

# Sameaich Tesamach

A supplementary resource tool for chassan teachers and a practical guide for Jewish men

# PART ONE\*

## Shalom b'Ohalecha

\*To receive Part Two of this kuntress (**which discusses intimacy and could be triggering for some**), and/or to forward comments, questions, or requests for consultation, send an email to the below email address. When requesting Part Two of the kuntress, please confirm in the email that you are a married or engaged man who is interested in reading it.

[kuntreisim@gmail.com](mailto:kuntreisim@gmail.com)

There is also a kuntress for women. The request for it can be sent to the above email address by the woman who would like to receive a copy. In the email, please confirm that you are a married or engaged woman who is interested in reading the women's kuntress.

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## Introduction

The *Rambam*<sup>1</sup> writes that the purpose of the entire Torah is *shalom*:

היה לפניו נר ביתו ונר חנוכה או נר ביתו וקדוש היום נר ביתו קודם משום שלום ביתו שהרי השם נמחק לעשות שלום בין איש לאשתו, גדול השלום שכל התורה ניתנה לעשות שלום בעולם שנאמר דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום.

“If one has to choose between purchasing *Shabbos* candles or *Chanukah* candles, or *Shabbos* candles and wine for *Kiddush*, *Shabbos* candles take precedence because of the overarching value of *Shalom Bayis*. For, behold, even the Name of Hashem is erased in order to make peace between husband and wife. *Shalom* is of supreme importance, for the entire Torah was given in order to make peace in the world, as it says in the *pasuk*, “Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.”

It goes without saying, then, that cultivating and maintaining a harmonious relationship between husband and wife must always stand as the very uppermost priority in life. Furthermore, a man’s primary sense of success, happiness, and satisfaction in life is completely tied up with the peaceful and harmonious functioning of his home. Investing in your marriage, then, is both a fulfillment of your greatest responsibility and that which will ensure your personal happiness in life.

Writing a work on *Shalom Bayis* carries with it a certain degree of danger. As Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky said, there are no two marriages that are exactly alike. Just as people are infinitely varied, so too are the precise recipes for how to deal with subjective situations infinitely varied. It goes without saying, then, that one cannot make a hard-and-fast, recipe-style rulebook on how to deal with any given situation in married life. There is no question that every married couple is unique and needs to find a particular system and rhythm that works for them, both in general and in any given specific situation.

Nevertheless, there are certain basic *yesodos* that serve as the *moreh derech*, the general outline and guideline for all marriages. One needs to learn these principles, understand them well, and discover how precisely they will apply in his particular situations. That is the way to study a work such as this; not as a 1+2=3 instruction manual, but as general guideline of the underlying principles by which one should calibrate his particular course of action and direction.

There are many wonderful works written on the topic of *Shalom Bayis*. Because *Shalom Bayis* is such an amazingly complex and varied topic, it is very hard to say that there could be any one work that fully exhausts the topic. This one certainly does not at all claim to do so. Rather, it was compiled in order to deal with specific issues within the overall general topic of *Shalom Bayis* that are often not addressed directly or perhaps not exhaustively enough, particularly those issues that are of a more sensitive nature. This kuntras is not an exhaustive treatise of all the issues and nuances of *Shalom Bayis*. *Shalom Bayis* is a topic that encompasses a broad range of extremely important issues relevant to the husband-wife relationship, and there are many works that delve deeply into the numerous tools, attitudes, guidelines, approaches, etc. that are necessary to weave the delicate fabric that comprises the beautiful tapestry of *Shalom Bayis*. This kuntras is intended to provide an important supplement to these other works. It is the teacher’s or reader’s responsibility to not utilize this work as an independent guide, but

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<sup>1</sup> ה"ל מגילה וחנוכה ד"י

as a supplement to the information and guidance that is available through training and many other additional works on the topics of *Shalom Bayis*.

It is advised that upon completion of the course of instruction, the teacher give the *chassan* a copy of this *kuntras* for future review and reference. This is, however, provided that the above, critical stipulation is followed. Namely, that this *kuntras* not become the sole work which the *chassan* will rely upon for guidance in *Shalom Bayis*. He must have at least a few other pieces of literature that will round out the topic for him and ensure that his understanding is whole and balanced.

Learning these matters one time before getting married or during the first year of marriage definitely does not suffice. Even when *Avraham avinu* was 99 years old and *Sara imeinu* was 89 years old, the *Malachim* made a point to say *ayeih Sarah ishtecha* so that it would be emphasized in Avraham's mind how much of a *tzenuah* Sarah is and she would become even more endeared to him. Marriage is a delicate masterpiece that requires constant care, maintenance, and effort to keep it in top shape. You need to make refreshing and honing your knowledge in these matters a regular, lifelong enterprise.

Someone, we'll call him Yoni, once attended a *Motzaei Shabbos* presentation on the topic of *chinuch* by Rav Noach Orlowek and Rav Dovid Kaplan. Both of them are world renowned speakers in the English-speaking Torah world. Yoni expected it to be a packed house. Boy was he shocked when he entered the *Beis Medrash* and saw very few men there. Even once the event began, there were probably no more than 20 men there, definitely not more than 30. This was in a community that boasts an English speaking contingent in the thousands. When Yoni mentioned his shock to one of the event organizers, the latter responded, "On the women's side of the *mechitza* it was full. It is always like this. Whether *chinuch* or *shalom bayis*, the women come and the men don't. Apparently, men in general think they already know enough and do not need these presentations and seminars."

Not good. Not good at all.

Men *in particular* need to always be in search mode for how they can grow and improve in the realm of *shalom bayis* and *chinuch ha'banim*. There is no such thing as just "going through the *inyan* once or twice and being *yotzei-zein*". This is not just about your *chiyuv* and *achrayus* in life, it is about your own happiness. Hashem is very kind and He set things up that if we follow His instructions, we benefit. Big time.

So learn it. Review it. In six months go over it again. Buy another book. Etc. Make this your habit throughout your life and *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu* will do His part to give you the *siyata d'Shmaya* to see it through. אכי"ר.

# PART ONE שלום באהלך

## 1) The Bedrock of a Successful Marriage

### **Found or Finding?**

The *Gemara* in *Brachos*<sup>2</sup> says that in *Eretz Yisrael* when someone would get married they would pose the following question to the *chassan*: is it מצא or מוצא? The reference being to two *pesukim* that describe extremely divergent outlooks on a woman. One *pasuk*<sup>3</sup> says, 'מצא אשה מצא טוב ויפק רצון מה' whereas the other<sup>4</sup> says 'ומוצא אני מר ממות את האשה...'. Quite a stark difference isn't it? Basically, it would seem, they were asking the *chassan* if his wife is good, or more bitter than death.

Sounds like an awfully strange thing to be asking a *chassan* right after he married his wife, doesn't it?!

It's hard to imagine that if a *chassan* was himself wondering what the answer to that question is, that it would be good for his *shalom bayis*! Let's not forget that the *Gemara* in *Kesuvos*<sup>5</sup> says that one should dance in front of the *kallah* and call her נאה וחסודה even if she doesn't really look so beautiful to most people. Clearly *Chazal* were very concerned that we should say things that will endear the *kallah* to her *chassan*. *Kal v'chomer* that it would be a serious *avlah* to say something to the *chassan* that may make him think poorly of his *kallah*!

So what could possibly be the *pshat* in this *Gemara* about asking the *chassan* if its מצא or מוצא?

*Rabi Yaakov Mi'Lisa* ("the *Nesivos*"), in his *Emes L'Yaakov*, explains that they were not asking the *chassan* to tell them what he thinks about his wife. Rather, they were indicating to him that there are two approaches a man can take towards his wife. One approach is the approach that leads to מצא and the other approach is the approach that leads to מוצא. As in every word of the Torah, nothing is *stam*. If the positive approach is dubbed מצא in the past tense, and the negative approach is dubbed מוצא in the present tense, there must be a reason for that.

מצא means he found. He was looking for a wife, and he found one. The search is over. "Being in the *parsha*" can mean that a *bachur* can be almost drowning in an ocean of research, considerations, investigations, inquiries, deliberations, hesitations, clarifications, weighing relative options, and the list goes on and on (for some *bachurim*, quite literally!). And even those that were only ankle deep in it still had the same experience, at least qualitatively. But, now, that *parsha* is over. Done. Finished. Never to be revisited ever again. He has found his girl. No ifs ands or buts about it. The search is over. For good! From this point on, none of all the intensive work that went into all the *beirurim* matters anymore. Not even one iota. Once he has found and married her, that's it. This is his wife. No second guessing, no

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<sup>2</sup>.ח

<sup>3</sup> משלי יח:כב

<sup>4</sup> קהלת ז:כו

<sup>5</sup>.ז

niggling doubts, no wondering if he really made the right decision or perhaps he could have done better. This woman is the one that he found and that's all there is too it. End of story. מצא, he found her; it's done.

מוצא, on the other hand, means he is finding. It's present tense. He is still in finding mode. Even after he said the *harei at* and put the ring on her finger, he hasn't really moved on from being in the *parsha*. Although, technically, they are now married and his wife is most certainly a full-fledged *eishes ish*, he has not really exited the previous phase of his life to enter the new one. He is unable to fully make peace with his situation. Every time he notices some flaw, folly, or failing that bothers him, he cannot help but wonder if he made the right decision. In his mind he is still searching. He's still "in the *parsha*". Still checking to see if she really was the right one for him to pick. He is a מוצא, forever in that state of second guessing his choice. Of wondering if perhaps he could have done better with someone else. In his mind he is constantly assessing and reassessing her to see if she truly measures up to what she was made out to be when they did all the *beirurim* on her and when he dated her. And he is doomed to suffer a fate more bitter than death. Far more bitter than death.

Because the מוצא does not make peace with his situation, every little thing is going to drive him crazy. In *shidduchim*, there is a certain fantasy-land outlook that on paper and on dates everything needs to be perfect. But real life is not like that. Far from it. Everyone, but everyone has their *chesronos*. This guy, fool that he is, refuses to enter reality. He is still stuck in the immature, romantic, fantasy world of "the *parsha*". And it is going to make his life a *gehinnom* on earth. His expectations will never be met. Not only because they are not grounded in reality, but more so because of the attitude towards marriage that those expectations engender and express. "You need to deliver!" Isn't that in a nutshell how it works in *shidduchim*? If you want us to consider you, you better be able to sell yourself as a top-notch product. And if you actually want us to choose you, then you better present yourself as something really special. You have to prove your worth. If you can do it well, then we may just choose you.

In marriage, though, that outlook is doomed to failure. A marriage just does not work that way, no matter how much a babyish mind may want it to. In a marriage you are there primarily to be a giver, not a taker; most certainly not a demander. Even if that taking and demanding is done only in the recesses of your own mind. You are there to work together with your spouse towards a common, shared goal and value; not to see if she can prove herself worthy of your having chosen her.

The מצא guy understands that whatever led up to this point is now irrelevant. Completely irrelevant. Once I've signed on the dotted line, it's time to roll up my sleeves and get to work! Whatever was, was. This is my wife and that's it. This is my life and this is my *matzav* and that's it. No ifs ands or buts about it. The only thing which is up to me now is what I am going to do with my *matzav*. How I am going to take it, go with it, and the make the best of it<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> באמת ליעקב חילק בין מי שנושא אשה לשם שמים לבין מי שנושא לשם מילוי תאוותיו. בהשקפה ראשונה נראה לכאורה שמה שכתבנו בפנים אינו כדבריו, אבל באמת הדברים שהצענו עולים ממש בקנה אחד עם דבריו. והוא משום שיש לשאול, מה כוונתו שכתב חילוק בין נושא לשם שמים לבין נושא לשם תאוותו, הרי כבר אמרו חז"ל כולם יודעים למה כלה נכנסת לחופה וכו', ולא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה וגודר עצמו בה כמו שאמרו דיינו שמצילות אותנו מן החטא והשרוי בלא אשה שרוי בלא חומה וכו' וכתוב ובחטא יחמתני אמי וכו' כידוע. אז מה כוונתו באומרם לשם שמים ולא לשם תאוה? הענין נראה פשוט. איך האדם מתייחס לענין הנישואים באופן כללי? האם חיי הנישואים זה היכי תמצא להשיג את מבוקשיו ולמלא רצונותיו, או האם חיי נישואים הוי היכי תמצא לקיים את חובתו בעולמו. זהו עצם החילוק בין המכוון למילוי תאוותיו לבין המכוון לשם שמים. ופשוט הוא שמי שתמיד חושב ומסתפק בעצמו אם בחר באשה הנכונה ותמיד בוחנת אותה האם היא מספיק חכמה

He will succeed because he is committed. He doesn't consider any other options and therefore he will find the way that will make what he has work. And work it will. Because one who has found a wife, has found ultimate goodness, and he will have tremendous *siyata d'Shmaya* – ויפק רצון מה'.

This, then, is the very first thing a man needs to know to have a successful marriage; it's forever. Forever! Marriage is for keeps. Once you put that ring on her finger, she is bound to you and you are bound to her for all eternity. Make no mistake. This is not a *mussar-vort*. It is a recipe for a happy marriage; without which there is no recipe for a happy marriage<sup>7</sup>.

### ***Understanding the Flawed Thinking of the מוצא***

To sharpen our appreciation of this *yesod*, we'll quote a small section from Rav Eliyahu Goldschmidt, in his fantastic book Dear Son<sup>8</sup>, which really ought to be required reading for every *chassan* and husband. If you don't have it yet, go buy it. And read it many times *b'iyun*. Rav Goldschmidt writes about the following brief occurrence that happened with him.

*You know, my son, on one of my visits to Argentina I met a Jew who was divorced and happily remarried. He had some questions about the education of his children, and he wanted my advice.*

*In the course of the conversation, I asked him, "Why did you divorce your first wife?"*

*"I just had no patience for her," he said. "I couldn't deal with her."*

*"I see. And now you are happily married?"*

*"Oh yes. Very much so."*

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חרוצה יפיפיה וכו' היינו משום שהוא כל כולו תפוס בעצמו, הוא חושב בעיקר וכמעט אך ורק על "מה אני צריך לקבל כאן". הוא בא לכאן לקחת, במילים אחרים למלא תאווה (אבל באווילותו ימות ולא יהא אפילו חצי תאוותו בידו כמו שבארנו בפנים). לעומת זה, מי שאחר שכבר כרת את ברית הנישואים עם אשתו בחופה וקידושין כבר לא חושב כלל וכלל אודות תהליך הבחירה ואם צדק בה, ואינו מחשב ומהרהר על האם היא מספיק טובה והאם היא מוכיחה את עצמה וכו', אלא צדיק הוא ובאמונתו חי ובתמימות ובפשטות הולך ומשתלם עם מצבו שהזמין לו בורא העולם ושמח בחלקו ובמה שיש לו, ומבין שמה שעכשיו מוטל עליו זה רק לדאוג שיהיה טוב עד כמה שאפשר, הוא הוא אשר מכון לשם שמים כי אין עינו ולבו אלא על מה שעליו מוטל לעשות ולקיים - יש לו מצב, יש לו מצוות, והוא משתדל כפי כחו וסגנון רוחו והכמתו לקיימם כפי אשר תשיג ידו.

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps you're thinking, "Well, if that's the case, why does the Torah allow for divorce?! If the Torah affords the possibility of giving a *get*, then that means it must be an option!" Well, yes, the Torah does allow for divorce, just as it allows for a full-leg amputation. But, tell me, is that a thought that you walk around with, "You know, amputating my leg is always an option. If it starts causing me too much trouble, I could always get rid of it"? Even people who suffer from terrible, chronic aches and pains in their legs don't have such thoughts even cross their minds, let alone think about such an "option" on a regular basis. Divorce, my friend, is much more a drastic and severe step than amputating a leg. Yes, amputating a leg *is* an option; but it is an option that exists only for the most severe and extreme circumstances such that until one is *c"v* faced with such a horrific situation, the thought of amputation does not exist on his radar screen; at all! **At least** to the same extent, divorce must not even be on your radar screen - at all! And, remember, this is not a *mussar vort*. It is the key to **your** happiness.

<sup>8</sup> Page 173.

"So is your second wife opposite in character to your first wife?"

"No. Not at all. You can't imagine how much patience I need to deal with her."

"I don't understand," I said. "Why are you able to be so much more patient with this wife than you were with your first wife?"

He smiled and shrugged. "You learn from your mistakes."

You know, there are people who do not learn the lesson the first time around. They wind up getting divorced two times, three times, maybe even more if there are any women desperate and foolish enough to give them a try. There is a saying, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." Because someone who doesn't learn from his mistakes is acting like a complete fool. Wouldn't it be nice, though, if a guy would not have to make such a gargantuan mistake as allowing his family unit to crumble and fall apart in order to acquire the wisdom he needs to get it right?

So let's try to dissect this a bit and see if we can perhaps learn from Mr. I've-got-no-patience-for-my-first-wife-but-plenty-for-my-second so that we don't *chalilah* fall into the same trap he did.

What drives a guy to want to divorce his wife? Has he given up on the whole idea of married life? Definitely not. No-one wants to live in loneliness for the rest of his life. Certainly, a *frum* guy who gets divorced is almost immediately going to look to get remarried. So, no, it is not that he has given up on the whole idea of marriage. So, what is it? It's pretty simple, isn't it?

He thinks he can do better elsewhere.

"If only I would have married someone like...*then* I would be happy." There could be different variations of this going through a guy's head depending on his background and orientation, but they all come down to one basic assumption: with a better wife I would be happy.

And that is the terrible fallacy that brings down so many marriages. *Rabosai*, it's a sham! It is an outright, flaming lie and fantasy that people "indulge" in to *patur* themselves from doing what they need to be doing in life. **You** won't have it better with anyone else. Sure, if the guy learns from his mistake and realizes that the only way he is going to achieve marital success and happiness is if **he** changes and adjusts his behavior to match the needs of marriage-unit, then he might in fact have a shot at having some happiness with his second marriage. But, and this is the fundamental point, it is **not** because of the different woman to whom he is now married; it is because of the different person **he** became. If he doesn't get the point, though, and does not change, he will not find marital happiness the second, third, or even fourth time around. It just won't happen<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> עיין מסכת כלה רבתי פרק ג' לגבי דרכו של אהרון הכהן בעשיית שלום דאיתא התם, "שמע על בעל ואשתו שעשו מריבה הולך אצל הבעל ואומר לו בשביל שאני שומע שנתנצית עם אשתך אם אתה מגרש אותה ספק תמצא כמותה ספק לא תמצא ועוד אם אתה מוצא ומתנצית עמך תחלת דבר היא אומרת לך כך עשית לאותה ראשונה ועל זאת היו כל ישראל אנשים ונשים אוהבין אותו." יש לציין שלא נקט לשון "ספק תמצא טובה ממנה" אלא לשון "שמא תמצא כמותה", כלומר למצוא טובה ממנה בודאי לא ייתכן, ואפילו למצוא כמותה ספק הוא. ואפילו על הצד שיצליח למצוא כמו אשתו הראשונה, בכל זאת, בהכרח יהיה לו יותר גרוע עם השנית כי כל פעם שתכעס עליו היא תשתמש עם זה שגרש הראשונה כנגדו. סוף דבר, האדם צריך להבין היטב ולהחדיר עמוק עמוק לתודעת נפשו שאין שום סיכוי בעולם ש"יעשה יותר טוב" עם מישהי אחרת וכנ"ל בפנים. ואין להקשות הרי אהרון שינה את דבריו מפני השלום ולכן א"א להביא ראייה ממנו לגבי עצם המציאות, דזה אינו. הגע עצמך, האם ייתכן שאהרון היה מצליח לעשות שלום ע"י שקר גס כ"כ הרבה פעמים, בין לגבי חברים בין לגבי בעל ואשתו? ע"כ דמוכרחין לפרש דלא כוונו חז"ל לומר דסתם שיקר להם ע"י סיפורי הבל שלא היו ולא נבראו, אלא שהצליח ע"י

## ***A Good Work Ethic is Indispensable***

If you're still a *chassan* or within the first *tekufah* following your *chasuna*, you may very well be in a state of bewilderment reading these words. You're still floating on cloud nine and cannot possibly imagine how any of this talk could ever be relevant to you. Or, perhaps you are one of those lucky guys who truly possesses good *middos*. Good *middos*, by the way, at least in this context, has absolutely nothing to do with a naturally refined character. Oh sure, that helps a lot and goes a long way in greasing the wheels of the marriage mobile, but it is nowhere near sufficient standing alone. Good *middos* when it comes to marriage means primarily a good, solid work ethic.

Huh?

That's right: work ethic. You have to be prepared to *shvitz*. Life in general requires this<sup>10</sup>, and marriage and family life is the *kur ha'barzel* of life. It is a people grower. If you are not prepared to extend yourself and work at it, there isn't much hope. Don't worry, that doesn't mean you'll be expected to go beyond your endurance and stamina level. Whatever situation Hashem gives us, He also provides us with the tools we need to succeed. But if you think that you can just sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride – you're in for one seriously rude awakening.

At this juncture, it's *k'dai* to momentarily diverge a bit from our thread to mention something that is relevant to this point: almost every single one of us goes into marriage completely unprepared. In centuries past life was such that even when you were a kid and a single *bachur*, you simply **had** to *shvitz* and work hard to make it in life. The enormous wealth and comfort with which our generation has been blessed – and, yes, it is a blessing – has created a situation in which a *bachur* barely needs to push himself, if at all. And this is not talking about the exertion of so-called "*shteigen*". To make it in life, a person needs to know how to push himself and work hard in an *olam-hazeh-dikeh* manner that is concrete and tangible. What this means, is that you have to be able to deal with the situation you are in and act accordingly.

Take for example a *bachur* who, at the onset of *Elul zman* of his third year in *Beis Medrash*, discovers to his dismay that his new roommates are not the type of guys that he wanted. He is a *ben aliyah*; he doesn't want to be around guys that read novels (albeit "*frum*" ones) and talk about the Yankees and Shweky's latest albums in their spare time. So what does he do? Simple. He switches rooms. If it's the type of *Yeshiva* that you need the *hanhala's* approval for that, he makes sure to get it. If not, he just does it on his own. Worst case scenario, he just makes sure to avoid his room as much as possible, at least when those "undesirables" are around. *B'kitzur*, you don't like the *matzav*? Change it. Simple as that<sup>11</sup>.

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אהבת הבריות העזה שבערה בלבו להראות לכל אחד נקודה הטובה האמיתית שבחבירו, שבעצם זה מה שקורה בפנימיותו, ואין כאן המקום להאריך בזה. מה דנוגע לדידן הוא דאם אנשים שוכנעו והיו אוהבים אותו על זה, מוכרח שראו שדבריו צדקו במאת האחוזים. ויש להבין את זה היטב.

