

"It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helpmate opposite him." (2:18)

The *Torah's* description of Chava as a helpmate "opposite" man seems peculiar. A helpmate should work side by side in a parallel relationship, rather than opposite! The *Midrash* infers from this expression that a wife can be either a "helpmate" or an "opposition". If man is worthy, his wife will be a source of support and a helpmate. If he is unworthy, she becomes his opponent. Indeed, as the *Tiferes Tzvi* extends this idea, a helpful wife is one who encourages her husband to study *Torah* to the full extent of his ability. This applies to any endeavor. A wife's encouragement can be one's greatest source of moral and spiritual support.

As Hashem created a wife and a partner for Adam, He simultaneously created the first "relationship". It, therefore, is appropriate to study this paradigmatic relationship not only from the husband-wife perspective, but also from the perspective of true friendship. The term "rztg", or helpmate, clearly indicates that woman has been created in order to give man the physical, moral, and spiritual partnership which he requires. Man's task on this earth is too awesome for him to bear in solitude. He needs a helpmate at his side. Consequently, the term reserved for woman is invested with the highest nobility. A helpmate is an equal partner, not someone who remains in his shadow. The notion of being "opposite" suggests a specific form of support.

The husband-wife relationship should be one in which each partner is prepared to stand "opposite" the other, lending support through intellectual appreciation. Unconditional love should not cause a spouse to support an irrational act on the part of a life partner. Nor should criticism be the sole basis of one's relationship. One should stand opposite, providing primary source of review and approval. Life partners should seek each others imprimatur. This should apply to all relationships. A true friend is not one whose support transcends even the foolhardy, but one who is prepared to offer a constructive critique when appropriate.

The *Talmud* in *Eiruvim 18a* suggests that the first person was a self-sufficient androgynous being. Hashem said, "ostv ,uhv cuy tk usck". It is not good that man should be alone as a self-sufficient creature, devoted only to himself. He, therefore, divided this first being into two distinct people, man and woman, each reflecting unique qualities. Either one alone is incomplete. The perfection of the human personality occurs when man and woman live for one another in total harmony, functioning together as one unit, even while each performs their own individual tasks. Indeed, as the *Raavad* states, woman was created from man's body in order to establish the tone for marriage. Had she been created from dust like man, they would have gone their own separate ways, independent of one another. Hashem created one from the other in order to designate their reciprocal need to live together as one unit, in constant need of each other.

The *Raavad* states that this manner of creation also defines the approach necessary to establish a stable marriage relationship. The couple's attitude should be one in which each views the other as

an inherent component of him or herself. One should be as concerned about his or her mate as he is about himself.

This paradigmatic relationship should serve as the basic model for all relationships among fellow men. We should identify with our fellow Jews' needs as being intrinsically our own. We will then have attained the apex of fulfilling the *Torah's* perspective of the *middah* of "*chessed*", kindness.