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## ONE ENTITY

CHAZAL TELL US: "Who is a worthy woman? One who fulfills her husband's will." (This is also brought down in the *Shulchan Aruch* as an actual *halachah* — *Even Haezer* 60:69, *Rema*.)

On the other hand, it is written in *Mishlei*: "*Chachmos nashim bansah beisah* — the wise among women built her house" (*Mishlei* 14:1). Chazal bring this *passuk* in relation to Devorah Haneviah. This great woman was called "*eishes lapidos*" because she prepared wicks so that her husband — an *am ha'aretz* — would bring them to the *mishkan* and spend time among worthy men, and thus merit a portion in the World to Come. It was in this merit that she earned the power of prophecy. Chazal also mention this *passuk* in reference to the wife of Ohn ben Peles, who took bold action to spare her husband from joining a sinful rebellion and suffering a terrible end.

What are we to infer from these two seemingly contradictory dictums? On the one hand, Chazal extol the virtues of a woman who submits herself completely to her husband; yet paradoxically, the *midrash* commends women like Devorah Haneviah and Ohn ben Peles who used their innate wisdom to influence their husbands positively!

Is a woman supposed to use her talents and strengths to build her home, or is she meant to subdue them to fulfill her

husband's will? In addition, Chazal share that women were accorded *binah yeseirah* — an extra measure of practical wisdom. Surely Hashem granted women this special gift so that they would use it, not stifle it!

In order to understand this delicate balance, let us attempt to appreciate the true meaning of marriage and the special relationship between husband and wife.

As a starting point, let us clarify that the Torah's commandments were not intended to repress our innate strengths. On the contrary, the Torah is *Toras Chaim*, a life-giving Torah. Just as a manufacturer will include an instruction manual for the

consumer's safe and beneficial use of his product, Hashem, the Creator of the world, gave us the Torah that instructs us how to utilize our lives and the world in the most proper, effective, and pleasurable way. "*Deracheha darchei noam vechol nesivoseha shalom, eitz chaim hi lamachazikim baht...*" — The Torah's ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace, it is a tree of life for those who hold onto it..." The Torah, given to us by the world's "Manufacturer," provides us with the key to live pleasant lives, in synchrony with our nature and with that of the world around us.

**How much should a woman invest in building her home according to her wisdom and to what extent should she subdue her own understanding and bow to her husband?**

### The Woman Draws Life from Her Husband

LET US EXPLORE what the Torah tells us about the relationship between husband and wife.

In the Torah's account of the creation of Adam Harishon, it is written, "*male and female He created them*" (*Bereishis* 1:27).

Rashi (*ibid*) cites the *midrash* that Hashem initially created Adam with two faces. The creation of Adam Harishon included Chavah. But then Hashem said, "*It is not good for man to be alone; I will make for him a helpmate... and Hashem put man into a deep sleep and he slept, and He took one of his ribs... Hashem built the rib that He took from Adam into a woman and brought her to Adam...*" (*ibid.* 2:18).

Hashem separated the two halves of Adam and created Chavah from one of Adam's ribs, for her to be his wife. The Torah then says, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, and he shall cleave to his wife, and they will become one flesh*" (*ibid.* 2:24).

The physical world reflects the spiritual reality. Not only had Chavah's body been a part of Adam; their souls too, had initially been one. Then Hashem took part of Adam's soul and created Chavah with it. Adam remained with the innermost essence of the *neshamah* while Chavah received the more external part.

Ever since that original separation of man and woman at the beginning of creation, husband and wife are created as separate individuals. But their souls are actually created as one unit. Before they are born, Hashem splits the soul into two: the essence of the *neshamah*, its root part, comes to the world as a son in one family, and the external, more exposed part comes down as a daughter in another family. When they marry, their souls are united once again.

That is why, although an unmarried girl may *have* intellect, strengths, and goals, and she may *do* many things, she has difficulty identifying who she is.

