RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS

FOR THE HOME

PARSHAS NASO

PARENTS' OPINION OF A CHILD'S SPOUSE

Parshas Naso is the longest of the *parshiyos*. One of the reasons for this, is that it comes right after Kabbalas HaTorah, when the *hashpa'ah* from the Torah is greater. The *hashpa'ah* of the Torah is our guiding light in every aspect of our lives. Whenever we discuss any aspect of our lives, including our relationships with others, we should always start by finding out what the Torah's perspective is. Even when things seem simple and self-understood, it's important to remember that the Torah is always our guide.

In Parshas Naso, we learn about the *korbanos* of the *nesi'im* and how each one brought the identical *korban*. The Chiddushei Harim asks why Rashi explains the reasons for the specific *korbanos* only by the second *nasi* instead of the first. The Chiddushei Harim explains that when the second *nasi* brought the same *korbanos* as the first, it would have made sense to assume that he was simply copying the first *nasi*, and so too by the other ten *nesi'im*. Therefore, Rashi felt it important to explain the reasoning by the *second* nasi, to stress that there were specific reasons for the *korbanos*. No one was copying anyone. Each *nasi* had his own specific *kavanos*.

None of us are here to copy others or to find favor in their eyes. We're here to serve Hashem, and although we all take the same *arba minim*, that's because we were all commanded to do so by the Torah.

It's not terrible to want others to think highly of us, but that's not the reason for us to be doing the right thing.

It's when we're *not* looking to impress others, that we can get the clarity to do what's right. The Skolya Rebbe was once seen performing a certain *minhag* and was asked why. The Rebbe replied, "*Di velt firt zich azoi* — this is what the 'world' does." His grandson, however, had never seen anyone doing that, and so the Rebbe explained, "*Di velt vus ich red is R' Shimon Bar Yochai, the Ari Hakadosh, the Baal Shem Hakadosh and the Heilige Komarna* — the people I'm talking about are the R' Shimon Bar Yochai, the Ari Hakadosh, the Baal Shem Hakadosh and the Komarna Rebbe."

The Skolya Rebbe wasn't concerned about what other people thought and he was specific when deciding whom to take into account when figuring out what to do. He only sought to emulate those who exemplify Torah ideals, and this is something we should all learn from.

This is especially pertinent when it comes to a Yiddishe *shtieb* and a marriage relationship. It's about what Hashem wants from us. It has nothing to do with what other people will think or say. This relationship is personal and holy.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SPONSOR AN EDITION OF TORAH LESSONS,
TO HELP ENHANCE THE CHINUCH HABANIM IN SO MANY HOMES?

PLEASE EMAIL TO PARSHALESSONS@LEHAIR.ORG,
AND YOUR DONATION WILL BE MOST APPRECIATED.

QUESTION

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

I struggle with the fact that my parents disapprove of my husband. Technically, though, as in chassidishe circles, they were the one that chose him for me. I feel constant pressure and a pit in my stomach when we are around them. I know that it's in my head a lot, and sometimes are harder than others.

My husband is a quiet person and isn't the most social. My parent's children are louder and bubblier. Once, my father called my husband "klutz." I was so hurt, I cried for days, but I couldn't tell my husband because it would hurt him too.

I didn't choose my husband myself. They sat me down for a *beshow*, they asked for information, and I trusted them. Now they're punching the ball back in my face. I know that my husband isn't the biggest *macher*, but to label him like that hurts.

His quiet nature could bother me from time to time, but he gives me everything I need so I can't complain, especially since this detail doesn't affect me specifically. It's between him and his friends.

At the beginning of my marriage, I was in a total mess. My husband and I grew together, and this made us so close. He has changed drastically and so have I. I'm proud to say that now that we've been married for a few years, it feels good.

We could use some more quality time, though. My husband is not a big talker nor a deep thinker and is fine with practically everything. Any ideas how we could enhance our marriage even more?!

Thanks a lot for inspiring me. The weekly questions and answers make the *shiurim* more real and help me grow.

