

PART I



Great
Expectations
LTD.

Great Expectations

How much can we expect of our children when they get married? Can we ask — nicely — for help, or is it a taboo topic and we mothers are meant to manage all alone? And what about our in-law children? What can we expect from them, and how far should we go to accommodate them?



CHAPTER 1

Adjustment Time

Nechama's Story

Don't forget the cabbage!" I yelled as Eli shut the door. "And keep the baby out for a loooooong time. I have tons to do still!" I took a deep breath and a gulp of coffee, and started mopping the floors, trying not to hyperventilate. The cleaning lady had canceled yesterday and I had spent all last night wide awake reading stories to Elazar, who had a stomach bug. Now it was two hours to a two-day yom tov, and I was *wiped*.

I wish, wish, wish that Chevi would walk in right now and say, "Hi, Ma! I thought you could use some help!" I fantasized. But of course, that wouldn't be happening. Chevi had told me that she and Shua had planned a picnic for the early afternoon. They'd for sure be exhausted afterwards and would need to take a long nap, after which it would take Chevi at least two hours to get her makeup and sheitel looking perfect for yom tov.

At this rate, I'm lucky if I have time to smear on some lipstick!

I swished the mop halfheartedly around the corners of the dining room, trying to push away a muddy streak of resentment.

Doesn't she know it's almost yom tov? Doesn't she remember how exhausted I sounded on the phone this morning when she called to ask me how to

make my special tuna salad? I specifically told her about being up all night. It was a hint... but she didn't seem to take it.

There wasn't much time to dwell on these rancorous thoughts, though, because the next minute the potato knishes were burning, and Baruch was hollering from upstairs that the light bulb had just burned out in the bathroom.

"You look exhausted," Eli said, when he came home from the supermarket. "Why don't you go and rest for a little bit. You don't want to go into yom tov feeling like a shmatte."

"Kneidlach," was all I could mumble. "I forgot to make the kneidlach!"

"What's with Chevi?" Eli snapped. "She should be here helping. They're coming for yom tov; they should help make yom tov, no?"

I pretended not to hear him.

"She went to her in-laws for Rosh HaShanah. Don't tell me they didn't go over to help first," he went on. "I'm calling her right now. You can't be doing this all alone."

"No! Don't call her!" I begged. "Please, Eli! It's not right. She's... married now." My voice caught in something that sounded very much like a sob. My sisters had predicted that I'd be falling apart when Chevi got married. As the only girl in our family, followed by seven boisterous boys, she was my right-hand woman, my best friend, and my round-the-clock erev yom tov helper. But she'd gone and gotten married, leaving me flying solo. And I was trying to be a big girl about it.

"I really don't understand what the big deal is," Eli said. "She has no responsibilities and nothing to do today. They're moving in for two days, for goodness sake. We even built them their own personal sukkah! What's the big deal about asking for a little help? They should have offered it themselves!"

"I don't know what the whole boundaries thing is," I blubbered, adding too much pepper to the kneidlach mixture. "I don't even know what's right anymore. I want to be a *good* mother of a married daughter. I don't want to mess it up. I don't want her to feel that we're infringing on her space at all. I still remember overhearing a friend talk about her friend who was too clingy to her married daughter and she ended up getting totally shut out of their lives." I shuddered. "Newlyweds need tons of space."

“They have tons of space,” Eli said flatly. “They have their own apartment on the other side of town and we never pressure them to come over or to do very much at all. In fact, the only thing I remember asking Chevi to do since she got married is to pass me the salt when they were here for Shabbos. When we were first married, I’m sure you would have offered to help your mother prepare for yom tov. I think you’re overthinking this one, Necham.”

Somehow, in what could only be called a monumental miracle, I made it to the finish line. Shua and Chevi rushed through the door as I was *bensching licht*.

“Sorry I’m late. We went to visit my in-laws to wish them a *gut yom tov* and there was crazy traffic,” she said breathlessly. “Let me light!”

“You’re taking a rest,” Eli told me firmly. “I’m sure that Chevi —”

I shot him a reproachful look, but Chevi didn’t even seem to hear.

“I’m just going to walk Shua to shul,” she called from the foyer. “And then I told Miriam that I would come over for a little bit to schmooze.”

You should have seen the look on Eli’s face.

I took a deep breath and set the younger kids up with some toys so I could try to get a few minutes of downtime, but inside I was fuming. What had happened to my daughter, who was always so in tune with me in the past? Wasn’t there even a shred of closeness between us anymore? How could she be so callously indifferent to my needs?

I pushed these angry thoughts away. There was no point in coddling them; they’d only grow bigger and more painful. Instead, I tried to focus on the good and the practical.