There is a common joke about a person who constantly misplaced his things. One night, he drew up a list of every item he'd need in the morning, and where it could be found.

so he wouldn't have a problem locating them. He wrote where he'd put his hat, suit, socks, and shoes, and finally where he himself could be found—in bed. He put the note near his pillow and went to sleep. In the morning, he read the list and got dressed. When he read "I am in bed," he went to his bed to look for himself, but of course, he didn't find himself there. He then roamed the house, searching, "Where am I?"

This joke contains a valuable lesson. There are people who "wear a suit and hat," but cannot find *themselves*. They don't recognize their true, inner identity.

This is the life of a girl before she marries. She wears clothing—she *has* strengths, talents, and desires; she may *do*, initiate, and accomplish, but she will not know who she *is*. A girl defines and measures herself by her talents, her actions, and her achievements. When asked, "Who are you?" she will say, "I can... I am good at... My job at home is..." She is not at peace with herself unless she is doing something useful. If she doesn't do anything, she feels worthless. She will therefore constantly seek to be involved in something fulfilling.

When you meet a girl the day after her wedding, she is an entirely different person. What has changed? She stands taller; she's become her own person. She has found "herself." When you now ask her, "Who are you?" she'll proudly say, "I'm the wife of..." This is her identity. She no longer depends on her productivity or talent; she is now happy with *herself*.

In fact, the compliment most appreciated by a newly married woman is one about her husband. It is praise for her, because her husband is her very self.

A married woman has a natural yearning for her husband; she waits for him to come home. He is her essence, her soul. This yearning connects her to her husband and provides her

with her inner life. A woman wants to do all she can for her husband. She wants to do what he wants more than what she wants herself, because he is more "her" than she herself is. She draws her deepest essence, the source of her *chelek Eloka mima'al*, from her husband. A woman always seeks her husband's opinion and guidance, because without him she is not a person. She lacks life, her very *neshamah*, without him.

A boy goes through an opposite process. Until his marriage, a deep urge constantly churns within him, but he lacks *binah yeseirah*—the ability to identify and bring this desire to fruition. He lacks inner peace and stability; he constantly changes his mind and his spiritual goals. When he marries, he finds peace of mind; his happiness and contentment are evident on his face. He projects his inner essence onto his wife, and this is how his own essence is revealed to him. He learns to identify and express his inner desires and finds focused direction in his life.

When a woman marries, she feels a natural yearning for her husband; she seeks his influence and his direction and is constantly occupied with his needs. This is the way Hashem created the world; a woman draws her inner identity, her essence, from her husband. Sometimes, over the course of time, a woman begins focusing her energies on her career, and her husband in his own endeavors. The woman might think that she is best off independent, but this is a mistake.

The Torah says, "It is not good for man to be alone." With this the Torah discloses the natural truth of creation. A woman who lives her life independently, without her husband's support, is like clothing without a person. She will develop knowledge, talent, and impressive goals, but she will lack true life—her *neshamah*. She will not be connected at an internal level to her *hashkafos* in life; she will lack inner

*kedushah*. Only a woman who seeks her husband's light and guidance is connected to her *neshamah* and to *kedushah*.

### A Woman Honors Her Husband Exceedingly

THE RAMBAM WRITES:

*"Our Sages have commanded that a man honor his wife more than himself and love her as himself. If he has money, he gives to her with as much as he has. He shall not impose upon her excessive fear and he shall speak with her softly, and there should be no sadness or anger. Likewise, the Sages have commanded the woman to honor her husband exceedingly and his fear shall be upon her, and she shall do everything according to his will, and he shall be in her eyes like a prince or king, following his wishes and distancing all that he despises." (Hilchos Ishus 15, halachah 19:20)*

This does not dictate that a husband and wife should adopt certain external codes of behavior in order to please one another. The Torah is *Toras emes* and its commandments are an expression of an inner truth. The Torah's commandment that a husband and wife honor one another refers to true, internal honor.

