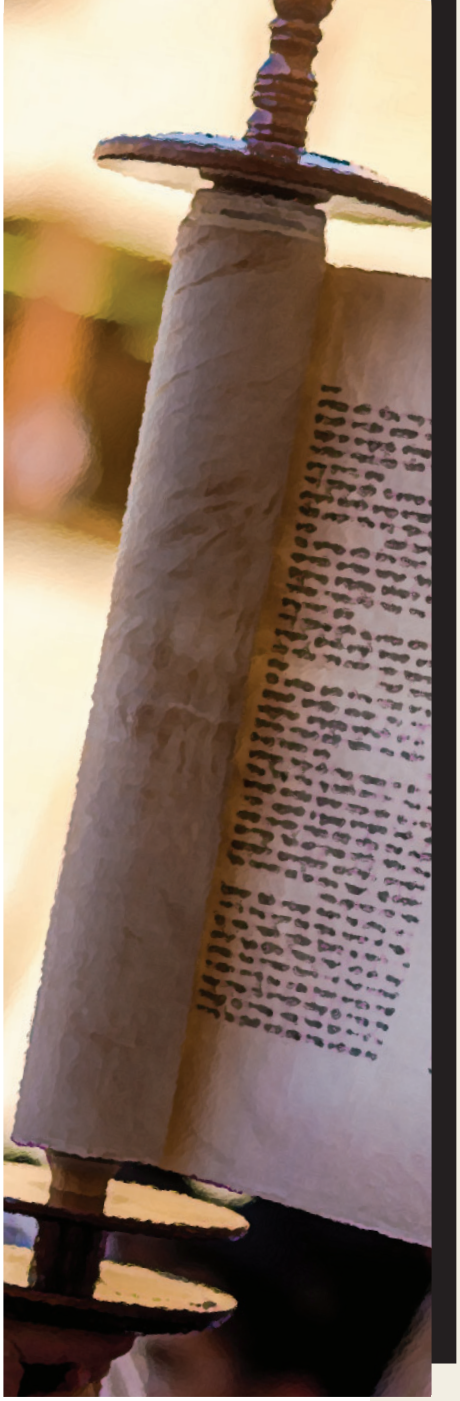


Special thanks
to a dear friend
R' Yoel Schlesinger
for sponsoring this
week's essay!

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

KNOWING WHAT YOU GIVE, ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT YOU GET

In this week's *parshah*, the Torah tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu was "extremely humble, more so than any person on earth" (*anav me'od mikol adam al penei ha'adamah*). Considering that nobody other than Moshe was chosen to speak to Hashem "face to face," this is an extraordinary statement. There are various ways to understand it, which highlight the Torah's perspective on humility, awareness of our strengths, and consciousness that everything is a gift from Hashem.

Reb Pinchas Koritzer, however, focuses on a different aspect of the *passuk*: "*mikol ha'adam*," which literally means, "from every person." How was Moshe, with his immense stature, able to be so humble, he asks. This was only possible, he explains, because he viewed each of his strengths as derived from others.

Moshe Rabbeinu is described as the "*daas*" of the entire Jewish People, equivalent to the collective knowledge of everyone together. Instead of taking credit for his knowledge and awareness of Hashem, he attributed each aspect of what he had as being derived from another Yid who himself possessed that aspect.

Our natural tendency is the opposite — to see and focus on what we give to others rather than what they give to us. Most people, when asked, are readily able to tell you exactly what they do for their spouse, their children, their colleagues at work... but if you ask them, "What does your spouse do for you?" the silence may extend for a few moments while they try to collect their thoughts and think of an answer.

Very often, we find ourselves craving appreciation, feeling taken for granted, and wondering whether others are taking advantage of us. It's worth pausing for a moment whenever such thoughts surface and trying to look at the picture from the outside. Is it possible that the very person we're accusing of taking us for granted actually gives us much more than we recognize? Could there be a more balanced way of viewing the situation?

