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## Getting to Know Your Family - 01 New Perspective On Your Marriage

### ***Editor's Introduction***

***Getting To Know Your Family*** is a second take from the Rav on marriage and raising children. It is a series of 9 classes given to *Kolel* men in the summer of 5773.

Those who have read "***Getting To Know Your Home***" are familiar with the Rav's deep approach to family life, to infuse the spiritual dimension into our closest relationships, with focus on practical growth. This is the same idea with ***Getting To Know Your Family***.

However, the approach of this sefer towards marriage is a bit different. This series of 9 classes was given to *Kolel* Men, geared towards those who really want to grow and strive for self-perfection. The material here is sharper, heavier, and not for the faint of heart. If you're ready for hard-core *mussar*, this sefer is for you - if you seek feel-good inspiration, this sefer is not recommended. It is a sefer that requires us to really think, reevaluate our priorities and values, and ask ourselves if we really are living by what we know is correct.

Another difference between this *sefer* and ***Getting To Know Your Home*** is that this one is perhaps a more down-to-earth and goes straight to the punch (Hope you can handle those punches!)

**(Note: These *shiurim* were given to men, so women are kindly asked to please not read this - it will certainly not enhance *shalom bayis* if women do.)**

**Women who seek guidance in their marriage can refer to the Rav's previous sefer on marriage, [Da Es Baisecha](#), [1][Getting To Know Your Home](#) [1].)**

### ***Going Back In Time***

We will learn a little about the *sugya* (topic) of *eizer k'negdo* (the helpmate who is the opposite of man) - what marriage is, as seen through the pure lens of our holy Chazal, in an inner way.

Let's ask a very simple question. What is the purpose of getting married? Why should a man marry a woman?

We recite in Kaballas Shabbos, "*Sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah*" - The end of actions if first with

thought.” Before we go into anything we do, we have to first think about what it is that we are getting involved in. So the first thing we have to know is: What is the purpose of marriage?[\[1\]](#)

When we look for a *shidduch* (spouse), did we do so because we have a “*mitzvah*” to look for a wife, or because we simply wanted to have a wife? We know that we are commanded to get married, but is that the actual reason we got married? We know that we did not really get married because the Torah says so. We had some personal reason why we got married, being that we worry for ourselves and are concerned for ourselves.

There are all kinds of intellectual give-and-take discussions that exist about marriage, and all kinds of definitions that people have about it. But our question is: What, practically speaking, is the reason that each of us gets married?

If we are honest with ourselves, we know that none of us gets married for a lofty reason. When we each stood under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy), we were not thinking of any spiritual reason to get married. We were thinking about how it would somehow be good for ourselves. So we got married for ourselves - and not because it was a *mitzvah*. That is the reality.

Here is another question: theoretically, if we could have a child without having to be married, would we still get married? We would. So we didn’t just get married to have children.

So what is the reason that we get married? Even if the Torah wouldn’t command us to get married, would we still get married? We would - why?

So altogether, we present three questions here.

- 1) What is the necessity to get married? (Write down all the reasons you think you should get married).
- 2) Why did I, personally, get married?
- 3) If I would get married today with what I know now, why would I get married?

### ***Finding The Root of Marital Issues***

The root of problems in marriage can be traced to the beginning point of our problem. When we figure out what our beginning point of marriage is - the reason why we get married - we will be able to then solve problems in marriage. This is because all of the problems are really rooted in that one point. “*A wise person’s eyes are in his head*” - when we get to the beginning point, we can see where all the problems began.

If we would know the reason that we got married, **90% of marital problems** would go away on their own. A person who never thinks, though, will wonder after 2 years of being married why he has problems. But a person who does think will already know beforehand what causes problems in marriage, and then he will know how to get to the root of the problems.

The problems are not because the husband and wife clash with each other. It’s because something was misunderstood to begin with.

### ***Why Do We Live?***

What we really need to think is: “**Why do I live?**”

This is a point that one needs to think about before he thinks about why he gets married. It is the beginning that comes before the beginning of marriage. The Mishnah in Avos says that 18 years of age is the time to get married. Before that, though, is Torah and mitzvos. We can learn from this that if a person thinks why he has to get married but he doesn't know why he is living in the first place, it's as if he's starting from the middle of the story.

