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The Body and the Soul

The “self” has two components: the revealed component, represented by the body (*guf*), and the concealed component, the holy soul (*neshamah*). Just as a person is comprised of *neshamah* and *guf*, so too, when he marries he unites with his spouse on these levels. Both components, the body and the soul, are essential in marriage.

The *neshamah* connection in marriage is one of its most vital elements. Secular books which discuss marriage are often unaware of the spiritual connection which exists between husband and wife, and therefore lack a very important dimension in their description of marriage. They discuss the physical relationship and the emotional relationship, but they leave out the spiritual aspect of marriage, the union which takes place within their souls.

The spiritual aspect of marriage cannot exist on its own. Obviously, the physical aspect of marriage can never be ignored. Both unions are essential and they must exist together harmoniously at every step of the marriage.

Marriage Based on the Neshamah and the Guf

In this section, we will demonstrate *b'ezras Hashem Yisborach*, several examples of how marriage can be built upon the foundation of the *neshamah* together with the *guf*; merging the spiritual aspect of marriage together with the physical view. We will see that when the spiritual dimension is added to the marriage, many problems and issues are automatically and naturally resolved.

People who view the world through the lens of the physical must keep in mind that they are not only physical beings; they also have a *neshamah* within them which sees the world in an entirely different way. The people who view (or try to view) the world through the perspective of the *neshamah* must remember that they also have a body. We are not yet souls living in *Gan Eden* – we are living with our physical bodies in This World! A person cannot deny the fact that he has a body. Instead, he must understand the nature of his body and fulfill its needs.

It can happen that people who are very involved in Torah, *tefillah* and keeping *mitzvos* may be living solely based on the view of the physical *guf*. Even though they are involved in spiritual activities, they never acquired the essential elements of *emunah* and *bitachon* (faith and trust in Hashem). They do not see their marriages as a spiritual union, with a deep love emanating from their souls. Because they view their own lives as purely physical, they view their marriages that way as well.

We have written this section, with Hashem's help, to help people view every situation within their lives and marriage in both ways, through the physical and spiritual, and to work with both of them simultaneously.

Before reading this section, we recommend first reading the *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh (Building a Sanctuary in the Heart, Part One and Part Two)* where we describe the *neshamah's* view of life, the view of *emunah* and *bitachon*. After we acquire a spiritual view to life in general, we will be able to apply this concept to marriage as well.

Combining the Two Views

The *neshamah* and the *guf* experience the world in two entirely different ways. Only the combination of both aspects will bring success and perfection to life and to marriage. If a person is lacking the *neshamah's* perspective, he will certainly fail. And if he is lacking the perspective of the *guf*, he will also fail. When the two are combined and join together in the correct proportions, success in life and to marriage is much more attainable. We will begin with one important example.

There are two different approaches that people adapt when they are searching for their *zivug* (their future spouse). Some people adapt the view of *emunah* and *bitachon*. They are certain that Hashem will prepare for them the spouse who was destined for them from forty days before their formation^[2]. They feel no need to search for or investigate the background of their intended *shidduch*. Other people feel that *hishtadlus* (need for personal effort) is required – they must search for their *shidduch*, and verify and clarify the personality, intelligence, financial standing, health and other matters of every *shidduch* that is proposed to them.

The *neshamah* aspect obviously takes the *emunah* and *bitachon* approach, and feels no need to do *hishtadlus*. The *guf's* view, however, is to search and clarify the *shidduch* to the utmost.

Being that a person is a mixture of *neshamah* and *guf*, he must combine both views when he is searching for his *shidduch*. He must adapt the view of the *neshamah* and thereby have *emunah* and *bitachon* that he will certainly receive the *shidduch* which was destined for him from heaven. He must also adapt the view of the *guf* and do the proper amount of *hishtadlus*. The amount of *hishtadlus* he will be required to do will be dependent upon the degree that his *neshamah* is revealed within him. For those whose *neshamah* is more revealed within them, a minimum amount of *hishtadlus* will be sufficient, but those whose *guf* is more dominant, will need to do more *hishtadlus*.

After marriage, these two diverging viewpoints reappear. Husband and wife will inevitably discover imperfections and disappointments in their spouse that they weren't aware of beforehand. These shortcomings will automatically bring forth the original view that they had when they were in *shidduchim*. From the *neshamah's* point of view, he can concentrate upon the fact that the *shidduch* was from Hashem, and therefore certainly for his and her benefit. If he originally believed that the *shidduch* was destined from heaven, he should continue with this belief even after the revelation of imperfections in his spouse.

The *guf*, however, the part of him where the light of *emunah* has not penetrated, does not have this faith, because it is beyond him. (There are some faults in the spouse that the *guf* will be able to endure and calm itself with its minimum level of *emunah*, but there are more severe faults which the *guf* cannot make peace with, because he lacks the level of *emunah* required to cope with them.) He will be forced to deal with the problem in a "physical" way, either by learning to live and make peace with the situation, or to concentrate upon the good qualities of his spouse and not the faults. There are ways to do this (which we will discuss), and thereby strengthen and encourage himself during these difficult times in the marriage.^[3]

Many people, before marriage and at the beginning of their marriage, think that marriage is for pleasure and joy. Shortly afterwards they become rudely aware that marriage isn't only about pleasure and that there is hard work in marriage as well.

