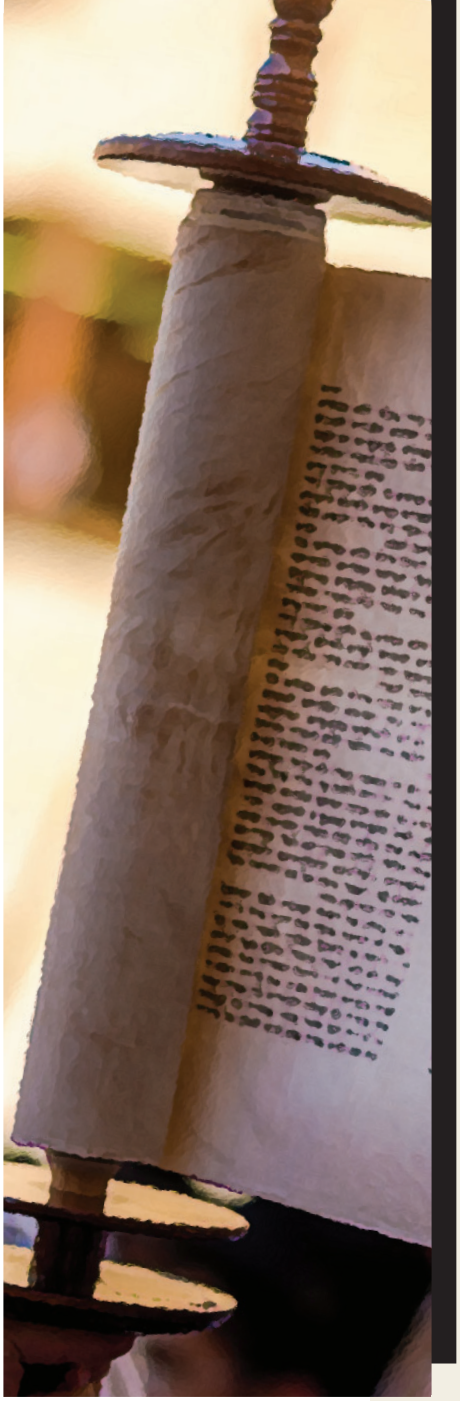


Mazel Tov to

Mr. & Mrs. Yoily Bodek

on the birth
of their baby boy!!

May they be Zoche to much
Nachas and Simcha!

Parshas
Tazria
VOL. 6 | ISSUE 26

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

NO ONE IS A LOST CAUSE

This week's *parshah* begins with the *mitzvah* of *bris milah*. The Chasam Sofer takes note of the different ways in which the Torah refers to *bris milah*, depending on whether the person being circumcised is a Jew or a non-Jew. When a Jewish baby is born, the Torah commands us to remove the "flesh of his *orlah,*" but when describing the laws of eating the Korban Pesach (of which a non-Jew may not partake), the Torah tells us that non-Jews must first have their *orlah* removed. The Chasam Sofer explains that Jews are born with "circumcised hearts" — our very essence is pure and only the "flesh of" the *orlah* has to be removed to reveal this. A non-Jew, by contrast, possesses essential impurity which is referred to as "his *orlah,*" and when he is circumcised, his very essence changes.

We must internalize this very fundamental lesson. Jews are by definition good — even if we have gone astray, all that happened is that the fundamental goodness has become covered up — and all that needs to be done is to clean away the dirt and reveal the essence.

When we look at other people, whether a spouse, a child, or anyone else, it makes so much difference if we see them as fundamentally good, albeit with issues, rather than fundamentally problematic and in need of "fixing." Jews don't need fixing — they just need some help clearing off all the issues. And if a particular issue can't be cleared up, it doesn't mean that the person is damaged goods or that we should give up on them.



