

*DIMENSIONS
OF LOVE*

*The Jewish
Foundations of Love
and Marriage*

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

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Translated by Bracha Slae

Edited by Liora Silberstein

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To order this book:

American Friends of Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

PO BOX 1076

Jerusalem, Israel 91009

Telephone: 02-628-4101

Fax: 02-626-1528

Or e-mail: toratravaviner@gmail.com

Computer typesetting: Moshe Kaplan



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May you merit building a faithful house
among the Nation of Israel

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim
in the Heart of Yerushalayim

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner
Rosh Ha-Yeshiva



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PREFACE

A Note from the Editor

Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, shlita, Rosh Yeshiva of Ateret Kohanim and Rabbi of Beit El, was a disciple of R. Zvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook, z"l who was the son of R. Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, the first chief Rabbi of Israel. This is the first of R. Aviner's books to be translated into English.

The English speaking observant community has not had much exposure to the writings of the disciples of R. Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, especially on the topic of love and marriage. Therefore this book provides refreshing insight into a topic that is so very much written about today. The difference between this book and many other books on marriage is that it deals with the philosophical foundation of love and marriage; what kind of relationship we should be striving for, as well as clarifying difficult ideas about soulmates and the couple's role in the dating process. It is not a practical book dealing with day-to-day complications which arise in marriage but rather a spiritual discourse on what lies behind these issues and how they can be corrected.

Liora Silberstein

Part One



CHOOSING A
MARRIAGE PARTNER

❖ Chapter 1

How to Decide Whom to Marry

There are times when a couple puts off the critical decision of whether to marry or not for fear of making a mistake. Intellectually, each one knows that the other is a fitting partner for him,¹ with the requisite character traits and spiritual qualities, that their goals in life are the same, and that they get along well together. Nevertheless, they refuse to commit themselves because they don't feel all-consuming love for each other. There may be moments when each one feels overcome by emotion, but most of the time their hearts are lukewarm or even cool. Days pass, while they wait for their hearts to tell them for sure. This endless deferment can make the heart sick.²

Faith In G-d

The most important thing is to believe: if one has met a person he likes, whose character traits he admires and which fit

¹ For the sake of clarity, we will usually refer to "he", although everything said applies equally to "she".

² *Mishlei* 13:12.

his personality, and she awakens a certain amount of affection in him, then he should trust in G-d's providence. This must be the woman who was meant for him. Of course, this doesn't mean that he should rush into things without thinking, but simply that he should not be overly cautious and search indefinitely. Otherwise, he might decide to meet every unmarried Jewish girl alive before reaching a decision, as it is always possible that somewhere there might be someone else even more fitting to be his wife!

R. Yechiel HaLevi Weiss, in *Beit Yehezkel*³ writes: "Furthermore, I was told by HaRav HaGaon Binyamin Zilber, *shlita*, that each partner need only ascertain that the other has a good nature and no characteristic which could later interfere with marital harmony. All the rest - money, apartment and profession - is irrelevant. Man must make the minimum essential effort required of him; then it is up to G-d to find him a mate."

In the responsa, *Igrot Moshe*⁴ of R. Moshe Feinstein, a young man who was considering marriage to a certain woman, asked if it was permissible to ask her to cook him a sample meal.⁵ R. Feinstein answered: "As far as cooking a meal for him, it would seem that there is no halachic prohibition here whatsoever. However, this should not be done,

³ Vol. II, *Hilchot De'ot*, p.200.

⁴ *Yoreh Deah* 1:90. R. Feinstein was one of the foremost Torah authorities of our generation.

⁵ The technical *halachic* problem here was that of *shimush ba'isha*.

for it is not good to be too clever: If a woman is attractive to him, has a good name and comes from a respectable family, then one should trust in G-d and marry her, believing that she is his Divinely ordained mate. Not only are further tests unnecessary, they will be to no avail, as it is written, ‘You shall be guileless (*tamim*) with G-d’⁶

The fact is that a good marriage is one which is built by both partners. Overwhelming love and burning desire at the very beginning of a marriage are not absolutely necessary. If they do exist, there is no guarantee that they will endure, and if they do not exist, they may be engendered by mutual effort. Human effort is what this world is all about. There may exist a good foundation which is a gift from G-d, but in principle, “man was born to labor.”⁷ He must build his own life through his own efforts. Theoretically, no preliminary basis for affection should be necessary at all in order to build a happy marriage, but obviously it is much simpler and easier if such a basis does exist. Therefore it is necessary to ascertain that there are fruitful grounds for love to grow on, or at the very least, a lack of impediments, and then one must proceed from there.

It Is Sufficient to See or to Meet Her

“One is not permitted to betroth a woman before seeing her, lest he later discover something ugly in her and come to

⁶ *Devarim* 18:13.

⁷ *Iyov* 7:5.

hate her, for the Torah commands us: ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”⁸ This passage in the Talmud also teaches us that one must see his future wife himself in order to know whether she is a person he could come to love, and that that minimum, (along with knowing about her), is sufficient.

The Rambam rules accordingly: “It is permitted to look at an unmarried woman... to see if she is pleasing to him so he can marry her. Not only is this in no way prohibited, it is the proper way to behave.”⁹

Taken at face value, these passages seem incomprehensible. Can it possibly be enough for one to meet his future wife for a few minutes to ensure that he will be able to “love her as he does himself,” as the Torah commands us? Only acceptance of the thesis that love is the result of human efforts can explain this approach. Seen in this light, it is only necessary to ascertain whether conditions are favorable for the growth of love through one’s efforts after marriage. Therefore the minimum requirement is to see her. No prolonged acquaintance is necessary. This also explains the rabbinic ruling that in extenuating circumstances one may even betroth a wife through an agent. It is possible for a marriage to be built without any preliminary basis whatsoever, even without the minimum of pre-nuptial affection.

In a healthy natural situation, however, some affection

⁸ *Kiddushin* 41a.

⁹ *Mishneh Torah, Sefer HaKedusha, Hilchot Issurei Biah* 21:3.

should be felt from the beginning. Thus, if after a reasonable period of time no affection develops, common sense would dictate breaking off the relationship. If however, there is already an affectionate relationship, one should not expect fiery passion.

Yitzchak's Achievement

Our patriarch, Yitzchak, whose wife was chosen for him by his father's servant Eliezer, and who did not even meet her beforehand, embodies complete marital harmony in the Torah. We don't know under what circumstances Avraham met his wife Sarah, but we do know of several sharp disagreements between them regarding the treatment of Hagar and Yishmael. Similarly, Ya'akov, who fell in love with Rachel at first sight,¹⁰ also lost his temper and replied, "Am I in place of G-d?" when she demanded of him, "Give me children or I will die!"¹¹ Our sages comment on Ya'akov's sharp words: "Is this the way to answer a woman in distress?"

On the other hand, the "passive" figure of Yitzchak (whose marriage was arranged for him and who did not even recognize Rivka at their first meeting) had a marriage without any friction or strife. Even after Rivka arranged for the blessing - which Yitzchak had intended to bestow upon Eisav - to be given to Ya'akov, there is no hint in the Torah of any

¹⁰ As it says, "And Ya'akov loved Rachel," (*Beraishit* 29:18)

¹¹ *Beraishit* 30:3.

change in Yitzchak's feelings towards Rivka. They continued to live together in love and harmony. It is Yitzchak of whom it is written, "And behold Yitzchak was sporting with Rivka his wife."¹² Thus, the ultimate in marital harmony and love in the Torah appears here, in connection with Yitzchak. It is no coincidence that it is Yitzchak who is the embodiment of *avoda*, the character trait of endeavoring to improve himself. The Talmud tells us: "The good deeds of the fathers serve as a beneficial precedent for their children."¹³

A Pre-ordained Partner

If we accept the premise that our own efforts play a decisive role in our lives, we must try to understand the declaration of our sages that "forty days before the creation of an embryo a Divine voice declares, 'Miss X will marry Mr. Y'"¹⁴ In other words, even before one is born, his mate has already been Divinely pre-ordained. How then can one know when he has found his mate? And if she really is his Divinely appointed helpmate, why doesn't he immediately, instinctively recognize her? The issue is dealt with in the Talmud on the very same page:

Rabbi Shmuel Bar Rav Yitzchak said, "A man's wife is determined by his deeds..." Raba Bar Chana said in the name of R. Yochanan,

¹² Ibid. 26:8.

¹³ *Sotah* 32a.

¹⁴ *Sotah* 2a.

“Matchmaking is as hard for G-d as splitting the Red Sea...” How can this be true? Didn’t R. Yehuda state in the name of Rav: “Forty days before an embryo is formed a Heavenly Voice declares: Miss X to Y! X’s house to Y! X’s field to Y!”?¹⁵

The Talmud resolves this seeming contradiction by stating that there are two types of marriages: one which is Divinely appointed, and one which is as difficult to match as splitting the Red Sea (i.e. when one does not marry his Divinely appointed mate). One’s fate depends on his behavior. If he merits it, then Divine providence will ensure that he finds his Divinely appointed mate. But if he has deviated from the Divine order, then he will not marry his Divinely ordained mate.¹⁶

Rambam also questions Rav’s statement, “Miss X to Y.” Doesn’t it contradict man’s freedom of choice if G-d has already decided in advance who will marry whom? Furthermore, the acts a man chooses to do of his own free will often involve the performance of *mitzvot* or *averot*. G-d cannot decree that anyone perform a *mitzva* or *averah*.¹⁷ Rambam solves this problem by stating that the Divine decision is simply that Miss X is a fitting mate for Y, that they make an ideal couple. Their **deeds** determine whether or not they

¹⁵ *Sotah* 2a.

¹⁶ Rashi there.

¹⁷ *Shmoneh Prakim* Ch.8.

actually marry, or whether Divine providence guides them towards a life of bliss, or G-d forbid, dissension.¹⁸ R. Ya'akov Emden applies this rule to all the promises of blessings mentioned in the Torah. Whether or not they actually come to pass depends on man's merits.¹⁹

In principle it is easy to understand that everything depends on one's deeds. However, the actual situation is much more complex. Perhaps one's Divinely ordained mate has not yet been born, or lived many years ago? These questions are all part of the unfathomable secrets of G-d. The Ramchal, R. Moshe Chaim Luzzato, discusses these possibilities, and concludes that even in those cases where the partners are not a Divine match, they can become one. G-d builds them a "home" (in kabbalistic terminology), i.e. a new spiritual reality uniting them evolves. Luzzato teaches us that even when one marries someone who is not his "Divine match", deep harmony and compatibility are possible.

It is true that "if G-d will not build the house, the builders have toiled in vain."²⁰ Nevertheless, it is not up to G-d alone to build, man must first toil and then G-d grants His blessing. In conclusion, we have no knowledge of the secrets of the soul and cannot know whether someone is a Divinely decreed spouse or not. However, (as one can see from R.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See his commentary to *Shmoneh Prakim*, Ch 8.

²⁰ *Tehilim* 127:1.

Luzzato's philosophy) in practice, it is not as critical as one may at first believe.

❖ Chapter 2

The Secret of “*Nesirah*”

The reason why one does not intuitively identify his Divinely appointed mate has to do with the secret of *nesirah*. This is a kabbalistic term denoting the separation of the female from the male. G-d created Adam as one whole perfect human being who was both male and female. He then separated Adam into two independent units of male and female: “For in the beginning they were really one double-faced entity, joined back to back. Since it was not good for Man to be alone, G-d separated them and made them two.”²¹

At first it was clear that both the male and female parts formed one entity. Since the separation however, each part seemingly has his own independent existence, and great effort and willpower are required to regain unity.

Nesirah between the soul and G-d

The question then arises, “Why was this separation necessary and was it beneficial? Hasn’t it wrought confusion?” The Ramchal treats this subject in depth, extending the con-

²¹ *Beraishit Raba* 24.

cepts of *nesirah* (and the change in status from being “back to back” to being “face to face”), to apply to the world as a whole. He claims that these concepts refer not only to the relationship between man and woman, but also to that between G-d and His world. For example, before any soul descends to this world it is, by its very nature, inseparably attached to its Creator and wholly infused with the Divine light, not by virtue of its own effort, but through the power of the Creator. This mars the relationship between the soul and its Creator, for “one who lives on charity, (lit. who eats bread he did not earn), is ashamed to look his benefactor in the face.”²² This type of natural, compulsory union, not achieved through the efforts of free will, is designated the state of “back to back.”

Through *nesirah* (the descending of the soul into the body), the soul is separated from its Creator, and becomes independent. This then allows it to achieve adherence to the Divine through its own *avodah* or effort. The resultant spiritual glory is then credited to the soul itself; this is the greatest achievement possible to a person in this world. When one, of his own free will, turns to his Creator and attempts to cling to Him, this is called being in the state of “face to face,” and brings the whole world to a higher state of perfection.

²² *Yerushalmi Orlah* 1:1, cited by Tosfot on *Kiddushin* 36. See also Ramchal, *Pitchei Chochmah*, no. 4

The same principle applies to the relationship between man and woman: before *nesirah*, man and woman were joined “back to back” by their [Divinely ordained] nature and regardless of their own free will; now they can reunite “face to face” through the efforts of their own free will. In other words, the term “back to back” refers to an automatic, instinctive, compulsory state of encounter, that of one object to another; while the term “face to face” refers to a voluntary encounter, in which a person must invest all the spiritual resources available to him.

Perhaps the Hebrew word for face, *panim*, is linguistically related to the word *pnim* (within). The face expresses that which is within. This again brings us back to the central point, that our attainments in this world must come from within us, from our own efforts. This is our only claim to greatness and honor. Therefore, G-d created an imperfect world which only the human being, through his own efforts, can bring to perfection.

An “impression” remains

The question then arises: why didn’t G-d create man and woman as two completely separate entities in the first place? Likewise, why is the soul first united with the Divine only to be separated through *nesirah*?

R. Kook explains in the case of the soul, that the link with the Divine has not been completely erased by *nesirah*, for an “impression” remains, and it is just this “impression”

which lays the foundation for human effort. For this reason, the term “create” (*yotzeir*) is used three times in one of the *sheva berachot*²³ - the first time refers to creation by G-d, the second time to human creativity, and the last to emphasize that human creativity is also G-d-given, “Were G-d not aiding and abetting man’s intelligence, his free will would be of no use to him.”²⁴

In his commentary on the *siddur*, *Olat Re’iyah*, R. Kook discusses the third of the *sheva berachot*:

*G-d, in His wisdom, has decreed that a person be able to perfect himself in the process of perpetuating his kind, through merging the natural and the instinctive with free will. The principle of free will is based on instinct, for without this instinctive foundation, which G-d in His wisdom and mercy imbued in His world, there would not be any possibility for free choice to exist.*²⁵

The primary goal of this world is the achievement of brotherly love and married love, (in R. Kook’s words, “to bring goodness and perfection to the world”), through man’s free will, as a result of a rational decision to act righteously. Man is helped, though, by the elements of love and friendship

²³ Seven blessings recited during the wedding ceremony and every day thereafter for a week.

²⁴ R. A.Y. Kook, *Olat Re’iyah*, Vol. I, p.292.

²⁵ *Ibid.* This relates to the connection discussed above between *panim* and *pnim*.

imbued in his innate nature.²⁶ However, if mating were completely instinctive, as it is in the animal world, it would preempt free choice. Therefore, only a slight impression of instinctive behavior remains, in order to allow a person room for free choice. Nevertheless, it does provide the foundation upon which free choice depends.

R. Kook continues: “One’s power of free will is expressed in his **face**, in how he sees the world [and] how his heart and mind are affected. On the other hand, instinctive behavior is based in the **back**. The physical union of husband and wife in the place governed by instinct, utilizes instinct to reinforce marital harmony.”²⁷ The third blessing of the *sheva berachot* discussed above: “who created Adam in His image... and provided for the perpetuation of his kind,” refers to the ever present innate Divine basis which makes love and harmony possible.

In order for man’s free choice to remain intact, Adam was put into a deep sleep when his rib was separated from him to create Chava. This sleep enabled man’s instinctive nature to remain as a mere “impression”, but not as a dominating impulse. Thus a person has no clear memory of his original “double-faced” state, merely the intellectual ability to discern the presence of the “impression” left upon him.

²⁶ This relates to the idea discussed in the previous chapter, that a person should only commit to another when he intuitively feels that there is a likelihood of affection developing between them.

²⁷ Ibid.

This idea is similar to the *aggada* of our sages that before a soul enters a body, it is taught the entire Torah, “but just before he is born, an angel touches his upper lip and causes him to forget everything that he has learned.”²⁸ Here too, what point is there in teaching him the whole Torah if he is to forget it all? The answer is the same: this “pre-natal” Torah study leaves an impression on the soul which is capable of arousing the deep attachment, yearning, will-power and mental ability necessary for Torah study later on.

In summary, man’s rational efforts to achieve a loving, productive marriage²⁹ are always based on the Divine order of nature. It is this which guarantees the possibility of success and the assurance that instinctive attraction has the potential to lead to a union of love and deep harmony.

Even if one has married someone who is not his Divinely pre-ordained mate, the Divine element of union in the form of an “impression” appears during the *kiddushin* (betrothal) ceremony. During the betrothal, the souls of the man and woman unite. The husband’s soul encompasses his wife’s, and an ongoing spiritual penetration, perpetuated through *avodah*, is set into motion.³⁰

²⁸ *Nidda* 30b.

²⁹ Whether this union comes from “a Divine decree” or “the building of a new home” in the terminology of Luzzato (see Chapter 1).

³⁰ According to Lurian Kabbala.

❖ Chapter 3

Emotional Ups and Downs

In his commentary on the *Hallel* prayer in the *Pesach Haggada*, R. Kook explains that

*From time to time during one's normal daily existence, a person experiences occasional moments of spiritual elation, when he rises above the level of his routine and is able to praise G-d with uncommon fervor. However, it is not advisable to remain in such a state of spiritual elevation for long periods of time because equilibrium in one's spiritual and physical powers is one of the greatest blessings possible. Therefore, 'one who recites Hallel every day is a blasphemer.'*³¹

Unpleasant as the thought may be, we must realize that coming closer to the Divine inevitably upsets our spiritual equilibrium. Prolonging such an abnormal (albeit uplifting)

³¹ *Shabbat* 118b.

situation, turns it into a burden and almost an illness, and leads to the very opposite of that spiritual elevation.

However, when this elevation occurs only periodically, and is based on a normal healthy life of kedusha (sanctity),... then it cannot be imagined how beautiful this experience is, and what enlightenment it brings to our daily routine, even after it has passed like a flash of light in the darkness... until, in the normal course of life, it reappears, again bringing that spiritual elevation so befitting the holiday periods of rest and pleasure, when the soul enjoys the Divine presence with thanksgiving and praise.

