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## Getting to Know Your Family - 02 Purpose of The Home Is Expressing Love

### ***Can We Always Be In 'Giving' Mode?***

Let's return briefly what we have begun to explain in the previous chapter (the concept of giving in marriage).

One of the basics of marriage is that the husband must be a "giver" to the home. He must learn the art of giving and know how to keep giving towards his home - to give, and to give, and to give.

Right before a man gets married, he is given some guidance. He is told that he must now become a giver. Until now, he was used to living for himself, but now he has to become a giver. Ideally, this is really the way it should be - after a man marries, he should become a constant giver.

But we must know the following. If he's not a nice person outside his home, he won't be able to suddenly be nice either when he comes home. A person acts in his home no less than how he acts outside the home; if he is not used to giving, he cannot suddenly become a giver in his home.

If one works for a living, the ideal perspective he should have is that he is working only in order to be able to provide for his family, and he shouldn't be in it for selfish purposes. If he learns in *kolel*, he should be learning not for his own spiritual growth, but in order to give spirituality to his family.

(Of course, a person is allowed to enjoy himself in the process, but the main drive of a person should be that he is trying to give).

Now, if a person would do everything *l'sheim Shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven), he wouldn't need any guidance to prepare for marriage. But the reality is that we don't always do things *l'sheim Shomayim*. We go to work or we learn Torah for own purposes. We want to take it for ourselves, and we are not necessarily motivated to give. We are taught that marriage is about giving, but it is very difficult to change the orientation which we were living with until now.

Thus, we have difficulty giving in our homes. Why? All day, we are involved in ourselves. When we work, it is for ourselves. When we learn Torah, we are involved in our own spiritual growth. Then when we come home at night, we have to switch to "giving" mode - we have to be there for our wife and help the kids, feeding them, doing homework with them and putting them to bed, etc.

So because we have to keep switching "modes" every day from "taking" to "giving", it's hard for us to

get used to the change of mode, and as a result, we have a hard time becoming givers when we come home. This is the problem we grapple with in the home: we cannot suddenly transform when we come home.

### ***The Stressful Atmosphere At Home***

What happens when we come home at the end of the day? What do we feel like? The house to us becomes like a place full of hard work – and it certainly is.

Surely we give in our homes. We give all the time to our spouse and children, by helping them each day with many different things. But there is so much to do that it feels for the most part forced upon us. We do not feel like we are in ‘giving’ mode to our family, even though we do a lot for our family.

Maybe a person can try to consciously feel like he’s ‘giving’ for about 2 or 3 weeks or a few months at best, but it is not a way to live. Nobody can live like this. Some rare individuals are on a very high spiritual level and they can do everything in the home to ‘give’ to their family, but most people cannot do it. Giving is therefore a high level, a lofty comprehension.

The words we will speak about here will describe how one can enter an inner kind of life which anyone can simply live.

### ***The Inner Work Of Running Our Home***

The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that all of life is a test. This was the concept we explained in the previous chapter, that one must view the home as being a place of *avodah*, of inner work. There are many difficulties involved in the home. It’s not supposed to be easy; it is a place that takes hard work, just like all other areas of life.

What do our homes mean to us? Most of us aren’t too fond of our home. Many people don’t feel like coming home at night and would rather go shopping and take their mind off their home, saying “I don’t have any energy to deal with my home right now.”

What is the home to us? Do we understand the function and the purpose of our home?

We aren’t clear what our home exactly means to us. When we learn, it’s clear that we are learning Torah. When we go to a wedding, it’s clear that we are at a wedding. But when it comes to our home, we are surprisingly unsure of what it even is to us. What is our home?

So our question  
is, when we come  
home at the end  
of the day, what  
do we want from  
our home?

Let’s be honest. No matter what we do – whether one works for a living, or whether he learns all day in *kolel* – we are all tired at the end of the day. We all want to come home at night and relax a little in the house. To our disappointment, we never get to relax in our homes – as soon as we walk through the door, there is so much for us to do. We want *menuchah*, serenity, and maybe a little rest – and lo and behold, we come home, and there is no *menuchah*, but only more hard work to do, even harder than the day’s work.

There is much to do in our house, in whatever stage of life we are up to. A newlywed couple faces certain struggles with each other. Young children present a different set of problems. When children get older and more mature, their issues become more challenging to deal with. When our children are in *shidduchim*, a new set of worries begin. When we become grandparents and our married children come over, we face new challenges with them. There are all different issues we go through in life, no matter what stage we are up to. There is never one answer to all of them.

So our question is, when we come home at the end of the day, what do we want from our home?

