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Introduction

The *Rambam*[1] writes that the purpose of the entire Torah is *shalom*:

היה לפניו נר ביתו ונר חנוכה או נר ביתו וקדוש היום נר ביתו קודם משום שלום ביתו שהרי השם נמחק לעשות שלום בין איש לאשתו, גדול השלום שכל התורה ניתנה לעשות שלום בעולם שנאמר דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום.

“If one has to choose between purchasing *Shabbos* candles or *Chanukah* candles, or *Shabbos* candles and wine for *Kiddush*, *Shabbos* candles take precedence because of the overarching value of *Shalom Bayis*. For, behold, even the Name of Hashem is erased in order to make peace between husband and wife. *Shalom* is of supreme importance, for the entire Torah was given in order to make peace in the world, as it says in the *pasuk*, “Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.”

It goes without saying, then, that cultivating and maintaining a harmonious relationship between husband and wife must always stand as the very uppermost priority in life. Furthermore, a man's primary sense of success, happiness, and satisfaction in life is completely tied up with the peaceful and harmonious functioning of his home. Investing in your marriage, then, is both a

fulfillment of your greatest responsibility and that which will ensure your personal happiness in life.

Writing a work on *Shalom Bayis* carries with it a certain degree of danger. As Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky said, there are no two marriages that are exactly alike. Just as people are infinitely varied, so too are the precise recipes for how to deal with subjective situations infinitely varied. It goes without saying, then, that one cannot make a hard-and-fast, recipe-style rulebook on how to deal with any given situation in married life. There is no question that every married couple is unique and needs to find a particular system and rhythm that works for them, both in general and in any given specific situation.

Nevertheless, there are certain basic *yesodos* that serve as the *moreh derech*, the general outline and guideline for all marriages. One needs to learn these principles, understand them well, and discover how precisely they will apply in his particular situations. That is the way to study a work such as this; not as a 1+2=3 instruction manual, but as general guideline of the underlying principles by which one should calibrate his particular course of action and direction.

There are many wonderful works written on the topic of *Shalom Bayis*. Because *Shalom Bayis* is such an amazingly complex and varied topic, it is very hard to say that there could be any one work that fully exhausts the topic. This one certainly does not at all claim to do so. Rather, it was compiled in order to deal with specific issues within the overall general topic of *Shalom Bayis* that are often not addressed directly or perhaps not exhaustively enough, particularly those issues that are of a more sensitive nature. This *kuntras* is not an exhaustive treatise of all the issues and nuances of *Shalom Bayis*. *Shalom Bayis* is a topic that encompasses a broad range of extremely important issues relevant to the husband-wife relationship, and there are many works that delve deeply into the numerous tools, attitudes, guidelines, approaches, etc. that are necessary to weave the delicate fabric that comprises the beautiful tapestry of *Shalom Bayis*. This *kuntras* is intended to provide an important supplement to these other works. It is the teacher's or reader's responsibility to not utilize this work as an independent guide, but as a supplement to the information and guidance that is available through training and many other additional works on the topics of *Shalom Bayis*.

It is advised that upon completion of the course of instruction, the teacher give the *chassan* a copy of this *kuntras* for future review and reference. This is, however, provided that the above, critical stipulation is followed. Namely, that this *kuntras* not become the sole work which the *chassan* will rely upon for guidance in *Shalom Bayis*. He must have at least a few other pieces of literature that will round out the topic for him and ensure that his understanding is whole and balanced.

Learning these matters one time before getting married or during the first year of marriage definitely does not suffice. Even when *Avraham avinu* was 99 years old and *Sara imeinu* was 89 years old, the *Malachim* made a point to say *ayeih Sarah ishtecha* so that it would be emphasized in Avraham's mind how much of a *tzenuah* Sarah is and she would become even more endeared to him. Marriage is a delicate masterpiece that requires constant care, maintenance, and effort to keep it in top shape. You need to make refreshing and honing your knowledge in these matters a regular, lifelong enterprise.

Someone, we'll call him Yoni, once attended a *Motzaei Shabbos* presentation on the topic of *chinuch* by Rav Noach Orlowek and Rav Dovid Kaplan. Both of them are world renowned speakers in the English-speaking Torah world. Yoni expected it to be a packed house. Boy was he shocked when he entered the *Beis Medrash* and saw very few men there. Even once the event began, there were probably no more than 20 men there, definitely not more than 30. This was in a community that boasts an English speaking contingent in the thousands. When Yoni

mentioned his shock to one of the event organizers, the latter responded, “On the women’s side of the *mechitza* it was full. It is always like this. Whether *chinuch* or *shalom bayis*, the women come and the men don’t. Apparently, men in general think they already know enough and do not need these presentations and seminars.”

