

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

CROWNING THE KING

In this week's *parshah*, Moshe Rabbeinu asks Hashem to provide Am Yisrael with a leader who will "go out before them and enter before them," a genuine leader who will guide the people forward and direct them.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter notes that one of the features of the period right before Moshiach arrives will be (as the Gemara states), "*Pnei hador ke'pnei hakelev*." This refers to the leaders of the generation who can be compared to a dog on its master's leash. When a person goes to walk his dog, the dog can usually be observed pulling ahead, its owner following along. However, every so often, the dog turns around to make sure he's going where his master wants him to go.

At the End of Days, the "leaders" will be at the front, "going out before the people" and guiding them. But in truth, they'll be constantly checking behind to make sure that the "guidance" they're giving is what the people want to hear. They won't be willing to risk their popularity by giving true guidance and providing genuine leadership.

When a person asks a rav a *she'ilah* and makes it quite obvious that he only wants a certain answer, the rav should give him the right answer regardless of how happy it makes the questioner. But a genuine questioner will make it obvious that he wants only the truth, and true Torah guidance, and this will provide a rav with the encouragement and strength to answer appropriately. Those who seek the truth are clear about their willingness to be led; they're not just trying to make it appear that they're following.

The same can be said in the relationship between a woman and her husband. The Torah teaches that the husband is the king and his wife, queen. Even if the husband is not a "natural ruler," his wife can transform him into her king simply by being a loyal queen, true to her role and position in the home.

In honor of R' Shimon

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Parshas
Pinchas

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Question one:

Dear Rabbi Gruen, I would like to ask for some advice in *shalom bayis*.

I know that the way things should be is for the wife to be the *mekabel*, the receiver, and the husband should be the *mashpia*, the giver. But I don't understand how this can work when in practice the wife is doing everything — cooking, cleaning, washing, serving, etc., and the husband is on the receiving end all the time.

I'd also appreciate if you could give me some practical *eitzos* for better *shalom bayis*.

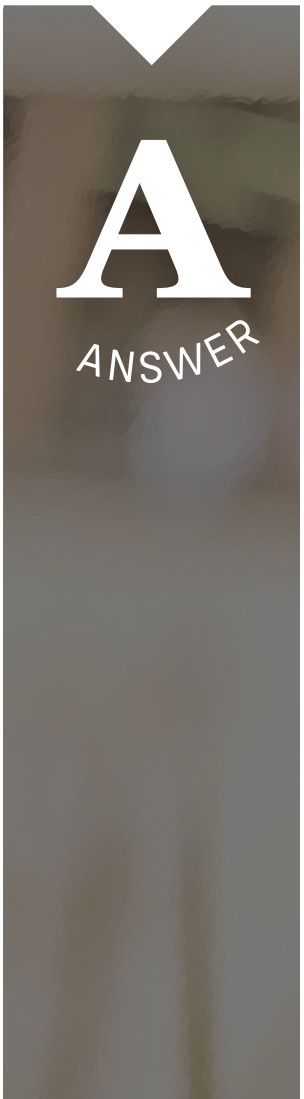
Thank you.

Question two:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I just have a short question. What can I do in my case, where me and my wife don't have an emotional connection and what's more, my wife doesn't seem to care?

Thank you



Giving and receiving can appear to be very simple concepts, but when we examine how relationships really work, we realize that they don't necessarily happen the way we assume.

The Torah provides us with several examples of relationships where the giver and taker aren't who we might think they are at first glance. In the case of a beggar asking a rich man for a donation, it seems obvious that the rich man is the giver and the poor man the taker. But on a deeper level, the beggar is giving more to the rich man than he is receiving — he's providing him with the opportunity to give *tzedakah*, the satisfaction of doing a *mitzvah*, and the chance to overcome his challenges and perfect his character.

Chazal say something similar about a suckling calf: "More than the calf wants to drink, the mother wants to nurse it." This dynamic is easy to see with our children, when the parents' joy at giving is greater than the child's joy at receiving whatever it is.

Interestingly, a king, who is the ultimate example of a "*mashpia,*" is, when you think about it, sitting on his throne and being served all day long. What does he actually give? It might not be something tangible, but it is extremely significant. A king provides leadership, guidance, clarity, a stable order, wisdom, and much more. He may not actually do very much, but his essence is one of giving, of influencing, of ruling and leading.

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Unfortunately, many women get into the "if-only" mode when discussing the respect they should be showing their husbands. "If only my husband was successful, respected in the community, a big *talmid chacham*, with imposing good looks, then of course I'd respect him! But you don't know my husband, he's just a *shlemazel*..."

While it certainly can be easier to respect a man who's very obviously deserving of it, you may be surprised to hear that there are plenty of "successful, respected, intelligent, handsome" husbands whose wives don't respect them at all. And there are actually plenty of nondescript husbands whose wives think the world of them.

What is it that makes the difference?