<sup>10</sup> כמש"כ מהגר"א באבן שלמה פרק א' אות ב' "עיקר חיות האדם הוא להתחזק תמיד בשבירת המידות ואם לאו למה לו חיים." ומדברים הנאמרים פה אפשר ללמוד פירוש שלם על ענין זה של שבירת המידות ולמה הוא שורש חיות האדם.

<sup>11</sup> If you are reading this and thinking to yourself, "Well, that's not me at all. I would never try to change rooms or just avoid them in such a situation. *Aderabah*, I would try to befriend them and exert a positive influence on them. So, obviously, this critique does not apply to me." That may be true, but is very unlikely. The explanation for that is this: if the reason you would have behaved differently than the *bachur* in this theoretical scenario is that you truly believe in facing situations head on, despite being inherently adverse thereto, and dealing with them, making

Or maybe it's not so simple after all. You see, whether or not changing rooms is in fact the right thing for that *bachur* to do in that situation is irrelevant to our discussion. What is relevant, very relevant, is that this type of conditioning – yes, it's conditioning *rabosai* – does absolutely nothing for that *bachur's* future prospects of having a good marriage. He is not learning to face situations head on and deal with them. Struggle with and through them. Grapple with the issue and grow bigger in adjusting and adapting himself to deal with it properly. Almost everything about our current-day society – and this is referring to our *frum, yeshivisheh* society – is training, yes training us to not work hard in life. Food is plentiful, and if it isn't tasty enough just listen to how some of us gripe about it. Plane tickets are bought by parents. Tuition is paid for or fundraised by others. Rebbi or Mommy takes care of *shidduchim* for us. In a nutshell, we don't exactly need to exert ourselves to get we want or need. It is more or less all taken care of for us. What a *bracha*! No jokes, for real it is in fact a tremendous *bracha* and we really need to profusely thank Hashem for this *bracha*.

But what a danger! Because if a guy doesn't learn how to work and *shvitz* before he gets married, it might just take him too long to learn that *chochmah* once he is married. By the time he gets it, it may *chalilah* be too late.

### **Mental Preparation – In Advance**

So what's the *eitzah*? The *eitzah*, and there is no other *eitzah*, is to mentally prepare yourself for the new reality that is going to hit you like a mac truck<sup>12</sup>. Don't get scared. It won't bowl over you all at once, at least usually not. It comes in stages. First dealing with *chasunah* pressures (unless that also is completely taken care of for you), then dealing with issues pertaining to getting a *dirah* (ditto that). Then beginning to deal with a wife (by this point no matter how babied you were before, you are now on your own; and if you somehow still have someone "taking care of this" for you, you're in really serious trouble). Then pregnancy, a small baby, more children, financial pressures, etc. It's another one of Hashem's *chassadim* that he does for us that it comes gradually and in stages and not all at once. But

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the best of them, and growing from them; then you are correct. You must be one of those incredibly lucky one out of ten thousand who was blessed to have either parents, teachers, or life circumstances that taught you how to be a "fighter". Chances are, though, that the real reason you'd have acted differently is not because you are a *shvitzer* (yet) but because you just have a different personality type. You are the gregarious, people-loving, forgiving, drawing-close type of person who really appreciates these types of situations. It is your element. If that is the case, although it is quite a plus in your favor, it will have practically zero effect on your need to learn how to really work, stretch beyond self, adapt, make the best of things, and grow as person in life; in particular in marriage. To really get a gauge of yourself, you need to imagine being in a situation that you really do not like at all (and we all have those; some less, some more, but we all have them), and think about what would be your tendency in terms of how to react given that unwanted type of situation.

<sup>12</sup> אחד מתלמידי מו"ר הגאון הקדוש רבי משה טברסקי זצלה"ה הי"ד סיפר איך שפעם ביאר מו"ר שענין המחשבה ליהרג על קידוש השם בשעת קר"ש שביארו הראשונים הוא הכנת האדם בתוככי מחשבותיו למשימה אפשרית שיכולה לבוא עליו כי לכל דבר ומצב שיבוא על האדם בכדי שיוכל לפעול כראוי צריך שיקדם לו הכנה חשיבתית. ועל דרך זה אמר שכדי שיוכל האדם לעמוד בניסיון במצבים שמהווים ניסיון לכעס וכדומה, יצייר בדמיונו שקורה לו כך והאיך יגיב כדת וכדין שלא ירגז ולא יכעס אלא יתנהג בויתור וסבלנות, או אז אם אכן יקרה לו יוכל בנקל לעמוד בניסיון. וראויים הדברים למי שאמרם.

come it will, and to go into it without any preparation is a really bad idea. That's what you're here for, to start learning the *yesodos* of how to successfully manage married life.

So, as we said above, the way you lay the most basic, fundamental groundwork for marriage is by understanding that it's for keeps; forever. Once you put the ring on her finger there's no turning back. Once you truly accept that fact in your mind, your attitude will automatically and organically shift into "making it work" mode.

### ***Making it Work***

Now, we are up to the next step: ok, so how do I make it work? Before we answer that question at length by elucidating the various, major facets that lead to *shalom bayis*, we need to clearly reiterate a point that was also made above. Marriage is a people grower. However much you mentally prepare yourself, and however many tools you learn about, marriage is, by necessity, going to stretch you. It is going to force you to mature and grow beyond the constricting boundaries of the self-persona that you now know. Just as in physical growth when one develops his muscles, there will necessarily be a certain amount of feeling discomfort and burn, so too when it comes to true character growth is there necessarily going to be a certain amount of feeling discomfort and burn. The good news is, that just as a body builder doesn't suffer from the burn, on the contrary, he revels in it because he knows it means his muscles are getting bigger, he is getting stronger, and his endurance and power levels are increasing by leaps and bounds; so too, if you are aware that this is what it's all about, will you feel a tremendous *simcha* and satisfaction in feeling the burn of the character development and growth that takes place within you as you traverse the beautiful road of marriage. And it truly is something exquisitely beautiful and breathtaking, if we but approach it in the right way.

Ok, so here we go. What better place to begin but the *Rambam*, right? In *Hilchos Ishus*<sup>13</sup> the *Rambam* writes:

צו חכמים שיהיה אדם מכבד את אשתו יתר מגופו ואוהבה כגופו ואם יש לו ממון מרבה בטובתה  
כפי הממון ולא יטיל עליה אימה יתירה ויהיה דיבורו עמה בנחת ולא יהיה עצב ולא רוגז.

In this amazingly concise statement, the *Rambam* has summed up for us the rules of how to treat and relate to a wife. This statement truly is the *kol ha'Torah kulah* of *shalom bayis*, and the rest is its *pirush* which we need to learn. We need to brand this statement into the deepest level of our consciousness. It goes without saying that every single *chassan* should start off by memorizing this statement and accepting it deep within himself as the creed by which he is going to live his entire married life.

Let's take this *maamar* and break it down into its component parts, and try to build at least a rudimentary understanding of each facet that will serve as a solid foundation upon which to build throughout our lives. The first one is:

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<sup>1313</sup> טו:ט

שיהיה האדם מכבד את אשתו יתר מגופו ואוהבה כגופו, that a man should be honoring<sup>14</sup> his wife more than himself and love her as much as he loves himself.

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<sup>14</sup> Please note, unless indicated otherwise, the words honor and respect will be used interchangeably.

## 2) Respect – The Foundation of the Relationship

### **Honoring Your Wife – A State of Being**

Note, that the *Rambam* does not write 'שיכבד האדם את אשתו וכו', that a man should honor his wife etc., rather he wrote 'שיהיה האדם מכבד את אשתו וכו', that a man should **be** honoring his wife etc. This is not a small textual nuance, it is a world of a difference. The *Rambam's* choice of words indicates that the goal is not to simply carry out acts of honor and love towards one's wife; rather, it is to become the type of person that this is what he does: he honors and loves his wife. It is meant to become part of your very essence. It is not just something you do, it is a state of being. It is who you are. You are a man that honors and loves his wife. You are not just *yotzei-zein* and go on with your life. No, that is not it at all.

Don't forget, there is a *chiyuv* to be מכבד and love every *Yid*<sup>15</sup>. Obviously, that would apply to one's wife as much as to any other Jew, if not more<sup>16</sup>. So what were *Chazal* adding by issuing a specific instruction about the *chiyuv* on a man to honor and love his wife? This is the question the *Rambam* is answering for us by employing the *lashon* שיהיה; that when it comes to your wife, it's not enough to carry out acts of demonstrating honor and love for her; it is a state of being. You take it with you wherever you go because it's a part of you.

Let's take a look at this *yesod* in action.

*A man once went to the home of Rav Yechezkel Abramsky to discuss a certain matter with him regarding a particular yeshiva. "When I arrived," this individual related, "he was not there. The rebbetzin told me that he should arrive home any moment, so I waited for him there. A few minutes later, the Rav entered his house. The Rebbetzin immediately served him a cup of tea and sat down with him at the table. The Rav began conversing with his rebbetzin.*

*'I left home this morning and took bus number 12 until Ha'Nevi'im Street. From there I walked up the hill. It wasn't too difficult for me. I continued in the direction of Strauss Street until I got to the Geulah neighborhood. I went to Rav Yechezkel Sarna's house and he received me with great honor. I discussed a problem regarding Vaad Ha'Yeshivos. You already know that I hold that there is a need to expand the number of those who take part in the Vaad's meetings, and I wanted to convince Rav Yechezkel Sarna to start coming on a regular basis. You know what type of person he is, after all, Chazal say that women are better judges of character than men; and if he'll become a permanent participant, it will spur everyone to follow through more thoroughly and assiduously with the Vaad's resolutions.'* In this manner he continued elaborating to her about that matter.

*'When we finished our discussion,' continued Rav Abramsky, 'Rav Sarna escorted me out to the street. [Regarding where I needed to go next] I was not sure if I should take a taxi or a bus; but in*

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<sup>15</sup> כמו שאמרו באבות "יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כשלך", ו"איזהו מכובד המכבד את הבריות", ואמרו במדרש "כך אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל בניי כלום חיסרתי לכם מה אני מבקש מכם הא איני מבקש אלא כדי שתהיו אוהבין זה את זה ותהיו מכבדין זה את זה ותהיו יריאין זה מזה, ואמרו שמתו תלמידי ר"ע על שלא נהגו כבוד זה בזה, ועוד הרבה. ולגבי אהבה מקרא מלא דיבר הכתוב ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

<sup>16</sup> Because of the rule, כל הקרוב קרוב קודם.

*the end I preferred taking the bus, and it was really min ha'Shamayim. On the bus I met someone who works at Techiya Publishers which is where I am having part of my Chazon Yechezkel being printed. He told me that they finished printing the parts that I gave already more than a week ago, and they have been sitting with nothing to do regarding my seifer. I do not know why no one from there informed me of this beforehand - you know how anxious I am for them to finish the project quickly – and I already have the next three sections ready. Were I to have travelled by taxi I wouldn't have known anything about this...' and such did he go on elaborating about that point.*

*When he finished his conversation with his rebbetzin she got up from the table and he came over to me. He said to me, 'Forgive me that I ignored you all this time. However, baruch Hashem that you merited to see how one is meant to draw his wife close. Look, the whole day she's alone at home. I have to find a way to make her feel a part of what goes on with [my] day. Although it may have seemed to you that I was speaking trivialities with her...but that is what happened to me today...so I tell her.'*

*Rav Abramsky added one more point, 'Baruch Hashem I have merited old age, and it is only in the zechus of the chesed that I do at home to make her feel a part of my goings-on and thereby lift her spirits...'<sup>17</sup>*

Rav Abramsky referred to this conduct of his as a *chesed*, but it is obviously a *chesed* that is born of tremendous respect and love; it is a *chesed* that demonstrates great honor. Let's try a bit to understand why. This is going to require some elaboration, so please be patient, and don't worry, soon we'll get back to analyzing this story of Rav Abramsky. Also, although we are going to begin with a discussion about learning how to talk to your wife, it is important to realize that the most important thing a husband needs to learn regarding communicating with his wife is how to listen. Generally speaking it is the wife who does most of the talking, and as her husband you absolutely must learn how to listen to her properly which we will elaborate upon later. So, that said, let's continue.

### ***Two Nations Divided by a Common Language***

Rav Noach Orlowek makes an observation that almost any man who is married for at least a few years immediately recognizes as so true: men have constipation of the mouth. You read right, constipation. Now, this is not to say that men do not know how to *schmooze*. But, somehow, when it comes to their wives (mothers, daughters, etc.), they get constipated. She wants to know how your day was and you manage but a barely audible grunt of "great". She wants to know if davening at *Shul* on *Shabbos-Rosh Chodesh* was nice, and just to respond "yeah" already feels like such an effort. She wants to know if the *Rosh Kollel* was happy to hear that you had a baby girl, and with great difficulty you barely get out an "I don't know; I think so." Yes, regarding their wives, men have constipation of the mouth. Even a man

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<sup>17</sup> גדולי ישראל בביתם, עמוד ע"ג

who has no problem shooting the breeze with his *chevrusah* for hours on end (when he is supposed to be learning!) may find that with his wife he gets all clammed up!

What is going on here?

It's actually pretty simple. There is a *Gemara* in *Shabbos*<sup>18</sup> that clears up this confusion, along with a lot of other sticky points in *shalom bayis* as well. It is a really fundamental point that is going to come up a lot, so pay close attention and assimilate this information really well. It is one of the most basic *yedios* you need to know in order to successfully negotiate married life.

*Mishna: A woman is not allowed to go out (into the reshus ha'rabbim) wearing a needle that has a hole, nor with a signet ring...and if she does she is chayav [to bring] a chatas.*

*Gemara: Said Ulah, it is the opposite when it comes to men (meaning, if a man goes out with a signet ring he is patur, if he goes out with a regular ring he is chayav -Rashi-). We see, then, that Ulah holds that something which is fitting for a man is not considered fitting for a woman, and something which is fitting for a woman is not considered fitting for a man. Rav Yosef asks on this from a Braisah, "Shepherds can go out wearing sackcloth, and not only regarding shepherds did they say this (heter), rather even regarding anybody this is so, just that it is the manner of shepherds to wear sackcloth (so we see that even though regular people are not accustomed to wearing sackcloth, the fact that it is an adornment for one type of person suffices to halachikly classify it as an adornment for everyone -Rashi- [so why is it not the same regarding a signet ring vis a vis women and a regular ring vis a vis men])?! Said Rav Yosef, Ulah holds that women are a nation unto themselves.*

The *Gemara* there continues with a back and forth regarding whether we can perhaps disprove *Ulah's psak*. At the end of the day, we do *pasken* like *Ulah*<sup>19</sup>. So not only is *עצמן הן עם בפני עצמן* an observable fact, it is such a powerful reality that it directly impacts the *halacha*. Even though we generally say that once a particular item is used as an adornment for wearing by one type of person, that is enough to *halachikly* classify it as such for everyone; between men and women, though, it is impossible to say this. They are simply too different. The one's adornments simply have no *shaychus* whatsoever to the other. They are two, different nationalities. There is a nation called men, and there is a separate, different nation called women!

The truth is that it doesn't take a big *chacham* to recognize this; actually, it is the incredible thick-headedness of contemporary society that causes us to overlook this so basic point. Just take a look at a three year old boy and a three year old girl. The boy is busy digging up earthworms and dissecting them, stomping on giant ants, and riding his toy truck as fast as he can into the wall; and the girl is busy selecting the prettiest bow for her hair, feeding a bottle to her doll, and squealing in delight over the pretty sticker her *morah* gave her. And you can't see that these are two completely different creatures?!

The way men think about things and the way they process their emotions is completely different from the way women do. The way men express what they are thinking and what they naturally enjoy conversing about is completely different from women. The way men respond and react to any given

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<sup>18</sup> סב.

<sup>19</sup> או"ח סי' ש"א סע' ט' וסי' ש"ג סע' ט'

situation is so, so different from the way women do. And of course, the way men act and conduct themselves is so incredibly different from the way women do.

*B'kitzur*, in every facet of human behavior, men and women are worlds apart.

No wonder, then, that the type of questions she asks, the kind of information she desires to hear, and the manner in which she enjoys conducting a conversation can be not only uninteresting to a man, it can be downright burdensome! Her whole way of thinking, expressing, and communicating is so incredibly foreign to him that he just cannot relate; at all! So, yes, he is constipated; and not only in his mouth, but also in his mind. Because he does not at all think the way she thinks, he is practically screaming inside his head, "What does she want from me?!" If he is a crass boor he may even allow that inner scream to express itself externally as such. That is obviously very, very bad, and we hope that *Bnei Torah* are above that. But even they, if they are still clueless as to how a marriage is meant to work, may say something like, "What more can I tell you? My day was fine, that's all. The same thing that happens to me every day is also what happened today, so what more could I say?!" Even if he manages to curb his inner sense of frustration and say those words calmly or even not say them at all, it is still seriously missing the point. It is not honoring his wife, most certainly not being one who honors his wife, and it is not good. Not good at all.

What is perhaps even worse, before we get to how to work on growing in this area and meeting the challenge, is that when she then dominates the conversation and tells him every little this and every single that, and goes on and on about details and in a manner that he finds completely uninteresting and boring, he may slowly but surely come to loathe his private time with his wife. He may come to find being alone with her a bothersome burden of which he cannot wait to be relieved. He may come to think of her as a nag, *Rachmana litzlan*, and a great distance can begin to form between them. A deep chasm and rift can begin to pull them emotionally apart from one another. This is not *shalom bayis*. It is not even honorable behavior, and it is most certainly very, very far from love<sup>20</sup>.

They may be well mannered enough to not fight (quite unlikely, though), they may even be careful to always speak to one another in a courteous and cordial manner (hard to believe), and they may even make a point to politely smile at each other regularly (what are the chances?); but it can hardly be said that this is *shalom bayis*. Maybe by the *Goyim* lack of war is considered peace, but by us *Yidden* the lack of fighting is most certainly not the definition of *שלום*. This lack of *shalom*, which is so acutely manifest in their failure to successfully communicate and connect with one another robs a woman of one of her most basic needs in marriage: to feel emotionally connected with her husband. This lack of

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<sup>20</sup> וענין חשיבות הגדולה והדגולה של אהבת איש ואשתו אינו צריך לפנינו שהרי במסכת ידים פרק ג' משנה ה' "אמר רבי עקיבא חס ושלום לא נחלק אדם מישראל על שיר השירים שלא יטמא את הידיים שאין כל העולם כולו כדאי כיום שנתן בו שיר השירים שכל הכתובים קודש ושיר השירים קודש קודשים", וכל ענין שיר השירים הוא תיאור האהבה עזה כמוות שבין הקב"ה וכלל ישראל במשל אהבת איש ואשתו, ואמרו חז"ל ביבמות סג: "אמר רבא בא וראה כמה טובה אשה טובה...דכתיב מצא אשה מצא טוב אי בגוה משתעי קרא כמה טובה אשה טובה שהכתוב משבחה אי בתורה משתעי קרא כמה טובה אשה טובה שהתורה נמשלה בה." וכן בש"ש אף אנו נאמר כמה גדולה אהבת איש ואשתו דאי בגוה משתעי קרא (ההינו מבחינת אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוט) כמה גדולה שהכתוב מאריך בתיאורה ואי באבהת הקב"ה לכנסת ישראל משתעי קרא כמה גדולה שנמשלה בה. ודוק בנוסח הברכה שאנו מברכים תחת החופה "אשר ברא ששון ושמחה חתן וכלה...אהבה ואחוה..." ויש להאריך בזה טובא.

communicating with her is most certainly not honoring her. On the contrary, it inflicts deep pain on her<sup>21</sup>.

### ***What it means to Honor Another***

What this brings us to, then, is the very first premise we need to know for showing another honor; and that is to realize that you are honoring **another**. In other words, if you try to show someone else honor by taking your *musagim* of respect and just doing a copy-and-paste for that person, not only might you not wind up honoring, you may even wind up insulting and hurting<sup>22</sup>! If you give an old Japanese guy a firm handshake and hearty hello, you may feel like you are showering him with honor and affection by proffering such a warm greeting, but for all you know he may be shaken to the core by how badly you just insulted his honor! Because the old-school Japanese nature and habits are so different from Americans', they may relate to such behavior as a serious affront.

How, then, can you possibly show honor to someone who is so radically different from you? Well, go ask the clever, industrious, up-and-coming politician or businessman what he does when he needs to score a big deal in a foreign country. He studies up on their mode of conduct! He learns about them. He tries hard to find out what type of speech and behavior is acceptable to them<sup>23</sup>. ***He wants very much to understand them, to get to know their way of thinking acting and relating, so that he will be able to successfully interact and communicate with them***<sup>24</sup>!

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<sup>21</sup> על דרך מש"כ הסטייפלר גאון זצ"ל במכתב, מובא בספר ארחות רבינו ח"ה פרק "קדושה" אות ס"ז "אשר כידוע עיקר תקות האשה בעולמה הוא שיהא לה בעל האוהב אותה וכשהיא רואה שזה אינו כמעט שקרוב לפקו"נ מרוב צער ויגון על היותה גלמודה כאלמנות חיות". ועל אף דנושא המדובר שם הוא ענין קיום מצות עונה כיאות, פשוט דה"ה והוא הטעם אם אינו מתחבר אל אשתו במישור הרגשי, ואדרבה הרי כבר כתב הגה"צ רב שלמה וולבה בקונטרס מאמרי הדרכה לחתנים שאם האשה אינה מקבלת מבעלה הסיפוק הרגשי מקשר אמיתי איתו אזי לא רק שאינה נהנית מהחיבור הגופני אלא אדרבה נמאסת בו ואלו דבריו ז"ל, "בת הזוג אינה משוחדת מהקירבה הגופנית. אדרבה תוך כדי המגע הגופני היא מרגישה בכאב עצור שאין כאן עדיין קירבה נפשית! כי זאת עלינו לדעת הזיווג הוא שיא של קירבה, אבל כל שיא קודמת לו התפתחות עד שמגיעים אליו. קירבה גופנית בלי קירבה נפשית מעליבה את האשה! עיניה של אשה בעלת רמה דווקא אל קירבה נפשית ויחס של שימת לב אוהבת. אם יש יחס כזה היא משתוקקת גם אל קירבה גופנית, אך אם אין בעלה מגלה כלפיה שימת לב אמיתית וקירבת דעת תמידית היא סולדת ממש מהזיווג הגופני! כי קירבה גופנית שאינה באה מתוך קירבת דעת משפילה אותה וכואבת לה!" הרי לפניך דברים ברורים כלהבות אש שכל עיקר העיקרים של שלום בית וקיום חובותיו כלפי האשה תלויים במאת האחוזים בהתפתחות קשר רגשי אמיתי איתה, ובלי זה אין בידי אלא השפלה הרגזה אכזבה כאב וצער, רח"ל.