One has to know, clearly, why he is living. There is a goal which we are living for, and we must know that goal. One of the major, central ways to get to the goal of life is, through marriage.

### ***Getting Along With Yourself First***

Before marriage, people seek guidance for marriage, how to get along with a spouse. What about first learning how to get along with oneself? Shouldn't that come before learning how to get along with the spouse? Don't you first need to get along with yourself before you can learn how to get along with another?

People think that as long as they get the right *shidduch* and then everything will be fine. A person seeks a wife who will be pleasant to live with, someone who will make his life easier, someone who will help him. But this is all a fantasy. It doesn't happen in any home. Problems then occur in the marriage, and the person is bewildered how this could happen.

So we have to get to the root of this. The words here may be hard to accept, and perhaps you are looking for something different to hear, such as some practical tips to help your marriage.

Maybe you want each class to end off with a nice piece of practical advice, such as how you can calm down the yelling in the house and how you can make the house clean. Each person has his own idea of what he would like in his home. But we need to think truthfully. If a person is clear in the reason of why he is living on this world, he will be able to build a solid home upon that.

There are people who don't even know why they are living at all. A person has to make sure he knows why he is living, before he begins marriage. Building a successful marriage can only happen after a person is clear in the reason of why he is living.

So our first question we need to ask ourselves, before we work on our marriage, is: "For what reason are we living?" Whether we are 18 years old or before, or whether we are 90 years old, why are we living? If we know why we are living, we can see how marriage fits into the picture.

So let's ask ourselves this very simple question: For what do we live for?

### ***The Answer***

We "know" the answer: we were created to become close to Hashem. However, this takes hard work. It is *avodah*. It requires us to purify our entire being - our body, or soul, our middos, our speech, our thoughts. The goal is to reach closeness with Hashem, and the ways to get there is through a certain purification process, which spans all of our lifetime.

### ***Seeking Comfort Vs. Being Prepared To Work Hard***

So the next question we need to ask ourselves is: are we realizing that we live for that purpose we know we are here for - the fact that we are here on this world to we to purify our souls - or are we just trying to seek comfort in our life?

For example, when we go to *shul* in the morning, are we realizing that this purifies our existence

more? Intellectually we might know about this, but do we feel that way? When we learn Torah and do mitzvos, do we feel that this is purifying us more and more, or are we doing them because it's comfortable for us?

Usually, if we ask this question to anyone, there is no definite answer. Most people will not give a definite 'Yes' or 'No'. Only a few people are thinking a lot and very aware.

When a person gets married, he naturally sees that it is hard work. If he did not know beforehand that this will require hard work, and he takes life as it comes, then he will have a hard time in marriage.

How does he deal with the problems he encounters? It is most difficult when a person doesn't know why he is living and how marriage is a part of that.

The hard work we need in marriage is always changing its colors. Your personality can change, your wife's personality can change, and your children are growing up. Each of these situations brings a different kind of hard work for you. If a person would know that before he got married, his marriage would be a lot better, because he would have mature perspective towards it.

But if a person got married and didn't realize that marriage is going to take hard work, and he got married for the sake of enjoyment - and most people are getting married for this reason - life will be very difficult.

The home is part of life. The issue is how a person understands why he is living. A person who works for a living gets up in the morning and he davens, and then he goes to work, thinking that his "work" starts when he goes to work. But "work" really began with *davening*, because everything needs to be seen as "work"!

### ***The Root Perspective Towards Marriage***

When we know life is about *avodah* - inner work - we still might have questions and issues of how to make our marriage better, but at least we will have the root understanding towards marriage, that it is *avodah*.

Without this perspective, a person might ask another for advice in his marriage and he'll be told: "You want her to be nice to you? Give to her, and you'll see that she'll give you back double of what you give her. You don't lose out by giving in your marriage; you will only gain." This is a nice piece of advice, but it makes marriage seem like a business deal! Is this what marriage is about? You are nice to me, and I'll be nice to you?

What we are getting at here is very simple, but the words here will appear foreign for one who takes life as it comes and he lives life as he sees fit, without understanding that life is about working hard. What will happen when he gets married? He won't be able to live as he was used to. No two people are the same, due to their differing personalities, natures, desires, thoughts, and ways of life. He and his wife are going to clash with their different ways of living, and he won't be able to handle it.

