RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS BEREISHIS

WORK IN PROGRESS

The Torah begins with the words, "*Bereishis bara Elokim*." The Shineve Rov zt"l in Divrei Yechezkel points out that the last letters of these three words spell out the word *"emes,"* but not in the correct order. If we start with the second word, *"bara Elokim es,"* the final letters do spell *emes* in the proper sequence. This teaches us that when a person works on the *middah* of truth, he may not always see results right away. However, he should continue to work on it even if it isn't yet as it should be. Over time, Hashem will help and he will achieve success. [The Shineve Rov is actually famous for being outstanding in the *middah* of Emes].

The Divrei Yechezkel compares building one's character to creating a physical structure. Surely, a structure must be built in the proper order: beginning with the foundation, then the walls, then the roof. It can't be done any other way. But when you begin purchasing the building materials, you don't have to buy the foundation first. If you find a good deal on roof shingles, you can buy it immediately. Only the actual building must be done in the right order.

There's something about not always getting it right, or in the right order, right away.

It's interesting that we learn this regarding *emes*. There really is no such a thing as half a truth. Half a truth is not truthful, but still we're taught to begin working until eventually we'll get it right. People get discouraged in many areas, not just in Emes. "I'm not getting it right *yet*, and it's just not working." But the Torah teaches us an important lesson. There are things that you have to work on, even if you don't get it right at first. Slowly, things will fall into place.

Sometimes people work very hard on building their homes, their *shalom bayis* and *chinuch*, and things aren't as they should be. They look at other people who seem to be doing so well. But it's important to continue putting in the work even if things aren't right at first, and *b'ezras Hashem*, things will eventually fall into place. *Shalom bayis* and *chinuch* take time and work, and we have to be patient to see the results.

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

Many singles brought up in today's Western culture are influenced by the secular view on marriage, as I was growing up in the 60's during the feminist movement. The Torah view of a healthy marriage is confusing to many. Is the woman second fiddle? Insignificant? Must she be subservient to her husband in all areas? Is she entitled to her own opinion? Is she *mechuyav* to honor him as a parent and never disagree?

I have been told that a woman needs to view her husband as a king. I know that makes her the queen, but how does that play out in real life? I assume that personality differences do come into play. Is that correct?

Can you please clarify the Torah view of the role of a husband and the role of a wife?

Answer:

This is an eye-opening letter which actually contains several questions. We'll use it as a springboard and attempt to gain some clarity on this topic.

We are definitely influenced by culture and society and the different things we hear on the street. Yet, we have to remember what is Torah and what is not Torah. The Torah is Hashem's blueprint for the way the world should be run. When we read and hear things, it's important to know what to be attracted to and what to stay away from. If it's not Torah'dig, it's not working for you even if you think it is.

When it comes to gender roles, male and female, there is clear Torah guidance. One of the tortures of Mitzrayim was that they made the men do what women were supposed to do and vice versa (Sotah 11b). In the 60's, people thought that was bliss. But it's torture. It's playing with the foundations Hashem set for the world. Not understanding the role one is supposed to play is a form of torture, regardless of how it is presented in secular media.

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You mention the respect a woman should have for her husband. I discussed this in Torah Lessons for the Home on Parshas Chayei Sarah – 5779 [available by email request]. Respect should be mutual and husband and wife should respect each other. As the Rambam rules *"Mechabdah yoser m'gufo - he should honor her more than himself"*. Still, a woman does have to respect her husband more, as a father figure, as I explained there in more detail.

But is the woman second fiddle or insignificant? In this week's parsha, we

specifically see that Chava got her name because of her importance. Chava is e*im kol chai*, mother of all life. A woman's role, a mother's role, a wife's role is great. Calling anyone insignificant, even a child, would be wrong. No one is insignificant and no one is second fiddle.

Furthermore, in this week's parsha we learn that Adam and Chava were at first created as two halves of one whole. Man and woman complete each other. Adam was not complete until he had a wife. And Hashem didn't make a wife so she can be on her own. It's not so much about hierarchy as about understanding our role.