<sup>22</sup> כענין מש"כ הח"ח בכלל ה' דהל' לשה"ר סע' ו' "אם יאמר על איש שאחרים מספיקין לו את מזונו ואין לו דאגת פרנסה שהוא לומד לערך ג' או ד' שעות ביום הנה לפי ערכו יהיה לו זה לגנאי גדול ולשון הרע מיקרי... והזהר אחי שאל יטעה אותך היצר לומר מה אמרתי עליו שהוא שאינו לומד רק ג' או ד' שעות ביום הלא איני מצווה לאהוב אותו יותר מכמוני והלואי שהיו אומרים עלי שאני לומד תורה ג' או ד' שעות ביום... אבך באמת זהו טעות דכוונת הגמרא כל מאי דעלך סני וכו' היינו אם היית במדרגתו היה דבר זה שנאוי לך ובאמת זה תלוי לפי האיש שדיבר עליו והמקום והזמן". וכן הדבר בכל ענייני בין אדם לחברו שהחיוב הוא לשער כפי צרכיו רצונותיו וענייניו של הזולת כדי לדעת את אשר יעשה לו ואת אשר ימנע ממנו.

<sup>23</sup> I personally know a businessman who spent a month studying the Russian language as preparation for embarking on a long-term, major-potential business endeavor in Russia.

<sup>24</sup> You may ask, "But it's not fair! That guy has a huge motivation. He wants to score a big deal!" The answer is that there is no greater deal than marriage. Both in this world and the next, there is nothing that will bring **you** more benefit than a marriage done right. So go score the big deal, and make it work!

That is the *yesod*. That is the *alef-beis* of honoring someone. רצונו של אדם זהו כבודו. Acting with another in accordance with the way **they** want things is how you honor that person<sup>25</sup>. The first thing you need to do, then, is understand that person, how they are different from you - perhaps even very different - so that you will be able to say and do those things that will indeed be honorable for them in accordance with their unique needs, wants, and character.

### ***Maseches Aizer K'negdo***

To paraphrase Rav Eliyahu Goldschmidt, getting married means that you are moving to a new country in which you will need to learn an entirely new language and an entirely new mode of thinking, relating, and behaving. Not that you will discard the mode of thought, speech, and conduct that defines who you are; not at all. You very much need to hold onto that and infuse that character into the marriage in order to supply it with one of its most basic requirements; namely, male strength, stability, and leadership. You maintain that way of thinking, speaking, and acting and carefully apply it where appropriate, but you learn to expand beyond it as well. You learn to incorporate the knowledge of an additional, whole new way of processing and relating so that you can successfully build the bridge between yourself and your wife by which the two of you will truly bond and come together. You grow by learning and applying the skill of a new, different way of thinking, communicating, and acting.

What this means, in more *yeshivishev* parlance, is that your wife is a סוגיא עמוקה into which you need to invest a lot of time and effort to learn up properly. This really shouldn't come as a surprise, seeing that *Nashim-Nezikin* is the standard, *yeshivishev* fare. You already know full well that the sugyas in *Nashim* are deep and complex, and require a lot of determined effort to work out. Perusing a few *sefarim* that outline the major *yesodos* of those *Masechtos* would never suffice. If it's like that in the *olam ha'machshava*, how much more so when you go to plug it in *l'maaseh*<sup>26</sup>. And if it's like that in the *cheilek* thereof of *chovos ha'eivarim*, all the more so when it comes to *chovos ha'levavos*.

A guy who thinks he can just waltz into the *zman*, open up *Kiddushin*, *Gittin*, or *Yevamos*, and that it'll just go *mi'meilah*...well, we all know what type of "lamdan" he will turn out to be. Anyone who is not prepared to really *shvitz* it out and put forth serious effort to learn the *inyanim* well is basically not going to come out with much at all. Sure, he may come out with a handful of superficial *yedios* about the *Masechta*, but **knowing** *Nashim*, he most certainly will not. And the same goes for marriage; with a *kol sheh'kein*. If you think that you can just get married and everything will go *mi'meilah*, that just like you have no problem talking and relating with your friends that's how it'll be with your wife, you are making a serious error. And just like the guy who didn't take *Nashim* seriously enough to learn it up properly can wind up being *matir* an *eishes ish*, so too is there a very serious danger that this type of cavalier

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<sup>25</sup> ע"פ תוס' קידושין לא: ד"ה רבי טרפון והוא מהירושלמי פאה א:א וע"ע ספר חסידים סי' קנ"ב

<sup>26</sup> עיין מהרש"א סוף מסכת ברכות דהחמאה של התורה כלומר החלק המובחר שבה הינה ההוראה. והענין פשוט הוא, שלקחת את יסודות ההלכה וליישם במישור המעשי דורש חכמה ההכי גדולה.

attitude will wreak disastrous results on a marriage. Know what you are getting into and mentally prepare yourself to do the intensive, and extremely satisfying, work that it takes to do it right<sup>27</sup>.

And just like you could easily spend your whole life learning *Maseches Kiddushin*, so too are you going to spend the rest of your life learning *Maseches Aizer K'negdo*. Sure, you are learning a lot about it now before you get married so that you can go in with the proper *yesodos* to build on, but they are just that: foundations to build upon. As you go through life's experience, you will truly start to understand the concepts and how to implement them. There will always be more *nekudos*, more *dahers*, and more *chiddushim* that you will be *megaleh* along the way. Because your whole life you are meant to grow; and marriage is a people grower.

Coming back, the very first thing you need to know in order to show her honor and love, is her. You need to understand – to the best of your ability - her needs, her unique character, her desires, her way of thinking, processing, feeling, and communicating. Once you really start to understand her, you will be able to communicate with her and conduct yourself in a way that is truly respecting and honoring her, truly expressing love to and for her.

### ***Making it a Part of You, and Her***

This is the first and primary lesson we can cull from that *maaseh* with Rav Abramsky (see, in the end we did get back to it). Rav Abramsky told his visitor that it may have appeared to the latter that he was discussing trivialities. Indeed, how many of us would expect to hear a *gadol b'Torah* speaking about such seemingly unimportant details?! Rav Abramsky told him that he should thank Hashem that he merited to see how a man is meant to converse with his wife. Rav Abramsky displayed phenomenal understanding of the feminine nature and character. Therefore he was able to really honor his wife and express his love for her in a way that she would feel it.

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<sup>27</sup> If you consider yourself someone who is not a *baal kishron* and therefore tend to be *mistapeik b'muat* with a relatively superficial understanding of the *Gemara*, you may feel quite discouraged at your low prospects for a good marriage. That is a mistake, though. Hashem does not put you into a situation that sets you up for failure. *Chalilah*. So what's the answer? Simple. What do you do, if you are the simple-minded type of person, when it comes to shailos of *halacha*, even in *inyanim* that you've learned? You ask! You don't rely on your own understanding of the *sugyos* because you know that it is lacking. Regarding your *chiyuv* of *talmud Torah* you do your best, which is all that is expected of you. But when it comes to plugging things in *l'maaseh* you will not rely on your own learning since you realize that it is not at a level that would enable you to do so on your own. The same thing, then, goes when it comes to *shalom bayis* (or any other facet of life for that matter): you need to make it a habit to ask questions regularly. Make sure that you go to a *shiur* or *vaad* on *shalom bayis* at least once a week. Also, make sure that the ideas and information being presented are something you can grasp and relate to. It is a *mefurasheh Gemara* and it is *paskened l'halacha* that a person is not necessarily *zocheh* to learn from just anyone, no matter how great that individual. So make sure to find someone who "speaks to you". And make it a point to develop a relationship with that person so that you can discuss your personal life with him and get hands-on *hadracha* vis a vis how to apply the concepts to your life and your unique situations, in addition to discussing any specific questions that arise (by the way, even *baalei kishron* really ought to follow this advice as well). When you do what is within your power to do, Hashem provides *siyata d'Shmaya* and you succeed.

The way *Chazal* expressed the obligation to love your wife is *אוהבה כגופו*, he loves her like himself. But why did they say *כגופו* instead of *כעצמו*? What this shows us is that just like your love of yourself is an inherent reality of your being that goes with you, in your *גוף*, wherever you go; so too must be the love of your wife. Furthermore, it needs to be that this reality becomes just as inherent a part of **her** existence as it is yours. It needs to be that your love for her travels with her wherever she goes because it is a basic, inseparable part of her. Just like your love for yourself is always inside you because it is inherently part of you, so too must your love for your wife be always inside of her because it is inherently part of her. She feels it always. And this can only be achieved if that love is expressed to her in a manner that **she** can feel it, experience it, and internalize it.

Rav Abramsky told his wife about all the minute details of his day because he knew that that is what women love to hear. For them it is not the accomplishment or the purpose of what occurred that is the main thing, but the experience itself. She wants to feel that her husband is sharing that experience with her, and she wants to be able to share it with him<sup>28</sup>. Not only because it is the experience that interests her, but more so because that is what makes her feel connected to him. She only feels this sense of sharing if she is told enough detail that she can relive it with him as it is being told.

Most probably, any one of us would have assumed that honoring one's wife in a situation such as described in this story of Rav Abramsky would mean making sure to pleasantly greet your wife first before addressing the visitor. Rav Abramsky's example demonstrates for us the difference between honoring one's wife and someone for whom honoring his wife, and making his love for her an inherent part of their shared reality, is a state of being. Because it is so much a part of who he is, he cannot suffice with a few cursory words of greeting, pleasant though they may be; no, he has to immediately sit down with her, provide her with his full and undivided attention, and share his experiences of the day with her so that she receives that which is so important to her, to feel that close connection with her husband – that she is an integral part of his life and part of his every day. And this she feels so strongly when she sees that when he comes home he simply cannot involve himself with anything before telling her all about what he did and experienced that day.

### ***Share with Her, but Put Her Mind at Ease***

This is the general, basic lesson that we need to cull from this example of Rav Abramsky. It is literally a *moreh derech* for how a husband is supposed to treat his wife and interact with her. Ah, but Rav Abramsky was such a *gadol olam* that from his example we can gain even more *chiddushim*, beautiful pearls of wisdom, regarding the finer details of this *sugyah*.

*“From there I walked up the hill. It wasn't too difficult for me.”*

Women tend to worry about things. One of the pieces of advice that many *chassanim* are told, and indeed this is something that we should all make a point to be careful about, is that if you are going to

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<sup>28</sup> This is not a redundancy.

be late, call home to let your wife know<sup>29</sup>. Otherwise, she may worry about you. She may even start fearing the worst. Because of their sensitive, emotional nature, women can easily begin to conjure up all sorts of terrifying scenarios in their mind<sup>30</sup>. Part of your caring for her and respecting her is making sure that you do whatever you can to prevent her from experiencing any anguish. But it is not only about the “big things” that women can worry about. They care. They care a lot. Hopefully, you’ll succeed in building a good relationship with your wife, and you will see and feel that there is literally no one in the world who cares about you as much as your wife does. And when you care that much, you are concerned about every small detail. Rav Abramsky knew that his wife may worry how he fared walking up that hill, so he calmed her by making a point to mention that “It was not too difficult for me.” She knows he did not suffer walking up that hill. She feels a sense of relief that her husband did not suffer. Nevertheless, he also did not say, “it was not difficult at all”. By telling her that it was not so difficult, he is sharing with her the fact that it was a bit difficult for him. This makes her feel very close and connected to him because he is sharing even his relatively small experiences with her. It was something that affected him, he did have to exert himself a bit. She hears, gets to share the experience, but without distress because “it was not too difficult”.

Obviously, one cannot expect of oneself such balanced perfection right off the bat. After all, this story is describing a *gadol ha’dor* in his elder years. The benefit that we can derive from this analysis is that it serves as a beacon of light pointing us in the right direction. This way we know where we need to be headed. With that in mind, let’s continue.

### ***Your Kavod is Her Kavod***

*“I went to Rav Yechezkel Sarna’s house and he received me with great honor.”*

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<sup>29</sup> Of course, it goes without saying that you don’t leave before telling her. Whether or not you should always tell her precisely where you are going, or whether or not you always need to tell her what time you’ll be home will depend on the particular needs of your wife. Some women don’t always need to know where their husband is at any given moment, and do not necessarily need to know when to expect him home; whereas others do. It may also be that early in the marriage she will still feel insecure and/or lonely and therefore may really need this information, whereas later when she feels more secure and is not so lonely she may not. No matter what, though, if she is expecting you back at a certain time and you are going to be late, you must call to let her know.

Regarding the importance of this matter, see [Rav Pam \(Artscroll\)](#) page 436 where the following is related. “One day, he was feeling very ill and needed to be taken to the hospital. His grandson Rabbi Mordechai Pam happened to be with him and was to accompany him in the ambulance. As he was being wheeled out of the house, Rav Pam turned to his grandson and said, ‘Call your wife and tell her that you might be home late.’ This was in the afternoon and his grandson was not expected home for a while. But Rav Pam, though ill enough to require hospitalization, was anticipating that his grandson’s wife might later worry if her husband did not arrive home when expected.”

<sup>30</sup> כ"כ רב חיים פרידלנדר זצ"ל בקונטרס וידעת כי שלום אהלך בעמוד כ' ז"ל שם "הבעל או הילד מאחר להגיע הביתה, והאשה נמוגה מפחד וחוששת כבר לגרוע ביותר... על הבעל לדעת, שפחדים אינם מעוגנים בהגיון, אלא נובעים מהרגש. ככל שהרגש שולט יותר, כן הפחדים גדלים... זה מחייב אותנו שלא לאחר. ואם קורה שדבר מה מעכב אותנו מלחזור בזמן, צריך לחפש אפשרות להודיע לאשתו על ידי טלפון... על ידי זה הוא מונע מאשתו פחדים. יתר על כן אשתו תהיה אסירת תודה לו, על שהוא מתחשב בה.”

This one really is quite a *chiddush*. In general, to talk like that is unbecoming; it smacks of pride. Furthermore, we all know that it is simply unpleasant to be around people who talk like that and toot their own horns. The *chiddush* that we see from Rav Abramsky is that speaking in such a manner is *pasul* only when it comes to other people; when it comes to your wife, though, it is a *mitzvah* to speak in such a manner. Of course, not to *chalilah* say such things in a big-headed tone of voice, because even a wife will most certainly not appreciate that in addition to it being inherently wrong. However, stating the facts as they are is very important when it comes to your wife.

Think about it, although you don't go around tooting your own horn, you certainly enjoy it and it makes you feel very good when other people show you recognition, admiration, and *kavod*. Well, your wife completely identifies herself with you. When you get *kavod*, it is her *kavod*<sup>31</sup>. There is almost nothing that gives a woman greater pleasure than to see or become aware of her husband being respected and honored.

So, for example, to not tell her when the *Rosh Kollel* or the other *avreichim* complimented you on your *chaburah*, or when you got an *aliyah* in *Shul* is just unacceptable. It is an *avlah* of "*al timnah tov mi'baalav*". For her to never hear that you were complimented or that you got an *aliyah* is the equivalent of you never getting complimented and never getting an *aliyah*<sup>32</sup>; and how do you think that would make **you** feel? Regarding everyone else, you keep it to yourself, but regarding your wife, you must tell her all such things<sup>33</sup>.

There is a *maaseh* with Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky that makes almost the identical point, albeit it with a slight, additional twist.

*Nothing better expressed Reb Yaakov's extreme modesty than his abhorrence of having people stand for him when he entered a room. But there was a time he made an exception even in this. Reb Yaakov and Reb Shneur Kotler were once preparing to enter the main hall during the annual convention of Agudath Israel. Reb Shneur suggested that they enter from the side in order to avoid anyone standing for them. But Reb Yaakov shocked him by rejecting the suggestion. "Our wives are present, and it will give them pleasure to see everyone honoring us. It makes it easier for them to put up with the constant intrusions on our time throughout the year"<sup>34</sup>.*

Despite Reb Yaakov's severe aversion to people being *mechabeid* him in such a manner, he displayed tremendous wisdom and sensitivity regarding the needs and desires of his wife to be able to see her husband's *kavod*. His deep and clear understanding of a wife's needs prompted him to overlook his own discomfort and act in the manner that will provide her with the emotional satisfaction that is so

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<sup>31</sup> עיין כתובות עה. "דאמר ר"ל טב למיתב טן דו מלמיתב ארמלו אביי אמר דשומשמנא גברא כורסיה בי חראתא רמי לה" ופירש רש"י "מי שבעלה קטן כנמלה כסאה בין השרות בנות חורין מושיבה כלומר גם לי בעל כמוכם". וע"ש עוד

<sup>32</sup> Likewise, if she only hears it infrequently, it is the equivalent of you only getting complimented or receiving an *aliyah* infrequently. In fact, it is much worse because her emotional need for it is greater.

<sup>33</sup> *Derech agav*, the same thing goes for your parents. To them as well you must tell about all your successes and *kavod*.

<sup>34</sup> Reb Yaakov (Artsroll) page 321.

important to her. Because Reb Yaakov spent a lifetime cultivating honoring his wife as a state of being, as opposed to just something one does, he recognized how he must act in order to make his wife happy even in a situation where such behavior was inherently anathema to him<sup>35</sup>. Of course, it stands to reason that Rav Yaakov and Rav Shneur did not suffer undergoing what otherwise would have made them suffer, because they were only focused upon and thinking about the fact that through this their wives would be happy and fulfilled.

Do make sure to tell your wife about all of your successes and honors. It means the world to her.

### ***Compliment Naturally***

Coming back, the final point we should focus upon in the story of Rav Abramsky is this:

*You already know that I hold that there is a need to expand the number of those who take part in the Vaad's meetings...You know what type of person he is, after all, Chazal say that women are better judges of character than men...you know how anxious I am for them to finish the project quickly..."*

Throughout the conversation Rav Abramsky utilized the expression "you know", which means "you know so well". The most immediate effect of talking in this manner is that it greatly compliments his wife. It shows how it is a given that she knows so many significant matters. She is a knowledgeable person. And it goes without saying that when he stated in so matter-of-fact a manner that she of course knows how crucial Rav Sarna's participation is, since after all *Chazal* say that women understand people better than men, that his wife must have felt very flattered by this. Particularly because it was said in such a way as to convey that he was not intending to flatter her, he was just simply stating the facts as they are (that makes it clear that it is truly genuine). This is a big point to take note of: inextricably woven into Rav Abramsky's casual conversation with his wife were numerous expressions that indicate esteem and high regard. He made it a point to talk in a way that would praise her and make her feel

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<sup>35</sup> As mentioned above, it is critical to recognize that these stories are about *Gedolei Torah* in their golden years. As such, the degree of beauty and perfection they display is truly mind boggling. It should therefore be self-understood that in no way do these comments reflect negatively on Rav Shneur Kotler. Rav Yaakov was known, even amongst his contemporaries, as the *Urim v'Tumim* of the generation; a *pikeach* of phenomenal proportions. In addition, Rav Shneur was decades younger than Rav Yaakov. It is more than safe to assume that Rav Shneur as well lived his life in accordance with this *yesod*. That he did not think of this particular *nekudah*, though, until Rav Yaakov pointed it out to him, does not reflect poorly on him at all. Even amongst *Gedolei Torah*, not every *gadol* will necessarily come up with every single *chiddush* that his contemporaries come up with, even if the *chiddush* is clearly *yashar* and *emes la'amito*. And don't forget, *Maseches Aizer K'negdo* is a *sugyah amukah meod!* And lest you think that *Gedolei Yisrael* are at the pinnacle of their perfection even right from the start, consider the following comment by Rav Aharon Kotler's rebbetzin, "When we first got married I needed to get used to his unique sharpness, but by the time we reached our later years I had to get used to his unusual patience." The hallmark of a *Gadol b'Yisrael* is that he is always growing throughout his life, constantly reaching ever higher vistas of perfection and balance.

great about herself without even making it overtly discernible that he intended to do so<sup>36</sup>. This is a very worthwhile habit to make every effort to adopt. It is a true *kiyum* of the *mitzvah* to be honoring one's wife and make her happy.

### ***Express Closeness***

There is yet another aspect to these expressions of "you know". It shows an assumption of intimate closeness and knowledge. It essentially conveys the following message: "I am not aloof of you. It is not as if I have a whole involved life and you are but one part thereof, and perhaps I tell you about bits and pieces about the rest of my life from time to time. No, not at all. 'You know that I hold there is a need to expand...', 'you know how anxious I am...' – you know all of this because I share my whole life with you. We are two parts of one unit and as such you naturally know everything significant that I know because as the other half of my whole I of course automatically share all of it with you.

This message is at the heart of what a woman needs to feel in life: that her husband is truly, deeply, and inextricably connected with her and that she is connected with him. When he naturally and automatically always shares the major and minor details of his life with her<sup>37</sup>, and particularly when he makes it clear to her that he is not just doing so to make her happy but because it is just a given and is simply a natural outcome of their deep bond, she powerfully feels this reality and it fills her with a deep sense of fulfillment and joy. She experiences real *simchas ha'chaim*.

A man usually does not naturally have the same deep need for this type of intimate, sharing relationship with his wife. In of himself he'd be able to manage with a more superficial type of relationship, albeit loving and warm. But he needs to respect his wife. He needs to honor her. He has a *mitzvah* to make her happy and to **be** honoring his wife; love her like himself and make that fact an existential reality. So he needs to expand beyond himself. He needs to stretch and grow to truly understand her needs and calibrate his relationship with her to provide her with those needs. When he does that, he is not just honoring and loving her, he is being honoring and loving her. He is making honoring and loving his wife into a state of being for himself; and for her. This is the goal you are aiming for.

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<sup>36</sup> The fact is, that it is wholly possible that he really did not have any conscious intention to do so, and he nevertheless did so because that manner of communicating and relating to his wife was so deeply ingrained in him. The fact that Rav Abramsky only mentioned to his guest the idea of telling your wife about what goes on in your day supports this assertion. Simply because Rav Abramsky was a true embodiment of the Rambam's instruction to **be** honoring your wife did it come naturally to him to speak in this way to his wife without even thinking about it.

<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that spouses should share every single last detail of their lives with one another. Rav Avigdor Miller said that, in general, it is not advisable for spouses to share negative information about each other with one another. Rather, the general impression each spouse should be giving to the other is that "everything is fine with me" (see *Ohr Olam* volume nine, page 171). Obviously, there are many, major exceptions to that rule, and of course spouses will often need to talk about each other's issues where necessary. Nevertheless, the general rule is try to keep things positive.

