

They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” and he said, “Behold! She is in the tent.” (18:9)

Three angels, disguised as Arabs, were welcomed by Avraham *Avinu* to his tent. After “partaking” of a luscious and satiating meal, the angels prepared for their real mission: to inform Avraham and Sarah *Imeinu* that they would soon be the progenitors of the next Patriarch. The angels inquired about Sarah’s whereabouts, to which Avraham answered, “She is in the tent.” *Rashi* explains that the angels were quite aware that Sarah was in the tent. The intent of their query was merely to endear Sarah to Avraham by underscoring the fact that she was a *tznuah*, a modest/chaste woman. Avraham’s vocalization of Sarah’s qualities would enhance his appreciation of her. Interestingly, we observe that the one quality which impressed Avraham was the *middah*, attribute, of *tznius*. I think this serves as a paradigm for marriage: a husband is (should be) proud when his wife is lauded for her adherence to the laws concerning *tznius*.

Chazal (*Yoma* 47a) relate that Kimchis had seven sons who served in the position of *Kohen Gadol*. When questioned by the *Chachamim*, Sages, what she did to merit such a great reward, she replied, “In all my days, the beams of my house did not see the braids of my hair.” [This is not a discourse on *halachah*. *Chazal* imply that Kimchis’ act of *tznius* was an act of piety, going beyond the letter of the law. This is, indeed, the opinion of many *poskim*, *Halachic* decisors. There are those, however, who rule otherwise, making it mandatory to cover one’s hair even in the privacy of one’s home. The purpose of this citation is simply to underscore the overriding importance of *tznius* in Jewish society and especially in the Jewish home.] Interestingly, *Kehunah Gedolah*, High Priesthood, is a position which is a legacy that is usually extended to the children of those in that position and to every generation thereafter. *Tznius* affects generations, leaving its mark not only on the present, but on the future as well.

Why was Kimchis blessed with *Kohanim Gedolim*? What connection is there between *Kehunah Gedolah* and *tznius*? The *Kohen Gadol* performs his greatest service to Hashem, and on behalf of *Klal Yisrael* in the most private realm of *kedushah*, sanctity: the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*, Holy of Holies. Nobody sees him, because nobody is granted entrance. Indeed, only the *Kohen Gadol* enters, once a year, on *Yom Kippur*. This is the epitome of *tznius*, which extends beyond our collective dress code. *Tznius* is a vital part of the Torah lifestyle, demanding modesty in all aspects of behavior. Hashem is everywhere: in everything we do, in every area of our lives. Our moral modesty allows us to have greater access to Him. The “smaller” we make ourselves, the more room we provide for Him.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, makes an insightful observation. *Chazal* teach that Avraham was twenty-five years old when he married Sarah. When the angels paid their visit, the couple had been married just about seventy-five years! Endearing a wife to her husband would seem appropriate, perhaps even necessary, when they are a young couple, commencing the journey of married life – but not for a couple about to celebrate their seventy-fifth wedding anniversary!

The *Mashgiach* derives from here a powerful lesson: the closer the relationship between two people, the greater is their difficulty in showing and articulating the appreciation they have for one another. [After time, the pair become so used to one another and each one's contributions to the relationship that they begin to expect it.] Each party expects his/her spouse to give it his/her all. After all, it is his/her "obligation." Thus, when one fails to deliver, to provide, is late, or lacks enthusiasm, the relationship becomes damaged.

The *Sifri* teaches: "*Chesed* begins with those who are closest to us, and then spreads to encompass our neighbors, until we reach out to the entire world. Jewish law demands that a man be as concerned about his wife as he is about himself. Indeed, it is only when each member of a married couple is concerned for the other that happiness reigns in their home, in their lives." In other words, the most critical component of a happy marriage – and, by extension, a happy home – is *chesed*. The institution of marriage begins with *chesed*, because each one, husband and wife, is obligated to shift focus from him/herself to his/her spouse.

The *Mashgiach* explains that, regardless of the husband's avenue of *parnassah*, livelihood – whether he is gainfully employed, or he is learning full-time in *Kollel* – he spends his days toiling to deliver sustenance – be it material or spiritual – into the home. The wife spends her days working – either within the home or outside of it; plus, she cares for and raises the children. Each member of the marriage unit, husband and wife, should show his/her spouse appreciation for everything that he/she does. If we would only focus on the many positive contributions of the spouse, instead of the one thing or time that something was not done, we would have a better, more sustainable relationship. Unfortunately, some people, by their very nature, always note what was not done and make the effort to harp on it all of the time. If the angels felt it necessary to endear Sarah to Avraham – after seventy-five years of marriage – we may be certain that acknowledgment and appreciation of a spouse's qualities and contributions are crucial to a good marriage – regardless how long one has been married.

Furthermore, parents should view themselves as transmitters of the *mesorah*, the Torah tradition from *Sinai*. As such, their preoccupation should be focused, not on material gain,

but on a nurturing, calm, happy home which fosters Torah adherence. If both partners in the marriage focus on these aspects, not only will they succeed in providing the perfect background for their children's education, they will also have a much happier home life. Happy parents set the tone of the home. Children growing up in a happy home are themselves happy; thus, they are able to grow spiritually – which is really what Judaism is all about: raising spiritually astute children. When a spiritual breakdown occurs, it manifests itself in the emotional, ethical and moral development of the children.