RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Yisro

No Big Deal

When Yisro saw how hard his son-in-law Moshe Rabbeinu worked, spending all of his day *judging and guiding* Klal Yisrael, he advised him to take on some help. "*...And they should judge the nation... [and] every big thing they should bring before you.*" Moshe heeded his father-in-law's advice and chose influential people, whom he crowned as the new judges. The *passuk* then says "*A difficult thing they brought before Moshe, and a small thing they judged themselves.*"

Hagaon Reb Chaim Berlin asks why the *passuk* used a different term than the one Yisro did. Yisro had said to bring a "big" thing before Moshe, and the *passuk* says that a "difficult" thing was brought before Moshe.

In the general population, when someone has a dispute over a small amount of money or property, he usually resolves it via a third party or maybe in his local civil court. When it comes to big money and big numbers, that's when he would go to the larger, more influential court.

In *halacha,* that is not how it works. Moshe knew that size and amount does not matter. If it isn't questionable *halachically*, then the discussion can be about millions of dollars but the answer is clear. If it is questionable *halachically*, then even if the dispute is only about a few coins, a *halachic* authority needs to be consulted. That is why Moshe did not tell the newly appointed judges to send him "big" cases. Because for Torah Jews, it isn't big or small *amounts* that matter. Something seemingly insignificant can be considered difficult and of importance, if it needs a Torah sage to clarify the will of Hashem in regard to it.

In interpersonal relationships we can often see this play out in a similar vein. When a person is sensitive about something or holds something dear, it can mean the world to them even if it seems negligible or silly to another person.

Even if you might be able to logically explain to your spouse why the money you spent, or the amount of time you were late, or the item you ruined isn't all that much, if it was something he or she held dear, then no excuse will justify it and they will still be upset. In fact, trying to explain to them why they shouldn't be so riled up will likely only add fuel to the fire. Now, aside from losing something they felt was important, they will feel misunderstood and disrespected as well.

It's important to keep in mind that when your spouse – or anyone around you – holds something dear, whether it's something tangible or even an idea or a perspective, you should treat it with the proper respect. Even if for you it's nothing, to them it's a big deal.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen

I benefit tremendously from your weekly *shalom bayis* and *chinuch shiurim*. I need some advice. My husband gives all his time and energy to many people and causes, and then when he comes home, he isn't left with anything for us. He has no patience to listen to me or the kids and is perpetually stressed out. Even though the home is clean and peaceful, he still angers easily and is always on edge.

Please let me know if there's anything I can or should be doing differently, or is this something that he needs to seek help for himself, being that it's his issue and not mine. Thank you.

Answer:

Since you are the one posing the question, we need to figure out what it is that *you* can do to remedy this situation. I'll admit that if your husband would be the questioner, I would likely answer him very differently. And yet, even if the fault isn't yours, by finding out how you can make this better, you're already halfway to solving the problem.

It's important to note, that while you are a wife asking about her husband, this scenario can take place the other way around as well. I've heard husbands complain that their house is neglected, while their wives are busy running around and helping everyone. The principles outlined below can be applied in such a case, as well.

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I'm going to answer your letter assuming that it's true that your husband behaves as you describ.e it. I'm mentioning this because I've seen situations where a wife claimed so, and the husband didn't know what she was talking about. From his perspective he helps quite a bit, and often even more than average. Even if his perspective is also up for debate, it's important to think into why *he* at least may not agree with the

way you're presenting the situation. With that said, I'll continue based on the premise that he really isn't helping much, or at all, in the house.

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It's interesting to me that you feel that your husband has nothing left for the family because he uses all his time and energy to help others. While I hear this a lot, I don't believe it's ever a reality. People have more strength than they think. Energy and resources don't get "used up" all that fast. Only that we'd rather expend energy on things that are gratifying to us than on things that we don't enjoy all that much.

You often see this at weddings. The *chassan* is weak after a day of fasting and intense prayer. When dancing with his great-uncle or the local *meshulach,* he barely has the stamina to keep going and plops onto the nearest chair, perspiring and spent. Enter his group of friends, and the *chassan* transforms into a brand new creature. Feet flying, hands lifted, he dances the night away. How does he all of a sudden have the strength? Because he enjoys dancing with his friends, and so he finds it within himself to do so.

