

FAMILY ISSUES

Life Chronicles

By Rachel Bluth



Dear Mrs. Bluth,

When does a married woman have to worry that her marriage is in trouble? I've just had a terrible fight with my husband over the way I washed his shirts, and am sitting in the den, in tears, because I really think this marriage is a mistake. We have been married for six months and since then we have had arguments that graduated into full blown verbal attacks almost two or three times a week. I am at my wits end and don't want to do this any more. I am nineteen and feel like an old, tired woman who can't do anything to please her husband.

You are probably wondering if I have shared this with anyone else – parents or friends – and the answer is no. I am too ashamed to tell anyone what has been going on since right after the *sheva brochos*. I have five friends who got married the same time I did and they all seem so happy, while I just know my marriage is over. But I decided to write to you and hear what you have to say, before I let everyone know that I want a divorce.

The truth is, when we are not fighting I love my husband, even though there are quite a few things that bother me about *him*! He leaves his dirty laundry on the bathroom floor when the hamper is just feet away, and expects me to handle his underthings. In my home, my father would not allow my mother to wash his laundry; he washed his personals by himself and gave his outerwear to the cleaners. That is an argument we have regularly, because it seems his mother did everyone's laundry. Why can't he understand me when I say I won't do his?

I am a vegetarian and cannot stand the smell or handling of meat, so I almost always cook dairy dishes that he hates because he's a "steak and potatoes" guy. If he could, he'd have meat for breakfast. So we eat out twice a week, but always in a meat restaurant, where almost everything comes in contact with meat products and I can only have salad. Do you see how inconsiderate he is? If he cared for and loved me like he says he does, why can't he conform more to my dietary needs? Because he loves himself more, obviously!

There are other things, to be sure, that make our married life more of a war zone than a haven: his parents always "popping in" at the worst times and his always wanting to go to them because we spent last Pesach and Shavuot with my parents and family, which we only did because they go away to a hotel for *Yomim Tovim* and pay for us to join them. He's so ungrateful because we cannot afford to go five-star hotels and cov-

er airfare to the exotic places my family treats us to.

What makes it so evident that we are doomed as a couple is that I never saw my parents fight, not even a small difference of opinion! They are the most loving couple, doing things for each other, always caring about what the other needs, even after 40 years of marriage. They act more like newly-weds than my husband and I do!

Please let me know your thoughts on our issues, as I don't think I want to wait around and take much more of this.

Simi

Dear Simi,

I'm going to talk to you as if you were my own daughter, so listen up. You are very young, that being the first issue. You went from a home where everything was done for you and your needs and wants were met without hesitation. Although you leave out many details about your home-life before marriage, what comes across is a huge level of indulgence without consequence. You wanted = you got. It was all about you. It also appears that no one enlightened you to the fact that a marriage is comprised of *two* people, often from two different backgrounds and lifestyles, making compromise and consideration mandatory. The fact that you never saw your parents disagree doesn't mean that they didn't have arguments or differences of opinion. It means that they had them in private.

It is perfectly normal for young married couples to have a bumpy first year, where they find out how they differ and what they need to let go of in order to co-exist in a loving and giving union. That being said, I often encourage young couples in pre-marital counseling to pick their differences carefully, that not everything is worth arguing over, and sometimes, giving in to your spouse serves to strengthen and cement that new and fragile loving bond.

The thing about the laundry has thrown me for a loop. I always thought the washing machine did the laundry, and that all you had to do was put dirty clothes in and take clean ones out! I'm a bit old school here in that laundry was part of a wife's work description, unless of course you have a full time job and then the dynamics change. Whoever comes home first should do what they can to lessen the chore load. In a shared domicile, where both husband and wife work full time, there's no "your job/my job." The rule is "he (or she) who can, does." I agree that it is not appropriate or nice for your husband to leaving his dirty laun-

dry on the floor in the bathroom, when it only takes a step or two to drop it in the hamper. That's 1 for you and 0 for him.

As for your husband liking meat and you not even wanting to think about it, wishing to turn him into a vegetarian like yourself, you may as well wait for snow in August... it's not happening. So now the score is 1 for you and 1 for your husband, in tennis; I believe this score is known as "love" so that makes you even.