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The Torah instructs men to provide three essential things for their wives, which are non-negotiable. These are what the Torah refers to as *she'eir*, *kesus*, and *onah*. For instance, even in families where the husband is learning and the wife goes out to work, the financial responsibility for the home is still the husband's. For providing these three basic things, a husband is worthy of his wife's respect and gratitude; when he receives these, it gives him stature in her eyes and he becomes her king.

The Torah tells us that there is no such thing as a king without a people to rule over. The same is true in other relationships. A rav gains stature from the respect and admiration of those who seek his guidance. Rav Shimshon Pincus would quip, "A cow doesn't appreciate a black hat." When a cow sees a rav, he sees nothing more than a person wearing something black.

It is told that when the Vizhnitzer Rebbe the Ahavas Yisrael went for a walk with his son, the Damesek Eliezer, the non-Jews in town assumed that the son was the Rebbe and the father, who was shorter and far less imposing in appearance, must be his attendant. It takes a person with understanding to distinguish between people who only look impressive and those who are genuinely worthy of respect.

Within the home, when a wife looks up to her husband she actually *gives* him stature. It doesn't matter whether he's a big-shot businessman in the outside world, or a *rosh yeshivah*, or a storekeeper. At home, he is her king, and she becomes his queen.

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When we stop looking at things in a material sense and start looking beneath the surface, it often becomes easier to put this into practice. So much of what a husband provides isn't tangible at all, just as the example of a king mentioned above. The husband should be the spiritual head of the home. He sets the direction for the family, the guidelines all family members adhere to, the general *hashkafah* of the home.

When a wife recognizes this, she will naturally turn to her husband for advice, for *chizuk* when she needs it, for a compliment to keep her going, and so forth. And each time she can do so, she will build him up into becoming her king.

Even if she doesn't feel that she needs his advice, if she is wise she will ask for it anyway. As the *sefer Orchos Tzaddikim* teaches, we should always seek out a friend who gives us the good feeling of needing us, even if the truth is that we need them more than they need us.

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Many of the Torah's teachings in this area fly in the face of secular ideas of gender equality and independence that have seeped into all our communities and caused a great deal of damage. The Torah tells us that there is no truth to the idea that women gain from being independent and not needing their husbands — in fact, the Gemara is clear that, "It's better for a woman to have any husband, no matter who, than it is not to have a husband at all."

Of course this doesn't mean that suffering due to one's husband is a good thing. One way of understanding this Gemara is realizing that women have an incredible *koach* to influence their husbands for the good.

But it must also be recognized that virtually no one is truly independent. Almost everyone needs other people for advice, *chizuk*, and a good word now and again. Even women who pride themselves on "not needing" their husbands generally do turn to others (mothers, sisters, friends) for help when needed. And each time they do, they miss out on a

huge opportunity to turn to their husbands for that help instead.

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Husbands, like anyone, like to feel needed and any normal, healthy husband will happily give his help to a wife who asks for it. A wife is a queen, not a serving maid, and is not expected to work like a slave for her husband.

If she is working too hard, then she should recognize a need to slow down and get help. Certainly she should never reach the point where she is unnecessarily exhausted and resenting her husband for "doing nothing" while she slaves away.

As always, getting communication right is key to improving rather than harming one's *shalom bayis*. A wife who needs help should ask and not demand; a husband being asked should happily do whatever is needed.

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To the second questioner, who asked about a wife who doesn't seem to want an emotional connection with him, I would answer with very similar ideas.

Don't wait for your wife to be your loving queen. Treat her like a queen, and you'll see her, *be'ezras Hashem*, beginning to treat you like a king. Give her respect and tell her how much you appreciate and treasure her. Don't wait for her to signal that she wants an emotional connection. Start creating it yourself.



Sometimes, people tell me about a *shiur* or essay of mine that they enjoyed, and then add, "Now I just have to find a way of getting my husband/wife/parent to listen to it." To these people I reply, "No, you heard what you were meant to hear. Now go and put it into practice. Don't wait for someone else to make the first move."

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The Torah tells us, "All beginnings are difficult." Making the first move is difficult, no doubt about it. The reward is great, but it's hard work.

I recall a certain young husband who came to see me, carrying a long list of things that his wife wasn't happy with and wanted him to change.

"Just look at this list!" he exclaimed. "How can I possibly do all of this?"

"It's not so bad," I consoled him. "Look how clear she made it for you. She knows what the problems are, and now you can set about fixing them."

He shook his head. "There's no way I can do all this..." he told me.

"It's certainly a lot," I agreed, "and you may not be able — or even obligated — to do everything written here, and certainly not all at once. But giving up before you've even started could mean that you'll have to accept the consequences of a marriage where 'I can't do this...' sets the tone."

May Hashem give us the wisdom to know what's important and the eyes to see that we really can do it if we only want to, and may we all be *zocheh* to build homes where the Shechinah can dwell with us.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: PINCHAS 5784

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