Not good. Not good at all.

Men *in particular* need to always be in search mode for how they can grow and improve in the realm of *shalom bayis* and *chinuch ha'banim*. There is no such thing as just “going through the *inyan* once or twice and being *yotzei-zein*”. This is not just about your *chiyuv* and *achrayus* in life, it is about your own happiness. Hashem is very kind and He set things up that if we follow His instructions, we benefit. Big time.

So learn it. Review it. In six months go over it again. Buy another book. Etc. Make this your habit throughout your life and *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu* will do His part to give you the *siyata d'Shmaya* to see it through. אכי"ר.

PART ONE שלום באהלך

1) The Bedrock of a Successful Marriage

Found or Finding?

The *Gemara* in *Brachos*[2] says that in *Eretz Yisrael* when someone would get married they would pose the following question to the *chassan*: is it מצא or מוצא? The reference being to two *pesukim* that describe extremely divergent outlooks on a woman. One *pasuk*[3] says, מצא אשה מוצא אשה whereas the other[4] says מוצא אני מר ממות את האשה.... Quite a stark difference isn't it? Basically, it would seem, they were asking the *chassan* if his wife is good, or more bitter than death.

Sounds like an awfully strange thing to be asking a *chassan* right after he married his wife, doesn't it?!

It's hard to imagine that if a *chassan* was himself wondering what the answer to that question is, that it would be good for his *shalom bayis*! Let's not forget that the *Gemara* in *Kesuvos*[5] says that one should dance in front of the *kallah* and call her a נאה וחסודה even if she doesn't really look so beautiful to most people. Clearly *Chazal* were very concerned that we should say things that will endear the *kallah* to her *chassan*. *Kal v'chomer* that it would be a serious *avlah* to say something to the *chassan* that may make him think poorly of his *kallah*!

So what could possibly be the *pshat* in this *Gemara* about asking the *chassan* if its מצא or מוצא?

Rabi Yaakov Mi'Lisa (“the *Nesivos*”), in his *Emes L'Yaakov*, explains that they were not asking the *chassan* to tell them what he thinks about his wife. Rather, they were indicating to him that are two approaches a man can take towards his wife. One approach is the approach that leads to מצא and the other approach is the approach that leads to מוצא. As in every word of the Torah, nothing is *stam*. If the positive approach is dubbed מצא in the past tense, and the negative approach is dubbed מוצא in the present tense, there must be a reason for that.

מצא means he found. He was looking for a wife, and he found one. The search is over. “Being in the *parsha*” can mean that a *bachur* can be almost drowning in an ocean of research, considerations, investigations, inquiries, deliberations, hesitations, clarifications, weighing relative options, and the list goes on and on (for some *bachurim*, quite literally!). And even those

that were only ankle deep in it still had the same experience, at least qualitatively. But, now, that *parsha* is over. Done. Finished. Never to be revisited ever again. He has found his girl. No ifs ands or buts about it. The search is over. For good! From this point on, none of all the intensive work that went into all the *beirurim* matters anymore. Not even one iota. Once he has found and married her, that's it. This is his wife. No second guessing, no niggling doubts, no wondering if he really made the right decision or perhaps he could have done better. This woman is the one that he found and that's all there is too it. End of story. מצא, he found her; it's done.

מוצא, on the other hand, means he is finding. It's present tense. He is still in finding mode. Even after he said the *harei at* and put the ring on her finger, he hasn't really moved on from being in the *parsha*. Although, technically, they are now married and his wife is most certainly a full-fledged *eishes ish*, he has not really exited the previous phase of his life to enter the new one. He is unable to fully make peace with his situation. Every time he notices some flaw, folly, or failing that bothers him, he cannot help but wonder if he made the right decision. In his mind he is still searching. He's still "in the *parsha*". Still checking to see if she really was the right one for him to pick. He is a מוצא, forever in that state of second guessing his choice. Of wondering if perhaps he could have done better with someone else. In his mind he is constantly assessing and reassessing her to see if she truly measures up to what she was made out to be when they did all the *beirurim* on her and when he dated her. And he is doomed to suffer a fate more bitter than death. Far more bitter than death.

