

PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

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A BAIS NE'EMAN B'YISROEL

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

The big sugya in this *parshah* is the marriage of Yaakov Avinu to Rachel and Leah. There are many things that we need to learn and study and analyze from Yaakov's marriage because they could be very relevant to us.

The first thing one must know when he thinks of marriage is: What is the *tachlis* of marriage? You have to know that when Yaakov Avinu got married, he just wasn't getting married to propagate and have a nice Jewish family. Yaakov Avinu's marriage was creating a *nitzchiyus*, an eternal bond. That is what is unique about Klal Yisrael. Avraham Avinu's marriage was to build an eternal branch, an eternal tree. He was *zocheh* to be *maamed* all the *shivtei kah*, amazing accomplishment, and to lay down the roots for the future.

The first thing one has to know is when they are married, that is what they are doing. Most people, they give them a *brachah*, they should be *zocheh* to be *boneh* a *bayis ne'eman beYisrael*. You know why? Because a lot of them have no *shaychus* to *bayis beYisrael*. They *punkt* happen to be Jews who are getting married, but they are not adding to this tree. They are not plugging in to this *shoresh* and broadening the base and building this *netzach*, this eternity.

In the *sheva brachos* we say: עַד יְדֵי עַד בְּנֵי לֹא מִמֶּנּוּ בְּנֵי עַד - "and He fashioned for him out of his very self a building (i.e. Chava) for eternity." It's amazing. When I thought of that, it was overwhelming to me. This means that my wife and I are *pashut* building a *binyan* יְדֵי עַד. That's what it is. It's not a *stam binyan*, not a *stam bayis*. It's a good structure to have organization, to have families, neighborhoods, you have *yishuv*. Having children is – the *gemara* says, *lo sayu bra lasheves yetzara*, it's a good *zach* to have children. It builds up the *yishuv*. Marriage, however, is much more than that. That's why we call it a *bayis ne'eman beYisrael*. Are you being loyal to the history of marriage in Yiddishkeit?

HOW IS MARRIAGE DIFFERENT FROM THE BRIS MILAH?

The word *nisuin* means uplift. That's what it is. A *nisuin* means, you uplift. The bond that you make with your wife - when two of you were independent before, but now come together - becomes uplifting.

The *gemara* says that a person who is not married is a *plag guf*, he's a half a *guf*. Yaakov Avinu through his marriage to Rachel and Leah had a tremendous elevation. He was *zocheh* to such a *nisuin*! *Lo kol hanisuin shovoi zu lezu*, they are not all the same. Somebody who is more uplifting makes a greater *nisuin*.

My Rebbi (R' Meir Halevi Soloveichik) once told me that the Brisker Rav was at an *einikel's bris* and a man came over very excitedly and he said, "Ah, mazel tov, mazel tov!" The Brisker Rav said, "Why are you so excited?" He said, "A *groise bris*!" The Brisker Rav said, "What do you mean, a *groise bris*? Every *bris* is the same, you're *nichnas* into Klal Yisrael." "The Brisker Rav's *einikel*," the guy finally said. The Brisker Rav told him, "Neh, *alle brissim sennen de selbe*, all *brissim* are the same." No *groise brissim*. Maybe you have more lox, less lox, more meat, less meat, *ich veis vos*, but the *bris* itself? The baby is becoming a member of Klal Yisrael.

With marriage, it's not like that. The uplifting nature of marriage is to the degree that a person elevates himself and actually attaches himself to the trunk of Klal Yisrael, so to that degree it could be a *groise nisuin*. Or it could be the opposite, where the guy produces some dried out branches and doesn't manage to graft himself onto the trunk of the *nitzchiyus* of Klal Yisrael.

KIDDUSHIN MEANS TAKING ACHRAYUS

The lesson of one of the most important things that has always bothered me in this parsha can be seen when Yaakov Avinu was facing a marriage without any funds. He had no jewelry, he had no money. He had nothing to offer. He was bereft of all. But you might have thought that Yaakov Avinu would have figured, "If Hashem doesn't want me to have money, that means I'm going to get married without money." That's what I always thought. But on second thought, I realized it's not like that. Yaakov Avinu had to pay such a steep price for his marriage, it is mind boggling. Mind boggling! He had to work his first stint seven years of *avodah mufreches*, backbreaking work. He worked day and night. And he wasn't like us, where he slouched off, or he wanted a four-day work week. We like to work five days a week. Yaakov worked the whole week. And he said *evadcha*, I'm going to be your *eved* for seven years. I was amazed, why did he say seven years? Why didn't he say, "I'll work for you for a year, a few months and afterwards we'll see." Seven years? That's amazing. It's mind boggling!

