

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

DON'T WAIT TO BE ASKED

There are many types of *korbanos* — *chatas, asham, olah*, etc. — but when it comes to the *shelamim* offering, this week's *parshah* tells us, "And this is the law of the *shelamim* (peace offering), which he shall bring to Hashem." The Kli Yakar points out that it is only with the *shelamim* sacrifice that the Torah specifies that the person bringing it should offer it up himself ("which he shall bring…") rather than presenting his sacrificial animal for the *kohen* to offer to Hashem.

The Kli Yakar explains that this is because the *shelamim*, unlike the other *korbanos*, is brought as a gift to Hashem, and not in order to make amends for an *aveirah* the person has committed. If a person had harmed or slandered a human king, he continues, it would be considered a great chutzpah for him to approach the king in person with a conciliatory present. Instead, a respectful subject would send a messenger with the gift. So too, if a person sins against Hashem, he sends the *kohen* as a *shaliach* to offer up his *korban*. However, when a person wishes to give the king a gift out of a simple desire to please him, he comes in person.

There are times when we need to make amends for hurting someone or harming them in some way. Gifts can help to ease the reconciliation. However, what can really enhance a relationship is a "*shelamim*," where we give something simply because we want to make the other person happy. Responding with willing assent when asked to do something is good; preempting the other person's request and offering, of your own accord, to do what you know is needed is so much better.

We do so much for our spouses in order to enhance our *shalom bayis*. We tolerate things that are hard to come to terms with; we compromise even when it's difficult to be flexible; we give up time and invest so much effort. If we're already doing all this, why not take the extra step and do it without first being asked?

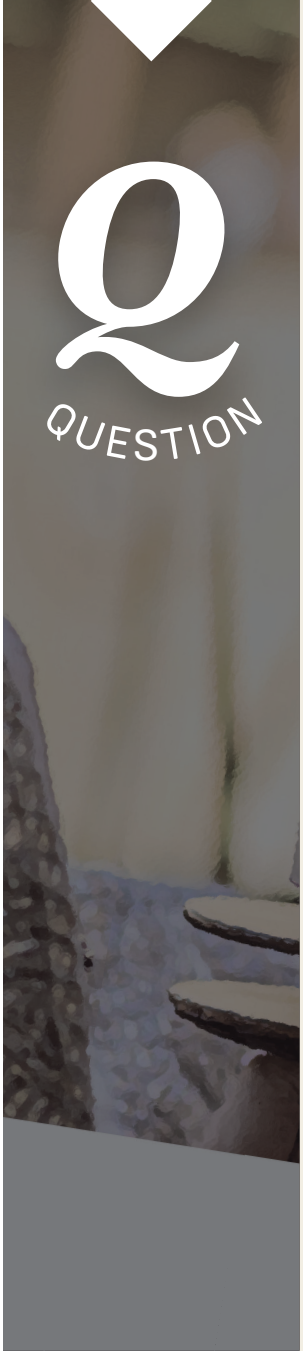
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Parshas **Tzav**

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Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I'm hoping you might be able to share with me a good tip on a topic where my husband and I have very different views. It's a really simple topic, but somehow it stirs up lots of emotions with both of us. It's about "what time to go to a *simchah*."

My husband is extremely punctual. He likes to arrive early and have plenty of time to find a parking space. He has no problem being the first person in the hall and waiting half an hour for other people to arrive. He likes to plan the night before what time we should leave the house even to simple *simchos* where no one stays too long.

For example, everyone knows that even though an engagement or a bar mitzvah is called for eight o'clock, no one shows up before nine. However, my husband still feels he needs to get there on time.

I have a very different view on this. As a mother of little kids, every minute at home makes a difference. I don't like the stress of rushing the kids into bed and rushing out of the house just to arrive early. I think going to a *simchah* should be a pleasure and not a source of tension.

We've discussed this so much but we simply can't come to an understanding.

Not long ago, my husband's sister was making a *simchah* and the invitation was for eight o'clock. My husband told me the night before that we would be leaving the house at eight (the journey would take around half an hour). When I explained to him that it was way too early he really got wild... He begged me to fall in with his plans and even told me that he's always going to be this way and asked me to just get used to it.

As a joke I suggested that I could take a car service and leave a half hour later. I can't hold him back from doing what he wants but I can't leave so early for *simchos*. He didn't like my suggestion.

We always seem to be having these kinds of arguments and I'm very much desperate to find clarity on how to get along better so we can both enjoy going to *simchos*.

Thank you

A ANSWER

You may have heard this from me, or from others, but I feel that it can't be stressed enough: It's fine for spouses to have different views on things. Our opinions depend to a great extent on our personalities, and it's okay for spouses to have different types of personalities as well. Anyone getting married should expect to be different from their spouse. This is not plan B — it's the way things are meant to be.

In almost all areas of life, there's no such thing as the "normal" or "right" way to do things. Each type of person has his own style, and that's what makes for various methods of doing almost anything, some more common, some less so. Getting caught up in, "but everyone..." just becomes a source of stress and distress. When someone assumes that

he and his wife should hold the same opinions and live in effortless harmony — something that almost never happens — he becomes anxious and searches in vain for ways to achieve his idea of *shalom bayis*.

