

Healing Words in Your Marriage

[Adapted from Zelig Pliskin's, Marriage, Chapter 3 (New York, Mesorah Publications, 1998)]

Your words to your spouse can create feelings of joy, love, closeness, gratitude, and maybe even radiant bliss. Your words to your spouse can console, comfort, inspire, motivate, elevate. But other words can create feelings of pain, distress, and anger.

When you choose the right words, you can say things that would create a quarrel had you said them differently. For example, you can say no to a request in a way that creates resentment or ill will. "You don't meet my requests when you don't feel like it, so I'm not going to do what you asked," is such an example. But you can say no in a different way. "I would love to meet your request at a different time. But I'm afraid that I can't say yes right now." As someone once said, "If you can't oblige, at least speak obligingly."

Rushing your spouse by saying "Come on already. What's taking you so long?" in a loud tone of voice so everyone can hear, is highly likely to cause pain. Tone of voice communicates a lot and even under anxious circumstances, like being late, you should be calm and pleasant when you speak. The challenge is how to access a more relaxed state and way to communicate. You might find it more helpful to say in a sweet tone, "You're worth waiting for. Nevertheless, I would appreciate it if you could hurry."

Every statement you make can be phrased in many ways. Choose positive ways to word things. Marriage is a great way to learn tact. Tact is when you say your position in a way that is sensitive to the feelings of the person to whom you are speaking. A husband or wife should avoid speaking in a way that would be considered mocking, belittling, scoffing, derisive, insulting, or a put-down. Sarcasm or jokes at your spouse's expense do not further your vows to love and cherish each other.

Here are some examples of put-downs and the more tactful option:

- ☞ *"That's ridiculous."* Compare this with: "I see some difficulties with that."
- ☞ *"How could anyone in their right mind think that?"* Compare this with: "I think that another position has its merits."
- ☞ *"That's totally stupid."* Compare this with: "Let's look at this in another way."

If your spouse doesn't understand you, it would be tactful to say, "I must not have expressed myself clearly. Let me explain what I mean."

If your spouse claims that your words caused him or her pain, don't argue that you think they really didn't. Apologize.

Do everything you can not to embarrass your spouse or put him or her on the spot. There is no need to point out every single error and mistake. If a mistake is likely to be repeated or needs to be corrected, do it with finesse. Most of the time, it is a one-time error that could, and should, go uncorrected. Your service is to build up your spouse, not bring him or her down.

Some people claim, "I can't control what I say and how I say it," but the control depends on the motivation. Many people actually believe this about themselves. But the very same people can usually control what they say and how they say it if someone they respect knocks on the door. And most people can do this even if the person at the door is a total stranger whom they will never see again.

Now, imagine that this person is your soulmate your other half because he or she is this person. Speak to them with the love and respect you both deserve.

And remember what a wise man once said when asked what came to mind when he thought about an important principle for marriage: "Don't say everything that comes to your mind," he said.