

# Shalom Bayis Booklet for Men

Written by a Rosh Kollel in Bet Shemesh, and reviewed by prominent Rabbanim

For questions or comments, please write to: [kuntreisim@gmail.com](mailto:kuntreisim@gmail.com)

The Kuntresim were sent to [www.guardyoureyes.com](http://www.guardyoureyes.com) with the following note:

I would like to share with you these two kuntreisim that I wrote on Shalom Bayis, one for men and one for women, which attempt to address the lack of essential knowledge in our community today. However, because of the sensitive nature of the work, I do not plan on selling it in stores, rather distributing it privately to chassan and kallah teachers, and then they would use their discretion to distribute it to their students as they see fit.

## 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. Therefore, one must not rely only on this work. It is very important to read a number of different works and/or listen to varied classes to get a nicely rounded picture of all the myriad, multi-faceted components of married life and how to successfully deal therewith.

Just as important is the awareness that learning these *inyanim* one time before getting married or during the first *tekufah* 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

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<sup>1</sup> ה"ל מגילה וחנוכה ד"י

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. אכ"ר.

## מוצא או מצא – The Bedrock of a Successful Marriage

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 a 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 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 *ishes 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

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<sup>2</sup> .ח

<sup>3</sup> משלי יח:כב

<sup>4</sup> קהלת ז:כו

<sup>5</sup> .ז

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>.

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'.

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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 דייני שמצילות אותנו מן החטא והשרוי בלא אשה שרוי בלא חומה וכו' וכתוב ובחטא יחמתני אמי וכו' כידוע. אז מה כוונתו באומר 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 הנישואים 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 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 תאוותו (אבל באוילותו ימות ולא יא 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 מכוון 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 וחכמתו לקיימם כפי אשר תשיג ידו.

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."*

*"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

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<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.

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>.

### 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

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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 ראיה 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 אהבת הבריות העזה שבערה בלבו להראות לכל אחד נקודה הטובה האמיתית שבחברו, 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.

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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<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." ומהדברים 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 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.



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 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

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<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.

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 יותר 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:

כגופו, that a man should be honoring<sup>14</sup> his wife more than himself and love her as much as he loves himself.

### 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

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<sup>13</sup>13 טו:יט

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

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 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.'*

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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.

*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 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*

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

<sup>18</sup> סב.

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 *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 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

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

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 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

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<sup>20</sup>וענין חשיבות הגדולה והדגולה של אהבת איש ואשתו אינו צריך לפנינו שהרי במסכת ידיים 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 משבחה אי בתורה משתעי קרא כמה טובה אשה טובה שהתורה נמשלה בה." וכן בשה"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...אבהו ואחוה..." ויש להאריך בזה טובא.

<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 שאי 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 בידינו 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

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>!

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 *yeshivish* 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, *yeshivish* 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*

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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!

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

*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 *ishes ish*, so too is there a very serious danger that this type of cavalier 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.

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

<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.



### 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.

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

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

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 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.

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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.”

## Your Kavod is Her Kavod

*"I went to Rav Yechezkel Sarna's house and he received me with great honor."*

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>.*

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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 (Artscroll) page 321.

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 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.

### Always On Your Mind

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

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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.

*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 questioners<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!

## 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.

#### 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

<sup>39</sup>.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 הוא כמאן דאתפליג וכד מתחברן דכר ונוקבא כדין אתעבידו חד גופא 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 שריו 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..."



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 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.*

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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 ולעליה. 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."

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 Kolliel, 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 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,

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

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.

### 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<sup>46</sup>. 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

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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.

spirit of Torah and it causes all sorts of problems with jealousy, pride, and more. One does need to 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.

### Respectful and Respectable

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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:

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.

### 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 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>.

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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' דאייתא התם דהא דצריך לומר עשרתם ערביתם הדליקו את הנר צריך לאומרו בלשון רכה כדאייתא 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.

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

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

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 *zemiros* with feeling and passion, have a solid learning-*sefer*, 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'oraysah* 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 *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*. Create 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

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

<sup>56</sup>גיטין נט:

<sup>57</sup>הל' מגילה ד:ד

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>.

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-*

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<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" (סי' רס"ג סע' 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.

<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 ביחודא כי היכי דליקבלינהו מיניה."

*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. 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

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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 מאחרת 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".



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 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

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<sup>64</sup> במכתב, מובא בספר אורחות רבינו ח"ה בפרק "קדושה" אות ס"ז.

<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'.

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 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

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<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.

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

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 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."

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<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."

<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".

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 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

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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 דכין 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 לאחרים."

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!" 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

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<sup>74</sup>תפארת אבות עמוד ט"ז

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

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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'

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 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?”*

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<sup>77</sup> כמבואר בשבת סד:

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 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

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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.



uninfluential to his treatment of those around him<sup>80</sup>, but that's a very hard thing to do which most 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 *Maharal*<sup>84</sup> points out that although there is an *issur d'oraysah* 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 *Maharal*, 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

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

<sup>81</sup> כמבואר בחובות הלבבות שער ט' שער הפרישות פרק ד' שכתב "כאשר אמר קצת החסידים הפרוש צהלתו בפניו ואבלו בלבנו." 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

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.

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 שכל שאם א' מתירא שלא ישל 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 ה"ל 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>.

### 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*

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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 במ פושעים יכשלו במ (ב"ב פט:).

<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 כדאמרינן לעיל ו"ל דלמא נמי הלכה לצורך רבים שבת ראש הגולה היתה והיו רבים צריכים ממנה".

<sup>92</sup> ברכות נא:

*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."*

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*

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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.

*and just remained silent. He allowed Reizy to get her whole tirade and diatribe against him off her chest. 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.

## Broaching Issues

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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>ג.

<sup>97</sup>שם ע"ב

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 *pikeiach* 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.

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.

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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, ועין רש"י בראשית ב:יח



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

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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'.



## PART TWO ופקדת נוך

### Serious Obligation

A man has a *chiyuv d'oraysoh* to provide his wife with marital intimacy. ועונתה לא יגרע. Like any *mitzvah*, this obligation has specific parameters. If these parameters are not met the *mitzvah* is not fulfilled. This is no different from holding *dalet minim* except that one of the *aravos* was accidentally inserted upside down. He's not *yotzei*; at all. Period. That is why you need to be careful that when you do a *mitzvah*, you do it right. Otherwise, all the time, money, and effort expended will be for naught. Sure, you'll get *schar* for trying, but the *mitzvah* itself you don't have if its defining parameters are not upheld.

However, when it comes to *mitzvas onah*, if the defining parameters are not upheld, aside from being *mevatel* a *mitzvah*, there is an element that is particularly *chamur*. Namely, that this *mitzvah* pertains to an obligation that you have towards another person. Both by Torah mandate and by specific contractual agreement you are obligated to provide your wife with marital intimacy. If you fall short of the mark and do not provide her with that which you are obligated, in the words of the *Steipler Gaon zt"l* such a man is "a total sinner, and this sin pertains to *ben adam la'chaveiro* that even *Yom Kippur* and death does not atone, and behold he is like a thief and bandit for he has stolen from his wife that which he is obligated to her, and this is bloodshed for a woman."

He continues that a man who carries out intercourse without following the parameters by which one is actually providing his wife with her needs, then "she is as if placed before a lion who pounces and eats...she has no fulfillment from it. On the contrary, she is pained and shamed, and she cries inside herself [over her plight], and her tears do not go for naught...and he is certainly arousing harsh judgments upon himself, and he will not merit any Heavenly assistance – not in material matters nor in spiritual matters...for from sins and iniquities one causes only damage and becomes sullied<sup>102</sup>."

Basically, you get the point. This is serious business. As a married man, you have very serious obligations to your wife, and you need to make sure that you do your utmost to fulfill them properly. So, let's try to gain a solid understanding of the parameters of this *mitzvah*.

### Establishing a Definition

Everything that will follow rests on one major, basic *yesod*: *mitzvas onah* is not an obligation to perform intercourse with one's wife. It is not just a simple act of *k'mikchol bi'shfoferes*. That is *biah*, no different from a *maaseh beheimah*. Rather, ***mitzvas onah* is an obligation to utilize the act of intercourse as a means of performing the quintessential act of marital intimacy.** It is the supreme unification between husband and wife, wherein they are fused together on all levels: spiritual, emotional, and physical. The physical facet of this unification is just that, a facet. It is one component of this unification. True, it is the key component, but it is crucial to understand that it both serves as the vehicle to access the emotional and spiritual unification and the manifestation thereof as well. Always remember this most basic point that *mitzvas onah* is not *biah*, it is marital intimacy.

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<sup>102</sup> אורחות רבינו ח"ה בפרק קדושה אות ס"ז

To further elucidate what this means, we'll start with a quote from Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt"l<sup>103</sup>.

*A man is prone to being "bribed" by [the] physical closeness [of marital intimacy]. He believes that the closeness between him and his wife is already complete, thinking, "What an incredible closeness of v'hayu l'basar echad; what could possibly be missing?!" Yes, the physical closeness [of intimacy] is a strong "bribe". It does not even occur to him that he is still very far from true closeness. However, his wife is not at all bribed by the physical closeness. On the contrary, during the physical contact she experiences a suspended pain that there is still no emotional closeness! We must realize: intimacy is the peak of closeness, but [the attainment of] every peak necessarily must be preceded by [a development] stage to reach it. **Physical closeness without emotional closeness is an affront to a woman!** It is primarily the emotional closeness and loving-attention that is the desire of the woman. If that relationship is present then she also yearns for the physical closeness. However, if her husband does not demonstrate consistent and ongoing emotional closeness, consideration, care, and devotion she literally recoils from the physical intercourse, for physical closeness that does not emanate from emotional closeness makes her feel painfully degraded.*

As one wise individual put it, women are relationship beings. For women, it is all about the emotional bond that is attained through the **medium** of marital intimacy<sup>104</sup>. Without that, she feels that she is just being used. She is his *cheftza* to fulfill his lust. Like a piece of meat. Like the lion's supper that he just pounces on his prey and doesn't care at all if it is dead yet or not. The lion does not care a whit about his prey. All he knows is that he has an urge to eat, so he commences consumption regardless. So too, says the *Gemara*<sup>105</sup>, is the manner in which an *am ha'aretz* carries out intercourse with his wife, "he hits and is *boel*." All he is focused on is his lust. Perhaps when he is so in heat he may even get so physically rough that he is actually smacking and hitting her. Sure, she is also human and she was also created with a physical drive for intercourse. But for her that is so secondary; the emotional component is by far the primary focus for her. So, if all he cares about is his lust and he is effectively just using her, of course she is going to feel degraded, ashamed, and so terribly betrayed. *Biah* it is, but it is the diametrical opposite of *mitzvas onah*, of marital intimacy. She may get so burned out by such treatment that despite her own physical desire she may come to literally loathe and despise it.

### Reciprocal Relationship

Therefore, in order for her to feel pleasure in the act – actually process as we shall soon learn – of intimacy, it must be done in a way that she feels it is an expression of and a vehicle to achieving emotional closeness. Another key point, as we see from Rav Wolbe's words, is that if he only treats her well when he needs to carry out *mitzvas onah*, but he falls short in terms of their general relationship, then it will just not cut it. She will see that he doesn't really mean it. He is only doing it either because he realizes that this is the best way for him to get the most out of her, or perhaps even because he feels *halachikly* bound, but it is not because he truly loves and cares for her; for if he did why wouldn't he treat her well all the time.

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<sup>103</sup> בקונטרס מאמרי הדרכה לחתנים, שיחה חמישית

<sup>104</sup> היינו שלאשה אין התשמיש אלא כהיכי-תמצא בעלמא להשגת הקרובה האמיתית

<sup>105</sup> פסחים מט:

Understanding this point is key: just as dysfunction in the bedroom will necessarily cause problems in general *shalom bayis*, so too will dysfunction in general *shalom bayis* cause problems in the bedroom. It is impossible to have one without the other. If you want intimate life to go well, you absolutely must make sure that your relationship with your wife in general is healthy and positive - that you are close and devoted. So too, if you want your relationship and *shalom bayis* in general to be good, you must make sure that intimacy is going well.

Even if you theoretically would not care about one or the other (in which case you should seek professional help), it is your responsibility – *m'doraysoh*, *m'drabbanan*, and by specific contractual agreement – to do so. One who does not carry out his marital responsibilities properly is a *chotei gamur*. At the same time, realize that when you do fulfill your responsibilities properly, you will personally benefit and enjoy a pleasure that until you get there you simply cannot imagine. And this pleasure is not only spiritual and emotional. You will also achieve a degree of physical pleasure that you never could have imagined existed.

What we see, then, thus far, is that the very first thing a man needs to do in order to fulfill *mitzvas onah* is to make sure that his relationship in general with his wife is good, loving, close, and positive. In addition to its independently enormous significance, it also serves as the necessary precursor to a healthy and successful intimate life.

### Frequency

The general guideline prescribes that couples are meant to be intimate twice a week, with one of those times ideally being on *leil Shabbos*<sup>106</sup>. Regarding *leil Shabbos*, that is a *mitzvah l'chatchila* of *oneg Shabbos*. If there is any reasonable justification (even if it is a relatively minor consideration) to shift that *onah* to a different night, there is nothing wrong with that<sup>107</sup>. Certainly, if the reason is that either husband or wife are tired and it will negatively affect their mutual pleasure, that is an extremely significant consideration (as we will learn later) and definitely justifies, and perhaps even mandates moving that *onah* to a different night, even if that switch becomes fixed and permanent and they never wind up being intimate on Shabbos.

The frequency of twice a week, though, is not simply an ideal or a suggestion, but a full-fledged obligation that you have towards your wife<sup>108</sup>. The word *onah* literally means time, in the sense that

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<sup>106</sup> שו"ע או"ח סי' ר"פ סע' א', אג"מ אבה"ע חלק א' סי' ק"ב

<sup>107</sup> אג"מ שם. ולענין מה שהביאו האחרונים את דברי האריז"ל שאין לשמש אלא בשבת, עיין באג"מ אבה"ע ח"ג סי' כ"ח שהרבה להשיב על זה שהוא נגד ההלכה, וסיים שם "ולמעשה ודאי צריך לעשות כהלכה הפסוקה". וע"ש לעיל מיניה בסמוך שכתב "ולכן ברור ופשוט שצריך לבעול בכל עונה אף בחול ובליל טבילה וכשהוא יוצא לדרך כפי הדין המפורש ובזכות המצוה יתן ה' נפש קדושה אף שהוא בחול".

<sup>108</sup> ב"ה סי' ר"מ סע' א' ד"ה ת"ח, אג"מ אבה"ע חלק ג' סי' כ"ח "כל זמן שלא עבר השבת אין זה ענין תשלומין אלא עדיין הוא החיוב עצמו דאף דעבר יום שקבע עדיין יכול לקיימה בימים שאחר השבת דלא נפטר מחיובו בשביל שעבר הלילה שהורגל לקיים בו חיובו... אבל עכ"פ מסברא יש מקום לומר דשייך תשלומין היינו שמתפייסת עי"ז יותר מפיוס בעלמא והוא כהחזיר לה הנאה יתירה תחת הצער, או מטעם שכתב דבידעת שישלם לה הוא כיש לה פת בסלו שאינה מצטערת כל כך, אף שודאי אינם סברות ברורות ואולי בשביל זה הוא ספק הא"ר... ובשלא כדרכה ברור שליכא בזה מצות עונה דהא הוא דבר האסור... ודאי הוא גרוע ממה שלא נקרא קדוש... וממילא לא שייך שיהיה בזה קיום מצות עונה ובפרט שנקרא בלשון עיניו... וביומא דף פ"ב כתבו התוס' גם דא"א שלא תהנה קצת אבל ודאי העינוי יותר מהנהגה, ואין שום ספק בזה דלא כדכתב בעזר מקודש שם שמתפק בזה. גם מש"כ אולי יוצא י"ח גם בהערה ונשיקה, ברור שלא יצא דהא יש לה תאוה ביותר באמצע הביאה דהא כל שתחלתה באונס אמר רבא בכתובות דף נ"א דאפילו סופה ברצון דאומרת הניחו לו שאלמלא לא נזקק

now is the time for intimacy that you owe her. If you do not provide her with all the times of being intimate of which you are obligated, you are a *gazlan*. Not *like* a *gazlan*; rather, a real, bona fide thief<sup>109</sup>. A man who does not give an *onah* to his wife is no different than an employer who withholds wages from his employee or a borrower who refuses to repay the loan. A *gazlan*. Plain and simple.

