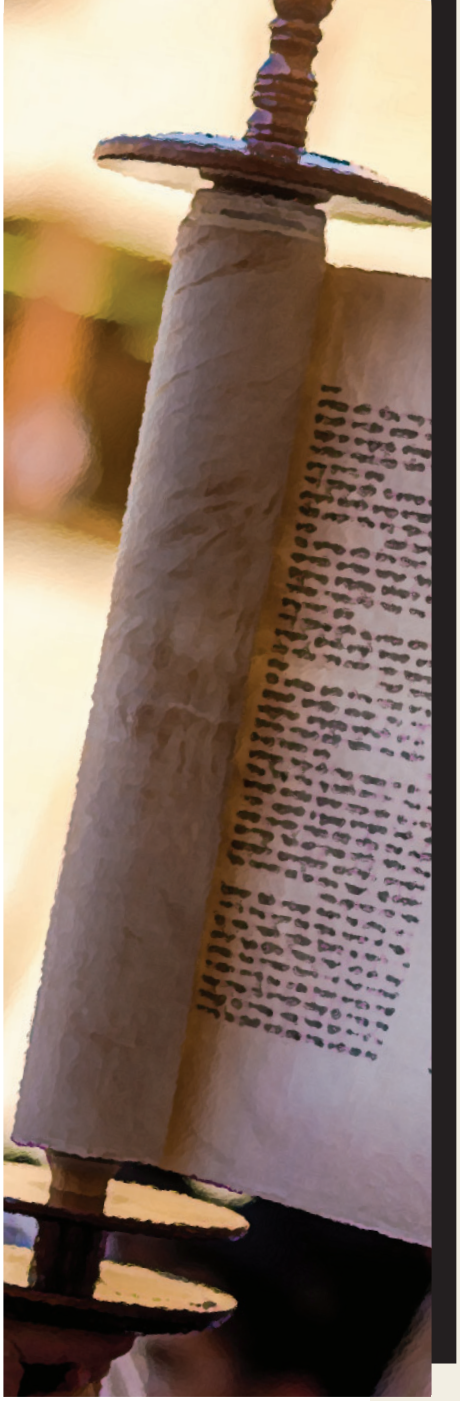


RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

GROWING FROM EXPERIENCE

When Korach confronted Moshe Rabbeinu and accused him of raising himself up above all the other Yidden, he argued that "the entire congregation is holy." Rashi explains that Korach was drawing attention to the fact that although only Moshe ascended Har Sinai, all the Yidden heard the Aseres Hadibros from Hashem.

The Ksav Sofer adds an intriguing idea. When Moshe came back down the mountain after the Torah was given to find the Yidden dancing around the Eigel, he immediately sought to find a *limud zechus* for their behavior. The Yidden are not at fault, he protested to Hashem, as only he heard the Aseres Hadibros (including the prohibition of idol worship). Therefore, they should be forgiven.

Now Korach was challenging Moshe and contradicting him. "All the Yidden are holy," he said — they all heard the Aseres Hadibros being given and yes, they all sinned afterward. But, he added, they did *teshuvah* afterward, making them *baalei teshuvah*, and the Torah tells us that "in the place where *baalei teshuvah* stand, even perfect *tzaddikim* cannot stand" (*Brachos* 34). Therefore, not only are you not greater than all the other Yidden, Moshe Rabbeinu — you are in fact lesser than them, as you never repented after sinning!

The ability to do *teshuvah* and not only repair what we broke but actually grow from the experience is a tremendous gift from Hashem and one that we can often utilize in our relationships. Too often, couples get stuck on what went wrong in the past instead of looking for ways to avoid making the same mistakes again. Those who succeed in understanding the past in order to learn from it, often find that what they build afterward is so much stronger.

No one wants to experience conflict in relationships, but most of the time, some degree of conflict is practically inevitable. If we deal with conflict in the right way — by apologizing for what we did wrong and resolving to try better in the future — we can *im yirtzeh Hashem* enhance our relationships tremendously.

