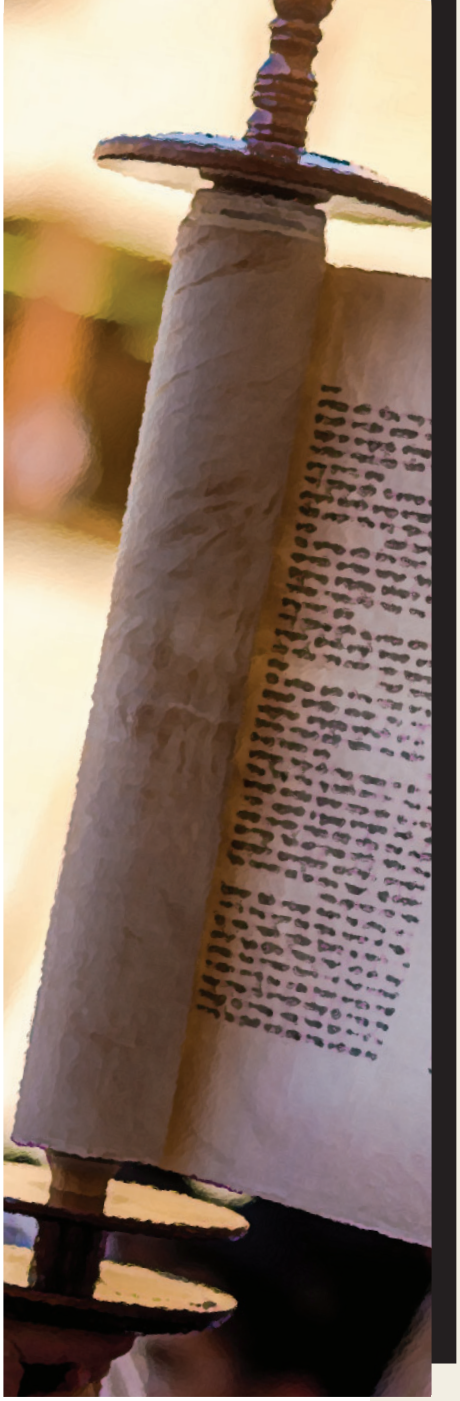


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

ONE DAY IT WILL BE TOO LATE

When the brothers of Yosef Hatzaddik were brought into his palace, the *passuk* tells us, they were very afraid, suspecting that they were about to be put in prison due to the money that had been replaced in their sacks, after paying for the grain on their first visit to Mitzrayim. The Noam Elimelech explains the words of the *passuk,* "*Vayiru anashim ki huv'u beis Yosef,*" as referring to *ehrliche* Yidden who are afraid as they are about to enter the next world, and who say, *"al-devar hakesef ... anachnu muva'im lehisgolel aleinu*—because of all the longing we had for the good things of this world, we are going to suffer now..."

The Noam Elimelech explains that this is generally the mark of *ehrliche* Yidden — they always have in mind the ultimate goal of life and the accounting they will have to give for their days in this world. Therefore, they live in a constant state of *teshuvah*, regretting their *aveiros* and resolving to improve their ways.

The idea of remembering that our days are limited can also be helpful in relating well to our loved ones. As Harav Avigdor Miller *ztz"l* would say, one day, after years of bickering and complaints, you're going to come home to an empty house and wish that you could be given another chance to say sorry or thank you, to appreciate, to compliment... but it's too late. How much better to live with the awareness that every day could be the last and to make the most of all its opportunities.

You often see the gravestones of husband and wife next to one another, sometimes with an inscription that "in life and death they were not parted." Of course that's not true, because they were technically parted by death, and sometimes sadly in life too. Instead, we can use each day of life to be together, to give a smile, a compliment, a word of praise — and to stay connected.

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Parshas
Mikeitz
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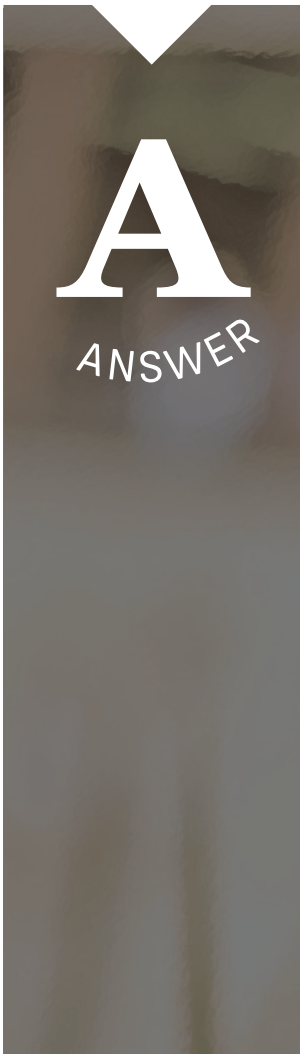
Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you for all your *shiurim*, which I listen to on Torah Anytime; they're really helpful and insightful.

I have a question that I'd like to ask. My husband leaves the house at six o'clock in the morning to go to work. He comes home around six in the evening. He eats supper and then we put the kids to bed together, which takes until around seven-fifteen. From then until half-past-eight we spend time together, talking etc., and then my husband goes out to daven and to learn. When he gets home, he's exhausted and likes to go straight to bed. (He also goes out twice a week for longer — he leaves earlier and comes home later, and spends this time with friends.)

I feel that the time we have together in the evenings isn't enough for a married couple, but my husband doesn't see the problem. I also feel that time with me should be more important to him than time with his friends, but he doesn't see it that way. Please can you clarify how to go about this, because it will for sure make my life easier if I know how to handle this.

