

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

MAKE IT WORK WHEN YOU CAN

In this week's *parshah*, we learn that Moshe Rabbeinu will not be entering Eretz Yisroel and will be *niftar* and buried on an unnamed mountaintop. The reason his burial place remains unknown is to prevent us from turning Moshe Rabbeinu into an idol and treating his kever as a place of worship.

The Meshech Chochmah asks why suddenly now, as Moshe Rabbeinu is about to die, does this become an issue. After all, Moshe was a legendary figure, almost larger than life, who was instrumental in bringing Klal Yisrael out of slavery and taking them to the very heights of Matan Torah. He spent forty days and nights on Har Sinai, showing himself to be virtually beyond the limits of human potential. Why do concerns about deifying him only appear once he has passed away and is no longer an instrument for Hashem's miracles?

He explains that the very essence of *avodah zarah*, as Chazal teach us, is based on the mistake of serving Hashem's servants. Ancient peoples knew that Hashem was the sole Creator but were also awed at the sun and moon, His servants. Over time, they began to worship the servants as well.

Moshe Rabbeinu's essence was that of a servant of Hashem. If not for the fact that Klal Yisrael constantly complained about him while he was leading them, there might very well have been reason to be concerned that the people would worship him. But the constant complaints made it impossible to have that kind of awe and respect for him. After his passing, however, the way of the world is that complaints are forgotten and only a person's qualities are recalled. Therefore, it was necessary to ensure that this did not lead to Moshe Rabbeinu being turned into an idol.

It would be great if we could internalize this lesson for ourselves, and keep in mind at the present moment how we are likely to feel later. Rav Avigdor Miller so poignantly describes the scene of a man coming home after a long day of work. Not every evening at home is calm, peaceful, and happy. There's often bickering and arguing. But if one were to remember that the day will come when the call of, "Hi there, I'm home" will get nothing more than silence in response, things could look very different.

The day after a spouse passes away, *R"l*, the home is empty and there's nobody there to argue with. When that day arrives, one will yearn for the sweet times together and reminisce about the "good old days." Isn't it a shame to wait till then to realize how wonderful things once were, and how much better they could have been if only we had realized at the time? Let's not wait for the day when we'll be abruptly alerted to all the good things we no longer have, to how petty all the arguments were, and how they prevented us from seeing all the blessings in our lives. Wake up now, take a look at the big picture, and appreciate all the many amazing details, before it's too late.

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Parshas
Va'eschanan
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Q

QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

First of all, I'd like to thank you for your many amazing ***shiurim***. My husband and I have been listening for years and gaining so much advice and inspiration. I've actually told him that I'm sending this question to you because I want him to be able to read your reply.

Baruch Hashem we've been married for over 20 years and we have wonderful *shalom bayis*. We understand and respect each other and get along very well.

There's just one issue, which is about my husband driving me places. My husband is generally happy to drive me wherever I need to go, but he always gets upset when I'm later than I said I would be. He also gets upset when we need to go somewhere together, like a *simchah*, and he has to wait for me to be ready.

He's told me that he feels it's disrespectful of me to keep him waiting, and that it's the hardest thing for him to tolerate in our marriage. Then, two years ago, he decided that he couldn't take it anymore and that if I was late from then on, he wouldn't wait. If I ask him to pick me up at a certain time and I'm not ready, he'll wait a minute or two and then if I don't show, he'll leave. And if it's somewhere that we have to go together, and I'm not ready, then instead of waiting for me in the car he'll come back into the house, hang up his jacket, and make himself a coffee or do something else — and then when I'm ready, I have to wait for him to finish whatever it is, before we leave, which sometimes makes us late.

I've asked my husband to be more flexible but he refuses and just says that if I'm running late I should call a taxi. So I realize that I basically have two options here — either be ready on time or get a cab — but I find it so stressful.

I'd be grateful if you could offer some advice and perhaps a solution that I didn't think of.

Thank you



A

ANSWER

The example you are illustrating may not be as common as the broader issue you are describing — namely, two spouses who have personalities that clash — which is very common indeed. Sometimes it's the wife who's punctual and the husband who is always late; sometimes it's a husband who is careful with every cent and the wife who spends money without worrying about balancing the checkbook; and sometimes it's one spouse who's more social and enjoys going out and spending time with lots of people while the other would prefer to just stay home.

