RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS SHEMOS

THE RIGHT WAY

Parshas Shemos starts with *"Ve'eleh shemos Bnai Yisrael haboim Mitzraymoh,"* the beginning of *Galus Mitzrayim*.

Chazal tell us that the galus came about because of *mechiras Yosef*. This raises a difficult question: We know that Yosef forgave his brothers, so why were they being punished?

The Chida, based on a *Sefer Chassidim,* explains that while Yosef Hatzaddik did forgive his brothers, there was an outstanding Heavenly account. They were still held responsible for the sin of selling a Tzadik.

The Chida goes on to explain, based on this principle, Chazal's statement that Yaakov was punished with not seeing Yosef for 22 years, due to the fact that he left his father, Yitzchok, for 22 years. Although Yitzchok blessed him on his journey to Lavan and he was certainly not obligated in Kibbud Av during those years, there is still a heavenly accounting for the fact that this Mitzvah was not done.

In every relationship, whether with a spouse, children, or anyone else, there are two reasons to take the relationship seriously: One, because it's what Hashem wants. Even if someone is willing to give in, you have to make sure it's the right thing to do and that you're not taking advantage or hurting someone. And two, because you're dealing with your fellow Jew, and it's nice to be accomodating and make them happy. It's very important to take other people seriously, right as you may be.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I listen to your teachings on Torah Anytime, and gain a lot from them. May Hashem continue to help you help *Yiddishe kinder*.

I'm an average hard-working man with a large family. I was recently at a speech where I heard about the 5 Love Languages, acts of service, words of affirmation, physical touch, quality time, and gifts. The speaker mentioned that every person has at-least one love language, and some have more than one. My wife needs all of them and I can provide most, but I find it hard to give gifts.

I consider myself a loving father and husband. I'm not home much, but when I am, I am fully present, helping out with the children and household, etc. In general, I focus on providing the other four areas of love.

But when it comes to gifts, it's completely against my nature. I'm a very satisfied person. I never buy myself anything and don't want others to buy for me. My wife, though, has a list of gifts she wants me to get for her. After *another* conversation about this, I finally told her, "Why don't you just go and buy gifts yourself?" But no. She wants me to buy them for her as *a present*.

I challenged her. After all these years, why can't she accept that this is one thing I cannot provide? Nobody is perfect and this is my flaw. But she challenged me back, "Why should I change my need to receive gifts rather than you changing your difficulty with giving gifts?". We are both feeling stumped by this.

In other words, should a person change their nature and personality for their spouse's needs, or should the spouse accept the fact that this is the reality and make the best of it?

Thank you.

Answer:

This is a great question. It's easy to get confused with a question like this. Who is to say which spouse should do the bending? Should the one asking the question be the one to bend, or should he be the one getting the other party to bend? Should no one bend, and no one happy, or both bend... still leaving no one happy?!

This is not a Beis Din, or a forum for mediating disagreements. But even if it would be, I don't think that in this case, your *shalom bayis* will be enhanced if I hand down a verdict on who's right. If I say that one party is right, it may settle the disagreement, but it won't make you happier. Besides, there is no way I can decide who is right in your case

without really hearing more about the different "sides" of the argument.

◇

So let's discuss different ideas and perspectives involved here.

There's the perspective of control. One spouse can't and shouldn't control what the other person *must* do. Even one spouse dictating what the other spouse *should* do won't make anyone happy.

But, taking this a step further, let's say I tell the questioner that he's right and he doesn't have to learn his wife's language of love. Let's say she has to accept that fact. Now he can tell her that he's right. And then? Will she be happier hearing that, or maybe the opposite?

I recently spoke to a man about a certain issue, and he *was* right. I guided him how to deal with it and specifically told him *not* to tell his wife that I said he was right because it would be counterproductive. He couldn't control himself. The need to be right is so strong, that even when it works against us, we still want to be proven right.

◇

Because this is being read by many readers, let me admit that If each of you would have approached me individually, I would likely tell the husband, "If you know what your wife wants, why don't you give it to her? It's hard for you. but it will make your life so much better."