Parshas
Beha'aloschah
VOL. 7 | ISSUE 33



Dear Rabbi Gruen,

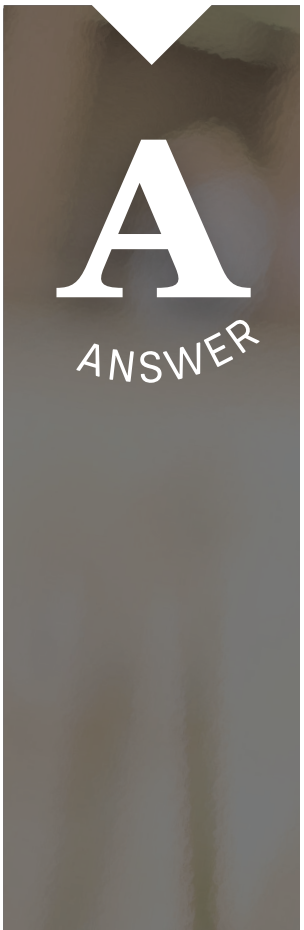
I have a question about the idea of boundaries that you describe in your book and often mention in classes — mine, yours, and ours. I still feel a bit uncertain on what you define as "ours."

This is how it plays out in my life: My wife often asks for my help in looking after the kids, or with aspects of housekeeping. Sometimes, she does so in a very controlling manner. What I'd like to know is how to say "no." I feel like I always end up acquiescing, even though I feel controlled.

I get that it can look a bit lopsided, such as if I'm lying on the couch reading when I get home from work, while she's working really hard taking care of the children. But I feel like she takes my help so much for granted that she just orders me around. For instance, on Shabbos morning I'm happy to look after the kids, give them breakfast etc. while she sleeps and recharges from the week. I really don't mind doing it, but I've come to feel that I don't have a choice in the matter. One time, I told her that I was too tired and that just for that week, I couldn't — and she got really angry.

I want to do my part, but I don't want her to take it for granted. What would you advise?

Thank you



Thank you for your question and your honesty in presenting it. Understanding and respecting boundaries is fundamental to any relationship, not just marriage, and confusion in this area is very common.

In a nutshell, the areas of "mine" and "yours" are areas of life in which what we do doesn't directly impinge on anyone else. The keyword here is "directly." For a woman, this might mean the clothes she chooses to wear. If she likes blue, she is fully entitled to wear a blue dress even if her husband doesn't like the color. As long as she is *tzanua*, the most her husband is entitled to do is ask her, kindly and gently, if she would mind not wearing that color so much as he can't bear it (if his feelings are really that strong).

For a man, "his" domain might mean the people he associates with, as long as they are relatively decent people. If a wife feels that a certain friend of her husband exerts a negative influence over him, she may certainly raise the subject but in a manner that acknowledges that ultimately, this is his domain and not hers or "ours."

What the "ours" domain means is any issue that directly affects both spouses, such as the finances, a choice of where to live or which school

to send the children to, and so forth. Neither spouse should dictate choices in these and similar areas.

With this basic breakdown clear, it becomes much easier when differences of opinion arise, as they can be dealt with respectfully, with an awareness that each spouse is equally entitled to have an opinion and be part of the decision-making process.

With regard to your question, it appears that you are asking whether watching the children is yours, or ours, and whether your wife is entitled to dictate how much you contribute in this area. Given that childcare is often within the category of "ours," it seems inappropriate for one spouse to dictate how and when the other must do things.

• • •

In the situation you describe, you are feeling controlled and unappreciated in an area that you see as yours alone (your spare time, when you come home from work, plus your spare time on Shabbos morning). Appreciation is a universal human need. Nobody likes to feel that their help is taken for granted.

Unfortunately, there are a great many people who find it very challenging to ask for help. Some end up demanding it instead. Others prefer to forego help entirely rather than accepting that they are not entitled to give orders and should ask nicely. Sadly, in such situations, it's not always possible to convince them that asking nicely and thanking wholeheartedly is a better approach, one that will ultimately be far more productive and satisfying for everyone concerned.