Because the מצא does not make peace with his situation, every little thing is going to drive him crazy. In *shidduchim*, there is a certain fantasy-land outlook that on paper and on dates everything needs to be perfect. But real life is not like that. Far from it. Everyone, but everyone has their *chesronos*. This guy, fool that he is, refuses to enter reality. He is still stuck in the immature, romantic, fantasy world of "the *parsha*". And it is going to make his life a *gehinnom* on earth. His expectations will never be met. Not only because they are not grounded in reality, but more so because of the attitude towards marriage that those expectations engender and express. "You need to deliver!" Isn't that in a nutshell how it works in *shidduchim*? If you want us to consider you, you better be able to sell yourself as a top-notch product. And if you actually want us to choose you, then you better present yourself as something really special. You have to prove your worth. If you can do it well, then we may just choose you.

In marriage, though, that outlook is doomed to failure. A marriage just does not work that way, no matter how much a babyish mind may want it to. In a marriage you are there primarily to be a giver, not a taker; most certainly not a demander. Even if that taking and demanding is done only in the recesses of your own mind. You are there to work together with your spouse towards a common, shared goal and value; not to see if she can prove herself worthy of your having chosen her.

The מצא guy understands that whatever led up to this point is now irrelevant. Completely irrelevant. Once I've signed on the dotted line, it's time to roll up my sleeves and get to work! Whatever was, was. This is my wife and that's it. This is my life and this is my *matzav* and that's it. No ifs ands or buts about it. The only thing which is up to me now is what I am going to do with my *matzav*. How I am going to take it, go with it, and the make the best of it[6].

He will succeed because he is committed. He doesn't consider any other options and therefore he will find the way that will make what he has work. And work it will. Because one who has found a wife, has found ultimate goodness, and he will have tremendous *siyata d'Shmaya* – ויפק רצון מה.

This, then, is the very first thing a man needs to know to have a successful marriage; it's forever. Forever! Marriage is for keeps. Once you put that ring on her finger, she is bound to you

and you are bound to her for all eternity. Make no mistake. This is not a *mussar-vort*. It is a recipe for a happy marriage; without which there is no recipe for a happy marriage[7].

Understanding the Flawed Thinking of the חסיד

To sharpen our appreciation of this *yesod*, we'll quote a small section from Rav Eliyahu Goldschmidt, in his fantastic book Dear Son[8], which really ought to be required reading for every *chassan* and husband. If you don't have it yet, go buy it. And read it many times *b'iyun*. Rav Goldschmidt writes about the following brief occurrence that happened with him.

You know, my son, on one of my visits to Argentina I met a Jew who was divorced and happily remarried. He had some questions about the education of his children, and he wanted my advice.

In the course of the conversation, I asked him, "Why did you divorce your first wife?"

"I just had no patience for her," he said. "I couldn't deal with her."

"I see. And now you are happily married?"

"Oh yes. Very much so."

"So is your second wife opposite in character to your first wife?"

"No. Not at all. You can't imagine how much patience I need to deal with her."

"I don't understand," I said. "Why are you able to be so much more patient with this wife than you were with your first wife?"

He smiled and shrugged. "You learn from your mistakes."

You know, there are people who do not learn the lesson the first time around. They wind up getting divorced two times, three times, maybe even more if there are any women desperate and foolish enough to give them a try. There is a saying, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." Because someone who doesn't learn from his mistakes is acting like a complete fool. Wouldn't it be nice, though, if a guy would not have to make such a gargantuan mistake as allowing his family unit to crumble and fall apart in order to acquire the wisdom he needs to get it right?

So let's try to dissect this a bit and see if we can perhaps learn from Mr. I've-got-no-patience-for-my-first-wife-but-plenty-for-my-second so that we don't *challilah* fall into the same trap he did.

What drives a guy to want to divorce his wife? Has he given up on the whole idea of married life? Definitely not. No-one wants to live in loneliness for the rest of his life. Certainly, a *frum* guy who gets divorced is almost immediately going to look to get remarried. So, no, it is not that he has given up on the whole idea of marriage. So, what is it? It's pretty simple, isn't it?

He thinks he can do better elsewhere.

"If only I would have married someone like...**then** I would be happy." There could be different variations of this going through a guy's head depending on his background and orientation, but they all come down to one basic assumption: with a better wife I would be happy.

