

A Woman of Valor

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YOUR SUCCESSFUL CHOICE

My dear *kalla*, you have chosen your *chassan*, and now you are both anticipating your wedding day, when together you will begin a life of true happiness. It is natural, however, for this anticipation to be mixed with anxiety over the unknown future. Though your *chassan* has indeed found favor in your eyes, only the future will bear out whether you have chosen aptly. Only a life "ends upon your preparation and attitude.

Shlomo Hamelech said: "The wisdom of women builds her home, but folly plucks it down with her hands" (*Mishlei* 14,1). There is a particular wisdom involved in building a home. Just as an architect knows how to sketch building plans, which materials to use, and how deep to lay foundations, she too possesses "architectural" wisdom with which to construct the life of the couple after the wedding. Such wisdom was given specifically to the woman! Although the architect learns from books and from teachers, and the woman's wisdom has not been transcribed – for her wisdom is not of technology but of the heart – it is wisdom nonetheless and worthy of an attempt at defining its principles.

Commenting on *Mishlei*, the Vilna Gaon wrote that building a home is a construction of permanence. A marriage is not for a fleeting period, Heaven forbid, but is, with the help of *Hashem*, a *binyan adei ad*, an eternal structure. The "wisdom of women" aspires, essentially, to construct a stable, firm building.

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Stability? The two of you are human beings, not angels; each possesses varying dispositions and fleeting moods. It is difficult enough for each, individually, to be stable in his actions and thoughts. Now the two of you must live *together*, and your differing needs and moods will inevitably clash. Is there not enough volatile material concealed within every home that agitates, irritates and courts despair until it could explode, Heaven forbid?

A HEAVENLY UNION

The first principle in the "wisdom of women," the wisdom of building a home, is the clear, unqualified fact that the moment that the china plate is broken during the "*tennaim*," it is confirmed that this is a union that was decreed in Heaven ("The daughter of so-and-so to so-and-so!") forty days before the embryo's formation, as the Midrash relates:

"Rabbi Pinchas said in the name of Rabbi Ivo: 'In the Torah, in the Prophets and in the Writings we find that a man's partner comes only from *Hashem*. Where in the Torah? As it is written: 'And Lavan and Besuail answered and said, 'The matter comes from *Hashem*' (*Bereishis* 24,50)... There are those who travel to their partners and those whose partners travel to them. Yitzchak's partner came to him.... Yaakov went to his partner....' (*Bereishis Rabba, Parashas Vayetzei*).

The members of practically every union see the *hashgacha g'luya* – the revealed, careful guidance of *Hashem* – in their finding one another and then entering the covenant of marriage. We, who believe in *Hashem*, in His powerfully detailed involvement in our lives, know and trust that a man and a woman come from a single spiritual root and are matched, one to the other, from the very

Based on "A Letter to a Kalla, first published in 1976, by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe אוריאל, one of the foremost living educators and mussar personalities of our time.

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onset of their creation. As a result, we are capable of achieving mutual understanding and true peace in marriage.

FIRST: PATIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Every couple, of course, must undergo a period of adjustment. After all, each party comes from a different home and from varying surroundings, and for all of the harmony in the depths of their souls, they possess differing, even opposing strengths and dispositions. How, then, do they achieve harmony?

First and foremost, there must be *patience*. When inconsonant tendencies and outlooks begin to surface – almost immediately after the wedding! – do not fear that your world has fallen apart. Be assured that it is possible to overcome the difficulties of adjustment and attain equilibrium.

"A woman recognizes guests more so than a man" (*Berachos* 10b), meaning that a woman is graced with an instinctive understanding of a man's disposition and strengths. She is specially suited, therefore, to thoroughly understand her marriage partner, and such genuine understanding removes many stumbling blocks.

For example, you may discover that your husband is not very orderly. This might shock you and even irritate you. After you've calmed down and become rational, you might consider: "Why is he so disorganized with his possessions and his clothing?" Insight should not be slow in coming. You have noted that he is immersed in learning and abstract thinking to a degree well beyond the norm and simply fails to take note of where he left his watch or dropped his clothing. You recall that he has been living in a dormitory for close to ten years, and when you inquire a bit about dorm life, you will come to see to what degree this lifestyle has made your husband accustomed to

disorder; yeshiva dormitory life is a far cry from dormitory life in a Bais Yaakov. Building on this premise, you will find a way to get your husband accustomed to orderliness – drawing, of course, on an abundance of patience and good will.

There are also certain things that irritate a woman to a greater degree, such as when her husband shows indifference toward her. Sometimes, a husband fails to honor his wife's concerns, not noticing what she is wearing, whether her dress is blue or green; not taking the slightest inter-

est in what he has eaten for lunch, though she had invested much effort in her cooking. As revelations of such indifference mount, one after the next, you may feel shattered and begin to think: "Perhaps I have chosen unwisely!" Prior to the wedding, you had found such favor in his eyes, and he had shown so much interest in you. It had never occurred to you that he could become so indifferent, a thought which could now bring you to despair.