Hi,

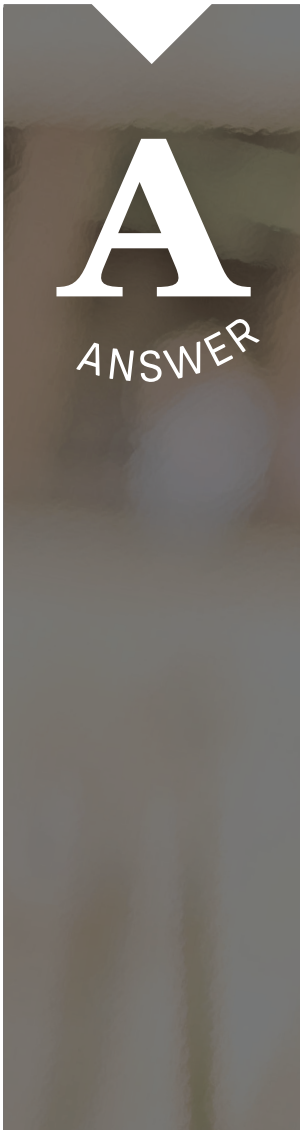
My husband is very critical about all sorts of things, especially *segulos*, and he also mocks them in front of my children. He'll laugh at people who believe in going to R' Shaya'la Kerestirer, saying his name when in trouble, and the amazing stories told by R' Meilech Biderman (which he claims aren't true).

Recently he was making fun of the *drashos* he's expecting to hear at the Siyum Hashas, in front of my son, who's going to be going there with him. *Chas veshalom* he doesn't make fun of R' Shaya'la, R' Meilech, or the Siyum Hashas itself. But my kids are very young (all under bar mitzvah age) and I don't think they understand the difference.

I've mentioned a few times to my husband that I don't think it's healthy for our kids to hear these negative things. My husband admits that I could be right sometimes, but at the end of the day, he's still speaking in this way.

My question is not how to deal with my husband's issue here, as I feel it's a lost cause. What I'm really worried about is whether it's detrimental for my children.

Thank you so much.



As with any challenge a person is experiencing due to someone else's issue, the first thing to do is recognize that they must be struggling with some difficulty in this area, and try to understand them.

In our day and age, the *hester panim* is so great that, unfortunately, people do at times really struggle with questions of *emunah*. It can often feel difficult to see Hashem's involvement in our lives; and even people who do have faith in *segulos*, could probably tell you of times when they didn't help as expected.

As we move deeper into Golus, things become more and more obscure, and it's important to note that even a few hundred years ago, when great *tzaddikim* worked open miracles the likes of which we don't see today, there were also challenges in the area of *emunah*. The story is told of one of the great *tzaddikim* of many generations ago who, upon hearing someone recounting all the *nissim* that a specific *tzaddik* brought about, felt that it was important to set the record straight, for whatever reason, and retorted that the list of all the things that the said *tzaddik* had failed to bring about, was much longer. It's definitely been a long time since there has been an open and unquestionable *yad Hashem*, and it's no wonder that there are people who have a hard time being impressed by things they hear.

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Aside from the general challenge, many people have a more specific challenge in this area because they are by nature skeptical or pessimistic. These are the kind of people who will tell you about a person who ate only healthy food, exercised every day — and still died young, or about all the mice

in the house where R' Shayale's picture is hanging. They'll even appear to enjoy telling you such stories, as they confirm their basic outlook, which is that life is tough and no one should expect otherwise.

Sometimes, their skepticism can even become a self-fulfilling prophecy, because they are actively looking for the events that "prove" their point. It's interesting to note how people who look for the good and the bright side of life tend to see it faster than those who look for the gloomy reality. I remember two *talmidim* of a certain *rosh yeshivah* who was in coma for years, and when they discussed their recent visits, the one who had a hard time believing that a person in a coma is aware of his surroundings never saw anything to indicate otherwise — whereas his friend who was generally more optimistic and hopeful somehow always noticed a fluttering of an eyelid and other signs of acknowledgement.

Other people don't necessarily start out so skeptical, but after going through hardships in life, they become embittered and find it much harder to have flawless *emunah*. I recall one elderly Yid who had lived through the Holocaust, who got angry when someone told him that Moshiach "must be coming soon" during the COVID scare. "I waited for him through the entire war and he didn't come," this Yid responded.

I don't intend to condone problems in *emunah* or justify skepticism, and people who say that believing in *segulos* and the like isn't important, as it isn't an essential part of Yiddishkeit, are often treading a dangerous path. We find in one of the *teshuvos* of the Rashba, for instance, that one shouldn't mock something that the "grandmothers" believed in. It generally doesn't make any difference whether something is stated explicitly, or whether it's something that *ehrliche Yidden* have always believed. The Divrei Chaim, for example, removed a *melamed* from his position because he questioned whether the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh had *ruach hakodesh*. Now, it doesn't say anywhere that he did, but something that *ehrliche Yidden* believe shouldn't ever be mocked.

