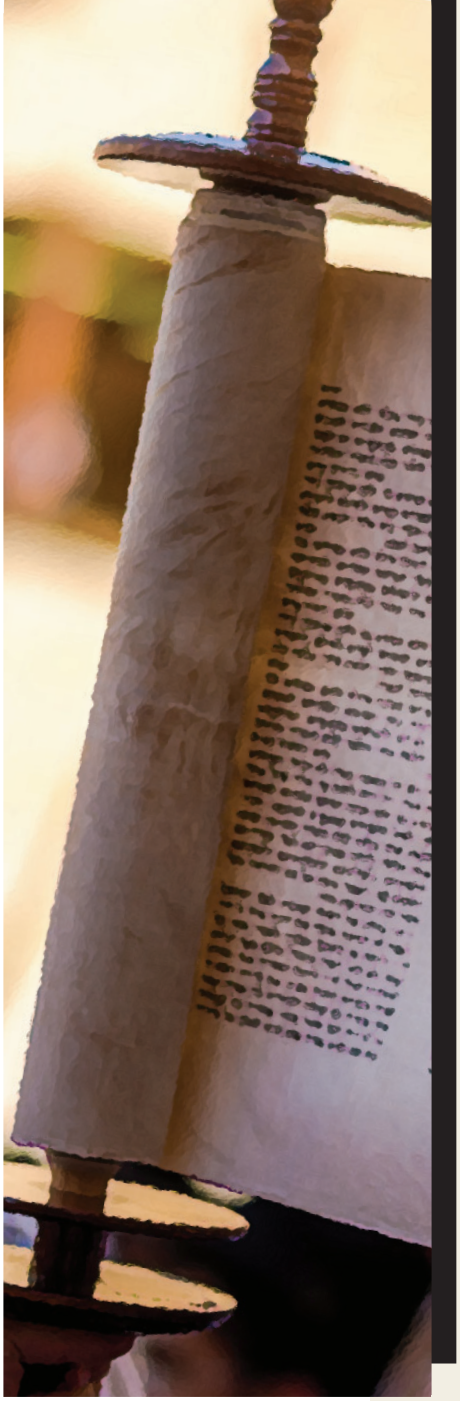


A special Mazel Tov to

Mr. & Mrs. Moshe D. Weissmandl

on the birth of their baby girl!

Many more Simchos and much Nachas!!

Parshas
Mikeitz
VOL. 8 | ISSUE 10

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

CAN ALL PROBLEMS BE SOLVED?

In this week's *parshah*, Pharaoh encounters Yosef Hatzaddik for the first time and, impressed by his interpretation of his dreams, he exclaims to his servants, "Will we find anyone like this, a man in whom there is the spirit of G-d?"

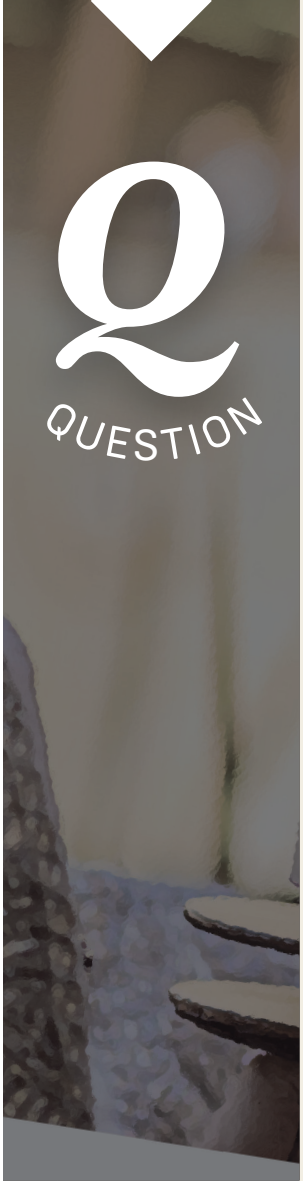
Pharaoh was not merely praising Yosef for his wisdom and understanding, explains the Rebbe R' Bunim of Peshischa. What amazed him was that someone like Yosef, who came across as what we might call "down-to-earth" (in that he curled his hair and placed some stress on his appearance) could also be so holy. Indeed, this ability to be in the world and yet overcome *nisyonos* distinguished Yosef from his father Yaakov Avinu, who was a "*yosheiv ohalim*" and retreated from the world to avoid *nisyonos*.