If a person only wants *menuchah*, he is expecting something that is not realistic, because life is not about *menuchah*, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* says. But the home cannot either be defined as a place of only hard work, because then when do we get to rest from all of this? If the home is entirely seen as a place of *avodah*, we cannot rest in it, so when and where are we supposed to rest, if not in our homes?!

Obviously, we need a little *menuchah* in our homes, so that we can be minimally calm. If we want a little bit *menuchah* in our homes, we need to know how to properly view our homes, and then we will have a degree of *menuchah* in it (though we might not get all the sleep and rest we want in it).

When we walk into our house at night - what is it that we should want from our house? How should we view our home?

If a person has *shalom bayis* (marital peace), he will view his home as a peaceful place, but if he doesn't have *shalom bayis*, he will have the opposite view of his home. If he has calm children, he views the home as a pleasant place, but if he does not have calm children, he does not view his home as pleasant. Each person will view his home according to his situation. But what is the inner way to view our home?

Surely our life is about hard work. "*Man was created to toil.*" We must work hard in learning Torah, in the mitzvos, in our *middos*. That is all true. But only the Gedolim are capable of working hard on themselves all day! The average person cannot work hard all the time in his life, even if he can relate to the concept. What, then, is the way for an average person to go about life? Besides for having aspirations, how must a person actually live his life?

### ***Expressing Love In Your Home***

We each have a wife and children that we love. Do we love them?

Of course, we do. (If anyone here answers "No", then there is nothing here to discuss). We can all say that we love our spouse and children, but can all of us say that we express that love to them? That is the question.

(To clarify the following misconception before we continue: the home is not mainly about being '*oived*' Hashem (serving Hashem). You can't be '*oived*' Hashem as your child is screaming and the phones are ringing...)

Do we love our family? We will all say, "Yes". Do we want to express love to them? Most people will also say "Yes". But the question is, how much time of the day do we *actually express* love to them?

Here is where most people will be unable to answer. It is this unanswered question, though, where all the problems in the home begin.

The love that we have for our family is always there, but it is mostly hidden and not openly revealed

enough. If we want to reveal love in our home, and we are really prepared to do this every day, we will have successful homes.

Of course, this does not mean that you will have a 100% perfect home if you do this, but you will definitely have a general recipe for success in the home. There are also certain issues that come up in the home which cannot be solved through merely expressing love to them. But the basic recipe for a successful and good home is: to express love to your family, every day.

Remove all of the masks and coverings - and let all of the love be revealed in your home.

Don't view this as some lofty, spiritual level. It is true that it is part of serving Hashem. But many people will feel like they cannot do it if they view it as 'Avodas Hashem.' Instead, view the home as the place where you can express your love. This is much easier for a person to accept, especially because we need an idea that talks to the level of our *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul) which has a hard time with 'serving Hashem'.

What is the most important thing you can give to your child? To buy him clothes? It is very important, but there are more important things than this. (Hiring for him a tutor or teacher? Even the best teacher cannot replace the love you can give to your child. It is true that giving him love is not everything; the child needs to learn, be educated, and be neat and orderly. He has all these needs. But what are his basic emotional needs?)

I am not asking you what his spiritual needs are. What is his basic need? **He needs to feel loved!** Any sensible person knows this. Making a child feel loved must be the basis of the home.

Some people think that this is called getting too emotional, and that too much *regesh* (emotion) in the home will lead to *geresh* (divorce). But the home must be viewed as the place where you express the depth of your love. It is not merely a place to sleep, eat meals, get dressed, and study and learn.

### ***Expressing Love Naturally, and Not as An 'Avodah'***

We must realize that love in the home is the basic atmosphere which the home needs, and, it must be expressed naturally. Expressing love must not come as something forced upon you, as something you have to do because if not then you will go to Gehinnom and if you do, you will go to Gan Eden. That should not be the mindset at all.

Earlier, we defined the home as being a place of hard inner work. Now, it seems that we are implying the opposite approach, that in the home you must not force yourself to do things, and in this way, you find *menuchah* (serenity) in your home. This seems like a contradiction: Is the home about hard work, or is it about finding serenity? It is because if you work on yourself to express love in the home and it begins to flow naturally from you, you will find that there can be *menuchah* in your home.

### ***Misconceptions That People Have About the Home***

If one doesn't realize that the basis of the home is expressing love, what will be the basis of his home? Which is the point he is mainly emphasizing?