When someone discovers character traits in his spouse that he feels he cannot endure and handle, he is shocked and confused. He says: "I didn't think that my spouse would be like this! I was certain that they would be completely different..." Sometimes these revelations are over minor issues, but sometimes the issues are more severe. The disillusioned spouse claims that if he would have known about these faults beforehand, they would never have gone through with the marriage.

Anyone who has traversed the first year of marriage understands what we are referring to. There isn't anyone who got married and didn't discover something about their spouse which simply shocked them. When the issues are relatively minor, one can overlook them - if he naturally has the ability to overlook faults that he finds in another person. However, when the faults are greater, it can be very hard for him to overlook them.

At times like this, they say: "People deceived me with false information! I fell into their trap!" or "I was in such a hurry to marry that I didn't do enough research and checking," or "Since I didn't have money for a dowry, I couldn't find a better *shidduch*," and similar clichés which are used when one discovers that his spouse is different than he had originally thought.

Other people respond differently. They say: "This is the *shidduch* which was destined for me from heaven. This was *Hashem Yisbarach's* decree from forty days before my formation" They try to strengthen and encourage themselves with this faith to succeed in their marriage.

Although this approach is valid, the person must determine whether he is actually on this high plane of *emunah*, whose roots are found in the *neshamah*. The *neshamah* has this great *emunah* and rejoices with his faith, but the *guf* is not always on this level. Sometimes, fortunately, the *guf* also has this *emunah*, and then he can comfort and strengthen himself with the belief that everything is planned and ordained for a purpose from heaven, including his present situation. But sometimes the *guf* doesn't really have this *emunah*; it is only being expressed in speech and in thoughts, but the heart hasn't truly accepted this faith, and he doesn't experience any true respite.

When the *guf* doesn't yet have this *emunah*, there are two possible scenarios that can ensue: Sometimes, even if the *guf* is not yet on a sufficient level of *emunah* to comfort itself, then speaking about and contemplating concepts of *emunah* can be helpful. The *emunah* will eventually penetrate, bringing the *neshamah* and the *guf* to perfectly believe that the *shidduch* was ordained from heaven, and that will calm them. But sometimes the *guf* is very distant from this *emunah* and he will not be able to calm himself with thoughts of *emunah* either because he is on a very low level, or because the situation is extremely difficult.

At times like this, he must incorporate both viewpoints. He must have *emunah*, because that is the *avodah* of the *neshamah*, but he must also find other ways to calm the turmoil which is in his heart. (We are not referring to situations when the faults of the spouse are so great that, to our great anguish, they must divorce, based on the advice of a Rav competent in these matters.)

There are several practical ways to calm the heart when turmoil has arisen in marriage. A person can: 1) Concentrate upon the many good qualities his spouse embodies; 2) Understand that nothing is perfect in life, and there are problems everywhere; 3) Understand that everyone suffers in *Olam Hazeh* (This World), and the troubles with his spouse are obviously the portion of suffering he must personally endure; 4) Rejoice with the *yissurim* (suffering) because they cleanse the person and prepare him for the next world; 5) Concentrate on and involve himself in other matters; 6) Focus on

giving to others (not necessarily to his spouse), because when a person is involved in giving, he is less involved with himself and his personal issues. He will automatically and at least temporarily forget about his spouse's faults.

One must combine both approaches in his marriage. He should have the perspective of the *neshamah* and recognize that everything is destined. This realization should encourage him and give him the ability to overcome difficulties. But at the same time, he must follow the needs of the *guf* which is not always calmed with *emunah* alone, and he will need to employ other practical methods to deal with the situation the best that he can.

For a successful marriage, one must unite the aspect of the *neshamah* with that of the *guf*. If a person will lead his life exclusively through the lens of his *guf*, he will never be able to build a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael*, a true Jewish home. The perspective of the *guf* by itself is insufficient, because it ignores the spiritual element of marriage. Similarly, if he will only employ the view of the *neshamah*, without combining the advice of the corporal body, his *emunah* will be incomplete [having no expression in the physical world]. The correlation of the two aspects are both required in order to build a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael*.

A person will not succeed in bringing the spiritual aspect into his marriage if he is not already striving for spiritual growth in all areas. He cannot live a materialistic life and then expect to bring a spiritual connection and element into his marriage.

Many people search for advice and ideas on how to build a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael* because they understand the immense importance of building a true Jewish home, and want to build their home upon the strong foundation of spiritual goals and ambitions. But they forget that spirituality doesn't start and end at marriage; there are other important aspects of spirituality, including Torah, *mitzvos*, *chesed*, and *tefillah*. If a person lives his life solely according to the dictates of the *guf*, then his marriage will also be little more than a physical relationship. The best advice in the world will not be able to help him build a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael*, because he, with his life's view, has removed the foundation of the home from beneath him.