Nonetheless, at the time of his *nisayon* with the wife of Potiphar, Yosef had learned a powerful lesson. It was then that the image of his father appeared before him, giving him the impetus to overcome this challenge. It was also a message for him, that it was time to go in his father's path and not provoke the *yetzer hara* into tempting him.

It seems that while there are situations that are best met head-on and dealt with directly, there are also those that call for retreat or avoidance. This doesn't mean sweeping things under the rug, which is often easier but rarely a good strategy. But retreat (accompanied by a level of acceptance) can be far more appropriate for those problems that perhaps cannot be solved, ones where repetitive confrontations and ongoing attempts to resolve achieve nothing other than hard feelings. At such times, we need to know how to co-exist with what troubles us, if total avoidance is impossible.

Distinguishing between the problems that need to be solved and those that need to be endured isn't always simple. It starts by knowing that there is a distinction, and that is important in itself.

WISHING ALL OUR READERS A FREILICHEN CHANUKA!



Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Thank you so much for your speeches, which are so full of *emes* and lead to such clear and healthy ways of thinking.

I have been married for a few years and have a beautiful marriage — I couldn't have asked for a better husband *baruch Hashem*. Before becoming a *kallah*, I davened my heart out to get a good husband, being that my parents didn't have a good marriage to put it mildly. But I'm finding myself confronting some of the issues I thought were firmly in my past.

My question is: How can I avoid disassociating from my husband when he loses control of himself? For example, last week, someone triggered him regarding money matters and he couldn't stop screaming about the situation. He wasn't screaming at me but it was still very frightening. This had never happened before but I was always worried about this because I grew up with this type of father. My parents would sometimes lose control of themselves when they were angry and do traumatizing things to the children; therefore, I am extremely shaken. When I was growing up I would just disassociate from that parent for a few days, until I got back to myself. (I know it's not the best way but that was my method of coping.)

When I calmly told him it's not acceptable to scream like that because it's too traumatizing for me and that there are other ways to let out his anger, he told me that I need to accept him as he is. How do I show I accept my husband unconditionally, even with his flaws?

I want our relationship to stay close and loving — my marriage is the most important thing in the world for me because of where I'm coming from.

Thank you so much for everything.



I understand that you come from a background that has led you to appreciate the importance of a loving and stable marriage. You are doing the right thing in investing in your *shalom bayis*. Marriage is indeed extremely important, and should be dealt with as such, not just for you, but for everyone, no matter what their backgrounds. Everyone should take their marriage extremely seriously and continually invest in maintaining and enhancing *shalom bayis*.

Sadly, too often, problems arise in marriages that have already lasted decades simply because the spouses stopped investing, and avoided dealing with issues. What a shame when this most fundamental of bonds that should be the basis of all accomplishment in life, is not given the proper attention.

Your many *tefillos* brought you a wonderful husband, *baruch Hashem*, a person whom you appreciate greatly. And yet, it seems that you have been constantly "on the lookout" for the problems that you experienced as a child to appear in your marriage. This is true for many people with traumatic backgrounds, though not always do people realize that they are hyper-sensitive

to seeing their parents' flaws in their spouse or children. It's great that you have this awareness.

It can certainly be very scary to see old patterns appear in what you thought was a new life. That said, it does seem from your letter that this incident you describe was the first of its kind in at least several years of marriage. When assessing any kind of problematic behavior, this kind of information is very important to have. Screaming isn't pleasant, but it does fall into the category of "normal" if it doesn't happen often, was provoked by a significant event, and isn't directed against anyone personally (especially someone vulnerable, such as a child).

If your husband were exploding on a regular basis and/or directing his anger at his wife and children, my advice would be very different. But it doesn't seem that this is the situation you are describing. And given that you have experienced first-hand what it's like to live in a home where parents are so unpredictable, this is something to be very grateful for.

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You ask how to have "unconditional acceptance" for your husband. It's very important to distinguish between accepting the person and accepting the ways in which they behave. Naturally your husband has flaws, just as we all do. Some flaws are actions or behaviors that actually should not be tolerated. Even then, accepting a *person* is entirely different. It means treating them with respect, understanding that they have good points as well as weaker points, and focusing on having an *ayin tovah*.

You begin your letter by stressing that you "couldn't have asked for a better husband," which indicates that you do see his strong points. What an excellent basis for *shalom bayis*. Does your husband know you feel that way? Often, spouses and parents take for granted that their loved ones "know we love them" — but do they, really? Perhaps they only know what we tell them, and if we silently appreciate their *ma'alos* while we are loudly critical about their *chesronos*, they may "know" a very different reality than the one we think we are projecting (and they might be more right than we think). Therefore, it's important for you to be vocal about your appreciation of your husband's good points.