You know what the *pshat* is? The *pshat* is like this. You have to know that what is the *kinyan* of *kiddushin*? The *kinyan* of *kiddushin*, getting married, is a person accepting responsibility for his wife. Most people don't understand that the *chiyuv* of *kiddushin*, the *achrayus* of *kiddushin* is the *baal* to the *ishah*. The *ishah* is *mekabeles* and the *baal* does the *ma'aseh kichah*, "the act of taking." It says *ki yikach ish ishah*. You know what a woman's role in marriage is? To put her hand out and receive the gifts. Today, there is a *mishugaas*, the woman gives her husband gifts also. But in the Torah's time, there was no such thing! All the gifts came from the husband! He plied the wife with gift after gift after gift! And the wife's role is to be only a *mekabeles*.

The *gemara* says that if a lady is *mekadesh* a man, it's not a valid *kiddushin*. That *kiddushin* falls apart. It doesn't start. It's not *chal*. Ladies can be silent. Whenever I officiate at a marriage, I mention to the wife, "You are doing nothing. You are sitting here and you are accepting the act of *kiddushin* from your husband to be. Don't say you are marrying him. He is marrying you and you are accepting your

marriage and you are becoming *mekudeshes*. He is the *mekadesh*.” So you know what a *mekadesh* means? A *mekadesh* means, I am going to accept *achrayus* for you. That’s what it means. That’s an amazing thought. Many people don’t know that. They think, what is she going to do for me? What is her family going to do for me?

A WORKING WIFE: A LACK OF “KI YIKACH ISH”?

You know, in the Torah there is no concept of a wife working for her husband. The Torah’s concept is a man provides for his wife. That’s the Torah’s concept. A *moradige chiddush* arose about 150 years ago, which was unheard of before. Especially, in the last 70 years, a concept arose that was never heard of before and became an accepted norm. Even in Europe before the war, this concept wasn’t heard of. I am specifically talking about a wife supporting her husband. And it’s very common for people nowadays to ask, “Does she have a good job, does she have a *shvache* job?” People want to know how much money the wife’s parents are going to give them. That kind of marriage lacks *ki yikach*. There is no *achrayus* from that husband. He is not being *mekadesh* an *ishah*.

Does that mean that a lady can’t work? No. Let’s say a lady says to her husband, “My dear husband, I would love for you to learn Torah, so I’m willing to forgo your providing for me. I’m *mochel* you. You don’t have to provide for me. And I would like to work so that you could learn.” She could do that 100%. And that’s amazing.

I’ve gotten many calls from people who ask that their husband wants them to go to work to bring in more funds, and they say, “But I’m a wife.” I say to them, “What does your husband do?” Answer: “He works.” I said, “If your husband works, tell him to work harder. You have no obligation whatsoever to go to work.” I’ve even told this to kollel people, that if the wife says, “I can’t do it anymore,” I’ve told many husbands, “I’m very sorry to disappoint you, you must take *achrayus* now. That’s your *chiyuv*, to take the *achrayus*. That’s how the Torah looks at marriage.”

Yaakov Avinu worked seven years for Rachel. That’s called taking *achrayus*. And Yaakov Avinu was doing tremendous *avodas Hashem*. Don’t think this was a sidekick, a side job that he had to deliver papers and then play with Lavan’s sheep. No. He understood that it was an *avodas Hashem she’ein kemoso*. And every husband should see and look at his life as if he is doing tremendous *avodas Hashem*. To accept *achrayus* for a woman is a tremendous *Avodas Hashem* and *chiyuv* min HaTorah.

WHAT EVERY CHASSAN SHOULD KNOW!