And that is the terrible fallacy that brings down so many marriages. *Rabosai*, it's a sham! It is an outright, flaming lie and fantasy that people "indulge" in to *patur* themselves from doing what

they need to be doing in life. **You** won't have it better with anyone else. Sure, if the guy learns from his mistake and realizes that the only way he is going to achieve marital success and happiness is if **he** changes and adjusts his behavior to match the needs of marriage-unit, then he might in fact have a shot at having some happiness with his second marriage. But, and this is the fundamental point, it is **not** because of the different woman to whom he is now married; it is because of the different person **he** became. If he doesn't get the point, though, and does not change, he will not find marital happiness the second, third, or even fourth time around. It just won't happen[9].

A Good Work Ethic is Indispensable

If you're still a *chassan* or within the first *tekufah* following your *chasuna*, you may very well be in a state of bewilderment reading these words. You're still floating on cloud nine and cannot possibly imagine

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Making it Work

Now, we are up to the next step: ok, so how do I make it work? Before we answer that question at length by elucidating the various, major facets that lead to *shalom bayis*, we need to clearly reiterate a point that was also made above. Marriage is a people grower. However much you mentally prepare yourself, and however many tools you learn about, marriage is, by necessity, going to stretch you. It is going to force you to mature and grow beyond the constricting boundaries of the self-persona that you now know. Just as in physical growth when one develops his muscles, there will necessarily be a certain amount of feeling discomfort and burn, so too when it comes to true character growth is there necessarily going to be a certain amount of feeling discomfort and burn. The good news is, that just as a body builder doesn't suffer from the burn, on the contrary, he revels in it because he knows it means his muscles are getting bigger, he is getting stronger, and his endurance and power levels are increasing by leaps and bounds; so too, if you are aware that this is what it's all about, will you feel a tremendous *simcha* and satisfaction in feeling the burn of the character development and growth that takes place within you as you traverse the beautiful road of marriage. And it truly is something exquisitely beautiful and breathtaking, if we but approach it in the right way.

Ok, so here we go. What better place to begin but the *Rambam*, right? In *Hilchos Ishus*[13] the *Rambam* writes:

צו חכמים שיהיה אדם מכבד את אשתו יתר מגופו ואוהבה כגופו ואם יש לו ממון מרבה בטובתה
כפי הממון ולא יטיל עליה אימה יתירה ויהיה דיבורו עמה בנחת ולא יהיה עצב ולא רוגז.

In this amazingly concise statement, the *Rambam* has summed up for us the rules of how to treat and relate to a wife. This statement truly is the *kol ha'Torah kulah* of *shalom bayis*, and the rest is its *pirush* which we need to learn. We need to brand this statement into the deepest level of our consciousness. It goes without saying that every single *chassan* should start off by

memorizing this statement and accepting it deep within himself as the creed by which he is going to live his entire married life.

Let's take this *maamar* and break it down into its component parts, and try to build at least a rudimentary understanding of each facet that will serve as a solid foundation upon which to build throughout our lives. The first one is:

שיהיה האדם מכבד את אשתו יתר מגופו ואוהבה כגופו, that a man should be honoring^[14] his wife more than himself and love her as much as he loves himself.

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2) Respect – The Foundation of the Relationship

Honoring Your Wife – A State of Being

Note, that the *Rambam* does not write 'שיכבד האדם את אשתו וכו' etc., rather he wrote 'שיהיה האדם מכבד את אשתו וכו' etc. This is not a small textual nuance, it is a world of a difference. The *Rambam's* choice of words indicates that the goal is not to simply carry out acts of honor and love towards one's wife; rather, it is to become the type of person that this is what he does: he honors and loves his wife. It is meant to become part of your very essence. It is not just something you do, it is a state of being. It is who you are. You are a man that honors and loves his wife. You are not just *yotzei-zein* and go on with your life. No, that is not it at all.

Don't forget, there is a *chiyuv* to be מכבד and love every *Yid*^[15]. Obviously, that would apply to one's wife as much as to any other Jew, if not more^[16]. So what were *Chazal* adding by issuing a specific instruction about the *chiyuv* on a man to honor and love his wife? This is the question the *Rambam* is answering for us by employing the *lashon* שיהיה; that when it comes to your wife, it's not enough to carry out acts of demonstrating honor and love for her; it is a state of being. You take it with you wherever you go because it's a part of you.

