RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Pesach

Eradicating the Chametz

The Shulchan Aruch (459:2) rules that when the dough of a *matzah* becomes pale *(hichsifu panav)*, during the baking process, it should be discarded.

The Magen Avraham there writes: "We must be very careful with this, because it happens very often and nobody takes note". The Kozhnitzer Maggid takes a powerful lesson from these words of the Magen Avraham. The phrase "Hichsifu panav" is also used in the gemara about someone who is shamed publicly. Thus the Magen Avraham is saying "We need to be very careful about embarrassing others, it happens all the time and people are indifferent to it"!

Many people who are not careful with honoring others dismiss their wrongdoing by saying that they were just jesting, or that they didn't really mean it. But if someone is a true *yerei shamayim*, and is really careful about *chametz* on Pesach, he should be just as careful with choosing his words.

In the days leading up to Pesach this can be especially true, when the atmosphere in many homes is taut and nervous, with never ending lists of things to do and tasks to complete. It can be hard to refrain from letting hurtful words leave our mouths in the heat of the moment. However, we need to remember that now is the time to be *more* careful, not less. Perhaps this is part of our *avodah* of getting ready for this beautiful, liberating Yom Tov – to be especially stringent with our speech and to respect and honor the members of our family.

By the same token, we need to try not to take what others say too much to heart. Often, when someone tells us something that we don't like, we are quick to judge and take offense. Take a step back, breathe, and realize that it is erev Yom Tov for everyone and your spouse/child/relative/acquaintance might be under stress, too, and they simply didn't mean what they said. The idea is to be as stringent as you can with yourself, while remaining lenient with others.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

While many of my friends are realizing that certain stringencies and traditions they are accustomed to simply aren't *shayach* **when you have a big family, such as the extent of how careful you can be with** *minhagim* **like"***mishing***" and "***gebrokts***", my husband insists on keeping to all of his** *minhagim***, even those that are inconvenient and impractical. This causes the kids to resent the Yom Tov.**

We are taught to let the kids enjoy and bring a *geshmak* **into the Yom Tov, but I don't see how it can work together. We obviously try to stick to whatever we can, but when it's at the expense of the children's** *chinuch* **and attitude towards serving Hashem, especially when I know that other people do things differently, I feel like it's time to rethink and reprioritize.**

In general, I am very careful with *minhagim* **and I'm not lax about them, especially when they can be enjoyed by all. My question is specifically when it becomes a burden and is resented. I believe that if I know the right approach, it would make the** *shalom bayis* **part a lot easier. After all, many of my husband's stringencies are at my expense since I am expected to run the kitchen to his liking. I pointed out to him that even his own Rav gave up certain** *minhagim* **over time, but he claims that he doesn't see a reason to do the same, and the Rav's reasons for changing his standards do not pertain to us.**

I would greatly appreciate some clarity and approval on this topic.

Answer:

I hope you won't mind the first point I'll make - although likely totally out of place. As a wife, you have an obligation to unconditionally respect and honor your husband, regardless of whether he is stringent or lax when it comes to *halacha*, *minhag*, or anything else. No matter how you choose to deal with the issue at hand, it should not interfere with your respect for him. It's understandable that it might not be a very easy thing to do when you have an ongoing misunderstanding, but it is still something very important to bear in mind before we tackle the specifics of your situation.

One more point; please bear in mind that I usually address the relationship aspects of any topic mentioned, and in this case that would be much more about the ideas of how to communicate your frustrations to your husband, and how not to, as well as making sure this doesn't then spiral into arguments, debates, resentments and a full blown family feud, and less about the topic of Minhagim. However because your question was about this, and it's relevant for many this time of year, I'll try to give some perspective on this topic as well.

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I'd like to mention that I don't see this as much of a Shalom Bayis question, rather it seems to me to be a question for a Rav. Keep in mind that according to *halacha*, deciding on

which *minhagim* will be kept and how the home will be established, is the man's department. This is important both in regard to women who are reluctant to keep their husband's stringencies, as well as those who deem it important to impose their traditions on their husbands who don't have those customs and are not obligated to follow them at all. Of course this can and should be discussed with *daas Torah*, especially in the event of a disagreement, but beware that in most cases women are asked to defer to their husbands in this regard, even if they were specifically brought up differently.