I want you to know that when the Rambam writes about the *mitzvah* of getting married, you know how he writes down the *mitzvah*?¹ He says *לישא אישה*, to marry a woman, *בכתובה וקידושין*. So the *mefarshim* all ask, “בכתובה”?! That’s a separate *zach*. There is *kiddushin*, which is a marriage. But *kesubah* is something that came about afterwards. Rabanan didn’t want to make it easy to get rid of a wife, so they figured they’ll tack on a charge so the guy will think twice if it’s worth it. That’s what the *gemara* (Kesubos 39b) says: *שלא תהי' קלה בעיניו להוציאה*: So how did the Rambam write, the *mitzvah* is to marry a woman *בכתובה וקידושין*? The *halachah* is, that a man is not allowed to live with a woman if he doesn’t give her a *kesubah*. And I’ll tell you an even bigger *chiddush*.

You don’t have to know where your ring is. Once you give the *kiddushin*, you give the ring, your wife could lose the ring, it doesn’t make a difference. But if you don’t know where the *kesubah* is at any time during your marriage, you can’t be in the house alone with your wife. I can’t tell you how many times I got a call at 12 o’clock, “I can’t find my *kesubah*.” I say, “Well, if that’s the case, step out of your home, buddy. You can’t be home alone with her.” You have to be aware of where your *kesubah* is. You don’t have to have it in your house. That’s even more important than the ring! Your wife may be disappointed if she loses the ring and you may be disappointed as well, yet you’re not disappointed if you lose the *kesubah*. The fact of the matter is - the *kesubah* is more important.

So what’s the *pshat* in this Rambam? What does the *kesubah* say? The *kesubah* says, “*Ana eikar*,” I’m going to respect you. You know what respect means? You say, “I’m taking *achrayus* for you to feel important.” Did you hear of a *chassan* who knows and understands that this is what his responsibility for marriage is? “I’m going to make my wife feel important.” Every *chassan* has to know this!

I have to be honest with you. When I got married, I was young and dumb and I didn’t know that. I thought *she* was supposed to make *me* feel important. But it’s not what the Rambam says. In the *kesubah* it says, “I’m going to respect you.” And then, as an *eizor* - “I’m going to support you, I’m going to give you clothing, I’m going to provide a home for you.” There are a lot of obligations there. Do I have the money? Do I have the ability? That’s what you get married for.

KESUBAH AND KIDDUSHIN MUST BE TOGETHER!

You have to know, *kesubah* and *kiddushin* are together because that is what *kiddushin* is! A *kiddushin* means, “I am being *mekadesh* you, I am accepting full responsibility for you.” When you support your wife, that places her in your *reshus*. When you tell a woman, “I am going to be *achrai* for you, I am going to be responsible for you to feel important,” you are fulfilling your most basic responsibility of *kiddushin*. How many people talk down to their wives? How many people berate their wives? A lot of people do! A lot of people talk this way: “You don’t bring in money, you don’t bring in this, you’re not this, you’re not that.” You should know that that guy is *mamash* voiding his *kiddushin*!

So that’s your *chiyuv*. And when you do that accept the responsibility, you know what happens? The wife is now *nichnas l’reshus’cha*. She comes into your domain. And the more you are *mechabed* her and the more you support her, the more she comes into your *reshus*.

The *gemara* says that an *ishah* is *koreses bris*, she forms an unbreakable bond to the person who makes her a *keili*. *Keili* is a receptacle that holds things. If a guy gives his wife \$25 a week, so he’s turning her into a thimble, a bottle cap. That is *gornisht*. You’ve got to make a *keili* where you’re going to put lots of good stuff in that *keili*. And then she’s *nichnas* to you, she becomes loyal to you. Whenever you see *shalom bayis* problems, you know what the man always says? “My wife doesn’t respect me.” You know what my response is? “You probably don’t deserve any respect. You don’t take care of her. You’re not *mekabel achrayus*.”