Similarly, I'd probably tell the wife, "If your husband is expressing love his way, why are you trying to get him to do something that is so difficult for him? Accept and interpret his acts and intentions as love." Marriage is all about finding a way to give and appreciating what's being given.

A *dayan* recently approached me about an issue he was dealing with, and the premise was similar. Two *mechutanim*, one felt that there should be no photography by the *chuppah*, because taking pictures wouldn't be appropriate at such a holy and momentous time. The other one felt that pictures meant so much to his mother, he didn't want to deprive her of it. Who is right? Who should give in?

I recommended that the *dayan* explain to one side why pictures are so important to the other side, how much it means to them, and that maybe peace and harmony comes before respecting the holiness of the moment. By the same token, he should explain to the other side how much the moment means to the *mechutan* and that maybe that comes before honoring a grandparent. Whichever one would be able to see the other side faster would be able to give up on their own need.

In the case of this questioner, the same holds true. If I can get the husband to understand that buying his wife gifts will make her happy, he'll be a winner because he'll have a better marriage for it. At the same time, if I can get the wife to realize how much she is already getting from her husband through acts of service and words of affirmation and accept the fact that he doesn't buy gifts – especially because he lets her buy them herself – she'll also be so much happier. Whoever can see the other one's point of view is the one who will be happier.

◇

You mentioned that your wife has a list of gifts she wants. I want to point out that buying everything a spouse demands has nothing to do with Love Languages.

A gift shouldn't be dictated by the receiver. That's more about manipulation and control, than expressions of love. Giving a gift is not so much about what the gift is and how expensive it was, etc. Sometimes it's about the thought behind it or the card with it.

Sometimes just mentioning that you wanted to buy a gift but couldn't for whatever reason, time or money, etc., can give the feeling that you care and love. Maybe discuss what they'd want for the next occasion. All that can show that you want to make them happy.

◇

But let's back up a bit and discuss the idea of the Five Love Languages, so that nothing about

what I said till here is misleading. I believe that when there is a difference in love language and expression, there are usually other emotions that create the difference. It's usually not *just* a preference or personality, there are usually other emotions at play that create the difference and the challenge. It's not like, "I like vanilla, you like chocolate," there's more to it. Usually people with different Love Languages sound more like: "I like chocolate, and I can't stand the vanilla you like. I believe that your love of vanilla proves you don't really love me. And I NEED chocolate."

The book, *The Five Languages of Love* didn't solve the world's problems. One reason might be because people misuse its information. People interpret love languages in the way that's beneficial to them. When I want to learn your language, is it because I want to give you what you need or because I want to get what I want? In other words, and I think this is what the questioner means to ask, who is supposed to learn whose language? The book doesn't talk about that.

Learning someone else's language is not only for giving *or* for taking. It's for both. Should I learn your language to accommodate you, or should I read it to tell you what I want and need, (and must have or else...?).

Whatever you answered to that, you may have missed another option, reading the book (or just becoming familiar with its main idea, without necessarily reading it, as I don't recommend reading non-Jewish books without clear Daas Torah guiding you to do so), to learn how to accept and properly interpret that which someone else is doing for you!

We should be learning the other one's language in order to accept what they're able to give and interpret that right. You're giving me words of affirmation, but I need gifts. If I learn your language, I'll understand that you're really expressing love to me, even though you're not doing it my way.

In other words, there are two reasons to understand someone else's language. One, to figure out what your spouse will appreciate *from* you. And two, to learn how to appreciate what your spouse is already giving you, but you may not have noticed without understanding that language. So in this case, both of you should learn to accept the other one's language. That's what *shalom bayis* is about.

With such a topic, it's clear that each person has their own work. It's about understanding *you* better so I can make you happy, and understanding *you* better so I can be happy with what you have to offer, and interpreting things in such a way that will make our marriage better. The goal is to understand *your* role. It's not about coming to an agreement or being right. And it goes far beyond five languages.

Wishing you much Hatzlacha,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

SHEMOS 5782

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557** or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**
To subscribe to receive the weekly essay, please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SEND ANY QUESTIONS, ON THIS TOPIC OR ANY TOPIC TO RABBIGRUEN@LEHAIR.ORG