My wonderful daughter-in-law is an avowed vegetarian who has many of your aversions to meat; however, out of love for her husband (my son) and children (my grandkids) who are avid meat-eaters, she has learned to cook magnificent meat meals and takes special pride in making her family happy. She, on the other hand, has learned to eat certain foods in a meat restaurant that are perfectly meatless and satisfying, just by inquiring from the chef what they are. Thus, there is love and harmony in the Bluth abode in Boca Raton.

And now for the "Great Dividers," the in-laws (or in your case, the outlaws): What I am about to impart is as much for them as it is for you. When you marry, you don't just keep your own family, you inherit your spouse's family, good, bad or otherwise. From where I stand, your in-laws fall into the "otherwise" category as you've not been able to say anything bad about them (yet) outside of their unannounced visits. A heart to heart sit-down with them, preferably over cake and coffee, will change the situation for the better, I'm almost sure. Your parents, on the other hand, seem to be hogging your presence at each *Yom Tov*, leaving no family time with his family, which is grossly unfair, even though they take both of you to wonderful hotels in far-off places on their dime. This does not give them the right to monopolize you. That makes 1 for your in-laws!

Just to give you a clearer picture, a marriage is like owning a house. There's always something that needs repair, something that must be replaced, refinished or rearranged. But you bought the house because you loved it and saw its wonderful potential. So you bought it knowing that this house was always going to be a work in progress, changing as you changed but always giving you warmth when it got cold, comfort when you needed to feel safe and joy when you saw your children grow in it. The same thing holds true in a marriage. You have to learn that the "I" has to become "*you & me*" and that there will always be differences. Pick the important ones to make a stand on, so that your union will always keep you warm, make you feel safe and comfy and, one day, when you welcome children into your life, you and me will have become "us."

No, Simi, you shouldn't consider divorce just now; you have too much to learn about being together and sharing in a caring marriage. There's a long and happy life waiting for you, if you want it. All you have to do is decide it's worth working on. Grow up, get smart, let go of the unimportant stuff and you should be just fine. And please don't forget to send me an invitation to your tenth wedding anniversary; I love a good party!

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Are You In A Toxic Friendship?

By Ita Yankovich

Friends are important. Yes, it's nice to have people join us for shopping excursions, coffee breaks and silly chit chats; but friends can also play an integral role in our mental health, helping us gain fresh perspectives, overcome hardships, resolve conflict, or simply provide a much-needed laugh. In fact, *Pirkei Avot* (1:6) encourages us to "acquire a friend for ourselves." There are times, however, when our friendships can become unhealthy and toxic.

One of the classic characteristics of a toxic friendship is feeling trapped, used, and generally unsatisfied by the other party. Most people in these kinds of friendships tend to be people pleasers – they want to help everyone and hate saying "no" to any request, no matter the burden it bestows on themselves. Dr. Gail Gross, Ph.D., a nationally-recognized family and child

development expert, author, and educator practicing in Houston, TX, recommends asking yourself why you are in this friendship, and why you pick friends that hurt your feelings and punish you. She says that if this issue is left unaddressed it can manifest in "physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, as well as the emotional feedback of sadness, anxiety and low self-esteem."

If you suspect you're in a toxic relationship, but need some clarity, try speaking with friends of yours who do not know this person and might be able to give you an objective opinion about the relationship.

Signs You're in a Toxic Friendship

It's parasitic: All relationships need to be two-sided in order to function properly. This give-and-take comes in the form of listening, making the effort to get together, and spending resources on the friendship. A friendship is out of balance when it becomes one-sid-

ed. So, if you're always the one initiating get-togethers, making the calls, doing the driving, and picking up the tab, something may be wrong.

You're no longer compatible: Maybe years ago, you two were inseparable, spending hours chatting on the phone; you considered each other family, but life changes people and impacts how we see the world and how we choose to behave. You cannot force yourself to stay in a relationship out of guilt or because you have a long history together. Perhaps your friend is not the same person she was 10 years ago. You don't need to be apologetic or feel bad – you've both grown but in different ways.

You are happier alone: Your friend's name pops up on the caller ID and you automatically tense up. Your friend wants to come over and you are just not in the mood. Do you seem less stressed or tired on the

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