¹ הלכות אישות. יש בכללן ארבע מצוות – שתי מצוות עשה, ושתי מצוות לא תעשה; וזה הוא פרט: (א) לישא אישה בכתובה וקידושין; (ב) שלא תבעל אישה בלא כתובה וקידושין; (ג) שלא ימנע שאר כסות ועונה; (ד) לפרות ולרבות ממנה (משנה תורה, תוכן החיבור ד:ג)

ARE YOU LIVING UP TO YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

Not long ago, a bum came to me, a guy who sleeps most of the day and almost every day he was complaining to me that his wife did nothing. I said, "Does she work every day?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You're a bum. If I was advising your wife, I would tell her not to go to work for a second. You're an absolute bum! You were never even *mekadesh* your wife!" He kept going: "But my wife doesn't do this or that." I said, "You're lucky she stays in the same house with you! She's nuts for doing that! You don't live up to any of your responsibilities! You don't take any *achrayus* for her. You just use her." That's not a marriage!

There is a *passuk* in the *chumash* (Devarim 24:5) that says when you get married, ושמח את אשתו. Rashi says, it doesn't say *vesimach im ishto*. It says *vesimach es ishto*. What does that mean? What is the difference between being *mesameiach es ishto* and being *mesameiach im ishto*?

So Rav Chaim Stein (1913-2011), Telzer *rosh yeshivah*, once told me an interesting thing about this Rashi. He told *yungerleit* when they got married, there is a certain *minhag*. They started a *minhag* in America, which is not a normal *minchag*, that when you get married, you don't go to night *seuder*. The first year you don't learn. It starts with the first year. And then after the first year, you say, "Well, I wasn't *yotzei* the first year," so you're *mamshich* the second year and it goes your whole life like that! So he used to say, "Why don't you learn night *seuder*? Because it says in the *passuk* ושמח את אשתו." He said, "Did you ever look at what Rashi actually says?" Rashi doesn't say *vesimach im eshto*, "rejoicing together with your wife." It says, you are responsible to see to it that your wife is happy. You have to figure it out. Are you deciding if you want to be rejoicing with your wife?! No, it doesn't say that in the Torah anywhere."³

And then I'll tell you another *pshat*. I didn't hear that from him, but there is another *pshat*, a *moradige pshat*. What is the difference between *im* and *es*? If I'm having fun with you, or I'm giving you fun. If I'm having fun with you, then I'm saying, "I'm partying with you," you know what that means? I am making my contribution, I contribute my part and together we party. But let's say you don't contribute your *chelek*, so I'm not going to contribute either. ושמח את אשתו says that the man is fully responsible to see to it that his wife is *besimchah*. Whether she gives it back to you or not, whether she contributes or not. You're not partying together with her. You're making her *besimchah*. It's not about making yourself *besimchah*. There is no such a *tenai* that she has to be *mesameiach* you. *Rabbosai*, that's a real *Torahdike hashkafah*. You have to be *mesameiach* her. You work for her! Do you understand this?

Now, of course, an *ishah tzidkonis* that sees her husband working for her and doing for her and being *mechabed* her, you know what that lady says? "I'm going to love you back and I'm going to be *mechabed* you back." It's amazing. A person has a responsibility to be *mechabed* her *yoser migufo*. You have to be *mechabed* your wife more than your own *guf*. That's one *halachah* I had a very difficult time with, I have to tell you.⁴ Respect her more than myself?! Maybe equal, maybe. But more? It's a very *shver zach*. But that's your *chiyuv*. You have to know, that's what your *chiyuv* is. It's very scary because most people take their wives a little bit for granted. A little bit. She got married to me, so I use her. You don't say it like that, of course. You say it nicely. Couch it in American terms, PC terms.

YAKOV AVINU DEMONSTRATED ACHRAYUS

But the *emes* is that Yaakov Avinu demonstrated *middas haTorah* in this regard. Can you imagine going to work and tending sheep for seven years?! Could you imagine the *bitul* Torah involved here? I mean, it doesn't say he hired people and he just sat in the *beis medrash* while a bunch of shepherds took care of the sheep. It doesn't say that! He himself did that *avodah*. I'm thinking, "Yaakov Avinu - the *bechir* of our Avos - is shearing the sheep, cleaning up their *tzoia*!" Sheep go to the bathroom,

you've got to clean their *tzoia*. They don't clean by themselves. The shepherds did everything. And all for what? For his wives. He demonstrated *achrayus* like nobody's business.

