שלום בית

The CHOICE *of* "ONE"

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Publisher's Note

This booklet is a compilation of several *chassan shmuessen* delivered by **Rav Binyomin Jacobs *shlita***. Rav Jacobs currently serves as the twelfth-grade *maggid shiur* at Yeshivas Keren Hatorah in Lakewood, N.J. He is also a son-in-law of the late *mashgiach* of Bais Medrash Govoha, Rav Matisyahu Salomon *zt"l*. A sought-after speaker and *baal eitzah*, Rav Jacobs provides *hadrachah* for *bachurim*, *chassanim*, and *yungeleit*. As Rav Jacobs notes at the beginning of the booklet, these *shmuessen* are intended not only for *chassanim*, but also for those who have been married for many years. Readers will benefit most from his foundational words by actively engaging with the material and reviewing it regularly.



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Introduction

This *drashah* is somewhat different from the *chassan drashos* you may hear from other *chassan rebbis*. It is not preparing you for the first four weeks after your *chasunah*; it is preparing you for your entire life. Everything said here is something that could equally be said to someone married many years. Proper guidance is not simply a list of what to do and what to avoid during the first weeks of marriage. These words are directed more toward being married than toward getting married, and the guidance offered applies from day one.

What follows is an attempt to understand what marriage truly is.

Part I

Responsibility

For many years, Rav Yehuda Jacobs gave the freezer *shmuess*, and he would begin with one question:

"*Rabosai*, you are going into *shidduchim*. Who said you are ready to get married? Who gave you a license?"

There is one question you need to ask yourself: Are you ready to take responsibility for another person?

Some people can barely take responsibility for themselves. If you are not ready to be *achrai* for someone else, you are not ready for marriage. Go back to the *beis midrash* and work on that first.

Responsibility is not just another *maalah* that makes someone a better husband. It is part of what marriage means. When you marry a woman, you take responsibility for her.

Rav Chaim explained a similar idea with *kol na'im*, a pleasant voice in a *chazan*. A pleasant voice is not merely an extra quality that makes a person a better *chazan*; it is part of what a *chazan* is. Marriage is similar. Becoming a husband means becoming responsible for your wife.

You are *achrai* for her. If you are not ready to accept that responsibility, you are not ready to get married.

Emotions and Feelings

This idea can be taken a step further. Rav Ben Tzion Kokis asked what *nisuin* actually means. He explained that it means carrying. A man who enters *nisuin* is accepting the responsibility to carry his wife.

Rav Kokis added that this includes responsibility for his wife's emotional well-being.

Every person has feelings. Some people are relatively stable, while others go through difficulties that leave them deeply shaken. Everyone has ups and downs.

One might assume that this responsibility applies only when a husband himself has caused his wife pain and is therefore *achrai* to comfort her. That much is obvious. If he has hurt her, he must certainly be *mefayes* her. But his responsibility for her feelings extends much further. If a neighbor has offended her or her employer has spoken to her harshly and she comes home broken, her husband is *achrai* to lift her up and give her *chizuk*.

This does not mean that a *chassan* must train as a psychologist before his *chasunah*. It means understanding that part of being a husband is paying attention to his wife and being there when she needs support.

Mitzvas onah provides a strong *makor* for this idea. When you learn the *halachos* of *mitzvas onah* properly, you will find that much of it is clearly intended to build up one's wife — to ensure that she feels her best and is able to flourish.

A Yiddishe Marriage

Rav Yehuda Jacobs used to ask: What is a *Yiddishe* marriage?

Nearly every home in Lakewood has a *chassan-kallah* picture. In some homes it hangs in the bedroom; in others, in the dining room. The *chassan* is standing upright and smiling, while the *kallah* stands beside him. The picture itself is simple, but it captures something about the structure of a *Yiddishe* marriage.

The Gemara (*Yevamos* 63a) describes a marriage with the words "*nechis darga nesiv issa — go down a step and take a wife*." Marriage is not two people standing opposite each other, each insisting on his own position. Husband and wife may disagree, and a wife certainly has opinions of her own, but a *Yiddishe* marriage has a certain deference on the wife's part toward her husband. She is not simply standing *shaveh b'shaveh* with him. There is a willingness to accept and to give way.

Dependency

A hundred years ago, this dynamic came naturally in a different way. The husband was generally responsible for the family's *parnassah*. *Kollel* as we know it today was not common. Women had fewer educational and professional opportunities and were far more dependent on their husbands financially.

The structure of the home reflected that reality. The husband was the central provider, while the wife was largely occupied with the home and children. Her dependence on him was built into the way life worked.

Today, the reality is very different. Women receive an extensive Torah education, pursue careers, earn money, and often carry enormous responsibilities both inside and outside the home. A wife may even have more professional or practical authority than her husband in certain areas. She is no longer dependent on him in the way a woman once was.

