

THE JOURNEY TO GREATNESS - AT HOME

In R. Shlomo Wolbe's *Kuntros Hadracha L'Chasanim*, he quotes the powerful statement of R. Chaim Vital:

שמידותיו של האדם נמדדות אך ורק כפי יחסו אל אשתו

A person's character traits are primarily measured based upon how they are to their wife.

A common obstacle to *shalom bayis* is the rationalization of inappropriate behaviors for a greater good. It can be criticizing your spouse because she is not going to make it to the *simcha* on time or over troubling your family because you want to be more involved in *chesed* projects. Performing good deeds at the expense of your family is like driving a luxurious Lexus with a broken engine – impressive to others, yet, it may not get you to where you truly want to go. If we truly want to fulfill the desire of *Hashem*, if we truly want to achieve *sheleimus*, completeness¹, then we should refine our behavior at home. According to R. Chaim Vital, the barometer of character development is our behavior at home. *Chesed* not only begins at home, rather, the home is the ultimate arena for *chesed*.

In *Pirkei Avos*, R. Yossi states “וכל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים”, and all your actions should be for the sake of Heaven”. R. Simcha Bunim of Peshischa interprets the *Mishna* by explaining that when you are behaving for the sake of heaven, that itself should be done for the sake of Heaven. Valuable goals do not justify inappropriate means. Life is not merely about striving to become an *Eved Hashem*; it is about acting as an *Eved Hashem*. We are not only evaluated based on our “big accomplishments”; we are judged based on our everyday behaviors². R. Chaim Vital's statement implies that what may appear as unimportant, is actually the most essential. Proper behavior towards your spouse may be your greatest accomplishment.

Even if you agree with the above idea, the nature of man is to forget quickly – that which we know cognitively, may have little correlation with behavior. Therefore, we need reminders. I have heard from several clients that the *Tomer Devorah* by R. Moshe Cordovero is a helpful guide in improving their interpersonal relationships. Learning and reviewing the *sefer* can assist in transferring the logic of the mind to the logic of the heart. The *sefer* begins:

האדם ראוי שיתדמה לקונו, ואז יהיה בסוד הצורה העליונה צלם ודמות

It is proper for man to emulate his Creator, for then he will attain the secret of the Supernal Form in both image and likeness.

R. Cordovero explains how we are charged with emulating *Hashem* by responding to others with the same acceptance, compassion, and love that he showers upon us. May we all merit to achieve greatness by improving our ability to have acceptance, compassion, and love to those closest to us.

¹ This translation is intentional. While others may choose to translate it as perfection, I prefer completeness. In Judaism we do not strive for perfection, we strive for completeness (or wholeness).

² R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk states a similar idea about the verse, "צדק צדק תרדוף" (דברים טז: כ). Righteousness must be pursued with righteous means.