RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME

PARSHAS EMOR

~~NOT~~ THE IDEAL CIRCUMSTANCE

In Parshas Emor we learn that if a kohen has a *mum*, he is disqualified from serving in the Bais Hamikdash. Many *meforshim* ask why this is so and indeed, if this is fair to the *kohen*. If something happened to him or he was born with a physical blemish, why shouldn't he be able to serve?

The Torah teaches us that Hashem takes everything into account, in advance. If a kohen has a *mum*, it's because Hashem knew that this *neshamah* was not supposed to do the *avodah*. He's not disqualified from the *avodah because* of the blemish. He has a blemish because he wasn't meant to do the *avodah* in the first place.

The Midrash teaches that when Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai left the cave, he saw a person shooting at birds, and as the man fired, he heard a *bas kol* announce, "This bird will live, this bird will die…" and the man missed or hit birds accordingly. Rabi Shimon was amazed at the *hashgachah elyonah*. The birds didn't die because they were hit; they were hit because they were supposed to die.

Hashem takes everything into account. Everything that happens was supposed to happen exactly that way. This is a tremendous *yesod*. We may not know what Hashem's plans are for us, but as our life stories play out, we see those plans clearly. We may assume that a *kohen* will grow up to serve in the Bais Hamikdash, but if he becomes a *baal mum*, we now know that he wasn't meant to serve.

This is relevant to every aspect of how life "plays itself out." One example (which can be relevant to the questions addressed below) is that everyone has to be *mechabed* their parents. All the same, there are aspects of the *mitzvah* that change when a person gets married. Chazal teach that a woman's first allegiance is to her husband. How does that affect her obligation regarding her parents? We'll see as her life plays out. At times, her parents' needs will dovetail with her husband's wishes; at other times, they'll be in conflict. Married children are certainly obligated

THIS WEEK'S ESSAY IS SPONSORED BY M. E. D.

לזכות ולכבוד התנא האלקי רבן שמעון בר יוחאי

נסיעה טובה - און מז'אל פועל'ן אלעס גוטס!

QUESTION #1

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

Thank you so much for your *avodas hakodesh* and your work for the *klal*.

I recently got married and we live close to my parents. Whenever we visit, which is quite often, it gets really stressful. The personalities of my mother and my husband clash. Over time, we started going over less, but recently things came to a head.

Baruch Hashem, we had a baby quite soon after our marriage, but only after a complicated pregnancy. My mother came with us to the hospital as a matter of course. I knew that my husband would feel pushed aside, but I didn't have the courage to say anything. My husband needs to be involved in everything and he was resentful that my mother ran the show. This was the beginning of a very stressful stay at my parents' house. My mother and my husband clashed a few times and our *shalom bayis* also suffered. No one was happy and my husband didn't feel that I was "on his side." They both have stronger personalities, while I have a weaker personality, and I was stuck in the middle.

My husband was overprotective of the baby and very careful with who was touching the baby. I felt bad for my mother because she was so excited for this *simchah* and worked so hard to be there for me. But I also felt bad for my husband that he couldn't enjoy it as much as he would've liked. Then I felt bad for myself that I was stuck in the middle of this right after birth.

When we got back home, everything calmed down. Our *shalom bayis* is *b"H* great, and my relationship with my mother is also good. But I feel like everyone has resentment inside, and nobody is talking about it. I keep switching between feeling bad for my husband, my mother, and myself, and I sometimes feel anger towards them. I believe everyone feels the same way.

I want to open a discussion with all of us about this, so that we can clear the air and I can apologize to my mother. Can you advise how to do this? Should I explain my husband's side to my mother, or should I validate her? Should I explain my side to my husband, or will that just make things worse? I want to make sure to do it in a way that will fix things, and not break them even more. Thank you.

QUESTION #2

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

Thank you so much for your *shiurim*.

My husband feels a responsibility for me to have a close relationship with his mother. He means well, but he puts pressure on me. When I go to visit, I don't enjoy it.

For example, we went to his parents for Yom Tov. When we arrived, I was very hungry but I didn't see anything to eat. I didn't feel comfortable asking my mother-in-law. I asked my husband if he could see if there's anything available, but it bothered him that I didn't just open the fridge or look for myself. At least, he felt, I should have asked my mother-in-law directly. *I* was bothered that something like that bothered *him*.

Over Yom Tov, when I sat quietly by the meals, it bothered him that I wasn't making conversation with my *shvigger*, that I wasn't going to the kitchen to help her serve. I didn't have what to talk to her about and I didn't mind sitting. But it became stressful and I didn't enjoy it anymore when I saw that he was uncomfortable.