Understanding His Soul and The Soul Of His Spouse

A person is compared to a profound *sefer* (book), as it is written:[\[4\]](#) "*Zeh sefer toldos Adam*". Just as every deep *sefer* demands careful and in-depth study, so do people, in order to understand themselves. First and foremost a person must study and become acquainted with himself, and then with his spouse.

He must know himself. He must know his talents, his thinking patterns, his personality, etc., otherwise he will never be able to grow. The purpose of life is for self-improvement, but if one doesn't understand himself, how can he ever improve?

The great people of our nation reached their high levels of wisdom and understanding by investing a great deal of time and effort towards understanding themselves and their potential. Only when a person understands himself can he grow and reach his perfection.

A person who doesn't understand himself can be compared to a person who wants to build but is unaware that he already has the tools. How can he build when he thinks that he doesn't have the tools?

Similarly, if a person doesn't know himself, he will never be able to build anything true in life.

After marriage, it is even more important for him to know himself because now there is a union of two

souls. If he doesn't know himself, it will be impossible for him to merge together with another soul. This can be compared to a rotting seed planted together with a healthy seed. They can never merge together to become like one.

Most "*shalom bayis*" (marriage) problems are not due to a lack of understanding of their spouse. It is more often because they have difficulty understanding themselves.

However, it is not sufficient to only know and recognize himself. He must also understand and become acquainted with his spouse. He must understand her talents, abilities, nature and personality; otherwise the marriage will fail. They must know how they are similar and how they are different; how they can unite through their similarities and through their differences (such as by compromising with each other and by learning from one another).[\[5\]](#)

When a person doesn't understand his spouse, he will also not understand their language, feelings and requests. They will be like two deaf and dumb people living together without any coherent communication.

In order to get to know each other, there must constantly be conversations taking place between husband and wife. A home that doesn't have these types of conversations will become a home of disputes, and if they don't fight, it is because they have completely lost hope for a fruitful relationship.

When there are healthy conversations taking place in the marriage, then even if issues arise where they do not see eye to eye, they will not shout and scream at one another. They will have a "soul to soul" conversation, and attempt to understand each other's point of view.

There has to be a clear rule established in the home: Every issue, physical or spiritual, large or small, must be discussed in a calm and relaxed manner. With this rule in place, they will come to understand one another, and be able to resolve every difficulty that arises. They will be able to rejoice together with every happy occasion.

When there are conversations taking place in the marriage, aside from getting to know one's spouse, there is an added benefit - he will get to know himself. Most people have a superficial understanding of others, and even less understanding of themselves. Conversations between husband and wife will help people understand themselves, because during the conversation the spouse may reveal a certain trait or quality that he/she sees in you that you weren't aware of.

Conversation in marriage is one of the great assets that a couple has, yet many people do not utilize this great opportunity because they don't realize how vital it is for them to recognize themselves and their spouse.

A perfect recipe for a successful marriage is based on conversations, as well as private times for contemplating and striving to understand themselves and their spouse.

Intelligence and Emotions

It is an acknowledged fact that the intellect is the man's most prominent strength, and the emotions are a woman's main strength. This difference between the genders is the source of many conflicts in marriage, because men and women view various important aspects of life in opposite ways.

The husband shouldn't look down on or disregard his wife's opinions. Although his wife's views are different than his own, by understanding that his wife's views and opinions are emerging from her emotions, he will understand that her opinion has validity. He must learn to incorporate the emotional

aspect that she brings to an issue into his own more rigid and logical perspective, which will ultimately help him make correct decisions. The wife must also understand that the main strength of her husband and the source of his views come from his intellect.

Once this concept is understood, it brings great clarity into the marriage. While these essential differences are still concealed, it will be hard for the husband to understand the opinion and views of his wife. He will think that his wife is being overly emotional, and that she lacks intellect. Similarly, the wife will think that her husband is cold, selfish, and inconsiderate.

But, when both of them understand the viewpoint and opinion of the other, they will then understand that their opinions are not the result of bad *middos* (character traits) or a negative personality, rather that they are built differently and therefore have different perspectives.

Learning From the Nature of the Spouse

The purpose of creation, and in particular, of marriage, is unity. "*V'hoyu l'basar echod*,^[6] they will become one (in marriage)." *Achdus*, unity, doesn't only imply living in peace and harmony, or that they will have a deep relationship with one another. Unity is when their talents and strengths merge and each one learns from the other, until they become like one.

A man, as a rule, uses his intellect and has a natural tendency towards and interest in wisdom, but his emotions are generally dormant most of the time. Therefore, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the Holy One Blessed be He, determined that a man must marry a woman, an emotional being, so that she can teach him what emotions are all about. She will help become more of an emotional being. The purpose of *avodas Hashem* is to strengthen the emotions as it says,^[7] "*Rachmana Liba boyee.*" Hashem wants the heart, the emotions. As long as his emotions are concealed and underdeveloped within him, he is lacking this important element of serving Hashem.

A husband's acknowledgement and respect for his wife's emotions, and a wife's for her husband's intellect is still not enough to create unity between them. The perfection of the marriage is when they both learn from one another. The husband learns how to be emotional, and the wife learns how to think in an intellectual manner. In this way they will truly become one.

