

Lift Up Your Feet, What Plagues 85% of Unhappy Marriages

After Ya'akov flees home, he begins an eventful journey to Charan. The Torah tells us that he 'lifted his feet' (29:1) as he went. Rashi^[1] understands this to mean that he had an easier time walking, once he heard good tidings of his future and was assured a safe journey. Immediately after (v. 2), Ya'akov has an encounter with a small group of shepherds, who seem to be loafing. Upon investigation, Ya'akov finds out that they are actually standing idly by because they are unable to remove a large stone from the top of a well. Ya'akov immediately moves the stone, enabling the men to give their animals water to drink.

It's difficult not to find significance in the juxtaposition of these two incidences. Ya'akov feels elated and he proceeds to navigate a potentially intense conversation. If Ya'akov would feel tense or vigilant because of his brother's desire to attack him or depressed at having to leave home, he may have chastised the shepherds before fully investigating their predicament. (See *The Seven Ways* (2011), pp. 55-8 for a treatment of how to properly speak to someone in tense circumstances, especially when one needs to correct others' behavior^[2]). He may have created more tension or focused on the negative side of the situation.

When a person feels good about his- or herself, he or she is better able to speak to and act towards others in a positive way. When a person is in a good mood, that person is far more likely to be able to deal with a stressful situation.

Dr. John Gottman found from extremely thorough, longitudinal studies that in 85% of marriages in which the couple was dissatisfied at least one of the partners felt bad about themselves and criticized their partner as a result. As Gottman has demonstrated in his monumental work on marriage satisfaction, negative behaviors such as contempt and criticism the most destructive poisons one can bring to a marriage. (I highly recommend his book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (1999), among other books on similar topics)

The key to relationships is to continually improve our wellbeing through fostering positive feelings in ourselves. If we do so, it will show up in our mood and in our manner. Our smile will be broader and our feet will carry us to the same elation that Ya'akov felt.

IB

References:

Bailey, I., (2011). *The Seven Ways: Jewish Insight into People and Personality*. Baltimore: Createspace.

Gottman, J., Nan, S. (1999) The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work. New York: Crown. (My usual disclaimer about books: There are very good ideas and pieces of advice in this book, in general, but not every single idea about evolution or ideologies (there are only a few) are compatible with Orthodox Judaism.)

^[1] Based on Bereishit Rabbah 70:8.

^[2] See Emet L'Yaakov to Genesis 29:5.