If you have a particularly taxing and/or time-consuming profession, or otherwise feel too weak in general to provide two nights of intimacy per week, it may be permissible for you to cut it down. On the other hand, if you have an easy, cushy job (or don't really need a job b/c you already have plenty of money) and you feel strong enough to provide more than twice a week, you may very well be obligated to increase the frequency, in certain circumstances even up to every night<sup>110</sup>. The guideline of twice a

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לה היא שוכרתו מותרת לבעלה ישראל דנחשב אונס דיצר אלבשה הרי דקשה לפניה מאד לפסוק הביאה עד שהוא בדין אונס, שא"כ הצער גדול מאד כשפורש ממנה קודם גמר ביאה, וכן מצינו שהצער להאישי גדול מאד כשנשמטה ממנו קודם גמר ביאה בסוטה דף ט', ואיך שייך שיוצא בזה דהא עדיף היה לה שלא היה נזדקק לה כלל מהפרישה באמצע וצ"ע, ולדינא לא יצא בהעראה ולא בשלא כדרכה.

ספן שבזה"ז שנסיעתו בהליכה וחזרה שבוע ועשרה ימים...כשיושב אח"כ בביתו ואינו עושה כלום כטייל איזה חדשים, דפשוט לע"ד דאף בזמן שהיה הספן שוהה בדרכו ששה חדשים אם נזדמן שעשה דרכו בפחות מחצי זמן כדמצינו שאירע כן לאלכסנדרוס מוקדן בסוכה דף נ"א, ואף בדרך נס לא יפטר מעונה כשישב אח"כ טייל בביתו, והזמן נאמר על הזמן שמוותר לשהות בדרך ואין לו למחר מדרך הספנים ששוהין כל כך זמן אף שאפשר לו לפעמים לקצר. וכ"ש כשפרנסתו הוא מנסיעות למדינות רחוקות להביא סחורה שמתחלה היו שוהין כחצי שנה ויותר ועתה הוא רק שעות שודאי לא נפטר אלא אחרי שנשאר לישיב בביתו תלוי זמן ההוא במה שעושה בביתו אם טייל אם פועל, ורק יש למילף שאינו מחוייב להחזיר מדרכו שודאי כל הנוסעים לפרנסתן שוהין איזה שבועות בהמדינה ההיא לצורך מסחרם מצד ריבוי ההוצאה שלא שייך שיסעו לשם בכל שבוע אף שרק שעות אחדות היא הנסיעה, שרשאי להשהות כדרך הסוחרים שנוסעים לשם כמותו אף שהוא כבר גמר עניניו בפחות, אבל כשבא לביתו שוב הוא בימים שהוא בבית כמו האנשים הקבועים בפה כטייל ופועל

יהיה מתורץ לפ"ז מה שלכאורה קשה על הא דהטיילין בכל יום הא אין רוח חכמים נוחה ממי שרגיל אצל אשתו ביותר ובשביל זה תיקנו טבילה לבעלי קרי כדי שלא יהיו ת"ח מצוין אצל נשותיהן כתרנגולין כדאיתא ברמב"ם פ"ד מתפלה ה"ד ואיך שייך תקנה זו להטיילין שמחוייב אדרבה לבעול בכל יום ועיין בש"ע סימן ר"מ שנקט סתם בסעיף א' לא יהא רגיל ביותר עם אשתו ולא הזכיר ת"ח כלשון הגמ' ברכות דף כ"ב ולשון הרמב"ם וגם לשון הטור שנאמר שלא יהיו ת"ח מצוין אצל נשותיהן כתרנגולין וכתב בבאר הגולה דהוא משום דה"ה בכל אדם וכוונתו דלשון ת"ח לאו דוקא, וכתב הגר"א ע"ז וכן מוכרח דהא על הכל גזר טבילה ולא רק על ת"ח, וגם במג"א סק"א איתא בטיילין שחייבין בכל יום הוא אפילו בבני תורה והוא משום שמפרש דהא שאמר רב כגון ר' שמואל בר שילת בכתובות דף ס"ב הוא כפשוטו אף ר"ש בר שילת, ואף להב"ש סימן ע"ו סק"א דת"ח אף שהוא טייל הוא בעונת ת"ח ומ"ש בש"ס כגון ר"ש בר שילת הוא דוגמא בעלמא כגון ר"ש ולא ר"ש עיין שם, נמי הא דוקא ת"ח שתורתן אומנתן ואף שמסתבר שאין כוונתו דוקא תורתן אומנתן כרשב"י וחבריו אבל עכ"פ הוא דוקא ת"ח שעיקרן הוא למודם תורה ולומדים גם בלילה כלשון המג"א שבחול צריכין לעסוק בתורה בלילה. וא"כ סתם בני תורה שאין עוסקים כל זמנם בתורה יש להו דין טיילין שחייבין בכל יום אף להב"ש ובשבילם הא מפורש שתיקנו לטבול כדי שלא יהיו מצוין אצל נשותיהם, וגם הא ברור ופשוט שהדין עם באה"ג והגר"א שלא יהא אדם רגיל עם אשתו ביותר הוא לכל אדם מהא דתיקן עזרא הטבילה לכל אדם שתמוה איך שייך להו למעט, אבל לפ"מ שכתבתי ניחא דכיון שבשביל התקנה דצריך לטבול לתורה ולתפלה שהוא טירחא גדולה לפניו הוא נמנע מלשמש בכל יום הרי לא תעלה לה מחשבה שמחמת שאינו אוהבה אינו מזדקק לה, וגם לטעם שמשותקת בטיילין יותר נמי בידעה שהוא טירחא גדולה לפניו לא משותקת אליו יותר מאם היה פועל. ונמצא שמצד התקנת עזרא דטבילה לתורה ולתפלה ליכא לטיילין העונה דבכל יום והמשנה נשנית לקודם תקנת עזרא או לאחר שבטלו לטבילותא כר"י בן בתירא.

ובדבר מה שחדשו האחרונים שהביא הפ"ת סימן ע"ו סק"ג בשם מעיל צדקה שיש לת"ח בזה"ז לקיים עונה שנים בשבת ובבאר הלכה סימן ר"מ הביא כן גם מהחכ"א בשם צואת ר"י מפראג וכתר"ה כותב שכן הורו גם גאוני זמננו, הנה גם אני אומר כן, ואני מוסיף דלפ"מ שכתבתי שעיקר העונה הוא מה שהאשה משותקת ומתאוה, וכיון שכתב הפ"ת בשם ספר מעיל צדקה דהוא משום פריצת הדור וקנאת ירך חברתה הרי בא מזה תשוקה ותאוה ליותר מפעם אחת שלכן נמצא שהוא מעיקר העונה ואף שלא הכיר בעלה בזה יש לתלות שהוא מצד הבושה וגודל הצניעות דהרי בשביל זה קבעו הזמנים כדכתבתי לעיל ולכן שפיר הורו דיש ליעץ וגם לחייב שתי פעמים בשבת

<sup>109</sup>מכתב הסטייפלר גאון צ"ל, מובא בספר אורחות רבינו ח"ה פרק הקדושה סי' ס"ז. ובאמת דבר זה פשוט למאוד הוא ואינו ואינו צריך לשום ראייה, שהרי לא גרע חיוב זה מכל שאר חיובים, וזיל קרי בי רב הוא ועונתה לא יגרע!  
<sup>110</sup>כל זה כתבנו ע"פ המבואר באו"ח סי' ר"מ סע' א' ובמ"ב וב"ה שם

week is a general standard. If you suspect that you may be an exception to the rule in either direction, speak to a competent *Rav* who can advise you about this.

Of course, as with any monetary-like obligation, your wife can waive her rights if she so pleases, in which case you'd be allowed to skip an *onah* after you have at least one boy and one girl<sup>111</sup>. You'd better be real sure, though, that her *mechila* is wholehearted<sup>112</sup>. Otherwise, you're playing with fire<sup>113</sup>. With women, it is no easy task to know if they really mean it. As we explicated above at length, the feminine language heavily relies on intuiting what the other person really means, as opposed to the emphasis of statutory analysis inherent in male communication. So, tread very carefully.

If she needs more than twice a week, you are obligated to provide, assuming that you have the physical strength to do so. Any time you notice that she is trying to attract you – whether by flirting with you, wearing certain clothes makeup or jewelry<sup>114</sup>, or even by quarrelling with you<sup>115</sup> (!) and you realize it's

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<sup>111</sup> (שו"ע אבה"ע סי' ע"ו סע' ו') Otherwise, the *mitzvah* of רובו פרו obligates you to engage in intimacy every *onah*.  
<sup>112</sup> כדמבואר באגר"מ אבה"ע ח"א סי' ק"ב שכתב "אם האשה מוחלת בלב שלם פטור", הרי שדקדק לכתוב בלב שלם. וכמו"כ מבואר נמי מדברי הלח"מ בהלכות אישות פרק ט"ו הלכה א' שכתב לחלק בין מי שקידש אשה ע"מ שאין לה עליו עונה דאמרינן דתנאו בטל משום דהוי צערא דגופא ולא ניתן למחילה לבין אשה שהרשת לבעלה למנוע עונתה אחר הנישואין דקיי"ל שמוטר, וזה לשונו "שאני התם דאמרינן ודאי היא לא מחלה צערא דגופא אלא מפני שרוצה להתקדש לו משום טב למיתב טן דו מלמיתב ארמלו ולא הוי מחילה גמורה... אבל אחר הנישואין כיון שהיא הרשתה את בעלה הא מחלה בלב שלם ודוחק. אי נמי דהכא נמי אינה מוחלת אלא שכ"ז שהיא אינה תובעת ונותנת לו רשות מותר לו להמנע אבל בידה לתבוע כל עת שתרצה." והנה לפי תירוץ הראשון ודאי מבואר להדיא דאין המחילה מועלת אא"כ היא בלב שלם. ואף לפי תירוץ השני נראה ברור דהכין הויא, דלא הוקשה לו בתירוץ הראשון אלא זה שיתכן מחילה עולמית אחר הנישואין משום שאין לנו טעם אחר לתלות מחילתה עליו, דזה דוחק דסוף סוף מחילה עולמית הרי צערא דגופא הוא ולא ניתן למחילה. לכן תירץ דענין המחילה אחר הנישואין היינו לבינתיים, כלומר בינתיים היא מרשה אותו למנוע עונתה אבל לעולם בידה לשוב ולתבוע אותה כל עת שתרצה, וכה"ג שפיר איכא למימר ביה דמחילתה מחילה, אבל כלפי ההנחה הפשוטה דבעינן מחילה גמורה בלב שלם אין שום טעם לומר שתירוץ שני יחלוק על תירוץ ראשון בפרט זה ואדרבה אפושי פלוגתא לא מפשינן. ומזה עצמו רואים בעליל שלפעמים אשה תאמר בפיה הסכמה על איזהשהו דבר ובאמת אינה מסכמת אלא שיש לה סיבה אחרת למה היא אומרת כן. וידוע דזה מצוי מאוד אצל הנשים כלפי בעליהן שמסכימות לענין מה משום שאינה רוצה להרגיזו או משום שרוצה לעשות לו נחותא אבל באמת אינה רוצה כן בלבה, ולפעמים אף מצטערות מאוד על זה שרואה שאין בעלה מבין ללבה ואינו שם לב לצרכיה ורצונותיה, אלא דבכל זאת מתנהגת ככה בדרכן של נשים כשרות שעושות רצון בעליהן, אבל כמובן אין זה פטור הבעל מחיוביו.

<sup>113</sup> כדאיתא בכתובות סב: "כי הא דרב רחומי הוה שכיח קמיה דרבא במחוזא הוה רגיל דהוה אתי לביתיה כל מעלי יומא דכיפורי יומא חד משכתייה שמעתא הוה מסכיא דביתיה השתא אתי השתא אתי לא אתא חלש דעתה אחית דמעתא מעינה הוה יתיב באיגרא אפחית איגרא מתותיה ונח נפשיה... ברירה דר' חייא חתניה דר' ינאי הוה אזיל ויתב בבי רב וכל בי שמישי הוה אתי לביתיה וכי הוה אתי הוה קא חזי קמיה עמודא דנורא יומא חד משכתייה שמעתא כיון דלא חזי ההוא סימנא אמר להו רבי ינאי כפו מטתו שאילמלי יהודה קיים לא ביטל עונתו הואי כשגגה שיוצא מלפני השליט ונח נפשיה." ש"מ דענין חמור מאוד הוא לבטל עונת אשתו! ועיין עוד בטור או"ח סי' ר"פ.

<sup>114</sup> טור אבה"ע סי' כ"ה, חכמת אדם שער בית הנשים כלל קכ"ח סע' י"ט, ועיין עוד באגר"מ אבה"ע חלק ג' סי' כ"ח וז"ל "ולענ"ד היה נראה דעיקר העונה הוא בשעה שרואה הבעל שהיא משתוקקת אל בעלה שלכן אמר רבא בפסחים דף ע"ב חייב אדם לשמח את אשתו בדבר מצוה שפרש"י אפילו שלא בשעת עונתה אם רואה שמתאוית לו... שהוא חיוב גמור מדאורייתא אלמא שמפרש כן הקרא דועונתה לא יגרע על זה שחייב לשמחה בשעה שרואה שמתאוית לו, וכן ביוצא לדרך שאמר ריב"ל ביבמות דף ס"ב דחייב לפוקדה מטעם זה שהאשה משתוקקת שהוא ודאי חיוב מדאורייתא... עכ"פ כיון דחזינן שמה שהאשה מתאוית ומשתוקקת עושה חיוב עונה מדאורייתא, מסתבר שזהו עיקר חיוב העונה שבתורה, וכן מפורש בלשון הראב"ד שהביא הטור באו"ח סימן ר"מ שהכוונה הג' היא כשהיא משתוקקת כשהיא מניקה שמכיר בה בזה וכן בצאתו לדרך שברור לו שהיא משתוקקת אלא אף שלא ראה היכר דהא כן אמדו חכמים היא מצות עונה האמורה בתורה ומה שחושב זה בכוונה הג' הוא משום דהראשונה והשניה איכא תרתיה גם מצות פ", ובלשון הראב"ד עצמו בספרו בעלי הנפש שער הקדושה איתא והיא היא מצות העונה שאמרה תורה דמיון שארה כסות שהם צרכי האשה והנאותיה, שלשון זה משמע שזהו עיקר עונה האמורה בתורה שלכן כתב והיא היא בכפל לשון, וגם דומה זה לשארה כסותה שאין זה ענין התלוי בזמן אלא תלוי ברצונה וצורכה לאכול ולשתות ובצורכה לבגד, כמו כן הוא עונתה שנאמר שם דג"כ הוא בעת צורכה שהוא בשעה שמשתוקקת דרק אז הוא צורכה, אבל מחמת דרוב הנשים הן צנועות ולא ניכר כל כך רצונם שיש אנשים הרבה שלא יכירו שהיא מתאוה לזה ע"י עניני חבה שמראה לפניו... קבעו חכמים זמנים שאמדו לבד כח האיש אלא גם דעת הנשים שרובן לא ישתוקקו ליותר בידעם בטרדת הבעל. ובטיילין שיש לו כח וגם זמן בכל יום אולי אמדו שהאשה בידעה ג"כ שיש לו כח וזמן תהא משתוקקת בכל יום, אך זה



because she wants your intimate attention – you are obligated to take due note and provide. Having to attend night seider, needing to catch up on work, or just not feeling like it is no excuse. You are *mechuyav*. Plain and simple<sup>116</sup>.

Of course, if couples want to, they can engage in intimacy as often as they please. The *Gemara* does say that it is unbecoming of *Talmidei Chachamim* to frequent their wives the way roosters frequent chickens<sup>117</sup> and the *Tur*<sup>118</sup> explains that really this applies to everyone and the reason the *Gemara* mentioned *Talmidei Chachamim* is that they're generally the ones who are careful about these things. In the words of Rav Beryl Povarsky *shlitah*, a person ought not make his whole life about *tashmish*. This is not only out of consideration of avoiding over indulgence of *taavah*. It is unhealthy to have *tashmish* too often<sup>119</sup>. Also, it can have a negative impact on *shalom bayis* if you significantly overdo it. Strictly speaking, though, during *yemei heter* couples are not limited to any number of times that they can engage in intimacy.

During *shana rishona* couples may feel a strong desire to engage in intimacy very often, and that is perfectly normal. They don't need to feel bad about it even if they find themselves engaging in intimacy during *yemei heter* every night. As a matter of fact, there are significant sources that indicate that this is *l'chatchila* how couples should behave during *shana rishona*<sup>120</sup>.