We do not mean that the wife should strive to become a *talmid chacham* and learn *Gemara*, rather that her intelligence should test her emotions, to certify that her emotions are not being expressed in the inappropriate areas.

This is true for all character traits which are stronger for one and weaker in the other. They must understand that Hashem has placed them together so they can learn about these different traits from each other. Hashem has performed a *chesed* with him, and He brought the attribute which he was lacking into his home. He must follow the dictum of Chazal^[8]: "Who is wise? He who learns from everyone," and in particular, his spouse. When husband and wife absorb and acquire these different traits from one another, they will be united on a very deep level. It will be a perfect unity, and not the artificial unity found in casual friendships.

A Jewish home is not a place where two people just live together peacefully. It is primarily a place for learning and for growth. As it is written: *Mikablin dein min dein*,^[9] they receive from one another. They teach each other and learn from one another. Every couple is different from one another, each in their own way. Their individual differences have many benefits. Each partner one can learn from the other and acquire the qualities of their spouse. Another benefit is humility. When a person sees a quality in his spouse that he doesn't have, it is often difficult for him to admit it. He is not ready to accept that someone has a quality that he lacks.

The work of man and the greatest level that the husband and wife can achieve is to be able to accept that their spouse has a quality that they don't. It teaches humility. The proud and haughty person will say to himself, "I also have a lot of great qualities of my own." But for those who seek the truth, the recognition that the spouse has a quality that they are lacking will bring them to humility.

Growing from Faults

Until now, we've discussed how one can grow from the positive qualities that he finds in his spouse that are different than his own. Now we will discuss how the couple should react to the differences that they find in their spouse, when the differences are actually faults and imperfections.

Firstly, he should work toward his own improvement and distance himself from these negative attributes. *Chazal* taught, in reference to the *sota*, "A person who sees a *sota* in her disgrace will separate himself from drinking wine."^[10] By seeing how the faults blatantly manifest themselves in his spouse, he will separate himself even further from those faults.

When one sees the faults in his spouse, he can also earn humility; one of the most important traits that a person must attain in life. We discussed above how recognizing the spouse's qualities that he himself lacks will lead him to humility. Now we will add that seeing the spouse's faults will also help him reach greater levels of humility, because when a person finds faults in his spouse, he is humbled by the fact that this flawed person became his spouse. This realization can lead him to true humility.

Another important gain is his acceptance of Hashem and His sovereignty over the world, and especially over himself. The faults that he finds in his spouse are entirely against his will and free choice. He would prefer that these faults not exist at all, but they are there. The improper reaction to this is anger: "I wanted... But I don't have..." However, when a person is wise and his life is directed towards serving Hashem, he will view the challenges and disappointments that he discovers in his spouse as a reminder that the world is not under his control, and not everything goes according to his personal plan. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sends situations and challenges which are contrary to the person's will so he will be forced to recognize, in the depths of his heart, that Hashem runs the world, and not he.

The *guf*, which is not yet ready to accept the spiritual view, will also reach perfection through hardship. The *guf* suffers immensely without respite from the faults of the spouse. This suffering will bring the *guf* to its rectification and improvement. Just as earthenware utensils are purified by breaking them,^[11] the *guf* is broken by the realization that his spouse is not as he expected, and this broken spirit will lead him to personal growth, correction and improvement. In the meanwhile, the *guf* can comfort itself by concentrating upon the spouse's good qualities and strong points, and by trying to ignore and overlook the faults that he sees.

When the inevitable, permanent, faults are revealed at the beginning of a marriage, a spouse will at first be shocked and plagued by dilemma. After a while, he will realize that the faults and opposite natures that he discovers in his spouse are just a challenge through which he must work and perfect himself. When a person reaches this level of developing his spiritual side, the shock diminishes and he realizes that the situation is another opportunity to elevate his soul.

Until then, his life is not a life! Every person has unwanted things in his life, and he must learn how to cope with them. A simple solution is to run away and try to escape the discomfort, but once a person is married, this option is not available. Trying to escape marriage by divorcing is no option at all (except in a few exceptional situations). In his next marriage he will only find other faults, and sometimes even the exact same faults he tried to escape from.

Marriage accentuates the awareness that life is not always a picnic. It is a lot of hard work, of learning to make peace with unpleasant situations, learning how to compromise, overcome desire, and annul the ego. If he cannot come to terms with these truths, he may end up despairing of his marriage. He becomes depressed and miserable, and buries his life before it even begins. The wise person recognizes and understands that this world is a world of *avodah* (working on spiritual improvement), and he girds his loins to do the *avodah* which is expected from him, and he strives to do his *avodah* with joy. Every one of us has the ability to be happy and satisfied in his life, if only we will understand and accept that this world is not a world of pleasure and relaxation. It is a world of challenges and toil, and the ones who will succeed in the end will see the great light – the light of Hashem Yisborach.

Giving in Marriage

Man's *avodah* and purpose in life is to overcome the desire to live only for himself, and to learn to be a giver to others. In this way, he attaches himself to the Creator, Who created the world to give kindness to His creations.

Although there are always opportunities to give to others, a single person is generally not in the position to give continually. When a person marries, however, the marriage state itself demands constant giving. Why do people say things like, "Give to your spouse and you will receive double," or "Give and your spouse will love you"?