A person might know he has inner contradictions within his own self, but he learns how to put up with himself, more or less. He learns how to 'go with the flow'. But it doesn't work that way in marriage. When husband and wife encounter friction, it won't be enough if the husband just decides he will nullify himself to his wife. Just because he nullifies doesn't himself doesn't mean she will nullify herself to him. He will find life with her to be unbearable, when he just tries to go along with the flow of life and not really work hard.

If one is already aware of the inner contradictions in his own soul and he has learned how to deal with

his own self, he will be able to have a mature outlook towards marriage. He has realized long before marriage that life is about growth and dealing with challenges, and he views marriage as a part of this. He does not view marriage as a new concept. He views it as another step in the growth process that is life.

Of course, marriage contains many new kinds of situations that a person has never faced, and there are parts of marriage which make every person struggle, but it can still be viewed as a continuation of the challenges we must grow from in our life, as opposed to something completely new that we have never navigated before.

### ***In Summary***

Thus, to summarize, before one gets married, he first has to be clear why he lives. It must also be clear to a person that life is about *avodah*, inner work. When we *daven*, learn, and do *chessed*, it is all *avodah*.

This does not mean, of course, that life is all about hard and difficult work and that there is no pleasure in life. It can definitely be pleasant, but it is just that we must see it as *avodah*. One has to realize that he is here to work on something. It is written, "*Man was born to toil.*" When this is the perspective, and when one is aware of this before marriage, he has gotten married with the correct mindset.

If not, a person thinks that life is about seeking comfort, and that is how he erroneously enters marriage. Most people are in fact getting married with this mindset.

A boy getting married may very well be living a very blissful and comfortable life: he is known as a *masmid* (diligent in his studies), as a *Yarei Shomayim* (G-d fearing), someone who *davens* with *kavanah* (prays with concentration), (and by the way, only Hashem knows what he's really davening for); and the girl is known to have a good heart and to be modest and G-d fearing – and then they get married – and what happens? They discover about each other that it's not quite what they were told. How do they deal with it...?

### ***Marriage Involves Self-Improvement In All Areas***

Marriage is even hard for one who works on his *middos* (character traits), when he doesn't have the right perspective we have described, towards marriage.

Now, if someone didn't work on his *middos* before marriage, he will of course have it a lot harder when he gets married; we know many people like that. But even if a person did work on his *middos* before he got married, marriage can still be very hard for him, when he doesn't realize that marriage will require *avodah*.

For example, if a person is always working on his trait of humility, how will he be able to restrain himself from getting angry when it's the tenth time that his anger is tested in one day? In marriage, **all** of a person's *middos* are tested. Things are constantly happening against our will. The children always do things their parents don't like. Erev Shabbos and Erev Pesach are even more stressful times. These situations test all of our *middos*, not just our humility.

So 'working on our *middos*' is not either enough to have a successful marriage, because there is only so much that we can do to improve ourselves. At a certain point, we become flustered.

Thus, one has to realize that life is *avodah*, and that marriage is part of the *avodah* in life. The fact that life is *avodah* \hard work is not a side point – it is what life is all about.

## ***Hard Work and Pleasure In The Home***

Of course, *avodah* is not all there is to life. Life also contains pleasure. *Avodah* contains pleasure as well. The home has in it pleasure and joy as well, along with the *avodah* that it requires. It is not only *avodah*. If it was only *avodah*, a person walking to his *chuppah* would feel like he's walking towards his grave.

On the other extreme, there are those who are so immersed in the *simcha* and blissful thought of getting married that they get a false notion that marriage is entirely about joy, comfort and pleasantness. But it is not entirely *simcha*. When one doesn't understand that, he thinks everything will be fine and wonderful, and then he finds out the hard way.

But the true perspective is that life is a fusion of ***avodah*** together with ***simcha*** happiness and ***neimus*** pleasantness. Some things come across to us as totally pleasant, some things appear to be only hard work, and in each thing we need to see both the hard work and the joy. We need a balance. If we look to see only how each thing is pleasant and we don't want to agree that there is hard work too, we are fooling ourselves and we will find out the hard way. Yet, if we only see everything as *avodah* and with no joy in it, then we can't survive, because we cannot survive without joy.