As time moves on, though, you should be aiming to even out at about two times per week; not as a *chok v'lo yaavor*, but as a general parameter. There still may be considerations, though, that may call for couples being intimate more often. An example of this is if one or both spouses are going through a tough time. Sometimes this may require couples to cut down (if less than twice a week, only with your wife's explicit, full consent), but other times this can be a reason for them to increase the frequency. It is also possible that some people are just built with a stronger need for *tashmish* and need it more often<sup>121</sup>.

You have to use your wisdom and understanding to calibrate it properly. And don't hesitate to consult with your *Rav* or *Rebbi* (or any other experienced and reliable mentor such as a frum health

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לא מסתבר לכאורה שתהא משתוקקת בכל יום אלא הוא מטעם אחר מחמת שתחשוב שודאי אם היה אוהבה היה מזדקק לה, דהרי יודעת שגם האישי יש לו תאוה ועוד יתירה מהאשה... שלכן תחשוב שהוא מחמת שאינו אוהבה ותצטער מזה הרבה אולי עוד יותר מעצם מניעת התשמיש ולכן חייבו בכל יום".  
115 חמכת אדם שער בית הנשים כלל קכ"ח סע' י"ט

<sup>116</sup> This does not mean that you necessarily have to cancel your night seider (or other plans) when it is a *mitzvas onah* night, it just means that if it is necessary to do so in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* properly, then that is what you need to do.

<sup>117</sup> ברכות כב.

<sup>118</sup> או"ח ריש סי' ר"מ

<sup>119</sup> כמו שאמרו בשבת קנב. כל השטוף בזמה זקנה קופצת עליו, ועיין ברמב"ם הל' דעות פרק דהל' י"ט "שכבת זרע היא כח הגוף וחיו ומאור העינים וכל שתצא ביותר הגוף כלה וכחו כלה וחיו אובדים הוא שאמר שלמה בחכמתו אל תתן לנשים חילך כל השטוף בבעילה זקנה קופצת עליו וכחו תשש ועיניו כהות וריח רע נודף מפיו ומשחיו ושער ראשו וגבות עיניו וריסי עיניו נושרות ושער זקנו ושחיו ושער רגליו רבה שיניו נופלות והרבה כאבים חוץ מאלו באים עליו אמרו חכמי הרופאים אחד מאלף מת בשאר חלאים והאלף מרוב התשמיש."

<sup>120</sup> בעל הטורים פ' כי תצא כד:ה, פמ"ג סי' ר"מ א"א ס"ק ג', שו"ת ציץ אליעזר חלק י' סי' י"ג סוף אות ג'.

<sup>121</sup> באגרות קודש להסטייפילר גאון זצ"ל באגרת י' כתב וז"ל "אם מי שנפל במרא שחורה וניסה לאבד א"ע ר"ל...אולי ללמד לאשתו שתגיד לו דברי ידידות וקירוב והנה אולי הוא נוהג בענין מצות עונה בצמצום ובאמת זהו רפואתו כמ"ש בסידור יעב"ץ ואצלי היה אחד שנפל לדכאון גדול ומתוך הדברים התברר שמתוך לימוד בספרי מוסר אינו מקיים מצות עונה אלא פ"א בשבת וגם זה מתוך הרבה הכנות ודוקא בדיוק בחצות ובמהירות וכו' ואמרתיו לו שירבה במצות עונה אפילו ג' וד' פעמים בשבוע ואפילו יותר ובקירוב וחיבוק ונישוק וכו' ותל"ת הוא חזר ונעשה בריא גמור וראינו בחוש שעצת היעב"ץ ז"ל מועלת מאוד."

professional) if need be. Although this *inyan* is extremely private and must be guarded as such, the precept of “*Torah hee v’lilmod ani tzarich*” nevertheless applies<sup>122</sup>.

### It’s a Process

This segues very nicely into the beginning stage of the intimacy process. For, truly, that is what it is: a process. It cannot be emphasized enough that to do this right, you have got to get out of your head the notion that *mitzvas onah* is an **act of *biah***. It is no such thing! That is a *maaseh beheimah*. What *mitzvas onah* is, is a complex, delicate, and involved process. The act of *biah* is but one stage of that process. And even that part has its very specific parameters of how it must be done. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

### The First Step of the Process

Coming back, the beginning stage of the intimacy process takes place many hours before one starts leading up to intimacy proper. The *Mishna Brurah*<sup>123</sup> writes in the name of the *Bach*, “One must be careful that before nightfall arrives, he is obligated to show extra endearment and love to his wife; and it goes without saying that he must be extremely careful to avoid any quarreling (and if there is any tension between them he must appease her –*Bach* inside-).” If you’ll take a look at the *Bach* inside, he writes that the reason for this obligation to show his wife extra *chibah* already during the day is to make sure that their *mitzvas onah* will not get canceled.

The question of course is why is this necessary? Why can’t he just show her the extra endearment and affection when it actually comes the time for them to be together?

The answer is simple: she may think that you don’t really mean it. If you only start demonstrating extra love and affection as an immediate prelude to intimacy, she is prone to thinking that this is just your way of getting out of her what you want, namely, to satisfy your *taavah* through her. She has to be convinced that you truly love her and that your wanting to engage in intimacy with her is an outgrowth of that love. The way you do that is by expressing extra love and affection during the day time, long before it is actually time for commencing intimacy. This demonstrates to her that your heart, and not just your lust, is really engaged in this process<sup>124</sup>.

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<sup>122</sup> כדאיתא ברכות סב: "רב כהנא על גנא תותיה פורייה דרב שמעיה דשח ושחק ועשה צרכיו אמר ליה דמי פומיה דאבא כדלא שריף תבשילא אמר לו כהנא הכא את פוק דלאו ארח ארעא אמר לו תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך."  
<sup>123</sup> או"ח סי' ר"פ ס"ק ג'

<sup>124</sup> By definition, intimacy is a very personal, private matter. As such, not every couple will necessarily fit into the cookie-cutter mold of fixed times. Some couples may find that spontaneity is crucial for their intimate life, and thus may not know that *mitzvas onah* is going to take place until the spur of the moment. If that is the case, it is obviously not going to be feasible to always begin showing extra love and affection during the day-time prior. Nevertheless, one must always bear this *halacha* in mind and apply it to whatever extent possible. For example, even those who keep things very spontaneous often know earlier than “the last second” what their plans are for the night. As soon as you come to that realization, you should immediately (but suavely without awkwardness) begin to dispense *chibah yeseirah*.

Furthermore, this prefatory outpouring of love acts as the primer for your wife to be able to later smoothly glide into the actual intimacy process. This brings us to one of the absolute most basic things a man needs to know about this topic.

### Bridging the Worlds Apart

Because men naturally tend to relate to intimacy not as intimacy but as a simple act of *biah*, they are ready for it within seconds. All a man needs is a bit of visual (or imagination-induced) stimulation, and he almost immediately reaches erection and can immediately carry out the act of *biah*. Once involved in that act, he can theoretically get to the point of ejaculation (when the זרע comes out) within but a few seconds. And, once ejaculating, he is emptied of his current load within another few seconds. This entire “process” can be over and done with for him in less than one minute<sup>125</sup>.

Women, on the other hand, are incredibly, incredibly different. It takes a woman a long time to reach sexual arousal. Even once she has reached that state of arousal, it takes her a long time to reach her point of release, otherwise known as orgasm. Once she has reached orgasm, that peak of pleasure can carry on for quite a bit of time, and she can even experience multiple bursts of orgasm that can come in waves with small breaks of time in between each one. Even after she has completed her entire orgasm experience, she needs yet further closeness and affection to cap off the whole experience and “bring her back down to earth”<sup>126</sup>.

That’s right, you are no match for her. Her experience is so much more complex, involved, and sophisticated than yours. If you don’t make a very deliberate, concerted effort to control and calibrate yourself to meet her needs, there is not the slightest chance in the world that you will fulfill your duty to her. Not the slightest. *Mitzvas onah* demands a huge investment of time, effort, and energy. It also forces you to grow a lot. Without the emotional component she is left frustrated, unfulfilled, and hurt; and to achieve that emotional component requires you to stretch and grow. To control yourself regarding the physical component, as well, also requires you to develop your middos of caring, patience, self-control, and so on. Remember? Marriage is a people grower.

### Love and Lust

Before we get to the specifics of how to successfully execute each one of the aforementioned stages, it is necessary to first lay down a *hakdama*. Clearly, this whole process involves a heavy amount of *taavah* and indulging in physical pleasure. Since some people unfortunately have a terrible misconception in their head that *taavah* and physical pleasure is bad, it is necessary to be *maarich* a bit to disavow people of that mistaken notion.

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<sup>125</sup> כדאיתא בסוטה ד. דשיעור סתירה הוא כדי ביאה וע"ש שהוא זמן קצר מאוד  
<sup>126</sup> שמעתי מרבי הגאון רב אהרון לופיאנסקי שליט"א שכל ענין זה הוא מה שאמרו חז"ל בנדה לא: "מתוך שמשהין עצמן בבטן כדי שזריעו נשותיהן תחלה."

First of all, marital intimacy it is **not** a necessary evil. It is not something טמא that we have no choice but to do. On the contrary, it is actually the most קדוש thing in the world. This unification between husband and wife is literally *Kodesh Kodashim*<sup>127</sup> and brings down the presence of the *Shechina*<sup>128</sup>.

Now for the sources that marital intimacy is not supposed to be done in a serious or solemn manner. On the contrary, it must be done with maximum joy, pleasure, and passion.

The *Rambam* (הל' אישות טו:יז) explicitly states that a couple should come to intimacy through mutual desire and joy. The *Gemara* in *Brachos* (סב.) says that when *Rav* would engage his wife in intimacy, he would first converse and laugh with her. *Rashi* explains that *Rav* was deliberately doing so to arouse desire, and the *Gemara* likewise makes it clear that the level of passion that he was trying to arouse was that of a fresh *chassan* who is completely new to it!

In a similar vein, the *Gemara* in *Nedarim* (:כ) concludes that it is permissible for a man to converse with his wife during the act of intimacy as long as the conversation is strictly limited to their act of intimacy. The *Rosh* there explains that the purpose of this form of conversation is in order to increase the husband's passion. This is *nifsak l'halacha* by the *Tur* (או"ה סי' ר"מ) and *Shulchan Aruch* (אה"ע כה:ב).

A particularly emphatic source for this point is to be found in the *Zohar* (פ' קדושים דף פ"א): *Ha'Kadosh baruch Hu* only dwells on that which is one...and when is a person considered one, when male and female are together and they become sanctified with Heavenly *kedusha*...when a person is engaged in marital linkage, one male and female, and wants to achieve proper *kedusha*, that is when he is complete and he is called one without any blemish. **Therefore, a man must gladden his wife at that time so that they should both have the same desire for it so that they will achieve complete unity, in soul and body.** The soul-unity by clinging together in shared desire, and regarding the body as we have learned that until a man marries he is as a half, and when the male and female physically bond they become one body. The result is that they are one soul and one body and are called one person. *Ha'Kadosh baruch Hu* dwells in oneness and entrusts a holy spirit upon that one unit.

Similarly the *Zohar* (פ' בראשית דף מ"ט) also says: When one engages in marital intimacy with his wife **he must speak sweet words with her to arouse strong feelings of love and endearment in order that they both go into it with mutual desire without any sense of coercion**; otherwise one should not lay with her.

In terms of the fiery passion of marital intimacy, this is what the *Zohar* (רע"א מהימנא כרך ג' פ' פנחס דף רכ"ו) has to say about it: Meritorious are the limbs of the body because they become sanctified during marital intimacy because they are [like] the wood of the *korban olah* in which take hold the holy flames [of the fire of the *Mizbeich*].

We find further that the *Gemara* in *Maseches Shabbos* (קמ:) relates the guidance that *Rav Chisdah* provided for his daughters regarding marital intimacy (presented in accordance with *Rashi's pirush*): When, in arousal for intimacy, your husband caresses and holds your breasts with one hand and your *oso-makom* with his other hand, make your breasts available for him immediately, but your *oso-makom* you should withhold from him for a certain amount of time (e.g. by crossing her legs or tightly covering it with her hands) in order to tease him and increase his lust.

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<sup>127</sup> יומא נד.

<sup>128</sup> סוטה יז.

Along these lines, the *Rokeiach* (הל' תשובה סי' י"ד) writes: After one's wife has *toiveled* he should gladden her, hug her, kiss her...he should be <sup>129</sup>משעשע with her with rubbing, touching, and all forms of embracing to fulfill his desire and her desire so that he should not think about any woman other than her for she is the wife of his bosom, and he should express endearment and love to her.

The *Siddur Ya'avetz*<sup>130</sup> writes that the mental acuity of the child that is formed from the parents' union will be in proportion with the degree of love that the parents felt for one another during their act of intimacy; and, to quote his words, האהבה לא תהיה כי אם מן התאוה, love only comes from (or through) desire. In other words, the passion and desire that they feel for one another is the medium through which is manifest their powerful feelings of love for one another, and this in turn will very positively impact the child that is born of this union<sup>131</sup>.

Clearly, then, intimacy needs to be done with love, joy, mutual interest and desire, and full fiery passion. These ingredients are very important for their *Shalom Bayis*, for the achievement of true unity and *hashraas ha'Shechina*, and for the positive impact that it has on their children<sup>132</sup>.

### Piyus 1 – Arousal of Love

Now that we've clearly demonstrated the crucial role of *taavah* and pleasure in marital intimacy. We can begin to describe the particulars of how this process is properly executed.

The first stage is called פיוס. The word literally means appeasement. In a very real sense that meaning should be taken quite literally in this context. A woman needs to be appeased in order to get her to "agree" to engage in intercourse. Of course, if she only begrudgingly agrees, you have most certainly not carried out *piyus* properly, because this "agreement" of hers is either wholehearted or not at all.

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<sup>129</sup> This word means to play, toy, have fun with, take pleasure in.

<sup>130</sup> הנהגת ליל שבת פרק ו' אות י'

<sup>131</sup> Even when a couple is engaging in intimacy at a time when it is not possible to have a child, it is still necessary to maintain the flame of passion and desire, as is clear from the sources cited further. The statement of the *Ya'avetz* was quoted here only to provide us with an inkling of how important the passion and desire is.

<sup>132</sup> This whole exposition is not at all in contradiction to that which we find in many sources that engaging in intimacy for the sake of indulging one's desire is to be frowned upon. It is only if the indulgence of lust is isolated as an interest and end goal by itself that it is considered negative. However, if it is utilized as a component of achieving the necessary state of love, affection, and union then it is very positive and very necessary. The *Midrash* says that when the women in the *midbar* brought their mirrors to Moshe to be used for the *Mishkan*, Moshe initially spurned them because of their usage for enticing the *yeitzer hara*. However, Hashem told Moshe, "These are more precious to me than everything [else] because it was through them that the women perpetuated many legions (of children) in *Mitzrayim*". This is well understood through the aforementioned principle. Moshe initially viewed the mirrors as something to be spurned because their usage can become a facilitator for crass indulgence of desire; and, of course, lust and desire for its own sake is certainly negative and only serves to steep one in gross physicality. Hashem revealed to Moshe, however, that because these mirrors were used to bring about an arousal of desire that became the means towards maintaining the very existence of *Klal Yisrael*, those mirrors became objects that were worthy of serving as a כלי קודש in the *Mishkan*. When passion and desire are used as a means towards a goal of *kedusha* and upholding Hashem's mitzvos, and not as an end in of itself, then it is very worthwhile and very meaningful, and, indeed is thereby fulfilling its very purpose of creation - for that is precisely the purpose for which *Ha'Kadosh baruch Hu* brought it into the world (see *Sanhedrin* 64a that describes how *Chazal* wanted to totally nullify the desire for עריות and they reneged on that because the world ceased to procreate without it). Do not ever forget for a moment that the harmonious relationship between husband and wife is an ultimate value in the Torah. Therefore, any shared pleasure between them that maintains and enhances that relationship is a huge *mitzvah*. Therefore, even when not for the sake of bringing children into the world, it is crucial that intimacy be carried out with full love and passion.

And, when it is wholehearted, it comes with a tremendous surge of desire and passion. Effectively, then, what you are doing during this stage is bringing her to a state of sexual arousal.

As is clear from the sources mentioned above, there are two components to פיוס: schmoozing and חיבוק ונישוק, “hugging and kissing”. The first step is the schmoozing. Remember, for a woman, the experience of marital intimacy is primarily emotional. Therefore, she generally cannot rush into the heavy, physical component thereof. She first needs for you to talk to her in a very pleasant, endearing, and engaging manner to arouse her strong feelings of how much you love and adore her and how much she does you<sup>133</sup>. Talk to her about how much you appreciate the warmth and love she brings to the family unit. Tell her how much you appreciate how devoted she is to you. Mention specific things, such as the care she takes to provide you with food that you enjoy so much and the like. Obviously, tell her how beautiful she is. Again, be specific. For example, “Your eyes have such a deep radiance to them,” or “The pink color of the shirt you are wearing so beautifully accentuates the hue of your delicate skin.”