A person who hasn't yet understood that the purpose of creation is kindness, is lacking a very important foundation and introduction to life. He is always checking whether it is worthwhile for him to give or not, and whether he is giving more than others are giving him.

A person who understands that his purpose in life is to give, even though he is not on the level to be a perfect giver (because he also desires to receive), nevertheless accepts his role as a giver. He gives generously, with the deep understanding that this is the purpose of life.

The purpose of marriage is to unite with one's spouse. As long as a person is interested only in himself, it is impossible for him to unite with another. Therefore, Hashem created the concept of giving, so that he can break his ego and self-centeredness. Once the ego is broken, he will be able to properly unite with his spouse. The purpose of giving, therefore, isn't only for the benefit of another, but that through his giving, he will break his ego. Difficulties that we experience are only meant to be stepping stones towards the ultimate goal of uniting with the spouse. Once we understand this, our view of marriage changes radically.

Obviously we are not implying that there is no pleasure and joy in marriage, only that there will always be difficulties alongside them. These difficulties are as important to the marriage as the pleasures, because it is through these difficulties that he will be able to unite with his spouse.

When we understand the depths of the Creation and its purpose, we come to understand the great importance of marriage, and especially giving within the marriage. Although it is true that we give because we love our spouse and want the love to increase, this is not the main purpose of giving. The main purpose of giving is to annul one's own ego. When the ego is tamed, love will grow automatically, because there will be no ego to separate them.

Through giving in marriage, we will eventually reach the level of loving every Jew, and loving every creature in Creation. Because the truth is that all Jews are one at their source. The ego, by creating separation and division, blinds us. Once the ego is annulled, love comes naturally. So the purpose of the Jewish home is not only to create an inner union within the home, but also to summon love to all creation.

The Gemara says [12] (Sota): "A person should always study Torah and *mitzvos*, even *shelo l'shmah* [not for the sake of Heaven] because eventually he will keep the *mitzvos l'shmah* [for the sake of Heaven]." The *Michtav M'Eliyahu* [13] explains that a person must always have at least some elements of *l'shma*, proper intentions, within his *shelo l'shmah*.

In regards to our topic, when one gives to his spouse with the intention of receiving in return, he is giving *shelo l'shmah*, giving in order to gain. When one gives without any plan to receive, this is considered giving *l'shmah*. But even when a person is not yet on the level of pure giving, he must also have some element of *l'shmah*, pure concern and love, in his giving, even though he still has self-interests and thoughts of gain when he gives. Otherwise, his home becomes a business of give and take and not a Jewish home.

One of the primary purposes of giving is to train ourselves to disengage from our ego. When we give in order to receive, we forfeit this benefit, because our giving is really taking. Therefore, there must always be some element of purity and caring in giving to our spouse. Through this small portal of giving *l'shmah*, we can break the ego by uniting with our spouse.

Openness of the Soul

The home we grow up in has its own culture. Each one of us becomes accustomed to particular behaviors and patterns that we learn from our childhood home. When a person marries, he will often find that his spouse's lifestyle patterns are entirely different than his own. It is very hard for him to get used to his new home and surroundings, because it is so different from what he was used to, and because he often feels that the lifestyle and behaviors of his new home are inferior in comparison to those from his childhood home.

Let us think about the depths of this concept.

The nature of man is limited, and his purpose and goal is to connect to Hashem, Who has no boundaries. Therefore, a person's desire, both in his conscious and subconscious mind, is to overcome the boundaries of life. He wants to be able to cross rivers and oceans, to rise above the hemisphere and to reach the moon and stars and heavenly beings. All of this is derived from the inner desire to break all boundaries and connect with the eternal.

With this in mind, we can understand why *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created man with the challenge which requires him to enter into a different home and live in a place where there are customs and habits that he is not used to. The purpose is to train him to open his horizons and not limit himself. It trains him to have an open mind and soul to every situation (as long as it is not contrary to the holy Torah).

A person who is not open to these changes suffers immensely. He feels every change jabs him like a prod from a sword. He was accustomed to a certain lifestyle and he doesn't want it to change. His *avodah* is to free himself from all negative restrictions. He should not feel tied down to anything except *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah. He shouldn't feel bound to one particular house, to specific objects, to a certain place, to one group of people, or one set of customs. He must learn to open up and to flow with life according to the will of the Creator, and to follow its path.

A person who reaches this level of openness will feel that his soul is redeemed. Those who do not attain this understanding do not understand its potential.

There are people who will only sleep on a certain type of bed, only cover themselves with a certain type of blanket, only use a certain brand of towel, they only eat certain kinds of foods, and they only live in a neighborhood where they will have friends that are similar to them. A life such as this closes off the inner light of the soul.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave man many opportunities to free himself from this closed lifestyle. One of the powerful tools He gave is marriage, because in marriage, a person is forced to learn to get along with a different lifestyle.