In the same manner, the feeling of being in love may come and go. This should not cause alarm, whether it happens before the engagement, during it, or even after the wedding. It is due to the unstable nature of our emotions, and is what prompted our sages to state: “One who recites *Hallel* every day is a blasphemer....”³²

The fragility of love before marriage

According to our sages, it is natural for married love to have its ups and downs: R. Meir used to say, “Why did the Torah command a *nidda* to abstain from marital relations? [Be-

³² Ibid. See also R. Kook, *Orot HaKodesh* I, p.255 on the dynamics of life and death in the world of emotion.

cause] if the couple becomes too familiar with each other, their union loses its attraction. Therefore the Torah prohibits her to him... so that on the day of her purification she is as attractive to him as she was on their wedding day.”³³ In other words, maintaining a state of constant burning desire is untenable. If this is true for marriage, how much more does it apply before marriage, when the love felt has no real foundation and no outlet. It is a disembodied emotion which has not yet had the opportunity to actualize itself through mutual devotion and continuous acts of loving-kindness. It is like an engine running without fuel, an unhealthy state, which may cause fluctuations of emotion, from overwhelming love to complete emptiness. The practical expressions of affection in daily life act to stabilize and reinforce love. Doubts can only be removed by real life situations and not in theory.

The state of having no real practical commitment to each other, of having no *brit* or contract, is the source of the fragility in the relationship preceding marriage. In contrast, true friendship is akin to that of the commitments of secret societies - absolute devotion even to the point of complete self-sacrifice. The Hebrew word for this kind of real friendship, *chaverut*, has acquired a distorted connotation in popular use. This is a reflection of a distorted attitude towards life in general: attachments with no real commitment or selfless giving. The original meaning of the word denotes a

³³ *Nidda* 31b.

healthy relationship between a man and a woman, one of mutual obligation based on a contract, i.e. marriage.

The prophet Malachi rebukes the men of Israel for taking second, non-Jewish wives in addition to their Jewish ones, who were no longer young and beautiful after the strenuous trek from Babylon back to *Eretz Israel*: “Let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth, [for] she is your friend (*chavert’cha*) and the wife of your covenant.”³⁴ She is your real friend, not that strange woman you married for her good looks. Love based on self-enjoyment (on the pleasure principle) is not true love. True love must exist within the framework of a mutual pact.

Betrothal

On the face of it, R. Kook’s commentary on the betrothal ceremony seems to contradict the above idea. On the expression, “And I shall betroth you to Me forever,”³⁵ he comments:

*Although marriage is considered a more complete union than betrothal, nevertheless betrothal expresses the intrinsic elevated basis inherent in the Divine union, which is so exalted that it has no physical expression at all....*³⁶

³⁴ *Malachi* 2:15.

³⁵ *Hoshea* 2:21.

³⁶ *Olat Re'iyah*, Vol I, p.35.

In other words, betrothal is the soul of marriage, its exalted nucleus, which gives life to the physical expression but is not influenced by it. This seems to imply that disembodied love is the most noble and virtuous, but that is a misunderstanding of R. Kook's words. According to the *halacha*, betrothal (marked by the *kiddushin* ceremony) signifies the entrance into the marriage contract, which is finalized by the actual wedding, the *nisuin*. A betrothed couple was considered to be married in every way except for the fact that the wife remained in her parents' home and had no intimate physical contact with her husband until, after the wedding, he took her to his home. In general, betrothal was meant as a preparatory phase to perfect the inner elements of their life together so that it be built from the inside out.

It is clear from this that the concept of romantic love has no place in Judaism. Therefore, each person must search his own soul to see if he really loves his partner, or if he is in love with the pleasant feeling that he himself experiences in the other's presence, his partner being merely the means through which he attains this love. This type of love is just plain egotism. Certainly, there is nothing which can compare with the blissful feeling of being in love. True love, however, is not the result of a feeling; it may exist even in the presence of a temporary absence of emotion.

❖ Chapter 4

Friendship

The Rambam, in his commentary on the *mishna*, discusses the injunction, “Acquire a friend for yourself.”³⁷ He explains that without a friend a person cannot improve himself, as our sages said, “[Give me] either a friend or death.”³⁸ One man alone is incapable of mending his ways - in the Garden of Eden, G-d said, “It is not good for Man to be alone. I shall make a helpmate for him.”³⁹ Furthermore, this friend or helpmate must be acquired, i.e. one must make an effort to gain his affection. This is done by trying to please him, by finding out what he truly likes, not projecting what you like, or what you think he should like.

The Rambam then proceeds to define three different types of friends a person could need: “One person, but three types of friends: a friend for expediency, a friend for peace of mind, and a friend for excellence....”

A friend for expediency is needed for practical reasons. One needs a friend to help him accomplish his daily needs, to help him make physical improvements. A friend for peace

³⁷ *Pirkei Avot* 1:8.

³⁸ *Ta'anit* 23a.

³⁹ *Beraishit* 2:18.

of mind helps satisfy one's psychological needs. The human being is a social animal. He needs a friend to talk to, to share his experiences with, to help him improve spiritually and emotionally. A friend for excellence helps the two achieve a common goal. Together they will strive, together they will try to bring about peace and perfection in the world. This is the type of friend the *mishna* in *Pirkei Avot* is telling us to acquire.

There is nothing wrong with the first two kinds of friends, but they lack the merits of the last. Their friendship is really self-love, in contrast to the friend of excellence where the goal of the friendship is to strive together towards the higher ideal of *tikkun olam*. This is the most elevated type of friendship. It is not a closed circuit of mutual favors, but rather mutual aid for the most constructive of purposes.

A person chooses the first two types of friends for his own personal good, be it physical or spiritual. In contrast, the third type of friendship teaches us that peace and love among people is a value in itself, being the testimony of G-d's presence in the world. This shall be further explained.

Two types of harmony and unity

R. Kook writes that there are two types of harmony and unity among people: the first kind is utilitarian, where the individual realizes that he is by nature a social being, and that if each person tries to achieve his own personal aims alone, he will not succeed. Only when people unite by mak-

ing peace, will they achieve their desires, and each individual will thereby achieve his own aim. This type of unity, which is natural to mankind, is to be found even in godless societies.

The second type of harmony is more elevated; its driving force is to achieve universal peace and unity. It is based on the idea that all people are essentially brothers, all belonging to the same Father in heaven, and that this harmony is the Divine will. Through this type of unity, all the great ideals of wisdom, justice and integrity among people will be put into practice.

Likewise, there is a tremendous difference in the **consequences** of these two types of unity. Unity which is the result of selfish, egoistic considerations of individuals, is really incidental unity, and will not endure, for it has no true center. Although this unity may sometimes appear to gain strength, it will end in flames, in fierce hatred and civil war, as each person attempts to benefit himself. In contrast, the second type of unity will endure forever, gaining strength and magnitude as time progresses, for it is based on the recognition that the Divine plan for this world can only be fulfilled through peace among men and a true love for mankind.⁴⁰

In our case, this means that each person must search his own soul and ask himself if he really loves his spouse or if

⁴⁰ R. Kook, *Olat Re'iyah*, Vol I, p.257.

he is indulging in self-love. Even then, love is not looking into each other's eyes, but looking in the same direction. For instance, the love between R. Akiva and Rachel impelled them to separate temporarily so that he could study Torah. This was not love based on mutual enjoyment, but love directed towards a common ideal.

When one decides to cement a bond of friendship, the ultimate ideal being the friendship of a married couple,⁴¹ it must be clear that this friendship is the means by which the Divine presence is revealed in this world. As R. Kook wrote:

For the tool through which G-d's will shall be achieved, and what G-d desires, is shalom. This is the true nature of the world, demonstrating the truth that all the manifold opinions and desires point towards one goal, and all actions join together, through peace, to bring about the revelation of G-d's glory through the paths He has established. Therefore, the main virtue of peace and harmony is the revelation of the unity and interconnection of all human wills with the Divine will, through the harmony between individuals.⁴²

⁴¹ See the *mishna* in *Kiddushin* 41a cited above.

⁴² R. Kook, *ibid.*

❖ Chapter 5

What Constitutes “*Avodah*”?

The *avodah*, or effort, one must exert in order to build a strong, loving relationship can be classified as the achievement of two good *middot* or qualities: having an *ayin tova* (lit. a good eye - appreciation and understanding through seeing the good in the other person); and having a *lev tov* (lit. a good heart - generosity and unselfish devotion).

A good eye

Having a good eye means utilizing one’s mental faculties to search for the good in every situation, not by ignoring the bad, but by understanding that reality is basically good, while the bad can be corrected. As R. Kook wrote:

“The great love which we have for our nation cannot blind our eyes and prevent criticism of its faults. Nevertheless, we find its inherent nature, even after freely criticizing it, to be lacking any

*blemish, as it says: 'You are all fair, my love; there is no blemish in you,'*⁴³

This principle applies to love between husband and wife. A couple should see the good in each other, by virtue of their being members of *Klal Yisrael*, and because they are each other's closest friend and therefore the person they are most obligated to love. Acquisition of this frame of mind is only possible through *avodah*, as R. Kook writes:

*[Achieving] love of Israel, and the avodah of pleading the cause of the whole society and its individuals is not merely a matter of emotional discipline; it is a whole area of Torah study, requiring wisdom which is deep, broad and multi-faceted....*⁴⁴

In *Olat Re'iyah* he writes that one should ponder the virtues of *Klal Yisrael* and come to an intellectual understanding and a clear recognition of the sanctity of Israel, and of its great virtue.⁴⁵ In other words, love is not merely an emotion. It is also a science - the science of understanding that the other person is not an object but a human being, like oneself, with all the accompanying complexities.

This would seem to be a simple even obvious principle, but it is one which is easily forgotten in everyday life. Compli-

⁴³ *Shir HaShirim* 4:7. Excerpt from *Orot Yisrael*, p148.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Vol II, p.111.

cations often arise between a husband and wife simply because they cannot raise themselves to the level of understanding the other as a person. Couples tend to categorize each other, to treat each other as objects, instead of listening to the other and treating him as a person in his own right.

The story is told of a boy who had a very difficult childhood; he was always being insulted and picked on. When he grew up, he became a teacher. One of his students always looked neglected, and this angered him no end, so that he was constantly punishing the boy. One day, he looked at the boy, and suddenly realized that this boy was no other than he himself! He immediately took him and washed him up, bought him new clothing from his own pocket, gave him special attention, and the boy slowly began to improve.

This then is our advice: look for the good in each other. Know that just as it is clear to you that you are a good person, despite your faults, and your faults are not signs of innate wickedness but rather deviations which can be corrected, so it is with your spouse. You must show the same tolerance and understanding towards him.

Sometimes this takes tremendous strength, but it is worth it to break through the shell and to reveal the hidden goodness, as well hidden as it may be. As R. Kook continues in *Olat Re'iyah*: "The sanctity of the elevated soul of every Jewish person should cause us to tremble with fear [in the

presence] of such holiness.”⁴⁶ The disciples of Avraham Avinu may be recognized by their good eye, in contrast to the disciples of the wicked Bilaam, who are characterized by their evil eye.⁴⁷ We are the sons of Avraham Avinu.

In a story, “The Seven Beggars,” of R. Nachman of Breslav, the beggars are also capable of discerning the inner goodness of reality. One says at a wedding, “You think I am blind, but I am not blind at all. I just don’t think the world is worth looking at!” And the deaf man says, “You think I am deaf, but I am not deaf at all. I just don’t think it is worth listening to all that is wrong in the world...I live a good life which doesn’t lack anything.”

A good heart

So much for the intellectual effort one must make to find the good in other people. The second effort one must make is to give of oneself. The popular conception is that one loves those who give to him, and that one gives to those whom he loves. The truth is that we love those to whom we give of ourselves. R. Dessler devotes a large section of his *Michtav Me’Eliyahu* to loving-kindness:

*Whatever one gives to another person is not lost,
for it is an extension of oneself. What he has
given to his friend seems to him as if it is still part*

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Pirkei Avot* 5:23.

of himself. This is how the attachment we call 'love' is formed between two people...Therefore we say that this love is the result of the fact that each one completes the other. This is their Divinely ordained nature, as our sages said: 'A man without a wife...is not a complete person.'⁴⁸ Each individual is deficient, for alone he cannot fulfill his goal in life [of having offspring]. Thus, when two people complete each other, they love each other, each one's aim is to give pleasure and joy to the other.⁴⁹

In other words, it is the differences between people which prevent them from forming bonds with one another. But when one person invests of himself in the other, by giving to him, such a bond is possible.

Let man realize that he will only love those to whom he gives. He will feel as if he has something in common with them, and will be attached to them, as we have said. Let man then understand, that that person who seems to be estranged from himself, is so because he has not yet given to him, not yet helped him in some way. If then one begins to help everyone he can, he will feel that they are all his brothers, all his

⁴⁸ Beraishit Raba 17.

⁴⁹ Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Vol I, Chapter "On Loving-Kindness", pp.37-8.

*friends; for he has something in common with each one; they are all extensions of himself.*⁵⁰

A person who has been successful in reaching this high level will be able to take literally the Torah commandment: 'Love your neighbor as yourself,'⁵¹ i.e. exactly as [you love] yourself...with no difference.⁵² In your soul, you will realize that you and he are really one; you will really feel that he is like yourself.⁵³ The numerical value of the Hebrew words *ahava* (love) and *echad* (one) is the same.

It follows from this that a union which the partners consider merely a framework within which to make demands on each other, and take from each other, has not much chance of survival.

It is clear that most people are takers and not givers. Under the rule of instinct, they become givers and lovers. But they quickly... revert to being the takers that they were before. Neither do they themselves notice exactly when this change occurs. Instead of being givers, as they were originally, they become takers, each one making demands on the other... This is what I tell newlyweds: Be careful, my friends, to continue in your desire to bring joy to each other, just as you

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Vayikra 19:19.

⁵² Luzzato, *Path of the Just*, Chapter 11.

⁵³ *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, *ibid.*

*do now. Remember, as soon as you begin to make demands on each other, you will no longer be happily married.*⁵⁴

It follows that marriage means self-sacrifice. It entails giving without demanding compensation, “do for me and I will do for you.” According to our sages: “one who says, ‘What is yours is mine and what is mine is yours’ is a boor.”⁵⁵ He is turning human relationships into trade, making them a matter of expediency.

The highest level is that of the *chasid* or righteous person: “What is mine is yours and what is yours is yours.”⁵⁶ Acts of loving-kindness are done for their own sake and not for reciprocity. If my recipient is also interested in doing good for me - that’s fine, but I did not give to him in order to be repaid. This is not a relationship based on trading favors but rather a free-flowing stream of mutual giving.

Taking all that has been written above into consideration, a prolonged period of decision-making is not advisable. We may conclude that if two people meet, and they find that their personalities, philosophies and goals in life are compatible, and they have a certain amount of affection for each other, they should trust in G-d that this is their intended union, the house in Israel they are meant to build. One must

⁵⁴ Ibid. pp.38-9.

⁵⁵ *Pirkei Avot* 5:10.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

realize that his desire to resolve all doubts may not be realistic. Doubts can only be resolved, with G-d's help, in real life situations.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ This is aside from all of the *halachic* reservations regarding postponement of the decision to marry, not dealt with in this book.

Part Two



HOW DO YOU DEFINE
LOVE?

❖ Chapter 1

Love as an Irrational Emotion

אהבה מקלקלת את השורה (בראשית רבא נה:יא)

Love upsets one's equilibrium (Beraishit Raba 55:11)

It can happen in the dating process that emotions sweep the couple off their feet. This reaction calls for caution - not dismissal or derision - but caution. A person can become so overcome by emotion that he loses all ability to make rational decisions. The expressions “lovesick” and “crazy about each other” describe these feelings. And in some ways a person can behave as if he really were sick or crazy.

The Shakespearean hero or rather anti-hero, Othello, is a classic example of this. An intelligent, considered person and a great military commander, he completely loses his equilibrium when he falls in love. As a result he becomes so mixed up that he misinterprets a simple remark and murders his beloved out of perverted jealousy.

In such a case love makes an adult as capricious as a small child. His ability to think logically fails him. His whole life

revolves around one central focus; everything else is regarded as meaningless and chaotic. He becomes addicted to his love; a passive victim lacking the ability and willpower to bring his life back under control. This kind of powerful love is not bad in essence. It all depends on whether it leads to emotional growth or to egotistic withdrawal; to spiritual upliftment or to a state of temporary insanity and lack of control, leading to harmful, deviant acts.

One might think that love which can be brought under control is not true love but rather some kind of insipid, lukewarm emotion. It is thought that real love should be a rushing river of emotions that sweeps away everything in its path and cannot be stopped. This is simply not true. Noble feelings and actions may become perverted when carried to an extreme. A person must always remain slightly aloof from his own personal affairs in order to retain the ability to say no. Man's willpower is unlimited. With courage and determination it is possible to control even the most powerful of emotions.

❖ Chapter 2

The Fickleness of Romantic Love

Sometimes couples delay their decision to get married because their relationship does not conform to a romanticized ideal. They are waiting to be swept off their feet by feelings of all-consuming love. As wonderful as it may sound (and wonderful and proper it is within a husband-wife relationship), one must also be realistic and not make over-ambitious, impractical demands that real life cannot always fulfill. One must realize that emotions, noble and pure as they may be, are liable to ups and downs and are subject to changes in life's situations. Even someone who is head over heels in love will inevitably experience a weakening of this feeling at some time or another. This is no cause for alarm. As R. Kook wrote: "As time passes, feelings lose their potency, they grow old and no longer have the same vitality."⁵⁸ Love between husband and wife is not **only** a feeling, but it is **also** a feeling. It is also reason, perception and deep understanding. Above all, married love is the experience of living the marriage together, a reality where

⁵⁸ R. A.Y. Kook, *Orot HaKodesh* vol. I, p.255.

two people are one: one soul, one body, one fate, one destiny. Two who are one.

This existential reality expresses itself both intellectually and emotionally. The intellect is constant, while emotions rise and fall. This in no way implies that one's emotions are not important. They are essential, precious and can be holy, but one should be prepared for the inevitable reality that they will vacillate. One should not despair when this happens and it is certainly no cause for alarm if, during the dating process, one's emotions go up and down.

All great ideals consist of both intellect and emotion. The intellect doesn't appear to be very powerful; it does not carry one away, but it is of great value. As quoted in R. Kook: "The mind is small in quantity and great in quality.... It is the foundation of the soul of the ideal."⁵⁹ This esoteric, inner truth can only be communicated through the emotions. The mind may at times be too theoretical, distant and detached while our feelings are closer to the immediacy of our lives so that to a certain extent: "what I feel is what I am." Perhaps one could describe emotion as the body of love compared to thought which is its soul: "Feeling is the body which encases the intellectual ideal, and translates it into everyday life."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Experience bears out that the delicious romantic feelings are fragile. After a while, the words “I love you, you are so precious to me” sound like a worn-out cliché and no longer arouse any inner response in the one who says it or the one who hears it. “As time passes, feelings lose their potency, they grow old and no longer have the same vitality.”⁶¹ The reader may appeal: “What will happen now? How awful! Is there any hope?” Yes, there is hope. The inner kernel of truth is unchanged; the intellectual love is still there. Although it is not as exciting it is steady and loyal. In the words of R. Kook: “If the intellectual essence [of love] is strong and pure, it will not tire nor grow old [because] truth is eternal.”⁶² From the source of this truth, it is possible to revive the emotion and to replace the old tired feelings with new, rejuvenated ones.