There is one area where she may need her husband more than ever: emotional support.

A woman can be highly capable, financially independent, and responsible for much of the home, yet still have a deep need for her husband's recognition, affection, and care.

The Chazon Ish writes (*Kovetz Igros* 2:41) that a woman's very nature includes a need to receive recognition, love, and care from her husband, and that these things are *b'nafsham* — of vital importance to her.

That need is significant in every generation, and perhaps even more so today. A wife may carry tremendous responsibilities, but she still needs to know that her husband sees her, values her, and appreciates what she does.

When she feels secure in her husband's love and recognition, she can give much more of herself. She can carry the home, work tirelessly, support his learning, and do whatever else her responsibilities require. When she feels emotionally depleted, she may have very little left to give.

This is part of a husband's *achrayus* toward his wife's emotional well-being. He has to help build her up. She needs to feel recognized, respected, and valued by the person whose recognition matters most to her.

That is one of the foundations of a good marriage. It does not always come naturally. A husband has to grow into the responsibility and learn what marriage requires of him.

Feeling Her Pain

There are times when a wife is in terrible pain and her husband can do absolutely nothing to remove it. He cannot change the situation. But his inability to help does not mean that he should become emotionally removed from her pain.

If he has a good relationship with her and is truly close to her, he will feel her pain together with her. Even when he cannot do anything to take the pain away, he can still feel what she is going through.

Concerning Paraoh, the Gemara (Sotah 11a) says, "*Shloshah hayu b'osah eitzah: Bilam, Yisro, and Iyov — Three men were part of that counsel: Bilam, Yisro, and Iyov.*" Chazal say that Bilam, who gave the *eitzah*, was *neherag b'cherev*; Yisro, who fled, was *zocheh* that his descendants sat in the *Lishkas HaGazis*; and Iyov, who remained silent, was *nidon b'yissurim*.

The obvious question is: What could Iyov have done? He could not change Paraoh's mind. Why, then, did he receive *yissurim* for remaining silent? Yisro also could not accomplish anything to change the *gezeirah*. He ran away because he understood that he could not change it.

The *teretz* is that "*Iyov sheshasak*" does not merely mean that Iyov kept quiet. His silence meant that he remained at peace with what was happening. He may not have been able to stop the *gezeirah*, but to be emotionally at peace while such a thing was being done to the Yidden was itself a terrible *avlah*. Therefore, he was *nidon b'yissurim*.

A husband may see his wife in terrible pain, such as during labor, and there may be nothing he can do to take the pain away. But if he is simply at peace with her pain and does not feel it with her, that reveals a real emotional distance. Being there for her means that her pain matters to him even when he cannot remove it.

The *metzius* of marriage is a very deep connection. There are no two people who become as close to one another as a husband and wife. *Kesher nisuin* is a deep *kesher*, and that is the *metzius* of marriage.

The Obligation To Be There

The *pasuk* (Bereishis 16:5) relates that when Avraham took Hagar as a wife and she conceived, Sarah said to Avraham, "*Chamosi alecha.*" Rashi explains that *chamosi* is an expression of *gezel — theft.*

Rav Shach explains Rashi's words with a broader *yesod*. Just as stealing money makes a person a *gazlan*, there is another form of stealing: withholding a *tovah* — failing to do a favor for someone when one can help.

Sarah had complete *bitachon* in Avraham's *tefillos*. She knew that if he would *daven* for her properly, Hashem would answer his *tefillah*, based on the principle of *tzaddik gozer v'Hakadosh Baruch Hu mekayem — a tzaddik decrees and Hashem fulfills*. When Sarah saw that she had not yet become pregnant, she concluded that Avraham had not *davened* sufficiently for her. She therefore told him, "*Chamosi alecha*." By withholding the *tefillah* she needed, he had, in effect, withheld something that belonged to her. In this context, withholding a *tovah* is considered *gezeilah*.

Not every failure to help someone is *gezeilah*. A person is not automatically obligated to help every acquaintance simply because he can. *Gezeilah* applies when there is an obligation to give that person something and he withholds it.

Marriage creates such obligations. A husband and wife are bound to one another in a way that creates responsibilities to do good for each other. When a husband withholds something that

he owes his wife, he is not merely being inconsiderate; he is withholding something that is rightfully hers.

This applies not only to a husband's obligation to *daven* for his wife. It applies to all the things he owes her, including emotional support. A wife needs her husband to be present for what she is going through. She needs someone to listen, to care, and to share her burden. He may not be able to solve the problem, but he can still be there for her.

Even when there is nothing practical he can do, he should not remain emotionally detached from her pain. Being present with her is part of what he owes her. Withholding that presence is a form of *gezeilah*.