You don’t necessarily have to come up with original lines each time, but you do need to genuinely mean it each time. Otherwise, it will come across to her as cheap and even fake. That does not mean that if you are not feeling so lovey-dovey that you should not say these things. You must. There is most definitely a large degree of fake-it-till-you-make-it in cultivating the proper husband-wife dynamic. Nevertheless, if you just say these things as if you are being prompted from a script, then not only will it not turn her on, it will likely turn her off. So, try your best to really feel what you are saying. Even if you don’t, at least do a good job pretending that you do. The truth is, that it is not as if men are unfeeling louts. It is just that they do not easily get in touch with their emotions. Deep down, those loving feelings really are there inside you. So, if you do a good job “pretending” and say the words with a sincere tone of voice, that itself can arouse those true feelings from within you to the surface of your consciousness.

If you often find yourself all stymied and mouth-constipated when you are supposed to be going on and on with all this sweet talk, you will need to prepare beforehand. Take out the time to sit down with a pen and paper and think about different things you can say. The loving talk should address her *maalos*, her *peulos*, and her *yofi*. *Maalos* refers to things like how kind, caring, sensitive, devoted, and loving she is, etc. *Peulos* refers to things like all the effort she puts in to take care of the children, the time and effort she expends to provide you with your needs (including, by the way, your intimate needs [e.g. all the *tircha* of the *shiva nekiyim*, *bedikos*, and *tevilah*, and/or dolling herself up for you, etc.]), encouraging you in what you do, etc. *Yofi* is, of course, her looks. Even though you ought to make her *maalos* and *peulos* the main things that you go on and on about, nevertheless, do not be *mezalzeil* in the matter of telling her about her *yofi*. Women very much need to hear from their husbands how much he appreciates her physical beauty. It is *tofeis* a big *makom* by her. So, if such sweet talk does not come naturally to you *bishas maaseh* and you are not even managing to “force” it out, you must take the time to write out a few pages of things that you can say to her. This schmoozing is critical and indispensable. You absolutely cannot just do away with it.

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<sup>133</sup> Because husband and wife are meant to be thinking exclusively about one another during intimacy, you want to gradually steer the conversation in a direction that it focuses solely on the two of you and your relationship, to the exclusion of all else. So, if to “break the ice” you begin talking about things that involve other people, such as your children, that is ok. But as things get more intense, you really ought to not be talking about anyone else in the world at all. Most definitely, you don’t want to be talking about any other adults. This ideally should be avoided even from the very beginning of this pre-intimacy schmoozing.

Also, don't forget, in general women are much more talkative than men. Even though she definitely needs to hear all this sweet talk from you, it is wholly possible that she may need to do the majority of the talking. When she is telling you things like how much she loves you, enjoys being together with you, appreciates you, etc. – you need to make sure to turn your skill of empathic listening to maximum frequency. Make a lot of eye contact. Try to feel her words along with her. Accept them, appreciate them, and reciprocate them.

## Piyus 2 – Physical Arousal

Once you have gotten her to the point where she feels a powerful welling-up of the intense love between the two of you, she is ready to begin the physical part of the process. This does not mean that you can't touch her at all while you are doing the schmoozing part, but what it does mean is that you must not rush into the heavy חיבוק ונישוק before sweet talking has achieved its part. A little caress here and there, holding of the hands, etc. may be very appropriate during the schmoozing stage.

At the same time, though, realize that it may often happen that any and all physical contact may need to be held at bay until the schmoozing part begins to take effect. The reason for this is that she may be in not the best mood, or perhaps there is something about which that she is slightly (or maybe even more than slightly) upset at you. If that is the case, and it often is, it means that she is "underneath sea level". Before bringing her up to love arousal and then sexual arousal, you first need to bring her up to "ground level" where she feels ok about herself and ok about you. If that is the *matzav*, then you have to realize that any physical affection at all can possibly be interpreted very negatively in her mind. If before she even gets up to ground level you start giving her a touch or a peck, she may get really annoyed at how crass and boorish you are. It may really turn her off.

## Affection in General

It is important to diverge for a moment in order to prevent a very bad misunderstanding. Rav Moshe Aharon Stern coined a rule of marital harmony, it's called the three A's (or Triple A, if you please): Attention, Affection, and Appreciation. All three of these need to be in constant, regular supply. Just as paying attention to and expressing appreciation to your wife needs to become an ingrained habit, so too does giving her a hug, kiss, caress, etc. need to become like second nature (by the way, affection also needs to be verbal and through facial expressions as well)<sup>134</sup>. There is no way to make this an automatic

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<sup>134</sup> מבואר מכמה מקומות דאין שום איסור בחיבוק ונישוק אף כשאינו הכנה למצות עונה, כגון ביו"ד סי' קפ"ד סע' ב' דאיתא שם "בשעת וסתה צריך לפרוש ממנה...ולא משאר קריבות אלא מתשמיש בלבד", ובש"ך שם סי"ק ו' כתב "משמע אפילו חיבוק ונישוק שרי", וע"ש שכתב דכן הוא הסכמת כל הפוסקים אלא שיש אומרים דהמחמיר באלה תע"ב, וכמובן שם זה רק לענין דין פרישת עונת הוסת, אבל מבואר להדיא דבעלמא ליכא שום איסור בזה, וכן מבואר באה"ע סי' כ"א סע' ז' דאיתא שם שמגונה ומעשה טפשים הוא לחבק ולנשק לאחותו הגדולה ואחות אביו וכיו"ב שאין לבו נוקו עליהן, ואי היה בחו"ל לאשתו טהורה שלא להכנה לתשמיש איזה שמץ או ריח של איסור לא היו נמנעים הפוסקים מלכותבו, וכן ממש"כ שם בסע' ד' דאסור לשחק עם

habit if every time you want to hug or kiss your wife you have to wonder if she is going to take it the wrong way. And there is no reason to be concerned about that, certainly not in general. Just as you should not think twice about dispensing attention and appreciation to your wife, so too should you not think twice about dispensing hugs, kisses, and other forms of affection to her<sup>135</sup>.

So you may want to ask a *kashya*: why is it that when it comes to the affection preceding *mitzvas onah* you have to be very careful to get the timing right, and when it comes to affection in general the motto is "just do it"? Good question! The answer is very straightforward. Regular expressions of affection in general do not at all come across as a bid to get something out of her. It's the middle of the day, or you're on your way out to go on errands, or it's not *mitzvas onah* night. So obviously you're not giving her that hug, kiss, or caress b/c you want something out of her. It is simply and clearly a genuine expression of love and endearment. Not so when it comes to foreplay (the closest thing that English can provide as a generally accurate translation of פיוס). When it is holding by *mitzvas onah*, she is prone to harboring a suspicion that you are only doing what you are doing right now b/c you have your *taivos* and you need her to be able to fulfill them. That is why, specifically when you are involved with the פיוס for *mitzvas onah*, you need to calibrate your steps quite carefully.

#### Gradual Increments

So, coming back, play your cards well, and assess the situation. Wait until you can tell by her facial expressions, the look in her eyes, and the way she is talking to you (perhaps also from her breathing getting heavier), before you start employing physical contact.

Remember, though, that *mitzvas onah* is a very-involved, complex, and sophisticated process. As such, even once you have gotten her to love arousal and she is now ready for the stage of getting her to sexual arousal, you cannot just "jump in". You cannot immediately commence the heavy duty form of hugging, kissing, etc. Rather, you must go מן הקל אל הכבד. Start slow, and gradually work yourself up to more intense actions. For example, begin by gently touching the tips of her fingers. Keep up the sweet talking. (By the way, "sweet talking" in this context is meant literally, as the *Zohar* quoted above employs it. It most certainly is not referring to the fake buttering-up as in the *tefisas olam* of the secular

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אשתו נדה, הרי שבאשתו טהורה מותר, וידוע שענין שחוק באשתו היינו כל מיני קורבה וחיבה כענין הכתוב יצחק מצחק את רבקה אשתו ורב שח שחק ועשה צרכיו, וע"ע ברש"י סוכה כה: שכתב דצער החתן לישוב בסוכה היינו משום דבוש לשחק עם כלתו ועיין בתשובות מהר"ם מלובלין סי' נ"ג דכתב להדיא שם דהשחוק היינו כל מיני קריבות שאדם משמח בהם את אשתו, ומבואר שם עוד דלא רק דהוא מותר אלא מצוה נמי איכא בזה שע"ז משמח את אשתו, וכל זה פשוט ולא הארכנו אלא להוציא מלבם של האינם-מחמירים-אלא-מתמיהין, ועיין עוד באגר"מ אבה"ע ח"ד סי' ס"ו דאף כשבא לידי קישוי ע"י החו"נ אין מן הסתם מקום לחשוש להוצאת ז"ל כי זה לא מצוי אלא במיעוטא דמיעוטא, וכן מבואר נמי מאגרת החזו"א שאין לחשוש מן הסתם אף כשמתקשה ע"י החו"נ, והגדרה ברורה אמר בזה רב יצחק סילבר שליט"א בשם הגרי"ש אלישיב זצ"ל דהדין כאן הוא כבכל דיני התורה דהיינו כל שאין מה שהוא עושה בגדר פסיק רישיה לה"ז שרי, ומבואר מזה דאף אם לפעמים יקרה לו מקרה קרי ע"י החו"נ ושאר מיני קריבות לא עשה בזה שם איסור (עכ"פ מצד הז"ל) וכמו בגורר כסא שכל שלא היה פס"ר אף אם לבסוף יצא שנגרם חריץ לא נחשב שעשה הוא כלום. ואגב, ע"ע שם באגר"מ דהרהור אמנם אסור אף באשתו הטורה משום דמצוי לבוא עי"ז לידי ז"ל אלא שכתב שם שלהרהר ביפיה ומעלותיה וכו' אין זה ההרהור שייך לענין הוצאת זרע, אלא "דוקא הרהורי הגנה דמעשה תשמיש שיש לו עמה ואיך שישמש עמה גם להבא שאלו דברים הם מביאים להוצאת זרע" והמשיך שם דזה לא מצוי שסתם אנשים ירהרו על נשותיהם באופן זה, אבל עיין באגרת החזו"א שכתב "באשתו הטורה הכל מצוה" וכתב עוד באגרת אחר "ולא אמרו איסור הקישוי והרהור אלא בדבר עבירה...אמנם קישוי בימי טומאתה נראה דאסור". משמע מפשטות דבריו שם דלא כהאגר"מ ושהרהור לגמרי מותר כלפי אשתו טהורה. עכ"פ, מה שנוגע לעניינינו דהיינו חו"נ וכל מיני קריבות דעלמא להיות רגיל בזה בודאי מותר (וע"ע באגרות החזו"א דמי שאכן יוצא הזרע לאונסו ע"י עניינים אלו או קודם הכניסה וכו"ב אין זה עפ"ר רוב חולי וצריך לבקש רפואה).

<sup>135</sup> Of course, if you see that something is really bothering her and she may need special treatment, obviously act accordingly.



world which is just a way of getting what you want out of someone. Yes, you will get and enjoy a lot. *Mitzvas onah*, though, is a *mitzvah* to give, not to take. The *Ribbono shel Olam*, in His infinite mercy and kindness, has set it up that one also gets tremendous *hanaah* when he does this *mitzvah*. But your primary focus must be on giving.) Assuming she responds well to your first physical overtures, begin moving on to more intense forms of physical affection such as stroking her arm, a kiss on the cheek etc. Do not desist from the sweet schmoozing. Until things get really heavy, that must continue. Only once the חיבוק ונישוק gets to the point where it is really intense will the talking for the most part be over. There may still be a word or two here and there, but by that point it will for the most part be silent emotion being expressed and manifest in the physical interaction.

Once you have gotten things to the point that the חיבוק ונישוק is in full swing, you should be touching, caressing, rubbing, etc. all over her body. In particular, her shoulders, breasts, and – eventually - her *osomakom*. In addition to experimenting with all forms of kissing, holding, caressing, etc., you should also make usage of open communication to ask her if she likes what you are doing, would prefer something else, or perhaps softer, harder, etc.

A woman's tendency is to be extremely reticent about communicating her likes and dislikes, particularly in the first *tekufah* when she is still not fully comfortable with the whole process. Therefore, to succeed in getting her to verbalize what she does or does not like you may need to ask her again, and again, and again, not just one night, but for many, many nights. At the same time, it is important to realize that a woman can be turned off by a sense that her husband does not feel confident and sure of himself. So make sure that when you ask her to tell you what she likes or does not like, that it comes across as coming from a place of consideration and not from a sense of insecurity about what you are doing.

A general rule of thumb is that softer and gentler is better. Holding or rubbing too hard generally tends to be rough for a woman, so unless she expressly requests it, or is it blatantly obvious to you that that is what she wants, don't do it. Stay gentle. There is an exception to this rule, and that is in regards to getting her to the point where she actually begins to orgasm. Even that exception, though, is not a hard and fast rule.

## The Pinnacle

First, though, a word of introduction. You know very clearly where and when your orgasm is. It is when you release your זרע. Let's analyze this for a moment. What exactly is happening? There is a tremendous buildup of sexual tension, until it gets to the point that there is quite literally an explosion of sexual energy. That is the ירייה כחץ of the זרע literally shooting out. It is like a pressure cooker where the pressure has gotten so great that the lid just explodes off the pot. Now, imagine for a moment, if after all this incredibly heavy stimulation and buildup of sexual tension, your release would not occur. How do you think you would feel? It doesn't take much imagination to realize that aside from being beyond-belief disappointing and frustrating, it is also physically quite painful. For you to orgasm and achieve the release is a snap, so you don't need to really be worried about that. You just go in, do your thing, and you've got it; irrespective of what she is doing. For your wife, though, it is not simple at all. She is completely dependent on you to bring her to orgasm. If her orgasm does not occur, all she is left with is all that pent-up sexual tension. That, in addition to an incredibly painful, emotional let-down.

The word excruciating to describe the pain she suffers if such a thing happens does not do it justice. *B'kitzur*, you don't want this to happen. And it won't, because you are going to do it right.