Life is not an extended honeymoon. This is the secret of Jewish family purity laws according to our sages.⁶³ A woman’s biological clock serves G-d’s purpose of defining “a time to refrain from embracing.”⁶⁴ This period of abstaining from marital intimacy is not an end in itself, but rather a preparatory period for “the time to embrace.”⁶⁵ Desire fades with time; habit dulls delicate feelings. The Torah teaches us that there is a time during which embracing is forbidden, “so

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Nidda* 31b.

⁶⁴ *Kohelet* 3:5.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

that she will later be as precious to her husband as on their wedding day.”⁶⁶ The reunion every month becomes a honeymoon; every month brings a renewal of love. “The love you felt at your betrothal”⁶⁷ returns every month, fresh and reinvigorated.

“Such is the fickle and temporal nature of the world of emotion, while the pure intellect is absolute, always producing a new generation after the death of the old.”⁶⁸ Romantic love is proper and beautiful, but only as long as it is innocent and humble and doesn’t turn into an emotional illness destroying all that is good. What a harsh Divine sentence will be given to the authors of all those romance novels and producers of films which portray sick, unrealistic pictures of love. Aside from the fact that these images are forbidden by Jewish law,⁶⁹ they encourage people to develop false expectations which end in terrible disappointment, like a check with no coverage.

Romantic love between a husband and wife certainly has its place, but it is not everything. Much, much deeper is the Rambam’s classification of three different types of affinity and friendship:⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Nidda*, *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Yirmiyahu* 2:2.

⁶⁸ *Orot HaKodesh*, *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 307:16.

⁷⁰ Rambam, commentary on *Pirkei Avot* 1:6.

1) *Friendship which gives pleasure*

We enjoy each other's company, it feels good to be together.

2) *Friendship which provides security*

I trust you and can depend on you. I'm not alone; I have someone to tell my secrets to. I have a good friend with whom I get along very well.

3) *Value oriented friendship*

We both want to reach the same goal and we help each other along the way.

Certainly "friendship for security" is not as romantic and vital-sounding as "friendship for pleasure", but it is more realistic and is really a finer, fuller love, an expression of complete loyalty throughout the stressful situations of daily life.⁷¹ This loyalty is not influenced by passing moods, unlike one who "befriends another for his own benefit, acts like a loyal friend when it benefits him but does not stand behind his friend in his time of need."⁷² This second type of love is less emotional, but is steady as iron and strong as steel.

How sad it is when the feelings between the couple have dulled and there seems to be no way to revive them. Says R. Kook: "The effects of mourning, the incapacity brought

⁷¹ This may be somewhat comparable to the distinction Freud draws between 'the pleasure principle' and 'the reality principle'.

⁷² *Pirkei Avot* 2:3.

about by shock and grief, are characteristic of the emotional system. When an emotion loses its potency it leads to a general emotional depression, not only of that emotion but of the whole system which was formerly supported by it, and which now is paralyzed.”⁷³ The reaction to waning emotion should not be one of despair, but rather a determination to revive the emotion. One must realize though, that this cannot be achieved immediately. The knowledge that the emotion has not died forever, that it will return to life, is not in itself sufficient to revive it:

*Just as the comforting promise of the eternity of the soul and the resurrection of the dead cannot immediately heal the soul of a mourner at his time of grief. However, in time a new spirit will appear, bringing the period of mourning to an end. The spark of intellect will appear, illuminating the darkness and generating a host of new emotions.*⁷⁴

⁷³ *Orot HaKodesh*, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

❖ Chapter 3

Intuitive Knowledge of the Other

והאדם ידע את חוה אשתו (בראשית ד:א)

And Adam knew Chava his wife (Beraishit 4:1)

Love seems to be such a simple thing which everyone knows about. However, love is a very deep concept, which yields great treasures of wisdom to those who seek to understand it. Love, most simply defined, is a sentimental, emotional bond between two people. This is certainly an aspect of love but it doesn't reflect the whole picture. Love can be defined much more broadly and abstractly than mutual attraction. Plato noted that love is multi-faceted and that there are many levels to love; that it can be directed toward a person, an idea, a moral value, or the achievement of universal good. Clearly there is no contradiction between these aspects of love. On the contrary, love between two people is nothing less than a spark of the all encompassing love of the Divine good. When love is perceived in this way

then it is not merely an emotion, but a deep awareness and understanding.

It is no coincidence that the Torah uses the Hebrew word *yada* (knew) to describe Adam's most intimate relations with Chava: "And Adam knew Chava his wife."⁷⁵ The Hebrew word *yediah* - translated simply as "knowledge" - denotes an inner meeting of souls. In the words of the *Tanya*: "the meaning of the word "knowledge" is derived from the verse: 'And Adam knew Chava'. It means an intimate connection which involves man's inner perception in an extremely strong bond."⁷⁶ This "knowledge" is not an intellectual knowledge but rather an intuitive perception, which is more elevated than the intellect.

Certainly love is an emotion, but it is not merely the feeling of mutual attraction which may be egotistical. Rather the one who loves has a strong sense of the other person. He empathizes with the other's character, his ups and downs, his successes and failures, his ambitions and desires. This is empathy in its etymological definition: "feeling together." Whatever one feels so does the other, because of their great affinity. In this sense, feeling rises above intellect and encompasses the delicate processes of understanding and perception of the other. Therefore one can conclude that pure love is really the intuitive knowledge of another.

⁷⁵ *Beraishit* 4:1.

⁷⁶ *Tanya, Likutei Ma'amarim*, end of Ch. 3.



Chapter 4

To Be One

ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד (נראשית ב:כד)

And he cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh
(Beraishit 2:24)

As with all things in life there are levels, and so with love. Love can range from the base to the sublime. We may classify love in the following way:

- 1) **Selfish love:** This is the lowest level of love where a person desires another for his own benefit. In the same way that one may love eating oranges or taking nature walks, one may also love another person. This love is really love of oneself and therefore egotistical by nature, being the fulfillment of one's desires without consideration of the other's wishes, interests and aspirations.
- 2) **Love of giving:** This type of love is more elevated than selfish love; in fact it is the opposite of it for it seeks the welfare of the beloved. This love begins with admiration of the other and may lead to self-sacrifice for the beloved, be it for his physical well-being or spiritual enrichment. This type of self sacrifice on behalf of another can also

find its expression in devotion to a great ideal, to one's nation, to one's country, to the Torah, etc. However, when this kind of love takes on the form of dependence and self-subordination to another, it can be self-destructive to the lover's personality.

- 3) **Love of holy connection:** This form of love is the highest and the holiest type of love: "And he shall cleave to his wife!"⁷⁷ Neither partner subjugates his own personality for the sake of the other; rather the two merge together, as one complete unit: "And they become one flesh"⁷⁸ and one soul. At this level, love is not only an experience involving the emotions, but also a deep intuitive connection embracing all facets of life.

In this third type of love, the connection is based on more than the love the couple feels towards each other. Rather, there is a great ideal which unites them, towards which they both strive and which underlies their union. As a poet once said, "Love is not only looking into each other's eyes, but looking in the same direction." When what connects the couple is an elevated ideal, then their love is nothing less than a spark of that great love which fills the whole universe: the love of G-d. "If they merit, the Divine presence rests between them."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Beraishit* 2:24.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Sotah* 17.

❖ Chapter 5

Happy Together

כי טוב לו עמך (דברים ט"ו:ט"ז)

For it is good for him to be with you (Devarim 15:16)

Many commentators have raised the question as to how one can possibly fulfill the *mitzva* of “loving one’s neighbor as oneself.”⁸⁰ Isn’t this *mitzva* contrary to human nature?⁸¹ Regarding marriage, however, it certainly is possible to take this commandment literally. One must sincerely endeavor to do everything possible to help the other, both physically and spiritually. One must try to feel out what his spouse needs and fulfill those needs unconditionally. Just as every person naturally strives to do whatever is best for himself, he must also try, with all his heart and soul, to do what is best for his spouse. By so doing, a person is freed from the shackles of self-love, and reaches the level where he is not satisfied unless his partner feels “good” being with him (see introductory quote).

In its original context, this phrase refers to the moral obliga-

⁸⁰ *Vayikra* 19:19.

⁸¹ Ramban on *Vayikra* 19:19.

tion to treat a Jewish slave well. How shameful would it be if the treatment of one's spouse were on a lower level than the treatment of one's slave! In Jewish law a slave's comfort often takes precedence over his master's wellbeing. As the *Tosfot* notes, "Sometimes a person may have only one pillow. If he himself uses it and lets his slave sleep without a pillow, he has not observed the commandment to make his slave feel "good... to be with you," for he is sleeping on a pillow while his slave is not. He has no choice but to give his slave the pillow and do without one himself."⁸²

One might object: "If I spend all my energy thinking of my spouse's good and caring for him, what will be left for me? I may be exploited and neglected if I don't stand up for my own rights." Such thinking propels a person into the pit of self-love, which is one of the greatest moral problems in our time. In contrast, the Torah teaches that the relationship between husband and wife must be reciprocal. Marriage must be based on a covenant of mutual responsibility of sorts in which each partner states, "You are very precious to me. I swear to be true to you and to do all in my power for your well-being, just as I do for my own, as long as I live. I won't be happy unless you are happy with me and I with you."⁸³

⁸² *Tosfot* on *Kiddushin* 20a, quoting the *Yerushalmi*.

⁸³ See R. Y.L. Ashlag, *Matan Torah*, Chapter on *HaArvut*.



Chapter 6

Unconditional Love

כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר, בטל הדבר בטלה האהבה; ושאינה
תלויה בדבר, אינה בטלה לעולם. (אבות ה: טז)

Love which depends on some external reason will pass if that reason passes. But love which does not depend on any external reason never ceases to exist. Which is the love that depends on an external reason? The love of Amnon for Tamar. Which is love independent of any reason? The love of David and Yonatan (Pirkei Avot 5:16)

To some people, loving someone means experiencing that special blissful feeling of being in love. Aside from the fact that being in love is not really love for another but rather self-love, the nature of this kind of love is that it rises and falls, comes to a peak and dies down. The story of Amnon and Tamar exemplifies this point. Why was Amnon so love-sick for Tamar? Simply because of her beauty. “And Avshalom the son of David had a beautiful sister called Tamar, and Amnon the son of David fell in love with her.”⁸⁴ Amnon thought that he really loved Tamar, but it soon

⁸⁴ *Shmuel II*, 13:1-15.

became clear that it was not she whom he really loved, but himself, he wanted to gratify his own desires. This can be seen by the fact that he paid no attention to her when she pleaded with him. “Please don’t, my brother. Please don’t afflict me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel. Do not perform this wanton deed. And I, where shall I carry my shame?”⁸⁵ Amnon was swept away by his lust, but once it was satiated, “Amnon hated her with an exceedingly great hatred; so that the hatred with which he hated her was even greater than the love with which he had loved her.”⁸⁶

The love of Amnon for Tamar was “love dependent on an external reason” par excellence, for it depended on Tamar’s physical beauty, something which doesn’t last and one can tire of.⁸⁷ The height of “love which is independent of any external reason” is the love of David and Yonatan, which was completely pure and not for personal gratification.⁸⁸ As Yonatan said to David, “You shall be the King of Israel and I will be your viceroy”⁸⁹ Their love for each other was based on a desire to fulfill the Will of G-d. Thus David eulogized Yonatan by saying, “How wonderful was your love for me, surpassing the love of women,”⁹⁰ meaning that Yonatan’s

⁸⁵ Ibid. verses 12-13.

⁸⁶ Ibid. verse 15.

⁸⁷ Rabbeynu Ovadya Me'Bartenura.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Shmuel I*, 23:17.

⁹⁰ *Shmuel II*, 1:26.

love for him was not affected by any external factors whatsoever.⁹¹

Between these two extremes are many varied types of love which are dependent on external causes to different degrees.⁹² In most cases, love between a man and a woman depends to some extent on external causes for we are not angels. Only the love of David and Yonatan was completely pure.⁹³ The more dependent the love between a man and a woman is on external causes, the more fragile that love is. Love that depends on other factors fades away with time, necessitating the object of that love to be changed periodically. In that case love is experienced as a series of temporary liaisons in order to give pleasure and enjoyment.⁹⁴ This thinking blocks a person emotionally from relating to marriage as an eternal bond. Nowadays, when marital love is so often experienced as a love dependent on external factors, it is no wonder that there are so many failed marriages.

What then is love? It is unity. It has been noted that the numerical values of the words *echad* (one) and *ahava* (love) are the same. Love is that state of being in which two are one, united in their desires, aspirations and fate. The deeper the awareness and feeling of unity, the stronger is the love.

⁹¹ Maharal, *Derech Chaim*.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ as described by Kierkegaard in his book *Diary of a Tempter*



Chapter 7

Love After Marriage

ותהי לו לאשה ויאהבה (בראשית כ"ד:ט"ז)

And she became his wife, and he loved her (Beraishit 24:16)

Yitzchak's first encounter with Rivka was not as romantic as that of Ya'akov and Rachel.⁹⁵ He was not privileged to have such a romantic courtship. Instead Eliezer, Avraham's faithful servant, was sent armed with instructions to betroth a wife for Yitzchak. Rivka agreed to marry Yitzchak without having laid eyes on him, solely on the basis of what she was told about him: "And they called Rivka and they said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' And she said, 'I will.'"⁹⁶ A simple and uncomplicated story.

Toward the end of her journey to her new home, "she said to the servant, 'Who is that man coming to meet us, in the field?' And the servant said, 'He is my master.'"⁹⁷ This is the groom. *Mazaltov!* "And she took her veil and covered her-

⁹⁵ See *Beraishit* 29:11-20.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 24:58

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* verse 65.

self.”⁹⁸ They were new to each other, and so Rivka displayed extreme modesty. It all sounds so simple. Yitzchak and Rivka were completely passive. Their parents and the servant made all the arrangements: “This thing came from G-d.”⁹⁹ It was a match made in Heaven.

With this, “Yitzchak brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent”¹⁰⁰ and they were married. It was at this point that Yitzchak’s true strength of character became apparent. There was no fanfare, no trumpets blew. Quietly, in a still, small voice, Yitzchak manifested his greatness which we see in one delicate phrase: “And she became his wife, **and he loved her.**”¹⁰¹ Love **after** marriage is the true revelation of wisdom and strength of character. Being in love before marriage is no great feat. It is wonderful, enjoyable, and completely free of any responsibility or moral commitment. It is merely preparation for married love. The real test for the couple is to form and strengthen the deep spiritual bond of love between them after marriage.

It is written in *Pirkei Avot*: “Love which depends on some external reason will pass if that reason passes. But love which does not depend on any external reason never ceases to exist.”¹⁰² Yitzchak’s love was not dependent on his emo-

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. verse 50.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. verse 67.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. verse 57

¹⁰² *Pirkei Avot* 5:16.

tions at any particular moment and therefore could not be influenced by external circumstances. There is not one word in the Torah that even hints at any diminishing of the love between Yitzchak and Rivka even under the most difficult conditions. Yitzchak did not marry until the age of forty and had to wait twenty more years to become a father.¹⁰³ Those twenty years of barrenness must have been frustrating and stressful. Yet Rivka did not demand, “Give me children, or I will die!” Nor did Yitzchak retort, “Am I in G-d’s stead?”¹⁰⁴ They loved each other, with or without children. When Rivka interfered and arranged for Ya’akov to receive Eisav’s blessing, “Yitzchak trembled very greatly,”¹⁰⁵ but he said not one word against Rivka. He trusted her implicitly. Their deep bond could not be weakened by any outside factors. This strength of character, which formed the basis of their love, was timeless.

Therefore he was named Yitzchak (future tense of the verb “laugh”), for he was a man of the future, above time and circumstance. Despite this, Yitzchak also knew how to live within the framework of time. We learn this from the passage “And behold Yitzchak was sporting (*metzachak*) with his wife Rivka.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *Beraishit* 25:20-26.

¹⁰⁴ See exchange between Ya’akov and Rachel in *Beraishit* 30:1-2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 27:33.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 26:8.

❖ Chapter 8

Romantic Love and Eternal Love

ויהי כאשר ראה יעקב את רחל בת לבן אחי אמו ... וישק יעקב לרחל
וישא את קולו ויבך (בראשית כ"ט: י"א-י"ב)

*And it came to pass, when Ya'akov saw Rachel, the daughter
of Lavan, his mother's brother... and Ya'akov kissed Rachel,
and raised his voice, and wept (Beraishit 29:10-11)*

At first glance, it seems strange that such a great and holy man should kiss a woman who is not his wife, a woman whom he has never even seen before! Indeed, our sages tell us that those present at this encounter were shocked, and their shocked reaction caused Ya'akov to cry, for his kiss was misunderstood: "Why did he cry? Because, when he kissed her, he heard people whispering to one another: Has this stranger come to teach us immoral behavior?"¹⁰⁷

In truth however, this kiss wasn't a kiss of physical desire, but purely spiritual. When Ya'akov met this noble soul who was such a fitting partner for him, he was uplifted to such a

¹⁰⁷ *Beraishit Raba* 70:12.

high level of emotional exaltation that he kissed her. Our rabbis referred to this kiss as a “kiss of kinship.”¹⁰⁸

A question arises: What proof is there that this was a completely spiritual kiss, free of all sensuality? The answer is simple. A man who could mistake Leah for Rachel for a whole night, and only at daybreak realize that he had been with Leah, must certainly be on an extremely high spiritual level, removed from all physical inclinations. The Ralbag comments that this incident proves Ya’akov’s incredible modesty beyond doubt.¹⁰⁹ This is similar to what is written in the Talmud about a man who didn’t realize that his wife had been one-handed until her death, so modest was he.¹¹⁰

In any case, the love Ya’akov had for Rachel, exalted as it may be, is still not the highest level of love. On the contrary, Ya’akov’s love for Leah was even deeper, even more sublime. It was not based on mutual attraction of the spirit, but rather on the desire for children. “And [Leah] called [her son’s] name Reuven, for she said, ‘G-d has seen my affliction for now my husband will love me’”¹¹¹ Indeed, the essence of this love, directed towards the continuity of the Jewish people, was so spiritual in form, that it was hidden. It appeared as if “Leah was hated.”¹¹² This verse is not to

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ *To’aliyot HaRalbag, Parshat Tetze.*

¹¹⁰ *Shabbat 53b.*

¹¹¹ *Beraishit 29:32.*

¹¹² Ibid. verse 31.

be taken literally, but rather in contrast to Ya'akov's feelings towards Rachel: "And he loved Rachel more than Leah."¹¹³ Leah too was loved, but Rachel was loved even more.