This is all normal beginning-of-marriage stuff. I’m sure it’ll pass and we’ll get into some kind of swing of things. So just bite your tongue. Hard. And smile, Nechama, smile as though you mean it. It’s a nachas that she’s married, and he’s a wonderful boy. You’re managing just fine on your own.

I mentally uttered this magical mantra a dozen times that night. I rehearsed it as I stood up to clear the dishes and schlep them up two flights of stairs all by myself — with Chevi blissfully oblivious as she whispered with Shua, hardly even noticing when I removed the fish plate in front of her. I hung onto my mantra for dear life as I served the main course and dessert — with Eli and a couple of the boys coming to lend a hand. And then I forced myself to intone it again, as my oldest son Heshy helped me tidy up after the seudah when Chevi and Shua

left right after *bensching* to “get some fresh air.” Chevi had literally not budged from her seat all night.

“If you don’t say something, I will,” Eli growled as we set up the sukkah beds. “Because I am about to explode. Where are her *middos* and *derech erez*? Is she totally blind to the fact that you need a break?”

That’s when I fell apart.

“I just don’t know what to doooooo,” I wailed. “I have no idea what I’m supposed to say and what I’m not supposed to say. I’m trying so hard to be a good mother and mother-in-law, but it feels *impossible!* And I have no idea what happened to my Chevi!!!”

Chevi’s Take

I HAVE TO BE honest here: I was really nervous going to my parents for yom tov. I mean, of course Shua and I have been at Mommy and Tatty’s for Shabbos, but this is different. It’s yom tov, two whole days, long meals, plus my parents often have guests — it’s just... *a lot*. It can get intense. Also, all the boys are home, unlike a regular Shabbos, which can mean all sorts of fighting and kibitzing. I was worried that they’d start ragging on Shua, which would be sooo embarrassing. And on yom tov, Mommy gets super tense from all the cooking and serving and cleaning. Just another reason why I was so nervous about going to them.

I love my parents and my family, but Shua’s not at all used to that kind of situation. He’s the youngest in his family, totally pampered, and they have only three kids so it’s very low-key all the time in their house. It’s not like I’m trying to exactly *protect* him from the full extent of my lively family... Okay, maybe I am. I just kind of want him to ease into things instead of getting hit over the head with it all in one shot.

That’s another thing. Shua’s not like my brothers. He’s not a life-of-the-party type of guy. He doesn’t love noise and jabbering and singing at the top of your lungs. He doesn’t say anything outright, but I think he often feels kind of put upon by our family. He’s not a hundred percent comfortable with the way everyone’s sort of expecting him to participate during the meal; Tatty always wants him to do the *mezuman*. I think he really just wants to be left alone and hang out with me.

I would never tell my parents about this straight out — they would be

very offended, and also they'd get nervous that maybe he's not the right boy for me, blah, blah, blah. It's such a delicate balance with parents.

It was also sort of sticky about us coming to my parents for yom tov altogether. Shua's older brother, who's married with two kids, went to his wife's family in England for Sukkos, so that leaves my in-laws with only their daughter, who's single, which means it's lonely for them. They're not the most social people, so it's not like they have tons of guests to invite and I really felt bad leaving them without their youngest son for yom tov.

Obviously, they have to share us, and we *did* go to them for Rosh HaShanah, and my parents definitely deserve to have us also. Still, at the end of the day, I knew that Shua felt guilty the whole time, which made it hard for me to really enjoy myself. I'm glad we made the trip out to wish them a *gut yom tov*. They were literally beaming with happiness when we showed up and surprised them on erev yom tov.

Another thing is that before I got married, my mother and I were best friends, in, like, a cute way, not overkill. With me getting married, I knew I was going to have to break that connection — my kallah teacher emphasized to me that I really needed to move away from my mother in order to bond with my husband, and she's right. Mommy and I never really talked about it — it was an unspoken type of thing.

Obviously, she knows that I can't be that close with her anymore; it wouldn't even be healthy or appropriate now that I'm married! I'm not going to come right out and *say* it, because that would be awkward, but it's also awkward trying to build some kind of new relationship on totally different terms. I was going to ask my kallah teacher about that, actually. Like how close are you supposed to be with your mother after you're married? I find it to be such a gray area.

I feel a little bad, because I really didn't help very much during the seudah. I knew that Shua wouldn't want me to leave him alone even for a second, so I kind of tried to hint that to Mommy so she would understand why I wasn't getting up to clear and stuff. I hope she understood, although I'm getting major vibes that she's mad at me. I really don't know what to do. I used to help her a ton before I got married. Now I feel like it's my time to be a newlywed; let the boys help out for once! When did I ever have a chance to be pampered?!