An unwise person will try to explain to his spouse why his lifestyle and habits are better, and convince his spouse to follow them. But once he recognizes how limited his soul is, he will be happy to have the opportunity to open up and broaden his horizons. We are not referring to the customs and lifestyles which are contrary to the Torah and the path of our forefathers; rather we are referring to minor and insignificant changes, related to style and mannerisms.

It is not wise for a person to be stubborn and to insist upon maintaining a particular lifestyle. This attitude can be a source of tension and discomfort in the home. The more a person trains himself to be flexible in regards to all areas of life which are not of great importance, the more relaxed and comfortable his home will be. Once he has proven himself to be flexible and agreeable, if there is a particular custom from his earlier life that is very important to him, and he feels he must maintain it, he can insist on it.

Every member of a family is obligated to contribute in creating an atmosphere of calmness and pleasantness in the home, pressure-free, where not every small thing becomes a great issue. Being flexible and learning to accept changes will help bring about this atmosphere into the home.

The Yoke of a Jewish Home

Chazal taught: "It is good for a person to accept the yoke in his youth,' this is referring to the yoke of a wife."[\[14\]](#)

Before marriage, a person is free to do as he desires, without anyone holding him back. And even if someone is, they are not holding him back strongly and definitely. But marriage is a different story. After marriage, he is bound to his home. Building a home is a combination of joy and pleasure with responsibilities and limitations, the yoke of marriage.

A person's primary role in life is to accept upon himself the *Oi Malchus Shamayim* (Yoke of Heaven). The yoke of marriage helps him understand this awesome concept. The many responsibilities of marriage-- caring for the spouse, earning a living, raising a family, leading the home, etc. - train the person to understand what responsibility means, and what it means to accept the *Oi Malchus Shamayim*.

The responsibilities of life may appear to him at first as disturbances. He will soon realize that these responsibilities are for his benefit, in helping him to accept the *Oi Malchus Shamayim*.

In the *sefarim hakedoshim*, the husband is referred to as *koach*, potential, and the wife is referred to as *po'al*, (realization of that potential). In other words, marriage is the arena where man's potential can be developed and revealed. It is not an opportunity for relaxation. Marriage takes work, and it is this effort that will ultimately help him develop and express his true potential.

Common Situations in Marriage

Let us explore some common marriage scenarios and demonstrate how they can help the person grow spiritually and develop his potential.

It often happens in marriage that one spouse will ask the other for a few moments to discuss a matter which is bothering them. But, because life is so stressful and busy, people are often tempted to answer, "Not now. I am busy. And I already know what you want to say..."

Once it is understood that marriage is an opportunity to develop his potential, he will consider his spouse's request for conversation as an opportunity to develop his patience, to learn how to listen, and how to understand and feel for his fellow man. Marriage is a place where a person can develop his good *middos*.

Another example: Throughout one's life, a person encounters various situations which are contrary to his desires, and he is tempted to become angry. He must train himself to overcome his anger. These moments can happen anywhere, but they happen more often in marriage because of the many issues, small and large, that the couple has to deal with.

If he is impatient, and he gets angry, or worse, he yells and shouts or says harsh words to his spouse, then he is destroying the foundations of his home. He must remember that he came to the world to work on himself and to correct his behavior, and marriage is the ideal arena for growth and self development. There is no place in marriage for anger and bad *middos* (behavior).

Sometimes the wife must take her husband's place, like when he is traveling, and sometimes the husband must take over the role of the wife, like when the wife gives birth and is not able to run the home. These can be very difficult and stressful times, but they can also be an opportunity for growth. They will learn to appreciate the efforts of their spouse.

People usually do not realize how much their spouse does for them. It is hard for a husband to recognize how much effort his wife expends in caring for the children and tending the home, and likewise, the wife doesn't fully understand the great role and responsibility the husband undertakes in the home.

The majority of the problems in life, and in particular those which arise in marriage, evolve from an incorrect view of life, where people are looking for comfort, pleasure and honor. When people want others to love and appreciate them, but they are not interested in giving to others, there is no possibility of self-improvement.

However, the purpose of life, and in particular, the purpose of marriage, is for spiritual growth. When a person views life and marriage in this way, then no matter what happens to him, he will always be able to think of and find ways for each situation to help him grow.

Balancing the Needs of Body and Soul

When a person marries, the soul sees the marriage as a great opportunity to increase its *emunah*. It uses the marriage as an opportunity to constantly remind itself of concepts in *emunah*, such as: "This is my spouse, who was destined for me from heaven" and "The qualities that my spouse has, and his faults, are exactly the qualities and faults that the Creator gave me for my needs and perfection..." For the *neshamah*, the marriage is a world of *emunah*.

The body sees marriage as an open field for pleasure and enjoyment. Physical pleasures, love and romance and all other forms of pleasure and enjoyments are its goal and desire.

If a person would only accept the view of the *neshamah*, the view of *emunah* without physical enjoyments at all, he will eventually collapse emotionally. Although the *neshamah* is having great bliss and enjoyment from her pure *emunah*, the physical body and its natural needs also need fulfillment. He is after all a body, not an angel, living in heaven. Therefore, physical pleasure is also essential in marriage.