Let's take a look at this *yesod* in action.

A man once went to the home of Rav Yechezkel Abramsky to discuss a certain matter with him regarding a particular yeshiva. "When I arrived," this individual related, "he was not there. The rebbetzin told me that he should arrive home any moment, so I waited for him there. A few minutes later, the Rav entered his house. The Rebbetzin immediately served him a cup of tea and sat down with him at the table. The Rav began conversing with his rebbetzin.

'I left home this morning and took bus number 12 until Ha'Nevi'im Street. From there I walked up the hill. It wasn't too difficult for me. I continued in the direction of Strauss Street until I got to the Geulah neighborhood. I went to Rav Yechezkel Sarna's house and he received me with great honor. I discussed a problem regarding Vaad Ha'Yeshivos. You already know that I hold that there is a need to expand the number of those who take part in the Vaad's meetings,

and I wanted to convince Rav Yechezkel Sarna to start coming on a regular basis. You know what type of person he is, after all, Chazal say that women are better judges of character than men; and if he'll become a permanent participant, it will spur everyone to follow through more thoroughly and assiduously with the Vaad's resolutions.' In this manner he continued elaborating to her about that matter.

'When we finished our discussion,' continued Rav Abramsky, 'Rav Sarna escorted me out to the street. [Regarding where I needed to go next] I was not sure if I should take a taxi or a bus; but in the end I preferred taking the bus, and it was really *min ha'Shamayim*. On the bus I met someone who works at Techiya Publishers which is where I am having part of my Chazon Yechezkel being printed. He told me that they finished printing the parts that I gave already more than a week ago, and they have been sitting with nothing to do regarding my seifer. I do not know why no one from there informed me of this beforehand - you know how anxious I am for them to finish the project quickly - and I already have the next three sections ready. Were I to have travelled by taxi I wouldn't have known anything about this...' and such did he go on elaborating about that point.

When he finished his conversation with his rebbetzin she got up from the table and he came over to me. He said to me, 'Forgive me that I ignored you all this time. However, *baruch Hashem* that you merited to see how one is meant to draw his wife close. Look, the whole day she's alone at home. I have to find a way to make her feel a part of what goes on with [my] day. Although it may have seemed to you that I was speaking trivialities with her...but that is what happened to me today...so I tell her.'

Rav Abramsky added one more point, 'Baruch Hashem I have merited old age, and it is only in the *zechus* of the *chesed* that I do at home to make her feel a part of my goings-on and thereby lift her spirits...[17]'

Rav Abramsky referred to this conduct of his as a *chesed*, but it is obviously a *chesed* that is born of tremendous respect and love; it is a *chesed* that demonstrates great honor. Let's try a bit to understand why. This is going to require some elaboration, so please be patient, and don't worry, soon we'll get back to analyzing this story of Rav Abramsky. Also, although we are going to begin with a discussion about learning how to talk to your wife, it is important to realize that the most important thing a husband needs to learn regarding communicating with his wife is how to listen. Generally speaking it is the wife who does most of the talking, and as her husband you absolutely must learn how to listen to her properly which we will elaborate upon later. So, that said, let's continue.

Two Nations Divided by a Common Language

Rav Noach Orlowek makes an observation that almost any man who is married for at least a few years immediately recognizes as so true: men have constipation of the mouth. You read right, constipation. Now, this is not to say that men do not know how to *schmooze*. But, somehow, when it comes to their wives (mothers, daughters, etc.), they get constipated. She wants to know how your day was and you manage but a barely audible grunt of "great". She wants to know if davening at *Shul* on *Shabbos-Rosh Chodesh* was nice, and just to respond "yeah" already feels like such an effort. She wants to know if the *Rosh Kollel* was happy to hear that you had a baby girl, and with great difficulty you barely get out an "I don't know; I think so." Yes, regarding their wives, men have constipation of the mouth. Even a man who has no problem shooting the breeze with his *chevrusah* for hours on end (when he is supposed to be learning!) may find that with his wife he gets all clammed up!

What is going on here?

It's actually pretty simple. There is a *Gemara* in *Shabbos*[18] that clears up this confusion, along with a lot of other sticky points in *shalom bayis* as well. It is a really fundamental point that is going to come up a lot, so pay close attention and assimilate this information really well. It is one of the most basic *yedios* you need to know...