## ***Always On Your Mind***

There is a story about Rav Elyashiv that also demonstrates this *yesod* with an additional angle.

*Rav Avraham Yeshayah Yanovsky used to visit Rav Elyashiv frequently to receive his halachik guidance, and enjoyed a special connection with him. One question he posed pertained to a new grape-harvesting machine. Similar to the combine harvester for grain, this machine separates the grapes from the vine and throws them into a container, from which a conveyer carries them up into the shovel of an accompanying tractor. When the shovel is full, the driver of the tractor empties it into a truck. During this process, juice begins to come out of the harvested grapes. The question was: If the harvester or the tractor is operated by non-Jews, is the wine thereby rendered yayin nesech (prohibited for use by Jews)?*

*Rav Elyashiv said that in order to answer the question he would have to observe how the machine works. He planned to visit the vineyard to watch the machine in action, but for technical reasons, he was unable to carry out the planned visit. Someone suggested that they film the machine in operation, and then Rav Elyashiv could watch a video of the machine working and issue a ruling without leaving his home.*

*Rav Elyashiv agreed, and a Yated Ne'eman photographer was hired to film the new machine in operation. He then came to Rav Elyashiv's house to set up the viewing equipment.*

*When all the equipment was in place, Rav Efrati entered the inner room where Rav Elyashiv was learning and told him that everything was ready. Rav Elyashiv emerged, and when he saw the equipment he said, "One moment." He then entered the room where the rebbetzin was and invited her to watch the video too.*

*This was the first time in his life that he would watch a video, and he knew that the rebbetzin, who also had never before seen a film, would enjoy the new technology. He spoke only two words, but these two words spoke volumes about his consideration of his rebbetzin, who would not utter a single word of her own to him during his lengthy study sessions or while he was answering questions<sup>38</sup>.*

The normal rules of honoring and loving your fellow Jew would most certainly not require you to be thinking about them at any given moment. It does not need to occur to you, "Oh, you know what, probably my neighbor Yankel would also like to see this; let me go call him." But this is not the case when it comes to your wife. In the words of Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky, from the time of the *chasunah* and onward "all thinking needs to be in terms of we." Before you get married, there is "I", and that "I" takes into account other people when necessary. There are times when you are obligated to do a *chesed*. You have to be careful not to upset other people. Sometimes you must give a person advice. But you are still separate from them; it is an "I" interacting with "them". With your wife, though, there is no more "I"; there is just "we". Because you have to **be** honoring and loving her. It is not enough to show her honor and love, it has to become part of you; your state of being that goes with you wherever you go. Of course, then, if you are about to see something interesting, it will automatically occur to you to think of her. This is the goal. It is in this direction that we must be determinedly headed.

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<sup>38</sup> [Rav Elyashiv](#) (Artscroll), pages 98-99.

## ***Even If You're Patur***

There is yet one more facet of this *yesod* that is worthwhile to uncover which is expressed beautifully in the following *maaseh* of Rav Avraham Pam.

*Rav Pam's rebbetzin was born on erev Yom Kippur. Every erev Yom Kippur there would be flowers on the table in honor of her birthday. One year, Rebbetzin Pam told him that although she really appreciated it, she did not want him to be spending some of his precious time on erev Yom Kippur going to buy flowers. Rav Pam agreed. Nevertheless, come erev Yom Kippur, the flowers were there. Rav Pam's excuse? "I just could not let your birthday go by without giving you this expression of my deep appreciation."*

A lot of times we are busy; sometimes very busy. Certain days of the year are high pressure. There is a lot going on, either in the physical or metaphysical realm, and we really need to not be bothered so that we can do everything that needs to be done. What can you do, though? Sometimes obligations vis a vis others hit us even when it is very inconvenient. There is no choice, a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah* and a *chiyuv* is a *chiyuv* even when it comes at a very inopportune time. So, for example, if your neighbor gets a flat tire on *Erev Pesach* and you're the only one around to help, you've got to do it, even though it may mean that you are going to be much more harried for the rest of the day and you may not even manage to finish everything on your list. Almost all of us, though, would be so relieved if, just as we started making our way with the jack to his car, his wife opened the door and called out, "Don't worry about it, I just called triple A to take care of it and they said they'll be here in 15 minutes." Phew! That's what it feels like, doesn't it? You know why? Because even though you have a *mitzvah* and *chiyuv* to help out, it is not necessarily part of who you are. When the *meshulach* is going on and on about his woes, you are most probably quite relieved when his driver tells him that they'd better get going if they're to make the rest of the names on their list. Even though you listen to him respectfully and show him his due honor, it is not your state of being. So you are happy to have been *yotzei-zein* and be able to move on.

With your wife, though, it is not meant to be like that, and this story with Rav Pam beautifully illustrates this point. Who would not be happy to get an exemption from having to do something like buying someone a birthday present on *Erev Yom Kippur*? She gave it to him. She did not want him to have to spend his precious time on this incredibly significant day carrying out such a mundane activity as buying flowers. Although he agreed in principle, he just couldn't not do it. He was not able to follow through. Honoring his wife and the love that he felt for her was such an ingrained part of him that he simply could not bring himself to allow her birthday to pass without giving her this expression of how much he appreciates and cares for her. To show her respect, esteem, and appreciation was a state of being for him. Therefore an exemption was irrelevant. I don't care if I don't have to; I want to. No, I need to! It is simply a part of me that I cannot let go of!

### ***Respectful and Respectable***

A big part of acting respectfully is acting respectably. Think for a moment, if the *Rav* of your *Shul* was visiting your home, would you walk around the living room in your undershirt and boxer shorts? Obviously not. Why not? Because that would be an extreme sign of disrespect (and perhaps mental illness as well). Although the familiarity of marriage does not demand the same formality of respectful expression as a Rebbi-Talmid relationship, the point is nonetheless clear: acting in a respectable manner is an intrinsic part of being respectful.

Although it is hard to unequivocally say that doing something like making a habit of walking around the house in your underwear is wrong, it can definitely be said that it is highly discouraged. The same goes for other forms of uncouth behavior such as lack of table manners or repulsive matters pertaining to personal hygiene (such as cleaning your nose or passing gas in the presence of others).

Also bear in mind that, in addition to the implicit lack of respect for your wife (and children for that matter) that unrespectable behavior conveys, it also can serve to undermine the respect that you want your family to have for you. It is very difficult to feel a sense of respectful awe for someone who exhibits behaviors fitting for a lout. Even if you grew up in a family wherein these matters were not assigned importance, you should make a point to grow in your refinement. It is only fitting of a Ben Torah, and it is what Shalom Bayis calls for.

### 3) Depth of the Marital Bond, and the Foundations of Good Communication

#### ***Your Home is a Mikdash, Literally***

Understanding why it is that regarding one's wife showing her honor and love is not just something you do but an intrinsic part of who you are can go a long way in helping motivate you to actually do it. Why is it that this needs to become a state of being that therefore goes with you wherever you go?

The *Gemara* in *Maseches Sotah*<sup>39</sup> says *איש ואשה זכו שכינה ביניהם*, when a husband and wife live in a meritorious manner the Divine Presence dwells amongst them. Rav Shimshon Pinkus writes emphatically<sup>40</sup> that it is critical to realize that this and all the other *maamarei Chazal* that compare *shalom bayis* to the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* are not mere allegorical analogies, rather they are literally true. Every Jewish home that functions *al pi Torah* and is permeated with real *shalom* literally serves as a *מקדש* for the *Shechina* precisely like the *Beis Ha'Mikdash*<sup>41</sup>. The most fundamental facet to this *מקדש* is the complete unity between husband and wife. When they create a true, deep bond with one another they are together becoming a unified whole, and that is what serves as a dwelling place for the *Shechina*<sup>42</sup>.

So, as Rav Pinkus emphasized, achieving this state of being wherein honoring and loving your wife is in an inseparable part of you is not only a *mitzvah* of *bein adam la'chaveiro* of the highest order, it is also a *mitzvah* of *bein adam la'Makom* of the highest order. With every smile, empathetic ear, and kind word you are literally laying the bricks of the *Mikdash*. Honoring and loving your wife need to become an essential part of you because that is at the beating heart of what marriage is all about.

39 י.ז.

<sup>40</sup> בספר תפארת אבות

<sup>41</sup> אפשר להבין דבר זה ע"פ מש"כ נפה"ח בענין קמחא טחינא טחינת שער א' פרק ד', דעיקר המקדש הוא נפש ולב היהודי וכו' ע"ש בארוכה. וכן בליקוטי מאמרים (בסוף הספר במהדורת רב יששכר דוב רובין) מאמר א'.  
<sup>42</sup> עיין זוהר כרך ג פרשת ויקרא דף ז: דאיתא התם "ותנינן בפרשתא דשמע ישראל יי' אלהינו יי' אחד מהו אחד דא כנסת ישראל דאחיד ביה בקודשא בריך הוא דאמר רבי שמעון זוגא דדכר ונוקבא אקרי אחד באתר דנוקבא שריא אחד אקרי מאי טעמא בגין דדכר בלא נוקבא פלג גופא אקר ופלג לאו הוא חד וכד מתחברן כחדא תרי פלגי אתעבידו חד גופא וכדין אקרי אחד ועיין עוד שם פרשת קדושים דף פא: "וכד משתכחי תרוייהו כחד כדין כלא חד בנפשא ובגופא לאדבקה דא בדא ברעותא חדא ובגופא כמה דאוליפנא דבר נש דלא נסיב הוא כמאן דאתפליג וכד מתחברן דכר ונוקבא כדין אתעבידו חד גופא אשתכח דאינהו חד נפשא וחד גופא ואקרי בר נש אחד כדין קודשא בריך הוא שארי באחד ואפקיד רוחא דקדושה בההוא אחד". ועיין עוד ביבמות סב: דאמרו "כל אדם שאין לו אשה שרוי בלא שמחה בלא ברכה בלא טובה בלא שמחה דכתיב ושמחת אתה וביתך בלא ברכה דכתיב להניח ברכה אל ביתך בלא טובה דכתיב לא טוב היות האדם לבדו במערבא אמרי בלא תורה בלא חומה בלא תורה דכתיב האם אין עזרתי בי ותושיה נדחה ממני בלא חומה דכתיב נקבה תסובב גבר רבא בר עולא אמר בלא שלום..."

### ***Expansion of Self = Enrichment of Self***

It is very important to be aware of the fact that this mode of behavior, namely working hard to understand your wife's unique feminine needs and cultivating the state of being in which you honor her, communicate successfully with her, and forge a deep emotional bond with her, is not meant to be something that you will find to be a burden. If you do feel that way, then take it as an indication that you still have quite a ways to go. For, on the contrary, despite the fact that the feminine manner of relating is so different from the male way, the more you learn to adapt to her way and truly internalize it as a facet of your expanded persona, you will discover an immense enjoyment and fulfillment in it. You will not find it burdensome, because when you start to really understand her way of relating to things, you will see and feel the beauty in it. No, it will not come to define you exclusively – you will not transmute from a masculine type of creature to a feminine type - but it will expand and enrich you. You will be able to incorporate another, great facet into your persona that will make you into such a greater person. Yes, you will learn, to an extent, how to see, understand, and process things from a feminine perspective as well, and it is going to make you into an *adam ha'shaleim*<sup>43</sup>. And in addition to the incredible emotional and spiritual enhancement that you will gain from forging this true bond with your wife, you will be rewarded with an even much, much greater benefit which is that bond in of itself. When you are truly connected and have a deep, powerful relationship with your wife, the *simchas ha'chaim* and satisfaction that permeates your entire life is simply indescribable. You have to be there to fully understand it. And if you work hard, *b'ezras Hashem* you will get there.

### ***Learning the Language***

Now, you may be wondering to yourself, "I can understand approaching my marriage as a deep, complex *sugyah* that needs to be learned up very well; that I need to work hard to understand my wife in terms of her unique needs and character as a woman and in her own, individual way. I can also understand the need to accustom myself to demonstrating honor and love to her to the point where it becomes so ingrained in me that it is second nature. Despite the immense amount of hard work involved in all of this, I can at least understand how I am to go about doing it. But you spoke before about marriage being akin to moving to a foreign country wherein I will have to learn a completely new language and mode of behavior. I have no idea where I am supposed to even start! It is not as if there is a dictionary that will translate men phrases into women phrases. How am I supposed to learn a completely new way of thinking, processing, and communicating?!"

That's a really good question. The truth is, though, that it is not as hard as it sounds. If you go into marriage with the drive and desire to do it, you will definitely manage to pick it up. Listen to your wife

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<sup>43</sup> כעין זה כתב הרב שלמה וולבה זצ"ל בקונטרס מאמרי הדרכה לחתנים שיחה שלישית סוף אות ג' וז"ל "האיש אשר כל משאת נפשו הוא העבודה בתורה עלול להעדיף כל כך את המאמץ השכלי על הרגש עד שהרגש שלו מצטמק אבל מצטמק ורע לו. כי סוף סוף גם לעבודה אנו זקוקים לרגש אם לתפילה אם למצוות בין אדם לחברו. אם למוסר ולעלייה. איבוד הרגש היא סכנה גדולה לרוחניות של האדם. היחס הקרוב אל אשתו מציל את הבעל מסכנה פנימית זו. הרגש שלו יהיה תמיד ער ורענן, לקיים בית אלקים נהלך ברגש."

carefully. Study her. Take close note of how she tells you things, what types of things she focuses on, and so on. If you really put yourself into it the way you put yourself into a *sugyah*, you will definitely be able to do it.

That being said, always keep one basic *yesod* in mind. Both men and women are comprised of intellect and emotions. However, men primarily function with their intellect and women primarily function with their emotions. This is at the heart of all the vast differences in the way men and women think, feel, react, deal, talk, act, etc. In describing the phenomenal difference between the way men and women communicate, one wise woman put it this way, "Men are listen, solve, fix. Women are share, care, and encourage." Although certainly not an exhaustive description of all the many nuanced differences, this statement gives us a very big foundation to work with. Let's describe a true-to-life example that will help us understand this a bit better.

*Baruch had a hard time concentrating on his learning today. Life was busy in the past few months and they had pushed off filing for their arnona discount until today. And today was the deadline. So, Penina made sure to clear her schedule so that she could go to the appropriate government office to submit the forms.*

*When Baruch arrives home he finds a distraught looking wife. "What is it Penina," he asks, "did you manage to get the discount?"*

*"I cannot even **begin** to describe to you what my day was like," began Penina. "As soon as you left for Kollel, Ruchy threw a tantrum and absolutely refused to go to gan-"*

*Baruch quickly cuts her off, "Penina (with a slightly exasperated tone), did you get the discount?"*

*"Well, because of Ruchy's tantrum, which I haven't even told you about yet, and the baby coming down with a fever – it took me two hours to finally get him into the doctor, I'll have you know..." By this point, Baruch's head is spinning and the pit in his stomach keeps getting deeper. They really cannot afford to lose that discount, and his wife's sob story is starting to drive him bananas!*

*Penina continues, "I wasn't able to get to the office until 12:34, which was exactly four minutes after they closed!"*

*By now, Baruch is starting to feel faint. Desperately, "So, Penina, are you telling me that you didn't get the discount?"*

*"Well, I pounded on the door until finally someone opened it and I just barely managed to get a word in edgewise seeing that they were being so rude to me and yelling at me for just wanting to submit some silly forms..." Baruch feels his lips starting to go dry. Almost in a yell, "Penina, please just tell me, did you get the discount or not?!"*

*"Listen, I practically had to beg and cry for them to even listen to what I had to say – which only took me all of 30 seconds..." Baruch thinks to himself, "Thirty seconds! How is that possible?!"*

*"And they told me that the office opens again from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm. I was floored. How in the world was I supposed to make it at that time?! That's when all the kids are home! I*

*practically kicked and screamed for them to just take the form from my hand – I was waving it in the clerk’s face! – but they just slammed the door on me and told me to come back at 3:30! Can you believe the chutzpah of it? I was so upset, I didn’t even know what to do with myself-“ Again, Baruch cuts her off. This time pleading, “Penina, could you please, please, please just tell me if you got the discount?”*

*“Baruch, if you’ll just **listen** to me you’ll understand **everything!** So, I was standing there outside the building under the scorching sun, holding our feverish baby, and my mind was so clouded and I was physically so exhausted that I couldn’t even move. Finally...”*

*This is how the conversation progresses (or perhaps digresses would be a better expression) until Penina finally gets to the end of her saga, and explains how with beyond-herculean effort she managed to find a baby sitter to take care of the kids while she went back to that awful office for a second time in the same day, had to stand inside the stuffy building on an interminably long line, deal with the rudeness and gruffness of the clerks, until she finally, finally did manage to submit the forms and get the discount. Throughout Penina’s soliloquy, Baruch vacillates between feeling dizzy, sick, interrupting her with more demands of “just tell me already”, and just spacing out from utter helplessness.*

*When she finishes, Baruch says to her in a completely wiped out and utterly exasperated tone of voice, “Penina! Why couldn’t you just tell me that right away?” To which Penina responds, “That’s precisely what I was trying to do, but you have no patience and you never listen to me...”*

Let’s step out of this screen before it gets really ugly. Although perhaps somewhat exaggerated to add a bit of literary flair and entertainment, the above description is not far at all from reality. That is, for those that are still too clueless to know how they are meant to negotiate married life, or just too lazy to do so.

### ***Understanding Her Point of View***

As a man, it really is difficult at first hash to understand what in the world is going on with Penina. I mean, fine, we can understand that you have a need to share your incredibly frustrating day with your husband, we can understand your need for an empathetic, encouraging, and supportive ear. But why not just tell him the conclusion that you got the discount right away so he won’t be kept waiting in anxious suspense, and **then** go through the whole *megilah* with him? Penina isn’t sadistic, is she? So why can’t she just tell Baruch the information that he wants to know right away and spare him suffering the unbearable suspense?

This is a really good question and its answer is multifaceted. For starters, Penina is a woman. Women are emotional, delicate, and sensitive. She had a very difficult experience today. She needs Baruch to lend her a supportive, empathetic, encouraging ear. She recognizes very clearly from the way Baruch is speaking that the only thing he really cares about is if at the end of the day they got the discount or not. But she needs him to care about her and the difficult experience she went through. If she tells him the conclusion of the story right away, he will most likely not pay much attention to the whole story that led

up to it. He will, in the words of one wise woman, “just go about munching on his supper while grunting ‘um-hm’ every now and then with barely a lift of his eyes.”

So, no, Penina is not sadistic. She is desperate. She is desperate for her husband to be the source of honor, support, and respect to her that she so acutely needs, that the Torah and *Chazal* imposed upon him, and that he explicitly obligated himself to in the *kesubah* that he gave her. Because this need is so critical to her, she sees no other recourse than but to keep him in suspense the whole time so he will have no choice but to pay attention to her story. It is her desperate bid for a bit of attention, care, and empathy. And, it should be noted, with every repetition of “could you just tell me if we got the discount”, he is effectively screaming at her, “I don’t care about you and your silly story, I only care about the money!” He is literally crushing her. Not good. Not good at all. It goes without saying that he is very, very far from even honoring his wife, let alone setting himself on the path that will lead to **be** honoring his wife.

### ***A Serious Achrayus***

At this juncture, we need to pause for a moment because a bit of *mussar* needs to be said. It is going to be sharp, so please brace yourself.

Imagine for a moment that you accepted responsibility to care for someone who has a unique, medical condition. This condition causes that every single time anyone holds his hand without positioning it in a very particular way, he suffers excruciating pain, but it is suffered in relative silence. Sure he cries bitterly now and again from the horrific pain, but part of his condition is that he is unable to verbalize precisely what it is that is causing the pain. Now, despite having accepted caring for him, you don’t know about this condition. If you would have acted responsibly and spoken to those medical experts that handled his case, and investigate the matter, you would have discovered this point with relative ease and been able to adjust yourself accordingly. Sure it would take some time getting used to holding his hand in such a unique way, and you would inevitably make mistakes from time to time. But overall, you would be a good caretaker because you are working hard at your job and over time you would get it just right.

But you were neglectful. You were lazy. You just arrogantly assumed, “what could be so complicated about caring for this guy? Yeah, he seems a bit sensitive and fragile, but no sweat, I’ll be able to manage it with no problem.” For years you subject him to indescribable pain without ever having the slightest clue as to what you are really doing. Yes, you definitely notice his frequent bouts of bitter crying and general state of malaise as a result of his constantly being subjected to such horrible pain, but that only bewilders you. Because, as far as you are aware, you are providing him with wonderful care, and his situation in general is fine and even very good. This bewilderment eventually leads to resentment and anger: “This is how he repays my dedication and devotion? This is what he calls *hakaras ha’tov*?! What an ingrate! He is just a terribly, immature mess of a person; I cannot believe that I was ever insane enough to accept his care!” Of course, whatever general good treatment you were giving him up until this point is going to obviously decline and decay.

Now, you need to ask yourself, *achar meiah v'esrim*, aren't you going to have give a *din v'cheshbon* for all of the intense pain and suffering that you inflicted on that person? What do you think the chances are that the *Beis Din shel Maalah* will accept the excuse, "But I didn't realize!?" True, *ones Rachmana patreih*, Hashem doesn't hold us accountable for those things that are beyond our control. But this is not *ones*; not at all. This is a *serious peshiah*; it is flagrant negligence. You accepted the responsibility to care for this person, and the *taynah* that "I didn't know" is just not going to hold water. It was your responsibility to ensure that you care for him properly; and certainly to not inflict unnecessary pain! You could have known, you should have known, and if you had not been too lazy and conceited, you would have known.

*Rabosai*, getting married is a serious *achrayus*. A very serious *achrayus*. When you put that ring on her finger and give her the *kesubah*, you are accepting full responsibility to care for her and provide her with **all of her** needs. If instead of doing that you inflict untold pain on her because you are simply too lazy or arrogant to figure out exactly what her unique needs are and work on adapting yourself so that you can provide them properly, well, such a sentence is better off left unfinished. The excuse, "How could I possibly have known?!" is just not going to cut it. Not at all. The fact that her needs and sensitivities are completely foreign to you is not going to get you off the hook. She suffers terribly when those needs are not met, and how much more so when instead of being met they are put down and trampled upon. There is no excuse for causing her to suffer like that. You have a responsibility. You must learn her up well and put forth the effort to care for her properly. To not do so is an act of gross, criminal negligence. Yes, you read that right: from a Torah perspective it is nothing less than **criminal** negligence.