Having personalities that clash doesn't mean that the underlying relationship isn't sound, as your description illustrates. You write that you have wonderful *shalom bayis* and this is something to be truly grateful for. There's no reason for any relationship to be spoiled, or seen as problematic, due to one area of contention, and I'm glad that this isn't the case here. Unfortunately, sometimes couples blow things out of proportion, assuming that a clash in one area means that there's a fundamental problem in the marriage.

You describe how your husband sees your tardiness as disrespectful. I don't know if it will help you to counter this, but perhaps in a gentle and respectful way you can clarify that this is your own issue with which you struggle, and not in any way something that stems from caring less about him or disrespecting him. But regardless of whether he'll accept that from you, people should definitely try to internalize this important message that differences of personality that affect opinions, taste, preferences, tendencies, or styles, should never be taken personally or viewed as a lack of respect or regard for a spouse.

While being chronically late is a problem that should be addressed, it's not directed at anyone in particular. It's fine to ask someone to try to help themselves in this regard, and to put in the effort to make small changes in the right direction and improve gradually, but demanding that someone completely alter their personality in a way that suits you

better is both unreasonable and unrealistic. Unless they're only late when it involves you, chances are that they aren't late because they don't respect or appreciate you, but rather because that's who they are.

It's both unproductive as well as hurtful to say things like, "If you really loved me, you would... " When it's a personality issue, it usually has nothing to do with anyone but them.

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That said, within any relationship, a person should do what he can to accommodate others within reasonable bounds. And where more so than within marriage? The *sefarim* say that one of the reasons one is commanded to get married is to overcome the selfish attitudes we have and learn to accommodate others. When one marries he learns that there are other ways of doing things, other valid ways of seeing the world, and other people to take into consideration. Discovering that one's spouse has a personality that sometimes clashes with our own isn't the revelation of a fundamental problem — it's a natural part of the marriage learning experience.

Furthermore, sometimes the fact that the parents are different from one another is an important part of raising healthy children, as this sets up a balance. To give just one example: in most marriages, one spouse is stricter than the other, and this is often helpful in having them together understand and cater to the different natures of their children.

Each spouse should be ready to move toward the other and compromise; neither should expect the other to simply accept them as they are without making an effort to be considerate and try their best to be accommodating.

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While both husband and wife should enter marriage ready to learn from each other and slowly adapt and be flexible to somewhat change for each other, it doesn't mean that both need to do so simultaneously. If you're the one blessed with the perception and motivation to resolve the issue at hand, then be the one to do something about it on your own. Don't be afraid to make the first move.

I'm reminded of the old anecdote of an American engineer who comes to Eretz Yisrael to learn how the Jews build their tunnels so quickly. He had been told that there, it takes only half the time it does back home, and he was eager to learn the secret.

"Oh, that's simple," a Jewish engineer he's introduced to tells him. "We don't just dig from one end — we dig from both sides at once, and we meet in the middle."

The American engineer thinks for a moment. "Well, I can see how that works," he admits. "But what happens if you get the calculations wrong and the two sides *don't* meet up?"

The Jewish engineer laughs. "Then we end up with two tunnels instead of just one!"

Within marriage, while joint efforts will speed up the results, you can achieve significant change even if only one spouse is making the effort. All the same, in virtually every case, you'll find that if either the husband or the wife starts digging, the other spouse will end up digging from his side too. Chances are you'll end up meeting in the middle even if it wasn't agreed upon in advance.

Therefore, even though you've let your husband know that you're writing to me, I wouldn't advise you to pressure him to read this article. If he expresses an interest, then that's great — and if he doesn't, that's fine too. Even if your husband sees you changing and doesn't immediately show any willingness to come towards you and meet you in the middle, that shouldn't discourage you. In fact, it gives you a certain freedom to make the changes you're comfortable with, without any pressure from his side to "reciprocate" or make the changes the way *he* wants you to make them.

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You describe two options, him waiting for you, or you waiting for him, but in truth, I'd assume there are many more. When you step out of the stress of a situation and look at things dispassionately, you may be able to see many more creative ways of solving this impasse.

Being that it's now summer time, let me give the following example. Consider the case of a wife who really wants to visit the kids in camp, and her husband who can't bear the idea of making the long drive. She's upset because she's convinced that it's vitally important for the kids to see how much they mean to their parents; he's upset because she's pressuring him to do something he doesn't see as necessary.