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Your Kavod is Her Kavod

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

This one really is quite a *chiddush*. In general, to talk like that is unbecoming; it smacks of pride. Furthermore, we all know that it is simply unpleasant to be around people who talk like that and toot their own horns. The *chiddush* that we see from Rav Abramsky is that speaking in such a manner is *pasul* only when it comes to other people; when it comes to your wife, though, it is a ***mitzvah*** to speak in such a manner. Of course, not to *chalilah* say such things in a big-headed tone of voice, because even a wife will most certainly not appreciate that in addition to it being inherently wrong. However, stating the facts as they are is very important when it comes to your wife.

Think about it, although you don't go around tooting your own horn, you certainly enjoy it and it makes you feel very good when other people show you recognition, admiration, and *kavod*. Well, your wife completely identifies herself with you. When you get *kavod*, it is her *kavod*[31]. There is almost nothing that gives a woman greater pleasure than to see or become aware of her husband being respected and honored.

So, for example, to not tell her when the *Rosh Kollel* or the other *avreichim* complimented you on your *chaburah*, or when you got an *aliyah* in *Shul* is just unacceptable. It is an *avlah* of "*al timnah tov mi'baalav*". For her to never hear that you were complimented or that you got an *aliyah* is the equivalent of you never getting complimented and never getting an *aliyah*[32]; and how do you think that would make **you** feel? Regarding everyone else, you keep it to yourself, but regarding your wife, you must tell her all such things[33].

There is a *maaseh* with Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky that makes almost the identical point, albeit it with a slight, additional twist.

Nothing better expressed Reb Yaakov's extreme modesty than his abhorrence of having people stand for him when he entered a room. But there was a time he made an exception even in this. Reb Yaakov and Reb Shneur Kotler were once preparing to enter the main hall during the annual convention of Agudath Israel. Reb Shneur suggested that they enter from the side in order to avoid anyone standing for them. But Reb Yaakov

shocked him by rejecting the suggestion. “Our wives are present, and it will give them pleasure to see everyone honoring us. It makes it easier for them to put up with the constant intrusions on our time throughout the year[34].”

Despite Reb Yaakov’s severe aversion to people being *mechabeid* him in such a manner, he displayed tremendous wisdom and sensitivity regarding the needs and desires of his wife to be able to see her husband’s *kavod*. His deep and clear understanding of a wife’s needs prompted him to overlook his own discomfort and act in the manner that will provide her with the emotional satisfaction that is so important to her. Because Reb Yaakov spent a lifetime cultivating honoring his wife as a state of being, as opposed to just something one does, he recognized how he must act in order to make his wife happy even in a situation where such behavior was inherently anathema to him[35]. Of course, it stands to reason that Rav Yaakov and Rav Shneur did not suffer undergoing what otherwise would have made them suffer, because they were only focused upon and thinking about the fact that through this their wives would be happy and fulfilled.

Do make sure to tell your wife about all of your successes and honors. It means the world to her...

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Respectful and Respectable

A big part of acting respectfully is acting respectably. Think for a moment, if the *Rav* of your *Shul* was visiting your home, would you walk around the living room in your undershirt and boxer shorts? Obviously not. Why not? Because that would be an extreme sign of disrespect (and perhaps mental illness as well). Although the familiarity of marriage does not demand the same formality of respectful expression as a Rebbi-Talmid relationship, the point is nonetheless clear: acting in a respectable manner is an intrinsic part of being respectful.

Although it is hard to unequivocally say that doing something like making a habit of walking around the house in your underwear is wrong, it can definitely be said that it is highly discouraged. The same goes for other forms of uncouth behavior such as lack of table manners or repulsive matters pertaining to personal hygiene (such as cleaning your nose or passing gas in the presence of others).

Also bear in mind that, in addition to the implicit lack of respect for your wife (and children for that matter) that unrespectable behavior conveys, it also can serve to undermine the respect that you want your family to have for you. It is very difficult to feel a sense of respectful awe for someone who exhibits behaviors fitting for a lout. Even if you grew up in a family wherein these matters were not assigned importance, you should make a point to grow in your refinement. It is only fitting of a Ben Torah, and it is what Shalom Bayis calls for.