There are some people who think that *dikduk hadin* (being very careful in *Halacha*) is the basis of the home, so this kind of person will mainly emphasize that the children be careful with *Halacha*. He is mainly concerned that the children be constantly taught what the *Halacha* is whenever they act. If the child doesn't say *Asher Yotzer* right away, he is reprimanded, etc. Such parents would like their child to be on the level of Rav Elyashiv [zt"l] who was very careful with *Halacha*....

Any sensible person knows that this is a wrong approach, for it does not happen with a child. We are not saying that *dikduk hadin* does not have to be taught in the home, *chas v'shalom*. Of course it needs to be taught. But the question is, is that the main emphasis to place in the home? The home cannot thrive on *dikduk hadin* alone. It cannot become the *neshamah* (soul) of the home.

(There were some people who based their entire homes on spirituality and mainly emphasized spirituality in the home, and they were partially successful. Some of the children turned out very good, and other children felt too pressured from this and they stopped being observant).

So what is the main point that one must emphasize in the home? That is the question which we are asking. What is the kind of atmosphere you mainly need to create in your home?

If anyone reflects deeply into it, he will see that it's not so simple to answer. What, indeed, is the correct atmosphere that one needs to mainly build in his home?

Someone told me once that his child in preschool was asked by his teacher to write down, "What Is The Most Important Thing In Your House?" Of course, all the children wrote, "Torah." But the question is, what is the atmosphere of the home?

To describe the home as being a 'place of Torah' is a general description that doesn't tell us much. The children might be aware that Torah is the main part of their home, but in their viewpoint, Torah means "not to disturb our father when he is learning". They grow up thinking that Torah means, "All day, we should not make any noise or disturbances, this way Abba can learn Torah in peace." This will be how they view "Torah"....

When a person makes sure that expressing love in the home and creating a warm atmosphere in the home is his main priority in the home, he will find that the home doesn't have to a place of 'war'. He will see the home as a place to reveal love, not as a place to engage in a 'war' with his family. And this will give him some *menuchah* (serenity) in his home.

We are not speaking of a deep and spiritual kind of love. We are speaking about a more basic and physical kind of love, which is necessary for all people to have, since we all have a body, and we are not entirely souls. When there is a basic level of love in the home, upon that, spirituality can thrive. Of course, our spirituality is the main thing we strive for. But without basic emotional needs, which are more physical in their nature, we aren't able to be spiritually healthy either. It is impossible to live a totally spiritual existence with no acknowledge of our physical body and basic emotional needs. The home cannot survive on this.

So we first need to let our natural love flow from our simple emotions, before we embark on spiritual levels, in the home. There are fathers who teach their child to love others because there is a *mitzvah* of "*Vohavta l'reicha Kamoicha*", "Love your friend as yourself." What is the problem with this approach? It is because this cannot be the basis of the home. The home needs to be developed sensibly, in steps, like rungs of a ladder. You start with the basic parts that are more grounded on the earth, not with the lofty and spiritual levels.

So the question we must ask ourselves is: What is the basis that we need to build the home upon? Should it be *derech erez* (decent behavior)? Should it be *nikayon* (neatness)? Should it be *kibbud av v'aim* (honoring parents)? (Some people think that *kibbud av v'aim* is all that there is to the home!)

(Another misconception people have is that the emphasis in the home should be, to "always do the will of Hashem." The problem with this is that if you only love your child because it is the will of Hashem, this is a form of disconnection. You need to naturally love your child, and within that desire of love for him is the deep will of Hashem which enables that will, but in the end of the day, the love

begins with your natural emotions. This is because as we said earlier, we are not entirely souls. We have a body which our soul dwells in. Thus, we first need to express our simple, natural emotions).

How many children feel that their father or mother doesn't love them! In fact, there are even parents who will admit it openly that they do not love one of their children. Deep down, we all love our children, because there is a natural ingrained love that every parent has for his child. But it can be pushed very deep into the subconscious, so it is not consciously revealed, and that is why the parent will feel like he does not love his child. (Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote about this concept.)

### ***Making This Practical***

Getting back to the issue, the question is if husband and wife are aware of the basis of the home, both with regards to their marriage as well with raising the children. It is a question about living life, and it is not a mere intellectual question.

Now let's try to make this practical now. How much of the day do we spend expressing love? It's possible that an entire day goes by where one did not openly express any love in the home. A person cannot come into his home and suddenly open up his emotion of love, like the sun beginning to shine on a cloudy day. It cannot happen. The home is a place where it's easier for one to express his love, because he is used to expressing it there, but even love in the home does not suddenly appear if one hasn't already activated any love from previously in the day.

Therefore, every person, **before** he comes home, needs to take the time to think how he will express love in the home. The point is not that every day a person should tell his children, "I love you." The words have to come from your feelings! You need to first let yourself feel your love for your family, and then the words of love need to flow from that. You can't just say the words if you don't feel the love.