You may assume that your husband has no strength "left" for you, as that would explain why he's not helping much. But I doubt that's the real answer. It reminds me of the old joke about someone who saw a fellow searching for his keys in a parking lot. "Did you lose it around here?" he asked him, wanting to help. The searcher shook his head and said, "Nah, but the light is shining over here so it's easier to look." It's much easier to go where the light is shining and things move along swimmingly. In this case, it's easier to assume that he doesn't help because his strength is "used-up" instead of trying to come up with the real reason.

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What you need to ask yourself is "Why?" Why is he expending - what seems to be - "all" his energy outside the home rather than within it? Is it possible that in other places he feels more appreciated, celebrated, revered? Maybe he gets more attention there? Maybe he gets a thank you from you too, but he doesn't feel it's sincere? Or he gets more criticism than appreciation, making it hard for him to feel - or remember that he's - appreciated.

Often, a spouse might feel like he or she doesn't need to show appreciation for what their spouse does. They're just doing their job! But everyone is deserving of appreciation for what they do, and everyone wants to feel like their efforts are validated, no matter what it is that they're doing.

Sometimes, a wife might say, "If he does so much for others, then I expect at least as much from him at home!" The husband might retort, "If she wants me to give her what I give to outsiders, then she should at least be as thankful as them!" It's really two sides of the same coin.

Some people might not even be so appreciation-greedy – with others. To outsiders they might give their all without expecting any acknowledgment, perhaps because they enjoy feeling like they are accomplishing, especially because they are actually less obligated. But at home, they do want to hear that thank you and be heaped with praise for what they do, because otherwise there isn't much great feeling to doing that which is expected and taken for granted by the and others. There, they want to be appreciated for their efforts.

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Remember that whatever the case may be, it isn't about you, and you shouldn't take it personally. He probably doesn't do favors for others because he is more loyal to them than he is to you. He might simply either feel better about himself there, as mentioned, or maybe just have some insecurities or a desperate need for recognition that he only gets from the outside. Perhaps if you heap praise on him and make him

feel good, he won't have that need to go looking for approval everywhere else.

But it's not only acknowledging what your husband does for you that can make him feel better. There are times when a spouse isn't especially interested in his wife's acknowledgment of what he does at home; he *davka* wants to hear her praise for what he does outside the home! A spouse might sometimes overhear a husband or wife telling others about how proud they are of their spouse's achievement, but they never get to hear it from them directly! That can be pretty painful. If your husband is making a major impact somewhere or being helpful to others and you hear about it, tell him! Tell him how proud you are of his achievements. Don't be worried that you're actually promoting and encouraging that which you'd want him to stop. Chances are he'll be happier to please you after being praised.

To you it might seem that if he's so popular, why would he need your little, pathetic thank you. But to him, your thanks and acknowledgment might mean the world. Give it to him.

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It might also be a good idea to try and figure out what it is that makes him feel "spent" at home. Maybe he's just tired and overwhelmed and needs to rest a bit before facing the family. You can try offering him a drink and some time to nap when he comes home. There might be something that you can do to give him that bit of motivation to want to be at ease at home.

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When he does something nice around the house, however small or infrequent, generously thank him. Don't be afraid that being too effusive in your thanks will make him feel like he did enough.

If being more thankful and complimentary doesn't elicit your desired response, don't hesitate to ask for help. You can respectfully tell him that you would appreciate more help, or less phone usage, inside the house. Don't be scared off by the fact that others don't have to ask for things like that. You are perfectly entitled to express your needs. Make sure to let him know that you know how busy he is, and you understand that he has a lot on his plate, but you would still really like it if he pitched in a bit. Don't forget to thank him – generously – when he does come through.

And to end off with the parsha lesson mentioned in the beginning, to you this kind of acknowledgment and appreciation can seem trivial and unnecessary, but remember, to someone else it can be a game changer and quite significant.

I'm hopeful that with the right attitude, and an abundance of appreciation and recognition you will easily be able to assert yourself and clarify your needs in a way that will elicit a good feeling on your spouse's end, to willingly be more a help and a pleasant partner in all that you do.

With best wishes for
hatzlacha and happiness,
Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: YISRO 5781

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