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That said, we should certainly not judge people for making such remarks; we don't know where they are coming from or what challenges they face. What's more, deep down, people like the elderly Yid who went through the war *do* believe that Moshiach is coming. It's important not to misinterpret words spoken in bitterness, disappointment, or pain. When such a person faces a *nisayon*, they too will open a *sefer Tehillim* and even accept upon themselves a *kabbalah* such as going to the Kosel for forty days straight.

Confronting someone who says something you think is unacceptable or mistaken, is also to be avoided. Doing so only pushes them into a corner and provokes them into defending their words, even though they don't really have doubts in *emunah* — it was just an emotional outburst, or an expression of pain.

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Pressuring a person to believe in a specific *segulah*, or even *segulos* in general, is just as unwise, as it's likely to backfire and make the person resistant to what you're saying. If something isn't a fundamental aspect of Yiddishkeit, and doesn't involve *kiyum hamitzvos*, no one should try to coerce them to believe in it or take it upon themselves. This is especially true if the person being pressured is likely to become discouraged if the *segulah* doesn't work.

As the Yeshuos Moshe said when giving a *kemaya* to someone: It's not the *kemaya* that helps — it's the *emunah* of the person who receives it. If you believe in a certain *segulah*, then Hashem may choose to send a *yeshuah* via that route. But for someone who doesn't believe in it, it's inappropriate to pressure them to "test Hashem" when they try it out.

As a certain wise Yid once said, "Hashem is so good that He'll send a *yeshuah* to wherever a person is — Meron, Uman, Kerestir, or his own home." The main thing is to remember that it's Hashem behind it all, and not get so carried away with *segulos* that you think you can manipulate events yourself.

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Now to address the lady asking the question, who is certainly coming from a good place of *emunah* and concern for her children's *chinuch*. The first thing I would stress is that it's best to avoid the topic as far as possible, and not bring it up unnecessarily.

However, if there's a specific comment made or viewpoint expressed that you find unacceptable or potentially harmful if the children hear it, certainly address that specific instance — not by telling your husband that he's wrong, but by saying how much it bothers you and how much you would appreciate it if he could stop saying it. If you ask him, respectfully and also firmly, to please stop saying such a thing, then he is far more likely to agree and comply, than if you address the problem in a general sense. You can even add that you understand that the topic isn't clear-cut and that some of his skepticism could be valid. This might just make it that much easier for him to take you seriously without getting defensive and doubling down on his opinion.

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While you are right to be concerned about negative influences on your children, children are not always as directly influenced by what they see and hear as we think. Sometimes, they can react in the opposite way to what we expect. Certainly if you always show great respect for matters of *emunah,* this can influence them just as much if not more,6 than your husband's comments.

Furthermore, hearing *segulos* and so forth mocked can also backfire on the skeptic, especially if your children have personally experienced what they recognized as *hashgachah pratis* or know of stories that illustrated it clearly. Children are often much wiser than we realize, and they can also "see through" their father's attitude and realize that it's probably coming from a personal issue rather than a true flaw in *emunah*.



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When relating to your husband, it's also vital to remember that contrary to the way you see it, he is not a "lost cause" in this area, or any other. He has challenges, and they could easily fade away over time. Even if they don't, his essence is still unflawed.

Therefore, it's much easier than you imagine to find common ground with him, as long as you allow him to set the scene and don't force it yourself. Whenever he mentions anything that happened to him, or that he heard about, which clearly showed Hashem's hand, make a big deal out of it and repeat it to the children. Over time, isolated instances will have an impact on the bigger picture and you could see things really start to change.

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Both the person who believes in *segulos* and the person who is skeptical need to remember that at the end of the day, it's all Hashem. No one should get obsessed with the details unless it's truly necessary. When we start to look for Hashem in our lives, our perspective changes and we learn to find Him, again and again, within our own lives, in ourselves, and in the essence of all those around us as well. May Hashem help us all to seek Him constantly, recognize His hand in every event, and build homes full of His Presence.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: TAZRIA 5784

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