They can argue over this, with each trying to manipulate the other, and between the lines accusing the other of being a less than caring or respectful parent or spouse. Or, instead of fighting, the two of them can realize that there are third, fourth, and more options. Maybe the wife can make the trip herself, perhaps traveling up with other parents. She doesn't have to tell the kids, "Your father couldn't bear the thought of the long drive." She could make some excuse and the children would probably be perfectly content. Or maybe the husband can figure out another time when he wouldn't mind making the trip, even if it isn't the official visiting day, and plan a few things he can do on the way which would make it easier for him. It's a shame when people argue over two options with one clearly destined to be the winner and the other the loser, if both can be happy, albeit not in the most perfect manner they envisioned.

In almost every situation, and in the one you describe as well, if you think about things calmly, without the pressure of your husband's displeasure hanging over your head, you're likely to find other ways of dealing with this issue that you hadn't thought of before.

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Sometimes, couples need to think out-of-the-box in order to move forward in their relationship, and there's nothing wrong with incorporating "unconventional" ways of doing things from day one, even before issues arise.

A certain Rebbe would advise young married men to always add a half hour or more to the time they plan to come home in the evening. He suggested that if, for example, you leave the office at five and the journey home takes an hour, tell your wife that you get home at around seven. Sometimes traffic will be light and you'll get home early and your wife will be delighted. Sometimes you'll chat with a friend after work and still make it home by seven and your wife won't get upset.

In your case, if you know that you plan to leave the house at six for a *chasunah*, you might be better off telling your husband you'd like to leave at six-thirty, or even seven. Yes, if you leave the house at seven you might be late, but you probably would have been late anyway... and this way, at least you'll have a pleasant ride to the hall. Another example of this strategy would be, if you're asking your husband to pick you up from somewhere, saying, "I'll call you ten minutes before I'm ready." That way, he won't be hanging around waiting for you and getting nervous all the while.

And for the husbands out there, you can also suggest similar ideas, or even create a special project, such as a *shiur* you listen to or a *sefer* you can pull out, or just some flexible work-related catching up to do, for the stressful minutes (or half hours) of waiting for your spouse. Being creative will probably help you to feel less frustrated with the time wasted and even the perceived inconsideration.

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I would also like to stress that your husband is already acting in a very commendable way by agreeing to drive you around to wherever you need to go. While it is customary in many chassidishe communities that only the husband drives, that doesn't mean that he automatically signed up to be his wife's personal chauffeur. If he feels that you don't appreciate him for the time he spends driving you, then that's likely to contribute to his frustration every time he has to wait for you.



While I don't think it would be acceptable for your husband to tell you that if you're late, you'll have to stay home, it's important to realize that he's saying something else entirely. He doesn't seem to have a problem with you taking a taxi instead, despite the expense. Certainly, it's more pleasant to travel to a *chasunah* together and not take a taxi and arrive half an hour after him. However, from your husband's perspective, it's more pleasant to leave the house on time with his wife and arrive on time at the *chasunah*. Remember, we see things differently and we're all entitled to our viewpoints.

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This issue, as with so many, is far easier to solve when we take a step back and look at the whole picture. Relationships might be simpler and smoother when both parties have similar temperaments, but in practice, virtually every marriage has areas where the spouses clash. As I mentioned earlier, these areas shouldn't be seen as signs that something is wrong, but rather as opportunities to grow closer and make the relationship stronger.

Looking at the whole picture also means seeing all the positive aspects in one's spouse and realizing that this one sticky issue is quite insignificant in the scheme of things. It's natural and easy to get stuck on the things we don't like, but so important to stop for a moment and "unstick" oneself.

You write that you have been married for over twenty years and that you have wonderful *shalom bayis*. Being grateful for what you have will go a long way toward enabling you to willingly look for and implement a way to get past this one tricky issue. I hope you both share many more happy and healthy years together, and that neither of you will ever have to experience going to a *simchah* alone. I hope that you will never need to come to the realization that patiently waiting for a spouse, or hurrying up your spouse, for that matter, is better than having the liberty of going when it's easiest for you — by yourself.

Appreciate what you have — appreciate the good and also the challenges that give you the opportunity to make things even better.

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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