• • •

The question now for you is what you should do about this. It's sad when people are left deciding between confronting their spouse with the "unfairness" of it all, or continuing to swallow their hard feelings. There's actually a third option, however, which is to take a fresh look at the situation.

You mention how hard your wife works, and that you are happy to do your part in helping out. Dividing responsibilities at home, even when the husband works all day, is very common and not at all out of the ordinary. It could be that she fully deserves your help, even though she may not express her gratitude in any way.

Take a moment to put yourself in her shoes. While she knows you work hard to provide for the family, she, too, works hard to care for the children. When she's feeling exhausted, perhaps she expects you to notice of your own accord and resents having to ask for help. Perhaps her controlling manner is a result of her feeling that you don't acknowledge what needs to be done unless it's pointed out.

Another possibility is that she senses that you see your helping out as an optional extra, not something you are obligated to do. You don't expect her to thank you for going out to work every day, because you yourself recognize that this is your basic duty. (That doesn't, of course, mean that it wouldn't be wonderful for her to thank you.) So, why do you want the appreciation for doing "more"?

• • •

I recently received a letter from someone in a similar situation — only it was from a wife, not a husband. She wrote of her frustration at her husband's lack of recognition for all she does, stressing, "My entire day revolves around my husband." From the details she provided, it was clear that all she was doing was cooking, cleaning, and the like, but her perception was that everything she was doing was specifically for her husband, not just the simple maintenance of the home.

A husband who goes out to work can also feel the same, that his entire day revolves around providing for his wife. The spouse of someone who demands appreciation for everything they do may understandably feel that too much is being demanded of them, but it's hard to deny that appreciation is actually appropriate.

It's also not uncommon for spouses who consistently feel that they are not getting the help they need, to "take revenge" by neglecting their duties. I'm certainly not justifying such an approach which is both wrong and counterproductive in

most cases, but it is something to bear in mind in every situation where one spouse feels that they "shouldn't have to" help with tasks that they believe the other spouse is solely responsible for.

• • •

This is why I would counsel you to continue doing as you are and not demand or even ask for appreciation. Raising the subject risks opening a whole can of worms and it's easy to envisage things spiraling into mutual accusations of "not doing enough," "never saying thank you," and so forth. These situations are harder to resolve than people think, because by and large, both spouses are right, according to their perspective. It all depends on how you look at things.

That said, if you do feel that you are about to explode in frustration, certainly addressing the issue is a better option. You should be very careful in how you do so, of course. That means getting the time, place, tone of voice, and wording right.

• • •

You mention in your letter that you did once tell your wife that you weren't able to look after the children one Shabbos morning, and that she responded with anger. I don't know when you told her this, but in general, giving one's spouse plenty of advance notice makes it far more likely that they will take it well. Therefore, if you want to raise the subject, do so on Tuesday; don't wait till Friday. Give her plenty of time to find a workaround.



Then, choose a calm moment. Don't let it come out during an argument. Take the initiative, and stress that this is your problem, not hers. Tell her first of all that you are not just willing but also happy to contribute to the household by giving her this rest-time on Shabbos morning, and that you know that she deserves it. Only then add that while you recognize that this isn't an "extra" that you do for her, but part of your basic obligation as a husband and father, you would really appreciate a "thank you" once in a while, just because it helps you to motivate yourself.

You should stress that this might perhaps be due to your own weakness, and not because you see her as obligated to ask you for your help, as you know you should help of your own accord. You can then add that there might be occasions when, much as you want to help out, you will be unable to do so, and that you know she'll understand if that happens.

You'll notice that none of this has included any complaint about feeling taken advantage of, or about being controlled. Even in cases where this really is an issue, it's still better to address it in a more roundabout way rather than directly, which usually provokes a defensive reaction.

If, on the other hand, you approach your wife with, first of all, recognition for all she does and then with acknowledgement that she deserves your help, you will *be'ezras Hashem* find a way to bridge the gaps and build a stronger relationship.

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