It has to be understood that the inner essential core of romantic love is love of eternity. This is the thesis of Plato's treatise on love, which our sages considered to be compatible with the Torah's teachings.¹¹⁴ People have a love of eternity. By marrying and having children they express their desire to connect to eternity. This is the spiritual source of married love. The *halacha* reflects this idea with great clarity, for it is not commanded in the Torah for one to marry, but rather for one to have children. Marriage revolves around the continuity of generations. "Sexual desire paves the way to the future."¹¹⁵

Ya'akov Avinu must make the transition from romantic love to responsible love with eternity as its source. At times the former may obscure the latter, and so we see that the union between Rachel and Ya'akov initially bears no fruit. This becomes more and more obvious with the passage of time. Finally Rachel demands, "Give me children or I will die!"¹¹⁶ She "wrestles with G-d"¹¹⁷ until He finally "opens her

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ The *Zohar* notes that some of Greek philosophy is "close to the path of truth" (Rabbi A. Y. Kook, *Olat Re'iyah* Vol I, p.437. According to my rabbi and teacher, R. Zvi Yehuda Kook, this refers to Plato's lofty concept of Ideas.

¹¹⁵ R. A.Y.Kook, *Mussar HaKodesh* p.299.

¹¹⁶ *Beraishit* 30:1.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, verse 8.

womb.”¹¹⁸ However there is still difficulty: “And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor... as her soul was departing, for she died.”¹¹⁹ The temporary kingdom of Rachel must make way for the eternal kingdom of Leah, just as the House of David (descendant of Leah) replaces the House of Shaul (descendant of Rachel). Romantic love is an essential precedent to the more exalted state of “and they shall become one flesh.”¹²⁰ Rashi explains this verse as referring to the fetus which “is created by both parents, and in its body, they become one flesh.” The complete house will be built through the merging of both Leah and Rachel.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, verse 22.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*. 35:17-18.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*. 2:24.

❖ Chapter 9

The Existential Reality of Togetherness

ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה עמה ויאכל (בראשית ג:ו)

*And she ate and she gave also to her husband with her and
he ate (the forbidden fruit) (Beraishit 3:6)*

Wasn't it sufficient that Chava sinned and ate from the tree? Why did she have to make Adam sin too? Rashi answers this question with a quote from our sages that "she didn't want to die and [let] him live and marry someone else."¹²¹ This theme is even more explicitly expounded in *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*: "Chava said, 'If we die, we shall both die, and if we live, we shall both live'." At first this seems to be the type of jealousy and desire for revenge that Samson felt: "Let me die together with the Philistines."¹²² However, on a deeper level, Chava's behavior denotes a certain greatness. According to Chava's perspective, everything must be

¹²¹ Ibid 3:6, Rashi.

¹²² *Shoftim* 16:30.

shared together with her partner in life. This is a higher form of love, the sharing of everything for better or for worse.

In fact, there is an even deeper way to understand Chava's behavior. The existential reality she experiences is one of complete identification. Whatever happens to one, happens to the other. They are now "one flesh" and thereby each is uplifted or G-d forbid, harmed by the life experiences of the other. The family is one complete organic unit, one unified block. Thus, the spiritual responsibility of the individual extends to the whole family. In other words, the narrow will of the individual is transformed into the combined will of the family unit. Instead of one personal egoistic will, there appears a more elevated, more inclusive family will. This transition is one step in the transition towards identification with the all-encompassing will, the national will, the will of all mankind, universal will, and Divine will. Therefore, whatever Chava desired for herself, she desired for Adam, too, since her desires for herself and for him were part of one unified desire.

❖ Chapter 10

Two are Better than One

טובים השנים מן האחד (קהלת ד:ט)

Two are better than one (Kohélet 4:9)

This statement is a universal truth and is particularly appropriate for marriage. “It is better for two people to live together than to live alone.”¹²³ This maxim has many layers of meaning and depth; the most immediate and obvious aspect is that “two are better than one for they have a good reward for their labor.”¹²⁴ Sometimes it seems to us that we work and work in vain. We have toiled to build something, when suddenly an evil wind blows, destroying the fruits of our labor. Life is full of crises, both external and internal; reality is the stuff of difficulties and complications. A person may lose his way, stumble or be trapped. Two can better withstand the ravages of time “for if they fall, the one will

¹²³ *Kiddushin* 41a.

¹²⁴ *Kohélet* 4:9.

lift up the other, but if he that is alone falls, he has no one to help him up.”¹²⁵

It is natural for a person to stumble and fall. Unfortunately, some people find it hard to admit that they are in trouble, either because of arrogance or because of some other emotional block. So great is their desire for complete independence that they refuse all help from outside and remain drowning in the quagmire. However, there are times when “a prisoner cannot free himself from jail.”¹²⁶ This is not to be confused with the idea of running away from one’s responsibilities. Every person is responsible for himself and has to make every effort necessary to work on himself and mend sinful behavior. Nevertheless, one can never be completely independent. The concepts of taking responsibility for oneself and being independent should not be confused.

Between two friends - or between a husband and wife – it is not always the same partner who falls each time. Not always does the “stronger sex” really prove to be the strongest in every crisis. Sometimes the “weaker sex” turns out to be the hero as the Talmud tells us: “Through the merits of the righteous women of that generation were the people of Israel redeemed from Egypt.”¹²⁷ The men despaired, but the women held their own and even succeeded in inspiring the men. “Two are better than one, for if they fall, the one

¹²⁵ Ibid 4:10.

¹²⁶ *Berachot* 5b.

¹²⁷ *Sotah* 11b.

will lift up the other.” Not always is it the same one who falls or the same one who lifts up. Today I help you. Tomorrow you will help me. Today I help you in your battle with yourself and with the forces oppressing you. Tomorrow you will rush to my aid. After all, these are not two separate wars, but one war against a common enemy, fought on several fronts. “Who has hearkened to the secret voice in the roar of the World War of good and bad as they wrestle for control of the world.”¹²⁸ Your own private war is one small front in the unending war “which appears in miniature... in man’s soul.” Helping the other when he falls is not an act of arrogant bestowal of aid to the weak, but an act of courage, as required in times of war. We all fight, we all fall, and we all struggle on in this never-ending war: “For a just person falls seven times, and yet rises up again.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ R. A.Y. Kook, *Mussar HaKodesh* 131.

¹²⁹ *Mishlei* 24:16.

❖ Chapter 11

Walking Side by Side

Our sages teach us that Adam, the prototype of all man, was first created two-faced; i.e. he contained within one body both a male and a female counterpart.¹³⁰ Only later did G-d build the woman from Adam's side.¹³¹

Thus G-d created a two-sided unified creature which he later divided into man and woman. This *aggada* is not merely a simple tale but contains innumerable secrets of the Torah which have to be unraveled. The question is: why does the Torah declare before their separation into two entities: "It is not good for Man to be alone."¹³² Why, he wasn't alone at all! Could there be any greater togetherness than Adam's original state? The Talmud helps us resolve this problem by asking another question: Who of the two walked first? The answer given is that the man must have walked first because

¹³⁰ *Eiruv* 18a.

¹³¹ *Beraishit* 2:22, Rashi. The word "side" (*tzela* in Hebrew) is often mistakenly translated as "rib." Rashi on this verse refers to the verse "And to the side of the tabernacle" (*Shemot* 26:20) in order to explain the meaning of the word *tzela* as "side."

¹³² *Beraishit* 2:18.

the Talmud itself advises men “not to follow a woman down the street, not even his own wife.”¹³³

When two people travel together, it is natural for one to go before the other at times. Life is full of narrow pathways where one has to walk single file. The fact that one of the two partners walks ahead of the other shouldn't be interpreted as an insult. Both are equally important. When mountain climbers choose one person to go first, he is very important, but no more so than the person who follows, holding on with all his might in order to support the one in front of him. Sometimes the one in front can stumble, but before he plunges into the depths, his friend grabs hold of him and pulls him back. “Two are better than one... for if they fall, the one will lift up the other.”¹³⁴.

It is usually the man who runs ahead. Happy is he to have been given that wonderful ability by G-d and man thanks Him for this gift with the blessing “Who has not created me a woman.”¹³⁵ Sometimes, however, he stumbles and falls, and then it is his wife who helps him back on his feet. She is not the one who runs ahead, but neither does she fall in the way he does. Thus, her nature is more in harmony with G-d's will, and therefore she is worthy of the blessing “Who has created me in accordance with His will.”¹³⁶ So it was,

¹³³ *Berachot* 61a.

¹³⁴ *Kohelet* 4:10-11.

¹³⁵ See R. A.Y. Kook, *Olat Re'iyah*, Vol 1, pp71-72

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

that in the crucial periods of our history the women were the real heroes: It was the women who did not lose hope in Egypt, the women who refused to contribute their jewelry to make a golden calf, the women who would not heed the words of the spies.

So too, when fighting a war, we do not send the whole force out to attack. While one battalion attacks another battalion protects them, guarding them every second of the way, and joining them with the heavy armory once their mission has been accomplished.

Therefore, it is clear that there must be a first and a second. The problem arises when the progress forward of one means a setback for the other. When Adam was two-faced, and man and woman were joined back to back, then as man walked forward, woman walked backward! He behaved as if he were alone, not taking his wife into consideration. Therefore the Torah says: "It is not good for Man to be alone", i.e. to march forward egotistically. Before marriage man marches forward towards his future; after the marriage he continues to do so. Before marriage the woman, too, marches forward. But after their marriage her future becomes blocked: his exclusive walking forward into the future causes her regression into her past. As his life progresses and broadens, hers recedes and becomes narrow.

When a man goes forward and does not notice that he is causing his wife to go backwards, it is as if he is "alone." Rather the two must advance together towards a common

future. A person's eyes were meant to look forward and not backward (an expression of the Rambam in one of his responsa). Man and woman must be able to look into each other's eyes, each one seeing his future reflected in the other.

❖ Chapter 12

Love of the Soul

שלי ושלכם, שלה היא (נדרים ג.)

[All that is] mine and yours, is hers (Nedarim 50a)

Love of another person means not only love of his body but also of his soul; in other words a desire for the other's moral and spiritual progress and a willingness to do everything possible toward that end. An example of a woman who loved her spouse in this way was Rachel, R. Akiva's wife. She sent him away from her to the *Beit Midrash* to study Torah, choosing to suffer financial and emotional hardship for many years. But she loved Akiva for himself and not for herself, and therefore she allowed him to spend twenty-four years learning, away from home. Thus the Torah he learned was due to her merits and not to his own, as he told his students: “[All that is] mine and yours, is hers!”¹³⁷

This applies not only to major decisions but to daily life, as noted in *Pele Yoetz*: “The essence of love is love between the souls.” Since each partner desires the spiritual progress

¹³⁷ *Nedarim 50a.*

of the other, it is up to him to rebuke the other lovingly and respectfully, to help his partner behave modestly, guard his tongue, avoid anger, take care in the performance of *mitzvot* and prayer, and so on. The closer the relationship between the two partners, and the deeper their love, the more their criticism will be accepted by the other and the greater a positive influence they will have on each other. In some ways, a husband and wife are each other's ideal educators. Of course, rebuke must not be offered as hostile condemnation of the other. Such rebuke is nothing other than verbal abuse masquerading as self-righteousness. Proper rebuke stems from pure love and a desire to help the other realize his potential and become a better person.

❖ Chapter 13

Jerusalem of Gold

The Talmud tell us the following story: “Rabbi Akiva betrothed the daughter of Ben Calba Savua. When her father heard of it, he disowned her. [Nevertheless] she went and married him.”¹³⁸ Neither her father’s opposition, nor the financial difficulties she would face in the future, deterred her. “In the winter they slept in a pile of straw” [for they had no cushions or blankets].¹³⁹ “Every morning he would pick the straw out of her hair.”¹⁴⁰ How dejected he must have felt to see how difficult life was for his wife and how her beauty had become sullied. He told her, “If I could, I would give you a Jerusalem of Gold.” Obviously, R. Akiva was not feeling sorry for himself, nor was his wife less attractive to him now, G-d forbid. It wasn’t necessary for her to wear jewelry or dress up to make him love her.¹⁴¹ But he felt badly for her, and so he promised that if he ever became rich, he would buy her a Jerusalem of Gold (which is a gold ornament in the shape of Jerusalem).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Rashi.

¹⁴⁰ Ran, or according to another interpretation, out of his own hair.

¹⁴¹ On the contrary, he declared, “Poverty shows off the beauty of a Jewish girl like a red ribbon on the head of a white horse.” (*Vayikra Raba* 34:6)

And, indeed, our sages tell us that R. Akiva really did buy a Jerusalem of Gold for his wife.¹⁴² This was not just the simple giving of a gift, rather it symbolized his deepest feelings. How so? This can be understood by looking at a story about Rabban Gamliel's wife: "Once, R. Akiva gave his wife a Jerusalem of Gold. Rabban Gamliel's wife saw it and was jealous (for this was considered an extremely valuable ornament). She went and told her husband. He answered: But would you have done for me what she did for her husband? She sold the locks of her hair so that he would be able to learn Torah."¹⁴³ So we see that this gift was not an isolated, superficial gesture, but expressed the very fabric of their lives. Because of his wife's devotion, R. Akiva was able to merit the crown of Torah. As he told his disciples, "[All that is] mine and yours, is hers."¹⁴⁴ She gave him the crown of Torah and he in turn, presented her with a crown of his appreciation and recognition: a Jerusalem of Gold.

What is significant about this ornament being a Jerusalem of Gold? It is the most precious ornament that could be given to a Jewish woman, as we see in *Tehilim*: "If I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy."¹⁴⁵ Jerusalem is the soul of the Jewish people, the highest ideal we strive for. Just as the aesthetic taste of Jewish women was associated with Je-

¹⁴² *Shabbat* 59a.

¹⁴³ *Yerushalmi, Shabbat* 6:1.

¹⁴⁴ *Nedarim* 50a.

¹⁴⁵ *Tehilim* 137:6.

rusalem, so was R. Akiva's wife's love for her husband associated with the strengthening of Torah study in the Jewish nation. As R. Kook says, "A holy nation is the inheritance of its devoted mothers; this is the true Torah of the Jewish people."¹⁴⁶ It is impossible to produce a holy nation without holy mothers. Therefore, the holiness of the nation must form the basis for all the refined emotions and well-meaning inclinations of the Jewish mother. There can be no more fitting way to express this than through a Jerusalem of Gold, "worn by those precious women, daughters of Zion, who love their people and their land with a pure heart. The center of the Jewish people, its most honored place, is a fitting ornament for them."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ R. A.Y. Kook, *Ayn Ayah 9 Shabbat* op. cit. Eretz Chefetz 12.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

❖ Chapter 14

Finding Someone Prettier

Our sages disagreed as to what constitutes valid grounds for divorce: “Beit Shammai say: No man should divorce his wife unless he has found her to be immoral. Beit Hillel say: If she so much as burned the dinner. R. Akiva says: If he has found someone prettier than her.”¹⁴⁸

These statements appear astonishing: Are these reasons sufficient grounds to divorce your wife? Obviously immorality is a legitimate reason, but is burning the food or not being a good cook? We wonder even more at such a holy man as R. Akiva conceiving of someone wanting to divorce his wife because “he has found someone prettier.” Aren’t we taught that “Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain.”¹⁴⁹

Being that this book deals with love, not hate, we are only interested in divorce insofar as it teaches us what marriage is not.¹⁵⁰ The Catholic Church forbids divorce, claiming that

¹⁴⁸ *Gittin* 90a.

¹⁴⁹ *Mishlei* 24:16.

¹⁵⁰ This method of learning the positive from the negative, is used in trying to describe the Creator. We cannot possibly describe G-d's essence so we describe

having a provision for divorce belittles the important value of marriage. According to the Church, the marital bond has to be so strong that it is unseverable, under any circumstances. The author of the *Sefer HaChinuch* derides this canon: "...like some non-Jews who are tied to their wives with a bond as strong as hell. The woman has no fear of divorce and may, before his very eyes, behave wantonly, destroy everything and everyone in their home, set fire to his fields, etc."¹⁵¹ Torah philosophy teaches just the opposite: The fact that divorce is allowed does not imply that marriage is to be taken lightly. On the contrary, marriage is such a highly esteemed institution that unsound partnerships are not to be tolerated. In this light, Beit Hillel appear not to be allowing an easy divorce but to be strict in their demands on marriage. According to the *Sefer HaChinuch*: "He may even divorce her for scorching the food, i.e. for a small matter, because she must be the most precious one of all to him." He should regard his wife as the most precious thing in his home. If their relationship is marred even slightly, then their marriage is not the elevated marriage described by the Torah.

what He isn't. (see *Kohelet* 2:13 and the *Zohar* Chelek 3 47) Likewise, the Torah repeatedly tells us what *Shabbat* is not and what work is forbidden; and from the negative we infer the positive. Thus the negative serves its purpose as a transition to the positive. In this vein, Rabbeinu HaMeiri explains that the tractate on divorce precedes that on marriage in the Talmud, just as a void always precedes being; only through experiencing a lack of something can one appreciate its existence.

¹⁵¹ *Sefer HaChinuch*, Mitzvat Asei 579.

Rabbi Akiva is even stricter. If a man can even conceive of a strange woman as being more beautiful than his wife, then that is a sign that their marriage is not worthy of existing. If he dares to look at other women and compare them to his wife, then their marriage is not the kind of marriage the Torah is advocating. She should always be “his lovely graceful bride”, with whom no one can compare.¹⁵²

¹⁵² *Ketubot* 17a.

❖ Chapter 15

Mother - Sister - Wife - Daughter

A man's wife can sometimes be called his daughter. For example, in the book of Esther it says that Mordechai took Esther to be his *bat* (Hebrew for daughter). Our sages comment, however, that he really took her to be his *bayit* (Hebrew for home, i.e. wife).¹⁵³ This seems to express a chauvinistic attitude, putting the man on a higher level than the woman. A mature outlook, however, accepts the fact that a husband may in some aspects be superior to his wife and that there is room for his relating to her in that way. There is a balance though, for in certain situations the wife plays the role of his mother and advises her husband as if she were now superior.

Through various *midrashim*, our sages teach us that a husband's relationship with his wife is patterned after four female role models: his wife, his sister, his daughter and his mother.¹⁵⁴ As a child, the only woman in his life is his mother. As he grows up, his definition of woman expands

¹⁵³ *Megillah* 13a.

¹⁵⁴ See commentary of *Shla* on *Parshat Lech Lecha*.

to include a sister. Upon reaching maturity, he makes the revolutionary change to linking his future with another woman, his wife. Later, as a father, he must establish a new type of relationship with a woman: his daughter.