ANSWER

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

In this case, I can't begin answering the questioner before addressing the parents. Since this is a public forum and I'm here to offer helpful information to the public, I think it's important for everyone to hear this. For lack of a better word, I'll call it a crime, a crime parents commit when they tell their child that they don't approve of the child's spouse. When a parent tells a child, "Your spouse is a *klutz*, a bigshot, irresponsible, unappreciative…" (these examples are all things I have heard) it is awfully wrong and terribly damaging — even if the parents believe it's true. The parent has to take responsibility for anything that results from speaking in such a manner, although once the damage is done there isn't much they can even do. It's a terrible thing.

This crime is just as bad when the parents weren't the ones to pick the spouse, but if they did it's bound to cause added unnecessary resentment. It's terrible if a parent does a *shidduch* for their child and then talks negatively about the person they chose.

Recently, I've spoken to many unhappy people who carry resentment about how their *shidduch* came about — which is a separate discussion: knowing how to correctly find the match that's right for your child, rather than what's right for you — but it should at least not be intensified with knowing that they're left dealing with disapproving parents on top of everything.

In this case, however, it doesn't even sound like the accusations are true. This husband doesn't seem to be a *klutz*. He may not be so outgoing, but why say something about someone your daughter is happy with, just because you don't like a particular aspect of his personality? It's not like she's being hurt or abused or living in denial.

So, does that mean a parent should just say nothing? Not at all! Parents can give a lot of compliments and positive feedback. Keep telling your child how impressed you are with their spouse, how much good you see and how impressed you are by their relationship. That will

make them feel good. Furthermore, in situations when things aren't going so well, hearing from a parent how highly they think of a spouse can help the marriage. Whatever is bothering your child can be softened by the fact that others think highly of their spouse. Often, what bothers people most is the worry of what other people are thinking. If your child knows you think her spouse is a wonderful husband, she won't think you're looking down at him *or* her.

All the more so if it's true. If your child is happily married, don't point out anything negative. Highlight the positive even more.

Of course, nobody sets out to cause damage, but perhaps this is a good opportunity to create awareness.

• • •

Back to the questioner:

It's easy to tell a person not to be intimidated and not to care about what parents say. But it's not so easy to do.

If a parent can say something as insensitive and irrelevant as that, it's important to remember that it might have more to do with them than you. You should look down at them, and certainly not become disrespectful. If you have a wonderful husband and you're a wonderful wife, the one who says something insensitive may very well be dealing with a far bigger issue.

One of the reasons a hurtful comment is so painful is because you're afraid it might be true. But when you realize that the commentator is out of bounds and possibly reflecting their own insecurities, it can be easier to let it slide and remain proud and confident. When people see that you're confident and proud of your husband, you're less likely to get such comments.

If there's a competition between your relationship with your parents or your spouse (aside from any *kibbud av* questions which you should discuss with a Rov), ultimately your spouse takes precedence, as you are building a home together.

Giving off that confident energy also does something. Don't be intimidated and don't live for what others will say about you. Your relationship doesn't have to look like other people's. Do what works for you, as you build your own home and promote your true values and long term goals.

Even if you weren't so happy, even if you had wanted somebody more social, it's important to be able to put that aside for the true *tachlis* of building your own home in the best way possible.

Unfortunately, so many people today live just to impress other people. People post pictures on social media, and I know from dealing with people what a baloney story it all is. People wax poetic about the vacation they had while they really spent the entire time fighting with each other. People share pictures of their meals, or other things that shouldn't be shared at all, and it all looks so glamorous, it makes people jealous, but there's often no happiness behind it.

There's nothing to be jealous of. It's important to review: "It's not about others. It's about myself, my spouse, my family. What is really important, is what we should we doing for each other, and not for nobody else."

• • •

A man approached me at a Shabbaton for help in calming down his wife. They had recently done a *shidduch* with their son. They found a *kallah* who was exactly what their son needed, kind-hearted, soft, *ehrlich,* and sincere. Unfortunately, people didn't react positively to the *shidduch,* making very subtle but insensitive comments about her looks and lack of "classiness." They got the feeling that people weren't so impressed with the *shidduch*. The mother was extremely hurt and began second-guessing herself.