Thank you



Before I address the points you're asking about, I'd like to acknowledge that your husband sounds like a very special person — so much so, that a lot of wives could find reason to be jealous of you for having such a wonderful partner. He's organised, responsible, and helpful, and although he has a long and busy day which includes davening, working, and learning, he makes time each evening to spend time with you. Wow!

Very often, people get accustomed to things being a certain way and they forget to be appreciative, and it's okay to need the occasional reminder. You may also not realize that many husbands don't set aside anywhere near an hour every day just to spend time with their wives. It's important to be aware that what you're describing is something very special indeed, and to appreciate it and express your gratitude.

Another point I'd like to make by way of introduction is that it's perfectly okay to see things differently from your husband. You describe two separate issues where you don't agree, and there's nothing wrong or abnormal about that. Problems only arise when spouses don't show respect for each other's points of view, when they're not willing to try to look at things from a different perspective — or when they think that a

difference of opinion is a problem of its own. But the fact that there are such differences really isn't a problem at all.

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Just to recap what you described: Your husband is coming home at the end of a long day, eating supper and helping with the children, and then spending around an hour with you. Twice a week he spends less time with you and more with his friends, and you're understanding this as him seeing his relationships with his friends as more important than his relationship with you.

The first thing I'd like to mention here is that your husband is spending most of his time working to support his family, and then more time in the evening to help, and to shmooze with you. Why shouldn't he go out a few times a week just to enjoy himself with friends? Of course if they were undesirable friends you might have to step in, in a wise manner, but it doesn't sound like this is the case here.

The second thing I want to stress is that your husband isn't seeing *his friends* as more important than his wife. He's just taking some time for *himself*, not too much, to recharge his batteries, the same way a wife might chat with a friend or a sister on the phone for an hour, a few times a week. There's no reason to even conclude from something so normal that he prefers his friends' company to yours. This would only be a problem if, for example, he discussed all important decisions for your home with his friends instead of with you. But what you're describing sounds relatively normal and reasonable, and not a reason for concern.

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As with anything else, communication is key. So much of getting people to take us seriously and be more understanding or flexible has to do with how and when we communicate. Often, people get frustrated and wait impatiently for the other person to somehow figure out what they want and then carry out their wishes. It takes a measure of humility to express one's needs in a reasonable way and then ask, rather than demand.

From what you write, it sounds like you have discussed these issues with your husband many times in the past and still didn't get anywhere. I do believe that investing more thought in how and when you communicate about this issue will help you to accomplish a lot more, and perhaps lead to your husband being more understanding and flexible in accommodating your needs. It's sad when people specifically resist being vulnerable and communicating openly because they feel that they shouldn't have to, or because they insist that the other person is obligated to take care of them without them having to request it.

It's also a shame when people come across as defensive, challenging, blaming, or critical, compiling all their complaints in a "federal case" in the belief that this will make it more likely to be taken seriously and not realizing that they're literally chasing the other person away. So, just in case the communication you've tried in the past wasn't as friendly or gentle as it might have been, or was attempted at the wrong times and therefore became emotionally overwhelming for you or your husband, I would suggest that you try to discuss your needs and desires in a calm moment in a kind, soft way, and hopefully this will make a big change.

If you have already tried communicating in the nicest way possible and didn't see any changes as a result, it may be time to accept that the situation is not going to change substantially. So let's move on to other ideas which may be helpful both in getting your needs met and helping you to see things differently.

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It's possible that whereas your husband has friends to spend time with, you don't have family or friends to chat with once in a while. This dynamic is fairly common and can create problems if spouses don't make the effort to be understanding and flexible. Many times, either husbands or wives complain that their spouse doesn't have a social life so they depend on their home life to compensate entirely. Of course friends can't ever replace family, but they often fill a role that husbands or wives aren't always capable of doing, especially if

they're tired, introverted, have different interests, or for any other number of reasons.

It's also possible that you do have your own friends and also family to chat with — just not in the evening hours when the children are sleeping and your husband is out of the house with friends or in shul.

If either of these situations applies and you feel that you would like to spend longer periods of time with your husband occasionally, just as he does sometimes with his friends — or if you simply want to spend more time with your husband in general — there are ways to achieve this without trying to find extra time in what sounds like an already very packed daily schedule. This is what vacations are for, and they don't have to be annual vacations of a few days or weeks at a time — they can also be weekly mini-vacations, such as a long walk on Motzaei Shabbos, an occasional evening with a change of plan, and so forth.

For example, you could take care of putting the children to bed by yourself one evening so that your husband can take a nap during that time, and then he'll have more energy to spend longer with you later. It does sound like expecting him to find more time the way things are currently structured isn't very feasible, as he is exhausted by evening and gets up early every day. If you are the one to take the first step toward him, it's more likely that he will be encouraged to take the next step toward you, once he sees that you are willing to put in effort of your own.

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What is also very important is making sure that the time you spend together is as meaningful as possible. Of course sometimes wives (and husbands) need to vent about whatever difficulties may have happened that day, but try to make your time together contain a minimum of kvetching so that it's something that you can both look forward to. I've no reason to think that this is the case here, but there certainly are people who spend a lot of time complaining and making demands, and it would be very surprising if the person on the other end of the complaints was willing and prepared to spend even more time having his ear chewed off.

That said, I do want to stress that having a full schedule and being exhausted at the end of the day shouldn't be allowed to get in the way of building a strong *shalom bayis.* If either husband and wife is too worn out to find time to enjoy being with their spouse, this is a problem that should be addressed, because spending regular time together in a relaxed frame of mind is essential, not a luxury.

Hashem should help that all couples should learn to enjoy every minute of their time together, use all their opportunities to create a strong relationship, and build homes filled with *ahavah, achvah, shalom, v'reius*.



TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: MIKEITZ 5784

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