Freud went a bit too far in stating that the love a man feels for these four female types is essentially one. His thesis, that the son competes with his father for his mother's love, (and likewise, the daughter with her mother), and that the love he later has for his wife is the same love he felt for his mother, is antithetical to Torah Judaism. These two types of love must be distinctly separated! "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife."¹⁵⁵ Although marriage should certainly not be an excuse for a deterioration in a person's relationship with his parents,¹⁵⁶ the love of his life must no longer be his mother, but his wife.¹⁵⁷ A man who cannot differentiate between his wife and his mother will run into conflict in his marriage.

Now, after these four different female roles have been clearly defined, we may take the liberty of noting the overlaps. We can comprehend how Mordechai's wife, Esther, could be called his daughter, how Yitzchak could have brought Rivka "to the tent of Sarah his mother,"¹⁵⁸ how

¹⁵⁵ *Beraishit* 2:24.

¹⁵⁶ On the contrary, with maturity comes a deeper appreciation of the couple who gave him life and brought him up.

¹⁵⁷ *Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer* 32.

¹⁵⁸ *Beraishit* 24:67.

Avraham and Yitzchak referred to their wives as sisters to the Egyptians and the Philistines¹⁵⁹ and how the beloved, longing for her lover, could wish, “O, that you were as my brother.”¹⁶⁰ From this it is evident that there are four dimensions to marriage which include all these types of relationships: the natural sibling connection, and the parent-child dynamic. At the core of the marriage though, is the relationship between a man and a woman who have chosen to share their lives together.

¹⁵⁹ *Beraishit* 12:13, 20:2, 26:7.

¹⁶⁰ *Shir HaShirim* 8:1

❖ Chapter 16

Love and Marital Relations

According to Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, the major source of emotional energy is the libido, whose chief expression is sexual desire. He therefore posits that the libido is perhaps the most primary factor influencing man's emotional behavior, for the good or the bad. Freud goes so far as saying that a person's religious, spiritual and cultural interests are merely sublimations of his sexual energy. Sexual relations, therefore, become the golden key to interpersonal relationships and marriage.

Certainly, the important role that sexual desire plays in the life of the human being cannot be denied. However, the Torah clearly states that the source of human life is from G-d: "the L-rd G-d... breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and Adam became a living soul."¹⁶¹ Man's life is based on his yearning for G-d, and love for all those created in G-d's image is an extension of this yearning. Sexual love between man and wife, therefore, is but one special, wonderful

¹⁶¹ *Beraishit* 2:7.

aspect of this all-encompassing love. Indeed, our Rabbis teach that there is no particular *mitzva* to love your husband or wife; it is included in the general *mitzva* to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁶² In fact, *halacha* requires that one’s choice of a marriage partner be predicated on that person’s capacity to fulfill this *mitzva* with him or her.¹⁶³

Those philosophies which consider relations to be one aspect of marital love, but not its basis, are closer to the Torah outlook. “Love is an encounter,” says Forel. One must learn how to relate to the people he lives with. Is he willing to accept other people whose inner and outer worlds are different from his? Can he train himself to acknowledge that the “image of G-d” may find a different expression in another person than it does in himself? Learning how to interact with and relate to other people, does not begin with sexual desire and marriage, but rather with one’s early childhood experiences. An encounter between a man and a woman is not just a meeting of the sexes, but first and foremost a meeting between two human beings, who happen to be of the opposite sex.

Nor are sexual relations the source of marital problems. On the contrary, sexual problems are the **result** of the failed communication between the husband and the wife. And this failure, in turn, is part of a general inability to sustain good

¹⁶² *Vayikra* 19:18.

¹⁶³ *Kiddushin* 41a.

interpersonal relationships. Thus, single men and women can best prepare themselves for a truly successful marriage by learning to form sound interpersonal relationships with others of their own sex.

Part Three



BEING A FAMILY

❖ Chapter 1

“The Mother of All Life”

ויקרא האדם את שם אשתו חוה כי היא היתה אם כל חי (בראשית
ג:כ)

*And Adam called his wife Chava because she was the
mother of all life (Beraishit 3:20)*

*“And Adam gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of
the sky and to every beast of the field.” (Beraishit 2:20)*

*“When G-d was about to create the world he consulted with
the angels, saying, ‘Let us make a person (Adam).’ They
asked, ‘What is the nature of this person?’ He answered, ‘His
wisdom is greater than yours!’ Then G-d brought before the
angels, cattle and wild beasts and birds. He asked them,
‘This one here, what is its name?’ and they didn’t know. He
brought them to Adam and asked him, ‘This one here, what
is its name?’ and he answered, ‘This is an ox, this is a don-
key, this is a horse, and this is a camel...’” (Beraishit Raba
17)*

*“Adam was very wise: He recognized and understood every
living creature, everyone who had a Neshama (living soul).
As soon as he saw them, he understood who they were, as*

it is written: Whatever Adam called every living creature, that was its name.” (Zohar Chadash 16, Midrash Ha’Ne’elam).

Considering the above, it is therefore an amazing fact that Adam, the lauded name-giver, did not know his own wife’s name! The truth is, that Adam saw no need to determine what his own wife’s name was. It was only after they sinned that we read, “And Adam called his wife’s name Chava.”¹⁶⁴ Before that, it appears that she had no name.¹⁶⁵

At first, Adam did not relate to his wife as an individual, as a person in her own right. We see that he said, “She shall be called woman because she was taken out of Man.”¹⁶⁶ Of course it is true that woman was taken out of Man, but she is still an individual in her own right. It is when one partner in a marriage does not treat the other as an individual that complications and sinful behavior arise.¹⁶⁷ Things even reached the point where Adam dared to say, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree.”¹⁶⁸ It’s all her fault. The “gift” you gave me is the source of all the trouble. Instead of rejoicing in the gift and showing his appreciation, Adam complained and blamed. Thus our

¹⁶⁴ *Beraishit* 3:20.

¹⁶⁵ Although we know that the Torah is not written in chronological order, the order of events as they are presented to us is of great significance.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 2:23.

¹⁶⁷ In this case, it led to their eating of the Tree of Knowledge.

¹⁶⁸ *Beraishit* 3:11.

sages tell us: “Here he was ungrateful”¹⁶⁹, “Adam was an ingrate”¹⁷⁰, “This is improper language; He blames his own failing on the gift G-d gave him, despite the fact that G-d had created her to be his helpmeet.”¹⁷¹ When one doesn’t realize that the other person has his own name and his own personality, then it is all too easy to complain and be ungrateful and this in turn leads to alienation from G-d.

It is true that “No one truly understands the words of the Torah until he makes an error [and learns from it].”¹⁷² From this crisis, Adam came to realize who his wife was, that she did have a name: “And Adam called his wife’s name Chava, for she was the mother of all life.”¹⁷³ He finally understood that she has a special role, a special merit: “the mother of all life.” At first she was subordinate to him. He was the “important one” who went out to work while she stayed at home to make the beds and cook dinner. (That is why the snake found her “at home” alone). It is true that woman is “man’s helpmate”¹⁷⁴; “she enlightens him and sets him on his feet,”¹⁷⁵ but her main role is that of mother and she is responsible for the physical and spiritual life of the family as a whole.

¹⁶⁹ Rashi, *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Avodah Zara* 5b.

¹⁷¹ Rashi, *Beraishit* 3:11.

¹⁷² *Gittin* 43b.

¹⁷³ *Beraishit* 3:20.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:18.

¹⁷⁵ *Yevamot* 63a.

We may well ask: why was Chava's punishment so much more severe than Adam's? He is cursed only in the realm of making a living, while she is cursed in her family life, which is undoubtedly much more difficult to bear. According to our sages, the curse of "I will greatly multiply your pain" refers to the pain of raising children.¹⁷⁶ A very simple rule applies here: the more important a particular task is, the more complicated it is, the harder it is to bear failure in that area.

Adam's task in the Garden of Eden was to grow food: "And He set him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it."¹⁷⁷ Work is a wonderful thing; even Adam could only taste something once he had worked for it, as the order of the verses are: 'And He set him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it', and only following that: 'You may eat from every tree of the garden'.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, a woman's task is to raise children. Which is more difficult? Which bears more responsibility? Our sages said, "It is easier to raise a legion of olive trees in the Galil than one child in Eretz Yisrael."¹⁷⁹ Who has higher status - man or woman? According to our sages it would seem that solving economic and social problems is less complicated than dealing with problems in the family and raising children.

¹⁷⁶ *Beraishit* 3:16, Rashi.

¹⁷⁷ *Beraishit* 2:15.

¹⁷⁸ *Avot D'Rabi Natan* 11.

¹⁷⁹ *Beraishit Raba* 20.

This kind of “negative proof” (of the severity of the punishment G-d gave to Chava) showed Adam who his wife really was. In fact her name is even greater than his, which is simply “Adam” (Everyman), while she is Chava (from the Hebrew word *chai* which means “alive, i.e. who gives life to her offspring.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ *Beraishit* 3:20, Rashi.

❖ Chapter 2

A Woman, Her Home, and Klal Yisrael

Sometimes married women are criticized for not contributing enough to the greater community. There are married women who feel conflicted and torn between the moral obligation to take care of their family, and the moral obligation to give of their time to their community and to the needs of *Am Yisrael* in general. Of course, going to either extreme will prove damaging in the end and is therefore not advised. In most cases, a woman who really desires to contribute outside her immediate family, can find ways to do so without harming her family life.

However, there are times when the needs of one's family and the needs of the greater community clash and a resolution must be reached. Therefore, it is important to clarify in principle the hierarchy of these values. In the Talmud there is a discussion as to which takes precedence: "*Shabbat* candles or *Chanuka* candles."¹⁸¹ The idea behind lighting *Shabbat* candles is to bring *shalom bayit* (peace and har-

¹⁸¹ *Shabbat* 23b.

mony) to the couple. When the husband and wife look at each other by the light of the *Shabbat* candles, they are filled with love and friendship for each other. During the hectic work week they may only have time to throw each other a smile, barely managing to sit together and give pleasure one to the other. This being together is what the *Shabbat* candles give the couple.¹⁸² Lighting *Chanuka* candles, on the other hand, has a completely different function - to publicize the miracle, to publicize the Divinely inspired bravery of the Jewish people. Which takes precedence? The Talmud rules: lighting *Shabbat* candles, which brings harmony to the household, takes precedence.¹⁸³ It would appear from this that one's first obligation is to bring about harmony in one's own family.

From this we may infer that it is not proper for a woman to devote her energy to communal concerns when she has not yet solved the problems of that part of *Am Yisrael* for whom she is personally responsible - her own household. Our sages explain that the group of laws of *Nashim* (those laws pertaining to women) in the *Mishna* is called in Hebrew "Chosen" (a word denoting strength),¹⁸⁴ because the strength of *Am Yisrael* as a whole, is based on the integrity of the family unit.

This may also be an appropriate place to note that there are

¹⁸² See R. A.Y. Kook, *Olat Re'iyah* Vol II, 13-14.

¹⁸³ *Shabbat* 23b.

¹⁸⁴ *Shabbat* 31a.

couples who try to help everyone else, but forget to pay attention to each other. For instance, there are families who have so many guests on *Shabbat* that they have no time to be together as a family. For that reason there are many families who set aside one *Shabbat* meal for the family alone. Of course, there can be no hard and fast rules for everyone for no two families are alike.

It is true that there are exceptions to the rule that women have to put their family first, in situations where extreme self-sacrifice is needed in order to save the nation. An example of this is Esther, who sacrificed her own personal family life in order to save her people, as she said, “If I perish, I perish.”¹⁸⁵ Our sages explained that her initiating a meeting with King Achashverosh, forbade the continuation of her marriage to Mordechai.¹⁸⁶

But even these heroic acts of self sacrifice had their foundation in the family, as in the case of Esther’s relationship with Mordechai.¹⁸⁷ Who could be greater than Yael, the wife of Chever HaKaini, who risked her life for *Am Yisrael* and brought the nation salvation (by inviting Sisera into her tent and then killing him).¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, our sages ask, “In what merit did Yael deserve to act as the agent who brought

¹⁸⁵ *Esther* 4:16.

¹⁸⁶ *Megillah* 15a.

¹⁸⁷ The *Midrash* tells us that Esther would consult the Sages about the laws of *Nidda* and she would immerse in the *mikveh* . (*Megillah* 13b).

¹⁸⁸ See *Shoftim* 4:17-22.

the Jewish nation salvation?” And they answer, “She was a good woman who did her husband’s bidding and from this we learn that the definition of a good wife is one who does her husband’s bidding.”¹⁸⁹ This means that a woman’s primary obligation is to her husband.

One in every thousand women is one whose only desire is to make her husband happy, and on that basis grows into an outstanding personality capable of doing extraordinary *chesed* for *Klal Yisrael*.

¹⁸⁹ *Yalkut Shimoni, Shoftim* 42:9.

❖ Chapter 3

It's Permissible for a Woman to "Breathe" a Little (A Responsum)

Question: In your article, "Thy Children like Olive Plants," you responded to the following question: Isn't it egotistic for a mother to prefer her own comfort and peace of mind than the imperative of bringing another baby into the world? Your response: A woman is also allowed to live like a mensch (Yiddish for person). They are not compelled to give birth non-stop."¹⁹⁰ Doesn't this position contradict what you have so often said, that a woman's function in life is to be "the mother of all life", the home maker, and therefore her goal in life should be to have as many children as she possibly can?

Response: Yes, a woman should have as many children as possible. The question is: What does the term "as many as possible" mean? In defining the term, we must allow for individual differences. This consideration for individual dif-

¹⁹⁰ An article in another book in Hebrew by the author on the topic of family planning.

ferences doesn't legitimize women being egotistic or spoiled, but rather takes into account women who seriously desire to be "the mother of all life,"¹⁹¹ but have become fatigued from many pregnancies, births, and raising young children.

Certainly one's desire should be to have many children. We rejoice over every Jewish baby born, for now there is another person in the world to serve G-d. However, when it comes to translating the desire for children into our everyday lives, we must relate to it as we do with everything else, through the prism of precise *halacha*. The *halacha* teaches us that there is a *mitzva* of "*Priyah U'Reviah*", of having at least one son and one daughter. This *mitzva* should be fulfilled as soon as possible with great seriousness, even if it requires much effort and self-sacrifice. After this basic requirement has been fulfilled, having more children falls into the category of a second *mitzva*: "Sow your seeds in the morning, but do not rest your hands in the evening; one who has children in his youth, will also have them when he is older."¹⁹² Here there is allowance for personal considerations regarding the spacing of the births.¹⁹³ Certainly these considerations have to be very weighty, and they are not grounds for being lazy and avoiding such an elevated *mitzva* as increasing the number of Jewish children.

Each case is unique, for no two women are alike. Some

¹⁹¹ *Beraishit* 3:20.

¹⁹² *Kohelet* 11:6; *Yevamot* 62b.

¹⁹³ *Birkei Yosef*, *Even HaEzer* 1:2.

women are blessed with easy pregnancies and pain-free childbirth and have children who are not problematic to raise. However there are other women who suffer terribly and this fact has to be recognized. Certainly one is expected to elevate oneself beyond one's reality but one cannot overcome difficulties by denying that they exist. There are women who are overjoyed to be expecting a baby, but their happiness is marred by tremendous physical suffering during pregnancy - pains, weakness, vomiting, long periods of being confined to bed, and so on. Moreover, there are women for whom childbirth entails pain and suffering. And the difficulties are not yet over. They are just beginning, for some babies are hard to deal with. For instance, the baby wakes up crying every night, his crying wakes up the other children and perhaps even the husband, who becomes angry with his wife, as if she were to blame for stealing his sleep. He has an eight hour work day ahead of him and needs a good night's sleep. (His wife doesn't need so much sleep for she only works sixteen hours a day plus the "night shift" and has to cope with many unpredictable events during the day!).

Life can be very hard for the mother of several small children. Not every woman has the temperament or ability to deal with the ongoing challenges and stress of raising many small children together. She might feel helpless in the face of the constant screaming and fighting of her children. These and other tensions in her everyday life may bring her close to breaking point and compel her to consult a Rabbi regard-

ing birth control. This does not mean that raising a large family is not her main goal in life.

There are other women for whom raising a large family cannot be their whole life for they feel imprisoned in their home. Intellectually oriented women need a certain amount of mental stimulation. Spiritually oriented women require opportunities for Torah guidance and inspiration otherwise they stumble and collapse. Socially oriented women need time to spend with their peers.

Unfortunately, the husband is not always helpful or even aware of his wife's needs and problems. His life is much freer. At work he encounters stimulating people and interesting situations. He has occasional vacations, and can even afford to be sick once in a while. Not so the wife! She has no chance of taking a vacation from the housework and looking after the children. She isn't even "allowed" to be sick. Even when the husband does help his wife there is still one crucial difference! He chooses to help his wife of his own free will. Should he decide otherwise, he can quit. We can understand this in the light of the explanation given by the *Tosfot* for the statement: "One who does *mitzvot* because he is so commanded is greater than one who does so voluntarily."¹⁹⁴ They explain that one who has an obligation to do something is greater, because he will always be anxious lest he fail in some way, whereas one who does a *mitzva* volun-

¹⁹⁴ *Tosfot, Kiddushin 31a.*

tarily is much more self confident. If he fails or decides to quit, he has lost nothing.”¹⁹⁵

The above should not be taken as a lament over the woman’s role in life. Blessed is the wife who is privileged to be raising a family as opposed to the husband who is growing fruit and vegetables! Nor is this meant to be a defense of those spoiled women who don’t understand their role as the “mother of all life” and who corrupt themselves by their own ever increasing demands and ambitions. It is simply meant to make the husband aware of his wife’s special circumstances and to motivate him to be considerate of her and not transgress the law: “don’t judge your friend until you have stood in his place.”¹⁹⁶

As time passes, and the burden of raising a family increases, a husband may become less interested in his wife. When she was young and pretty he felt all excited about her. He brought her flowers and treated her delicately, but in time he may become indifferent to her. She may become for him an ordinary object, occupying less and less of his thoughts and his life. He may find himself looking for other forms of distractions to fill the void. All kinds of vain and petty disagreements raise a barrier between them, leaving the wife feeling all alone. Despite her having a husband and children, her loneliness can increase from day to day, until gradually,

¹⁹⁵ Similar to this is the Maharal’s explanation of the difference between two things connected intrinsically or ‘incidentally’, as defined by the philosophers.

¹⁹⁶ *Pirkei Avot* 2:5.

she returns to that state of tragic isolation described as, “it is not good for Man to be alone.”¹⁹⁷

There are many different case scenarios. It could be that the husband feels neglected by his wife because her attention and love are completely taken up by the children. In any case, a husband must be considerate of his wife. This is not considered pampering her, but seriously realizing that she needs “to breathe” once in a while. He must understand that a woman is not a child-bearing-and-raising machine, but first and foremost a human being created in the image of G-d and that this image manifests itself as “the mother of all life.” Therefore young women should not be allowed to reach the point of emotional and physical exhaustion. This would be overdoing the injunction of “having as many children as possible.” Of course it is a delicate and complicated matter to know exactly when and where to draw the line, and therefore a *talmid chacham* must be consulted in order to arrive at a truly objective and reliable decision. It is not our intention to set detailed guidelines, which only *poskei halacha* are equipped to set, but rather to call attention to a simple but oft forgotten fact that a woman is also entitled to live like a human being.