So, with that in mind, let's go back to the exception to our aforementioned rule. For the vast majority of women, although there are some exceptions, the only way they can get to orgasm is through direct, intense stimulation to a specific part of the *oso makom* called the clitoris<sup>136</sup>. The clitoris is not inside the hole of the *oso makom*. It is kind of like a bump, or like a tiny finger, in between the two folds of skin towards the top. Now, generally you need to do a lot of rubbing, kissing, caressing, etc. all over her body – everywhere except for the *oso makom* – to get her stimulated enough that she feels the urge for you to begin vigorously rubbing her *oso makom*. In particular, you should be putting most of your efforts into rubbing, caressing, kissing, etc. on her breasts because that is what primarily stimulates her to the point where she practically feels a desperate need for you to stimulate her *oso makom*<sup>137</sup>. You

<sup>136</sup> אמנם שידיעה זאת מקורו מבחינת חכמה באומות תאמין, שהרופאים וחוקרים בררו הרבה את שינויי הטבעים בין אנשים ונשים בענין זה, אבל אין בית מיחוש כלל ללמוד מדבריהם כמבואר באגר"מ אבה"ע ח"א סי' ק"ב שדיבר שם אודות חתן שרוצה "לקרוא בספרי חכמי הרופאים בענין התשמיש איך שיהיה באופן הנאות להאשה כדי שיהיה שלום בית". וכמו"כ עיין בסידור בית יעקב (לרב יעקב עמדין זצ"ל) בהנהגת ליל שבת ("מטת כסף") חוליא ב' אות ז' שכתב "ואומרים בעלי המחקר שיהיו מראשותיו נמוכים וימשוך ירכה אליו לצד מעלה משך יפה", הרי שגם הוא הביא מדברי בעלי המחקר (וכן בפרק ה' אות א' שם הביא עוד מדבריהם), ועכ"פ אי אפשר להכחיש את המוחש וע"כ אנו צריכים להודות על דבריהם (כלשון הרמב"ן עה"ת לגבי הקשת בפ"ח ט"ב, ע"ש). ומה גם, ששמעתי מאדם גדול שענין השיא מרומז בדברי חז"ל באומרם בנדה ע"א. בשכר שמשוהין עצמן בבטן כדי שתזריע אשתו תחילה נותן לו הקב"ה שכר פרי בטן, וכן מבואר מהגמ' דרב חסדא שלימד לבנותיו ומה שפירש רש"י שם שענין משמוש אותו מקום בידיו חלק נכבד מן המעשה, וכן איתא נמי בבינת אדם (שער בית הנשים סי' י"ג אות כ"ג) "כאשר ימשמש הבעל באצבע בשעת תשמיש". וכן שמעתי מאדם גדול אחד שאמר שהיה הסטייפלר אומר לאנשים על ענין זה "רייב, רייב, רייב!" ועל אף שלא מצינו ענין השיא ע"י המשמוש מפורש ממש בחז"ל, מ"מ די לחכימא ברמיזא, וכן מורים רבותינו כמש"כ. ועיין בדברי רב אייזיק שער המובאים לקמן בסמוך שענין זה שהיא תזריע תחילה הוא ע"י שמעורר אותה כדי שהיא תקבל מלוא מילוי תאותה והנאתה. ובאמת, מעולם התפלאתי על עובדה זה שהנשים עפ"ר אינן מקבלות שיא הנאתם ממעשה הביאה עצמה או אפילו מהדישה וההזרעה אלא ממשמוש נקודה ההיא בחלק החיצוני של הא"מ, ולכ' הלא דבר הוא, דודאי דעיקר חיוב מצות עונה היא המעשה ביאה עצמה, ועל אף שמבואר מכמה מקומות שצריך לעשותה באופן שתשמח אותה ולא לטרוף אותה כארי, מ"מ האיך ייתכן דאפ' אם יפייסנה כדבעי בדיבורים ערבים נעימים ומתוקים וחו"נ כיאות דאפ' אחר כל זה לא די בהמעשה ביאה עצמה אלא צריך גם ובעיקר להתמקד במשמוש נקודה ההיא בחלק החיצוני של א"מ, ובהשקפה ראשונה ודאי שענין מתמיה הוא. ויש לי שתי תשובות בדבר זה, ראשית כל דאפשר דאדרבה היא הנותנת, שהרי מבואר מדברי רב אייזיק שער בקונטרס שלו שעיקר הקדושה בענין התשמיש הוא שהבעל שולט על חשקו העצום להנאת הביאה עצמה שמצד עוצם תוקף תאותו היה נוהג בטבע כבהמה ממש הדורס טורף ואוכל מכה ובוכל, ואינו עושה כן אלא שולט בגבורת המושל ביצרו ועושה הכל כיאות ולאט ובנחת הכל כדי להננות אותה, ומה שהיה הוא יכול לגמור ולהשיג את מבוקשו כמעט בין רגע, הוא עוצר ברוחו ומאריך נשימתו ומשקיע כל כחו וזמנו הכל כדי להננות את אשתו לפקוד נוהו ולהשכין השלום, וממילא דמובן היטב להפליא על מה עשה אלקים ככה, כדי ללמד לאדם דעת לבל יחשוב שמה שמהנה אותו לפי רהיטת דרכו ינהנה אותה, כי זה אינו, אלא צריך להיות מודע לעוצם שינוי טבע האשה מהאיש שאף באותו מעשה עצמו ממש אין מה שמביא לידי הנאתו הוא מה שמביא להנאתה היא. ובאמת צריך לדעת שאפילו אם מגיעה לשיא שלה, אין הנאתה שלימה כלל וכלל בלי כניסתו דישתו והזרעתו, אבל רק אם יתבצע באופן שהיא תגיע לשיאה אזי יגמור עצם הביאה את הנאתה השלימה. ויש עוד פשט בדרך אפשר בזה. והוא ע"פ מה שמבואר מחז"ל שאחר חורבן ביהמ"ק ניטלה טעם הפירות, וגם מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו, ובכלל מיעטו כל ענין השמחה מאוד, ועוד אמרו שניטלה טעם ביאה וניתן לעוברי עבירה, ואמרו שפתחים המביאים לידי גילה יהיו וכו', אשר מבואר מכל זה שמצב ענין ההנאה מתענגי עוה"ז התשנה לגרועותא מאוד מאוד בבחינת יורדו פלאים אחר חורבן הבית, ועפ"ז אפשר לומר דאה"נ בהיות שנים כתיקן בהשראת שכינתא דלעילא בתוכנו היה הכל מסודר על אופניו בסדר נכון ויאות והיתה ההתאחדות דשמים וארץ שלימה מכל הבחינות באופן שבשיא האיחוד בין איש לאשתו בהיותם נעשים אחד ושכינה שורה עליהם, ודאי שהיתה התאחדותם שלימה ואחידה ממש שהנאתו והנאתה שווה בשווה ממש, ורק מאחר שנחרב בית קדשנו ותפארתנו וברחה השכינה ממנו רח"ל נתקלקל השורה ואין ההתאחדות שלימה באיחוד גמור ממש. ולא דוקא שפשט שני סותר פשט ראשון, והבן.

<sup>137</sup> זה לשון רב אייזיק שער בקונטרס שכתב בענין זה "וכשיראה בעלה הצדיק שהיא ממציאיה לו המרגניתא (היינו דדיה) ישכיל לדעת שהיא רוצה שישתעשע עמה במרגניתא שלה וימלא את רצונה בכל כחו ואפשרותו עד שתעורר בכל תוקף תאותה ותזריע תחילה ואז תמציא לו הכורא (היינו האותו מקום) שיגמור את המעשה", וקצת יותר למטה מזה כתב עוד "מתחילה צריך הבעל לעורר אותה ויש בכוחה להמציא לו המרגניתא ולהסתיר את הכורא אבל כשתעורר מהבעל המשתעשע עם המרגניתא אז היא מוכרחת להמציא לו הכורא מאונס היצר יצרה אונסה... היא נופלת בשכרון התאוה שיצרה הפנימי משכר אותה בשעה זו אלא שהיא נמצאת חולמת בהקיץ בדמיונות של עונג ונוגם במילוי תאותה ותשוקתה הטבעית."

can also gently caress her *oso makom*, but that should not be your primary focus for the most part in building up the intense stimulation.

After she has gotten a lot of stimulation all over, in particular on and around her breasts, and she is in a state of intense, erotic arousal, that is when she is ready to orgasm. As mentioned, this generally only occurs by vigorously rubbing the *oso-makom* with your hand or fingers in a way that the clitoris receives protracted stimulation. Don't forget, *mitzvas onah* is an involved, complex, sophisticated process. Even once you begin applying this vigorous stimulation to the *oso-makom* and clitoris, it can still take quite some time until it actually causes her to orgasm. Likewise, even once she begins to orgasm, she is most likely going to need to stay at that peak of erotic pleasure for quite some time, and – assuming you continue to stimulate her appropriately and she has the energy for it - she may very well orgasm many multiple times – coming in waves with small intervals of time in between each erotic eruption or perhaps even one right after the other.

### Don't Let Go

Hopefully by now you are starting to really understand how much more involved and complex this is, so much more than you ever would have imagined it as a man. You may also be just beginning to really realize how much strength, energy, time, and most of all *mentchlich* consideration this requires.

It is critical to realize that at no point throughout this whole involved process can you just “give up and leave her hanging.” So long as she has not gotten her fill, she desperately needs you to stay with her and make sure she in fact gets it. Now, particularly if you are still not yet married, you may be wondering to yourself, “Why in the world would I do such a thing?!” The answer is that, completely unlike your wife, the moment your זרע leaves your body, you immediately undergo a drastic change in attitude. One moment before, you were intensely enjoying every second and nuance, full of powerful vigor and energy for what you were doing and involved in, and literally the moment after your זרע has completed making its exit, all that vanishes - instantaneously and completely! You are prone to losing literally every ounce of interest and energy after you have released. This does not mean that you are physically incapable of continuing to provide your wife with stimulation despite yourself, but it does mean that it will be that much more difficult for you to do so.

Although everything that led up until this point also entailed a great amount of time, effort, and energy; the fact that your own sexual drive was in full gear throughout served as a very powerful force and impetus to do everything that you needed to be doing<sup>138</sup>. After you have released your זרע, though, that is gone. Completely. At that point, you will have nothing propelling you other than your good will to do the right thing. When you are physically exhausted, and perhaps even uncomfortable – after you lose all interest you may very well feel physically uncomfortable, it is very hard to act on just good will alone. It is possible, but it is quite difficult because you are basically faking it at that point. If you proceed in a manner that makes your lack of interest apparent, that is likely to kill her continued sense of pleasure. So, yes, if you do happen to release before she has gotten her fill, you will have to push yourself that extra mile all on your own to fake it and continue stimulating her. That is not *l'chatchila*, though. The best *eitzah*, therefore, is to withhold your release of זרע for as long as possible. Doing this is a tremendous expression of both *gevurah* and *kedusha*. *Gevurah* because you are controlling one of your

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<sup>138</sup> וכמו שאמרו חז"ל דהקב"ה ברא היצר לצורך האשה, עיין בגמ' שבת מה שדרשו על הוא אמר ויהי הוא צוה ויעמוד ובמה שכתב המהרש"א שם

most powerful drives. *Kedusha* because you are taking full control of this inherently animalistic drive and directing it for a sublime purpose, namely to give pleasure to your wife and engender fantastic *shalom bayis* in your home<sup>139</sup>. That being said, this is not at all an easy thing to do. Particularly during the first *tekufah* when everything is brand new. It may take months or perhaps even years until you learn to control yourself to this extent. It requires a strong will and a concerted effort.

### Practical Advice

Three things, in particular, can go a long way in helping you to achieve this control and protract your point of release: a) be careful not to get overstimulated during foreplay, b) once the *eiver* is inside the *oso-makom*, do not immediately commence the back and forth movements, and c) once you do begin the back and forth movements, keep it slow and gentle – do not go fast and too hard.

Regarding point a, although it is perfectly ok to rub your *eiver* against any part of her body during *piyus* - so long as it is something she enjoys (or, at the very least, that she doesn't mind) - you need to make sure that such activity does not cause you to accidentally release your *zerah*. Besides the issue of *zerah l'vatalah*, it can also make it practically impossible to fulfill *mitzvas onah* that night. Many men need a few hours before they can achieve erection again after releasing *zerah*. Not good. Even when you know for sure that you'll be able to hold it in until the actual *biah*, you still want to be careful about not letting the *eiver* get too stimulated because that may cause you to not be able to maintain it during the actual *biah*. If the *eiver* was already intensely stimulated, the actual *biah* may cause you to release the *zerah* very quickly no matter what you do or do not do. **The *biah* is the climax of the whole process, and it is very important that it be prolonged enough for her to gain an adequate sense of fulfillment and satisfaction therefrom.** That is why it is generally advisable to keep stimulation to the *eiver* before the actual *biah* down to a minimum. That being said, she may very much want that type of stimulation during the *piyus*. If that is the case, be completely open with her so that she understands that she may essentially be making a tradeoff.

Regarding point b, *pshuto k'mashmao*. Once the *eiver* is inside the *oso-makom*, just stop doing everything. Let your full weight rest on her – don't worry, her body was specially engineered to take it<sup>140</sup> – and relax. Tell her as well to refrain from making any movements for the time being. Just enjoy the intense closeness as is. Stay like that until you feel that the unbearably intense urge to release has passed. This can take a good, solid few minutes or even more. Have patience. This physical closeness is usually very enjoyable for her, so it is a *mitzvah* every second, not *chalilah* a waste of time.

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<sup>139</sup> ונוסף על זה יש את מה שאמרו חז"ל שאם האשה מזרעת תחילה הולד יהא זכר, ועל אף דמבואר מהרא"ש שם שא"א לנו לדעת מתי בדיוק היא מזרעת, הרי עכ"פ כל שמשהה עצמו יותר בבטנה וכובש את מעיינו כדי שלא יזריע אלא עד קרוב לסוף השיא שלה, הרי מתרבה עי"ז הסיכוי שהיא הזריעה כבר ושתלד בן זכר.

<sup>140</sup> If you are heavyset, or otherwise concerned that she may be uncomfortable, ask her. If you can tell from her response that she is in fact somewhat uncomfortable, try holding yourself up ever so slightly with your arms/hands and feet/toes to relieve her of some of the pressure, even if just every now and then for a few moments. Just try to be careful that you don't move the *eiver* while doing so. Realize, though, that what generates erection in the *eiver* is a tremendous buildup of blood in that organ. When holding yourself up, you are necessarily diverting blood flow to the limbs that are doing the holding-up. This may, therefore, negatively impact your ability to maintain erection, and therefore should be kept to a minimum. It is possible, though, that depending on your individual level of strength, stamina, and precisely how you do it that you can maintain erection while holding yourself up.

Regarding point c, this is also *pshuto k'mashmao*. If you do the back and forth movements fast and too hard, it will very quickly stimulate the *eiver* to the point that releasing will automatically happen. Instead, follow the Ramban's instruction and be *boel b'nachas*. After you have rested there and feel that the unbearably intense urge to release has passed, begin the back and forth movements. Take it slow and take it easy. Even once you have begun the back and forth movements, you can pause every so often if you feel it is getting too close to the "point of no return". This pausing for a minute or so will cause the sense of "flood rush" to calm down, enabling you to continue again with more back and forth movements. With this approach, it is possible to maintain the *maaseh biah* for as long as she needs to get her full satisfaction therefrom.

Following these three *eitzos* should hopefully go a long way to helping you achieve a strong level of control. If despite following these *eitzos* and in general making a concerted effort to learn control you feel that it is just not going, then you may have a medical condition that requires treatment and/or a weak constitution that needs strengthening. Realize that, and this cannot be emphasized enough, men prematurely releasing can cause serious dysfunction in this whole *parsha* of intimacy. It is critical to your *shalom bayis* that you not allow an issue such as this to be swept under the rug; not only for the sake of the mitzvah, but also for the sake of your and your wife's happiness. See your doctor and be completely open with him about your problem. Although it is obviously difficult to share such a private part of your life with someone else, realize that it is much more common than you think, and this will not be some sort of shocker to your doctor. He has most certainly come across this complaint many, many times before. There are both medicines and exercises that can help with this problem. So, if you need the help, be a man and go get it.

Also, not being tired can make a huge difference. You need a lot of energy to be able to withhold the *zerah* from coming out for such a long time. The more tired you are, the less energy you have. So, as will be discussed more below, making sure you are well slept and not tired for intimacy is really important; both for the general enjoyment of the intimacy and in particular to facilitate your ability to control your release.

### The Seider Ha'Devarim, Or Lack Thereof

Thus far, we have more or less explained the concept of female orgasm and a basic description of the *maaseh biah* itself. What was not yet clarified, is the particular order between the two. The reason for this is very straightforward. There is no hard and fast rule. Some couples will prefer to have the wife reach the peak of orgasm during *piyus*, and then during the *maaseh biah* the orgasm will continue. Others, though, prefer to wait until the *maaseh biah* has commenced.

There are pros and cons to both approaches.

The benefit of bringing your wife to full, ecstatic orgasm before commencing the *maaseh biah* is that it is much easier. As mentioned, for many women it is only through direct, pinpointed stimulation to the clitoris that orgasm can be achieved. Obviously, this is much easier to do with one's fingers and hands than with one's pelvic bone (the bone immediately above the *eiver*). The pressure of the male pelvic

bone against the clitoris is general (meaning spread out), not acute, and therefore may very well just not suffice<sup>141</sup>.

Once she has already started orgasming, though, her erotic arousal level will often be so intense that she won't need any more pinpointed stimulation, and the general stimulation of pelvic pressure will be enough<sup>142</sup>.

If, though, you wait until the actual *maaseh biah* to bring your wife to full orgasm, it can require difficult maneuvering in order to get your hand to the clitoris and be able to rub it in the correct manner. If you are heavyset or on the weaker side, this may prove almost impossible. Also, the moving around necessary for such maneuvering may be problematic from another angle: it may cause you either to get overstimulated and release too quickly, or it may cause you to become distracted and lose erection.

Yet another consideration is this: the more orgasmic eruptions your wife has had before beginning the *maaseh biah*, the closer she is to the end. So, for example, let's assume for arguments sake that an average woman has 12 orgasmic eruptions in a *mitzvas onah*<sup>143</sup>. Let's also assume, for arguments sake, that each orgasmic burst lasts about 20 seconds and the lull in between the bursts lasts about one minute. In this depiction, the entire time from the first orgasmic eruption until the last is completed would be 15 minutes. What that means, is that if this only begins after the *maaseh biah* commences, for you to optimally satisfy your wife, you will need to control yourself - while the *eiver* is already inside the *oso makom* and extremely stimulated - and withhold releasing your *zerah* for 14.5 minutes. It is certainly not an impossible feat, particularly if you work on developing your control, but it also is not easy either. If she has already begun orgasming, though, before beginning the *maaseh biah*, you may be able to cut that time in half. For all these reasons, it may be very advisable for many couples (maybe even most) for the wife to start orgasming before the *maaseh biah* begins.

