



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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OHR

Parashat Ki Tetseh

HAMELECH

Successful Marriage

This week's *parashah* shares with us the secret to a successful marriage. Anyone who is interested in achieving that bliss ought to listen closely.

The *pasuk* reads (Devarim 24:5): When a man marries a new wife, he does not join the army; he need not do any work, even not on the front lines. He is to stay home for an entire year and make his wife happy. Rashi makes a point of stressing that the husband is to make a concerted effort to see to it that his wife is happy. He should not concentrate upon making himself happy, rather he should do what he can to make *her* happy. In the end, *her* happiness will be *his* happiness as well.

Although this *pasuk* speaks of the special attention to building one's home during the first year of marriage, Rashi elsewhere indicates that one year is only a minimum, but it is worthwhile investing a lifetime in this endeavor.

Where Did They Go Wrong?

Unfortunately, too many marriages result in frustration, pain, disappointment, anguish, and sometimes divorce becomes a welcome escape. Where did they go wrong? What can be done to avoid these most unwanted feelings? Certainly each situation is its own case with its own relevant factors. Nevertheless, the Torah's eternal teachings can direct one and all how to build a Jewish home with solid foundations.

Too many young couples begin marriage in a state of love and romance and believe that those uplifting feelings will remain forever and can serve as the basis of their marriage. But married life proves otherwise. Quite soon after marriage, the initial romance subsides and if there is not something more substantial underneath, the marriage is bound to falter.

That is why Torah gives us direction and instructs us how to provide ourselves with a lifetime of bliss. The Torah tells the husband: Stop thinking about yourself! Spend an entire year thinking only about your wife and what you can do, daily, to make her happy and content. And don't stop when the year is over either. That was just intensive training. Hopefully, once the first year is over and the foundation has been laid, b'ezrat Hashem, you will now be in a position to turn your attention to communal needs as well, all the while giving proper attention and respect and assistance on the home front.

What is a Bachelor Missing?

In Yevamot 62b we are informed of some of the marvelous advantages of married life. Rabbi Tanchum teaches that only a married person can experience true joy, blessing and goodness. Each of these points is backed up by a Biblical source. In *Eretz Yisroel*, they added that marriage provides for a true acquisition of Torah, general protection and peace. Rabbi Elazar taught that man does not deserve that title unless he is



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married – someone unmarried is not called “Adam.”

Our Sages are teaching us that a bachelor may appear to be happy, but he is not truly happy. He may seem to be prosperous, but that is not genuine prosperity. He may seem successful at Torah learning, but his Torah will be of such a greater dimension once married.

Kabbalistic sources refer to a bachelor as only half a person. The Zohar teaches that man and his destined mate began their spiritual existence in the Heavens as one soul. Then they came down to the physical world and had to find each other. At marriage, they once again fuse into one soul and complete each other. Your spouse is really your missing part, your other half. These are not just fancy expressions; they are utter truths. Someone who sees his spouse as part of himself, like a right side and left side of the same individual, will view his marriage and marriage partner very differently.

Hashem is Here

Baal Haturim and others point out that the final letters of “*naki yiyeh lebeito shana*” spell out Hashem’s Special Name. This indicates that the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) resides in a Jewish home, especially in a home in which the husband makes every effort to see to it that his wife is happy.

Shlah HaKadosh (Shaar Otiot – Shetikah) impresses upon us the importance of knowing what *not* to say; when to remain silent. He says that a person must be especially cautious not to

curse his wife. He adds that it would be quite foolish to do so, since, spiritually speaking, the two are really one; so it follows that cursing his wife is cursing himself.

In general, a husband should never look at his wife suffering and say, “That’s *her* problem.” He must realize that *her* problem is *their* problem, and he must help her get over it. Usually, just identifying with her and showing his care and concern solves more than half the problem.

A Happy Wife Has Good Children

And here is what the Sefer HaChinuch (#582) has to say about this mitzvah: Hashem wants the world inhabited with good people. Good people are born to parents who truly appreciate each other. That is why the first year of marriage is to be dedicated to developing a lasting fond relationship with one’s spouse. That is the focus. The husband is exempt from other communal obligations so that he can direct his energies at building a happy home. Parents who are happy with each other tend to have happy, good-natured children.

Sefer Yerei'im (228) says that a husband should seek to make his wife happy through all means at his disposal. He should not just suffice with the standard and mundane. He should go out of his way to make her life enjoyable and full of pleasure. This mitzvah applies in all generations and in all locations. It begins with an exemption from service in a Torah-abiding army. But it does not end there. The point is not so much what the husband refrains from in his first year of marriage;



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the stress is on how he maximizes the opportunity and rises to the task of utilizing his resources to generating and perpetuating his wife's ecstasy.