### ***First Things First?***

So, coming back, yes, by repeatedly begging Penina to just tell him if she got the discount or not, Baruch is literally crushing her inner world. Instead of receiving the caring, supportive, empathetic ear that she so badly needs, all she is hearing is, "I could not care less about your silly sob story; all I care about is the money!" So her keeping him in suspense is her last ditch, desperate bid to try to somehow pull some attention and caring out of him.

It goes further than that, though. Let us now imagine a Baruch who is far more considerate and caring than the first depiction. If Penina will tell this Baruch right away whether or not they got the discount, he will in fact afterwards listen to her whole story with concern and empathy. And wouldn't it make so much sense to do so? First get the distraction out of his mind, alleviate his sense of anxiety, and then he will have so much clearer a head to focus on what you're saying? No?

Well, no.

It's funny, because as men, that suggestion makes so much sense to us, doesn't it? Once you see it from her perspective, though, we are exposed for the louts that we really are. The fact that it is so burning a need for you to first hear the *tachlis*-conclusion of the story, before you are able to process even a bit of

what your wife needs to tell you about her day, means that push-come-to-shove, the money issue is **SO** much more important to you than her feelings!

And how do you think that makes her feel?!

If you would truly respect and love your wife then it would be the exact opposite. Her need for empathy and encouragement would be **SO** much your primary concern that you would have no ability whatsoever to hear a thing about the *tachlis*-conclusion of whether or not you got the discount before hearing her whole story and feeling everything about it along with her! Penina cannot possibly acquiesce to first telling Baruch whether or not they got the discount, even if he will afterward listen to her story with caring and empathy, because that would mean that he cares about the discount so much more than he cares about her. And, even though his constant refrains make it plainly obvious that that is so, she cannot emotionally accept it. She just can't.

### ***Understanding the Nature of Feminine Communication***

There is yet one more facet that needs mention here. Let us now imagine for a moment that Penina's story line is completely different than the one described above. She had a wonderful day. Everything went smoothly. The kids got off to school easily. The baby ate beautifully and slept on the bus ride to the office. She arrived there with plenty of time to spare. The building was comfortably air conditioned and the lines moved quickly. The clerks were courteous and polite and the whole process was successfully completed expeditiously, leaving her time to even do a bit of window shopping before she headed home and prepared lunch for her family.

Penina is in a very good frame of mind. She feels happy, accomplished, and content. She does not need any empathy or encouragement right now. Not at all. She feels great! And, yet, the same type of scene occurs when Baruch gets home and she begins to tell him what happened that day. She insists on going through every, small detail of what led up to finally getting the discount, and he is going bananas from the fact that she won't just first tell him about that one point.

Now, it could be that instead of empathy and encouragement, this Penina needs recognition and appreciation in addition to really wanting her husband to share with her the wonderful, positive experience she had that day. That is almost certainly the case.

But, for the moment, let's assume for argument's sake that she does not have any particular emotional need right now – not for empathy and encouragement nor for appreciation and sharing – but she still insists on telling it her way! What then?

This brings us to a facet of feminine communication that is no less important to understand than what we have elucidated thus far. Rav Eliyahu Goldschmidt explains<sup>44</sup> that whereas men have no problem distinguishing between the logical component of an issue and its emotional component, for women that

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<sup>44</sup> Dear Son, page 92.

is not possible. Men analyze things with an eye on *tachlis*. Afterward, they may or may not take the emotional side of the issue into account. Women, though, do not even see that distinction; **at all!** For them there is no differentiating between an issue's emotional load and its logical/practical ramifications.

Therefore, Penina **cannot** just isolate the point of whether or not they got the discount from the rest of the day's experience. In her mind it literally makes no sense to do so! It is all one thing. A distinction that to us men is simple, basic, and straightforward is completely and utterly counterintuitive to women!

If you insist on your way being right, you are going to upset and insult her because you are belittling the mode of communication that is so much an essential part of who she is. For men, their mode of communication is not something that they associate with how they feel about themselves; it is just pragmatically the most efficient, sensible way of going about things. If someone were to insist on a different mode of communication, a man does not get hurt and upset, he just gets frustrated by the lack of sensibility and efficiency. So, since for her it is a matter of self-definition, whereas for you it is just a matter of pragmatic efficiency and logic, you are the one who must give in and be *mevater*. This would be the case even if you were not enjoined to be honoring her more than yourself. All the more so that you are obligated to honor her so. Therefore, it is you who must learn her language and form of communication, and not the other way around.

### ***Listening: The Critical Link***

In addition to giving us a big window into the differences between how men and women communicate, the above exposition also brings to awareness of another major foundation in marriage: Listening. Listening is one of the most critical things that a woman needs from her husband.

A man could theoretically come home, sit down with a newspaper, and be as content as a bear in hibernation. Whether his day was fulfilling, exciting, drab, upsetting, or otherwise, it is wholly possible that he may naturally find himself most comfortable sitting by himself with a cup of coffee and something interesting to read. He does not necessarily need to tell someone all about his day. A wife, though, is not like that at all. She has an intense need to share, everything! As one wise man put it, women are relationship beings. As such, she needs to connect, and the way you connect is by sharing with another.

She has so much to tell you. Sometimes, even too much. It is possible that despite your best efforts, you may at times find yourself simply overwhelmed by the sheer volume of what she needs to share with you. Time is limited, and so is energy. For that reason, it is a very good idea to encourage your wife to maintain her friendships, at least with one or two really good friends with whom she can share her inner world.

This is not at all so that you can take your *achrayus* and dump it on someone else. First of all, that would be wrong. Furthermore, you **want** to build a deep, abiding relationship with your wife. Achieving this real *achdus* and unity is at the beating heart of what marriage is about, and listening to her, really and

truly listening to her, is a primary, critical component thereof. Furthermore, if your intent is to try to dump your *achrayus* on someone else, it will not work. For no matter how much she can get from connecting and sharing with her friends – and she really can get a lot – they will never be able to serve as a substitute for what she needs from you. No matter what, her husband is her primary relationship in her life. It is with him that she needs to connect more deeply than anyone else. They are each other's רעים אהובים and that cannot be replaced.

What the point of encouraging her friendships is meant to do, is to hopefully ensure that her need for connectivity and sharing will not overwhelm you. Part of the need will be filled with her friends so that the measure in which she seeks to connect with you will be just right. This is not some type of *b'dieved* trick. On the contrary, the world is meant to function *l'chatchila* in such a manner that women maintain close ties with one another. It is our crazy, fast-paced society that often obfuscates this reality and thus generates a need to bring to people's attention to the fact that they need to make a deliberate effort to ensure that this happens.

There is another reason why it is important that your wife maintain close friendships. No matter how well you learn up *Maseches Aizer K'negdo* and no matter how much you perfect your incorporation of the feminine mode of communication into your conduct with her, you will never be a woman. Obviously, women often need to be able to communicate "woman to woman", and you cannot fill that need. And make no mistake, it is a real need. If it goes unfulfilled it can cause significant problems. So do encourage your wife to keep up close, strong ties with her friends. Also with her mother (and/or sisters) if they have a good relationship. For a woman in particular, there is nothing like the emotional support of a mother.

It goes without saying that you should not feel threatened by your wife's friendships and close ties with her family, even if in the beginning they seem to eclipse her relationship with you. Don't worry, as time goes on, her relationship with you - assuming you do what you need to do - will most definitely occupy center stage, and her additional relationships with friends and family will only serve as a tremendous asset to your marriage.

Coming back, your wife has so much that she needs to tell you, and it is critical for the fulfillment of your responsibility to her and the health of your marriage that you learn how to be an effective listener for her. If you don't, both of you will be perpetually frustrated and upset about the dysfunction in your communication. It will not have a positive impact on *shalom bayis*.

As mentioned earlier, the main thing you need to know about listening is that men are "listen, solve, fix" whereas women are "share, care, and encourage". When men hear things, they automatically dissect the matter in problem-solve mode. This is so hard-wired into our way of thinking. You need to make a real, concerted effort to learn how to not do this with your wife. Ninety percent of the time, if not more, she does not want your advice, she does not want your input, and she does not want your solutions, observations, or constructive comments.

She just wants you to listen to her!

## ***Empathic Listening***

And to care. Because listening without caring is not really listening, is it? You need to learn the art of what nowadays is called empathic listening. This means listening just for the sake of sharing, connecting, supporting, and encouraging. An empathic listener spends most of the time doing just that, listening. By the way, acquiring this skill is not only a critical need for your marriage, it also will serve as a boon in all of life. By learning this skill to fulfill your marital responsibility, you are acquiring the two, great middos of *shmias ha'ozen* and *shtikah* – both incredibly beneficial to your growth as a person, which will become plainly obvious as you begin to acquire them.

To do this right, empathic listening that is, you need to try to imagine the feeling of the experience she is describing. So, for example, if she is in the midst of describing being shocked into stillness under the beating, scorching sun – picture yourself, as she is saying it, being in that situation and how it feels. Or, better yet, picture her in that situation and allow yourself to feel the immense concern and pity that hits someone who sees his most precious beloved suffering so.

An empathic listener will every now and then interject with expressions such as, “That must have been such a difficult situation to be in. I am so impressed that you managed to gather your wits and make it work out in the end. I don’t know if I would have managed to handle that situation!” This makes the speaker feel like they are really being listened to, and that you really do care about what they are saying. You are feeling along with them. You are sharing, connecting, and validating; and, at the same time injecting a word of encouragement by pointing out how impressed you are by how they handled the situation. Note, not a word of commenting how the situation could have been better negotiated, not a word about how it’s all the fault of those impolite clerks, and certainly not a word about how she was at fault because of this that or the other. Just sharing, caring, validating, and encouraging. Reflecting back the emotion of the experience and adding a short, encouraging word.

In a positive story line as well, that is what the interjected comments will sound like. For example, if your wife is telling you about how wonderful and satisfying her day was, you try to imagine that enjoyable, satisfying experience in your mind, and then you reflect it back to her. “That’s so wonderful. What a pleasant, satisfying thing to happen. You know, it doesn’t surprise me at all considering how smart and talented you are.” With that type of comment, you are showing her that you are really sharing the joy of the experience with her, in addition to adding a word of positive reinforcement that makes her feel great about herself. Men can often feel that such expressions are redundant and pointless. For them, “cool” or “nice” more than suffices. But that is not the case for her, because - and read this line very carefully - **she is not merely transmitting information to you, she is sharing with you.** Men generally do not share experiences and emotions. They just transmit information where appropriate, necessary, or of interest. Women, though, are relationship beings. They are not engaging in information-transfer. They are connecting, sharing, and relating. When you say things like “How wonderful; that is such a pleasant thing that happened”, you are **not** commenting on information, you are reflecting back to her that you are in fact sharing the experience and the emotion with her. Understand this well. It is a cornerstone of a successful marriage.

Particularly when your wife is feeling stressed and overwhelmed, a lot of times all she needs to make her feel better is a truly listening ear. Get a babysitter, take her for a walk, and listen; a lot. If you need to cancel your night seider for this, so be it. *Shalom bayis* comes first, in addition to the *chiyuv* to do *chesed* which is not possible for anyone else to do. By the way, don’t get fooled if her narrative lulls at

times. If you have an empathetic or encouraging word to inject, do so. Leave it at that. Don't start suggesting any ideas of how to make the situation better. Go silent. Give her a chance to pick up where she left off.

If she doesn't do so after about a minute, you can of course start sharing your own thoughts with her. Not about what you think could be done to make the situation better, though. Remember: no "fixing" unless she explicitly requests it. Even when she does explicitly ask for your practical input, more often than not, that is just her way of asking you to empathize with her, and she really does not want your ideas. You have to use your *chochmah* and slowly but surely learn up her patterns and calibrate yourself accordingly. Once the conversation picks up again, she may find her tongue and want to say more. So go back to listening mode. Listening properly is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your wife and by extension to your marriage. And learning this skill is a great source of personal growth for yourself.

### ***An Excellent Teacher***

One more point about general communication. Recognize that you have at your disposal a teacher who is a polished expert in the art of the feminine mode of communication. Yes, you guessed right, it's your wife! And this is not a joke. It is actually a point that is so simple while at the same time so incredibly helpful that it is such a shame that couples don't automatically recognize it. It can spare so much heartache and friction. Your wife knows exactly how the communication – both speaking and listening – she needs from you is meant to be. However, most women, especially *Beis Yaakov* graduates, will not take the initiative to instruct you on how it should be done. But you can and should request her assistance. She can be of immense help to you in learning up *Maseches Aizer K'negdo*.

For example, she tells you something and you find yourself at a loss of how to respond. Your mouth is constipated. Well, then, ask her! Say to her something like this, "My dear wife, I want so much to be a good husband to you and provide you with the emotional connectivity and support that you deserve (note, when speaking to her you should use "deserve" instead of "need"). However, as a man, I unfortunately often find myself clueless as to how to do this. We men are often quite thick-headed when it comes to understanding women. So, perhaps you could do me the tremendous favor of helping me learn how to do it right. If you were to have just told that experience to one of your friends, how do you think she would respond?" When she tells you, listen carefully to every word, and you will learn volumes.

Make it a habit to enlist this tool of garnering instruction from your wife about how to communicate with her, and your progress will be expedited exponentially.

#### 4) The Bottom Line

##### ***Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is***

ואם יש לו ממון מרבה בטובתה כפי הממון

In addition to expressing itself in thought and word, honoring your wife more than yourself must also express itself in action. What this means, *l'maaseh*, is that she comes first. No, this is not referring to the "ladies first" culture of the *Goyim*. As a matter of fact, *Chazal* say that it is a *gnai* to walk behind your wife<sup>45</sup>. The husband is most certainly meant to assume the leading role in the family unit, and this ought to be expressed in mannerisms as well (similar to sitting at the head of the table). What it does mean is that you are not a dictatorial megalomaniac of a ruler; rather you are a benevolent king in the sense of that which *Chazal* say<sup>46</sup> לעצמו כקונה אדון לעצמו. Yes, you are the king, but your job description as king is to lead in order that you can provide. Your primary responsibility as the king of your family is to make sure that the family as a whole has what it needs and that every individual within that whole has what they need.

Therefore, their needs come before yours. As *Chazal*<sup>47</sup> put it, "A man should always eat and drink less than what he can afford, dress in accordance with what he can afford, and honor his wife and children beyond his affordability level for they are dependent upon him and he is dependent on the One who said and the world came into existence." It is your responsibility to put her need for pretty clothing, jewelry and the like before yours. The same goes for living amenities such as nice furniture, high quality appliances, etc. The reason for this is simple. As a woman, she needs it much more. And, as is clear from the *Gemara*, it is not enough that she is well taken care of. She also needs her children to be well taken care of. It affects her deeply if they aren't.

This is not just a nice, abstract idea. It is a very *halacha l'maaseh* component of married life. Whenever you are considering issues of spending, her needs and desires –which includes the children's - must carry a heavy, preferential weight. You most definitely cannot start living beyond your means and getting yourself into *chovos* because of this<sup>48</sup>, but it must remain a top priority in your budgeting. And, as the *Rambam* explicitly says, the more money you have the better off you make her situation. If you can afford a higher end fridge and dishwasher, then that is what you buy for her. If your budget allows that she can wear more expensive clothing and jewelry, then that is what must be. As mentioned, the same goes for the children. Of course, one should never live in an ostentatious manner. That is not in the spirit of Torah and it causes all sorts of problems with jealousy, pride, and more. One does need to

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<sup>45</sup> ברכות סא.

<sup>46</sup> קידושין כ.

<sup>47</sup> חולין פד.

<sup>48</sup> כמש"כ הרב שלמה וולבה זצ"ל בקונטרס מאמרי הדרכה לחתנים בשיחה שנייה אות ג' "על אחת יש להקפיד בשום אופן אין להוציא כסף למעלה מן היכולת מלבד במקרה של פקוח נפש ח"ו! אין להזדקק להלוואות אם אין חשבון מהיכן לפרוע אותן לקניית דברים שאין בהם הכרח חיוני!" והנה דבר זה פשוט וזיל קרי ביה רב הוא כדכתיב "לוא רשע ולא ישלם" בתהילים לז:כא. ואין להקשות ממה שאמרה הגמ', "ויכבד אשתו ובניו יותר ממה שיש לו", כי בפשטות אפשר לומר דמאחר שהוא אוכל ושותה פחות ממה שהיה יכול להוציא כפי הכנסותיו, הרי נשאר לו עודף לכבד אותם יותר מאשר היה יכול להוציא כפי הוצאותיו, וזה בעצם מש"כ בפנים, דוק בדברים היטב ותבין.

strike the proper balance. The main thing though is to remember that she comes first and to whatever extent you can afford it, you provide her with higher quality; and the children as well.

A concrete example of this principle could find expression in a scenario where you want to take a vacation and your wife wants to buy a new *sheitel*. You can only afford one or the other. She comes first. This is the halacha! Therefore, as a general rule, you must defer to her and forgo the vacation for the sake of buying her the new sheitel. It is possible, though, that under certain circumstances exceptions need to be made. For example, you've recently gone through a very difficult time and you badly need the getaway. Her old sheitel, though, is not really that bad, and it could bear waiting another half year or so. It makes more sense, then, for the sake of the family unit, to take the vacation. You'll have to do a good job, though, of explaining to her why it is so important for the family to take the vacation so that she will be happy about the decision and not just feel that you're putting your needs before hers. So, yes, there may be extenuating circumstances where you'll have no choice but to put your needs first, but that is the exception to the rule; and even then it must be done carefully with wisdom and sensitivity.

It goes without saying that a man may not be domineering about the family's finances. Things like maintaining unilateral control of the bank account, micromanaging her expenditures, revoking her credit card, and the like are definitely completely out of line. She should have equal access and control over the finances<sup>49</sup>. Of course, if there are issues of overspending and the like (from either wife or husband), you need to talk about it. The discussion must be conducted with mutual respect and honor, and not with one or the other trying to control, insult, or undermine the other. If that does not suffice to solve the problem, then you may need to involve outside help. This can come in the form of a life coach, financial advisor, or any impartial<sup>50</sup> third party who can advise and guide them on these issues. A family's healthy functioning can be very ill affected if the finances are not being handled properly; so definitely if there are such problems it must be dealt with. Pronto. However, not through domineering or controlling actions. No matter what, you must always honor her more than yourself.

Internalize this point very well. Much of the *shalom bayis* problems that exist are directly a result of financial stress in the family and lack of dealing with financial issues in a gentle, mutually respectful manner. If respect does not express itself in terms of the bottom line, then it would be apt to apply the saying that talk is cheap. If you are willing to be considerate and deeply respectful of her in every way except when it comes to your wallet, then you are not really respecting her at all. *Chazal* tell us that a man's true colors show in how he handles himself *b'koso, b'kiso, u'b'kaaso*<sup>51</sup>. To a great extent, the real litmus test of whether or not you really honor your wife is how you handle your money in respect to her.

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<sup>49</sup> כ"כ הרב שלמה וולבה בקונטרסו מאמרי הדרכה לחתנים שיחה שנייה אות ג'

<sup>50</sup> This will almost always exclude involving other family members such as parents, siblings, etc.

<sup>51</sup> עירובין סה:

## 5) Striking the Right Balance

### **ולא יטיל עליה אימה יתירה**

As leader of your home, it is part of your job description to ensure that your home functions properly *al pi Torah*. You are the guiding force of the family. Your wife and children to a great extent live by your instruction and direction. As captain of the ship, your family will naturally relate to you with a great deal of respect (assuming that you don't behave in a way to undermine it). That's an important, positive thing because it reinforces the power of your authority which ensures that your directives, where issued, will be faithfully followed.

We see, then, that a certain amount of respectful awe is good for your family to have towards you, but on the other hand you are enjoined to not impose excessive awe. The question of course is, how do you strike the right balance? Seeing that the *Rambam* precludes any option of *ever* speaking to a wife in an angry or upset tone of voice, and this in addition to the obligation to honor her more than oneself, how is it possible to have a situation wherein one infuses her with respectful awe at all? The answer is that infusing her with respectful awe is not something that you are meant to do, per se. Regarding a *rebbe* of *talmidim*, we do find that the *rebbe* is allowed and even encouraged to act or speak in a manner from time to time that will keep the *talmidim* in line and make sure they maintain a stance of respectful awe towards their *rebbe*. In his position as Torah-instructor, spiritual guide, and mentor, the *rebbe* sometimes needs to do or say specific things in order to make sure that his *talmidim* will never come to deflate his authority in their minds. However, with a wife, that is obviously impossible. The *halacha* has forbidden a man from ever talking to his wife in such a manner<sup>52</sup>!

What we see from this is that you do not have to do anything at all (and you are not allowed to either) to get your wife to respect you. It comes naturally to her. The only thing you need to worry about is:

- To not do anything that would undermine that respect, which means treating her well and in general acting in a way that is deserving of respect.
- Make absolutely certain that you do not do anything that could cause that respectful awe to become too strong.

Considering that a) it *is* in fact your job to correct things in the home where necessary, b) men have a tendency to notice *every* single thing that is not to their liking, and c) men have a tendency to be *extremely* critical of their wives and children, this is not at all an easy directive to follow. But follow it

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<sup>52</sup> ואע"ג דאינו צריך לראייה כי מוכח מאליו כמש"כ בפנים, מ"מ הצריך לעוד ראייה לזה יענין בשו"ע או"ח סי' ר"ס סע' ב' דאיתא התם דהא דצריך לומר עשרתם ערבתם הדליקו את הנר צריך לאומרו בלשון רכה כדאיתא בגמ' שבת לד., וכתב שם המ"א בס"ק ב' (וכל האחרונים אחריו) דהיינו טעמא משום דאסור לאדם להטיל אימה יתירה בתוך ביתו, הרי לפניך שלומר אפילו דברים כאלו (שהם רק הזכרות נורמליות ושגרתיות לחלוטין, וגם מחוייבים ע"פ דין מחז"ל) באופן יותר חזק מלשון רכה כבר הוי בגדר הטלת אימה יתירה! ועל אחת כמה וכמה דסתם ביקורת אם לא ייזהר במשנה הזהירות למצוא את הדרך לומר אותה בלשון רכה ובאופן שהיא לא תיפגע מזה, פשוט שעובר על איסור זה של הטלת אימה יתירה. והטעם נראה פשוט כמו שכתבנו בפנים דמטבעה האשה יראה מבעלה, ולכן כל דבר אשר יעשה שעלול להטיל אימה ולו בזיז כל שהו הוי בגדר אימה יתירה.

you must! Don't worry, it is doable; just that, as in every aspect of married life, it will require you to stretch and grow. Don't forget, marriage is a people grower. And you will be so much greater a person when you achieve this. Your *middos* will begin to become truly *tovos*.