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Parshas
Korach
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Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Firstly, I'd like to thank you for your amazing classes. I listen to them every week and I'm blown away each time. I also read your book and felt so validated. I have grown so much after implementing the ideas you speak and write about and my life has changed for the better. Your *mehalech* is amazing and easy to follow. Thank you.

My husband and I have been married *baruch Hashem* for six years and we have several adorable children. I'm a typical highly-sensitive type, needy and emotional. My husband is very much the opposite, very reserved and self-contained who has difficulty sharing and expressing. Of course he has amazing *ma'alos* which I appreciate.

The first years of our marriage up until recently were a disaster. I was sad and lonely and often lost my temper. *Baruch Hashem* after seeing an *ehrliche* therapist and reading your book, I realized who I am and where my husband is coming from. I'm learning to accept and grow, and our marriage is slowly changing for the better.

However, there's still one area which I find difficult. I almost never receive understanding, validation, empathy, or support. There is also not much eye-contact. I basically don't feel listened to. For example, I could be speaking to my husband and he walks away to get a drink and answers from the other room, or lies down on the couch and closes his eyes while I'm speaking, or he hears me out and then, instead of answering, he says goodbye and walks out the door.

Whenever that happens I get so angry that I totally lose it. This shuts him down completely and he feels unsafe to open up and share anything. It's a vicious cycle and makes everything so unpredictable. It's also hard for me to say sorry.

The question is, how do I stop myself from losing it so that I can create space for my husband to be himself and share, and also ultimately give me what I need — empathy, support, validation, and understanding so that our marriage can become strong and loving?

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I actually wrote the above a few months ago and didn't send it till now... so I'd like to share an update, because recently, I started seeing an amazing *kallah* teacher who is guiding me and slowly, I'm becoming more aware and starting to understand how I was sabotaging my own happiness by doing or saying the wrong things. I'm learning (also from your *shiurim*) how to communicate in an effective way, to be a wife, to compliment, respect and do all the other good things a wife should be doing.

So my question now is slightly different: How can I embrace everything about my husband — his nature, *chesronos*, etc. — and understand and accept and respect him always, so that even when I get frustrated with something that's bothering me, I'm still able to fully respect him, communicate effectively, and keep the marriage steady?

Thank you so much



You are clearly gaining a tremendous amount of awareness and have made huge strides in understanding how to acknowledge and even embrace your personality and build your marriage. That's amazing. In fact, you're doing what everyone should do, regardless of whether they have a problematic spouse, see problems in themselves, or just want to enhance their relationships. There's no need to wait for anyone else to change first. There's so much we can do ourselves, without getting petty about "whose fault it is."

Attempting to pinpoint blame is rarely constructive and is often an impossible task.This is true even for an objective outsider; how much more so for someone who is emotionally involved. Even if it is fairly clear that one spouse is doing certain things wrong, that doesn't mean that the other spouse isn't contributing to the problem too, or even that it was things that they were doing wrong that started the whole vicious cycle, without even realizing it.

Self-awareness doesn't mean self-blame. No one sets out to ruin their *shalom bayis*. People mean well and try hard and can't always see where they're getting things wrong. As much as sensitivity can bring about challenges, being sensitive is no one's fault. It sounds like you found *ehrliche* therapists who aren't trying to convince you that you should be less sensitive nor that your husband should simply change to accommodate you. Personalities don't change; they're innate. It's great that you seem to have found what I call "help that helps."

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You're still finding certain aspects of your marriage challenging. That's because while you understand yourself better, your nature hasn't changed (and won't). It's fine to need a lot of validation and emotional support, and it's fine to ask your husband to respect those needs, and to express how much it means to you when he shows empathy and tries to understand you better.