There are times when I want my husband to ask his mother something, but he puts pressure on me to call her myself and be more *heimish* with her. I feel that this makes things very uncomfortable.

Is it his obligation to make me feel *heimish* and comfortable by his mother? Is it a normal thing? What does it mean to be comfortable? Do I have to talk loudly and take food myself? Can I do things the way I feel comfortable? Is it his responsibility that his mother should like me? He feels comfortable by my parents, but people are different.

In general, my husband has pressure that I should look good. If I make a mistake, it bothers him that I'm not perfect. He likes when people think that I'm perfect.

ANSWER

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

The gist of both questions is one person feeling stuck between their spouse and their parents. This is a very common occurrence. In the first question, a woman feels stuck between making her husband and her mother happy. In the second letter, a woman feels that her husband is coming between the two of them, putting her under pressure to make things work out.

There are many couples who are happily married, appreciate and understand each other, and have a lot in common, but then a parent mixes in and things start becoming complicated. Even if the "mixing" only takes the form of a parent mentioning "how upset I was when you/your wife said…" it can be very divisive. Then there are those couples whose marriages require some work, and they can make a go of it on their own, but it becomes far more complex when they are put under pressure, or put themselves under pressure, to please the parents.

According to *halachah*, a man is always obligated in *kibbud av va'em*. Nothing about this changes when he gets married. On the other hand, a woman does become exempt from honoring her parents if and when it's a contradiction to honoring her husband. (However, a husband's fulfillment of his basic obligation of *kibbud av va'em* will generally not imperil his *shalom bayis*, as long as he properly understands the extent of this obligation. As with any other question in this area, Daas Torah should always be consulted in order to clarify the details.)

When a person gets married, the marriage should become the most important relationship. That's the one you should invest in most and not take lightly. Rav Avigdor Miller *z"l* was once asked about the obligation to honor parents and in-laws. He quipped, "Be nice to your parents because you need their *yerushah*. But be nice to your spouse because that's who you'll be sharing it with." If you want your parents to take you seriously, you should take them seriously. Still, honoring your parents and concerning yourself with their welfare certainly does not have to detract from your *shalom bayis*.

I recently spoke to a man who was dealing with his father's health crisis. However, it was coming at the expense of things going on at home. His wife wasn't happy. He felt that it was either one or the other, and was feeling torn. Together we examined some ways in which he could feel less torn — while generally speaking a person's first priority should be his *shalom bayis*, it may not have to become a contradiction. Usually you can make both work. Often, it can be enough to just ask your spouse, "Is it okay if I call my mother now? Do you think it can work if I go over later?" Later, you can give your wife credit and make her feel good. "I'm glad we came to an agreement on this." So many situations can be resolved this way, by simply making sure that your spouse feels involved and good about what you're doing, and not challenged or only informed.

Rabbi Twersky once said, "When people look at things as 'all or nothing' it usually becomes 'nothing.'" When people think "black or white," it usually ends up "black." If you think you can please either your spouse or your parents, not both, then you will probably end up pleasing only one or the other. But if you can look at your options more broadly and show flexibility about when and how you do things, perhaps pleasing one person and *then* the other, you can often end up pleasing both. Being dedicated to your marriage doesn't have to mean that you neglect anyone.

• • •

When it comes to *shalom bayis*, people often assume that they have to be *completely* open and transparent. Not everyone likes it when I say this, but if your wife will be upset or feel threatened by something you've done, why do you have to tell her? Chazal teach us to be *meshaneh mipnei hashalom*. If you're a few minutes late and your wife won't care, but she will be upset if you're late because you stayed in the car to call your mother, why are you telling her that you called?

If you know from experience that telling your mother something about your spouse, or telling your spouse something about your parents, will make them upset, why do you have to say it?

• • •

In general it's important not to feel the need to take sides or team up with anyone. Once you realize that, you'll see that giving a good feeling to two people at the same time isn't as contradictory as you think. In the situation with the woman during the birth, pleasing one doesn't necessarily have to be a contradiction to pleasing the other. Yes, your husband does have to come first. However, if you tell your mother very gently, "Mom, as much as I'd love to have you here, I know my husband will appreciate being with me alone, and I understand him — thanks, Mommy, for understanding," then she may take it better than you imagine. Similarly, later on, if you tell her, "Thanks so much for everything. It would mean a lot to my husband if we could do things this way," then you may be able to resolve things as simply as that.