Surely the words "I love you" are what express your love, but the very first step is to expose the emotion of love in the first place.

(Every person feels what love is. There are some people who are very stiff and hardened, but every person has emotion. How can a person open up his emotions if he is stiff? He can practice it with himself, by saying words of love to himself. He can think about how to express love and he can practice saying the words to himself. For example, if he takes the children to the store and he buys them something, he can think to himself, "Why am I buying this for him? Because I love him." In trying love exercises like this, he can slowly but surely expose his emotion of love to them and train himself to express it and reveal it.)

### ***Knowing and Then Internalizing This Perspective***

The first step is to know what the basis of the home is: it is a place to express love to your family. It should be **entirely** love! (Of course, sometimes you need to apply punishment in the home. But the general basis of the home is, love). Love is the root; being able to be kind to your family is the step that comes after that. This is because *ahavah* (love) is the inner root of *chesed* (kindness).

The love in the home must be clearly felt in the home. It is not merely a phrase of "I love you" which the father must say every day to his child. It is much, much more than that. The entire home must be seen as the place to reveal love.

### ***The Problem: We Don't Have Time to Think...***

When you go away on a trip for a few days, and you come home and you are about to enter, you

know the children are waiting to see you, so you feel excited to enter your home (Maybe they just want your presents they think you bought them, but they're still awaiting you). So too, if one would view his home as being the place to reveal love, he would be excited to enter it each day. But in order to feel that excitement to enter the home, one has to create the right atmosphere in the home.

The problem that most of us grapple with is that we are tired at the end of the day, and we don't have time to think about this before we come in through the door. When we don't have any time to think before we come home, we come in to the house expecting to relax, and then all the trouble comes. Just when we want some rest after a long day, our wife and children bombard us with so many things. The house then seems to us like a war zone. But this creates disaster to our homes, and that leads to a destruction of our entire life.

The more a person reveals love in the home, the fewer problems there will be. The less revelation of love there is, the more fights and arguments there will be in the home; it will become a never-ending, vicious cycle of problems that keep resurfacing.

But all of us can change and live differently. It is up to us to develop the correct atmosphere in the home, and in order to change, we need to do the following.

### ***Opening Your Emotions***

First of all, as we said, a person doesn't have that much time throughout the day to express his emotions. But we need to find time every day to open our emotions. That is the first step.

The emotions that most people know are negative emotions, such as jealousy and hatred for others. But we need to learn how to develop **positive** emotions, and to learn how to express them more.

Most people are involved in a "world" of action, not in a world of thought, so it becomes hard for them to suddenly express emotion when they come home. The home then becomes a place of giving commands and telling everyone what they must do; it becomes a rigid place in which there is no emotion revealed. But if one has already revealed emotion earlier in the day, it is much easier for a person to come home and express emotions in the home, because he has already accessed his emotions before he came home.

A good way to work on this is to *daven* with emotion. When one *davened* during the day and he revealed some emotion in his *davening*, his emotions have been activated, and when he comes home, he can reveal the emotions.

### ***Putting Life Into Our Life***

Let us try to understand the root of most problems that go on in the world: it is because people are caught up in life, in the "world of action", and emotions are rarely accessed, because people don't have time. The home becomes a continuation of this monotonous kind of life. The person is kind of dead, and the home will also be dead. It is a deathlike kind of life, not a vitality-giving kind of life.

Sometimes I am in others' homes, and I find no life going on there; there is nothing going on there except eating meals, laundry, and sleep, which does not provide vitality to a home. How can the home be a place to live in when this is all that goes on there? As long as the dishwasher is working and the weekly newspaper comes to the home, the home is considered to be 'functioning' and a happening place? This is a 'dead' kind of house! How can there be life in such a home? When we enter such a home, do we feel life going on there, or do we just feel like it is neat and orderly looking?

What about the Shabbos table? Is it just a program to follow – the order that the *Zemiros* is sung, the

children must say *Divrei Torah*, then comes the first course, then the drinks come, then another set of children say *Divrei Torah*, then comes dessert, then they *bentch*, clear off the table, and then the table is reset to be the Shabbos table again?

Forgive me for saying this, but the “*dvar Torah*” in such a home is *divrei chullin* (mundane talk), because it is merely being seen as part of the program that must be done. The words being said in the *Dvar Torah* are not affecting anyone for the better and nobody could care less what is being said in the *Dvar Torah*. It is being forced, so that the child should be trained to “get used to saying a *Dvar Torah*”.