And while this may not necessarily apply to your husband, often, people who have anger issues have fragile egos too, and it's their vulnerability that makes them more likely to explode at small provocations. You may not be responsible for his anger management, but your encouragement and steady focus on his strengths can give him more of the balance he needs and will certainly strengthen the bond between you.

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You mentioned your upbringing and how you dealt with difficulties as a child. A child has very few options when it comes to dealing with angry parents, and it could well be that your disassociative response was the right one in the circumstances. It is very different with a spouse. Your husband is part of yourself and he needs to feel that you care about him and what he goes through.

This doesn't mean that an issue he needs to address must be adopted by you as your own pet project as well. Even if your husband truly had a severe anger issue, it wouldn't be your responsibility to address. While you shouldn't ignore it or tune out, you shouldn't become overwhelmed by it either. If you allow your emotions to dictate your responses, you'll find it very hard to approach the situation logically and find solutions.

Remind yourself that it's your husband's responsibility to work on his *middos*, not yours. You can encourage him by focusing on his good points, and also empathize when he is going through difficulties. As I like helping people understand, you may not be the problem (or the one responsible for it), but you can still be part of the solution, and see it as a privilege to help your loved one.

Often, we find it hard to empathize when we know that we would respond so differently to a challenge. This is what unconditional acceptance means — we accept that people deal with things differently, have differing levels of tolerance, and that what may look terrible to us may not objectively be terrible at all.

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Empathizing doesn't always work to defuse a tricky situation, of course. Some people calm down quicker when they hear others express sympathy; others get even more irritated by any sort of response and the best thing to do is simply leave them alone to process things.

If you find his anger very triggering for you, to the point that you can't respond without becoming emotional, then leaving the room to focus on staying grounded yourself will be better for both of you. Mistakenly believing that you have to "help" him calm down will likely only drag both of you into deeper water.

This should never be done in a hurtful way, of course. But often it is this lack of response that is the "least

reinforcing reaction." You should still make it clear that you empathize, later, when things have calmed down.

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It's okay to have a discussion about how this bothers you. Let me first point out that as you write, your husband didn't express his anger against you, which is a huge point in his favor. In a different situation with a spouse who takes out his frustrations on his loved ones, the approach would be very different. In your case, the first step to take is to distinguish between your husband's problem and the places in which it impacts you.

When you feel that the time is right to address the topic and discuss this, don't directly address your husband's anger — that's his problem and his responsibility. All you should mention is how his anger affects you. Use the word "I" far more than "you." The focus is on your feelings about what he does, not about his "character flaws" which lead him to behave in this way. When you take the focus off him, he will be far less defensive and far more willing to consider how his screaming affects you.

You can describe how you felt as a child in your parents' home, and how your experiences have made you more sensitive than others to anything similar. Stress that you know he is generally calm and easy-going, *baruch Hashem*, and how you realize that it's not his fault that you get so triggered by things that other people deal with just fine. And then ask him what the two of you can do to help you overcome this and feel happy and secure.

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Aside from the words and tone of voice you use, the timing is critically important. Don't try to have such a conversation in the heat of the moment, when your husband is still trying to deal with his stormy emotions in a challenging situation. At that point, all you can do is express gentle empathy and perhaps withdraw, if that seems best. Later, when things have calmed down, is the right time to have a conversation, one which is focused on solutions you can find to difficulties you are experiencing, not on how to "fix" your husband.

He does need to hear from you that you accept him unconditionally, even though there are aspects of his personality you find it hard to come to terms with — just as there are surely aspects of your personality that he struggles with. Stress the good points you see in him, the caring and love he has for you, and why this makes you certain that you'll be able to find a way to overcome this.

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You may also choose to not discuss this with him, if you feel that it might not be all that productive. You could instead focus on dealing with your feelings without involving him at all, and in fact, you shouldn't rely entirely on him to deal with the residue of your own upbringing. Just as it's his responsibility to deal with his own issues, it's your responsibility to deal with yours. If you do that, perhaps you'll see the entire picture with different eyes, which in itself will affect your relationship.

Whatever you decide to do, use the method that served you so well before you found your husband: daven your heart out for a solution that is good for both you and your husband. Daven that Hashem guide you in how to address any problems in your relationship, and that He show you ways to enhance your *shalom bayis*, and build a truly happy and healthy home.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: MIKEITZ 5786

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