While you can learn ways to keep your stress levels down and avoid triggering situations, you may not be able to change your underlying tendency to feel emotions more strongly than the average person. Since your husband can't see this happening, from his perspective it can appear that you are reacting in a way that is out of proportion to whatever happened to cause your outburst.

This is why it's so important to communicate effectively rather than expecting him to figure it out himself. And even though your therapist might seem to have more insight into your personality than your husband, it's important to realize how different these two relationships are. When you sit down opposite your therapist, she's giving you her undivided attention. Not only is she trained to do that, she isn't taking your complaints personally. They aren't directed at her and it isn't all that hard for her to hear them and then tell you how right you are. Your husband is not a trained therapist, and he isn't being paid to give you his undivided attention. Most likely he feels very uncomfortable about some of the feelings you express, given that they can easily sound like criticisms if not phrased correctly. He also realizes that you want him to not only listen but also find solutions. And, as much as he cares about you, he has lots of other things to think about as well, all simultaneously, such as his job or his *kollel*, his children, and even... himself.

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Now I'd like to address several points you make in the first part of your letter, although it's obvious from your follow-up that you know a lot of this already.

You describe yourself as sensitive and your husband as very reserved. Being sensitive means, among other things, that one experiences emotions intensely, to a far greater extent than other less sensitive types. In the heat of the moment it's hard to remember that, but once things have calmed down, it's vital to try to regain perspective.

To take one of the examples you give: You describe talking to your husband and having him simply walk away instead of responding. To you it felt that he was being dismissive, almost as if he knew you wanted a certain response and was withholding it, perhaps even that he was being intentionally cruel. Your

feelings then were real, but that doesn't mean that they are based on a true reading of the situation.

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You present a picture of an emotional, sensitive wife with a reserved, unexpressive husband. What many people don't realize is that "inability" to express one's feelings is often nothing to do with a lack of emotion. I would be inclined to suspect that your husband feels emotions deeply, which is why he appears to shut down when they threaten to overwhelm him.

It's even possible that he too is somewhat fragile, and that's why he tends to shut down at the slightest hint of a threat. When that happens, you see someone cold and unfeeling who doesn't care about you. What he sees is very different.

Standard advice for a husband or wife who gets so overwhelmed by situations that they "lose it" is to find a way to maintain self-control. There's nothing wrong with that advice — if it works. The problem is that it often doesn't, because it's just so hard to simultaneously focus on one's own hurt feelings and to hold back from expressing them.

What may work better is to shift the focus, from you to him. Remind yourself that when he's afraid that his emotions are about to get the better of him, his instinctive reaction is to retreat and pull up the drawbridge. That's what makes him feel safe, and at such times, he doesn't have the ability to consider your feelings as his own are so hard to deal with. So, instead of sinking into your own pain when this happens, look at him and try to penetrate beneath the surface.



This may not be easy to implement. However, it's clear from your letters that you have a great deal of insight into what it means to be sensitive and how this can make a person act and react. I do believe that you have it within you to learn, gradually, how to take a step back and a deep breath and look at your husband with fresh eyes and see that he means no evil.

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Many people, hearing such advice, protest that it's "not fair." Why should they do all the work when there are two people in a marriage? The answer to that is that they don't have to learn how to interpret their spouse or how to talk so that their spouse can listen. But if they're wise, they won't wait for someone else to take that first step.

You also write that it's hard for you to say sorry. It really is hard to say sorry, to admit that you've done things wrong. That doesn't mean that you don't have to apologize. If you do say sorry, you might find that things change dramatically for the better. If they don't, you should still give yourself the recognition that you accomplished something significant in accepting accountability for the mistakes you've made.

You aspire to a strong and loving marriage, and in fact, you've already made an excellent start, by recognizing that you don't have to wait for anything or anyone to make things better. Accept yourself, with all the mistakes you made when you didn't know better. And accept your husband, who is also a good person who wants to build a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael* and needs your help to do so.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: KORACH 5786

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