However, other couples may prefer, perhaps primarily for emotional considerations, to make the extra investment that it takes to do it the other way and only have her start orgasming after the *maaseh biah* has commenced. It is also possible that a man may sometimes become so stimulated by the wife reaching orgasm (remember: male stimulation is primarily through the sense of sight and the *koach ha'dimyon*) that it can cause him to release immediately. If that is the case, then there is no choice but to commence the *maaseh biah* first. You cannot do something which is definitely going to cause *zerah l'vatalah*.

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<sup>141</sup> To understand the difference between acute and general pressure try the following exercise. Smack yourself on the stomach with your whole hand, calibrating the smack at a certain, measured degree of force (not too hard; don't hurt yourself). Next give yourself a hit with the same degree of force, just this time only jab with your thumb instead of using your whole hand. Did you notice that the thumb-jab hurt much more than the whole-hand smack? The reason for this, of course, is that when you use your whole hand, the force of the smack is spread out over a much wider area, whereas the thumb-jab is concentrating all that force into one point. That's also why a rub will rarely cause a tickle-effect but one finger does. That is the idea at work over here. The pressure of the pelvis against the *oso-makom* during the back and forth movements is spread out over a relatively wide area. The clitoris, though, often needs pin-pointed pressure (not painful, though, *chas v'shalom*) to get sufficient stimulation to effect orgasm.

<sup>142</sup> This is not always the case, though. Sometimes, even after reaching orgasm she may still need continued pinpointed pressure stimulation of the fingers and hands, although perhaps not as much.

<sup>143</sup> This is just an example. Depending on multiple factors, not the least of which being individual propensities and natures, it can be much more or sometimes even much less.

It is also possible in certain circumstances that the wife may only reach orgasm after the *maaseh biah* is finished. This is usually the result of the husband not being able to control himself and withhold releasing his *zerah* for long enough to facilitate sufficient stimulation to the clitoris beforehand. Obviously, this is a serious *b'dieved* because once you have released your *zerah* the interest level that you have in any further sexual activity can become zero or less. That means, at that stage, that you are going to have to do a really good job faking it in order to give your wife what she needs. You'll have to use your fingers and hands to stimulate her *oso-makom*, particularly the clitoris, until she orgasms, and continue doing so until she has had her fill. In addition to the negative, needing-to-fake-it aspect of this, there is also the fact that she is not experiencing your full, bodily union while she is at her peak of ecstasy. That makes her pleasure and satisfaction significantly less than what it could have and should have been. So, yes, definitely do make sure to do the maximum that you can, given the circumstances, but do not use that as a "crutch" and decide that this is good enough every time. Work on it, and if necessary see a doctor, until you're able to do it right.

### The Final Stage

After the *maaseh biah* and her orgasming is completed (as we learned, ideally at around just the same time), comes the final piece of the tapestry of *mitzvas onah*. This piece is the *makeh b'patish* of the entire process. Without it, it is possible that the whole process will not be a source of enjoyment and fulfillment for your wife, rather a source of pain and angst. So, what is this secret ingredient? It's actually much simpler than you may have imagined: just lie with her. That's right, just stay next to her, perhaps caress her a bit or place your hand on her breasts stomach or *oso-makom*, depending on what she prefers, and be with her. As simple as this sounds, it is crucial.

Consider the following.

A *Rav* who is an absolute expert in the field of *shalom bayis* was giving a refresher course to *madrachei-chassanim*. When he mentioned to them the central importance of a husband lying with his wife after the completion of the *maaseh biah* and her orgasming, all of the participants in the shiur expressed their strong skepticism. They found it almost impossible to believe that such a thing could be so important. Left with no other recourse, the *Rav* told them this, "Ok, if you don't want to take my word for it, go home, all of you, and ask your wives." Realizing from their unanimous expressions of skepticism that none of them were careful to uphold this part of *mitzvas onah*, the *Rav* added, "I'm just warning you, they may cry." By the next week's installment of the *shiur*, only a few of the participants had actually had the courage to take the *Rav* up on his challenge, and the wife of each one indeed started crying when they broached the point.

So, what is it? Why in fact is this so crucially important? It's actually quite simple, that is the moment you view it from the feminine angle. We mentioned earlier that for women it is the emotional component of *mitzvas onah* that is primary. The closeness. The togetherness. The deep and powerful union of body, mind, and spirit. *Tashmish* for women is primarily a vehicle of expressing and receiving (primarily receiving) intense warmth and love. If the moment your taivos are spent you just roll over and go to sleep, well then that doesn't exactly say much in the way of expressing love, does it? No matter how much you put into everything up until that point. Just leaving her as soon as you are "done" practically screams at her that all you really wanted was to satisfy your animalistic lust, and that you weren't doing it out of true care and love for her. For her, that is painful beyond belief. Therefore, you

must be a *mentsch*, as Rav Wolbe writes in his *Kuntras L'Chassanim*, and give her the investment of time and just being together that she so much needs. It is a time to simply experience and be in the oneness that you just forged with her, and hopefully as life progresses you will also learn to very much enjoy this component of *mitzvas onah*. Because, really, that's the goal, isn't it? To gradually transform yourself from being preoccupied with the animalistic lust to living, being, and experiencing on a much more *ruchniyus* level of emotional bonding and connection. It is something you are meant to learn from your wife.

### Perseverance through Challenge

It is important to address the potential challenge of lack of excitement and interest in intimacy. Yes, it is completely natural to be excited for intimacy, but it can nevertheless sometimes be an issue.

There's a *Medrash* that says the women in *Mitzrayim* went to the apple orchards to meet their husbands and engage in intimacy there<sup>144</sup>. They would also bring mirrors and say to their husbands, "Look, I'm prettier than you!" Why couldn't they just wait until their husbands came home and then do the mirror activity? Furthermore, what do they need the mirrors for anyway? Is a woman's mirror-image more alluring than the woman herself? Another question: why this play-talk "I am more beautiful than you"? Isn't a beautiful woman in of herself enough to arouse a man's desire for intimacy?

A possible approach to dealing with these questions is as follows: the men in *Mitzrayim* were so terribly exhausted from their back-breaking labor and torturous treatment that the standard fare would just not work for them. In order to achieve the requisite state of arousal, which obviously requires a good deal of energy, the women had to come up with some creative, even fun idea that would spark their husbands' desire through a fresh, invigorating, and exciting experience.

Therefore, they went out to the apple orchards where there is a particularly pleasant fragrance in the air<sup>145</sup> and there are stimulating colors around - the lush red and green of the apples, the deep brown of the tree bark, and the beautiful blue, pink, and orange colors of the sun-setting sky. Perhaps there was also a rejuvenating breeze passing through the orchards, and birds were chirping their sweet, sunset melodies. The *nashim tzidkaniyos* picked the perfect setting for romantic arousal. They brought the mirrors and spoke "play-talk" as a fresh new "game" - it was spontaneous and even a bit amusing, thus awakening their husbands' alert state of mind and grabbing their attention<sup>146</sup>.

Furthermore, this mirror and play-talk activity directly aroused their husbands' desire for intimacy. Men, as you well know, are aroused mainly by sight, **and the more teasing the sight the more arousal is achieved**<sup>147</sup>. To tease their husbands' desire the *nashim tzidkaniyos* had them look at the reflection of the two of them in the mirror and goaded them with words that would draw their attention directly to their beauty.

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<sup>144</sup> כך הוא פשטות משמעות לשונו של רש"י בויקהל לח:ח, ובפ' נשא ה:ז כמעט מפורש הכי בדבריו, וע"ע בתנחומא פ' פקודי אה"ט. ובסוטה יא: איתא דשמשו בין שפתים ופרש"י שם דהיינו בין המיצרים שהיה מקום גבוה מכאן ומכאן וחריץ באמצע באופן שהיו מוסתרים מעיני אחרים.  
<sup>145</sup> תענית כט:

<sup>146</sup> The *Gemara* in *Maseches Pesachim* (ק"ז.) says that at times a *Rebbi* would tell a joke or light comment in order to catch the attention of the *talmidim* and open up their minds before commencing the *shiur*.

<sup>147</sup> יומא עד: "טוב מראה עינים באשה יותר מגופו של מעשה".



The lesson that we can glean from this is that a tool that you can employ to rekindle passionate interest in intimacy is by engaging in some type of exhilarating and/or fun foreplay that will rekindle the spark of excitement in your shared act of intimacy.

Although we, baruch Hashem, do not live in such frightful and debilitating circumstances, we nevertheless are forced to deal with this challenge of lack of excitement and interest in intimacy, albeit from a completely different angle. Consider the following *Gemara* from *Maseches Sanhedrin* (ע.ה.)<sup>148</sup>:

Said *Rav Yehudah* in the name of *Rav*, there was once a man who laid eyes on a certain woman and he became infatuated with her to the extent that he fell deathly ill. People inquired of doctors what to do about the situation and their response was, “He will only get better if he has intercourse with her.” The *Chachamim* said, “Well, then, he will just have to die and he may not have intercourse with her.” They were then asked if perhaps she could just stand naked in front of him - perhaps that will do the trick – but again, the *Chachamim* responded that he must die rather than having her stand naked in front of him. Then it was suggested that perhaps she could just talk to him from behind a wall, but the *Chachamim* said that even that is not permissible even if it means he will die.

The *Gemara* goes on to say that there is a *machlokes* regarding this incident whether the woman in question was married (to some other man) or if she was single. According to the opinion that the *maaseh* was regarding a married woman, says the *Gemara*, we understand very well the insistence of the *Chachamim* to not relent at all. But according to the opinion that she was single, how are we to understand that they made such a big deal about this? To that, the *Gemara* answers it was a matter of safeguarding Jewish girls from becoming desensitized to *arayos*. Well, if that’s the case, asks the *Gemara*, why couldn’t she just get married to him?

It’s worthwhile to interrupt the flow of the *Gemara* for a moment to express a reminder to pay close attention because the following words are truly astounding. Ok, back to the *Gemara*.

The reason why she couldn’t just get married to him, answers the *Gemara*, is that it wouldn’t help – his mind would not settle from that form of intercourse with her. As *Rabi Yitzchak* said, from the day the *Beis Ha’Mikdash* was destroyed, the taste of intercourse was taken away and was given to transgressors of sin, as the *pasuk* says, “Stolen waters shall become sweet, and hidden bread will be pleasant.”

In a nutshell, then, only if that man would have been able to be together with that woman in a prohibited manner would it have sufficed to calm his tempestuous, life-threatening lust. Having her *b’heter* just wouldn’t do it for him, because after *churban Beis Ha’Mikdash*, it is the transgressors that have the real *taam* for *biah*, whereas the rest of us don’t.

Now, why Hashem saw fit to give the *taam* of *biah* over to transgressors, albeit a fascinating point for analysis, is not really relevant for this discussion. What is pertinent for us is the fact that we most certainly are only going to function within a framework of permissible intercourse between husband and *tehorah* wife; and that, the *Gemara* makes plainly clear, can be lackluster. Given everything we’ve learned about how important joy and passion are for intimacy, this is not exactly good news.

To make this point sharper, before we begin to address what we may possibly be able to do to deal with this potential problem, let’s bring in another *Gemara*, this time from *Maseches Kiddushin* (פ.א.).

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<sup>148</sup> Paraphrased translation.

Whenever *Rabi Chiyah bar Ashi* would fall on his face in prayer he would say, "The Merciful one should save me from the *yeitzer hara*." One day his wife overheard him uttering this prayer. She thought to herself, "In as much as it is already some years that he has stopped having intimacy with me (because of old age), why is he *davening* in such a manner?"

One day he was learning in his garden. His wife adorned herself (in a way that he would not recognize her) and she passed by him once, and then another time. He said, "Who are you?" She answered, "I am *Charusah* (the name of a well-known prostitute) and I just got back into town." He bid her services. She told him, "Only if you get me that pomegranate that is atop this tree." He jumped up and got it down for her.

When he later came home, his wife had the oven going and he climbed in it in order to kill himself. She exclaimed, "What is this all about?!" He told her what he had done. She responded, "It was me!" He paid no attention to her words until she proved it to him by relating specific details of the incident. He said, "Be that as it may, my intentions were nevertheless for sin."

For the remainder of that *tzaddik's* life, concludes the *Gemara*, he fasted until he finally did die in that form of death.

Quite a *Gemara* isn't it? There sure is a lot to say about it; but, again, what is important for our discussion is the fact that it is directly related to the previous *Gemara*<sup>149</sup>. Although *Rabi Chiyah bar Ashi* had lost his ability to engage in intimacy with his wife, the excitement of *issur* completely and immediately reawakened his conjugal passion.

Engaged singles, newlyweds, and younger married couples may have a very difficult time relating to this concept. Marital intimacy is either still so forbidden or so new to them that their excitement and passion is in full force. But time goes on, people grow older, routine habit and life's busyness take their toll, and lack of passion can become a real issue. Physical and/or emotional exhaustion can also rear its head from time to time (or even very often, depending on a person's vocation and a host of other factors). In a nutshell, routine, boredom, and stagnancy in intimate life is a real potential challenge that needs to be addressed and dealt with.

Therefore, even for those in the pre or early stages of marriage, it is a good idea to study this matter and begin cultivating positive habits right from the start so that it will be easier to deal with the issue as time goes on.

### Reciprocal Relationship

Although this section of the *kuntras* is about the intimate aspect of marriage, a certain point about general *Shalom Bayis* must be made in this context: The more stale and lackluster a marriage relationship is in general, to that extent is their intimate life likely to become stale and lackluster as well. General *Shalom Bayis* and healthily-functioning marital intimacy do not exist separately from one another. On the contrary, the closer a couple is to one another in general is the extent to which their intimate life will also be fulfilling and enjoyable. Likewise, even if they in general get along well, enjoy each other's company, respect and trust one another, etc.; still, if there is dysfunction in the bedroom it will necessarily spill over to their general relationship and impact it negatively. You cannot have one without the other.

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<sup>149</sup>חומת אנך (להחיד"א) משלי ט:ז

As such, the very first thing a husband and wife need to do as their *hishtadlus* to keeping their intimate life fresh and invigorating, is to keep their relationship in general fresh and invigorating. That means that - beyond adhering to all the guidelines of respect, trust, gentleness, etc. - they need to make a deliberate effort to cultivate and nurture a fun, enjoyable relationship with one another. This needs to be a priority. Of course, as newlyweds (and often even as parents of an infant) this is often not difficult to do. Newlyweds usually have plenty of time to go on walks, outings, trips, etc. However, as people get older and the family grows, this becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. But it is crucial. If it is a top priority than time will be found for it. So, make it one of your very top priorities and stick to it your whole lives!

Part of this, by the way, is taking the time and effort to find mutually enjoyable activities. Some people like talking hikes in the mountains while others like to sit on a park bench. Some people really enjoy going out for a cup of coffee or a bagel, while others like to go bowling. You get the idea. In general, not a week should go by that husband and wife do not have some private time to do something fun and enjoyable together, just the two of them. And don't feel guilty about leaving your kids with your parents, in laws, or a baby sitter; it's an investment for them as much as it is for you!

One last point about this before we get back to the more intimate aspects of this discussion: aside from the weekly activity and/or outing, it is important to incorporate fun and enjoyment into the whole week. Shared jokes and light-hearted comments, smiles, and enjoyable conversation need to be the norm between husband and wife. Under your *chupah* and at every *sheva brachos* meal you were dubbed רעים האהובים, beloved friends, and you were blessed that the two of you should always have אהבה אחוה שלום ורעות, love, fraternity, harmony, and friendship. You and your wife are each other's most beloved and cherished friends. Therefore, you can, should, and deserve to act as such!

Ok, coming back, what we've established thus far is that joy and passion in intimacy is a must, and since the lack thereof can become an ever present challenge, we need to take deliberate, proactive steps in order to foster, cultivate, and maintain the passion and fire of intimate life.

### The Great Enemy

Before we get to the *aseih tov* part of this discussion, we need to mention at least one really important *sur mei'rah*: sleepiness is the biggest enemy of successful intimacy! If you or your wife are tired it is very unlikely that you will be able to foster the desired level of joy and ecstatic pleasure which is so important for intimacy.