However, if a person focuses only on the physical pleasures of the body, he will bury the light of the soul, and cause the soul's light to diminish until it will barely be seen and felt at all. Some people

think that marriage is purely physical, and in this they are mistaken. That is not at all the Jewish view of marriage. Some think the opposite that marriage is purely spiritual, but they are also making a big mistake. Those who actively seek spirituality are usually the ones who make this mistake. Sometimes, the people who have only recently accepted the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos* also think this way, and they assume that the Torah forbids and discourages all forms of physical enjoyments.

The correct way in marriage is to make the spiritual primary and to place the physical needs in their right perspective. While it's true that man's service in life is to continually sharpen both his awareness of spirituality and the vanity of physicality, he must remember that physicality also has an important place, and that physical needs must also be fulfilled.

Therefore, just as it is very important to build the spiritual connection between husband and wife, it is likewise important to create a physical bond. Chazal [15] tell us that the wife should make herself beautiful before her husband, and give recommendations for both the husband and wife in order to enhance the physical connection between them, because of its great importance. However, everything must be in the right proportion, with the spiritual being the primary emphasis in the marriage and the physical secondary. When the body becomes the focal point in the marriage, it will be the destruction of the home.

Marriage has the potential to fulfill both the needs of the *neshamah* and the needs of the body. A person must know what his spiritual needs are and what his physical needs are, and then determine how to balance their fulfillment between them.[16] The balance will depend upon the level of each individual. If his *neshamah* is more revealed within him, his body will automatically need less. On the other hand, if his soul is concealed within him, his physical needs will increase. When the right balance is found, the home will be built according to the ways of the Torah and the Jewish nation.

Marriage Is a Mixture of Responsibility and Pleasure

As we've mentioned earlier, Chazal call marriage a yoke, which is a mixture of responsibility and pleasure. This is also true, on a deeper level, of life in general. Life is a combination of toil, responsibility and pleasure. If a person will try to find only pleasure in his life, he will not succeed. But if he will view life as only work and hardships, without any pleasures at all, he will eventually collapse, because everyone needs his portion of enjoyment in life to derive his *chiyus* (spirit of life).

Some people will find pleasure from physicality, others will find it in spirituality, but everyone needs their portion of pleasure and enjoyment in life. A man who has no enjoyment at all is not really living. Although he appears to be alive, walking around the world and doing things, he is really dead inside, totally lacking *chiyus*.

Except for great *tzaddikim*, even a person whose main enjoyment is from spirituality will not be completely satisfied with only his spiritual enjoyments. He will also need some (although perhaps not very much) physical satisfaction. These concepts are true in regards to all aspects of life, and especially in marriage.

Although the main *chiyus* and enjoyment in marriage should be from their spiritual connection, it cannot and should not be their entire connection. Marriage should also provide physical fulfillment, if only the minimum amount.

Let us study this more:

When a person does not enjoy something, he is not really connected to it. The importance of pleasure in creating connection is relevant to the physical and the spiritual aspects of life. If a person keeps *mitzvos* without pleasure, for example, he is lacking attachment to the *mitzvos*. Someone who prays

without pleasure is not fully connected to the *tefillah* and to the Creator to Whom he is praying. Someone who derives no pleasure from learning Torah is lacking an inner connection to the Torah. Similarly, when a person doesn't enjoy something that is physical, he is not connected to it.

These concepts are also related to marriage.

As we discussed and elaborated upon before, marriage is a connection of a *neshamah* with a *neshamah* and a *guf* with a *guf*. If the couple lacks a spiritual connection, then they are lacking in their connection in their marriage. Similarly, if they do not derive any physical pleasure at all from the marriage, then they are also lacking in their physical connection.

The pleasure of the *guf* is a step towards creating and strengthening their union, and the vehicle for bringing forth the depth of their relationship. When the pleasures are only physical, the relationship lacks holiness. When the physical connection is a vehicle for their union, then the body is a utensil of the *neshamah*, and it is a holy relationship.

There is a delicate issue which we need to add. When a person enjoys the physicality as an essence and purpose for itself, it is considered a negative pleasure. The pleasure should come from the enhancement of the relationship that is taking place on a physical level. Hashem's desire is that the couple should unite on both levels and derive pleasure from their connection. Everyone needs physical pleasure, each according to his level, but it should never be seen as the purpose of the marriage. The purpose of the marriage is to connect and become like one.

Limiting the Extent of Physical Pleasure

One of the grave mistakes occurring in our generation is using physical relations as a means without an end, without limits and boundaries. The source of their mistake is because they do not know that the purpose for the physical relationship is to create a deep connection between the couple, and not for the physical sensation by itself.

When it is clear that the purpose for physical pleasure is to unite a couple and to make them like one, it will also be clear that the other spouse's pleasure is just as important as his own, in order to unite them. Therefore, he should be interested in giving pleasure, not in receiving.

Included within these ideas is the concept that a person must limit the extent of his physical pleasure, and use it solely for the needs of his *guf* in order to unite with his spouse and to make them like one. One must never ever exceed this boundary, which varies from person to person. The same person may have different needs at different times, and therefore there is always a very fine line, which many people don't recognize. There are those who draw themselves too far towards physicality, beyond their required need, and they lose the light of holiness in their homes, *rachmanah l'tzlan*. And there are people who draw themselves too far to the side of holiness and the *neshamah*, and thereby they loosen the connection with the body, and the physical connection between husband and wife.