What does the Torah concept of *kavod*, honor, mean? It refers to revealing an internal, hidden truth. (See chapter "Shavuot: Bringing Torah to Earth," p. 195.) For example, we are commanded to honor Shabbos: *"And you shall honor it by refraining from your regular ways"* (Yeshayahu 58:13). Externally, Shabbos is like any other day. We are commanded to behave differently on Shabbos than during the week—to wear special clothes (Shabbos clothing), to eat different foods (*challos* rather than bread), and to spend our day differently, thereby showing that Shabbos is intrinsically different, holier, and more important than the other days of the week.

The same is true with regard to *kevod Shamayim*. Hashem creates, renews, and controls all of creation at every moment, but in this world, that truth is concealed. Honoring "Shamayim" means recognizing this truth and openly exhibiting that Hashem is the essence of creation.

When a woman is commanded to honor and respect her husband, the intention is that she recognize and acknowledge the truth—albeit a concealed truth: that she draws her entire essence from her husband. Treating one's husband like a prince or king and following his wishes are not merely a code of behavior that allows for a mutual relationship, but rather a reflection of the very truth of life. A woman seeks her husband's opinion and guidance because only in this way is she connected to her *neshamah's* essence. He is her prince, her king who provides her with her deepest essence.

When a husband respects his wife, he is crediting her as an essential asset to his life. He knows that only when he gives to her can he reveal his essence and *realize* his inner strengths.

The Rambam ends with these words:

*"This is the way of holy and pure Jewish daughters and sons in their marriages, and in these ways will their lives be pleasant and praiseworthy."*

Where there is mutual respect between husband and wife; when a wife yearns for her husband and a husband has affection for his wife, they illuminate the essence of their *neshamah* and their true, internal connection.

### One Soul

ALTHOUGH THEY ARE, indeed, one soul, husband and wife are two separate individuals, born with distinct natures and

brought up in different homes. It is therefore only natural that differences in opinion and desires will crop up in all areas of life. The wife may want to buy a new piece of furniture or appliance, while the husband will find it an unnecessary expense. The husband may want to go away for Shabbos, with or without the family, while his wife will find this hard. The husband may want a perfectly neat home while the wife enjoys a homey, lived-in look and doesn't mind a toy-strewn floor. Or perhaps a meticulously neat wife will feel annoyed when her husband leaves things lying around haphazardly.

This brings us back to our original question: to what extent is a woman expected to yield to her husband's will and opinion?

Sometimes, arguments between couples resemble a tug-of-war: each party pulls toward himself, until the stronger rival prevails. Husband and wife each argue their point, trying to convince the other that he or she is right, until the more forceful contestant wins, or the more compliant one yields.

A couple who argues this way has not yet internalized the true meaning of marriage and sharing a home. Concepts such as persuading or yielding apply in a situation where two separate individuals are engaged in debate. Husband and wife, however, are one entity.

When a person experiences an inner conflict — e.g. his mind tells him that he ought to take a walk and air out, while his aching legs protest — will we say that his head is yielding to his legs, or his legs are submitting to his head? Of course not. The person weighs his options and decides what's best for him at the moment.

Husband and wife are one being, one *neshamah*. When they

wants one thing while the wife wants another, leaving one of them to acquiesce. Rather, they are one unit. Each of them wants both to be happy and each of them is unhappy as long as the other is not content. Just as one limb of the body is uncomfortable when another limb hurts, husband and wife are one combined entity, only satisfied when each of them are happy.

A husband and wife in such a relationship will openly express, "I want so much to do what you want, but it's hard for me." This is not mere talk. A woman *truly* desires to do what her husband wants — this is at the heart of her essence — but she needs to learn to express these feelings. There are no two sides in a marriage. A difficulty or need experienced by either husband or wife is a shared issue, and together they will seek a solution that is in their mutual best interest.

When a problem is shared and neither spouse struggles alone, that already makes the situation easier to bear. A couple sharing a joint burden will encounter *styatta diShmaya* in finding a solution that is best for them both. For instance, in the case where a husband wants to go away for Shabbos, they might brainstorm together to come up with comfortable arrangements for the wife. The wife may candidly suggest what could help her and make her feel that her husband is with her even when he is not physically present. Sometimes a simple note and a bar of chocolate can make all the difference!