¹⁹⁷ See Part 1, Ch. 1, *Beraishit* 2:18.

❖ Chapter 4

Being a Fulfilled Wife and Mother

No two people are alike. Each of us must follow his own individual talents and inclinations. This, of course, does not legitimize anarchy or egotistic behavior. As human beings created in G-d's image, and as Jews, we have an obligation to follow all the commandments of the Torah. However, within the Torah framework, there is allowance for individual difference and variety of self-expression.

It follows obviously that no two women are alike. Each woman must find her own spiritual fulfillment and achieve her own moral attainments in her own way. It is true that all women have the primary role of acting as “the mother of all life”, responsible for managing the house and taking care of the welfare of the whole family. However, what percentage of each day is spent out of the house, either at work or busy with communal needs, will vary from one woman to another. There are women who feel unfulfilled only being at home, feeling that they are locked up in the confines of their house all day long.

Sometimes there are technical difficulties preventing her

from getting out of the house. A woman must make a supreme, courageous effort to overcome them, for in the end every person has a responsibility to him/herself to develop his or her own potential. Ways can be found to lighten the burden of household tasks by getting help with the house and the children, so that she may have time for other things, too.

Moreover, some women are locked into a stereotype - enslaved to their own self-image or to others' expectations - that their whole world must be within their own four walls. They are really not happy with this kind of life, and are frustrated by the role of house-wife (particularly in our modern times when being a house-wife isn't considered a productive career). It is upon women to free themselves from these bonds and follow their hearts to find fulfillment in life, but of course within the limits set forth by the Torah, and with particular regard for the Torah demands of modesty.

In past generations there have always been pious, modest Jewish women who have managed to fill various public functions, voluntarily or professionally, without infringing on any laws of the Torah. One might object that such activities are carried out at the expense of the home. Here too, one must take care not to exaggerate - extremism is always harmful. When a balance is reached it will actually improve the situation at home, which is after all the major concern here. An unhappy wife and mother certainly cannot carry out her tasks at home in the best possible way. If she is able

to vary her daily schedule and get out of the house from time to time, she will be able to develop her own personality and this in turn will benefit the home.

❖ Chapter 5

A Woman and the *Mitzva of Priyah U'Reviyah*

The basis for marriage is the continuity of generations, the *mitzva* of “*Priyah* and *Reviyah*.” Marriage enables two people to gain immortality through their descendants.¹⁹⁸ It seems strange then, that although a man cannot fulfill the *mitzva* of “*Priyah* and *Reviyah*” without his wife, this *mitzva* is only directed to the man, while the woman is exempt from the *mitzva*. How can a woman be exempt from this *mitzva* which is the very basis for the continued existence of the world?

One answer given is that the Torah saw no reason to command women to do that which their inner nature dictates them to do: “It is good to be two together” (i.e. to be pregnant).¹⁹⁹ This is something which a woman’s own body commands her, which she feels in the very depths of her being. We learn this from how Chana prayed, “She spoke **on** (*al*)

¹⁹⁸ See also R. A.Y. Kook, *Mussar HaKodesh*, p299

¹⁹⁹ *Kiddushin* 41a.

her heart.” Our rabbis comment, “**About** the matters of her heart! She prayed to G-d: ‘Everything that You have created, You have created for some purpose: eyes to see, ears to hear, a nose to smell, a mouth to speak, hands to work, feet to walk, breasts to nurse. These breasts on my heart, of what use are they? Aren’t they to nurse? Give me a baby so that I can nurse!’”²⁰⁰

A man, on the other hand, has it within his nature to choose to abstain from marriage, thinking that abstinence is the path to holiness, as the Church or the Essenes did. Therefore the Torah teaches him that, on the contrary, holiness is not to be achieved through abstinence, but through marriage and through creating continuity. Procreation is not a necessary evil, nor is it an egotistic form of enjoyment. Rather it is a holy *mitzva*, as expressed in the marriage blessing said by the Rabbi under the *chuppah*: “Who has sanctified us through His *mitzvot*”

²⁰⁰ *Shmuel I*, Ch 1, *Berachot* 31a

The Torah need not command us to do what our own nature dictates. The book of *Beraishit* is called *Sefer HaYashar*, The Book of the Just. It must necessarily precede the Book of *Shemot*, of the giving of the Torah, for natural healthy moral integrity is the essential basis for achieving higher levels of sanctity. (*Avodah Zara* 25a.)

Part Four



COMPLICATIONS AND THEIR RESOLUTION

❖ Chapter 1

Pure, Straightforward Loving

In the beginning verses of *Shir Hashirim*, The Song of Songs, (that uplifting book which is about pure and holy love), unusual terminology is used to describe love: “Sincerely (lit. straightly - *maisharim*) do they love you.”²⁰¹ How does one love sincerely? Rashi explains: “strong love is straightforward love, plain and unswerving.”²⁰² Maybe in the future everything will run smoothly; but for the time being, nothing seems straightforward, rather full of complications. This situation could be a person’s own doing, as it says: “G-d made a person straightforward [but] he has sought out many contrivances.”²⁰³ From the perspective of the Creator, who is righteous and straight,²⁰⁴ everything in existence is straightforward, and can be seen as such in the light of the

²⁰¹ *Shir HaShirim* 1:4.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, Rashi. He associates the word *maisharim* (sincerely) with the verse in *Yeshayahu*: “And the crooked shall be made straight (*maishor*) and the rough places, plain.” (*Yeshayahu* 40:4)

²⁰³ *Kohelet* 7:29.

²⁰⁴ *Devarim* 32:4.

Torah, which itself is called *Sefer HaYashar*²⁰⁵ (*Yashar* meaning straight). But from the perspective of the human being, it seems that there are many stumbling blocks, crises, and complications in our daily lives.

Moreover, there are also complications in interpersonal relations. Put two people together and it is inevitable that at some point a conflict will arise. The example of Cain and Abel is a case in point.²⁰⁶ It is natural that there will be conflicts of interest, and clashes of emotions, thoughts and ideas between people and therefore they have to be anticipated. Only a drunk thinks everything goes smoothly: “To a drunk the whole world is straight, as it is written, ‘he looks at his cup and walks straight forward’.”²⁰⁷ In married life, too, not everything goes smoothly. There are mountains and valleys. Despite this, our love must still be straightforward. Rashi on the same verse in *Shir HaShirim*, defines “straightforward love” as “strong love.” Strong love does not mean a rush of powerful emotions when everything is running smoothly, but rather a love which remains sincere and straightforward despite all the complications.

How does one attain “straightforward love”? According to the continuation of Rashi on the same verse, we can learn how to love from *Am Yisrael*’s love for G-d, which is compared to the love of a bride for her groom. He brings the

²⁰⁵ *Avodah Zara* 25a.

²⁰⁶ See *Beraishit*, Ch. 4.

²⁰⁷ *Yomah* 75b.

verse from *Yirmiyahu*: “They (*Am Yisrael*) remind Him of the devotion of their youth, the love of their betrothal period, when they followed [G-d] into the vast, waterless desert, taking with them no provisions, believing in G-d and in His agent [Moshe].”²⁰⁸ They did not question going into the wilderness where there was nothing to eat. They followed G-d and He took them under His wings. There they lived happily, rejoicing in their closeness to G-d, and studying Torah, despite their lack of material comforts. It is in that context that their “straightforward love” for G-d is mentioned.”²⁰⁹ *Am Yisrael* had no provisions, they were in a desolate wasteland, they had no material comforts. Nevertheless their love remained sincere and straightforward. How? Because they had faith in G-d. Likewise, when each partner has faith in the other, then the love remains sincere and straightforward. When there is mutual trust not so many questions are asked, “Why is this like this and that like that?”, and the love and harmony, peace and friendship between the couple remain intact.

²⁰⁸ *Yirmiyahu* 2:2.

²⁰⁹ Rashi.

❖ Chapter 2

Wiping the Slate Clean

Part of the process to determine the innocence or guilt of a *sotah* (a married woman suspected of committing adultery), is that G-d's ineffable name is erased in water, in order to restore peace between husband and wife.²¹⁰ In any other case, erasing of the Divine name is one of the most serious transgressions in the Torah.²¹¹ In the case of the *sotah*, though, we do exactly that! And for what goal? To make peace between man and wife. From this we learn how essential it is to make compromises in order to restore peace between a husband and wife. Of course this doesn't mean that one may transgress anything written in the Torah in order to bring peace between man and wife, although there is one authority who wrote that it is more important for a wife to do her husband's bidding than to follow the *mitzvot* of the Torah, and that she is forbidden to fulfill a *mitzva* if

²¹⁰ *Yerushalmi Sotah* 1:4

²¹¹ This is deduced by our sages from the Biblical verses, "You shall utterly destroy all the places where other nations worshipped idols; ...smash their altars, break their monuments, burn their holy trees, cut down the graven images of their gods, and wipe their names out of that place...This you shall not do to the L-rd, your G-d" (*Devarim* 12:2-4)

it contradicts her husband's wishes.²¹² In my eyes and according to a *talmid chacham* I consulted with, this is a very peculiar and not generally accepted opinion.

There are, however, tales related by our Rabbis which would seem to indicate that peace between a husband and wife **does** take precedence over observance of *mitzvot*. For instance, there is a famous story about a woman who came home late one Friday night because she had stayed on at R. Meir's *shiur*. Her husband, in his anger, announced that he would break off all relations with her until she would go and spit in R. Meir's face. R. Meir heard of this and pretended to have an eye disease which could only be cured by having someone spit in his eye and requested that she spit in it. The woman's friends heard this and urged her to go and spit at him and so she did. Later, when R. Meir's disciples asked him how he could forego the honor due him - not in his own right, but as a Torah scholar - he answered that his honor was no greater than the honor of Heaven which may be blotted out in water to restore peace between husband and wife.²¹³

There is another tale of a woman who didn't understand her husband's Aramaic dialect well. When he asked her to bring him two melons, she brought him two clay lamps instead. Her husband, in his anger, told her to go and break them

²¹² *Responsa Beit Ya'akov* 147, cited in *Sefer Mitzvot HaBayit* vol. I pp.285

²¹³ *Vayikra Raba* 9:9 or *Yerushalmi, Sotah* 1

over the top of the gate (*rosh baba*). Misunderstanding his words, she took the candles and broke them on the head (*rosh*) of Baba ben Buta, one of the great Rabbis of that time. When Baba asked her to explain her action, she replied that she was merely carrying out her husband's orders! He said to her, "If so, you are a good wife, for a good wife is one who does her husband's bidding. May G-d grant you two sons who will light up the world, like Baba ben Buta." And so it was.²¹⁴

Obviously, the moral of these stories is not that peace in the family justifies transgression of the Torah; but rather that peace and harmony between husband and wife is our highest ideal. We have to do everything we can to achieve this goal of *shalom bayit*, including compromising, foregoing honor, and forgiving wherever possible.

Why is peace between husband and wife considered so highly, that even G-d is prepared to allow His Divine name to be erased in order to achieve it? Perhaps because this is the way to learn how to fulfill the *mitzva* "Love your neighbor as yourself."²¹⁵ Ideally, we should love everyone in *Am Yisrael*. We have been taught to love the community of all Jews (*Klal Yisrael*) and this clearly involves loving, not only the abstract spiritual entity of the Jewish people, but also each individual Jew that makes up the nation. Love of each

²¹⁴ *Nedarim* 66b.

²¹⁵ *Vayikra* 19:17.

Jew begins with a love of that part of each Jew which makes them Jewish, their soul, and this is then applied to love of each particular member of *Am Yisrael*.

Needless to say, this is a very difficult *mitzva* to fulfill, we are called upon to really love one another, with all our hearts and all our souls. But we cannot expect to succeed in such an endeavor overnight. And meanwhile? How can we exist without truly loving our fellow Jews? Therefore, until we are able to reach that elevated state of true love of our fellow Jew, we should at least try to love one Jewish person with all our hearts and souls. And that person is one's spouse. The *Mishna* teaches us that the main criterion for choosing a mate is one's estimation of whether one can fulfill the *mitzva* of "Love your neighbor as yourself" with that person. Therefore one is not allowed to betroth a wife without seeing her.²¹⁶ Before a couple get married, they should clarify how suitable the match is in terms of their being able to fulfill this *mitzva* of loving the other as they do themselves. This fundamental, particularized love may then grow into a love of all the Jewish people. That great love of all Jews is the ideal; it is not the foundation, which is love of the one closest to you - your "neighbor", your spouse.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that tensions inevitably arise between husband and wife. It is far easier to love the Jew in far away Japan, for we don't have to compromise

²¹⁶ *Kiddushin* 41a.

with him or make sacrifices for him. But when a married couple live together, clashes of will are unavoidable. There are consciously or unconsciously delivered insults and emotional harm, and tension invariably builds up. One spouse can become annoyed at, or resentful of, the other. Feelings of hate can even be aroused. Perhaps this is the hate that the Torah so strongly opposes: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.”²¹⁷

The emotion of hate doesn’t only refer to the strong desire to want to kill or even to hit the other; bearing a grudge is also a kind of hate. Hate comes in different degrees of strength. But whether it is a very powerful emotion, or just a slight feeling, it is still forbidden, as is the eating of even a speck of pork. In a case where one’s spouse **does** hurt the other’s feelings, in speech or in action, the injured party is forbidden to bear a grudge against the other. In such a situation, our Rabbis teach that one should either ask gently, “why did you say/do that to me?”, and thus rebuke the other, or he should really and truly forgive him completely. There is absolutely no excuse and no *halachic* justification for bearing a grudge!²¹⁸

Tensions between the couple can arise and renew themselves daily, and it is impossible to keep an accurate blow by blow account of each grievance. Furthermore, keeping

²¹⁷ *Vayikra* 19:17.

²¹⁸ Rambam, *Hilchot De'ot* 6:6.

continual score of all these petty mutual grievances breaks down and damages the marriage more than the grievances themselves. They could be included in the expression, "much ado about nothing", to quote Shakespeare. Therefore, an ounce of prevention - by wiping out accounts - is worth much more than any pound of cure later on. All mutual grievances must be completely blotted out.

A person belongs without his choosing to society. Society benefits him for he cannot exist in isolation, but nevertheless he also suffers from society. Too often he is overly sensitive and too easily hurt, but the pain he feels is real. Many times, he ends his day feeling hurt and full of grievances which he has suffered, from contact with a society which can be unjust and chaotic. Sometimes he himself is responsible for bringing the trouble on himself through his own faults or mistakes, and then he may be anxious and distressed by his failure and the resultant social pressure directed toward him. It is very difficult for a person to exist under such pressured circumstances without a place of refuge, where he is accepted for who he is, and may relax with no fear of being criticized. The above is not, of course, the marriage ideal for which we should be striving, but the point is important and worthy of attention. It is impossible to describe how much strength and renewed desire for life a person can gain from a spouse who accepts and loves him as he is, without bringing up grievances against him. Why greet your mate with complaints and demands? Why bear a grudge against him for this or that thing? Are you yourself 100% pure and holy?

Perhaps it is worth making a deal of mutual forgiveness! Our Rabbis teach that: “whoever overlooks someone else’s faults is forgiven for all his own sins.”²¹⁹ If you forgive your friend about things he doesn’t deserve to be forgiven for, G-d will judge you the same way.

It is well known that *Yom Kippur* does not grant atonement for sins to a fellow man until you have asked his forgiveness and been forgiven.²²⁰ This is why we recite the *tefilla zaka* on *erev Yom Kippur*. We all grant absolute forgiveness to one another. Of course this need not be done only on *Yom Kippur*; it should be done every day. Thus the *Ari’zal* composed the following statement to be said every night before reciting the bedtime *Shema*: “I hereby forgive everyone who has sinned against me, whether purposely or accidentally...” It is said that several great Rabbis, including R. Kook had an even more comprehensive version: “I forgive anyone who may sin against me in the future.” At least in our marital relations we should aim for such an achievement: complete forgiveness for any future offence one to the other. How pleasant and happy such a relationship would be!

Obviously this does not mean that one should call good, bad and bad, good and ignore failings. Certainly shortcomings should be corrected. But this is second priority. The first step is to love each other unconditionally, by erasing mutual

²¹⁹ *Yoma* 23a.

²²⁰ Mishna, end of *Yoma*.

grievances. Only from this frame of mind is it possible to really correct what needs to be corrected.

There is a famous story about the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, whose disciples asked him how to do complete *teshuva* (repentance) before the High Holy Days. He advised them to follow the practice of a certain simple Jew nearby. They saw the following amazing scene: The man stood opposite a fire, two notebooks in his hand. He said, "Master of the world, in this notebook I have written all the sins I have committed against You. Sad to say, they are quite numerous. I admit my guilt. In the second notebook I have written down all the troubles which You allowed to happen to me, G-d. And now, I will 'forgive' you, dear G-d, for all You have done to me, and I beg of You, please forgive me for all my sins. See, I am throwing both of the notebooks into the fire!" So, should husband and wife throw both notebooks into the fire.

One might object: "I'm willing to forgive my mate for hurting **me**, but not for the sins he has committed against G-d. That's why I'm angry at him." We answer firmly: "Don't be zealous on behalf of G-d! Don't hate your husband or wife for G-d's sake. Don't fight G-d's battles in His name without His permission. G-d is even willing to allow His Divine name to be wiped out in water in order to make peace between man and wife.

It seems though, that hostility - to a greater or lesser degree - is part of human nature, and can only be conquered and erased with great effort. This hostility sometimes appears

veiled in words of self-righteousness, in lectures on morality and so on.²²¹ Sometimes the animosity is not expressed verbally at all, but is part of the person's attitude. Difficult as it may be to heal oneself from this trait of hostility completely, one should at least try not to involve G-d. "G-d is good to all and His mercy is upon all His creations."²²² He is even willing to have His Name erased in order to restore harmony between a man and his wife.

This is the advice given to couples who are about to be married: "First, learn to live with each other; only later strive for additional holiness and closeness to G-d. Your first priority is to build the life of the marriage - the simple, natural love - 'strong, sincere love, plain and unswerving.'²²³ The foundation is pure, simple love. Then, on that basis, high levels of sanctity can be strived for. If one aspires to sanctity when the foundation of love is absent, the building will be off balance. First, all mutual scorekeeping must be eliminated and all IOU's must be thrown into the fire, even if the debt is to G-d.

Were we searching for the strongest possible way to express the elevated, beautiful principle - that the only firm foundation for marital love and happiness is complete mutual forgiveness, even concerning religious matters - we could never find a way to express it better than these few words of our

²²¹ See R. A.Y. Kook, *Middot HaRe'iyah*, chapter on *Tochachah*.