A story is told about a *bachur* who was facing many difficulties and was brought to Rav Matisyahu Salomon. Rav Matisyahu listened carefully and then said to the person who had brought him, "This *bachur* has many challenges. I cannot solve his problems, but I can give him my shoulder to lean on. Even that will help him."

A husband has the same responsibility toward his wife. He may not be able to solve what she is going through, but he can give her a shoulder to lean on. He can let her know that she does not have to carry the burden alone. That support is not merely an act of kindness; it is part of what he owes her.

Choosing a Path

Rav Dovid Levy once shared a *vort* on a Gemara in *Brachos* (8a). The Gemara relates that in Eretz Yisrael, the morning after a man got married, people would ask him, "*Matza* or *motze*?"

They were referring to two *pesukim*: *"Matza ishah matza tov — He who finds a wife finds good"* (Mishlei 18:22) and *"Umotze ani mar mimaves — And I find her more bitter than death"* (Koheles 7:26).

What can anyone possibly know about his marriage the morning after the *chasunah*? The *kallah* is still dressed in her wedding gown, everyone is caught up in the excitement, and the couple has barely begun their life together. A *chassan* certainly cannot know yet whether he has found *matza ishah matza tov*.

Rav Levy explained that the question is not really asking what kind of wife the *chassan* thinks he married. It is giving him a message: From the moment you get married, two paths are open to you. One can lead to a marriage of extraordinary goodness. The other can lead to a marriage that becomes deeply painful.

A marriage does not automatically move in one direction. It requires constant effort and many choices along the way. But ultimately, a person can build a truly great marriage, or he can allow the relationship to deteriorate.

The goal is to reach *matza ishah matza tov*. That does not happen on its own. It requires work, awareness, and a willingness to take responsibility for the marriage.

Rav Dovid Levy says that, in his experience, only about three out of ten couples reach what he considers a truly complete marriage. The other seven may remain married and may even get along reasonably well, but they do not reach the deeper level of connection that marriage can achieve.

Pulling in the Same Direction

How do you build a real marriage? The *pasuk* says, *Tovim hashnayim min ha'echad — Two are better than one."* But that is true only when the two are moving in the same direction.

Imagine two people carrying a heavy package. If each one is pulling it in a different direction, they only make the job harder. Two are better than one when they are working together. Otherwise, one is better than two.

Marriage is the same. Marriage is one of the greatest gifts in creation. The *Eibishter* said (Bereishis 2:18), *Lo tov heyos ha'adam levado, e'eseh lo ezer k'negdo — It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper opposite him."* Husband and wife are meant to help each other carry the burdens of life. But when they are pulling in different directions, they can make those burdens heavier instead.

Tovim hashnayim min ha'echad means that husband and wife share a direction. They are moving forward together.

That is not always easy. A husband may have spent twenty-two years being shaped by one family, while his wife grew up in another. No two families are alike. Beyond that, they are a man

and a woman, with different personalities, different strengths, and different ways of experiencing the world.

How do two such different people become *tovim hashnayim min ha'echad*?

The usual answer is that both sides must be willing to give in. A good marriage requires good *middos*. But Rav Dovid Levy raises an important question: The *Eibishter* created marriage for everyone. Can marriage really depend on having exceptional *middos*? Many people struggle with anger, selfishness, jealousy, and the need for control. Is marriage only for people who are naturally humble and always able to give in?

There must be something more.

Good *middos* certainly help. A person who is generous, flexible, and less driven by *kinah*, *taavah*, and *kavod* has an easier time building a good marriage. But perfect *middos* cannot be a prerequisite. Marriage was created for ordinary people too.

Like a Business

Rav Levy offers a *mashal*.

Imagine two men who own shoe stores. A woman walks into the first store looking for a pair of shoes.

The owner shows her one pair. She does not like it. He brings her another pair. She does not like that one either. After a few more attempts, he becomes frustrated. "I don't have what you're looking for," he tells her.

She leaves without buying anything.

She then walks into the second store. The owner brings her one pair after another. Three pairs, then four, then seven, then ten. He keeps looking until she finds exactly what she wants.

She leaves the store happy and tells everyone about the wonderful service.

Now imagine the same two men at home.

The first man's wife calls while he is working. He spends an hour talking to her patiently and respectfully. He is full of good *middos*.

The second man is working on Erev Pesach, with only an hour before Yom Tov. His store is packed, and every customer wants to try another pair. He remains patient and brings out shoes one after another.

Then his wife calls.

"Get off the phone! Are you out of your mind? I'm busy selling shoes!" he snaps.

Who has better *middos*?

The second man understands his business. He knows that patience with customers is necessary if he wants the store to succeed. The first man may have finer *middos*, but he does not understand what it takes to run a successful business.

That is the *mashal*. Marriage cannot depend only on having good *middos*. Of course, *middos tovos* make a tremendous