A wife should discuss her difficulties with her husband and share her feelings. Every husband needs a wife who is genuinely happy with him and not silently suffering and pushing herself beyond her limit. Husband and wife are one entity, naturally discussing *their* issues and handling them together.

When a wife knows that she is truly one with her husband and that their relationship does not depend on any outside factors, their relationship won't be affected when she notices

her husband's faults, just as a person is not less "himself" when he becomes aware of his own faults. A person knows that he is who he is, including all the strong and weak points that Hashem has given him — and his job is to serve Hashem just in those circumstances. Likewise, husband and wife are one, with the combined strong and weak points of both. These are the joint attributes with which Hashem created them, in order for them to serve Him in precisely the way He wanted.

A woman will also not feel pressured to hide her own limitations from her husband, because she knows that their relationship isn't dependent on her being perfect. Husband and wife are intrinsically bound together. If the wife makes a mistake, she will naturally apologize, but their relationship will not suffer. This is their very existence: one entity, with one *tafkid* in life.

A Yid is commanded to marry not only for the sake of having children and bringing future generations to the world. Marriage is Hashem's will by its own virtue, as the *passuk* states, "It is not good for man to be alone" (see *Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer* 1–8). A man without a wife is a *plag gufa* — half a body, and a woman without a husband is not even a person. Hashem's creation is only complete through marriage. Marriage is the connection of *neshamos*, where husband and wife each complete one another to become one entity — one *neshamah*.

*"Ish ve'ishah zachu, Shechinah sheruya beineihem —*

**If a man and woman are worthy,  
the *Shechinah* resides between them"**

A PROBLEM MAY arise when a wife possesses stronger *hashkafos*, ambitions, intuition, or understanding of *chinuch* than

woman "bury" her aspirations and abide by her husband's opinion in every matter, or should she rely on her own reasoning? What of the *ma'amar Chazal* that says that the worthy woman fulfills her husband's will?

Again, the Torah provides us with a map to live proper and pleasant lives. The Torah's commandments are not meant to repress an individual's natural strengths; rather, "*Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace.*"

How then should a wife relate to her husband when she is superior in capability and *yiras Shamayim*? How can her husband serve as her source of vitality in such a case?

To explain, let us borrow the example of a school. In every school there is a principal and there are teachers. The teachers' job is to teach the students and educate them. In some schools, there are even special supervisors who oversee the curriculum, or a separate committee in charge of accepting the students and teachers. What, then, is the principal's role in the school?

The principal is the life, the soul of the school. A teacher may teach, lecture, and devote herself to her students, but the students will be influenced mainly by the general atmosphere in the school, which is created by the principal. Even when a principal is not actively involved and does not give any lectures, it is his or her essence that permeates the environment and affects both the teachers and students. (For this reason, a father enrolling a child into a school will first make careful inquiries about the principal's personal *hashkafos* in life as well as her goals in running the school.)

What happens when a teacher with strong *hashkafos* works under a moderate-minded principal whose goals in

of education” or providing an education that will earn the school a favorable reputation?

The teacher might choose to disregard the principal, investing all her energies into the students of her class. However, she will achieve little, because students are mainly influenced by the general atmosphere of the school, generated by the principal. While the students may hear what their teacher is trying to tell them, they will not undergo any intrinsic change. They will develop according to the educational climate set by the principal.

A wise teacher will take a different path. She will respect the principal — not merely externally, but rather because she truly appreciates the principal’s role as the life and breath of the school. She will consult with her, whether about which contest to implement or which *chinuch* values to stress. The principal is, after all, a Jewish woman with a kind heart, and if she accepted the position of managing a school, she must possess special innate qualities that will ultimately surface. The wise teacher will cause these dormant qualities to come to the fore. The entire school atmosphere will gradually improve, positively affecting both teachers and students.

The same is true of a husband and wife who build their home together. There are women who have hoped for husbands who would be budding *talmidei chachamim* but realized after their wedding that their husbands were set on going out to work. A good wife will recognize and value her husband’s positive qualities; after all, every Yid has virtues.