The Inner Connection with Spirituality

If a person is very steeped in his physical pleasures, and his soul is not connected to spirituality even though he also studies Torah most of the day, *davens* and is careful with the *mitzvos*, he will be excessively drawn to the physical aspects of marriage. He will feel perfectly justified because he doesn't find any source in *halachah* which forbids his behaviors.

He doesn't realize that his entire life is built upon a mistake. He doesn't know because he doesn't have an inner connection to spirituality. Although there is an external connection to spirituality, because he is learning and keeping the *mitzvos*, he lacks the essential inner connection of holiness.

He uses physicality for pleasure and *chiyus*. He is overdoing the physical relationship in the marriage since he doesn't have a spiritual connection with Hashem, and therefore he exaggerates when he seeks physical sensations.

When a person is connected to the Torah and to the Giver of the Torah, his body is satisfied with even a minimum amount of physicality, and the minimum is sufficient to create a connection between him and his spouse. When this spiritual connection is missing, then his main enjoyment comes from different forms of physicality, and especially the physicality of the marriage.

As long as the person lacks a strong connection to spirituality, his marriage is in danger, because he will automatically be drawn towards physicality.

Some people claim that since we are living in a very low generation, and the pictures and images which are shown outside without shame arouse feelings of physicality, we have no choice but to permit the person to connect strongly to the physicality of marriage, as long as it is in a permitted manner.

It's a strong point. But the only way it can work is if there is a guarantee that he will immediately return to his strong connection to spirituality once he has calmed his inner drives. Most people, however, have a very weak connection to spirituality. If we will permit them to have a stronger connection with physicality, we have detached them even further from spirituality. How will they ever return?

When the physical pleasures of marriage are carried out properly, with *kedushah* and true unity, husband and wife will feel closer to one another and to the Creator.

The Paradigm of a Loving Couple

Shlomo Hamelech wrote his holy *sefer Shir Hashirim* as a *mashal* (analogy) of a loving couple, because the relationship between husband and wife corresponds to the very holy relationship between the Jewish nation and their Father in Heaven.

When a couple implants spirituality into their marriage, and build their marriage with spiritual goals and ideals, then their marriage will be a constant *mashal*, a constant model of the holy marriage between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the Jewish nation. Their home can serve as a reminder of the great spiritual relationship (Hashem's relationship with the Jewish nation) that their marriage represents.

When the couple are very spiritual, this correlation will easily and automatically be recalled at every stage of their marriage. If their spiritual level is lower, they will have to think about it, to remind themselves of the great relationship that their marriage represents.

It is crucial to always bring the aspect of holiness and spirituality into marriage, because it is a holy and spiritual entity. The spiritual awareness they bring will aid them and direct them in almost every step of their marriage to a perfect and holy relationship, and then, through every situation, they will draw each other closer together and closer to Hashem.

[1] This section was adapted from the author's hebrew *sefer*, *Da Es Atzmecha*. Rabbi Moshe Weinberger (Rav of Congregation Aish Kodesh in Woodmere, NY) introduced this chapter with the following explanation: "This section applies to all relationships but mostly, it applies to the relationship of marriage. To study this section is a great

hachana (preparation) for someone who is about to get married, and it is a very important and valuable reminder to those who already have the *zechus* of being married. It teaches us the Torah definition of marriage. Most of us, unfortunately, haven't had sufficient exposure to the Torah definition of marriage. We may go to a few *shiurim* here and there, but other than that, our conception of marriage is formed from ideas which are foreign to the Torah. We must do whatever we can to give our children the *zechus* of experiencing the feeling of security that comes from being raised in a loving home, by parents who love and respect each other. Those of us who have been fortunate to have parents who had a beautiful marriage and truly cared and respected each other enjoy a very precious commodity. We must give this commodity to our children as well." Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, has given several hundred *shiurim* on the author's various *sefarim*. They are available as audio files at www.ravmosheweinberger.com [1]

[2] Sotah 2b

[3] [Editor's Note: Once again, the ideal way is to combine both approaches in the marriage. He should have the view of the neshamah and recognize that everything is destined. This realization should give him great encouragement and ability to overcome the difficulties. But at the same time, he must also follow the opinion of the *guf* and seek ways to improve the situation the best he can.]

[4] Bereishis 5:1

[5] As discussed in the chapter of *Getting to Know Your Home* "Uniting the Emotions with the Intellect".

[6] Bereishis 2:24

[7] Sanhedrin 106b

[8] Avos 4:1

[9] Tikunei Zohar 39a

[10] Sota 2a

[11] Keilim Ch. 2, Mishnah 1

[12] Sota 42b

[13] In the chapter of *Getting to Know Your Home* entitled "No Reward in This World"

[14] *Eichah Rabba* 3:27

[15] Shabbos 64b

[16] See Reishis Chochma - Shaar haKedushah Chapter 16 Section 16 (Waldman Edition)

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Links

[1] <http://www.ravmosheweinberger.com>