This is actually not so different from what I mentioned earlier. People who make such comments are doing something terrible. You don't know what your insensitive comments can do to a parent or a spouse, how it might make them treat the new child-in-law. As an objective outsider, I was able to clarify for the parents that the fact that they were able to do a *shidduch* that was right for their son, even when they had other options that might have *looked* better, should make them feel proud. The fact that other people aren't impressed is actually a by-product of having done the right thing. They didn't *settle*; they consciously made a decision to do the right thing and put their son's needs before their own. That's something to be really proud of.

• • •

In this case, the parents don't seem to be thinking about their child's marriage. They don't appreciate the fact that their child is happily married. That's so sad. Nothing in the world should mean as much to parents as the fact that their children are happily married. How often do we see people mix into marriages and bring up trivial issues because their ego is getting in the way?

If someone's parents can't appreciate that their child is happily married, at least the child should appreciate it. It's about you and your spouse and no one else. Again, if you appear happy and confident, people are less likely to give you such comments. It's when you seem to be unsure, that you're more likely to invite them. Whether your husband is a blue-collar worker, a white-collar worker, or he sits and learns, people will respect him, if you're proud of him.

The Belzer Rav used to say that it's important for a *chassidishe bachur* to show that he knows how to learn. There's a misconception regarding the learning quality

of the *chassidishe* vs. *litvishe bachur*, so it's important to show that he can. There's something about proudly portraying that you are happy and proud of your husband. Talk about him highly. Show respect for him. This way, people will see that he's not a *klutz* in your eyes, he's a king.

• • •

In terms of figuring out the right response, or the best way to avoid having these comments made: If people do say insensitive things, you can respectfully respond, "I'm sure you didn't mean to hurt me. What you said was hurtful." Don't go into long explanations or mention that they chose him for you. Don't debate. Just assertively and unapologetically express yourself.

• • •

You mentioned that it's possible that part of the problem is in your head. A famous study called the "Scar Study" illustrates this point very well. People who joined the study were told they would have a scar painted on their faces and that they would have to report back how they felt when they interacted with people. They were shown their grotesque scars and they all felt pretty uncomfortable. Just before they were sent out, they were told that the artist would do some touch-ups on the scars. In fact, the artist erased the scars.

The study cohort all went out. When they returned, they all reported how awkward their interactions had been, and how uncomfortable people were when looking at their faces. Only then was the group told that the scars had been erased.

Often, it's not *just* in your head, and there is some truth to it. You may think you have a small scar and you think everyone sees it, so you feel intimidated. It's possible that others don't see what you think they're seeing.

It's possible that your father's insensitive comment is a reflection of himself and what he thinks about your husband. It could also be that it's not. Maybe you blew it out of proportion because you were so hurt. Maybe that feeling makes you see every comment differently. It's possible that some of it is in your head and it's important to keep that in mind.

• • •

I'm not sure exactly what the connection is between the two parts of your letter. First you spoke about your parent's comments about your husband and then about the need for more quality time.

Sometimes, subconsciously, we may feel we did settle on some aspects of our spouse's nature or personality. You may be okay with his quieter nature — the part that seems to bother your parents — but you feel you settled on something else. This feeling may make you think you should settle on other parts of your marriage as well.

You may not be able to make your husband into a big talker. Don't even try to change his nature. But don't see your relationship as mediocre. You can simply tell your husband how much it would mean to you to spend more quality time with him. He may do it for you.

If he's not a big talker, you can spend quality time together in a way that doesn't involve too much talking. Listen to a *shiur* together. Take a walk. You prepare something nice to say. When you do it the right way, you don't have to settle for less.

If you can change something in a healthy way, without anyone being hurt, you should try to change it. Every marriage deserves to be the best. Don't settle for less than it can be, and don't harp on what isn't feasible. Be smart and ask Hashem to help you make the most of every situation.

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!