However, there is no need to despair. The "*wisdom* of women builds her home,"

so accordingly, you will tell yourself that for some time your husband has lived exclusively amongst males and grown accustomed to dormitory life. He has been served food and has eaten well, with nobody demanding that he say "Thank you." Over the years, when his visits home to his parents were too short and far between, all of the etiquette of the home has become foreign. You must, therefore, gradually inculcate your partner with the awareness that he is not living in a "new dormitory" but in a home, *his* home, and that a home demands consideration!

AVOIDING ANGER

The first step in building a home is mutual understanding. And then what? There is no doubt that in every home, and in dealing with every husband, there are factors that can irritate a woman. The more common reaction is to become angry, which can express itself in shouting and quarreling or in silence and introversion. The first response is bad enough, for it can lead to fighting, even though in the end the husband at least may learn what is angering his wife. This is in contrast to the second sort of anger, wherein the woman, withdrawn, never reveals what has triggered her ill feeling. In the end, however, both types of anger are lethal, and it

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is worth bearing this in mind before you enter the *chupa, b'sha'a tova u'mutzlachas* (at an auspicious time). Be assured that the paths of the "wisdom of women" are not paved with anger. Anger, in any form, does not help build a home.

So what should you do when your husband irritates you? Wisdom would dictate that you speak to him on the matter, that you engage him, expressly and directly, in an issue-centered discussion and explain to him your problem with his particular habit or practice; then help him accept the conclusion that he has acted inappropriately. In the process, he may explain why he behaves as he does. If this annoying habit continues to recur, bring it up again. If you come to see that the issue stems from a long-rooted habit, the two of you should explore ways to wean him from it. Obviously, it is impossible to uproot life-long habits in the course of a single week. This requires patience on your part and good will on his. "Anger rests in the breast of fools" (*Kohelles 7,9*). It certainly has no place in the "wisdom of women."

Beyond the habits of bachelorhood, you are bound to discover some of your husband's characteristic tendencies that are inconsistent with the ideal picture that you had formed of him. You may attempt to strive to change these, with his benefit in mind, for in your view, if he could just correct this one point, he'd be perfect. For example, he is very social and popular, and therefore does not maintain what you would consider an appropriate distance between himself and younger *bachurim*. Or he is a thinker, and while something is on his mind, he is simply incapable of conducting light conversation. Bear in mind, however, that every attempt to change his characteristics will doubtless fail, resulting in your disappointment and his bitterness. In the final analysis, just as no two people are identical, men in general are different from women. Knowing how to make peace with perceived imperfections is also part of the "wisdom of women." It should also be stressed that frequent discussion – especially during the first year of marriage – can help promote compatibility and closeness. Make a practice of discussing problems as they arise,

and try finding, *together*, a design for improvement.

WEATHERING CRISIS AND STRESS

Our era is different from the one that preceded the Second World War. In the past, people were more capable of struggling with problems and striving to improve. Today, most young people find it difficult to withstand the slightest stress; if any formidable problem arises, they require a psychologist and even sedatives. Generally speaking, young people today are not accustomed to asserting control over themselves and overcoming challenges. One should accept that there is no home without problems, be they internal forces (involving personal adjustment) or external ones (insufficient income, etc.).

Young married people in general are simply unaccustomed to tolerating stress, and may suddenly find themselves in a whirlwind of difficulties, although they had imagined that their homes would serve as a safe harbor from problems. What should such young people do or think? How can they run their home?


Sadna d'ara chad hu, human nature is much the same the world over, and *b'nei Torah* and *b'nos Bais Yaakov* will also occasionally find themselves helpless when crisis strikes. This is a weakness that has affected our entire generation. Still, we are hopeful that a couple strengthened with faith and Torah is more apt than others to succeed in overcoming problems and crises together. After all, as stated, the foundation of a Jewish home rests on the conviction that the two are members of a union formed by He "who created joy and gladness, groom and bride, mirth, glad song, pleasure, delight, love, brotherhood, peace and companionship." He created all of these not only for the seven days of the wedding feast, but for the length of your entire lives!

Further, the *Talmud Yerushalmi* states that "it is impossible for a man [to live] without a woman, impossible for a woman [to live] without a man, and impossible for the two of them [to exist] without the *Shechina*" (*Berachos*, ch. 9).

Coupled with the knowledge of the "impossibility of one without the other" is the awareness of the *Shechina's* presence between them, of incalculable heavenly assistance throughout their life together.

If you should ask, my dear *kalla*: "How am I capable of feeling the presence of the *Shechina* and enlisting *Hashem's* aid?" I would answer that even now, before the wedding, you should accustom

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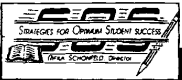
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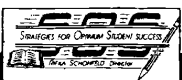
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