She will express her genuine appreciation of his nightly Torah *shiur* or the *chessed* that he does, accepting his other interests — his business, his fancy car — even if this is not what she had hoped for. These are the joint attributes with

which Hashem created them, in order for them to serve Him in precisely the way He wanted. She knows that he is her husband just the way he is. This is her *zivug* and this is the *tafkid* that Hashem has designed for her.

Together, in a completely natural fashion, they will raise their children with values of Torah and *yiras Shamayim*, along with whatever other values are important to the husband. The wife will appreciate that this is her husband’s home and that their children’s *chinuch* is their shared responsibility.

Women who have lived with this mindset have perhaps not transformed their husbands into a “Rav Akiva Eiger,” but they have merited a home imbued with *kedushah* and *simchas hachaim*, and they have raised good children with strong values of Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. Couples who live this way embody the *ma’amar Chazal*: “If a man and woman are worthy, the *Shechinah* resides between them.” The *Shechinah* and *kedushah* permeate their home.

In contrast, there are women who have tried to raise their children on their own, brushing aside their husband’s interests and conveying to their children that they expect them to be different from (superior to) their fathers. Such efforts have always backfired. Despite a mother’s best efforts to educate, explain, and instill certain values, children are primarily nurtured through their parents’ *neshamah*, which beams its light directly onto theirs. And as we said, the wife draws her *neshamah’s* essence from her husband.

A woman who endeavors to be *mechanech* her children on her own, without her husband’s partnership and guidance, is like the aforementioned clothing without a person. She may teach values and beliefs, but the essence, the *neshamah* — which she is meant to draw from her husband, is

lacking, and so the *chinuch* will not be intrinsically absorbed.

Not only will her children's *chinuch* suffer, but, being detached from her husband, she alone will lack the inner light and relationship with Hashem. Her *avodas Hashem* will consist of thoughts and understanding, but will not reach the level of true inner connection to *Yiddishkeit* and Hashem.

A man, too, will be unable to imbue values of Torah and *kedushah* into his home and children on his own. It is his wife's partnership that gives him the ability to reveal and reflect his inner essence, his *neshamah*, to his family.

A woman does not have an independent role in life. She is an *ezer kenegdo* — her husband's helpmate. A husband and wife have a shared *tafkid* in life, the woman's role being to uncover and bring forth her husband's inner essence — his *neshamah*. She must invest all her energies into this task, building her home in line with the inclinations of her husband's *neshamah*. To describe a worthy woman, Chazal use the words — "*kol she'osah retzon baalah* — one who does her husband's will." This can be interpreted to mean that the worthy woman brings her husband's inner will *lema'aseh* — into practice.

The Torah's commandments are not meant to repress our strengths; rather, they prescribe for us the true, good, and productive way to live. "*It is not good for man to be alone*" — the Torah teaches us that the way to truly realize our strengths is precisely through the partnership of husband and wife. With this partnership, the *neshamah* and internal *kedushah* combine with *binah yeseirah* — practical wisdom — to form a complete whole. This is the secret to living a life of peace and holiness.

*"Ish ve'ishah zachu,  
Shechinah sheruya beineiheim!"*

## A GUARDED TREASURE

THE TORAH TELLS US how the woman was created: "*And Hashem the G-d built (vayiven) the rib that He took from the man into a woman*" (*Bereishis* 2:22). Chazal explain: "It is written *vayiven*, for He considered (*hisbonen*) from where to create her... from a place that is hidden in the person [the rib that is concealed inside the person]... and with every limb that He created for her, He said to her, 'Be a modest woman, a modest woman...'" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 18:2).

Chazal are teaching us here that Hashem implanted in the woman the trait of modesty at the time of her creation. Modesty is an attribute that is rooted in the very essence of a woman.

We will begin by explaining the essence and the role of a woman in general to help us understand the *middah* of *tznius* and how it is an integral part of a woman's nature.

### Marriage: Revelation of G-dliness

ADAM AND CHAVAH were originally created as one being. It is written, "*Male and female He created them.*" Rashi quotes