RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

Parshas Bo

The Sacrifice of Silence

As the Yidden were leaving Mitzrayim, we learn that the dogs standing at the exit of the city held their tongues and did not bark. As a reward for their silence, we are commanded to give *treif* meat to the dogs.

Earlier in the Parsha, we learn that during Makkas Tzfardeia, the frogs chose to sacrifice their lives by jumping into the burning ovens. And yet, while the *rishonim* teach us that there was a *neis* and the fire was cooled for them, no special reward is mentioned in the Torah for their extraordinary sacrifice.

The Tzadik Reb Duvid'l Tolner zy"a, asks a pressing question. Why were the dogs rewarded forever for merely not barking, while we find no reward for the frogs, who actually sacrificed their lives? It seems, Reb Duvid'l deduces, that holding one's tongue is a greater sacrifice than actually giving up one's life.

Holding back from saying something hurtful or otherwise unnecessary, is often a greater feat than being a martyr.

Some people choose martyrdom over silence, and think they're doing others a favor! They "kill themselves" over inconsequential things, and then have no resources left to deal with things that actually matter. Your family doesn't need you to stay up all night to make that extra dessert if it means that you then snap at everyone because you're tired and irritable!

Remember, if you can EITHER be a martyr and accomplish something impressive, OR keep quiet and resist snapping at a loved one, or criticising someone's mistake in a hurtful way - the choice is clear, holding back the negative comments is more commendable.

It's important to remember how to correctly prioritize our time and resources, and always be mindful of how impactful our words are.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen

I listen to your *shiurim* on TorahAnytime and I find them very helpful. I especially found your *shiurim* on boundaries in a marriage very insightful. I never heard this idea before that a marriage must be divided between what's Mine, Yours and Ours, and I find the idea very illuminating. [See Torah Lessons Parshas Vaeira 5779].

The issue I currently have is as follows: my husband and I have been married for several years and have two small children B"H. My husband is a wonderful spouse, for which I am very grateful.

Ever since we've gotten married, my husband has been learning full time. Before I had children, I worked full time and now I work part time. We live simply but are not struggling to cover our day-to-day expenses thanks to savings I brought along into the marriage, having married in my mid-twenties. I have been happy to make it work because I appreciate the fact that my husband is learning, and as long as we can make it happen, it's worth it. We know that this arrangement won't work forever and my husband will have to go out to work at some point.

Lately, however, I've been getting quite frustrated, and I'm in the need of some guidance. I consider myself more of a Type A personality, while my husband is more Type B. When it comes to being on time or taking days off of Kollel, my husband takes it a lot easier than I would've taken it. For example, he has come home early from Kollel after a sleepless night with the baby. If he isn't feeling his best, he will go late or not at all.

I believe he is learning, but I don't feel like he is really pushing himself to accomplish as much as he can. Our time in Kollel is limited and I feel like taking it easy just because you're in Kollel isn't very responsible. I feel like he could have been learning a good few more hours a day without stressing himself out.

I've been doing a lot of thinking about the "mine, yours, and ours" concept that I learned from you, and I do understand that this is "his" issue. At the same time, I feel that it is "our" issue, as well. Living a Kollel lifestyle is something that we both agreed upon. I do make sacrifices because of it. I work, don't buy new clothes often, don't really go on any vacations and we cannot afford to buy a house. I don't care very much about these things, as long as my basic needs are taken care of, but at the same time I want to feel like we're living like this for a purpose! I feel that it has to do with me, too.

A part of me wonders if it would be beneficial for him to get a job, so that his schedule would be more structured. When you're working, you obviously can't come late frequently and stay home because you have an upset stomach.

I am very torn about if and how I should bring this up. There were times in the past that I have brought up this issue to some degree, and my husband has said that he understands and will try to be more on top of things. I hesitate to bring this up as perhaps this is being controlling, but at the same time it's really bothering me.

My husband is also very helpful when he is home and spends a lot of time with the kids, so I feel like discussing this would sound critical, since he does so much when he's home and it might sound unappreciative.

I would appreciate your thoughts.

Answer:

I am happy to hear that you have found my *shiurim* on boundaries helpful. It is extremely important for every married person to realize that there are some aspects of their spouse's life that are simply none of their business.

I remember, as a Chosson, visiting a well known Tzadik for guidance as I was embarking on this new stage of my life. To my utter surprise, he told me, "Make sure to have a place outside of your home where you can nap during the day." I think his intention was to teach me that my wife does not have to know every time I take a nap during the day.

I hope that no wife, or husband as well when it's the other way around, will be offended by hearing that such was advised to their spouse. This is not betrayal, dishonesty, or a lack of trust and openness, it's simply remaining an individual even after commiting to be in a relationship.

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A man's learning and his motivation to do so, is not the responsibility or obligation of his wife. Of course, she can and should encourage him to the best of her abilities, but she was not hired to be his *mashgiach* or to look after his diligence.

This is not to say that if there's something you can do to improve this situation you should shrug it off by saying that it's not your domain, and there might very well be things that you can do to make him feel better and more motivated about his learning, depending on the situation and relationship. But you must remember, that the results are not within your control or responsibility.

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You mention that you think his lack of motivation is due to his personality type, which differs from yours. I often tell people who blame differences on personalities, genders or backgrounds, that if you understand where it's coming from and what's causing it, why are you still trying to change it and being resentful? Type B people, according to your classification, are simply inherently different, and that's okay, regardless of your style and preference.