If someone would ask you if you're as important as the president of the United States, it would depend on what role you're talking about. When it comes to leading the country, you are not as important. But if you are a father of children, you're much more important to your family than the president is; there's no question about that! The fact that you have a different role doesn't make you more or less important. It's a matter of understanding your own position, role and responsibility, and then you're not second fiddle.

A plane has a pilot and a co-pilot. The pilot is supposed to be the leader, and you can't have two pilots. They each have their roles to play. At times, the co-pilot has to step aside and let the pilot fly the plane. Because that's his role, not because he's more important.

The problems begin when people look at the differences and decide what's more or less significant. The feminist movement didn't start out with the premise that women are as significant as men. It started with the fear that they are less significant. But what makes you think so? Know where you belong and be happy there. Does the fact that a man says "*Shelo asani ishah*," make her less significant? Then why does she say "*She'asani kirtzono*?" The fact that he has more mitzvos is simply Hashem's way of telling us who is supposed to do what, and not necessarily His way of telling us who's more important.

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Back at home, does a wife have to be subservient? Can she have her own opinion or disagree? Certainly, the Torah approach is different than anything you'll find in today's psychology and modern books – where everything is equal and one big mess. Secular literature doesn't require respect for parents either. Yet we find that a woman is absolved from *kibbud av va'em* because her time and respect must be devoted to her husband. But does that mean that she is subservient, doesn't count, and is not entitled to an opinion?

As long as it's respectful and doesn't contradict the respect she's supposed to have for her husband, she can have her own opinion. You can disagree respectfully. It's about having a discussion and making room for each other in a nice and respectful way.

Chava was expected to respect Adam Harishon and vice versa. It's not about being controlling and abusing the Torah-given right to be the decision maker. There is *kavod* and *ahavah*, and it works when we take each other seriously. Even if one of them tolerates the control, it doesn't make it right. It's wrong, it's not practical, and it's not what the Torah wants. We do find that the Torah set up certain things where the wife listens and complies with what the husband wants. Yet, it could and should be done respectfully with healthy boundaries and without controlling.

This is even true with children. It doesn't say anywhere that you have to control your children. You can be in control without being controlling.

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The questioner mentions the famous idea that if "if he's the king, I'm the queen," but let's explore this. If your husband is a steward, does that make you a stewardess? Does sitting next to the pilot make you the

co-pilot? Each person has their role. Some people are kings and some people are queens - without being married.

Interestingly, the *Midrash* says, "You should stand before your husband like you would stand before a king, and you should serve him like a maidservant." That's not what we would expect. A maidservant seems quite insignificant when compared to a king. But there's an important point here. You don't treat your husband like *a* king. You treat your husband like *your* king. Your king is not your equal. He is your king, and you treat him as if you were his maidservant.

But if you treat him like a king, and you're as respectful as if to a king, you can become a queen. Because you'll *be married* to a king. Being married to a king doesn't happen by itself. It's your decision. Treating someone respectfully works to your benefit. And it works both ways – husband to wife and wife to husband.

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What about personality differences? I discuss this in my book, "Get Along with Everyone." Different people have different ways of dealing with things and expressing themselves, and it makes a difference who is dealing with whom. It's important to know your own personality and the personality of the person you're dealing with. Yet, certain dynamics don't change. An employer and employee each have their roles, even if the employee is more skilled in certain areas. If these roles are not respected, even if the worker has great talents, he'll lose his job.

And it's the same with husband and wife. The Torah sets up the home in a certain way and teaches what the husband and wife should each be doing. These must be somewhat unconditional. The respect a wife must give her husband is unconditional (and husband to wife,) regardless of personality difference. Personality differences and needs can be discussed respectfully and is not a contradiction to respect.

Regarding the general roles of husband and wife, While in general the husband is the provider and makes the decisions, and the wife runs the technicalities of the home and tends to the children, this is certainly NOT a checklist where each does their job. It's a marriage with love and devotion. Still, there are individual jobs and partnership roles, and each is respectful of and makes room for the other. Yet, when people understand and respect each other, they're not so busy with boundaries and roles.

Hashem should help us understand our roles, not to feel insignificant or feel the need to dominate, but to really show respect and understand how the Torah set up our relationships.

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TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME:

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