This does not add life to the home! A person can say a thousand *Divrei Torah* yet not one of them is alive! There is a ‘life’ which we must ‘live’. If a father lives by the words of the *Dvar Torah* that he says, that is a true Shabbos table.

### ***Coming Out of Routine***

When the home is a place of mere physical chores, such a home is ‘dead.’ Perhaps it will be hard to hear and accept this. But it is like a body without a soul.

Along these lines, Chazal say, “What has Ben Dovid [Moshiach] not come yet? Because he did not come yesterday, or the day before, or three days ago.” It is because the routine of life is going on as usual, with no change.

What is our life about? It is not just about our schedule, obeying rules, gathering knowledge of Torah, applying what we learn to how we act, tests, successes, and vacations. Life is supposed to be full of *chiyus* (vitality). We must make sure that we have *chiyus* in our life, and then upon that, we will be able to build everything else which our home needs.

### ***The Home Is Not A Place To ‘Educate’ Or ‘Preach’***

The home is not either a place of mussar (ethics), where the father must teach the children the entire day and tell them stories. There are homes like that, in which the father teaches his children in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night, where the father thinks he must be a ‘*mechanech*’ (educator) to them always, always explaining to them what exactly they need to do and how.

I am not saying that there is no place for this in the home, but it should only be a percentage of what goes on in the home.

The basis of the home is to express love to your children. When there is love as the basis, everything else can follow. And you do need those other things that you want to incorporate into your home. But you must make sure that the basis is there. Love and vitality in your home has is like the air that the children breathe in the home.

Where does a person feel that he gets his *chiyus* from? Even a person who learns in Kolel the entire week, who learns Torah and does all the mitzvos – what does he feel like he lives from? I am not asking what he did the entire week. It is obvious what he did: he learned Torah and he did mitzvos. I am asking about *what he feels alive from*. One cannot live from the good actions alone that he does. If he lives like that, he raises his children to be the same way, and then his rigidity is continued by the next generation.

But if a person seeks to live an inner kind of life, although he will always have ups and downs, he can know that the atmosphere in the home needs to be mainly that of love and emotion, so that the home will feel alive. In this way, the home will not be seen as a warzone or as a place of just ‘*avodah*’ – it

will feel like a calming place. Although there are always problems that can come up in the home and there is work to be done there, it will still feel serene, when there is an atmosphere of love in the home; because such a home allows the soul to flourish and become more revealed.

### ***The Home: The Place To Be Your Best***

Some people feel that their families should just “Accept me for who I am”, because they do not wish to work hard on their character in the home. This kind of person might even have a mussar seder (time of learning self-discipline) every day and he has aspirations to improve his character, but when it comes to his home, he does not want to fix his character there. He just wants to be accepted in his home for who he is, with all his faults; to be allowed to “be himself.”

The home will feel unbearable to him, due to the many challenges that arise in the home which tests his character. Rather, he needs to see the home as being a place to reveal his love. It can be the place where he can reveal all of his aspirations he identifies with. When he makes sure to always reveal his love in the home, the family will be able to overlook all his faults, for it is written, “*Love covers over all faults.*”

### ***Infusing Vitality Into The Home - Through Emotion***

It was described here a way to actually live life. Some people do not feel that they are missing anything in their life if they are missing *chiyus*, and they feel fine as long as they are learning Torah and keeping all the mitzvot. When such a person hears a person getting emotional in a speech, or when he sees someone *davening* passionately, he might conclude, “This must be a very emotional person, a *baal hergesh.*”

But we must understand that if someone does not feel how a lack of emotion is detrimental to life, it is a sign that his life is kind of dead. He does everything right, but all of his actions are performed perfunctorily. He never wonders what is lacking in his mitzvot, other than wondering if “mitzvot need *kavanah*” or not.

Does a person realize that living an inner kind of life is only possible through revealing emotion? If he does, he has vitality in his life, and he will be able to continue that into his home as well, creating a vibrant and alive atmosphere in his home which enables the children to thrive. Such a house is pleasurable to enter, and the father will look forward to coming home at the end of the day. Of course, there will always be issues that can come up in the home, but he will still have the basic recipe for success, and he will thus find the home to be a calm place to enter.

### ***In Conclusion***

These are not ideas. They are about how we understand life. If one feels that the words have spoken to his heart and he wants to internalize them, he will find success, with the help of Hashem.

I hope that the inner message behind these words has been realized, and not just the two pieces of advice that I mentioned towards the end. If you listened to this only to get to the ‘tips’ here, then the whole point has been missed. The words here were not coming to give tips – they are presenting a way of life.