Another thing the Rav may be able to explain is the matter of keeping Minhagim itself. Minhagim aren't just a nice part of our tradition - quaint customs that add charm to our lives, actually, they are equal to *halacha*. *Minhag yisrael Torah*. Many aspects of our lives are adorned with *minhagim*, especially so on Pesach. Yes, some of them can be cumbersome to keep, but *al titosh Toras imecha* is a *halacha,* and it actually becomes a real *shaila* if you want to change a *minhag* that you grew up with. There are some *minhagim* that might be up for discussion as to their origins or reasoning, but it's important to remember that a *minhag* isn't just a nuisance or "*mishigas*" that your husband or parents made a big deal out of. It often holds the same gravity as *halacha*, and it cannot be dropped by suggestion of a friend or sister, without consultation with a *rav* or *morah hora'ah*.

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Pesach in particular has always been very focused on *minhagim*, with one of the *minhagim* being to be stringent about family *minhagim*. This is not a Halacha forum, yet I'll mention a Teshuva in the Shevet Halevi (Chelek 8, Siman 163), where he is asked about dropping a *minhag* on Pesach. His answer is that a *minhag* that was implemented due to circumstances of the time, or because of lack of choice, and today circumstances significantly changed and/or you do have a choice, there might be room for discussion. However, many *minhagim* were instituted because that was how our ancestors wanted it to be.

For example, "*mishing*" generally had nothing to do with trusting other people's standards of *kashrus*. Someone who didn't *mish*, didn't do so even with the most pious, stringent family in town. It was because they didn't want to eat anything that was made outside of their own home. This is not the type of *minhag* that you can drop just because it is inconvenient. On the other hand, if your ancestors *did mish* with someone in town that they deemed pious enough, then it might be up for discussion.

Just like it wouldn't dawn on you to eat *kitniyos*, even though your Sfardi neighbor does, your other *minhagim* aren't dispensable either.

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You're right that sometimes keeping to these traditions is simply not pleasant, to put it mildly. While everybody knows that fasting isn't pleasant, when Tisha B'av or Yom Kippur comes around, we all do it. We know that this is what needs to be done right now, and we make it work. It becomes a bigger burden when you think that it doesn't have to be that way.

Viewing *minhagim* and stringencies as optional, or thinking that your husband is just trying to make your life miserable, might cause a certain resentment and negative attitude to seep into your demeanor. This might be at the root of your problem, rather than the lack of *gebrokts* or *mishing*.

The first thing you need to do is reconsider your position. There's a very big likelihood that *minhagim* that you think can be chucked are not as easily dispensable as you would think, making it a bit easier to settle with and accept. I'm not suggesting that you resist discussing this with a Rav. On the contrary, I think you'll know your position better once doing so.

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The second issue worth discussing is the effect of your attitude. Of course, this is not something that can be switched on or off by the flick of a button, but it's important to be mindful of how, as the Akeres Habayis, so much hinges on *your* attitude. A big part of your children's perspective on issues at home might be directly related to their mother's attitude.

When your child asks you for something that isn't your *minhag* and you answer resentfully, "You can't have that! What can we do, Totty doesn't let?" the attitude comes across clearly to your children. On the other hand, when you say it matter-of-factly, it won't have such a negative effect on them.

And then there's the general Shalom Bayis/Chinuch idea relevant all year round that you want to be very careful not to send mixed messages to your children, such as goading them into doing things that your husband doesn't allow when he isn't around. That is turning a *shalom bayis* problem into a *chinuch* problem, and will only serve to confuse your children.

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Someone once repeated a story told by Reb Nissan Neiman, the Viznitz dayan from Monsey. Having gone to a modern *cheder* after the war, someone asked him how he was able to remain so *ehrlich*. He said that his father would make every preparation for Yom Tov and every *minhag* into a celebration. There was so much *simcha* surrounding everything that they did, and this was what kept him to Yiddishkeit.

