בס"ד

RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PARSHAS TZAV – PURIM

THE DIFFERENT ROLES IN MARRIAGE

The Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk teaches in *Tzetil Kattan* that man was created for one reason only and that is to break his nature and work on his *middos*. In this week's Parsha, the Noam Elimelech explains that the way to break our *middos* is by acting in a completely opposite way, with an opposing *middah*.

He thus explains the *possuk* which says that the *kohen* had to don his linen garments, *"mido bahd"*, while doing the *avodah*. The Noam Elimelech explains that the word "*mido*" can also refer to a person's *middos*.

If we wish to be a *kohen* and to enter into the service of Hashem, our job in this world is to overcome our *middos* challenges by donning *mido bahd*, by consciously resisting our natural negative tendencies and working to specifically behave in a positive manner. Rebbe Elimelech concludes that one who does so will be *"Ashrecha b'Olam Hazeh vetov lach b'Olam Habah* – fortunate in this World and in the World to Come."

It's important to remember, that while it is imperative on us to work towards character improvement, in regard to the people around us, however, our job is to accept them *with* their shortcomings, not to point those out to them. Of course, it's easier to notice where someone else should be working on *their* shortcomings, but the correct way to do things is to focus inward, on where you can do things just a little better on your own.

This is especially true when it comes to *chinuch* and *shalom bayis*. A person can only change himself. And in personal relationships, the most successful one is he who thinks about where he may have gone wrong and what he can do differently in the future, instead of harping on where others were wrong. "What can I do about myself to make my relationships better?" You may think that "working on yourself" isn't a "relationships idea," but it really is. When you work on yourself, you become the person that is easy and pleasant to be in a relationship with.

Nobody's perfect. Still, if someone did something wrong or is at fault, it doesn't give you a right to do something that may hurt them back or otherwise harm the relationship.

People often excuse themselves by describing how they 'got triggered.' It's easy to blame other people for your negative behavior. But if, when 'triggered', you can't make yourself stop doing certain things, you probably won't be able to get others to do so. How can you get along with other people if you can't get along with yourself?

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Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I listened to your shiur on Parshes Tetzave where you teach that a woman will be happy when she recognizes her role as co-pilot to her husband, the pilot. I don't have a problem with the idea, but I have no idea what this means practically. I suspect many people today don't understand this differentiation. Can you spell it out more clearly for us?

When it comes to relationships, I haven't had any positive role models in my life. I have been influenced by feminist ideas and learned to be independent. Even if I 'like the idea' of respecting my husband, I just don't know what it means practically. I would appreciate it if you can discuss this in your shiur.

Thank you.

Answer:

The questioner starts off about understanding roles and ends off asking about respect. The truth is, when you understand what the different roles are, the relationship is that much more respectful. But to define respect, it's not necessarily something you *do*. Respect is an attitude. It's holding a person in high regard and talking to them as someone deserving of that respect, even when you don't necessarily feel they do.

A person must respect their parents, and a woman must respect her husband, even when they don't 'feel' that the other deserves the respect. It doesn't matter if he's rich or poor, successful or a failure, a *talmid chacham* or completely unlearned, if he's your husband, you are required to respect him.

In the secular world it doesn't work like that. Respect is given to those whom (we feel) deserve it. But we have a Torah. If we try to follow feminist or other modern ideas, our relationships cannot succeed. We measure success according to Hashem's metrics. Hashem's blueprint for this world and for relationships is the only one that will work. Subscribing to modern ideals is like reading a Friedrich manual when you have a Mitsubishi air conditioner. You may find a line or two helpful, but you'll probably still get into trouble. Furthermore, the Torah is Divine. A man-made manual may have a mistake, but the Torah guidelines for our relationships are perfect.

This doesn't mean that we don't have our own issues. Even those of us who live a Torah-true life still have work to do on ourselves.

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One of the ideas taught in the Torah is that the man should be the "man of the house." In the shiur you heard, I explained this using the inaccurate analogy of pilot and co-pilot

because it helps us understand the importance of the unique and independent roles of husband and wife. The co-pilot may have more experience than the pilot, but if he tries to do the pilot's job, the plane won't fly smoothly. The pilot may allow the co-pilot to do some of his jobs, but the two of them sit on different sides of the control panel. This is not about who has a more important role; it's about unique and distinctive roles. When we start mixing the roles of the husband with the roles of the wife, things go wrong.