That's how you have a solid and healthy marriage. And you have to get your head on straight to know when it says (Yevamos 62b)⁵ that if you're without a wife, you are *shari belo brachah*. You know what that means? If you turn your wife into a wife, then you know what happens? Your wife, number one, wants to do for you more than you could imagine, if you make her feel good, if you take *achrayus* for her.

I know many people whose wives work and they take the check. The husband has no right to that check *al pi halachah*. She could say to him, "I'm working for myself, you're not supporting me, I'm supporting myself, so I'm going to take the check." What's the husband going to say? "Nah, that's not the way it's done." She says, "Why not?" He says, "There is no such thing." A person has to know, you'd better think of how you would fulfill what it says in the *kesubah*: ואתך אפלה ואוקיר ואזון ("and I will cherish, honor and support you"). How and what are you doing for your wife to make your wife feel indebted to you?

YOUR WIFE IS NOT YOUR "MOMMY"!

Many people have this concept that wives are not so interested in their husbands. They say, "That's how it is." It's not how it is. They are very interested in their husbands. But they are only interested in their husbands who act like husbands! When they have to be the "Mommy" of the husband, which is a personal thing that I have and it disgusts me – everyone who does, you should excuse me. I love these guys who turn to their wife and ask, "Mommy, what should we do, Mommy?" I look at him, "Where's your mother?" I asked one guy who called his wife this way, "Where is your mother? Isn't that your wife?" "Yeah, but I call her Mommy." I told him, "You know that it says, על זאת אמו ואת אמו, you're supposed to leave your Mommy and you are ואתך באשתו (Bereishis 2:24). You know what that means? A guy who calls his wife Mommy wants his wife to be *mekabel achrayus* for him! Maybe by some people it's not like that, but if it is like that, that's not what a *bayis ne'eman beYisrael* is supposed to look like.

² ושמח. ושמח את אשתו, ותרגומו "יחד; ית אתה", והמתרגם יחד; עם אתה טועה הוא, שאין זה תרגום של ושמח אלא של ושמח

³ Ed. note: Rashi disagrees with the Targum Yonosan's translation of ושמח, by pointing out that the word ושמח in the *pasuk* is not a *pi'el* form of the verb, like the Targum translates it (i.e. a causative verb, "be glad with his wife"), but rather, ושמח is in a *pa'al* form - (i.e. *שמח*, direct action verb), which means "he shall gladden his wife." He shall see to it that she's glad.

⁴ וכן צוה הקמים שיהיה אדם מכבד את אשתו יותר מגופו ואוהבה כגופו. ואם יש לו ממון מרבה בטובתה כפי ממונו. ולא יטיל עליה אימה יתרה. ויהיה דבורו עמה בנחת. ולא יהיה עצב ולא רגזן (משנה תורה, הלכות אישות ט"ו:)

⁵ אמר רבי תנחום אמר רבי חניליא: כל אדם שאין לו אשה - שרף בלא שמחה, בלא ברכה, בלא טובה. בלא שמחה, דכתיב: "ושמחת אתה וביתך". בלא ברכה, דכתיב: "להניח ברכה אל ביתך". בלא טובה, דכתיב: "לא טוב היות האדם לבדו".

NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY

A *bayis ne'eman beYisrael* has to look like that a person is building her up. Not by calling her Mommy, but taking care of her. “Mommy we’ll do it this way. How would you like to do it?” You could go down and you could listen to her, respect her. There is such a concept. Yaakov never was upset. If it was my Torah, I would have written, *vayeira hadavar me’od be’einei Yaakov*. Yaakov was very disappointed. After 14 years in Beis Ever, he probably wanted to sit down and learn a little bit, get married, and have a family. But he was working like a horse. It was *avodas Hashem*. That’s what a marriage is, and that’s what we have to understand. We have to revisit our relationships and think: “Does my wife feel built up from me? Does my wife feel that I am somebody who respects her and makes her feel important?”

I once heard a *moradige diyuk*. In the *gemara* it says, what is the purpose of a *kesubah*? It says (Kesubos, *ibid*) שלא תהי' קלה בעיניו להוציאה. So it shouldn't be easy in his eyes to get rid of her. But somebody said, if you look closely at the *gemara*, the *gemara* doesn't say what everybody thinks it says. It doesn't say שלא תהי' קלה בעיניו להוציאה. It doesn't say that it shouldn't be easy in his eyes to get rid of her. It says 'שלא תהי', so that she should not be קלה בעיניו! Hashem wants that your wife should not be taken lightly in your eyes. You should look at her as a *davar chashav*, as something of value. It's an *oifan* of respecting her. It's not an *oifan* just to prevent you from not doing hasty things.