Let's begin, then, with the following statement of Rav Pam: "You don't need to notice everything. And not everything that you notice needs to be commented upon." This needs to become one of your overarching policies in life, particularly with your wife and children. Remember, as a husband and father, you may **automatically** notice **every** single little thing that bothers you. **You have got to reign this tendency in.** Not every little flaw should be noticed. Learning to "choose your battles", as well as learning how to avoid turning issues into battles, is a very important part of managing life successfully, in particular in the home setting.

As Rav Pam said, not every infraction needs to be corrected. This is particularly so when it only has to do with *gashmiyus*, like if your wife squeezes the toothpaste tube from the middle instead of from the bottom, she forgets to put the keys in their designated place, or she was late serving supper. Definitely when it comes to all such matters the rule is *vitur, vitur*, and more *vitur*. Become bigger and let these trivialities go.

Even when it comes to *ruchniyus* matters, though, you need to really consider well if whatever you noticed is something that absolutely must be corrected. For example, let's say your wife often discusses her plans for the week on Shabbos. She is not talking about actually doing things that are *assur* to do on Shabbos, so strictly speaking there is nothing *assur* about it<sup>53</sup>. However, you don't like it. You strongly feel that it is not in the spirit of *Shabbos*<sup>54</sup>.

If you comment to her about such a thing, it may very well backfire, both in terms of what you are trying to achieve and in terms of your *shalom bayis*. Strictly speaking, her behavior is *mutar*. So leave it. The best way you could influence her to be better in such an area is by inspiring her about the beauty and *kedusha* of *Shabbos*. Don't preach. You'll come across as "holier than thou" and, again, it will have the opposite effect of what you want. Instead, tell her *divrei Torah* and stories of *tzaddikim* that demonstrate this concept in a way that will sit well with her. Sing *zemiras* with feeling and passion, have a solid learning-*seider*, and in general create a highly enjoyable and energized atmosphere on *Shabbos* (and in general), and you will see that your whole family's appreciation for the *kedusha* of *Shabbos* will greatly increase. This will organically lead to a cessation of activities that are not in the spirit of *Shabbos*. In a nutshell, teaching by example is your most effective tool, so long as it is done in a manner that makes people feel good, inspired, and enjoy themselves.

The same thing goes for something that is already a real issue of *assur vs. mutar*, but is not definitively prohibited. Take for example removing bones from fish while preparing it in the kitchen on *Shabbos*. Although it would seem that doing so is a straightforward *issur d'oraysoh* of *borer*, as some *Poskim* in fact say, nevertheless, there are *Poskim* that are *melamed zechus* on those who do so<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, in as much as she has upon whom to rely, why make an issue of it? Do not forget that *Chazal* say that the entire Torah is *darchei shalom*<sup>56</sup>, and the *Rambam* writes that the entire Torah was given to make

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<sup>53</sup> כמבואר באו"ח סימן ש"ז סע' א' וסע' ה'

<sup>54</sup> דאיתא באו"ח סי' ש"ו סע' ה' דמצוה שיהא בעיניו כאלו כל מלאכתו עשויה

<sup>55</sup> ב"ה סי' ש"ט סע' ד' ד"ה מתוך אוכל

<sup>56</sup> גיטין נט':

*shalom* in the world<sup>57</sup>. Maintaining *shalom bayis*, then, is a foremost spiritual priority. If you weigh the situation with that in mind, you will see that it just doesn't make sense to take a chance at compromising the strength of your *shalom bayis* if there are significant *Poskim* who ok what she is doing.

This is not to say that you should not aspire to raise the level of *dikduk b'mitzvos* in your home; not at all. That is a very noble, worthwhile goal. A goal that every *ben Torah* ought to have. The way to go about it, though, is similar to what was described above. Make a habit of sharing simple, straightforward *divrei halacha* at the table. Remember, don't sound preachy, but do sound enthusiastic. Tell stories about people that were *zocheh* to wonderful things in the merit of their *dikduk b'mitzvos*. Creative a very positive feeling about being precise in *halacha*. That way, when you eventually reach that particular issue in your *divrei halacha*, your wife and children will **want** to adopt the more meticulous stance. This way, you avoid a frontal confrontation; and, instead, you organically manage to inspire and uplift. Beautiful!

By the way, there are many, many details in *halacha* that are not nearly as clear-cut as we may have originally thought. Many things that we take for granted as being 100% *assur* or 100% obligatory may, upon further *iyun*, be discovered to not necessarily be so, at least not according to all opinions. Therefore, before you rebuke anyone about almost anything, particularly your wife and children, go through the *inyan* very well to make certain that it is not something that you can just leave be. You would be surprised to see how often there are significant *shitos* that justify their behavior. If you are not an accomplished enough *talmid chacham* to be able to do this (and very often, just looking it up in the *Mishna Brurah* does not suffice), then you need to make a solid habit of asking lots of questions. When it comes to a question of whether or not you should comment to your wife or children about something they are doing, make sure that the *Rav* who answers your questions knows you and your family well enough to be able to determine the proper answer to the question given the particular issue. Furthermore, you need to find a *Rav* who possesses *chochmas chaim*. Someone who knows *Shas* and *Poskim* thoroughly but does not have a solid understanding of people and the relative values that are at play within the family dynamic is not the ideal person to answer such *shailos*<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> הל' מגילה ד:ד

<sup>58</sup> To illustrate the point consider the following example. The *Chafetz Chaim*, in his younger years, was once in his *rebbe's* house, Rav Nachumkeh Horodner, during *Chanukah*. The time for lighting *Chanukah licht* came and went and Rav Nachumkeh continued going about his business as if he did not notice that fact at all. The young Reb Yisrael Meir was dumbfounded but refrained from commenting. At some point, Rav Nachumkeh's wife entered their home, and Rav Nachumkeh immediately proceeded to light *Chanukah licht*. Now it was obvious that Rav Nachumkeh had indeed taken note of the time, but had deliberately waited for his wife to return home before lighting. In response to the young Reb Yisrael Meir's question why he did so, Rav Nachumkeh responded as follows. "The *halacha* is that if one only has enough money to buy a candle for *Chanukah licht* or a candle for *Shabbos licht*, he must use the money for *Shabbos licht*. The reason for this is that *Shabbos licht* is for *shalom bayis* (so that people will not be in darkness Friday night) and *shalom bayis* takes precedence over *pirsumei nisah* (או"ח (ס' רס"ג סע' ג' 'ג). Were I to have lit before my wife came home, she would have been upset. The consideration of *shalom bayis* mandated that I wait for her to return, and the consideration of *shalom bayis* takes precedence over the consideration of *pirsumei nisah*." Now, would every *Posek* necessarily agree with that conclusion? Perhaps not. But someone to whom such a consideration would not even occur, you really don't want answering these types of questions.

Even when something is being done that is a clear-cut *issur* (e.g. something which is unequivocally forbidden *lashon hara*<sup>59</sup>), and must be addressed, you have to be very careful how you go about it. True, you cannot just wait until you eventually get to it in your divrei *halacha*, but you must still find a way to broach the issue without coming across as critical and disapproving. This is true for three reasons. First of all, you have an obligation to honor your wife more than yourself and you are never allowed to forget that, no matter what<sup>60</sup>. Secondly, even when it comes to rebuking any fellow Jew, you have to do so in a gentle, loving manner; and it must be clear to the individual that you are rebuking him primarily out of concern for his well-being<sup>61</sup>. Third, you want to achieve your goal which is that the forbidden behavior should stop, and when you come at it in a confrontational manner, the chances you'll succeed are not high at all<sup>62</sup>.

A frontal approach of, "Sweetie, you should know that it is not allowed to speak negatively of other people" and the like is not likely to work, no matter how sweetly you say it. Instead, in the moment just adroitly change the topic; and, assuming it is a recurring issue, try something along the lines of the following approach. Make a date with your wife. Go out and have a really enjoyable time. When both of you are in a really positive, loving mood, say to her something to the following effect:

*"Sweetie, there's something I would like to talk to you about. You know that I love you endlessly. I literally cannot even put into words how much I love you and care for you. Your well-being means the world to me. The strength and kedusha of our marriage means the world to me. And because of that I feel that it is very important for me to bring something up. Please understand that I think the world of you, and I appreciate your wonderful qualities so much. We all make mistakes sometimes and that's ok because, after all, we're just human. And, the truth is that what I am going to say is just as much my fault as anyone's. The important thing is that we try to correct our mistakes when we notice them. You know, I remember when I was in high school, there was a guy who once brought to my attention that I needed to be more careful with the way I spoke to my friends. You know me, I'm a real fun-loving guy and I guess my knack for witty remarks was getting a bit out of hand. In any event, when he first told me about it, I didn't want to believe him that I was doing anything wrong. 'My friendly jokes are no worse than anyone else's' I told myself. But from that point on, I couldn't help but notice that in fact some guys really were taking my jokes a bit hard. It really got me thinking. To make a long story short, I did a lot of improvement in terms of the way I spoke to other people that year. And you know what? I feel like I gained more from it than anyone else. Besides feeling so good about being careful to not be over on onaas devarim, I also felt such a deep sense of satisfaction at the personal growth that I got from improving my speech patterns. Sweetie, I think together we need to improve on our carefulness from discussing things that could be lashon hara. The truth is, that you could have been the one pointing this out to me, because I am just as much to blame.*

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<sup>59</sup> Even with something like this it is often not so simple. The generally accepted *psak* is that in certain circumstances it is *mutar* for a spouse to share something negative about someone else if they absolutely need to do so in order to calm down, etc. Obviously, this *heter* must be utilized with caution and not become an excuse that permits everything.

<sup>60</sup> כמו שאמרו ביבמות סג. דיינו שמגדלות את בנינו ומצילות אותנו מן החטא.

<sup>61</sup> רמב"ם הל' דעות ו:ז.

<sup>62</sup> כמו שאמרו בשבת לד. "אמר רבה בר רב הונא אף על גב דאמור רבנן שלשה דברים צריך אדם לומר וכו' צריך למימרינהו בניחותא כי היכי דליקבלינהו מיניה."

*As the saying goes, it takes two to tango. I guess I just happened to notice it first. Sweetie, I think in addition to keeping our home safe from these aveiros, we also will both benefit so much from being more careful about the way we talk. So, to make this idea become a reality, I would love it if you would agree to learn the halachos of shmiras ha'lashon with me every night for a few minutes. That way, we can really be mechazeik one another."*

Obviously, no two marriages are the same, and even within one marriage, no two situations are the same. You've got to use your head to precisely determine the correct approach and how to precisely word and calibrate what you are going to say given your unique relationship dynamic, personalities, and circumstances. But, still, you get the point. It has to be done coming from a place of genuine love and concern, in a soft non-confrontational manner, and with *chochmah* how to practically present it. Use the example above as a template for the *yesodos*. Find a quiet, undistracted time. Make sure you're both in a really good mood and state of mind. That she is feeling your love and feeling loving towards you. Use *meshalim* and *melitzos* to remove the sting of the rebuke<sup>63</sup>. Speak very gently, in an endearing manner. Make it 100% clear to her that, no matter what, you love and esteem her beyond describe. As much as possible, make it a "we" issue, not a "you" issue. And, finally, provide a practical *eitzah* of how the issue is going to be addressed. Of course, it goes without saying that if you put a coin in the *tzedakah* box and say a *teffilah* that you should succeed before embarking, your chances of success will increase many times over.

### ***Criticism, Poison to a Marriage***

By this point, the following statement is most probably self-evident, but because it is so important, and it literally can be the make or break of a marriage, it needs to be spelled out explicitly. ***Criticism is one of the greatest enemies of shalom bayis***, and the cultivation of emotionally healthy people for that matter. In particular, a woman is extremely sensitive to criticism from her husband, even if it is not direct criticism. Even something that you would just consider to be constructive feedback or sharing a good idea, she may take as ***biting*** criticism.

Particularly when a man does not intend to be critical, and he really is just trying to help, he can become bewildered by the sharp, negative reactions that he may receive from his wife. Understanding what is going on, then, is crucial. So, what is the reason for this? Why is it that women can take their husbands' "innocent" critiques so very hard? Why is it that even when husband is just "telling her a good idea on how to improve this that or the other" or just asking an "innocent" question about the way she does something that she may have such a negative reaction?

The *Steipler* writes<sup>64</sup>, and this is another one of those major *klalim* that you need to sear into your mind, ***"The primary hope a woman has in her whole world is that she should she have a husband who loves***

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<sup>63</sup> עיין סוכה כח. משלות כובסין משלות שועלים ופירש רש"י "שיסדו קדמונים לתת אמתלא לתוכחתם ותולין אותן בכובסים ובשועלים". ועיין עוד שבת כג: "דביתהו דרב יוסף הות מאחרה ומדלקת לה אמר לה רב יוסף תניא לא ימיש עמוד הענן יומם ועמוד האש לילה מלמד שעמוד ענן משלים לעמוד האש ועמוד האש משלים לעמוד הענן".  
<sup>64</sup> במכתב, מובא בספר אורחות רבינו ח"ה בפרק "קדושה" אות ס"ז.

***her, and if she sees that this is not so, it is practically a situation of pikuach nefesh because of her intense pain and sorrow over her lonely state as if she were a widow during her husband's lifetime."***

Furthermore, the *Chazon Ish*<sup>65</sup> writes, "The nature of a woman is to take pleasure in the favor that she finds in her husband's eyes."

It is fundamental to realize that pleasing her husband is the uppermost, primary concern for a woman. Practically everything she does, she does to please him. To make him happy. To care for him and give him that which will sustain him and provide for all his needs. Even in those things that she does that are not immediately or directly for the sake of her husband there occupies a primary place in her mind the thought, "I hope my husband will be pleased with this." Ultimately, her whole life and everything she does revolves around her husband<sup>66</sup>. For that reason, whenever she senses his displeasure, no matter how slight, she takes it hard. Very hard. To hear a word, or even just a hint of criticism or disapproval from him is to feel like her world is crashing down around her. Everything that she lives for is evaporating before her eyes in an instant. She feels bereft of the most important thing she needs in life: her husband's love, appreciation, and validation.

This description may sound totally surreal to a man. Partly, that is caused by him finding it difficult to believe the statement of the *Steipler* upon which this reality is predicated. And partly it is caused by wondering in bewilderment, "Why should a momentary criticism cause such turmoil? How can one moment undo endless hours, days, months, and years of a solid, loving relationship?" The answer to the first issue is simply that if you do not understand it now, you will see that it is in fact such a basic reality when you start to progress through married life (so long as you do not take a bull-headed attitude thereto). The second point is a result of not having yet come to terms with the fact that emotion is not rational. You cannot explain to an emotion that the way it is feeling doesn't make sense. Emotion does not work with logic, and as mentioned above, women function primarily with the power of emotion. For emotion, all that exists is the current moment, because this is how it feels right **now**. Everything else is irrelevant<sup>67</sup>.

No, that does not mean that all of your past, positive experiences with her are gone and lost forever. On the contrary, women are far better than men, precisely because of their emotional nature, at recalling their past experiences. Because of this, they can even remember things down to the finest details such as what color bow they were wearing at their *siddur* party. After the crisis blows over, the relationship can quickly reassume its overall positive, character; depending on how the mistake is negotiated.

What it does mean, though, is that right now, in the moment, she cannot feel anything but your disapproval; and that is so excruciatingly painful to her because it burns her to her core. It is literally a traumatic experience for her. It is a trauma that does not just blow away.

Now, imagine she would experience multiple moments like that on a day-to-day basis? What do you think that is going to do to her? That there are so many women that in fact do live in such a horrible reality is a major testament to the incredible strength of Jewish women. We men cannot begin to fathom what they are going through. A woman who regularly hears critique from her husband, or even

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<sup>65</sup> באגרת, מובא בקונטרס מאמרי הדרכה לחתנים להרב שלמה וולבה זצ"ל בשיחה ראשונה אות ב'.

<sup>66</sup> כל זה מבואר היטב בקונטרס מאמרי הדרכה לחתנים להרב שלמה וולבה זצ"ל בשיחה ראשונה אות ב'.

<sup>67</sup> Think about it, men as well, in a moment of anger, can forget everything that was or will be and the only thing that is influencing the person's thoughts at that moment is the angry feeling.

just “innocently placed good tips and ideas”, is suffering a pain that reduce us men to ashes were we to endure it. And if you don’t believe that Jewish women are in fact that strong, just think about childbirth. It is hard to imagine that there is nary a man who could go through such an experience and come out alive, let alone be willing to go through it again multiple times!

However, their incredible resilience does not take away from the fact that they are also very delicate and sensitive. It is one of those wonders of creation. A woman who lives with a husband who is regularly pointing out to her things that she could be doing better is suffering. *Al achas kamah v’kamah, kal v’chomer ben bno shel kal v’chomer*, if her husband is a truly critical guy; if he is not just “innocently popping some good pointers”, but actually speaks with a critical tone, then her *yissurim* are literally *norah v’ayom*<sup>68</sup>. She will not have to go to *gehinnom* at all because she is getting it here in *olam ha’zeh. Rachmana litzlan.*

If you are not yet married when reading this, consider yourself extremely lucky. As mentioned above, men have a tendency to be very critical with their wife and children, and they have a tendency to notice everything. As such, your average guy who does not make a very concerted, deliberate effort to overcome this tendency is going to be subjecting his wife to **gehinnom** on Earth. Not good. That’s why you are extremely lucky; because you can start right off the bat ingraining this self-control and good habit into yourself. It will therefore be that much easier for you to achieve this. Make no mistake, though, it will not be easy.

But it’ll be a lot easier than if you only start to correct this flaw after months or years of doing it wrong.

Even if you are one of those, though, don’t give up. Hashem will help you if you give it your best. Even someone who has in fact been subjecting his wife to *gehinnom* on Earth for countless years can do *teshuvah* and mend his ways. He’ll have to work hard, but if he really means it he’ll get there. And women, G-d bless them, can be very forgiving. So don’t give up. Not only because there is no excuse to continue doing an *issur* no matter how long you’ve been doing it<sup>69</sup>, but also because you **will** succeed. Work hard, be sincere, and Hashem will help you. Sure you’ll stumble a lot along the way, but in the end, with Hashem’s help, you’ll reach your goal.

On a practical note, any time you are about to point something out to your wife, stop! **Think about what you are about to say.** If it is a good idea how something can be done better, a pointer about how to improve this that or the other, and certainly if it is actual critique, don’t say it! Just bite your tongue (hard if need be) and leave it.

Instead, find something positive to say about what she did. A word of praise or appreciation.

This will be **very** difficult, but you **can** do it. Over time, it’ll get a lot easier. If you do this, in addition to getting the tremendous *zechus* of treating your wife well and having a wonderful marriage, you are also going to have the amazing benefit of growing into a pleasant person who makes everyone around him feel good and that people love being around<sup>70</sup>. You will become a builder; someone who builds up

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<sup>68</sup> כדכתיב במשלי יב: "יש בוטה כמדקרות חרב".

<sup>69</sup> כמו שאמרו בשבת לא: "דרש רב עולא מאי דכתיב אל תרשע הרבה...אלא מי שאכל שום וריחו נודף יחזור ויאכל שום אחר ויהא ריחו נודף" ועיין שם ברש"י דבלשון תמיה קאמר דמי זה טיפש שיחזור ויאכל עוד שום ויהא ריחו נודף יותר לזמן ארוך?!

<sup>70</sup> עיין אבות ג: "כל שרוח הבריות נוחה רוח המקום נוחה הימנו."

everyone that comes into contact with him<sup>71</sup>. Remember? Marriage is a people grower. You *shteig so* much from doing the right thing in marriage.

### ***Disapproval vs. Personal Taste***

In the context of this discussion about criticism, it is important to note that there is a significant distinction between disapproval and personal taste. Let's elaborate on this a bit. Take the following example. You come home for supper and see that your wife is still bathing the kids. Punctuality is important to you, particularly when your stomach is growling, and you say, "Why don't you start the bedtime process thirty minutes earlier?" Even if you say it in a completely non-accusatory tone, you have just expressed disapproval. She takes this very hard. Particularly in that moment. You could not have chosen a worse time to say it. Here she is, probably exhausted and at the end of her patience-rope trying to get everything done ***so that she can serve you supper*** – and for all you know she may have started an hour earlier than normal but one of the kids threw a tantrum, another tossed something down the toilet that clogged it, and a third suddenly remembered to do their homework - and you just broadcast to her one thing, "No good!" That is how it hits her. And it hits her hard. Very hard. That is an example of disapproval.

Now let's give an example of personal taste. Supper is quinoa-mango soup. It does not agree with your palate. At all. "How's supper, sweetie?" Assuming your relationship in general is good and both you and she are in a good mood, you could say this: "You know, this soup is really something! How did you manage to get such a smooth, creamy texture? And the blend of colors is really striking. Did you ever take culinary courses? This looks like a dish that would be served in a fancy restaurant!" She's no fool. "So, you don't like it?" At this point, you could say, "You know, I don't know what it is about me. I must have such immature taste buds, because seriously (and say it in a genuine tone of voice) I would expect to see something like this in a gourmet cookbook."

You see the difference? You are not expressing disapproval. You just happen to have a personal taste that doesn't agree with what she made. And you're saying it in a way that only utilizes expressions of genuine praise for her and self-deprecation for you. Although she will obviously be disappointed; after all, she put so much love and effort into trying to make you happy and it didn't work, she won't be hurt and insulted. Because it is not a matter of your disapproval, it is just your personal taste. She didn't do anything wrong. On the contrary, she managed to make a dish fit for a king; just it happens to not agree with your palate.

For good measure, if you are going to tell her on the spot, you ought to add in, "Dearest, thank you so much for trying so hard to please me. I really appreciate all the effort and tremendous amount of love that you put into making this for me." When you say these words, make sure to look her deeply in the

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<sup>71</sup> על דרך מה שאמרו חז"ל (סוך מסכת ברכות) אל תקרי בניך אלא בוניך וכדכתיב (שם במשלי יב:יח) "ולשון חכמים מרפא".

eyes and really mean it. (It goes without saying that such words should certainly be regulars when she does make something you like).

It may be nicer, though, to wait until tomorrow to tell her. You could fudge the truth now for the sake of her feelings, and then casually bring up your little “it was amazing gourmet but my immature taste buds unfortunately couldn’t appreciate it” speech a different day. It may soften the impact a bit. Whether you go with the on-site approach or wait-a-day approach will depend a lot on the particular dynamic of your relationship and your wife’s particular personality. In any event, you should never ever say you don’t like it if either one of you are not in an upbeat, good mood. In that situation, you must fudge the truth now for the sake of *shalom*.

