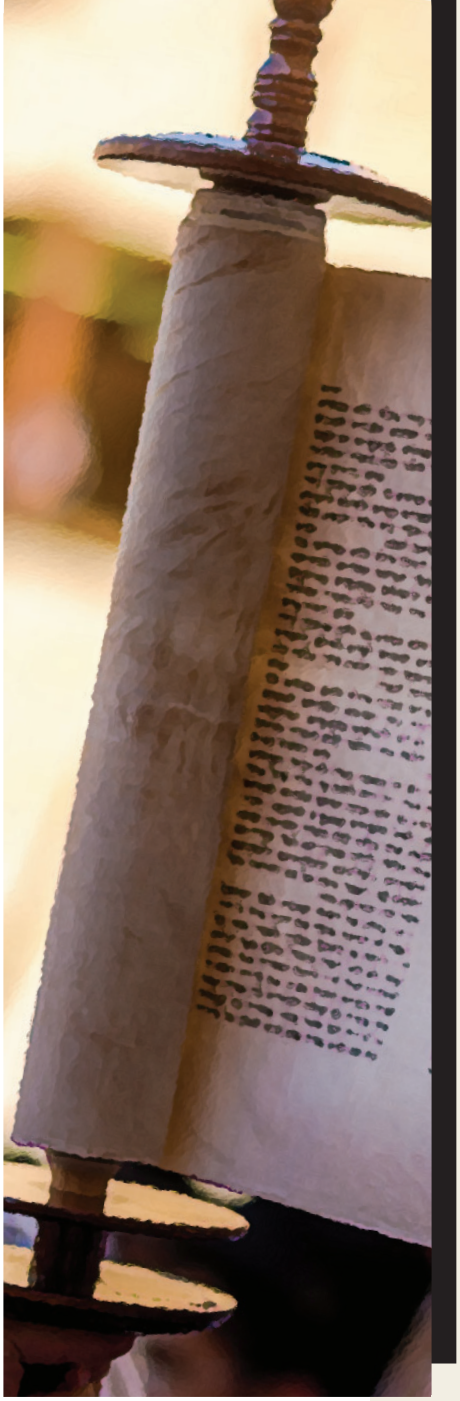


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ויה"ר שתזכי להצלחה
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RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT

In this week's *parshah*, the five daughters of Tzelofchad approach Moshe Rabbeinu, asking whether they can inherit their father's portion in Eretz Yisrael. The Torah tells us that Moshe "brought their case before Hashem." Rashi notes that while Moshe did not know what Hashem's response would be, the Bnos Tzelofchad did: "Their eyes saw what Moshe's eyes did not."

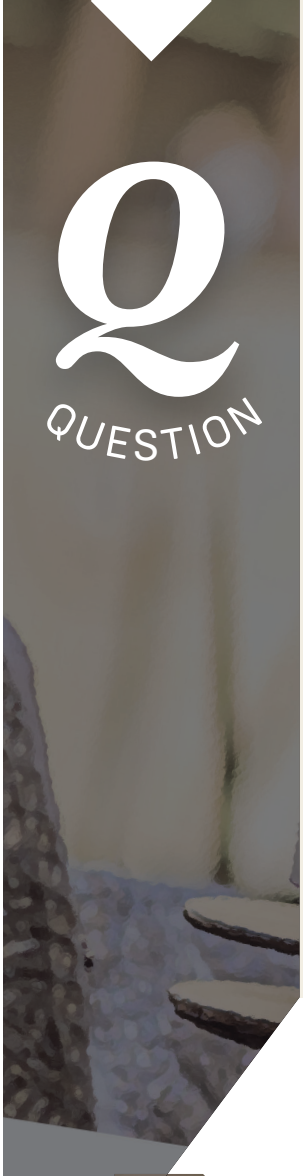
The Azor Eliyahu, a *talmid* of the Kotzker Rebbe, explains that since Tzelofchad's daughters were *nashim tzidkoniyos*—righteous women, their feelings were aligned with *ratzon Hashem*. When they experienced such a deep-seated yearning for an inheritance in Eretz Yisrael, they realized that it must be Hashem's will that they receive their father's portion. Moshe, however, could not see this great yearning and so he had to ask Hashem for His answer.