However, that might not be the case at all. You might be surprised to find that when your husband eventually goes out to work, he can actually be quite a diligent, driven and motivated worker. I've seen this so many times. His personality will not have changed, so what gives?

Every person is given his own unique *nisayon*, and men and women are given a different set of challenges. Just like it can be very difficult for a man to understand why his wife struggles so much with *tznius* – he might even boast that if he would've been a woman, he would have no issue wearing a longer skirt or thicker stockings – a wife cannot fathom the struggle her husband has to stay focused on *limud haTorah*. There is a special *yetzer hara* whose sole responsibility is to make learning Torah difficult. When you say that you wouldn't have struggled like he does because of your personality type, you may very well be sorely mistaken.

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Now let me address the main topic of boundaries you referenced, an important topic indeed. You claim that your husband's lack of motivation affects you. It is very important, though, to pinpoint exactly which part bothers you. There are some aspects that – while they do really make you uncomfortable – are still not within your capacity to change. Just like a man would be out of line to force his wife not to wear clothes that he dislikes, and a woman can't make her husband return a pair of shoes that he likes but she doesn't feel befits his stature, there are some things that are your husband's problem. The discomfort that you're experiencing is something that you can deal with on your own.

You mention not going on vacations or buying many new clothes, but actually, your husband is not obligated to provide these things to you. As long as you have the basics that you need, your husband may very well be holding his end of the deal as stipulated in the *kesubah*.

However, if you feel that working to make ends meet is very difficult for you, *that* would be of your concern. That is where the problem becomes yours. You need to be honest, though, because many women enjoy working and wouldn't give it up even once their husband leaves Kollel. That is why it's very important to identify what exactly it is that's bothering you.

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As with most relationship issues, communication is key, and any mutual lifestyle decisions need to be discussed with your husband in a responsible and respectful manner. It would be beautiful if you can discuss this topic with your husband as well. But the only way this conversation has any chance of succeeding, is if you are able to leave all emotion out of it. Otherwise, there will be many difficult or unpleasant feelings to deal with as your resentment comes out and your husband's defenses go up.

However, if you feel like *you* want to stop working, it would definitely be in place to bring it up with your husband. You need to make sure to keep the conversation about you and your feelings of overwhelm, while keeping your accusations of him and his lack of responsibility out of the discussion completely.

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While on the subject of *limud haTorah*, I'd like to share some thoughts about men who stay in learning for a while after they get married.

There's a term that Chazal use to describe a Torah sage who is wealthy: "Torah Ugedulah". Someone once explained why we hear this term thrown around lightly to describe every wealthy businessman who knows a little how to learn. It's never used to describe a Rosh Yeshiva who has a little pocket money. The explanation given was that money is not the real important thing in life, and you need lots and lots of it for it to be mentioned. But even if you have only a little bit of Torah knowledge under your belt, it is already worth to be mentioned.

When a man devotes time to *limud haTorah*, even if he doesn't end up becoming a famous, respected Rav or *dayan*, he deserves admiration and honor. Sadly, many women do not respect their husbands because they feel like "he should've turned into something more" or "he should've applied himself harder". They don't realize that the fact that their husband spends several hours every day immersed in an atmosphere of *kedushah* and surrounded by the sound of Torah, even if he spends a considerable amount of time drinking coffee, he is still in an ideal environment. This cannot be underestimated.

Besides for that, living a Kollel lifestyle affords you a certain freedom to NOT do certain things. After all, your husband is in Kollel. You don't have the pressure to keep up with the Schwartzes and the Weisses and buy the latest fashions and make the most lavish *simchas*. Obviously, you don't have to do it even once your husband does go out work, but now you have a handy excuse to save money.

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Bear in mind that no matter how studiously your husband learns, you still get the full reward for supporting a husband in learning. It's about the efforts, not the results.

The Ropshitz'er Rav was questioned every morning when he came home from *davening* by his Rebbetzin, "Nu? How was *Shacharis*?" Each and every morning he would respond with the same resounding, "Amazing!" He later explained to his *Talmidim*, "If the *davening* was indeed amazing, let her derive pleasure from the knowledge. If it wasn't, well then at least *someone* should feel good about it and be happy!"

Similarly, There is much in it for you and your sacrifices, regardless of how well your husband is utilizing his opportunities.

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Respecting your husband no matter what he does is so important, both for your husband and for your family. I remember someone telling me that his father was a simple but *ehrliche* Yid, who owned a busy store. Before Pesach his store was especially busy, every year, he would sleep through the first *seder* out of sheer exhaustion. "Never did my mother scowl, look down upon him, or criticize him that he wasn't doing enough to make us a special *seder*", this man told me.

When the children were witness to their parents' respect for each other, it was etched into their hearts, much more so than any lofty Pesach *seder* could have accomplished. They all have beautiful Sedarim these days with their families.

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People tend to get stuck thinking about themselves and their self-image. Remember that this is not about you, or how the situation reflects on you! Of course, in an extreme case where you feel like intervention is necessary, you might want to find a proper way to deal with it. In general, though, it's important to remember that your husband's *hasmadah* or his drive in learning are not of your concern. Aside from complimenting him and giving the welcoming and appreciated encouragement that only a wife can give - your silence is golden.

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