²²² *Tehilim* 145:9.

²²³ *Shir HaShirim* 1:4., Rashi.

sages, “G-d’s name is rubbed out in water in order to restore peace between husband and wife.”

❖ Chapter 3

Ezer Kenegdo: A Helpmate

וַיֹּאמֶר ד' אֱלֹקִים לֹא טוֹב הָיִתָּה הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אַעֲשֶׂה לּוֹ עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ
(בראשית ב:יח)

It is not good for Man to be alone. I shall make him a helpmate (Beraishit 2:18)

The phrase *ezer kenegdo* is not easy to understand, for its literal translation is: “a helpmate against him”, an expression which is self-contradictory in the original Hebrew also. Rashi quotes the *midrashic* comment: If he were worthy, she would be “a helpmate”; if he were not worthy, she would be “against him”, i.e. fighting him.²²⁴ Even before the world’s first marriage, our Creator tells us that marriage can be the greatest help, happiness, and enrichment of life possible; but it can also be the greatest obstacle to happiness, leading to the greatest war possible, within one’s very own home!

What makes the difference? It all depends on whether one “is worthy” or not; i.e. it depends on a person’s own free

²²⁴ Rashi on *Beraishit* 2:18, *Yevamot* 63a.

choice and not on fate. Whether one will be tall or short, wise or stupid, is decided in Heaven. But whether one will be found worthy or not is up to him.²²⁵ “Everything is in G-d’s hands except for fear of G-d.”²²⁶

The Torah is given to the Jew for his own good and is called in *Mishlei: Torat chesed*.²²⁷ Through both the oral and the written law, it kindly warns us: Be careful! Marriage is not necessarily a garden of roses. It can also be a field of thorns! And there are many possible combinations and varying degrees of thorns and roses. When you get married, you enter an unknown land. You may be swept from one extreme to the other, from experiencing the greatest “help” (*eizer*) possible, to the greatest force “against” (*keneged*) you possible. It can happen that each partner tries to change the other in an attempt to squeeze them into their conception of the ideal partner, to satisfy their own needs. On the other hand, the couple could try to communicate in a reciprocal, gentle manner so that each partner may be enriched by the other. Each partner may discover in the other person someone different from him but no less attractive than himself.

It is advisable to internalize well what the Torah has written: “A helpmate against him.” Can there be a greater paradox? Why does the Torah use such a powerful expression which

²²⁵ Rambam, *Shmoneh Prakim*, Ch. 8, pp. 55-56, Rashi on *Berachot* 33b

²²⁶ *Berachot* 33b.

²²⁷ *Mishlei* 31:26.

includes within it such elevated, gentle relating and such harmful, pressured relating? It is not to dampen your enthusiasm for marriage, but simply to warn you: Don't take futile consolation in the thought that "everything will be alright between us when we're married." It may or it may not.

Now that you are really shaken up, you may protest: "Why do you want to cause trouble? If my marriage is destined to fail, why should I worry about it prematurely? At the very least, you should tell me what I can do to salvage the situation." There **is** something you can do, and it is written in the Torah: "you shall choose life."²²⁸ It is all in your hands.²²⁹ Moreover, the oral law has spelled it out clearly for us; "If he were worthy, she would be a helpmate." The word worthy (*zacha*) - is related to the word pure (*zach*). You yourself must have pure motives, and you must be gentle; you must listen to and communicate properly with your spouse, and then your moral efforts will be rewarded.

It is true that sometimes things get so complicated and tangled up, that both sides become discouraged. But even in such cases it is possible to do *teshuvah*, to begin afresh. The essential first step, however, is believing that you **can** do *teshuvah*; and, moreover, that your spouse is also capable of doing *teshuvah*. There is never any obstacle too great which stands in the way of *teshuvah*. Of course, your part-

²²⁸ *Devarim* 30:19.

²²⁹ Rambam, *Shmoneh Prakim*.

ner must also have this faith in himself and in you. On this basis, it is possible to communicate with each other: Go to your spouse and say, “Until now we have been hurting each other. Let us forget the past and begin to build our future together. I believe that I can make amends, and I believe that you can, too. And you?” Of course, you will not succeed in transforming your relationship the very first day into one of *eizer*. Backsliding, reverting to the “against” relationship, is all too easy, almost automatic. Nevertheless, it is possible to be “helpmates” to each other. Even if it means repairing the new fractures each time they happen, it is possible!

❖ Chapter 4

Learning to Live Together

Sometimes a marital relationship may become so full of strife that both husband and wife despair and begin to consider divorce. However, when they sit down to analyze the source of the crisis, calmly and reasonably, they are surprised to discover that neither party has any serious complaint against the other. Their plight is simply due to the accumulation of many small incidents, whose total weight is devastating. This phenomenon is reminiscent of the illustration in the satire, *Gulliver's Travels*, where the hero is pinned fast to the ground by thousands of little threads. In most cases, one of the partners is in an anxious emotional state over her spouse but cannot pinpoint any really serious fault in him. Any tiny deviation he makes from her expectations, immediately re-awakens all her complaints over all the years of their marriage. In such a case, living together becomes so tension ridden, so frustrating and disappointing that the thought arises in their minds that the marriage was really a mistake and it should be ended. A calm, precise, unemotional analysis will usually show that, except for

exceptional situations, the situation is not hopeless and it is possible to amend it and to achieve a happy marriage.

There are two factors necessary for a happy marriage, one objective and one subjective. The objective factor is compatibility - in religious, ethical, cultural, and intellectual matters. If two people have different spiritual outlooks on life, it will require life-long and arduous adjustment. For instance, a marriage in which the partners disagree on the *mitzvot* of *Shabbat*, *kashrut* or family purity, is almost impossible to sustain. Likewise, intellectual incompatibility may also cause much tension. The second, subjective factor, is their personal, emotional reaction to each other. From all the reasonable options of marriage partners available, the heart chose this particular person. This internal mechanism has not yet been sufficiently analyzed by modern psychological research and remains a mystery. We don't need the well-known psychologist, Carl Jung, to tell us that love appears between two individuals whose souls belong together. We already know that even before the fetus is formed, a Divine voice decrees: Miss X to Mr Y. In any case, there is definitely a subjective factor involved. Today it is very rare for two young people to marry without a feeling of deep symbiosis or empathy for each other.

Even if the couple is objectively and emotionally compatible, these two factors alone don't guarantee a happy marriage. Each individual has his own unique personality and opinions, making it inevitable that clashes will occur. With a

reasonable investment of well-focussed energy, these differences can be resolved, on one condition: unpleasant incidents must be resolved on a daily basis and not be allowed to build up and form a barrier between the couple, destroying healthy communication. Unfortunately, newly-weds are often too emotionally immature to be sufficiently tolerant of their mates. By the time they reach this maturity, their relationship may have become so painful that all attempts at communication are also too painful and emotionally charged. Furthermore, the couple may be caught up in a vicious cycle. Their emotional imbroglio itself may be preventing them from attaining the maturity necessary to resolve it. They are in the tragic situation where the sin itself is impeding them from doing *teshuva*. The *Rambam* teaches us, however, that even factors which impede *teshuva* cannot prevent it completely. They may make it more difficult, but not impossible. There is nothing that can stand in the way of *teshuva*.

I would like to make a suggestion for a couple in such a plight: do *teshuva* for being unkind and judgmental to each other. This is not a license to lecture your partner on his need to do *teshuva*. Usually, each spouse is aware that he is not behaving properly and further mention of this fact only aggravates the situation, like sprinkling salt on an open wound. No one knows better than the person himself how far he is from perfection. If he is subjected to endless rebuke he will cut himself off in self-defense. Rather, each person should do his own *teshuva* and amend what has been

flawed in his relationship with his Creator and with his own self: for being intolerant, unforgiving, unkind, for seeing only the faults and not the good points of his spouse, for lying to himself and distorting his spouse's image by exaggerating every little fault, and thereby making a mountain out of a molehill. Making an effort to treat the other person generously and tolerantly is the most effective guarantee that the other person, too, will improve his attitude.

Let us not mistakenly assume that this reforming of self refers only to external communication, i.e. speaking politely and sweetly instead of being aggressive and critical. The most important thing is to change one's inner thoughts, feelings and emotions. Once a person's inner attitude changes, his manner of speech and general relating will also improve.

A person's conscience must stand up and shout loudly: "Stop complaining about the other person! Look in the mirror and do *teshuvah* yourself! Free yourself from selfishness, intolerance, anger, and bearing a grudge. You should be ashamed of yourself for treating your spouse, who is after all a decent person, in such a shameful manner. What does all your Torah learning, your high moral standards and your devotion to *Eretz Yisrael* and *Am Yisrael* count for, if you can't even get along with one person?! And not just any person, but a good person, who is doing his best, despite making a few minor faults, and whom you chose because of your love for him. Where is that basic spirit of gratefulness with which you are supposed to start each day? (by thanking

G-d in *modeh ani*)? Don't you have anything to thank your spouse for instead of complaining and criticizing?" When one listens to his conscience speaking up, clearly and sharply, all but the most insensitive souls will hearken, do *teshuvah*, and be healed.

❖ Chapter 5

A Story of Reconciliation

Sometimes there is a barrier separating a married couple - an objective obstacle - which, it seems to each spouse, cannot possibly be overcome. However, they continue living together, but each one finds his heart's fulfillment in a different area. Each spouse builds his own separate life, taking partly into consideration the other "tenant" of the apartment, but they don't share their goals and feelings with each other. This kind of marriage is really an emotional divorce. Technically and practically the husband and wife continue to live together, but emotionally they are separated from each other.

The *midrash* tells a fascinating story which can shed light on such a marriage: "*There was once a woman in Tziddon who was married for ten years and bore no children.*"²³⁰ At first glance, this appears to be an insurmountable obstacle between the husband and wife. Can there be any greater, more objective problem than a childless marriage? Jewish

²³⁰ *Shir HaShirim Raba* 1:31.

law states that “If one were married for ten years and his wife bore him no children, he is not permitted to wait any longer (to observe the *mitzva* of bearing children) and may divorce her.”²³¹

The *midrash* continues: “*The couple came to R. Shimon bar Yochai and asked him to arrange a divorce. He said to them, ‘Smile! Just as you celebrated your marriage with a feast, in the same way must you now celebrate your divorce.’*”²³² We might have expected R. Shimon bar Yochai to try to discourage such a fine couple from divorcing and rather refer them to a doctor, or offer to pray for them to have children. Didn’t he realize that his prayer was so powerful that it could work miracles!

This “divorce feast” that R. Shimon told them to have, sounds like a new law that he made up. But he sensed that in this case the source of their difficulty was the emotional distance between their two hearts. Usually it is not the objective problem which brings about emotional distance between the couple, but rather it is the emotional distance which lends a tragic dimension to the objective problem. R. Shimon understood that they didn’t know how to rejoice together, and so he was communicating to them that if they wanted a divorce, he was willing to arrange it, but on con-

²³¹ Mishna *Yevamot* 6:6.

²³² *Shir HaShirim Raba*, *ibid.*

dition that they return to the emotional state of their wedding day.

Continues the *midrash*: “*They did as he said, and arranged a festive feast.*”²³³ Perhaps at first the joy was restrained and forced, but as the evening progressed, “*she plied him with too much to drink.*”²³⁴ Drinking too much is a dangerous habit, but there is a benefit to controlled drinking wine as it says: “Praised is drinking... for it brings together those who are estranged.”²³⁵ Wine breaks down barriers between people and closes gaps which appear unbridgeable. And so, “*when he was sober enough to speak, he said to her, ‘My daughter, pick out whatever possession of mine in the house you like best and take it with you when you go to your father’s house.’*”²³⁶

Our sages tell us that “when wine is taken in, secrets go out.”²³⁷ The spark of love between the couple, dormant for so many years, was revived. The husband was effectively saying, “Suddenly I feel again the love I felt for you in the beginning: unselfish, unconditional love. Of course, I can’t give you myself, for there is an objective obstacle here, but “pick out whatever possession of mine in the house and take it with you.” It’s true that I don’t feel such perfectly profound

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Sanhedrin* 103b.

²³⁶ *Shir HaShirim Raba*, *ibid.*

²³⁷ *Eirubin* 65a.

love enough to call you, “my companion, my dove, my perfect one,”²³⁸ but I do at least call you “my daughter.”

The husband’s gesture aroused strong feelings of love in his wife, as it says: “make for me an opening for *teshuva* as wide as the eye of a needle and I shall make for you an opening through which chariots and caravans can pass.”²³⁹ She takes a daring initiative as the *midrash* tells us: “*What did she do? After he had fallen asleep, she motioned to her servants and told them, ‘Pick him up in his bed and take him over to my father’s house.’ In the middle of the night he woke up, completely sober, and asked, ‘My daughter, where am I?’ She answered, ‘In my father’s house.’ ‘What am I doing here?’ he asked. And she replied, ‘Didn’t you tell me last night to take whatever I liked best of yours back with me to my father’s house? There is nothing in the whole world that I like better than you!’*”²⁴⁰ There is no object in the world that interests me, nor are any of the favors you have done for me so very important. There is only one thing I desire - you. But what about our problem you ask? I don’t know. I love you, and that, to me, is more important than any logical consideration.

What should they do? “*They returned to R. Shimon bar Yochai*”²⁴¹ in the same predicament as they had been a few

²³⁸ *Shir HaShirim* 5:2.

²³⁹ *Shir HaShirim Raba* 5:3.

²⁴⁰ *Shir HaShirim Raba* 1:31.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

days earlier. What would he say now? R. Shimon said nothing. “*He stood and prayed for them.*”²⁴² Why hadn’t he prayed for them the first time that they came to him? What had changed? Objectively, nothing had changed, but the most important change in the couple’s life had taken place! The love of their youth was re-awakened. It was as if R. Shimon had said to them: “I’ll be happy to help you, but I can’t do your work for you. Prayer is not mechanical. It has to have a foundation on which to work. You must take the initiative, move closer to each other, even if there seems no reasonable chance of overcoming the obstacles. Only then will I be able to help you.” First, one must make an effort, and on that basis G-d will help, even that which seems unsolvable. “*He stood and prayed for them, and his prayers were answered.*”²⁴³

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

❖ Chapter 6

The Role of *Teshuva* in Marriage

It is the custom for a man to fast on his wedding day. The particulars of this custom differ among different Jewish communities, including whether the bride too, should fast. In any case, our sages explain that a person's sins are forgiven on his wedding day, that it is like a personal *Yom Kippur*, and hence the custom to fast. This point needs to be further clarified. Why should there be a need for a personal *Yom Kippur* before one gets married?

We must accept the fact that married life is bound to include struggles and friction. There are some who believe that the romantic love between a bride and groom is sufficient to prevent unpleasantness between them in the future. This is not true, for romantic love, like any other emotion, has its ups and downs, its own moods. "As time passes, feelings lose their potency; they grow old and no longer have the same vitality."²⁴⁴ We must be prepared in advance for the fickleness of the world of emotion.

²⁴⁴ R. A.Y. Kook, *Orot HaKodesh*, 1:355).

Furthermore, romantic love also includes egoistic elements. It is not only pure love for another person; it is also love of the experience of being “in love”, which is really self-love in which the other person serves as the means for self-gratification. This kind of love is similar to “love dependent on an external factor, which will eventually fade,”²⁴⁵ for each party is mainly interested in satisfying himself.

Moreover, one’s spiritual conceptions of the ideal marriage are not always strong enough to overcome the pressures of life. The exalted descriptions of marriage in the Ramban’s *Iggeret HaKodesh* are often left hovering above in the realm of the spirit and not able to be applied in practical day-to-day life.

In other words, the reality is, that despite a couple’s initial romantic love, and despite the exalted depictions of marriage in *Iggeret HaKodesh*, demands and complaints will inevitably arise, because of the couple’s different aspirations and expectations, which cannot be ignored. Each spouse tries to fit the other into his own way of thinking and lifestyle patterns, and this results in ongoing friction. Each one tries to “correct” the other, either for his own self-gratification, or for ethical, spiritual or idealistic reasons, or even for selfish reasons masquerading as idealism. This can lead to an unbearably tense atmosphere. And we ask, “What can be

²⁴⁵ *Pirkei Avot* 5:19.

done? How can two imperfect people possibly live together?”

This is the secret: make sure that **you** behave properly and don't worry about the other person. Then he too will behave properly. And this is exactly what *Yom Kippur* is all about. R. Kook explains that only after the purification of *Yom Kippur* is it possible “for all Israel to be worthy of sitting in one Succa.”²⁴⁶ Moreover, during the holiday of *Succot* there are all kinds of *Yom Kippur*, all kinds of self-purification because of the element of unity.²⁴⁷ It may be that the groom's day of atonement, although it brings atonement for all of his sins, is particularly directed towards those shortcomings which may harm a marriage. We hope that the groom's *teshuvah* and acceptance of responsibility on his wedding day will continue throughout his married life.

²⁴⁶ *Succa* 27b.

²⁴⁷ *Hasukkah Ha-achat, Ma'amarei HaRa'aya*

❖ Chapter 7

A Four-fold Blessing

By sinning, Adam and Chava caused a deterioration, not only in their relationship to their Creator but also to the world He had created. Adam was told: “cursed is the ground for your sake. Through suffering shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it grow for you, and you shall eat the herbs of the fields. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread, for you are of dust and to dust will you return.”²⁴⁸

Their relationship with each other also suffered. “I will greatly multiply the pain of your childbearing. In sorrow will you bear children, and yet your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you.”²⁴⁹ Ever since the sin of Chava, a curse has rested on family life and on the woman in her role as wife and mother. This curse is four-fold:

1. “I will greatly multiply the pain of your childbearing”
2. “In sorrow will you bear children”
3. “Your desire shall be to your husband”
4. “He shall rule over you”

²⁴⁸ *Beraishit* 3:18-19.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* verses 16-17.

These four curses will be explained in reverse order:

1. “He shall rule over you”

Because she is subordinate to her husband, she cannot develop herself. He blocks her spiritual progress and prevents her from realizing her potential. But a human being cannot stagnate, he must advance towards a goal, an ideal, a value. When a husband rules his wife, when he decides her priorities against her will, her life becomes empty of ideals, of sanctity; it loses its meaning. “He shall rule over you”, explains Rashi: “everything is from him; not from you.”

2. “Your desire shall be to your husband”

Even if the husband does not dominate her and she is free to fulfill herself by growing towards values and ideals, this is not enough. The fulfillment she feels from her spiritual growth has to blend harmoniously with her relationship with her husband. She has to be able to integrate her elevated ideals within the partnership in particular, as well as within the home. Nevertheless “Your desire shall be to your husband”, Rashi explains: “you won’t dare to voice it aloud.” The wife desires her husband but she remains unfulfilled because he treats her in a disinterested, cold manner and thereby does not allow her to express herself.

