



A Note to Couples

While the focus of this volume is on how to do inner Torah work and is not on couples per se, there are several important points to keep in mind when working together as a couple from this perspective.

First, each of you needs to do your own inner work. While you might want to share the fruits of that work with your spouse, you have to be the one to build relationship with your younger vulnerable self. That is not your spouse's responsibility. He or she can never be on call for that younger self 24/7 as you can, nor can he or she align as fully with that self as you can. This has nothing to do with how much you care about each other or how much you want to be there for each other. The reality is that *you* have to be the meaningful adult in your younger vulnerable self's life. Once you've done that, your spouse can contribute a lot – but in his or her own right, not as a substitute for you.

Second, keep in mind that difficulties in the marriage relationship, like difficulties in any other aspect of life, can be gates through which both of you can gain access to hidden parts of yourselves that need attention. If you maintain this perspective, it's easier to work with the problems in a constructive, productive way. Also, recognize that part of the reason you are with each other is to facilitate each other's healing and growth. Your souls are united for reasons that go well beyond your surface experience. There is some aspect of rectification that is being served for both of you in the union and whatever challenges it presents. If you embrace those challenges as coming from Hashem, you are more likely to feel empowered to face them and more able to call upon Hashem to help you meet them.

Third, once you recognize that, to some extent, you are both at the mercy of your past experiences, at least until those experiences are made conscious and healed, you will be less likely to take your spouse's behavior personally. You will understand that he or she has vulnerabilities that are not yet known and integrated which he or she may be taking care of in old ways that are problematic for your relationship. When things are difficult, you can gently remind each other to touch base with any younger, vulnerable self who may be triggered by what's going on. When you do this, you are essentially saying that you're willing to sit on the same side of the table with your spouse as a partner in getting to the truth with each other. You understand that this means that each of you will work to get to the truth with yourself, and then you will put the pieces together as they exist in the present, in the marriage. You are

committing to a cooperative, rather than an adversarial, stance.

Fourth, apply all the relationship skills you are learning with yourself in the inner Torah process to your marriage. Be genuinely interested in what is going on for your spouse, what he or she is experiencing in any given situation. Be willing to listen empathetically without jumping in to minimize, rationalize, undermine, mock, or otherwise negate his or her experience. Just try to understand and, if possible, validate the feelings he or she is expressing. Put aside your own need to explain or defend yourself for the moment. Create a safe place for your spouse to share, recognizing that his or her experience may be vastly different from what you intended or thought happened in a given situation. What he or she is telling you is not fact, but his or her subjective reality filtered through the lens of past experience. It is opening up a window for you into his or her soul. Try to hear it that way and receive it lovingly and tenderly. Trust that there will be time later for you to share your experience, your view of what transpired. Work with whatever comes up in yourself that resists hearing what your spouse has to say.

Fifth, make space for both of your realities even if initially they are incomprehensible to each other. Remember that you are each an *olam katan*, a small world. Care enough about each other's worlds to get to know them. It will help you build your shared world with integrity and make that shared world a place that feels safe and secure to both of you. It will deepen and sweeten your relationship as you both come to know each other more fully. Don't worry if one of you seems to be doing a lot more inner work than the other. Remember that this is an

arena where you can't second-guess. Everyone has their own timing, their own pace, their own capacity, and their own rhythm. Anything one of you does in this realm will invariably help the relationship as well. Be patient with and kind to each other. It is not easy to become more conscious, to come more into truth with yourself and with the person closest to you.

Finally, remember Hashem in the picture. Your efforts are only part of the equation. Ask Hashem to help you with whatever you are working on. Things will happen, openings will be provided that you could never engineer no matter how hard you tried. Try to see and acknowledge Hashem's hand when they do. Hashem united your souls for a purpose that only He can know. He is a participant in your marriage just as He is a participant with your father and mother in your creation. Never forget this divine dimension of your existence and your marriage. It is the true essence of who you are, the true core of your relationship with your spouse. It is, in the end, the only eternal part of your life.