When you hear such a story you might think, "Oh! How nice! I think I'm going to do that, too." Or, you might think, "Uch! Please. Who am I kidding? I hate Pesach cleaning, and now I have to start turning it into some sort of celebration?" No. You don't have to do that. Nobody expects you to become a parenting role model overnight.

This doesn't happen in an instant, and sometimes never. But it's certainly a nice ideal to aspire to.

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I once attended an *asifas chinuch* where the speaker was saying that if a father would come home every day from *davening* and talk about how wonderful the *davening* was, his children would have a different approach to *davening*. And I remember thinking to myself: That might be true, but then again, many fathers first need to find that *geshmak* in their *own davening*, before they can tell their children about it.

I know it's easier said than done. But the idea isn't necessarily to achieve the mindset to actually celebrate doing things that you don't feel up to. Changing your attitude towards that mindset, though, will most certainly make it easier for yourself and for your family. You can validate them (and yourself) that while you understand that it isn't easy, it is so special to be able to serve as a link in the chain of your *mesorah*.

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This is really such a typical topic of where the discussion becomes what I call a "Me-You" debate. Instead of focusing on the issue at hand, and the best way to achieve clarity as what the right thing to do is, people fall into petty arguments. Avoid the "if it's important to *you* then why should *I*...", or "how come when *I* wanted XYZ *you* couldn't help or care..." It's not a debate, it's a discussion, and discussing how to present such a question to a Rav is something to address respectfully and in a calm manner. There are no winners and losers.

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Instead of dreading Pesach – or any situation you know might be stressful – and waiting with bated breath for it to pass, prepare for it proactively. When you mentally and physically prepare for something, you will be less anxious and nervous about it.

Take a snow day for instance. If it were up to parents, they would wish the snow away with a magic wand. But they can't do that. So instead, smart parents will prepare themselves. They will stock their crafts cabinet and buy some shovels for the kids to play with, they will figure out how to prioritize their schedules. Every approaching difficulty can be dealt with calmly, with the right mindset.

When you know that Pesach is coming, along with its accompanying challenges, prepare yourself mentally by realizing how important it is to carry on the chain of your family's *mesorah*, and physically by seeing where you can make it easier for yourself within the framework of your family's *minhagim*.

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It's important to note that this isn't necessarily an issue that is exclusive to men. Women can be this way with Pesach cleaning, as well. As many times as their husbands will tell them that their strenuous efforts aren't necessary, it will fall on deaf ears. So as the husband in this case, you can either discuss it with a *rav* and see what is actually required, or you can make peace with the situation and deal with it. By having a negative attitude and becoming resentful, you are making it more difficult for everyone.

It is always important to have a *rav* or *rebbe* to guide you, especially in such cases. Whenever you find yourself in such a situation, you can respectfully suggest to your spouse that it might be a good idea to go and discuss it with your *rav*, as long as you both agree to go along with whatever his ruling might be.

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In closing, a word to the husband in question: It's important to learn the ins and outs of *minhagim* that might cause a strain on others, and see if there might be a way to make it easier for them. Stories abound of *tzaddikim* who were very careful not to keep stringencies that affected others negatively in any way. There's a story about one of the Lubavitcher Rebbes who dunked his matzah in borscht on Pesach when he noticed someone at his table being unkind to another participant who was "*brokking*" his *matzah*. It pays to note that in Lubavitch, they are very careful with *gebrokts*, but the Rebbe said that he would rather eat a red *matzah* than see a "red Yid". As the Kozhnitzer Maggid said: we have to be very careful with *"hichsifu panim"* on Pesach.

Whatever you ultimately decide to do, try to make it as easy as possible for others, and to make your home a happy and pleasant place to be. Every person can and should look for ways to make it easier and more comfortable for those around them, thereby creating a warm and loving home for their families.

Wishing you a peaceful and happy Yom Tov,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: PESACH 5781

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