Even though Bnos Tzelofchad knew that they would indeed inherit a portion in Eretz Yisrael, they still took steps to bring this to fruition — they didn't just wait for it to transpire. Similarly, when we are attuned to *ratzon Hashem*, we "know" that things will work out, that Hashem's plan for the world and for each and every one of us will come to pass; and still, that doesn't mean that we sit back and let it happen.

Another lesson that we learn from Bnos Tzelofchad is that of humility. They knew that in Shamayim, it had already been decreed that they would inherit Eretz Yisrael, and that Moshe Rabbeinu could not see this until Hashem revealed it to him. And yet, they still approached him with a question rather than a statement. They were ready to accept whatever answer they were given.

For those of us not privy to what has been decreed in Shamayim, it's certainly good advice to remember that even when we are one-hundred-percent sure that we "know" something and that "anyone" would see it that way, other people may see things differently and they could even be right. If we approach our relationships with humility and a true desire to fulfill *ratzon Hashem*, we will merit a great deal of *siyatta diShmaya*.

Parshas
Pinchas
VOL. 8 | ISSUE 36



Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I have a question and hopefully you'll be able to give me an answer or at least guide me in the right direction. I've been married for almost 20 years and *b"H* we have a number of healthy children. I don't even know how to write my issue down, how to collect the right words, I'm hoping you'll understand.

I don't think my husband and I have an understanding of one another. In fact I know definitely he doesn't know me because recently he listened to a *shiur* about men getting their wives to open up to them and get them to talk about what it is they want or feel. At the end of the *shiur*, I asked my husband what it was about and if he enjoyed it, and he said it wasn't anything new and in any case, it wasn't applicable to us because "You're pretty good at expressing yourself."

I was so taken aback I can't tell you. I can't even express how wrong that is! I don't think I've ever spoken about my feelings or what I want without rethinking a million times what I want to say and in the end decided not to say anything! But that's just a slight hint of the miscommunication we have. I really, really need someone to help me know what I can do to create or improve the communication that we don't have.

Please, if you by any miracle see this email, please get back to me and help me create a relationship that I'm yearning for.

Thank you!



A ANSWER

I actually do read all the emails I receive, although it can take a few months for me to be able to respond at length to each one. The responses I publish are generally those that deal with issues that apply to a great many people, and the issue you present definitely qualifies there; it's one that very many women experience.

What you're describing is totally normal. Although it can sometimes feel overwhelming, it's not uncommon nor as problematic as you think.

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You write that you "don't have" any communication with your husband, and that you virtually never express your true feelings. It's a shame to portray a situation in black-and-white to such a degree that you no longer notice the shades of grey. What I'd like to suggest is that even though your husband feels that you're "good at expressing yourself" and you feel totally the opposite, both of you could still be right. There's almost always room for two perspectives in a relationship.

How could your husband be right? Perhaps he's very good at reading between the lines and over the years, he's learned to decipher your underlying meaning from the words you choose, the expression on your face, your tone of voice, and so forth. Perhaps you reveal more than you realize and although he

doesn't respond by saying something like, "I get you," or "I understand how you feel," he does know what you're trying to say.

And perhaps he does understand you but simply doesn't always agree, which is why he doesn't respond in the way you hoped he would. This can be hard to swallow, especially when feelings run so deep. But at some point in every relationship, it's important to accept that even if we feel a great deal of emotion on a certain issue, that doesn't mean that others have to agree with our interpretation and act in accordance with it.

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That said, we all want to be taken seriously. Ironically, it's when we can admit that the way we see things is just one of many possible and valid ways, that others find it easier to respect our feelings. It's when people insist that their feelings are fact, that others write them off as unreasonable. But no one can argue with, "I feel," especially when you preface it (or follow up) with, "I know you feel differently, and I accept that."

The caveat is that you really should accept that your feelings are just that: feelings. That doesn't mean that you're wrong to feel as you do, or that you feel things too strongly. It just means that the way you see the world is filtered through your emotions. When your emotions change, the way you see things does too. And the same applies to your husband, and everyone. Feelings are real; real feelings, not necessarily reality.