For Avreichim as Well

All of this is so important and cannot be reiterated enough. This lesson must be internalized by scholar and layman alike. Many a *Yeshiva bochur* turned *avreich*, missed the point and continued learning with great *hatmadah* after their marriage, only to suffer greatly as they had neglected this all-important mitzvah of establishing their home on solid foundations. This is the mitzvah of the moment, not to be delayed or overlooked. Every husband's number one agenda must be his wife's happiness.

Certainly it is commendable for a man to invest time and energy in Torah study. But young *matmidim* must be made aware that too many marriages started off on the wrong foot when the young newlywed sought to continue his heavy learning schedule he had developed as a *bochur*, much to the neglect of his new wife.

That is why the Torah tells us and Rashi stresses: Young man! Do not do that which makes you happy! Do what makes your wife happy! Whatever she needs! Talk to her, walk with her, spend time together. As the Zohar says, those twelve months are hers. Be there for her. It is not for you to be happy, it's for her to be happy. Be free of all other obligations so that you are available for her. A young *chatan* is exempt from taxes and from battle so that he can focus his

attention on gladdening his wife. When a husband makes his wife happy, he is simultaneously making the *Shechinah* happy. Fortunate is a nation whose Master is pleased with them. Fortunate are they in this world and in the World to Come.

A husband must buy his wife jewelry and gifts and speak to her. Such a husband is a *tsaddik*. Spending time with your wife is not *bitul Torah*.

Pay Attention

The Maharil Diskin rarely allowed people to arrange meetings with him. He was very busy. It came to his attention that a certain young newlywed invested much time and energy in his Torah studies, to the extent that his wife felt neglected and ignored. So he had his secretary invite the young man to his home. The *avreich* entered and Rabbi Diskin continued learning as usual, paying no attention to his visitor. The man stood there for a very long time, trying to get Rabbi Diskin's attention, but to no avail. Two hours later, Rabbi Diskin called for his wife. When she came, he spoke to her about anything and everything; how was her day, what did she do, in the house, outdoors, etc.

Then he turned to the dismayed visitor and said, "You felt terrible being ignored for two hours. I was giving you a taste of how your wife feels all the time. So how should you relate to her? I just gave you an example."

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky would tell his students: A wife is not a *chavruta*. You don't have to share with her *chidushim*, even in *agada*. The main



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thing is to carry on conversation with matters that interest her, such as her job or her outings to the store.

The Steipler Gaon would discuss very mundane matters with his wife and that did not detract from his great levels of holiness.

These great people knew that treating one's wife with respect and giving her the attention she deserves is an integral part of a man's *avodat hakodesh*. It brings the *Shechinah* into the home.

One Year Plus

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach would tell *chatanim* that this mitzvah is not only for the first year of marriage, rather it is for a lifetime. He deduces this from the order of the *pasuk*. "He shall be free / available for his home for one year," – i.e., the exemption from military duty is for one year only. But the continuation of the verse, "And he shall gladden the wife which he married," – that has no expiration date.

Hold Your Tongue

A husband must be especially cautious with his tongue, not to say anything insulting or embarrassing in the home. Baal Haturim sees an allusion to this in the wording of the *pasuk*: "*Lechol davar naki*" which can also be read, "*Lechol dibur naki*" indicating that a new husband must make sure that his speech is clean from abusive language.

On that note, Sefer Ohr Daniel relates the following incident. A prominent Rav in Bavel (Iraq) did not have children for many years. He

and his wife prayed and prayed, but alas, remained childless.

One Friday night, after singing *Eishet Hayil* and making *kiddush*, the wife went to the kitchen to bring out the food. She held a tray heavily laden with all of the courses for the evening *seudah*. Suddenly, she tripped and fell, dropping all of the food. Embarrassed as she was, she was expecting to receive a few insults from her husband at her clumsiness.

Instead, the wise husband calmly began to sing *Eishet Hayil* once again, this time in a most stirring *nigun*, that he made up on the spot. He repeated the verse *Eishet Hayil mi Yimtza* so many times until he was sure that his wife understood that he was singing about her and valued her more than pearls.

Then he went on to the next verse, and the third. At "*Gimalatu tov velo ra*" he paused and interjected a plea, "*Ribono shel olam*, you gave me such a righteous wife. She only does good for me, never bad, all her days. So I beg of You, Master of the Universe, I beseech You, please grant us the fulfillment of the verse, "Her children arose and endorsed her – *Kamu vaneha vaye'ashruha*" – this line he repeated a few times, and continued, "*Ribono shel olam*, please grant us children who will make it clear what a great mother they had."

The *Rabanit* heard her husband's appreciation for her and his heartfelt *tefillot*. She was very moved and cried a silent plea. She slowly arose and they completed the verses of *Eishet Hayil*.



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Their *seudah* that evening consisted of *hallah* and no more, but they felt on a spiritual high.