3. “In sorrow will you bear children”

Even if she is fulfilled and this fulfillment finds its expression in the home, this too is insufficient. The home needs to bear

fruit which will advance these values forward. Thus the harmonious relationship of the couple needs to be expressed in children. Here, too, there may be a crisis: “In sorrow will you bear children” - “This is the pain of childbirth.” The ideals may not be able to be transmitted and continued into future generations in the noblest, purest way, through their children.

4. “I will greatly multiply the pain of your childbearing”

Even if the woman lives her life with ideals, and these ideals are in harmony with her husband and home, and also bear fruit, it is still not enough. Time must have meaning for her, she must live her daily life according to the pulse of her home. She has to feel that every passing moment brings with it new blessing. Instead, her life may be full of trials and suffering. Rashi explains each phrase in the above curse: “I will greatly multiply” refers to the “blood of menstruation and of virginity”, “the pain” refers to “the difficulty of child-raising”, “of your child bearing” refers to the “suffering of pregnancy.”²⁵⁰ It seems that our reality is fraught with difficulties and complications.

This four-fold curse found its rectification in the lives of the four mothers of the Jewish People (just as Adam’s four-fold curse did through Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya’akov and Yisrael, but this will not be dealt with here):

²⁵⁰ Rashi.

1. Rivka

In contrast to the curse “he shall rule over you”, Yitzchak does not in any way dominate Rivka. His attitude towards her is one of love and high esteem. “And he took Rivka and she became his wife and he loved her”²⁵¹, “And Avimelech, King of Plishtim looked out through a window and saw, and behold, Yitzchak was sporting with Rivka his wife.”²⁵² Yitzchak doesn’t force her into anything. She acts of her own pure independent will, even before she was married: “And she said [to Eliezer]: drink, my lord, and she hastened and let down her pitcher upon her hand and gave him to drink.”²⁵³ She was the same Rivka, before and after her marriage, true to her own special personality, her life dedicated to meaning and ideals.

2. Rachel

In contrast to the curse of unrequited desire, Rachel was desired by her husband Ya’akov to an unparalleled extent: “And Ya’akov kissed Rachel and he lifted up his voice and wept”²⁵⁴, “And Ya’akov loved Rachel and he said: I will serve you [Laban] seven years for Rachel, your youngest daughter”²⁵⁵, “And Ya’akov served seven years for Rachel,

²⁵¹ *Beraishit* 24:67.

²⁵² *Ibid.* 26:8.

²⁵³ *Ibid.* 24:18.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 29:11.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 29:19.

and they seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had for her.”²⁵⁶ But, Rachel was childless.

3. Leah

In contrast to the curse, “In sorrow will you bear children”, Leah gives birth to one child after another, in happiness and gratitude: “And Leah conceived... therefore my husband will love me”²⁵⁷ , “...And she conceived again...”²⁵⁸

4. Sarah

In contrast to the curse, “I will greatly multiply the pain of your childbearing,” we see that “Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.”²⁵⁹ According to Rashi that means that “she had stopped menstruating.” But low and behold “after her skin had grown old and wrinkled, it became soft and smooth again; the wrinkles disappeared and she was beautiful once again.”²⁶⁰ Sarah was above the restrictions of time; she gave birth contrary to the laws of nature.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. 29:20.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 29:32.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 29:33-34.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 18:11.

²⁶⁰ *Baba Metzia* 87a, Rashi.

❖ Chapter 8

Defending His Wife's Honor

It happens that married couples fight. This should not be viewed as a cause for alarm, but rather as an opportunity to make amends. After the couple has made up, their love will return, perhaps even stronger than it was before: “Where *ba’alei teshuvah* (those who have repented) stand, not even the holiest *tzadikim* can stand.”²⁶¹ Not even the worst quarrel should cause one to despair, because nothing is so bad that it cannot be remedied by *teshuvah*. As R. Nachman of Breslov says: “If you believe that it is possible to make mistakes, believe too that it is possible to correct them.”²⁶² Thank G-d, the process is reversible.

When does a marriage really deteriorate? It starts when people outside hear about the rift, when the secret is shared with an outsider. No matter how fine a person he may be, he is still an outsider. Even in a case where the secret is already well known, the situation is very different if it was actually revealed by one of the partners. This important

²⁶¹ *Berachot* 34a.

²⁶² *Likkutei Moharan Tanina* 112.

lesson is taught us by one of the greatest scholars of Yavne, R. Yose HaGalilee, who lived during the *Mishnaic* period. The *midrash* tells us that “R. Yose had a bad wife.”²⁶³ In this case, it was clear that it was she who was responsible for the discord. “*She used to humiliate him in front of his students.*” They all knew about it. “*His students advised him: ‘Separate from this bad woman who doesn’t respect you.’*” Nevertheless, nowhere is there any hint that R. Yose humiliated his wife in return.

The *midrash* continues: “*Once, R. Yose and R. Elazar ben Azariah were sitting together and reviewing what they had learned. When they had finished, R. Elazar asked if they could both go up to [R. Yose’s] home, and R. Yose agreed. As they entered the house, his wife turned her face away and walked out.*” No ‘Hello’. No welcome. No greeting to the guest. She couldn’t stand him and didn’t even want to look at him. When he walked in, she walked out. “*R. Yose saw that there was a pot on the stove. He asked her, ‘Is there anything to eat in the pot?’ She answered, ‘There is a compote.’*” In other words, there is nothing substantial in the house for you to eat, only fruit. “*He went and took the cover off the pot and found inside tender young chickens.*” She was angry with him and didn’t want to waste such good food on him and his guest. She thought that if she told him it was a compote, he wouldn’t even bother to check. He did, though, and found the chickens.

²⁶³ *Beraishit Raba* 17:3.

“R. Elazar ben Azariah understood what he had heard.” He realized what the situation was and how terribly R. Yose’s wife was treating him. However, since R. Yose said nothing, he too kept quiet. “*They sat down to eat. Finally, R. Elazar asked, ‘My teacher, your wife said there was only a compote, but we found young chickens’.*” We have caught her in the act of lying to you; it is clear that she treats you in a loathsome manner. Why do you remain silent? R. Yose saw that he had no choice. He would have to say something. And what was his answer? “*R. Yose said to him: ‘A miracle happened.’*” She wasn’t lying, G-d forbid. There really was a compote in the pot, but a miracle happened and it turned into chicken. This is the extent to which he was willing to go in order to save face for his wife. “A miracle happened”! She had shamed him in front of his student, thus putting herself to shame, too. Nevertheless, R. Yose tried to protect his wife’s honor. In time, however, he realized he had to divorce her. She remarried, and our sages tell us that R. Yose supported the couple all their lives because of the verse “Hide not yourself from your own flesh.”²⁶⁴

As long as they were married, R. Yose said not one derogatory word about her to any person. How he spoke to her in the intimacy of their own home we cannot know; but he said nothing bad about her to anyone. Obviously this same story could be told about a man mistreating his wife. The

²⁶⁴ *Yeshayahu* 58:7.

moral of the story is clear: it is a lesson for us as to the mutual respect a married couple should have for each other.

❖ Chapter 9

Respect for Your Husband (A Responsum)

Question: At a meal to which I was invited, the husband gave a *dvar Torah* and his wife commented, “But the Rabbi said otherwise!” Was she justified in contradicting him?

Response: Certainly not! If such incidents happen frequently, she reveals to her husband that she doesn’t respect him. She may make him feel that he doesn’t know anything and isn’t worth anything. This will discourage him from developing spiritually, and from giving *divrei Torah*, for whatever he may say, she might already know it, and she might have heard it from someone more knowledgeable and learned than him. The husband will suffer from feelings of inferiority and self-pity that he can’t measure up, and the atmosphere in their home will deteriorate. It is unnecessary to add that if she contradicts her husband in front of guests, she is also embarrassing him in public, a very serious transgression in itself.

A similar situation is likely to develop when the wife is more spiritually oriented than the husband, or when she incorrectly perceives that this is so (due perhaps to her superior

verbal ability). In such a case, the wife must behave with much restraint and sensitivity, otherwise she may seriously damage her husband's self-esteem, and this will have severe repercussions on their family life.

There may also be a situation in which the husband must work long hours and has little time free for Torah study, while the wife is able to attend Torah classes and it is she who brings home *divrei Torah*. Or the husband may learn Talmud together with a regular learning partner, while his wife goes to classes given by well-known Rabbis and absorbs guidance on spirituality, ethics, education, etc. This could lead to a situation where the wife seems "superior" to her husband in the area of Torah learning. Therefore a wife must be very careful in her presentation of these subjects at home so as not to appear superior to her husband. This doesn't mean that the wife should agree with everything her husband says. It all depends on the way in which she disagrees with him. Even though the Torah considers men and women equal in terms of their obligations,²⁶⁵ it is up to the woman to act and speak modestly to her husband, thus preventing their relationship from being damaged.

Some women feel that the obligation to honor their husband contradicts their equality to him, that their own personality will be compromised if they are so submissive, but this is not at all true. There is no contradiction between a woman

²⁶⁵ *Baba Kama* 15a.

doing her husband's bidding and developing her own personality. Who is greater than Yael, the wife of Chever HaKaini, who risked her life for *Am Yisrael* and brought the nation salvation, in the days of the judges? Our sages asked why Yael was chosen by G-d to be the agent of salvation, and their answer was that "she was a good wife who did her husband's bidding." From here the sages learn that a proper wife is one who fulfills her husband's will.²⁶⁶ First and foremost, Yael was a good wife, devoted to her husband's welfare. Her outstanding strength of character and bravery, which made her capable of saving all of *Am Yisrael*, stemmed from this foundation. It may take a couple a long time until they clarify how to achieve an effective balance, but the first step must be a woman's recognition of the importance of showing respect for her husband.

What is the *halachic* source for a woman's duty to honor her husband? Let us quote the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*: "The Rabbis have commanded a wife to honor her husband 'too much', to treat him with respect, consult him in every matter, and relate to him as if he were a prince or a king, taking into consideration his likes and dislikes. This is how the holy men and women of Israel have behaved towards one another, and this is the way to achieve a good marriage."²⁶⁷ The Rambam wrote simply and clearly; his words need no

²⁶⁶ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Judges 42, *Hagahot Rambam Ishut* 15:20

²⁶⁷ Rambam, *Ishut* 15:20.

amplification. One should however take note of the expression “too much” (understood as “even more than one would think was enough”).²⁶⁸ The Chida further proved that the source for the wife’s obligation of honoring her husband is rabbinic, i.e. the express desire of the sages.²⁶⁹

It should not be concluded from this that the husband is allowed to behave like a tyrant to his wife. Regarding the husband, the Rambam teaches us that “likewise our Rabbis have commanded the husband to honor his wife more than he does his own self.”²⁷⁰ The husband has to realize that marriage is a mutual partnership between two individuals, who together constitute a complementary whole in the image of G-d. This responsum deals only with a wife’s duty to her husband, in reply to the question asked, but it does not imply that their relationship should be one-sided. On the contrary, a husband may deduce from this how to treat his wife, too.

An objection may be raised: What’s wrong with a woman telling her husband that the Rabbi said otherwise? Isn’t the husband also obligated to listen to the Rabbi? Doesn’t honor of the Torah take precedence over honor of one’s husband?

Certainly honor of the Torah and of *talmidei chachamim* takes precedence over the husband’s honor. But the Torah

²⁶⁸ See *S'dei Chemed*, ma'arechet 20, clalim ot 121.

²⁶⁹ *Chida*, *Chaim Sha'al* 27.

²⁷⁰ Rambam, *Ishut* 15:19.

and the Rabbis have commanded that the way to honor them, is to honor one's husband. It is precisely this type of behavior which is sanctioned by our sages in such famous stories as the one about Baba ben Buta: There was a woman who didn't understand her husband's Aramaic dialect well. When he asked her to bring him two melons, she brought him two clay lamps instead. In his anger, he told her to take them and break them over the top of the gate (*rosh baba*). She went instead and broke them over the head (*rosh*) of Baba ben Buta, one of the outstanding Rabbis of that period. When he asked, "What have you done to me?", she replied, "That is what my husband told me to do!" Baba then said, "In the merit of being devoted to doing your husband's bidding, may G-d bless you with two sons like Baba ben Buta." And so it was.²⁷¹

From this tale we learn of Baba ben Buta's piety and humility, but we also learn how great an impression this woman made on him because she followed her husband's bidding, no matter how peculiar and disrespectful his wishes seemed. Of course this woman acted mistakenly and was not purposely disrespectful. It is also not clear that she would have been instructed to do such a thing,²⁷² However this extreme example teaches us how important it is for a woman to do her husband's bidding.

²⁷¹ *Nedarim* 66b.

²⁷² See Response *Shut Beit Ya'acov* 147.

❖ Chapter 10

Believing in Your Spouse (A Letter)

Dear ...

The basis of a good relationship is for the couple to build up each other's self-esteem. All the gentle rebukes you so generously bestow upon your wife are of secondary importance; your main goal should be to strengthen her spiritual character. Your list of rebukes are not only unnecessary but even harmful, for your wife is well aware of her own failings and makes no effort to deny that she has to correct them. Therefore, repeating to her continuously what she already knows, is like rubbing salt on her wounds. Your task must be to help her regain confidence in herself, for only through belief in herself will she be able to overcome her various obstacles. As R. Kook teaches us: "A person of integrity must believe in himself, i.e. he must believe that his natural tendencies and his emotions, coming as they do from his soul, strive for integrity... the Torah must be a person's guide, showing him where he is likely to stumble... but his inner strength must come from belief in himself."²⁷³

²⁷³ R. A.Y. Kook, *Orot HaTorah* 11:2.

Obviously, in order to help your wife develop belief in herself, you have to have confidence in her. The statement we are all so familiar with - that the gates of repentance are never locked and that no one is ever so far gone that he cannot return - is not just abstract theory. We have to integrate the truth of this idea regarding ourselves and those closest to us and live by it! The commandment we repeat morning and evening - that we must love every Jewish person, even the wicked - doesn't refer only to the Jews of China and Japan, or those across the street, but most of all to your wife, even if she does have faults.

Therefore, first of all, you yourself should do *teshuva* (repent) for your own flawed attitude towards your wife. Try to reinforce your own feelings of love for her, instead of dwelling on her faults and rebuking her. Rebuke is not a simple matter: Just as it is a *mitzva* to say something that will be listened to, so it is a *mitzva* not to say what will not be accepted. Criticism, (even if in itself is justified and correct) if given inappropriately, does not make its way into the receiver's heart. It is damaging and will anger or discourage the recipient, causing either despair, or aggression and hostility. Because of your ill-placed rebuke, the person is distanced even further from correcting his behavior.

Therefore, when you write that your wife has become overly critical, you are also partially responsible for this. Try to disregard her various failings, not out of anger and resentment, but rather out of a spirit of generosity and faith that, with

patience, the situation will be corrected. No-one can effect a complete spiritual reform overnight. If you succeed in ridding yourself of all the grudges and hostility you bear her, and slowly replace them with love and belief in her, your wife will respond similarly, like a mirror reflecting its image. Her spiritual character will be revived, to your benefit, to her benefit, and to a sanctification of the Divine name.

❖ Chapter 11

Marital Counseling (A Responsum)

Question: In dealing with the normal difficulties of life, like a young married couple adjusting to life together, is it preferable to turn to professional help (such as a marriage counselor, psychologist, etc.), or is it better for the couple to grapple with these problems alone, despite the high emotional cost of such efforts? Secondly, may one consult a non-religious or traditionally religious psychologist, or should one limit oneself to psychologists who are practicing Torah Jews?

Response: Should one try to grapple with marital problems alone or seek professional help? Certainly the best way is for the couple to solve their problems themselves, without outside intervention. However, this is not always possible. In some cases, “a prisoner cannot free himself from prison”, and outside help is essential.²⁷⁴ This should be no cause for embarrassment for “one who is too timid cannot learn.”²⁷⁵ This is the way things are, that sometimes we need to accept

²⁷⁴ *Berachot* 5a.

²⁷⁵ *Pirkei Avot* 2:6.

help. “Two are better than one... for if they fall... the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to he who is alone when he falls and there is no one to lift him up... And if the one is attacked, both will stand against the attacker...”²⁷⁶ We are all part of one nation, and we help one another. Today I help you; tomorrow you will help me.

However, we must beware of going to extremes, neither the extreme of those who refuse outside help when they really need it, harming themselves and their children, nor the extreme of those who run for advice before they have tried to solve their problems themselves. The latter may be compared to those “who have no need [of charity] but nevertheless receive it.”²⁷⁷ The golden path is to try to solve our problems by ourselves as best we can, but when we have exhausted all our own resources, then we humbly turn to others for help.

In response to your second question: must one choose only a G-d-fearing psychologist or is any psychologist acceptable? Psychology is not a scientific, technical field like chemistry, but rather a therapeutic science based on various schools of thought about the mind, not all of which are consistent with the path of Torah.

The Maharal²⁷⁸ explains that there are two types of sciences:

²⁷⁶ *Kohelet* 4:9-12.

²⁷⁷ *Pey'ah* 8:9.

²⁷⁸ *Netivot Olam, Netiv HaTorah*, Ch.14.

1) sciences that are based on purely physical data, over which there can be no disagreement, and which the Torah does not relate to, and 2) educational, ethical, philosophical sciences which clash with the Torah's educational, ethical teachings. Any psychologist who claims not to be influenced by any particular philosophy, but only to be a scientist dealing with mental health, is deceiving both himself and his clients. Each type of therapy is based on a particular school of thought which defines a psychologically healthy person. We Torah Jews must direct our lives in accordance with that school of thought taught us by the Creator of the world and the Creator of the human being. This is the reason why the great *halachic* authority, R. Moshe Feinstein, *zal*, took strong exception to dependence on psychologists.²⁷⁹ They are arrogant enough to express their opinions on the same matters with which the Torah concerns itself. Because of this, one must approach psychology with extreme caution for "two likes destroy each other."²⁸⁰

Because of this overlap, one should consult a seriously religious, learned Jew who has the necessary talent and experience to be able to counsel those in need of emotional help. Certainly, it is not a drawback if this person has a knowledge of psychology. However, there is a tremendous difference between a psychologist with a Torah background and a *talmid chacham* who also knows psychology. A *talmid*

²⁷⁹ *Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah* 57.

²⁸⁰ *Zevachim* 3 and see R. A.I. Kook, *Orot HaKodesh*, vol. I 65.

chacham will know what to accept and what to reject in the latest psychological theories; whether they fit in with the pure, holy Torah concepts of a person's place in this world.²⁸¹ Therefore, consulting a secular or non-Jewish therapist is a deviation from Torah standards. Use of such a therapeutic method may be compared to taking non-kosher medication, which is permitted in certain cases but only after personal consultation with a competent Torah authority who is capable of judging each situation on its own merit. The best path to take when a couple feels like they need marital counseling, is to consult a Torah scholar who will then direct them to a religious psychologist whom he trusts.

²⁸¹ R. A.I. Kook, *Mussar HaKodesh*, p. 232.