There's nothing unique about your question. Timing is just one of many areas where people have all kinds of ideas about what's "right" or "normal." I like pointing out to people that the doors to wedding halls are regular-sized for a reason. If the wedding was set for eight and everyone got there at eight, imagine the crush at the doors. If it was really "normal" for everyone to arrive at the same time (whether "on time" or "late"), the doors would be massive, to allow everyone to enter together, instead of having to form a long line or needing to push to get in.

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Not only is it unhelpful to argue about what's normal, it's usually counterproductive. You've already seen that for yourself — what have all your arguments with your husband achieved? Neither of you has changed the other's mind, and slowly, resentment mounts.

In general, no one enjoys hearing that they're "abnormal." And as abnormal as you think someone is, it's good to acknowledge that just as you, with your opinions, are normal, so is the other person, even if you think you can "prove" you're right.

You've been married for a few years already, and after so many years of trying and failing with this approach, perhaps it's time to explore a better way forward..

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That better way, based on the idea of acknowledging another way of thinking and feeling, is actually simple. First and foremost, it means changing the way you discuss things with your husband.

Your starting point is validating your husband's way of seeing things. "I know you're so punctual by nature, and I understand why you feel a need to arrive on time." Many people are afraid to take this step, even if they grasp the idea behind it. After all, insisting that there really is only one valid way of doing things (one's own, of course) seems like an excellent way to win a debate and persuade the other person to back down. The only problem is that it doesn't work. Marriage isn't a debate and there are plenty of acceptable ways of doing almost everything.

Only after you have taken this first step should you place yourself in the picture, simply by describing your own feelings. "I'm less punctual than you are, and I feel very uncomfortable arriving at a *simchah* when almost no one is there. I also prefer not to have to rush the kids into bed before leaving."

There's no need (and it won't help) to justify those feelings or to quote sophisticated ideas to back up the point you're making. After all, everyone is entitled to their feelings even if they can't explain them. Once you allow your husband to feel as he does, you can allow yourself to do the same, and perhaps he'll allow it too.

This is a very big first step to solving your dilemma.

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The next step is to identify the possible ways of coming to an understanding. It's possible that the previous point alone will help you both to think more creatively. You can suggest anything you think might work, while remaining open to the ideas your husband comes up with, now that you have made room for both of you.

If you still can't see a way forward, you may need to compromise, with each moving a little toward the other. Alternatively, you could take turns, arriving "early/on-time" at one *simchah* and "on-time/late" at the next one. After all, we often teach our children to solve problems by taking turns and expect them to be able to do so. Why can't we?

What shouldn't be an option is one person forcing the other to accept his way of doing things, period. Guilt-tripping, manipulation, and threats have no place in a marriage (or anywhere, for that matter). You describe your husband as "begging" you to accept his way of doing things. That's very different from controlling you, even though it hasn't been very effective.

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You write that you joked with your husband about taking a car service, and that he didn't take it well. I'm not sure why you only saw the car service idea as a joke. I see it as a very feasible way of solving your dilemma, and I don't understand why you haven't pursued this idea seriously. There's no rule in marriage that says couples have to arrive at *simchos* together. It might be pleasant to do so — but in your case, insisting that you leave together certainly hasn't had a pleasant outcome. Why not suggest the car service option again, but as a realistic solution, instead of a sarcastic comment?

You can still stress how much you would like to leave with your husband even though it doesn't seem that it can work out, and how you hope you'll be able to travel home together — and then add that you hope this way of doing things will work out for both of you.

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Until you do find a better way to resolve this issue, there's another important point to contemplate. Do you have any vision of how this will work out in the end? Frequently, especially with couples who have been married for a long time, they already know who is going to end up compromising and how much. If you know that you will ultimately do your best to accommodate your husband, why wait for him to beg? Even if you concede willingly, it's still not the same as offering, of your own accord, to do your best to leave at the time he wants.



Meanwhile, continuing to insist that your husband's way of doing things is wrong or too hard is only causing pain and distress. You may feel that you are insisting on behalf of your children, so that you can spend unhurried time with them in the evening before leaving when you want, but if the price you pay is your husband's disappointment and frustration, is it really worth it?

There's nothing wrong with one person deciding, willingly, to do certain things the way the spouse prefers. All of us could make a long list of the things we'd do differently if we weren't married. And all of us know that being married is worth the sacrifice of sometimes doing things the way someone else wants. When we make that sacrifice without being first asked or begged to, it's so much more meaningful.

Sometimes, it will still seem like a sacrifice, and it's okay to let your husband know that it's hard for you, but that you'll make the effort in order to enhance your relationship. You can even tell him how much it would help to hear his appreciation and a thank-you. What you should definitely avoid doing is making him feel guilty that you gave in whereas he didn't. This will only create resentment.

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Marriage isn't about damage control. Don't wait until the next argument threatens to erupt to start doing things differently. Make your compromise — whatever it ends up being — your gift to your spouse. If you can give willingly, with a smile and no hard feelings, you will hopefully see this new flexibility mirrored by your spouse, and it can immeasurably enhance your relationship.

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