



INBOX

Competition In Marriage

A recent Dr. Yael column contained a letter from a *kallah* teacher who warns new *kallahs* not to “invite competition into your marriage.” She offers examples of not making a single friend appear too glamorous to your husband and not praising a friend who lost the gained weight after pregnancy. She concludes, “Competition has no place in a marriage.” Dr. Yael agrees.

My first issue is that the competition is there. Most men today come in contact with women. A man in an office who sees associates smartly dressed cannot help but compare to the wife he left home in her housecoat. One sees women arriving at work in sneakers and switching into heels. How many women at home switch into heels before their husbands come home from work? Why would a married woman think it’s necessary to wear three different outfits to shul on a three-day *Yom Tov*, but consider it appropriate to wear the same nightgown to bed three nights in a row? Perhaps she has a misunderstanding of whom she should be trying to impress.

On the subway, one notices women touching up their lipstick and makeup, presumably for the husbands they are returning home to. When a man walks into the house and sees his wife still in a housecoat without any makeup, the comparison is there. In a world where the standards of appropriate dress have disappeared, that is part of the competition for wives. A frum woman shouldn’t dress inappropriately in public, but she might need to dress differently in the privacy of the home because of the competition on the street.

A man can eat at his daughter’s house and if it’s a wonderful lunch, compare it the meals his wife prepares. Often it’s not that the daughter is a better cook – it’s just that the wife no longer has an interest in extending herself for “just her husband.” A couple visits their neighbors and the home is beautifully decorated. Or maybe

it’s just that despite five kids, there are no toys strewn on the living room floor. The comparison is automatic.

The column is also sexist. Why not tell a new *kallah* that she should not regularly invite a single friend who is brainy, who can discuss the latest political crisis or offer brilliant insights on the *parshah*? Why isn’t similar advice offered to married husbands? They shouldn’t invite single male friends who are more sharply dressed or more erudite conversationalists.

Economists argue that competition – and businesses offering innovative new products and better services – is what keeps prices low. Competition might be a force that drives couples to work harder at their marriages. Maybe married women should try harder to be glamorous, go on diets, and make themselves look attractive. The same advice applies to married men. Too many have beer (or chulent) bellies; some are three days behind on their shaving or have other unattractive grooming habits. Competition could be a good force in other ways. A man also faces competition when his wife sees the neighbor’s husband rushing off to morning *minyan*. That might be a very good motivational force.

People should certainly not invite extra competition. But a husband and wife have to be fools not to understand that competition is always close by. Until both spouses work much harder on their marriages, the divorce rate will unfortunately continue to rise.

Harold Marks

Please note: Moshe sent the twelve spies on the 29th of Sivan. We apologize for the error.

Mazal tov to Tanya Rosen and family on the birth of a daughter, Avigail Maya.

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