dictum is not fair. You are in a relationship with another adult, why should one of you always end up having to do what the other one wants?

In truth, democracy is much fairer. But if you think about it, many things that the Torah tells us to do are not necessarily fair. We wouldn't question why we need to honor and obey our parents, but to the average American, this idea might seem scandalous. As Torah Jews, we have to accept that a wife is obligated to defer to her husband. In fact, after a woman gets married, she no

longer has to defer to her father, specifically due to her obligation to honor her husband instead.

This is how Hashem, in His infinite wisdom, created our world, and there's no doubt that it is for our benefit. Once we appreciate that this isn't a mistake, and that there's rhyme and reason even though we might not understand it, many questions fall away. It might not stop bothering us, but it will remind us of the idea that we are dedicated to a Higher Being, Who understands what's best for us.

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Now to understand the idea itself, perhaps a marital relationship can be correctly compared to that of a driver and the front-seat passenger in a vehicle. Nobody would question why only one person gets to do all the steering. Clearly, it would cause a tremendous amount of confusion and possibly disaster if both would steer the vehicle in different directions. The passenger isn't necessarily any less important than the driver, and often, the driver is actually working for his important passenger, but the driver is the driver!

Similarly a plane is flown by a pilot and a copilot, and they both need each other to fly the plane effectively. In a healthy marriage, both parties understand that being copilot isn't being second place. Each has different responsibilities and both play an important role in flying the plane. However, the copilot still needs to defer to the pilot in order to get the plane to its intended destination. Just as Hashem decided to have it that Adam was created first and Chava came second, Hashem has ordained that the woman is the one in the copilot seat.

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You mention going to a Rov for guidance, and I highly commend you for that. Doing your husband's bidding does not mean blindly surrendering to his every whim, especially when you suspect that it might have halachic or *hashkafic* implications. It's probably not the best idea to run to Daas Torah with *every* individual request, but whenever you are unsure if it is okay for you to do something, and for general guidance and clarity, this is certainly the ideal course of action.

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Speaking of surrendering, I have been asked many times about the book, The Surrendered Wife. In my opinion, Surrender is the wrong word choice. A woman isn't a maid who is required to always be at the beck and call of her mighty husband, with no regard for anything else. A man has plenty of obligations towards his wife, too. She is considered a very important part of the equation and has every right to express her feelings and desires. Both the husband and the wife need to be aware of this. There are times that "full surrender" is actually damaging, if it entails a fear of being expressive or assertive, as well as enabling controlling or cha"v abusive behavior of any sort.

But the idea of surrendering to the understanding that there is a man of the house, and he sits at the head of the table for a reason, is definitely a Torah idea, and we don't need secular sources to encourage that.

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We are often faced with a reality that can't be changed. In your case, for instance, it's a certain behavior that can make your spouse happy, and without it, maybe he won't be as happy. The reality is that that might not change so fast. Not always can the issue be changed, but the response to it, though, can definitely change.

The idea might not sit well with us, especially at the outset. We'd love to have a better way that does not involve us going so far out of our comfort zone. Still, it's good to be pragmatic and look for solutions, rather than dwell on the problem. The solution might not always be conventional, but if it's the only way out of the problem, it might be worth considering.

There's a joke that an announcement was made across the international radio that another Great Flood would be coming in three days and everyone should prepare to die. The Dalai Lama called to all the Buddhists to seclude themselves in meditation and concentrate on the tenets of Buddhism so that they merit to survive the Flood. The Pope issued a statement that every devout Christian should hurry to his local priest to confess his sins and thereby they might save the world from the Flood. The Universal Rabbi sent out an email blast informing the Jews of the world that we have three days to learn how to live underwater...

The Jewish way is to find solutions. To the best of our ability, we make it work. It might not be very pleasant, but if it's the only way to survive, we do it.

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I'd venture to suggest that it isn't the actual dropping of your minhag that is making you feel uncomfortable; rather, it is the thought that you are doing something wrong that is making you feel this way. That might be because you were taught all along that it shouldn't be done or that you grew up with different ideas. However, keep in mind that you consulted with your Rov, and he assured you that there is nothing wrong *halachically* with what your husband asked of you, and that means that you are doing the right thing.

Very often though, there's work on a relationship that can resolve many such feelings on both ends. Perhaps there is something else that you can do for your husband instead, which accomplishes the same thing, yet does not make you so uncomfortable and will make him less needy? Maybe there is something that he can do for you that will make it easier for you to give him what he wants? If you care enough for each other, and talk to each other honestly, there should be a way for you to work this out.

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I don't want to imply that your relationship is a problem at all. Still, maybe aside from you both trying to figure out a workable solution to this particular problem, and listening to Daas Torah, the fact that you have this problem at all might be an indication of something else worth exploring.

Let me throw out a few ideas, which might be a starting point of brainstorming, that you or others might benefit from taking into consideration.

Why is it that your husband can only be happy if you do something that makes you uncomfortable?

Why is he not taking your discomfort into consideration?

Maybe there is something about the relationship that leaves him wanting and this is the way he is expressing that.

The fact that you are so resentful about it might also indicate a bigger problem.

Why is your relationship such that he feels he can't live with it and you feel like you can't live without it?

I can't say it's always a very telling sign, and I don't want to imply there's a bigger issue if there really isn't, yet something doesn't add up, that a couple that is married for several years still gets stuck on an external factor such as this.

This might need some honest and careful consideration, and possibly a talk with your husband or an objective third party.

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While it's true that your husband is in the pilot's seat while you are merely the copilot, it doesn't mean that you need to let him continue steering the plane if you think that he might be drunk or otherwise incapable. That is why it is so important to have constant contact with Daas Torah to learn what the right thing to do in every situation is, and to gain clarity as to what your course of action should be.

By giving it your all and working to make your relationship one of unity and harmony, you will be serving Hashem constantly and merit all brachos.

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