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Learning the Language

Now, you may be wondering to yourself, “I can understand approaching my marriage as a deep, complex *sugyah* that needs to be learned up very well; that I need to work hard to understand my wife in terms of her unique needs and character as a woman and in her own, individual way. I can also understand the need to accustom myself to demonstrating honor and love to her to the point where it becomes so ingrained in me that it is second nature. Despite the immense amount of hard work involved in all of this, I can at least understand how I am to go about doing it. But you spoke before about marriage being akin to moving to a foreign country wherein I will have to learn a completely new language and mode of behavior. I have no idea where I am supposed to even start! It is not as if there is a dictionary that will translate men phrases into women phrases. How am I supposed to learn a completely new way of thinking, processing, and communicating?!”

That’s a really good question. The truth is, though, that it is not as hard as it sounds. If you go into marriage with the drive and desire to do it, you will definitely manage to pick it up. Listen to your wife carefully. Study her. Take close note of how she tells you things, what types of things she focuses on, and so on. If you really put yourself into it the way you put yourself into a *sugyah*, you will definitely be able to do it.

That being said, always keep one basic *yesod* in mind. Both men and women are comprised of intellect and emotions. However, men primarily function with their intellect and women primarily function with their emotions. This is at the heart of all the vast differences in the way men and women think, feel, react, deal, talk, act, etc. In describing the phenomenal difference between the way men and women communicate, one wise woman put it this way, “Men are listen, solve, fix. Women are share, care, and encourage.” Although certainly not an exhaustive description of all the many nuanced differences, this statement gives us a very big foundation to work with. Let’s describe a true-to-life example that will help us understand this a bit better.

Baruch had a hard time concentrating on his learning today. Life was busy in the past few months and they had pushed off filing for their arnona discount until today. And today was the deadline. So, Penina made sure to clear her schedule so that she could go to the appropriate government office to submit the forms.

When Baruch arrives home he finds a distraught looking wife. “What is it Penina,” he asks, “did you manage to get the discount?”

*“I cannot even **begin** to describe to you what my day was like,” began Penina. “As soon as you left for Kollel, Ruchy threw a tantrum and absolutely refused to go to gan-“*

Baruch quickly cuts her off, "Penina (with a slightly exasperated tone), did you get the discount?"

"Well, because of Ruchy's tantrum, which I haven't even told you about yet, and the baby coming down with a fever – it took me two hours to finally get him into the doctor, I'll have you know..." By this point, Baruch's head is spinning and the pit in his stomach keeps getting deeper. They really cannot afford to lose that discount, and his wife's sob story is starting to drive him bananas!

Penina continues, "I wasn't able to get to the office until 12:34, which was exactly four minutes after they closed!"

By now, Baruch is starting to feel faint. Desperately, "So, Penina, are you telling me that you didn't get the discount?"

"Well, I pounded on the door until finally someone opened it and I just barely managed to get a word in edgewise seeing that they were being so rude to me and yelling at me for just wanting to submit some silly forms..." Baruch feels his lips starting to go dry. Almost in a yell, "Penina, please just tell me, did you get the discount or not?!"

"Listen, I practically had to beg and cry for them to even listen to what I had to say – which only took me all of 30 seconds..." Baruch thinks to himself, "Thirty seconds! How is that possible?!"

"And they told me that the office opens again from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm. I was floored. How in the world was I supposed to make it at that time?! That's when all the kids are home! I practically kicked and screamed for them to just take the form from my hand – I was waving it in the clerk's face! – but they just slammed the door on me and told me to come back at 3:30! Can you believe the chutzpah of it? I was so upset, I didn't even know what to do with myself-" Again, Baruch cuts her off. This time pleading, "Penina, could you please, please, please just tell me if you got the discount?"

"Baruch, if you'll just **listen** to me you'll understand **everything!** So, I was standing there outside the building under the scorching sun, holding our feverish baby, and my mind was so clouded and I was physically so exhausted that I couldn't even move. Finally..."

This is how the conversation progresses (or perhaps digresses would be a better expression) until Penina finally gets to the end of her saga, and explains how with beyond-herculean effort she managed to find a baby sitter to take care of the kids while she went back to that awful office for a second time in the same day, had to stand inside the stuffy building on an interminably long line, deal with the rudeness and gruffness of the clerks, until she finally, finally did manage to submit the forms and get the discount. Throughout Penina's soliloquy, Baruch vacillates between feeling dizzy, sick, interrupting her with more demands of "just tell me already", and just spacing out from utter helplessness.

When she finishes, Baruch says to her in a completely wiped out and utterly exasperated tone of voice, "Penina! Why couldn't you just tell me that right away?" To which Penina responds, "That's precisely what I was trying to do, but you have no patience and you never listen to me..."