That very night, the Rav's father came to him in a dream and told him, "You should know that it had been decreed for you and your wife to remain childless all your years. But when your wife dropped the food and you expressed no anger, instead you sang her praise and uttered a prayer, this generated a great tumult in Heaven. Angels were dancing as you were singing and *Beit Din Shel Maalah* annulled your previous verdict."

This couple raised eight righteous children.

Hidur Mitsvah

In Rabbi Paysach Krohn's "Around the Maggid's Table," a story is told of Rabbi Shalom Eisen, renowned posek and expert in *dalet minim*. Shortly before *Sukkot* one year, a young *avreich* brought a beautiful *etrog* to Rabbi Eisen to examine.

Rabbi Eisen examined the *etrog* from top to bottom and declared, "This *etrog* is not for you."

The *avreich* was surprised. "Is there a *shailah* – a possible problem?" he inquired.

Instead of answering, Reb Shalom responded with a question, "What do you do for a living?"

"I learn in Kollel," said the young Yerushalmi.

"Do they pay?" asked Reb Shalom.

"Sure they pay," answered the *avreich* not yet sure where Rabbi Eisen was heading.

"How much?" asked Reb Shalom.

The *avreich* reported his monthly Kollel stipend, not a very impressive figure.

"And how much is the seller asking for this *etrog*?" Reb Shalom posed.

Now the *avreich* had quite a large amount to say.

So Reb Shalom summed up his halachic decision, "This is a beautiful *etrog*. But an *avreich* with that size stipend should purchase a much less expensive *etrog* and use the remaining money to buy his wife a new outfit for Yom Tov! That is a much bigger *hidur* than an *etrog mehudar*."

Dishwasher

When the family sat Shiva for the Steipler, it was related that when the Rebbetzin went to sleep too tired to wash the dishes, she would wake up to a clean sink as her *tsaddik* of a husband washed the dishes, thereby bringing more *Shechinah* into the home.

When Help is Needed...

A married grandson of the Chofetz Chaim learned in the Lakewood Yeshiva. The administration was honored to have someone of such illustrious lineage learning in their institution. But they were somewhat dismayed at his tardiness to *Shacharit* and frequent absence from the daily *minyan*.

One day, the *Mashgiach* Reb Nosson called him over to ask for an explanation. The *Rosh Hayeshivah* was also present at this exchange of words.

The *avreich* began, "Certainly I would love to daven in Yeshivah and to come on time. But what



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can I do? More often than not, on my way to *Shacharit*, I encounter a woman who has many children and she is just not managing. The children are crying. One wants a bottle, another needs help getting dressed, a third wants breakfast, a fourth needs help getting out to *cheder*, etc. This poor woman has to deal with this on her own and she just doesn't manage. I feel obligated to lend a helping hand.

"Often this gets me late to Yeshiva *davening*. Sometimes I go to a later *minyan*. But I feel that it is what I ought to do. It is a *chessed* opportunity that comes my way and there does not seem to be anyone else to do the job."

The *Mashgiach* was quite impressed with this trait of *chessed* which really befit a grandson of the Chofetz Chaim. "But who is this poor woman?" the *Mashgiach* asked, curiously, wondering if he was acquainted with the widow or divorcee.

"It happens to be," said the *avreich*, "that she is my wife!"

In conclusion, the Torah's directives are applicable in all generations. This week's *parashah* has a mitzvah which can bring bliss to every married couple. It involves investment, but it is well worth the dividends.

The *eitzah* is simple: Work on your marriage from the start. Do not assume that things will run smoothly. Marriages take work. The main thing is to shift your focus from yourself to your spouse. What are my spouse's needs and what can I do to get them fulfilled?

A home in which each partner is doing his / her best to bring joy and delight to the other, ends up being a happy home. The Torah teaches us that the beginning of the marriage is so important. That is when special attention must be devoted to develop the relationship.

Those who work in *shalom bayit* suggest practicing a "*shanah rishonah*" approach even years after the wedding day, if the marriage seems to need that kind of renovation or rejuvenation.

Paying attention to one's spouse's needs is a lifetime occupation. This includes refraining from verbal abuse as well as providing emotional support, validation and appreciation. The husband is to lend a helping hand in household chores. This is a mitzvah of *chessed* in which close relatives are given precedence.

The more a husband displays care and devotion, the more the wife will naturally reciprocate and encourage him to learn and attend *Shiurim*.

As we prepare for the Judgment Day on 1 *Tishrei*, let us not forget the home front. Let us examine our behavior towards our spouses and in the event that there is room for improvement, let us take strides in that realm. Let us ask each other for forgiveness and automatically we will discover how we can work very practically on home improvement. This will certainly be a great merit for all of us on the upcoming Judgment Day.

Have a Great *Ellul*!
Rabbi Mordechai Malka