*Chazal*<sup>150</sup> go so far as to say that despite the fact that in general it is *assur* to have relations during the daytime, there was a particular family who they praised for doing so. Now, obviously, says the *Gemara*, they did it in a manner that removes the *issur* (e.g. a very dark room), but why are they deserving of praise? The answer, explains the *Gemara*, is that the men of this particular family had a tendency to get tired by night time. *Rashi* explains that this was to the extent that their desire for intimacy was not so much. As such, if they were to do it during the nighttime, they would really only be doing so for the sake of the *mitzvah* (or to make the wife happy) which is terrible.

Yes, you read that right. If you are only doing it for the sake of the *mitzvah* or just to make her happy, that is terrible, because it means that you are not really interested in your wife at that moment.

If you are really tired and thus not really all that interested in her at that moment, then you may be prone to feeling a bit put off and a bit repulsed by the whole business which is the polar opposite of what marital intimacy is supposed to be all about. Intimacy means that they both want each other – to unite with one another, *b'leiv v'nefesh*, with passion, excitement, and desire.

So, make sure that you and your wife are both well rested and feeling fully energetic when you engage in intimacy. If you have to skip going to night Kollel on nights when the two of you are together in order to ensure that you'll be fully awake and alert, so be it. And if the only way you can make this happen is by engaging in intimacy during the daytime, then so be it<sup>151</sup>.

Particularly as time goes on and the family grows, tiredness can become one of the most difficult challenges couples face in the realm of intimacy. Therefore, you have got to make it an absolute priority. If your child will have to manage playing on her own or be left with a babysitter for you and/or your wife to get a nap, so be it. And the same goes for just about any other consideration. You and your wife getting proper sleep comes before just about everything else. I would go so far as to say that if you would walk away from reading this *kuntras* with only one thing, this should be it. Get proper sleep, you and your wife.

The fact is, that even on the very first night of their marriage, tiredness and exhaustion can be a major obstruction. Some people suggest that most chassanim do not manage to execute the first, bias mitzvah immediately following the chasunah. This is quite understandable when you consider a) how new he is to it, and b) the extreme fatigue from all the excitement and expenditure of energy during the chasunah itself (and how much more so if he was fasting the whole day!). Because of this, Rav Beryl Povarsky routinely advises chassanim to not attempt the first bias mitzvah during the night immediately following the chasunah. Instead, he tells them that they should just go to sleep and do it first thing in the morning<sup>152</sup>. This advice may not necessarily work for everyone, but it certainly deserves to be considered as a serious option<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>151</sup> Just make sure to close the shutters before commencing actual intercourse so it's nice and dark.

<sup>152</sup> To do this, you have to have window shades that keep the room dark (like *trissim* in Israel). Otherwise, you need to completely cover yourselves with a blanket.

<sup>153</sup> רמז לדבריו איכא למידק מתוס' בכתובות ב. ד"ה ליום הרביעי שכתבו שם "אם יעשה נשואין בלילה ה' דאיכא למיחש שיטרד בנשואין וכתובה ולא יבעול", ש"מ דייטכן שכשהחתונה מתקיימת בלילה שלא יתאפשר ביאת מצוה באותו לילה. ועיין עוד בכתובות ה. "איבעיא להו בתולה נשאת ברביעי ונבעלת ברביעי..." משמע דבחתן אין איסור כלל לבעול ביום, ואולי טעם הדבר משום דתקיף יצריה (כמבואר ברש"י שם ד. בד"ה אלא שלא בעל) ולכן לא חיישינן שמא תתגנה עליו, א"נ כיון דאין זה אלא חששא בעלמא לא העמידו את הנהגתם במקום בעילת מצוה. אח"כ ראיתי שלכ' נקודה זאת שנויה במחלוקת, דעיין ברמב"ן שם בכתובות שכתב "ואפשר שמפני כך שנינו שלא תנשא בחמישי מפני שמנהג הוא לבעול בלילה ולא בו ביום תיכף כניסה לחופה שישראל קדושים וצנועים הם ואין משמשים מטותיהם ביום אבל עכשיו מותר לישא בנשי שאם רצה לבעול בו ביום רשאי..." משמע דלגבי חתן עכ"פ אין בזה אלא משום מנהגא דצניעותא בעלמא שלא לבעול בלילה אבל מעקה"ד מותר לו ולא התנה דהיינו רק בבית אפל או מאפיל בטליתו, אבל מאדיר הרשב"א כתב על זה "כלומר בבית אפל ואם היה ת"ח מאפיל בטליתו", וכן כתבו נמי הריטב"א וחידושי הר"ן, ש"מ דס"ל דלא שנא חתן ולא נאמר לו שום היתר יותר משאר איש ישראל. אבל אין נראה להחליט הענין כ"כ בנקל ע"י רוב זה, משום דזה שרש"י לא פירש הכי, וכן לא רמזו תוס' מאומה לזה, משמע דס"ל כהרמב"ן דמעיקה"ד לחתן אין אוסרים הבעילה ביום. ועיין שו"ת תורה לשמה ס"י ק"ד שכתב "עיר שמנהגם לנשואין לאור הנר בלילה הראשונה של החופה דוקא אי אריך למעבד כן...בעילה ראשונה של בתולה נראה דשרי עורמה משום הכרח כדי שיראה דם בתוליה לנגד עיניו ואם ישמש במחשך יהיה לבו נוקפו אולי היתה בעולה ועשתה דעה עורמה להביא עדים מלוכלכים בדם עוף וכיוצא וקנחה בהם ותאמר אלו דם בתולים שלה ולכן כדי שלא יהיה לבו נוקפו בזה ובכיוצא בזה הותר לו לשמש לאור הנר כדי שיהיה הכל גלוי לנגד עיניו ויתברר אצלו כי בתולה היא ובזה תהיה חביבה בעיניו ויכרות ברית אהבה עמה זהו הטעם למקומות הנהגים בזה ולא כמו שחושבים העולם שנהגו בזה מפני שפעם ראשונה עדיין לא עשה מעשה יהיה בהול וחוששין פן לא ידע לכיון מעשיו כראוי כי דבר זה אפשר להיות אצל בחור ומה טעם נוהגין כן גם באלמן שנשא בתולה שכבר הוא בקי ומכיר הדרך אשר ילך בו היטב אלא ודאי הטעם הוא כמו שאמרנו והוא לטובת שניהם החתן והכלה." עכ"ל. ונר' דעדיין צריכין למש"כ טעם דכיון דתקיף עליו יצריה בעילה ראשונה ליכא למיחש לשמא תתגנה עליו

By the way, just to make sure you don't start to get all anxious about this, you are allowed and it is ok to be a little bit tired when you have intimacy; but, still, it is very undesirable. Ideally, you both should be fully awake and fully alert. If either one of you is really tired it is bad, particularly if it is you who is the one that is tired. If you see that you really are too tired, explain the matter to your wife and secure her agreement to push it off a night<sup>154</sup>. It goes without saying that if it's *mikveh*-night, that is a miserably *b'dieved* thing to do, so you definitely want to make a supreme effort to be well rested for mikveh night. Make sure that you and your wife are well slept and well rested, in general, and especially for intimacy<sup>155</sup>.

### Asei Tov

Very helpful to increasing stimulation and excitement in intimacy is the way your wife dresses for it. She should clothe and adorn herself in such a way that will be particularly eye-catching to you. We find reference in the Torah to the usage of stimulating lingerie for this purpose. In *Parshas Vayakheil* (לה:כב) the *pasuk* describes the items of jewelry that the women brought as a donation to the *Mishkan*. The last item mentioned is a כומז, which *Chazal* explain was a gold piece that was worn as an adornment on a woman's *oso-makom*<sup>156</sup>. Likewise, the *Targum Unkelos* and *Yonasan ben Uziel* strongly

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דאל"ה האיך אפשר להתיר מטעם דצריך כדי שלא יהא לבו נוקפן, אטו משום הכי אפשר לבטל מצוה דאורייתא של ואהבת לרעך כמוך מצד הגנאי שתתגנה עליו (אא"כ דלית ברירה כי אם לא כן יתבטל האהבה יותר, ויש לעיין). עכ"פ זכינו לדין שלדעת התורה לשמה מותר לחתן לקיים בעילה הראשונה לאור הנר ופשוט דה"ה לאור היום דהיינו הך. לכן, בעת הצורך שהחתן יבעול ביום ילמדנו לסגור התריסים אם אפשר לו, ואם אין להם תריסים או הם שבורים וכיו"ב בכל זאת יאכלו עניים וישבעו וישמשו אע"פ שיש אור.

<sup>154</sup> Psak heard from Rov Beryl Povarsky. He added that if the wife is for some reason not willing to be *mochel* (in which case there is an actual *mitzvah d'oraysah* on the husband to provide), this is a serious issue that does not have a clear resolution and would have to be determined on a case by case basis.

If a man truly would not have interest in what he's doing, then a *Rav* would be awfully hard-pressed to figure out a way to allow him to do it. However, if he is the type of guy that despite his sleepiness he is able to get into it, there could be more room for leniency. But as we said, this is definitely not the type of *shailoh* a couple wants to be asking; either way you're dealing with a serious *b'dieved*.

<sup>155</sup> If a couple finds that they simply cannot manage to do this, that life is so busy that getting proper sleep in general is out of range for them, then they need to take serious stock of their lives. Getting proper sleep is not only crucial for intimacy. We need it for our healthy functioning in every aspect of life. If as things currently stand a couple just doesn't see how they could possibly fit proper sleep into their lives, then they need to really think about what structural changes need to be made in order to fix this problem (or consult a doctor or other professional if it is an insomnia or other medically related issue [e.g. sleep apnea]). Consultation with a *Rav* or perhaps some type of coach or professional counselor may be necessary to provide an objective viewpoint and some strategies in terms of time management and the like that they may not think of on their own.

Furthermore, if a woman is functioning double-duty, as is the norm in many if not most *Kollel* families, serving both as homemaker and primary breadwinner, and this is preventing her from getting proper sleep, something has to give. A woman who is perpetually tired cannot function properly, not as a wife and mother in general, and certainly not in intimacy. Even if intimacy would be the only thing noticeably affected by her tiredness that alone is plenty dysfunctional to warrant making a serious change. That change may very well have to be that you become the primary breadwinner, as you obligated yourself in the *kesubah* that you gave to your wife, so that she can regain her ability to be a properly functioning wife and mother. Women working in order to further their husband's learning is a most noble goal indeed, but never ever was it intended to be at the expense of a healthily functioning marriage and family. And, as we said, and this cannot be emphasized enough, even if the only thing that would be affected would be their intimate life, that is plenty dysfunctional enough to warrant such a change.

<sup>156</sup> שבת סד ע"א וע"ב ובר"ן שם.

indicate that this item was indeed a stimulating adornment worn to excite her husband to intimacy<sup>157</sup>, and the *Maskil L'David* also says explicitly that it was a beautifying adornment for the *oso-makom*, and he adds that others explain it to be a reference to an adornment for the breasts<sup>158</sup>.

Hopefully, your wife will have been taught about this *inyan* of dressing up in general and specifically with lingerie, but if not you should broach it with her<sup>159</sup> in a gentle and very respectful manner. If she's totally clueless about this (whether the matter of beautifying herself in general, or in particular for intimacy), she may be extremely put off by it at first, but with patient and gentle explanation she'll come around. You should also ensure that your choice of words and tone of voice expresses the fact that this is not about a demand that you are making for your needs, but about a matter that concerns the marriage as a whole and that it is something important for your shared relationship. Perhaps the best thing you can do is to get her to read the *kuntras* for women. Included here are some of the basic points, but in the *kuntras* for women it is elucidated much more at length.

It is important for a couple to feel comfortable with one another, both physically and emotionally, and be able to discuss with one another in a mutually respectful manner any concerns or preferences that they have in regards to their relationship in general or intimacy in particular. For example, if your body odor is bothering her, your relationship should be such that she feels comfortable

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<sup>157</sup> דתירגמו כומז היינו מחוך, ועיין פ' תולדות כו:ח "והנה יצחק מצחק את רבקה אשתו" ותרגם אונקלוס שם "והא יצחק מחיך עם רבקה אתתיה", וע"ש ברש"י דהיינו שהיה משמש מטתו (ודרך אגב, נראה שזה מקור להא דרב שח שחק ועשה צרכיו). וכן מבואר נמי מישעיה ג:כב שאחד מן התכשיטין שנמנה שם הוא "חריטים" ובתרגום שם "מחכיא", ופרש"י שם דהיינו הכומז, והרי כל המדובר שם הוא ענין נשים הנואפות שהיו מקשטות עצמן כדי לגרות הבחורים אחריהם (כמבואר בשבת סב: וברש"י שם, ודוק), ושמה כנגד מדה הקב"ה יענישן ויסיר מהן כל תכשיטיהן. מבואר א"כ איפוא שבדאי כומז זה תכשיט לנוי ולהתעוררות הוא. וכן מבואר להדיא מדברי המהרא"י (בעל תרומת הדשן) בפ' כי תשא (לב:ו) שענין הכומז היה לעורר תאות התשמיש בכח הצחוק כענין מצחק עם רבקה אשתו ע"ש. וע"ע ברמב"ן פ' ויקהל פרק ל"ח פסוק ח' שהקשה מהא דמשה היה מואס מתחילה במראות משום שעשויין ליצה"ר שהרי לפי פירושה של חז"ל הכומז היה צריך להיות יותר נמאס מהמראות ולא מצינו שהיה למשה ה"א לסרב אותן, ותיך שם דשאני הכומז משום שהכל היה מעורב ולא נעשה ממנו כלי בפני". הרי מבואר מדבריו דגם הכומז ייעודו היה לעורר היצרא דתשמיש, דאי תימא דענין הגנאי של הכומז רק משום שהוא מונח במקום צואה ודם אזי אין ענין זה אצל זה ומה היה צריך לתרוצי, דודאי מיאוס כזה נשרף ונטהר בהתכתו וא"כ לא היה ליה לאקשויי ותרוצי דמה ענין זה אצל זה, אלא ע"כ דכוונתו לומר כמש"כ שהכומז היה משמש לגירוי לתשמיש. וכן ע"ע באברבנל, מושב זקנים, ורס"ג שם. ומה שפירש רש"י בברכות כד. שהיה כמגן על האות-מקום כדי שלא יוכלו זכרים להזדקק להם, כבר הקשה עליו הפנים מסבירות שא"כ היו צריכים לומר שמונע מגיחוך ולא מביא לידי גיחוך. ואולי בדוחק יש ליישב ע"פ מה שראיתי הובא בשם רבינו אפרים במתיבתא (בשבת סד. אות לא") "שהכומז הוא כלי כמין מנעול שקושרת האשה בו את פתחה ואין יודע לפותחו שום אדם אלא בעלה לבד ושבח הוא תכשיט זה לישראל שהוא לגדור מן הערוה". ולפ"ז אולי אפשר לומר דהכומז היה משמש שני דברים, למנוע תשמיש ע"י אדם זר, ולעורר התשמיש עם בעלה (כי גם זה גדר גדול לערוה כדמבואר מהרוקח והכל בו שנזכרו לעיל). ומ"מ צ"ע שהרי הסוגיא בברכות שם מדבר בבנות מדין ששבו במלחמה, ושלחן היו תכשיטין אלו, והאם נימא דגם הגוים היו גדורים ככה, אדרבה הן הם שהפקירו את בנותיהן להחטיא את ישראל. ולכן עדיין צ"ע ליישב מש"כ רש"י שם בברכות. ועכ"פ מה שנוגע לדידן דבשאר המקומות שהבאנו מבואר היטב דדבר זה תכשיט היה לעורר לתשמיש.

<sup>158</sup> ועל אף שיש מפרשים שחולקים על זה בתקיפות וכתבו מי יסתכל באותו מקום (ואגב, אף מדבריהם מבואר שזה הפשטות), מכל מה שהבאנו לעיל מבואר היטב דאין זה מה שעולה מחז"ל וראשונים, ומה גם שאינו מסתבר כלל לאסור ההסתכלות באותו מקום כשהוא מכוסה בבגד או תכשיט (אף לדעת השו"ע שהחמיר) שהרי פשוט דאף לענין קר"ש לא נחשב ערוה כמבואר מהפוסקים שכל שהערוה מכוסה לא קרינן עליו לא יראה בך, ופשוט.