When this is the perspective towards marriage, the beginning of marriage will be much different.

### ***'Giving' In Marriage***

Some people think that marriage is entirely about 'giving'. But how much can you give already...? Clearly, then, marriage cannot be based entirely on the *middah* of giving, though it is certainly essential in marriage.[\[2\]](#)

What is the difference between viewing the home as a place to give, with viewing the home as a place of *avodah*? Here is how you can see a difference. If you give and give and give to your family, how will you deal with it if you're not getting back in return? You will suffer at this and you won't be able to handle the disappointment.

So instead, view the home as being as place of *avodah*, and then you see everything in terms of *avodah*. When you view the home as *avodah*, you develop the ability to have *savlanus*, to endure suffering.

*Avodah* is essentially about developing the power to endure when things don't go your way. Giving is a different power in the soul: it is the ability to nurture others. They are both vital powers of our soul, but the power of endurance is more essential to the marriage than the power of giving. We see this from the fact that one can give and give in his marriage, but can he endure the fact that he gives when he doesn't get back? He won't be able to. But if he knows how to endure - because he views giving as part of *avodah* and not as a purpose unto itself - then he will be able to endure, even if he 'gives' and doesn't 'get back'.

Today there's a lot of emphasis today about the concept of 'giving' in marriage, as if it is everything, and the reason for this is because in today's times, most people are living superficially before marriage and are not used to 'giving', thus they have to be taught that in marriage you need to start giving. But although it is true that giving must become a major part of our life, we must know that life is not entirely about giving.

Our life is about *avodah*, being prepared to work hard on ourselves to improve. Giving can certainly be seen as part of the context of *avodah*, not as a separate goal unto itself.

If one would live his entire life entirely *lishmah* (for the sake of Heaven), then perhaps he does everything in order to give to others, and he would be able to view marriage as being entirely giving. But if one does not live entirely *lishmah* – which is our average situation – then he cannot make ‘giving’ into his entire life and marriage, or else he will get flustered.

So to begin working on our marriage, let’s first erase the notion that marriage is all about “giving”. The concept of “giving” sounds like a lofty idea, and perhaps we can write about it in a *sefer*, but realistically speaking, you cannot give all day to your family 24|7. There is no such person who can give so much. You don’t suddenly transform when you come into your home and become a “giver” - even if you were doing *chessed* (kindness) all day.

But when a person views life as being *avodah*, as being hard work, he will be able to view marriage as a part of this, and this will begin a true perspective towards marriage and enable him to succeed in it.

### ***In Conclusion***

Understandably, at this point, when we have just begun the discussion here, we won’t know how to take something practical out of this concept, but let it suffice as the beginning chapter to serve as the root which we will build upon in the coming chapters, with the help of Hashem.

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[1] During the shiur, the listeners were perplexed at what the Rav meant with this question, and an animated discussion ensued: *“Is it because it says in the Torah, “And they shall become one flesh”? That was applicable to Adam HaRishon [who was on a very high level]. But what about us? What is the reason that we get married? Is it because we have a mitzvah to have children? Is getting married all about having children? Clearly not. Is it because we have to bestow good upon others, and the way to accomplish this is through marriage? If that was the reason, we wouldn’t need to get married for that. We can bestow good on our friends in the Beis Midrash. If you counter that the home is the only true place to bestow good upon others, because that is where you do it for the sake of Heaven, this is not either specific to the home. You can be kind to others for the sake of Heaven even if you’re not married. It should be clear to us that none of us got married for any of the above reasons. We wanted what is best for ourselves. We worried for ourselves – and therefore, we sought a marriage partner for our own good. We started dating because we felt that it would somehow be good and pleasant to get married – each for his own reasons. There are also many people who start dating simply because they are embarrassed of society if they don’t start.*

[2] Editor’s Note: *It is well-known that Rav Dessler zt”l would emphasize the importance of becoming a ‘giver’ in marriage (see ‘Strive for Truth’ vol. I, “Essay on Loving Kindness”); The Rav certainly validates this point and is in full agreement with the words of Rav Dessler, but his point is to tell us that it isn’t everything, and it is part of a larger goal in marriage.*

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**Source:** <https://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-family-01-new-perspective-your-marriage>

#### **Links**

[1] <https://bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.beischa>