We can also explain this with another analogy. Is the brain more important than the heart? It doesn't matter which is more important. At times, it may even seem like the hands are accomplishing more than the heart. But we need both the heart and brain to survive, *and we need each one to perform its unique role* at the same time. Hands are hands. The heart is the heart. The brain is a brain.

One more comparison: A boss and manager in a business. The boss carries the responsibility and is the one to make the ultimate decisions. The boss can't walk away from his job and he can't be fired. The manager has a different set of rights and responsibilities. It doesn't make sense to ask who does more for the business. The manager might be more involved in day-to-day functions. In fact, the business may run into more difficulties when the manager goes on vacation than when the boss goes away. But the boss is still the boss.

In a healthy relationship, the boss will be very nice to the manager because he wants the manager to work well. He can't abuse the manager just because he's the boss. He doesn't have the right to do so and it will work against him. By the same token, the manager has to be very respectful of the boss, because he's the boss. If an employee gets a bonus or raise, the manager should be smart enough to give credit to the boss and not to himself. Even if he has all the knowledge to make a big decision, such decisions belong to the boss.

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It's easy to see how these analogies apply to the husband-wife relationship. The woman may be more involved in the running of the house and home. She may even help bring in *parnassah*. But the man is still the boss in the home. Unfortunately, many homes don't run this way. It's lopsided when the father is *told* (read: ordered) when to make kiddush and how large to cut the slices of challah. And if the "boss" allows it to be so, he's making a mistake.

There are some smart women who are capable of running the home and responsible for most of it, but still know how to make their husband the king. "Let's ask Totty", "I'll check with my husband." Some people claim that they don't know how to do this. But watch them when they're in public. Somehow in public, everyone understands that it's right to say that they'll check with their husband. But behind closed doors, they don't ask, they tell their husbands what to say and do.

There's the saying that "behind every great man stands a great woman." The key word here is "behind." If she understands that her place is behind him, that makes her a great woman.

Children sense the dynamics in a home. A woman who defers to her husband is teaching her children an important lesson.

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A word to the men: You may be boss, but don't abuse that position. If a boss doesn't treat the manager well, even if the manager may not be able to do much about it, the company won't run smoothly. In order to have a healthy environment, you want to be respectful.

Yes, in a Jewish home, there's a king and a queen. The king should be respectful to the queen and make her happy. He should listen to her opinion and respect her input. This is not just common sense, but more Torah ideas, principles and values. He should let her make her own decisions in those areas that affect her. He should take her seriously. And she should remember that he's the one to make decisions. These ideas go hand-in-hand, they're not contradictory at all. But they are not necessarily dependent on one another. You do

yours first. Often when the woman makes her husband king, that's when she becomes queen.

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Back to the idea of respect. Respect is an attitude. It happens often that a man will tell me how his wife called to demand that he come home immediately because he has to do certain things for her. That's not the right attitude. It doesn't say in the *kesubah* that your husband will drive you around on Sundays. It's nice if he does so, and he may be wrong if he never drives you anywhere, but you still have to be respectful either way. Besides, how would you speak to him if you were in front of other people? Speak that way in private as well.

In the story of Purim, Achashverosh wants to abuse his queen and shame her in public. How did that come about? Because Vashti taunted him in private, comparing him to her royal family members. Don't get into such situations.

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The Yiddishe home is modeled after *Kudesha Brich Hu uShechintei*. That's the special Oneness between Hashem and the Shechinah (which are not the same thing). We aim to have the husband-wife relationship emulate that. It's good to notice and learn from those who have successfully mastered this setup in real life.

And if you didn't have good role models as you were growing up, so get them now. Look at a healthy Yiddishe home and see how it functions. It's not always easy for a woman to put herself in second place. But find a woman who has done so and let her be your role model.

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What if a woman is in a situation where she feels she can't put her husband first because he's not healthy or stable, or some other situation? The first thing is not to go into the all-or-nothing mode. Find out in which areas you *can* give him more respect. And be careful to discuss your doubts and challenges with a *Daas Torah*.

Be especially careful about doing things that are against the Torah or halacha. Don't make your own justifications and decisions about such an important thing. Find out how to do it right and may you be the next healthy role model for others to learn from.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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