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You mention a *shiur* your husband heard about men getting their wives to open up and talk about their feelings. This is a topic I have discussed several times and I do believe that effective communication is central to all relationships, especially marriage. I'd just like to note that if the *shiur* contained advice for husbands, then it's up to husbands to implement the advice. When women listen to *shiurim* giving advice to husbands (or vice versa) and use what they learned to tell their spouse what they should be doing, the results aren't usually what they hoped or expected they would be.

No one likes being told what to do, though it's often easier to accept advice from someone who doesn't know you or accuse you of getting things wrong. When it's your spouse telling you about all the areas in which you've messed up, and that they should be listening to Rabbi X, somehow, the ideas don't seem so attractive or easy to implement.

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While it takes two to communicate, there's a lot you can do on your own to change the way you and your husband talk and share feelings. You might be surprised to discover how much of your comfort with expressing yourself is something you can enhance without waiting for your husband to learn better skills or figure you out.

While you're describing your inability to express yourself, it's not clear that it's your husband who is holding you back. It could have nothing to do with him. You might feel unable to express yourself because you're unaccustomed to making yourself vulnerable. If that's the case, it might be worthwhile figuring out why. Even if your husband is an essential part of the solution, it might not be in the way you think.

For example, you might be worried that when you do, finally, open up to him, you'll get a certain kind of response that in reality, he would never dream of giving. The only way to find out is by asking: "If I told you that I feel that ____ , would you think that I'm ____ ?" Very often, the one being asked is taken aback by the question and can swiftly reassure their spouse that they would never respond in a hurtful or dismissive way. It can feel very vulnerable to check that out, but you may come away pleasantly surprised and quite relieved, with better options for the next time around.

It could also be that you're fearful of opening up because your husband actually *was* hurtful or dismissive in the past. But, people change. He might not have realized that he came across that way, or he might feel very bad about a response he gave years ago and would welcome the opportunity to fix things and move forward in a more positive direction.

It could even be that you don't want a response at all, and only want your husband to listen and then confirm that he heard and understood. You can ask for that.

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As with any new thing, beginnings are hard but you might just need to jump in and try, and most likely, you'll feel so much better afterward, as long as you express yourself gently and respectfully, without making demands or having unreasonable expectations.

Make it clear that just as you would like him to understand you and accept that you feel a certain way about certain things, you want to understand him better too. Be sure to add that you accept his feelings, even if they are very different from your own.

In any case, don't fall into the common trap of expecting him to know anything already. He doesn't know how you want him to respond unless you tell him, and even though it might seem so obvious to you, it just isn't for him. Accept that.

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In general, it's better to express one's feelings calmly and carefully, than it is to bottle up one's feelings only to have them explode. And yet, there are times when "rethinking one million times what I want to say" is actually a very good practice, even if you end up saying nothing at all.

Rav Yisrael Salanter would give the example of a person who has wronged someone, and that other person has no idea what happened. Now Rosh Hashanah is approaching and the person wants to ask *mechilah*. But there's a problem: If he approaches that person he wronged and tells him what he did, he'll cause him so much *agmas nefesh*. True, there's no other way of getting *mechilah* — but that doesn't mean that he's entitled to cause that person pain!



Sometimes, it can feel so hard to keep difficult emotions locked inside and we reason to ourselves that it's much better to let them out. It's then that we need to look at the bigger picture and assess whether the damage caused by speaking out is really justified.

• • •

I can understand that you're frustrated. After so many years, you don't feel that you and your husband are on the same wavelength. The truth is that a husband and wife remain two different people even after being married for seventy or eighty years. Even when communication is "done right," people can still remain with their different perspectives. What can and should happen, is that they learn to respect each other's perspectives and accept that they might just both be "right."

If your husband is listening to *shiurim* on *shalom bayis*, and you're seeking advice on *shalom bayis*, you're both moving in the right direction, motivated by wanting to build a strong and healthy marriage. Don't panic that you and your husband haven't melded into a single unit. Don't even panic that for so many years you misunderstood what communication is supposed to look like. That, too, was part of Hashem's plan, and we all have plenty of work to do in aligning ourselves with *ratzon Hashem.*

And from here on you can do yours in trying to understand both your husband and yourself better, communicating better, and having a truly respectful and realistic relationship — one that's based on respecting who you both are and sharing it, while respecting your husband and his set of thoughts and feelings. That's what makes for a strong bond and a true connection.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: PINCHAS 5786

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