Let's step out of this screen before it gets really ugly. Although perhaps somewhat exaggerated to add a bit of literary flair and entertainment, the above description is not far at all from reality. That is, for those that are still too clueless to know how they are meant to negotiate married life, or just too lazy to do so.

Understanding Her Point of View

As a man, it really is difficult at first hash to understand what in the world is going on with Penina. I mean, fine, we can understand that you have a need to share your incredibly frustrating day with your husband, we can understand your need for an empathetic, encouraging, and supportive ear. But why not just tell him the conclusion that you got the discount right away so he won't be kept waiting in anxious suspense, and **then** go through the whole *megilah* with him? Penina isn't sadistic, is she? So why...

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Imagine a person straddled over a huge ravine, each one of his feet on a different side. The two cliffs are just close enough for it to be done, but it is literally by a hairsbreadth. And this guy is straddled on them. He cannot possibly move, ever (!), because the slightest move will cause him to go hurtling down the ravine. His survival is completely dependent on forever maintaining his state of tenuous balance.

There is a *Gemara* in *Bava Metzia*[83] that says, לעולם יהא אדם זהיר באונאת אשתו שמתוך שדמעתה, מצויה אונאתה קרובה, a man must **always** be careful to not cause emotional pain to his wife, for since her tears are always at the ready, the punishment for causing her anguish is likewise quick to come. The *Mahara*[84] points out that although there is an *issur d'oraysoh* prohibiting causing any Jew emotional pain, *Chazal* specifically warned men to be extra careful about this regarding their wives because a wife vis a vis her husband is much more prone to being hurt than others. This, explains the *Mahara*, is a function of the dual reality within which she lives. On the one hand, she is to a great extent subservient to and dependent upon her husband, as the *pasuk* says והוא ימשל בך. On the other hand, she is also his equal for she is his spouse, not a maidservant; this, in addition to the fact that she has her own, independent identity in which she see herself as an important individual.

This very delicate balance generates a tension within her that makes her exceedingly sensitive to even the slightest slight from her husband. Her equilibrium and healthy sense of balance is completely dependent on each one of her feet being firmly planted on each side of this balance. On the one hand, she has an essential, existential need to feel completely bound up with the identity of her husband. His love, appreciation, and approval are vital to her sense of self. On the other hand, she is not his maidservant. She is his wife, and in that sense his equal, and she needs to feel that she also has her own, independent significance; that she is also a major contributor to their relationship.

This balance is complex and very delicate. The slightest push can throw it off and send her hurtling down into the ravine below. Even the most seemingly insignificant snub or somewhat harsh word can deliver her a crushing blow. This doesn't mean that it necessarily will. What is being described here is the natural tendency of women; that to which they are inherently very prone. A woman can use techniques that will help her to "roll with the punches" and not have

the wind knocked out of her any time her husband is not 100% nice with her. But you most definitely cannot bank on that.

From your perspective, you need to view the situation precisely as described above, wherein the slightest wrong move can be just absolutely devastating. This state of delicate balance is her perpetual reality. She cannot ever leave go of it. It is with her 100% of the time, her entire married life. That is why, in respect to her, you have to be gentle and courteous 100% of the time your entire married life. There can be no allowances for the “down and out” days vis a vis your wife because the stakes are just too high. It is extremely difficult, if not most of the time impossible, for her to be able to simply brush it off and chalk it up to your bad mood. The pain it can inflict on her is so strong and so real, that you simply have no other option than to follow *Chaza's* injunction to **always** be careful from causing her emotional distress. That is what the *Rambam* is adding in this final phrase, that even when you may otherwise be excused for behaving in a grumpy, gloomy, or gruff way, with your wife there are no exceptions. A gentle, contented demeanor and mode of communication is an absolute must at all times and under all circumstances.

Damage Control

Granted, this is a very tall order, and many men may not muster up the strength and stamina to maintain this standard at all times no matter what the situation. So what are you to do if, for example, you had a really hard day and you just do not see wearing a smile on your face and talking all lovey-dovey a realistic possibility from the moment you walk in the door until the moment you fall asleep? What then? If that is the case, then at the very least what you need to do is keep up the show at least from the moment you walk in the door through the first ten minutes you are home[85]. Think about it, if you had to put on such an act for a very important guest, certainly you'd manage ten minutes...

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