SEVEN YEARS OF WORK - A SMALL PRICE TO PAY!

It says in the *passuk* (Bereishis 29:20): ויהיו בעיניו כְּיָמִים אֶחָדִים בְּאֶהְבֶּתָּ אֹתָהּ - “and in his eyes the seven years of working for Rachel seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.” So everybody asks a famous question. How does that work? If you worked for somebody for seven years, wouldn't you feel a little overworked? Would you feel that's like one day?! I never heard of that. If anything, it's the opposite. If I want something very desperately, every minute feels like a year! It doesn't feel like it's יָמִים אֶחָדִים. Good question.

So I saw the Rosh asked this question. He says, it doesn't mean that the work passed by quickly. *Adaraba*, he says, it passed by very slowly because he wanted to get married to Rachel. But you know what יָמִים אֶחָדִים means? He said, the price he was paying for Rachel, seven years of work, was a very small price to pay to be *zocheh* to Rachel Imeinu! Ah! That's the *pshat*. You hear that?! You know how Rachel must have felt, when she heard that?! That this man was working seven years and to him, it felt like a small price to pay to be *zocheh* to marry her. That's what *kiddushin* is, rabbosai! That's what *nisuin* is. That kind of *kiddushin* and *nisuin* brings *netzach*, rabbosai, it brings *nitzchiyus*, eternity!

You have to look at your wife in the following way. Without your wife, you'd be half a person, literally. You're a *gornisht*. Half of a person is a *gornisht*. Your wife who agreed to marry you because of your small commitment you made to her turned you into somebody. From a half you went to a whole. That's why you have to be *mechabed* her וְיָתֵר מְגִיפּוֹ. You know why? Because she turned you into וְיָתֵר מְגִיפּוֹ. Before your wife, you were a *chatzi guf* and now your wife turned you into a *shalem*. Ai, you don't feel it? Because you're a small, little, midget of a human being and your IQ has never been tested, and, no, don't test it now either. Because if you test it, you may discover it's below the level of most of humankind and you don't realize that your wife did you a favor and she helped you become elevated. Ai, you didn't use the opportunity, you just kept on bothering yourself. “Your nose, I don't like your nose. I always had a problem with your nose. Your nose always bothered me. Or your eyes.” You're such an animal, you're such a *beheimah*, that's what bothers you, that this is what you're busy with?! Did you ever live up to the *achrayus* you told your wife you were going to do for her?! Did you ever lift her up and make her feel like a million dollars?! No.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu should help us realize and appreciate our wives and our marriages, and when you're going to get married, you should realize what the *hatzlachah* of a marriage is and what the *achrayus* of a marriage is.

IN CONCLUSION

We can learn a lot from Yaakov Avinu's marriage. Firstly, we must understand the purpose of marriage - creating eternity and laying down the roots for the future of *Klal Yisrael*. We must connect to the roots and broaden the base of the tree. Marriage is a בְּנֵי עֵדִי עַד - an eternal building that gives us opportunity for *nisuin*, uplifting, of ourselves. The more a couple attaches themselves to the trunk of *Klal Yisrael*, the more uplift there is in the marriage. Secondly, the fact that Yaakov Avinu worked seven years for Rachel shows that he took *achrayus* for his future family seriously. The Torah's concept of marriage is that a man provides; to accept *achrayus* for a wife and family should be seen as true *avodas Hashem*. Thirdly, we see that a *kesubah* which delineates the obligations of the husband, is more important than a ring in representing a marriage. The *kesubah* includes respecting the wife and taking care of her. The husband must develop the means and the ability to fulfil these obligations. Hashem wants the wife to be seen as someone *chashuv* in the marriage and doing so, makes the wife into a vessel for blessing in the marriage. This week I will (*bli neder*) think about the *chashivus* of marriage and about the multifaceted concepts that marriage represents for a couple and towards Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*.