You may not be able to resolve things without hard feelings on either side. But you aren't obligated to please everyone. If you can't satisfy both parties, you are obligated to choose your husband over your mother. That doesn't mean you have to appear cold. You can show your mother you understand, and listen to her with empathy. Validating doesn't mean you agree with her. It just makes her feel understood — and hopefully that may make all the difference in this situation. More than that, take care to avoid the feeling of codependency, where you feel responsible for making everyone happy. That's not your problem. Validating and listening is something you can do, but their feelings are not in your hands, especially in a situation where there are others involved too.

• • •

The husband described in the second letter isn't asking me if he's doing the right thing by trying to get his wife to impress his mother, or get them to be close. But I'll share with my readers that although the intention is probably great, it's usually wrong to try and control these relationships. Obviously I don't know much about this specific situation,

but in general, it's wrong for a husband to pressure his wife to find favor in his mother's eyes or to impress her. As the person in the middle, your job isn't to exert pressure, but to make everyone feel understood while doing your best to avoid hurting anyone. You're not responsible for making sure they get along. It's nice to feel liked and to know that others are impressed by you. We're all like that. Yet we often ascribe too much importance to what other people think. A person has to live for himself and know what makes him feel happy and secure. It's important to know how to convey this to others, and to let them please you in a healthy way. But if you judge things by what other people say, and if people have to make you happy based on what other people think, that's when things start to go wrong. That's a codependent relationship.

If someone is putting pressure on you, you can say, "I understand you, but for me, this works better. Please understand me as well."

To the young man who feels that his mother must think highly of his wife: Perhaps you can say to your mother respectfully, "Maybe you can call my wife to discuss this, I know that she loves talking to you." That would be Aharon Hakohen's method. Aharon Hakohen went to each person and told them that the other person appreciated them and wanted a good relationship. As the monkey in the middle, maybe you can do that. You can also tell your wife, "My mother loves your company. She looks forward to your visits." Maybe that will make her more comfortable. Tell your mother how much your wife is looking forward to coming. That might make your mother more comfortable. Putting pressure on people will often only make them more uncomfortable.

Giving good regards can also be helpful. After Yom Tov, tell your mother how much your wife enjoyed being there. Tell her she liked the food and may try some recipes. Your wife doesn't have to know that you said it and your mother doesn't have to know that she didn't. There are so many things you can do for your mother to appreciate your wife, without having to resort to controlling anyone.

What about hurtful messages? Maybe your mother told you to tell your wife that "Next time you come, she should…" "Please tell your wife to come early to the *simchah*." If you know that it's not going to work and your wife will be resentful, you don't have to give over those messages. Your mother can think you said it, but it's not your responsibility. That's part of *muttar leshanos mipnei hashalom*.

• • •

If you know that it means a lot to your husband that you talk to or help his mother, you might want to do it. You don't have to, but you might want to, for his sake. Many people don't have ways of pleasing their spouses. Some people are unpleasable. If you know you have a way of making your husband happy, go ahead and do it. He shouldn't put pressure on you to comply, and you can do it in a way that still leaves you comfortable, but it might be a good opportunity to take, for your husband's sake.

There may be resistance only because he's demanding. And sometimes you know that it would mean a lot even if he doesn't apply pressure.

• • •

Although this is not what we're discussing here, parents should know and accept that married children have their private lives and may not be so open with them. Their marriage relationship has to come first. I often hear from people whose parents either make negative comments about their spouse, or mix directly into decisions that the couple should make themselves. Some impose or pry indirectly, pressuring their children to involve them "to spare their feelings." The correct way of doing things is to always take into consideration that your child is married. Whenever you do say something, you should add, "Only if your wife is okay with it…" "Only if your husband doesn't mind…" and even, "You have to make your own decision…" This will help the couple build their relationship.

In most cases, if spouses make it a priority to take each other seriously and only then try to accommodate others, the two relationships may cease being contradictory. It may be helpful and sometimes even necessary to consult with Daas Torah to make sure you're clear in all halachic aspects as well.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

TORAH LESSONS
FOR THE HOME

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**

If you enjoy and benefit from Rabbi Gruen's work please consider sponsoring a weekly Parsha essay which is read and enjoyed by thousands of readers, and have a Zchus in the many hours of classes which help so many homes.

To dedicate a week or a month of this newsletter, in honor of a Simcha, in memory of a loved one, or to show appreciation for Rabbi Gruen, please email to parshalessons@lehair.org, and your donation will be most appreciated.

Thank You & Tizku Lmitzvos!