<sup>159</sup> כמבואר ממה שאמרו חז"ל בכתובות ד: לגבי אבילות דידיה ש"אין אדם רשאי לכוף את אשתו להיות כוחלת ולהיות פוקסת", ש"מ דבעלמא יכול לכופה על זה, וכעין מה דאיתא נמי בב"ק פב: שאחד מעשרה תקנות שתיקן עזרא "שיהו רוכלין מחזרין בעיירות משום תכשיט נשים כדי שלא יתגנו על בעליהם" וכעין מה דאיתא בנדרים סח. דבעל מיפר נדרים שבינו לבינה ופירש רש"י שם "כגון שלא אשמש מטתו ושלא אכחול ושלא אתקשט", מבואר מכל זה דענין קישוט אשה לבעלה הינו דבר בסיסי לכל ענין נישואיהם, ולכן אם היא אינו עושה כן כדבעי ראוי לבעל להזהירה על זה, אבל תמיד כמו שאמרו בשבת לד. "צריך למימרינהו בניחותא כי היכי דליקבלינהו מיניה", ואין להציג את הענין כאל דרישה תקיפה עבור צרכיו הוא, אלא לשוחח עמה על זה בדרך נעימה שזוהי דבר חשוב ליחס המשותף שלהם וצורך חיוני להצלחת חיי נישואיהם. ויכול הוא להסביר שאין הצורך לזה אומר חלילה שאין היא יפיהה אלא שזה דבר נורמלי בכדי להשקיף את יפיה על נכון, ודבר נהוג ומבוסס הוא מימי קדם שחז"ל הקדושים התייחסו אליו כאל דבר מאוד חשוב וכנהנה דברים המתיישבים על הלב.

enough to broach the point with you and the two of you need to work together on how to resolve the issue. Likewise, for example, if you feel that certain hair-removal is called for, you should feel comfortable discussing this with her. Open, respectful communication is as significant to successful intimacy as it is to the relationship in general.

Be aware that, at least for most men, a completely naked body is not really all that attractive. As one *adam gadol* put it, "What men really like is to look between the cracks." It is the teasing of the *dimyon* that most arouses men. Therefore, *n'kot hai klalah b'yadcha*, don't try to see too much of your wife's body. Less is more. During the actual *maaseh biah* the *halacha* is that the lights in the room must be completely off<sup>160</sup>. Regarding ambient light coming from a different room or outside, it does not have to be like *choshech Mitzrayim*<sup>161</sup>, but it should be dark enough that one would not be able to clearly detect a blemish<sup>162</sup>. After all, that is the whole reason for the *halacha*. We are concerned, says the *Gemara*, that perhaps he will see something that puts him off and he will feel repulsed. Although it is clear that when it is not during the actual *maaseh biah* it is *mutar* for the lights to be on, and you are allowed to stare at any part of her naked body you so please<sup>163</sup> (except for the *oso makom mamash* if it is uncovered<sup>164</sup>), that does not mean that this is necessarily advisable. Remember, it is the "looking

<sup>160</sup>או"ח סי' ר"מ סע' י"א

<sup>161</sup>כמבואר במ"א שם ס"ק כ"ד ובשעה"צ שם אות כ"ה, ולשון זה שאינו צריך להיות כחשך מצרים שמעתי מפי רבי הגאון הרב אהרון לופיאנסקי שליט"א.

<sup>162</sup>כן שמעתי מפי רבי הגאון הרב אהרון לופיאנסקי שליט"א, ונראה דטעמו פשוט שהרי איתא בנדה יז. "אמר רב חסדא אסור לו לאדם שישמש מטתו ביום שנאמר ואהבת לרעך כמוך מאי משמע אמר אביי שמא יראה בה דבר מגונה ותתגנה עליו." ומאחר דזהו כל טעם האיסור פשוט הוא שאם יש מספיק אור בכדי שיוכל לזהות מומין הרי לא קיים כל עיקר הדין כלל.  
<sup>163</sup>שהרי רק אותו מקום אסור כמבואר בסי' ר"מ סע' ד', ש"מ דשאר מקומות המכוסין מותר, וכן מבואר נמי ביו"ד סי' קצ"ה סע' ז' ממה שאסרו להסתכל במקומות המכוסין כשהיא נדה, ש"מ כשהיא טהורה מותר. וכן העזר מקודש אבה"ע סי' כ"ה "מה שכתב בב"י ז"ל באה"ע סי' כ"ה שאסור להסתכל במקום טנופות נראה שאין זה רק לגבי אותו מקום באשה דאירי ביה שם משא"כ חוץ לזה גם שטוב לשמור את עצמו מכל מקום לא שייך בזה גדר איסור כי אין להוסיף על דברי חז"ל בכזה" (ומש"כ "טוב לשמור את עצמו" נראה פשוט דזה רק לחסידים ואנשי מעשה אבל לא לנו יתמי דיתמי גדולות ונפלאות, ומה גם דאפילו ממדת החסידות יש לפקפק בזה טובא ממש"כ הרוקח בהלכות תשובה סי' י"ד "ולאחר טבילתה ישמחנה ויחבקנה וינשקה ויקדש עצמו מתשמיש המטה ולא ינבל פיו ולא יראה בה דבר מגונה אך ישעשע במשמושי' ובכל מיני חיבוק למלאות תאוות ותאוותה שלא יהרהר באחרת כי אם עליה כי היא אשת חיקו ויראה לה חיבות ואהבות." הרי משמע שיש להשביע את תאוותיה בה (כמובן במדה משקל ומנין הנכון). מאידך אולי יש לדון מצד מש"כ הרוקח "לא יראה בה דבר מגונה" כן כדעת העזמ"ק, וצ"ע. עכ"פ כל חכם יעשה בדעת להרבות האהבה והאחדות ולא לבקש גדולות ונפלאות ממנו בין ברוחניות בין בגשמיות. ויש נקודה חשובה כאן להבין והיא שכל שהוא שומר איזה חלק של אשתו נסתר ממנו תמיד נשאר לו משיכת תאוה חזקה של כח הדמיון וכמו שכתב חידושי הר"ן על הא דהחביא רב חסדא חתיכת פחם באגרופו והשהה את בנותיו הרבה זמן קודם שהראה להן אותה כדי שיראו ויבינו כמה נצטערו לראותו בדיוק בגלל שהסתירה מהן, וז"ל "להודיען שדבר הצנוע אדם מחבבו יותר." משא"כ אם ימרק האדם את כל תאוותיו ולא ישאיר שום מקום באשתו שאינו מסתכל, אזי יכול להתהוות בתוכו התרגלות אליה שיכולה לגרום בעקבותיו שיעמום מסויים ויפחת התלהבות אש תאוותו אליה ח"ו. ע"כ ידע האדם שעצה טובה קמ"ל להתנהג בהבלגה עצמית מסויימת בכדי לשמור על רעננות והתרגשות תמידית לענין החיבור עם אשתו, אבל לא להפריז על המדה בזה יותר מדי עד כדי שירגיש מקופח כי גם זה לא טוב. על כן כתבנו שכל חכם יעשה בדעת לדעת את עצמו ואשתו ולנווט הדרך הממוצעת ויעילה להם.

<sup>164</sup>כדאיתא באו"ח סי' ר"מ סע' ד', אבל עיין באבה"ע סי' כ"ה סע' ב' ברמ"א שכתב כלשון הרמב"ם (הל' איסור"ב כא:ט) "ויכול לעשות עם אשתו מה שירצה בועל בעל עת שירצה ומנקש בכל אבר שירצה" ומבואר בגר"א שם דהבין את דבריו כפשוטם (ודלא כדברי הב"ש בס"ק א' שם שכתב דל"ד קאמר) דפוסק הרמ"א כדעת הרמב"ם ושיטתו ע"פ המבואר בנדרים כ: "א"ר יוחנן ז"ל דברי יוחנן בן דהבאי אבל אמרו חכמים אין הלכה כיוחנן בן דהבאי אלא כל מה שאדם רוצה לעשות באשתו עושה", אבל מ"מ מאחר דלא חלק הרמ"א באו"ח ואף באבה"ע יש פוסקים שאומרים דל"ד קאמר הרמ"א, ואף הגר"א שם מבואר דדעתו שלו הוא להחמיר בזה, לא נראה להקל. ומ"מ יש לציין שכשאלתי את פי הגאון רבי דב פוברסקי שליט"א על נקודה זו לגבי הדרכה לחתנים, השיב לי בלשון הזה, "זה לא טוב (היינו ההסתכלות והנשיקה באותו מקום). אבל אין לעשות לו רע על הלב כי יש בחורים שלא מתאפקים" עכ"ל. והנה שמעתי שיש שאומרים שמותר להסתכל על אשתו כשהיא לגמרי ערומה לכל הדעות דרך להביט מקרוב באותו מקום של כניסת מקום הפרוזדור ממש (דהיינו סוף החור מבחוץ) הוא מה שנקרא הסתכלות באותו מקום. ולענ"ד קשה מאוד לסמוך על זה שהרי במסכת חלה פרק ב' משנה ג' איתא "האשה יושבת וקוצה חלתה ערומה מפני שהיא יכולה לכסות עצמה" ופירש שם הרמב"ם "ר"ל שאם ישרה את ישיבתה על הקרקע והסמיכה רגליה זו לזו לא תיראה ערותה", והנה כשאשה יושבת באופן זה שרגליה ישרות לפניה ודבוקות זו לזו כמעט כל אזור אותו המקום

between the cracks” that really gets you aroused, and you do not want to see something that may put you off. Therefore, as a general rule less is more. But you have to be a chacham about it. Because if you restrict yourself too much that is also not good. Use your seichel and try to achieve the right balance. In this vein, it is a good idea to keep the lighting quite dim even before actual intercourse begins, because that way you won’t pick up any fine details of “imperfection” which may bother you. Also, if she put on something that you don’t really like, say to her something like, “Would you mind putting on such-and-such piece; I really like that one.”

### Additional Eitzos

Ok, coming back, what we’ve established thus far is that joy and passion in intimacy is a must, and since the lack thereof can become an ever present challenge, we need to take deliberate, proactive steps in order to foster, cultivate, and maintain the passion and fire of intimate life.

Because this can require some out-of-the-box thinking - let’s face it, no one is going out to the apple orchards to have intimacy there – here are some ideas of how this concept can be implemented in practice. The point of this list is **not** to provide 1+2=3 type of instructions; rather, it is to help open the mind to thinking in a creative manner about this topic.

- Play hide and seek while your wife is adorned in lingerie<sup>165</sup>.
- Play some lively music and dance together.
- Take a weekend vacation to a beachside *tzimmer* together<sup>166</sup>.
- Do the mirror game described in the *Midrash*. Ask your wife to show you all the pretty parts of her outfit and how nicely it accentuates her figure.
- Spend some time hugging and kissing in front of a full length mirror. Use the mirror to watch what you are doing and the responsive movements of your wife.
- Make it a habit to steal a quick, but passionate, kiss or hug (or even hand squeeze) in places that you really shouldn’t be doing that, but it’s ok b/c at that moment there is no one there for example, you’re both in the kitchen and all your kids went out to the porch<sup>167</sup>, or you’re at someone else’s house for a Shabbos seudah and you press your legs against each other under the table (just do make sure that nobody notices). Stealing these points of affection can generate and inject a *mayim genvim* quality into your relationship.

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מתכסה, דהיינו מקום השפתיים. וכן נראה פשוט מסברא דמהמקום שניכר ההפרדה בין השפתיים והלאה הכל כלול בגדר אותו מקום ומקום הערוה ממש. ולכן להביט בכוונה באותו מקום ממש נראה לענ"ד דישי להחמיר, אבל לחלק בין ראייה בעלמא להין הבטה בכוונה לזה אכן יש מקום גדול, וכבר כתב כן הער מקודש

<sup>165</sup> Obviously not *nogeiah* if the house is very small and/or kids are around.

<sup>166</sup> Often, if you set such goals way in advance, you can surprise yourself at how much money you’re able to save up over time to be able to make this happen.

<sup>167</sup> *Derech agav*, Rav Zev Leff gave the following *geder* for the question of whether or not parents can allow themselves to express physical affection to one another in front of their children. If it is the type of hug and kiss a child could receive then that is fine, but if it is a type of hug and kiss that is reserved for man and wife, that should not be done in front of one’s children. In front of other’s children, all physical affection should be avoided.



- Spend a night or two at a *tzimmer* that has a private pool. Go swimming together.
- Go for an invigorating walk. When no-one is in sight, hold hands.
- Play a game like miming, twenty questions, or a fast, fun card game.

Just as taking time to cultivate an enjoyable, friendly relationship in general is necessary, a tremendous mitzvah, and most certainly not a waste of time, so too is spending time on these types of more intimate activities most certainly not in any way shape or form to be considered *bitul zman*. On the contrary, it is a major *cheilek* of the *avodas ha'kodesh* of cultivating, maintaining, and ever-improving *Shalom Bayis* which is literally akin to *binyan Beis Ha'Mikdash*! Fostering passion and enjoyment in intimacy is literally *avodas ha'kodesh* of the highest level!

### Rav Chisdah's Instruction

In this context, consider the following *Gemara*<sup>168</sup>. *Rav Chisdah* provided his daughters with the following *hadracha*<sup>169</sup>: When, in arousal for intimacy, your husband wants to caress and hold your breasts with one hand and your *oso-makom* with his other hand, make your breasts available for him immediately, but your *oso-makom* you should withhold from him for a certain amount of time (e.g. by crossing her legs or tightly covering it with her hands) in order to tease him and increase his lust.

Here, especially, we see the tease-effect playing a very important role in the act of intimacy. By making her husband wait until he can caress and hold her *oso-makom*, she increases his urge to do so even more, thus making the whole act of intimacy that much more exciting and passionate. Of course, it is quite likely that it is not only the husband whose passion and desire will be aroused - the wife is also likely to become very excited by all of this, which is equally important.

To increase our appreciation of this *yesod* of *Rav Chisdah*, it is quite worthwhile to mention how the *Chidushei Ha'Ran* learns *pshat* in the *Gemara*. He essentially agrees with *Rashi's* explanation as quoted above, but he adds that *Rav Chisdah* gave his daughters a tangible demonstration of this point so that they would understand it well:

One day, when *Rav Chisdah* came home, he was holding a pearl in one hand and a piece of charcoal in the other. The hand that was concealing the pearl he opened immediately so his daughters could see it. The other hand that contained the charcoal, though, he left closed. His daughters of course thought that there must be something really valuable in that hand and they badly wanted to see what it was. After some time, when they had already gotten to the point of practically being in agony over wanting to see what it is, he finally showed it to them. He did this exercise with them in order to demonstrate to them that the more concealed and secretive something is, the more endearing it is to a person and the more one desires it. *Rav Chisdah* was using the pearl to hint to breasts, and the charcoal to the *oso-makom*. He was thus indicating to them to be modest to not show them to any [other] man, and that they not should not immediately engage their husbands in intimacy [rather they should wait a

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<sup>169</sup> Paraphrased translation based on *Rashi's pirush*.

bit] until his lust increases to the point where he is practically in agony over his desire for his wife. And this is as *Rashi* explained the *Gemara*.

From this explanation of the *Ran* we indeed gain a much greater understanding of this point. Achieving the “stolen waters” effect is very important. The two of you should engage in all types of hugging, kissing, caressing, etc. to the point where you are both practically in agony over your tremendous lust for one another. If your wife is reticent about this, gently and very respectfully encourage her to take an active role (not dominant, but active). Repeatedly tell her that you want her to also take the initiative to do whatever she enjoys doing and that you very much enjoy it when she does so. This is important for both of you. In general, as mentioned above, you both should be fully open with one another about what you like and/or want.

Since women can tend to be bashful, you may need to repeatedly encourage her to express her desires to you (e.g. where she wants you to touch, how she wants you to rub, etc.)<sup>170</sup>. Be patient with her and give her the time she needs to become fully comfortable with it. It is possible that it may take months or even years.

With respect, concern, love, and a sincere willingness to put forth effort to make each other happy, husband and wife will indeed be able to achieve the deep unity and harmony that brings the Shechina to dwell amongst them.

As a final note, it is always important to remember that if we truly want to be successful in any endeavor, we need *סייעתא דשמיא*; and to merit Hashem's help we have to ask Him, with heartfelt devotion, to provide us with that help.

ברוך המברך את עמו ישראל בשלום.

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<sup>170</sup> Although a woman is prohibited from aggressively demand intimacy (שׁוֹעֵ אוֹיָח רַמָּג), it is only an outright demand that is not allowed; cajoling, sweet-talking, dressing up for him, etc. in a manner that brings him to want to engage her in intimacy is fine (and even positive) and even an outright request, so long as it is respectfully worded and expressed with a gentle tone is perfectly ok. All the more so that it is perfectly ok for her to communicate with her husband about what she does or does not enjoy. Moreover, you really need for her to tell you these things because if you are doing things that she doesn't like, you are a *chotei*. So, by being very frank and open with you about these matters she is actually doing you a favor!