Just to make this point abundantly clear, were you to have said something like, “You know, if you’d let it cook longer, or add a bit of cumin...then it would have come out much better,” that would be expressing disapproval. Don’t do it; even if you are convinced that it is true. It will only damage. A lot. Don’t worry, she’ll eventually figure out your taste buds real well. Both through trial and error, and through directly querying you on what your preferences are.

### **Family Ties**

By the way, one of the absolute worst things you could ever say to your wife is, “Why don’t you do it like this, that’s how my mother does it.” *Chazal*<sup>72</sup> reveal to us that the natural disposition of mother-in-law to daughter-in-law and vice versa is one of hatred. That’s right, hatred. Even if they appear as loving towards one another, there may very well be a natural, automatic hatred that rests deep in their hearts which is undetectable to others<sup>73</sup>. Even without this revelation of *Chazal*, it would be elementary to realize that a woman is very sensitive to whether or not she is “measuring up” in terms of the care that she is providing for her husband. Telling her or even hinting to her that her performance falls short of what you used to get from your mother is like a serrated dagger straight into her heart. As much as you need to avoid expressing critique and disapproval in general, you have to be exceedingly careful to never ever express this type of comment.

Once we’re on the topic of in-laws, it’s *k’dai* to mention that it is also very important to withhold any negative comments about your wife’s family, even if you are convinced that they are deserved. This is true even if she started complaining to you about them. Aside from the fact that such a conversation is very likely to be a violation of *lashon hara*, if you add in your own two cents, she may well get upset with you! “They’re my parents so I can say what I want. But, you? You’re just plain badmouthing them!”

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<sup>72</sup> יבמות קיז.

<sup>73</sup> עיין בספר דף על הדף יבמות קיז. שהביא דברי האגודות אזוב "דאפשר לומר דשונא ידוע דעלמא כשר דכיון שהיא יודעת שהוא שונא שלה היא מדייקת יותר לברר אם לא העיד שקר אבל באותן חמש נשים השנאה היא כבושה בלב ונראין כאוהב לכך פסולות". ועיין עוד בחזו"א אבה"ע סי' כ"ב אות ז' שכתב להשיג על דברי הפתח"ת שס"ל שגם כל שונאות פסולות להעיד זל"ז וכתב על זה "ול"ק הוא דדבר זה מסור לחכמים ולא אמרו אלא בה' נשים שהוא ענין קבוע ותמידי אבל לא פסלו שונא ושונאה וגם מאן ספון לשקול טבעיות בני אדם ותוכן רוחם כרבותינו ז"ל ואם אמרו באלו אין ראייה לאחריים."

That is often what people are prone to think. As Rav Shimshon Pinkus says<sup>74</sup>, a father-in-law is not a father, a mother-in-law is not a mother, and a brother-in-law is not a brother. You need to be very careful how and what you say to and about your in-laws; both out of the general consideration of *bein adam la'chaveiro*, and the specific consideration of *shalom bayis*. The need to praise your in-laws is often greater than regarding your own parents and siblings.

Furthermore, you need to make sure that the delicate in-laws relationships are not interfering with your *shalom bayis*, from either direction. It can often happen that the involvement of his parents or her parents can cause problems. Obviously, there is a serious consideration of *kibbud av v'eim* (again, from both angles), and you need to be careful about how you deal with it. Sometimes, it may be necessary to keep a distance. Whatever the case may be, one thing needs to be crystal clear, once you are married you and your wife are one unit and that unit always comes first. Rav Avigdor Miller emphasized that husband and wife must be 100% faithful to each other. Not only in terms of intimacy, but in every regard. So, for example, if your wife is getting criticized by someone for something she did, you come to her defense. Even if she really was wrong, when you are with other people, particularly your family, you defend her. You respectfully but firmly insist that they immediately desist from their negative comments.

Another illustration of this principle was said by Rav Yitzchak Silver. For example, let's say that your wife is very uncomfortable being around your family. Maybe it's your mother, your sister, or maybe even your father. Now, your parents and siblings are expecting you for the *Pesach Seider*. Their turn is long overdue, "and Bubby is going to be there and really wants to see you and the kids." You don't have a choice. You'll just have to disappoint them. Your marriage and your *shalom bayis* is the first priority over everything else. Never forget that. Therefore, if there are issues with either your parents or her parents (or siblings, etc.), do not make light of the issue. Immediately speak to a *Rav* or your *Rebbi* or some other competent person who can advise you on the correct course of action, and follow through with it. Even if something as drastic as moving to a different country is what's necessary to ensure the health and stability of your marriage, so be it.

### ***On the Topic of Clothes***

Because it comes up a lot, let's talk about clothes also. Your wife just bought something new. As women tend to be, she is quite excited about it. She tries it on for you and proffers the inevitable, "Well, how do you like it?" Hopefully you love it and you can honestly answer, "It's absolutely fantastic! It looks gorgeous on you; how lucky is that piece that you decided to buy it!" But what if you don't? It's definitely not going to have a positive effect on *shalom bayis* if your wife wears things you don't fancy. So, you are going to have to tell her when you don't like something. The only question, though, is how.

Now, before we get to that, let's be realistic, you aren't going to love every single garment your wife ever buys. There are only a certain number of styles out there at any given time, and the notion that

she'd be able to hit the nail right on the head with every single piece is just not realistic. At all. So if the piece doesn't arouse your disfavor leave it. If it is *pareve* to you, there's no reason why you should make any issue out of it<sup>75</sup>. Once you are going to just leave it, why not do it in a way that makes her happy. You don't have to turn on your maximum effusiveness; that you can reserve for when you really do like what she's wearing. Nevertheless, at least a "very pretty; I like it" is definitely in order. Don't worry that it isn't the truth. There is a *mefurasheh Gemara* that says that not only is it *mutar* to do such a thing, it's a *mitzvah*<sup>76</sup>. If she's clever, which women usually are, she may say, "Oh, so you don't like it. Well, then, why don't you just tell me the truth?!"

If you tell her point blank, "You're right; I really don't like it. Not that I think it's ugly or anything; just I don't find anything appealing about it," she is going to be upset. Depending on how much time and effort she put into it, she may even get really upset. Such a statement can sting a lot to a wife; much more than we men may imagine. She is not happy that you told her the truth; not at all. She may even start to quarrel with you over your "too-picky" taste and whatnot. Having just been asked your honest opinion about the matter, it can be quite startling to all of a sudden be blamed and attacked for doing just that! The reason it's happening, is that she is hurt and upset and she (momentarily only, don't worry) sees your "refusal" to like what she bought as being the source of her angst. So, she is taking it out on you.

As an important aside, in general when something like this happens, that she gets all upset at you over what you perceive as nothing, realize that if you lash back you are going to defeat your own purpose. After all, don't you want to be happy? The only way you're going to be happy is if you have a good marriage. And lashing back, even if you feel you were unjustifiably attacked, is only going to bring you the exact opposite of what it is that you really want. Do you want to be right or do you want to be smart? Be smart and realize that she is just having a difficult moment because of her sensitive emotional nature that is getting her worked up. If you take it like a man and just respond with soothing reassurance, apologies (even if they are completely undeserved), and a bit of patience, the storm will pass and you will have scored it big both in *olam ha'zeh* and *olam ha'bah*. A worthwhile investment, don't you think?

Coming back, often she really does not want you to tell her the truth if that truth is going to hurt her. What she really wanted, at least in a certain sense, is for you to be a better liar! No jokes. She wants you to forever be adoring of and attracted to her. This is an important *yediah* in the language of that nation called women. Not always do they say what they mean or mean what they say. That is, according to the rules of our male language. For them in their language there is nothing duplicitous at all about such a manner of expression. You see, in the feminine language there is a massive amount of intuiting going on. Feelings and emotions can be deep and raw. It can be uncomfortable or "not nice" to express certain things outright (for women, that is); so there is a tremendous amount of "reading

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<sup>75</sup> If, though, the family budget only allows for such purchases on relatively rare occasions, and the garment can be returned or exchanged, it makes sense that most women really would want to know the raw truth. Still, be a *mentsch* in how you say it. Perhaps something like, "First of all, I want you to know that I really appreciate all the effort you go through to find appealing clothing which is both tasteful and *tzniusdik*. It really does mean a lot to me. The garment is very nice and it shows that you have good taste. That being said, for some reason it doesn't carry personal appeal to me. I hope you are not too upset by that. Honestly, I do think it's nice and that you have great taste, just for some reason this particular piece doesn't seem to agree with me."

<sup>76</sup> כתובות יז., ועיין בספר חפץ חיים הל' רכילות כלל ט' סע' י"ב אות ב'

between the lines” going on. Don’t be surprised. Don’t *Chazal* say that women have *binah yeseirah*? They use it in very large measure in the way that they communicate. To a great extent, in the feminine mode of communication it is up to the listener to intuit the speaker’s true intentions. This is actually one of the more difficult facets for men to learn; simply because *binah yeseirah* was not given to us. Still, we can learn it. Slowly. But it can be done. Keep your antennas attuned for these types of “please intuit what I am really saying” statements; it’ll go a long way in helping you cultivate great *shalom bayis*.

What are you to do, then, when your clever wife sees right through your feigned compliment? As we just saw, if you do tell her the truth, she may not be too happy. What you should do is keep reiterating with more emphasis that you do think the garment is pretty, and that you do like it. Again, you don’t have to hit your highest octave of enthusiastic approval, but you should increase the degree of emphasis with which you reiterate that you do like it. Whatever you do, do not get impatient and do not get upset; even if she does. Make sure to always stay cool like a cucumber, ride the storm (if there is one) like a pro, and eventually she’ll accept the fact that there are some things you like and some things you love.

What about those instances, though, when it is not *pareve*? What are you to do when you really don’t like it? You find it decidedly unappealing. If that is the case you cannot just leave it. There cannot be a situation wherein a woman is repelling her husband. That is totally antithetical to *shalom bayis*<sup>77</sup>. So you’ve got to tell her, but you have to be a *mentsch* in how you do it. You have to tell her the truth while at the same time being considerate of her hurt feelings; to try to mitigate and minimize the sting as much as possible. Something like this may work:

*“First of all, I want you to know that I really appreciate all the effort you go through to find appealing clothing which is both tasteful and tzniusdik. It really does mean a lot to me. I cannot imagine how difficult it must be for you to sift through all the inappropriate pieces out there to find something which complies with the gedarim of tznius and is also attractive. I cannot even begin to describe to you the tremendous schar you get for the zechus of this amazing mitzvah. It gives great nachas ruach to Hashem when a true Bas Yisrael such as yourself behaves in this correct manner. I am so, so very proud of you. Regarding this particular garment; I think it is very nice and it shows that you have excellent taste. That being said, for some reason it doesn’t carry personal appeal to me. I hope you are not too upset by that. Honestly, I do think it’s nice and that you have great taste, just for some reason this particular piece doesn’t seem to agree with me. I realize that having to return or exchange it may be a burden on your time. Please tell me what I can do to make it a bit easier. Perhaps helping some more to get ready for Shabbos this week, or arranging babysitting for when you need to go shopping?”*

By saying it in such a manner, you are shifting the focus to how much you appreciate her, you are not disapproving of her because it is inherently pretty just your capricious taste happens to not agree with it, and you are offering to help mitigate the inconvenience of having to return it. Most men would probably find such a lengthy “presentation” to be so way over the top as to be downright pandering. This is a major part of marriage, though, as we discussed above: realizing how very different your wife is

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<sup>77</sup> כמבואר בשבת סד:

from you and providing her with her needs according to her unique personality and character, both as a woman and as an individual.

It goes without saying that if you really work hard at overcoming the male, critical nature and instead make compliments and praise the standard fare in your home, it will be that much easier for her to accept the disagreeability of your personal taste when such occasions inevitably arise.

By the way, as long as we are on the topic of clothes, it's *k'dai* to point out that even though the *inyan* of beautification and self-adornment is primarily the realm of a woman vis a vis her husband; nevertheless, a husband also needs to be careful to maintain a respectable appearance for his wife as well. No, you don't need to stand in front of the mirror for ten minutes making sure you get the knot on your tie just right; but you ought to be particular, for example, to keep your hat brushed. Ditto for not wearing torn shoes, having a scraggly beard, or wearing the same shirt for two weeks. Looking like a shlump, aside from being a serious *chillul Hashem*<sup>78</sup>, is not exactly going to make it easy for your wife to feel ever adoring of and attracted to you. Obviously, maintaining proper hygiene by showering regularly, brushing your teeth, and the like is a *kol sheh'kein*.

### ***Be a Gentle Man, with No Exceptions***

ויהיה דיבורו עמה בנחת ולא יהיה עצב ולא רוגז

Seeing that we just learned that speaking in a less-than-gentle manner is already a violation of imposing undue fear, what is the Rambam adding by telling us that one must always use a gentle manner of speech with one's wife and not express unhappiness or irritation to her<sup>79</sup>? The answer is that one may have thought that as long as one is generally polite, gentle, and respectful with his wife that is enough even if from time to time he speaks in a less-than-gentlemanly manner. When it comes to other people, one can perhaps be excused if he is sometimes a bit curt, standoffish, or gruff. We all have our better days and those times when we are a bit in the dumps. If a coworker, fellow staff member, or the like comes in one day in a grumpy mood and is a bit ill-tempered that day, we forgive him and pay it no special attention. Why? Because we also have our days where we either woke up on the wrong side of the bed or are going through a tough time, and we expect people to be understanding of that fact and not get insulted if we are less than courteous. Therefore, we are willing to afford the same consideration to others. Sure, a person is meant to work on himself to try to make his internal angst uninfluential to his treatment of those around him<sup>80</sup>, but that's a very hard thing to do which most

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<sup>78</sup> כמו שאמרו בשבת קיד. "אמר רבי חייא בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן כל תלמיד חכם שנמצא רבב על בגדו חייב מיתה שנאמר כל משנאי אהבו מות אל תקרי משנאי אלא משניאי". ופשוט דהכל לפי המקום והזמן.

<sup>79</sup> ואין לומר דפירושי קמפרש לדיבוריה וה"ק האיך שומר עצמו שלא יטיל עליה אימה יתירה ע"י שמדבר עמה בנחת וכו', זה אין לומר, דאילו היה כן היה צריך לומר שיהיה וכו', ומזה שכתב ויהיה מבואר דהוא דבר נוסף, ופשוט הוא.

<sup>80</sup> כידוע בשם רב ישראל סלנטר שהאדם צריך לידיע שפניו הרי הם רשות הרבים, וצריך להקפיד שלא לשים ברה"ר דבר שמפריע לרבים.

people don't necessarily manage<sup>81</sup>. It's a part of life. You've got your ups and you've got your downs<sup>82</sup>, and you can't always be expected to be Mr. Nice 100% of the time, your whole life.

Yes, this is all true, but with one very notable exception: your wife! When it comes to your wife there are no excuses. Ever. Maintaining a gentle manner of communication and interaction 100% of the time is non-negotiable in marriage, for you. Regarding her, it's a whole different story, and later we'll discuss that. Now, you may feel that this is unfair or simply an impossible demand, but there's a very basic fact that a married man is never allowed to forget. Your wife, as a married woman, lives 100% of the time in a very delicate, high-pressure state of balance.

Imagine a person straddled over a huge ravine, each one of his feet on a different side. The two cliffs are just close enough for it to be done, but it is literally by a hairsbreadth. And this guy is straddled on them. He cannot possibly move, ever (!), because the slightest move will cause him to go hurtling down the ravine. His survival is completely dependent on forever maintaining his state of tenuous balance.

There is a *Gemara* in *Bava Metzia*<sup>83</sup> that says, לעולם יהא אדם זהיר באונאת אשתו שמתוך שדמעתה מצויה, אונאתה קרובה, a man must **always** be careful to not cause emotional pain to his wife, for since her tears are always at the ready, the punishment for causing her anguish is likewise quick to come. The *Mahara*<sup>84</sup> points out that although there is an *issur d'oraysoh* prohibiting causing any Jew emotional pain, *Chazal* specifically warned men to be extra careful about this regarding their wives because a wife vis a vis her husband is much more prone to being hurt than others. This, explains the *Mahara*, is a function of the dual reality within which she lives. On the one hand, she is to a great extent subservient to and dependent upon her husband, as the *pasuk* says והוא ימשל בך. On the other hand, she is also his equal for she is his spouse, not a maidservant; this, in addition to the fact that she has her own, independent identity in which she see herself as an important individual.

This very delicate balance generates a tension within her that makes her exceedingly sensitive to even the slightest slight from her husband. Her equilibrium and healthy sense of balance is completely dependent on each one of her feet being firmly planted on each side of this balance. On the one hand, she has an essential, existential need to feel completely bound up with the identity of her husband. His love, appreciation, and approval are vital to her sense of self. On the other hand, she is not his maidservant. She is his wife, and in that sense his equal, and she needs to feel that she also has her own, independent significance; that she is also a major contributor to their relationship.

This balance is complex and very delicate. The slightest push can throw it off and send her hurtling down into the ravine below. Even the most seemingly insignificant snub or somewhat harsh word can deliver her a crushing blow. This doesn't mean that it necessarily will. What is being described here is the natural tendency of women; that to which they are inherently very prone. A woman can use techniques that will help her to "roll with the punches" and not have the wind knocked out of her any time her husband is not 100% nice with her. But you most definitely cannot bank on that.

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<sup>81</sup> כמבואר בחובות הלבבות שער ט' שער הפרישות פרק ד' שכתב "כאשר אמר קצת החסידים הפרוש צהלתו בפניו ואבלו בלבו." הרי מבואר דזה מדת הפרוש ולא כל אדם זכי לה.

<sup>82</sup> כמבואר בתחילת ספר עלי שור בשם ספר הישר לר"ת דיש ימי האהבה ויש ימי שנאה.

<sup>83</sup> נט.

<sup>84</sup> שם בחידושי אגדות

From your perspective, you need to view the situation precisely as described above, wherein the slightest wrong move can be just absolutely devastating. This state of delicate balance is her perpetual reality. She cannot ever leave go of it. It is with her 100% of the time, her entire married life. That is why, in respect to her, you have to be gentle and courteous 100% of the time your entire married life. There can be no allowances for the “down and out” days vis a vis your wife because the stakes are just too high. It is extremely difficult, if not most of the time impossible, for her to be able to simply brush it off and chalk it up to your bad mood. The pain it can inflict on her is so strong and so real, that you simply have no other option than to follow *Chazal’s* injunction to **always** be careful from causing her emotional distress. That is what the *Rambam* is adding in this final phrase, that even when you may otherwise be excused for behaving in a grumpy, gloomy, or gruff way, with your wife there are no exceptions. A gentle, contented demeanor and mode of communication is an absolute must at all times and under all circumstances.

### ***Damage Control***

Granted, this is a very tall order, and many men may not muster up the strength and stamina to maintain this standard at all times no matter what the situation. So what are you to do if, for example, you had a really hard day and you just do not see wearing a smile on your face and talking all lovey-dovey a realistic possibility from the moment you walk in the door until the moment you fall asleep? What then? If that is the case, then at the very least what you need to do is keep up the show at least from the moment you walk in the door through the first ten minutes you are home<sup>85</sup>. Think about it, if you had to put on such an act for a very important guest, certainly you’d manage ten minutes no matter what you went through that day. Ten minutes is definitely manageable, so long as you see it as being a top-level priority.

So, you walk in the door with a bright smile and maintain convivial conversation for those first ten minutes. Then, after those ten minutes are up, you say to your wife as follows. “Sweetie, I had a really difficult day today. Because of that I am unfortunately feeling down. I just wanted to let you know this so that if you notice that I am in a sour mood you’ll know that it has nothing at all to do with you. I love you and appreciate you always. I just had a rough experience today and that’s why I am not at my best.” Realize that even with this your wife is prone to feeling hurt by your upset mood. Despite the fact that it truly has nothing to do with her, deep in her heart she may feel that if you would be perfectly happy with her and love her, you wouldn’t be in a bad mood. Still, if you see that you just will not manage to keep up the show the whole time, doing this is infinitely better than starting off in a bad mood and/or being in a bad mood without providing her any explanation.

Even with this, there is no excuse under any circumstances to be snappy, rude, or insulting with your wife. The above is only a “heter” to appear glum or grumpy around her; but you most certainly cannot ever take it out on her. (And even this “heter” is not really a heter; it is more like damage control. Meaning, if you aren’t going to manage doing it right, at least minimize the *avlah* to the best of your

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<sup>85</sup> Rav Yitzchak Silver.

ability<sup>86</sup>.) If you feel that you are in such a bad mood that you cannot keep yourself from irritable and short-tempered retorts, then you need to excuse yourself from her company. Tell her, "Sweetie, I had such a bad day today that I am in such a terrible mood that I just cannot deal with myself at all. If it's ok with you, I think I need to be alone until I manage to calm down. I love you so, so much and I do not want that *chas v'shalom* anything cross should come out of my mouth, and I am in such a compromised state right now that I do not feel in control of myself. Please realize that this has absolutely nothing at all to do with you; on the contrary, you are my silver lining in the dark cloud that I am in right now. So, if it is ok with you I'll just grab a quick bite to eat and go straight to our room to hopefully cool off, and maybe I'll even get an early night and go right to sleep." If you are in too sour a mood to say even this, then write it and hand her the piece of paper.

Realize, though, that she may also be worn out, harried, and at her wits end by the time you come home. If she works, she has her own pressures at the job place. In addition to that, she has to manage a home which is no small endeavor. And taking care of children, despite the great satisfaction that it provides, can be extremely wearying and nerve-fraying (just try it for an hour!). Therefore, she might really need you when you come home and may not be at all amenable to your escaping or sulking. She will justifiably perceive that not only as an insult but as an abandoning-ship. Not good.

That being so, you are better off not coming home, if possible, when you are in such a terrible state that the chance of withholding short-tempered, gruff words is next to nil. Call home and ask your wife if it is ok if you come home really late today (you can make up an excuse and say you have to work overtime or you have a *chaburah* that you need to finish preparing). Go buy yourself something to eat and hang out in the *Beis Medrash* until it is time to go to sleep.

Even this will not always work, though. She may tell you on the phone that the home-front is a disaster and she absolutely needs you there. If that's the case, you are just going to have to be *misgaber*. You got married and you have an *achrayus* that you cannot shirk. The only exception would be when you feel that you are really in a kind of emotional-crisis type of state where going home will only make things worse, perhaps much worse. If that is the case, it is obviously better for her to be angry at you for a bit and apologizing and making it up to her later than risk going home and having a full-fledged conflagration.

To reiterate, these "*heterim*" are not *heterim* at all. They are contingency plans of damage control that are only to be employed when absolutely necessary. You cannot take the ten-minute-show, the I-need-to-be-alone-right-now, or the coming-home-late as an excuse to wriggle out of your responsibility as a married man every time you're not feeling upbeat and contented. You most definitely need to get used to the fact that life is often not rosy, there are plenty of rough bumps along the way, and you

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<sup>86</sup> דזה ג"כ חלק גדול מלהיות בעל בחירה, לבחור את הרע במיעוטו היכי שרואה שאין שום מצב שיצליח לבחור בטוב. בנין אב לזה מצינו בגמ' מו"ק יז. "רבי אילעאי אומר אם רואה אדם שיצרו מתגבר עליו ילך למקום שאין מכירין אותו וילבש שחורים ויתעטף שחורים ויעשה מה שלבו חפץ ואל יחלל שם שמים בפרהסיא" (עיין שם היטב בראשונים). ועיין עוד בחלקת מחוקק סימן כ"ג ס"ק א' שכתב "עיין בספר חסידים סי' קע"ו שכ' שאם א' מתירא שלא יכשל בא"א או באשתו נדה ח"ו טוב לו להוציא זרע לבטלה משיכשל ח"ו באיסור א"א או בנדה רק יתענה מ' יום בימי הקיץ או ישב בקרח בימי החורף". וכמו"כ עיין עוד בספר ח"ח הל' לשה"ר כלל ו' סע' ה' ובבאמ"ח שם אות י"א.

nevertheless need to learn how to maintain a pleasant composure; at least vis a vis your family. Only on rare occasions should these "*heterim*" be used, when there really is no other alternative<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> על כיו"ב ודאי שייך אמרת חכמינו ז"ל אוי לי אם אומר אוי לי אם לא אומר...אמרה ומהאי קרא אמרה כי ישרים דרכי ה' וצדיקים ילכו בם ופושעים יכשלו בם (ב"ב פט:).

## 6) Awareness Goes a Long Way

### ***Don't be Caught Off Guard***

There are a few things of which men need to be aware and for which they need to be prepared. These are situations or occurrences that without prior warning could really catch you off guard. With a little bit of knowledge, though, you should have no problem navigating these “bumps” in the road.

The first one we'll call *zihara*. Why? Consider the following *Gemara* in *Brachos* about *Yalta*. But, first, a bit of background about her. *Yalta* was a very, very *chashuveh* woman. She was the daughter of the *Reish Galusah*<sup>88</sup> (the *Reish Galusah* possessed king-like authority, power, and stature<sup>89</sup>), and the wife of *Rav Nachman* who was of the very greatest *Amoraim* of his generation<sup>90</sup>. Besides her impressive lineage and family prestige, *Yalta* herself was heavily involved with communal affairs<sup>91</sup>. So, yes, this was one seriously *chashuveh* lady.

Now for the story<sup>92</sup>.

*Rav Nachman was accustomed to the opinion that maintains one should offer one's wife to drink from the kos shel bracha of bentching. One day, Rav Nachman had an extremely illustrious visitor: Ulah. Ulah was one of the undisputed Gedolei Torah of that generation. So much so, that Rav Nachman addressed him with extreme respect. Upon concluding their meal together, Rav Nachman honored his eminent guest to lead the bentching. Ulah happened to be of the opinion that there is no reason whatsoever to offer from the kos shel bracha to the woman of the house. He held that the bracha of the woman is transferred to her via her husband. Being unaware of Rav Nachman's differing opinion and thus that to which Yalta was long-accustomed, Ulah did not leave over any wine from the kos shel bracha for Yalta.*

*Well, that didn't go over too well with Yalta. By the time Rav Nachman managed to query Ulah on his divergent custom and the latter provided his scholarly explanation thereof, Yalta realized that she had just been deprived of partaking from the kos shel bracha and she flew into a rage; literally. She got up, says the Gemara, went to the wine cellar, and proceeded to smash 400 (!) jugs of wine.*

*And that's not all. When Rav Nachman saw how incredibly upset his wife was, he asked Ulah to send her a different kos in lieu of the original. Ulah did so, accompanying it with the explanation that all of the wine that was on the table during bentching is included in kos shel bracha. Well, if they thought that would pacify her, it didn't. Her response, although much of the flavor gets lost in translation, was, "From itinerants we get words and from rags we get lice."*

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<sup>88</sup> תוס' ביצה כה: ד"ה שאני

<sup>89</sup> כדאיתא בסנהדרין ה. "כדתניא לא יסור שבט מיהודה אלו ראשי גליות שבבבל שרודין את ישראל בשבט".

<sup>90</sup> רא"ש ב"ק פ"ט סי' ה', תה"ד סי' ר"מ, שו"ת ב"ח סי' ע"א

<sup>91</sup> כמבואר בביצה כה: "והא רב נחמן שרא לה לילתא למיפק אאלונקי" וכתבו תוספות שם "וא"ת והא לא התירו אלא כי יש בה צורך רבים כדאמרין לעיל וי"ל דלמא נמי הלכה לצורך רבים שבת ראש הגולה היתה והיו רבים צריכים ממנה".

<sup>92</sup> ברכות נא:

It's not within my comfort level to write what would appear to be the modern equivalent of such a statement, so it'll just have to be left to your imagination. Suffice it to say that this is not exactly how we would expect anyone to speak to a *Gadol b'Torah*, certainly not someone as great and *chashuveh* as *Yalta*! Yet, the *Gemara* does not take her to task over this seemingly incredibly inappropriate behavior; not even the slightest hint of censure or disapproval<sup>93</sup>!

So what exactly happened here? Rav Eliyahu Goldschmidt<sup>94</sup> explains that because of their sensitive, emotional nature, women may at times experience such an intense emotional stress that it explodes like a pressure cooker that was left on for just a bit beyond its limited capacity.

That is why, explains Rav Goldschmidt, in describing *Yalta's* fit of rage the *Gemara* employs the term *zihara*, which literally means a flash of light, as opposed to the word *kaas, rogez, or rischa*. Because, really, this was not an anger management issue. Rather this incredibly intense reaction was a light beacon for *Rav Nachman* to be able to see that there was something weighing upon his wife so heavily that the emotional strain was completely unbearable for her. She simply exploded. Not with anger, per se, but from the overwhelming strain of emotional distress.

Now, this is obviously not meant as an excuse for any woman who does have anger management issues to be able to poo-poo away her issue by saying, "What do you want from me? I am a woman, after all, and you hurt my feelings; so that's what happens!" That is most certainly not the point of this story of *Yalta*.

What the point is, is that it is practically inevitable for **every** woman to have such an outburst from time to time. *Yalta* was as *chashuveh* and as great a *tzadeikes* as they come. Much, much (much, much, much.....) greater than any great *Rebbetzin* that we may possibly conjure up in our minds. If it could happen to her, that means it could happen to anyone; yes, **anyone**. Also, there is no way to predict when it will happen. It can come all of a sudden and take you completely by surprise like a flash of lightening that suddenly tears through the black, night sky. Therefore, when it does happen, you have to make sure to keep your wits about you to not get hurt or insulted by it.

Realize, and this is the main point, that whatever your wife may say to you or about you in these fits of flashing rage do not at all reflect her true feelings about you. Consider the following, true account.

*A man, we'll call him Yaakov, was sitting in his study doing some work. Without any warning, his wife, we'll call her Reizy, barged in and started lambasting him for this that and the other. Having recently learned some very important skills in shalom bayis, Yaakov maintained his composure and just remained silent. He allowed Reizy to get her whole tirade and diatribe against him off her chest.*

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<sup>93</sup> And, mind you, do not think that the *Gemara* spares women its ability of scathing criticism where appropriate just because "after all, they're just women". Oh no, not at all. There is a *Gemara* (*Moed Katan* :טו) that describes a woman who was so absorbed in her work sitting on a sidewalk that she neglected to move out of the way for a passing *talmid-Yeshiva* (not a *Rav*, a *talmid*!). The *talmid*, shocked at such impudence, verbally expressed how *chutzpadik* this woman is. Fearful of what such an expression might mean, she came to *Rav Nachman* (what a coincidence!), to ask what she should do. He told her that since she did not hear an expression of *shamta*, all she had to do is conduct herself in a very chastened manner for a day. So, no, women don't get off scott-free just 'cause.

<sup>94</sup> [Dear Son](#), page 146.

*After a few seemingly interminable minutes, Reizy completed her invective and exited Yaakov's study with a slam of the door.*

*"Oh boy," thought Yaakov to himself, "this was a big one. Alright, I'll just finish up a couple of things here and then I'll begin to try sorting things out with Reizy. It'll probably take me up to six hours to do so, but it needs to be done."*

*Lo and behold, after a very short time, Reizy came back in to Yaakov's study, but this time she was all contrite and apologetic. "I don't know what came over me," Reizy stammered, "to say such things to you. Of course, none of what I said is true, and it's not your fault at all. Please forgive me for having spoken like that. It's not true at all. You're always so nice and considerate..."*

An unmarried man (or a married one who has not yet learned how to negotiate such situations) can find such a thing extremely difficult to believe. As a matter of fact, he may even be suspicious of such behavior. At the very least, he may wonder if his wife is perhaps emotionally unstable. How could it be possible for a person to spit out such a vindictive attack and within a few moments be all contrite, apologetic and full of praise for the erstwhile object of their diatribe?! The answer is, in the words of one woman, "I don't know what came over me. I felt as if I was possessed by a demon." No, she is most definitely not possessed by a demon. But she is not able to control herself under the circumstances. Women's emotions are very powerful and run very, very deep. At times, a strain on those emotions can become so unbearable that it literally causes an explosion. When that happens, she has no ability whatsoever to stop it. At the same time, it is crucial to realize that she doesn't really mean it; at all! It is not her talking, it is her pain.

Therefore, a wise and mature husband will not allow such "assaults" to upset him at all. On the contrary, he will take it like a man and react only with care and concern and with a compassionate desire to ease her pain however much he can. He will happily remain silent in order to afford his wife, whom he loves so much, the opportunity to get it all off her chest. Then, he will profusely apologize for whatever it is that she has accused him, even if those accusations are completely fabricated. Because, again, that is not the point at all. She is hurting, deeply. She cannot control it. He wants to help her feel better and he'll do whatever he can to do that.

Nine times out of ten, if the husband keeps his cool and reacts only with silent compassion, the wife will afterward proffer her own profuse apologies for having wrongly accused him, just as in the story of Yaakov and Reizy. Even if she doesn't, though, perhaps because she is too embarrassed, you still won't take it to heart; for one thing is absolutely certain, whatever she says in those fits of flashing rage do not at all represent her true feelings about you.

### **Testiness**

This brings us to the next point: testiness. Although not possessing the "got you off guard" quality nearly as much, testiness is nevertheless another good example of putting a man's true mettle to the test (pun unintended). Because a woman so badly needs the love, appreciation, and approval of her

husband, she may at times act in a deliberately aggravating manner to see what his reaction will be. "For if he truly loves me," she thinks, "he will not get upset at me even though I am not acting in a nice way." Quite literally, she is testing him. She may make sharp comments or do things that are very upsetting just to see how he'll respond<sup>95</sup>.

You've got to take it like a man and realize that the way she is behaving does not at all reflect her true feelings about you. Actually, it is precisely because she loves and *adores* you so much that she is acting that way, because she so badly wants and needs to be convinced of that fact. Also, much more often than not a woman may be behaving in such a manner completely subconsciously. She is not making a conscious decision to act unpleasantly; it is her powerful, emotional undercurrent that is pushing her to it.

Some women may even act in this manner on a constant basis.

The *Gemara* in *Yevamos*<sup>96</sup> recounts how both *Rav* and his uncle *Rabi Chiyah* had cantankerous wives. Whatever *Rav* would request for supper, his wife would do her best to give him the exact opposite! Nevertheless, *Rav* learned from *Rabi Chiyah* the secret of how to deal with such a situation: "It is enough for us that our wives raise our children and save us from sin." In other words, you needn't take your wife's cantankerous behaviors so seriously. She does so much for you, don't you see? The *Gemara*<sup>97</sup> proceeds to recount another fascinating account.

*Rav Yehuda was learning with his son Rav Yitzchak the pasuk that says, "And I find that which is more bitter than death, the woman..."; whereupon Rav Yitzchak asked his father, "Like who?" Rav Yehudah answered, "Like your mother." Is that so? A different time Rav Yehudah was learning with his son Rav Yitzchak and taught him that a man only finds full contentment with his first wife, as the pasuk says, "Your source shall be blessed and be happy from the wife of your youth." Rav Yitzchak asked, "Like who?" Rav Yehudah answered, "Like your mother." The resolution to this apparent contradiction is that maskif tekifah, she could be very tough and harsh, v'avurei mi'avra b'milah, yet she was easy to pacify and she would let go of what was bothering her.*

The upshot of that statement is that it all depends on how the husband handles the situation. If, when she is in a flash of rage or is in general acting cantankerous, the husband gets insulted and returns fire; then he will spiral into a situation that is more bitter than death. But if he keeps his wits about him and responds with level-headed maturity, with a clear recognition that the negative behavior in front of his eyes is not at all a true representative of his wife, then he will succeed to navigate the situation such that his pleasure and contentment in life will be greater than imaginable. Sure, getting called names, having nasty comments directed at you, and ill-mannered spousal behavior stings and is not easy to deal with. Don't forget, though, that the *Ribbono shel Olam* gave you a powerful *seichel*. Use it well and you will reap the great rewards.

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<sup>95</sup> ע"פ יסוד זה, הרבה יותר קל להבין האיך נתקלו רבי חייא ורב עם נשים קנטרניות שהיו מצערות אותן כמבואר ביבמות סג. דלכ' קשה שעם היו רעות הרי אמרו חז"ל בסוטה ב. "אין מזווגין לו לאדם אשה אלא לפי מעשיו שנא' כי לא ינוח שבט הרשע על גורל הצדיקים". לכן ניחא לי למימר דזה שהיו מצערות אותם לא היה מכח רשעות אלא מכח מדה זו ששייך לימצא באשה.

<sup>96</sup> סג.

<sup>97</sup> שם ע"ב

## **Broaching Issues**

This does not mean that you should not try to do something to make the situation better. If you feel this is a too-oft recurring issue, you can definitely try to remedy the situation (but it's not a bad idea to first speak to a *pikniach* to see what he thinks about it). When you are both in a good mood and frame of mind, broach it with your wife. Just make sure that you don't do so in an accusatory manner. Keep the tone respectful and loving. Make sure to choose your words carefully. For example, instead of "why do you say...it's so hurtful," say this instead, "when you say...it makes me feel bad...perhaps you could use a gentler expression like..." That way, instead of making it a matter of her poor behavior, you are making it an issue of your sensitivities. Realize, though, that she may also have a few things to tell you, and you must keep an open mind to hearing that criticism despite whatever impressions you may have.

Another rule of thumb is that you should keep the comments brief. Just state your point, in a loving and non-accusatory manner, and go silent. In addition to not making her agitated from a long-winded presentation of what you're unhappy about, this also gives her an opportunity to absorb what you said and respond.

At times, it may be necessary to elicit outside assistance, like a *Rav* or marital therapist. If that's the case, make sure to find someone that you'll both be comfortable speaking to. The main thing is to always make sure to maintain a frame of mind that "whatever issues we may have, it is not about me versus her, it is about us; our marriage, how we together can work on it and improve." You and your wife are one unit and nothing can change that<sup>98</sup>.

After all is said and done, though, you need to realize that the most primary determining factor of how your wife is going to relate to you is how you handle her; particularly when she is upset or testy. *Sof kol sof*, the main responsibility lies squarely on your shoulders. As *Chazal* say<sup>99</sup>, "If **he** acts meritoriously she will be an *aizer*, a supportive force for him; and if **he** does not act meritoriously, she will be *k'negdo*, a warring opposing force." It is all up to you.

## **A Bit about Hormones**

Absolutely essential to be aware of, particularly in the context of this discussion, is that women have major things going on inside of them that greatly impact their mood and state of mind. One witty individual put it pithily like this: You are not marrying one woman, but three. One during the time when she is permitted to you, one during the time when she is forbidden to you, and one when she is pregnant.

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<sup>98</sup> One last point about this: at times it may be warranted to employ the *middah* of *miut sichah*. In other words, some couples may benefit from being around each other a little bit less. This approach, though, carries a certain danger to it that *c"v* they may grow distant from one another and therefore should not be put into practice without close guidance from a wise, objective third party.

<sup>99</sup> יבמות סג., ועיין רש"י בראשית ב:יח

In truth, that statement is only partially accurate. It could be broken down into many more distinctions. Pre-menstrual, menstrual, post-menstrual, post-mikveh, first trimester, second trimester, third trimester, during labor, post-birth, nursing, and so on. This can seem absolutely mind boggling to a man.

The fact of the matter is, though, that because of the cycle of major physical and chemical upheavals going on inside a woman, there could be any number of major mood-affecting hormones coursing powerfully through her blood stream at any given time. If you are to have any hope in navigating married life successfully, you absolutely need to be aware of this reality and calibrate your preparedness and responses accordingly.

For example, you may come home one day expecting to see your pretty, smiling wife waiting for you with a nice, warm supper ready on the table. Instead, you walk through the door and see nothing but a pile of dishes in the sink, a mess on the table and floor, and everything in a general state of disarray. You futilely say "Hello?" in a louder than usual voice to see if anyone is home. Beyond the stark silence, you seem to make out the faint sound of a long-suffering moan. Realizing that it apparently came from your bedroom, you make a beeline to find out what is going on. What you find inside your room hits you even harder than what you saw in the rest of the house. Your wife looks absolutely disheveled. She is in her bed, moaning and groaning, and there is a bowl next to her that has something inside of it that does not look particularly appealing. Worried, you ask "is everything ok?" But you are only met with another long groan, just louder than before. You slowly inch your way to her bed and lovingly sit yourself down next to her. As you begin to compassionately stroke her arm and are about to ask if there's anything you can do to help her, she practically yells, "Don't touch me! And get off my bed!" And the moaning and groaning continues.

What happened? Oh, nothing much. She just happens to be pregnant. Maybe neither of you are even aware of it yet. When it hits, though, it can hit hard. It is entirely possible that for most of the first trimester, yes three whole months, she may have very little to no interest in any form of physical affection. Ditto for after birth. Even after the roughly six weeks that she is forbidden to you, she may still be totally exhausted and drained from the constant sleep deprivation and nursing that she is dealing with, let alone the barrage of hormones rushing through her system. And that's all in addition to having gone through the beyond-describe physical-trauma of labor and birth! After all that, she may just not have much energy left for you, if at all. And that may continue for many months.

It is not possible to enumerate all the myriad fluctuations that women can go through as a result of their physical, hormonal cycles, because although there is a certain generality to it, it can vary greatly from one woman to the next how it precisely manifests itself. The main thing to realize, though, is that you've got to always keep your wits about you and stay cool and level headed. When all of a sudden you are confronted by something totally unexpected - whether it is an inexplicably profuse weepiness, sudden extreme neediness, bizarre volatility, or who knows what else - don't get all worked up.

Whether it is her emotional sensitivity in general or particular hormonal flux that is causing it, there is no reason for you to get upset, annoyed, dismayed, or insulted. Your wife is not crazy or weird. She is completely normal. Instead, keep your cool and do whatever you can to empathize with her and alleviate her distress if possible. Beyond that, though, just continue to conduct yourself as normal, albeit with sensitivity to her distress, and be a supporting, stabilizing bulwark of strength. You are the rock and anchor of your family. By keeping yourself even-keeled, you are keeping things steady with your marriage and family even when tempestuous storms create strong turbulence.

That being said, you do need to keep your eye out for possible signs of depression and the like. Particularly after birth, but not limited thereto. Because women undergo such intense hormonal and chemical shifts, they are more prone to contracting some form or other of psychological illness. Do not stick your head in the sand and just wish it away. If you suspect that your wife's symptoms are beyond the normal range, do reach out to someone who has knowledge and experience in these matters. The gynecologist and/or family doctor is a good place to start. Alternatively, you can contact a support center or mental health professional. Leaving issues unaddressed can inflict an untold amount of unnecessary suffering on your wife, yourself, and your whole family, in addition to causing much damage to the functioning of the family unit. So, if you suspect something, reach out and get help.

### ***Mistakes, Don't Let Them Get You Down***

As long as we are on the topic of not letting yourself get thrown off balance, it is worthwhile to mention that another thing you should not allow to derail you is mistakes. Even big ones. Many couples get into fights from time to time. Particularly early on in the marriage when experience and wisdom is at a premium. No, this is not an excuse to fight; but it is a simple reality. If you make marriage into a lifetime work of concerted effort towards employing maturity and wisdom to go about it the right way, then hopefully such occurrences will be few and far between and relatively mild, and over time it will cease to occur at all<sup>100</sup>. Also, the more you prepare beforehand by studying these matters b'iyun and thinking about them a lot, the more likely you are to avoid such pitfalls. Make no mistake, though, there will always be differences of opinion. The goal is to ever improve the way you handle those differences of opinion. To engage in mature, mutually respectful discussion about the issues instead of such differences becoming a battle of wills or *c"v* worse.

Nevertheless, despite your best efforts you may at some point make a mistake. Perhaps you were particularly exhausted and under a lot of intense pressure, and you just didn't manage to catch yourself; and before you know it you find yourself in a nasty altercation. If such a thing does happen, don't let yourself get bewildered and panicky about it. Don't brood in self-castigation or think that now you've ruined your *shalom bayis*. You've done no such thing. Yes, you've made a mistake. Perhaps even a big one. Realize, though, that it is completely normal. It can and does happen to the best of us<sup>101</sup>. One of the starkest points we see from the entire *Chumash* is that great people are not defined by how they never made mistakes, but by how they managed to pick up the pieces of their mistakes – even really big ones – and grow from the experience. Great people are not the ones who never make mistakes; they are the ones who despite their big mistakes keep shooting for the stars. The way to deal with such an eventuality, then, is to make up as quickly as possible. Take all the blame, even if you were not

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<sup>100</sup> By the way, disagreements are not fights. As Rav Reisman often says, there is no reason why two intelligent, thinking people cannot each view a given issue in their own way. A fight occurs when lack of agreement devolves into a confrontation. It is learning how to successfully negotiate disagreements and adopting the art of mutual respect and compromise that prevents disagreements from turning into fights.

<sup>101</sup> כדכתיב משלי כד:טז "שבע יפול צדיק וקם" ועיין בפרי צדיק (לר' צדוק הכהן מלובלין) פ' נצבים אות א'.

completely to blame. Apologize profusely. Perhaps even buy her a gift. You'll see, your harmony will be immediately restored.