Anyway, bottom line, I really have to make sure that Shua feels as

comfortable as possible, especially at my parents'. That's my first priority now. It feels a little weird to not be doing *kibbud av va'eim* in order to take care of my husband. It's a big shift, but I'm sure my parents understand, and I'm also really sure that they're proud of me for being a good wife. Hopefully, with time, Shua will feel more comfortable and he'll get used to our loud, energized family, and then I'll be able to help out more and things will be less pressured.

Marriage is definitely a big adjustment — for everyone, I guess!

REBBETZIN ROCHEL LUBIN RESPONDS

A New Reality

NECHAMA AND CHEV'S ACCOUNT is a perfect portrayal of many of the factors that come into play when parents marry off their children. The mother is suddenly confronted with a reality that calls into question her deepest thoughts about raising children, about parenting, and about her own *avodas Hashem*. It's as if now that the child gets married, it exposes the mother's inner core; everything that comes out after the wedding can be seen as an outcome of the twenty or so years that preceded it.

Let's take a better look at what's happening.

First of all, Nechama, you sound completely and utterly exhausted. You just made a *chasunah* a short while ago! You married off your only daughter! This must have wrung you out to the core. Just the physical preparations are enormous, but there's also the emotional component that can be so, so difficult. And then on top of that, comes *yom tov* when there's so much to do. Above that, you have a new son-in-law and it's only natural that you want to impress him with good food and work even extra hard. So my heart really goes out to you, and I understand where you're coming from.

When a mother's gas tank is empty, she can't handle anything; she loses proportion and is set adrift. Having a worn-out battery is like trying to breathe underwater. Some years back, when my husband was a cancer

patient (*baruch Hashem*, he's healthy today!), he had to be treated for water that accumulated around his lungs. He described the sensation as what one may feel when underwater, when the person is drowning and desperately flailing to receive oxygen. The exhaustion and terror are unimaginable. This is how I see you, Nechama. This is why it's of paramount importance for a mother to keep herself feeling energized and full.

I remember becoming very aware of that during the many years of fighting for my husband's life. I had to figure out how to juggle raising kids and earning an income at a time when I made it my life's mission to save his. It was clear to me that when Hashem gave him the illness, He gave it to all of us; we were all in it together in a collective package deal.

Looking back, I feel that the balance I was able to maintain in my life was a direct result of my ability to be in touch with myself to the extent that I could intuit what I needed, in the moment, to give me an immediate dose of *koach*. Whether it was getting some fresh air, buying myself a little something, or having a cup of coffee — alone or with a friend; it didn't have to be grandiose or expensive as long as it made me happy! Giving my kids a balanced mother who hasn't lost it, a mother who manages to rise above the situation and be larger than life, is what made all of the difference. We didn't become mere survivors, we were thrivers. *Lo amus*, but rather *ki echyeh*, and with flying colors.

Being able to identify and address the need for replenishing our energy plays a crucial part in our lives. I always advise parents who have just married off a child to take time for themselves and perhaps get away together for a bit. We must remember that aside from our role as parents and CEOs of this operation we call "family," we are primarily partners. All of these little breaks have a cumulative effect to maintain the "us" as *rei'im ahuvim*, beloved partners.

Taking time off when money is tight doesn't have to put you in (further!) debt. Even if resources are scarce, which tends to be the case after a wedding, you can still make the time and place to spend quality time together, alone. It doesn't have to be a weeklong getaway abroad or a cruise to Alaska. It can be one day off or a weekend escape, just to get away and forget about the world. Staying at home is a plausible option too. Have your siblings or friends take the kids for the day and create a little vacation haven in your home. Recover like you did after you gave birth to your children!

Under Construction

Returning to the original anecdote, I want to highlight Chevi's predicament first. She is a newlywed. It's a wonderful time in her life, but it's also a very complex time. She is going through outrageous changes; she and her chasan are building a whole new life together. Ideally, newlyweds ought to walk around with a banner titled "Caution, Construction in Progress."

It takes a lot of effort to be newly married, and Chevi needs every resource she has right now. *B'ezras Hashem*, she'll only be a newlywed once in her life! She now exists in a bubble, and this bubble must be protected and nourished. As the Torah spells it out, "*Al kein ya'azov ish...*" A man must separate from his parents and attach himself to his wife.

Fact: Young couples tend to display self-absorbed patterns of behavior. We as parents *want* this for our newlywed children. We know that if they make that initial investment in the beginning of their marriage, they'll be setting the stage for the rest of their life together. The newlywed bubble is an important investment. You, Nechama, must fully comprehend this and do everything in your power to protect it, rather than wasting your energy to sabotage it.

You might tell yourself that you're only concerned about your daughter's *kibbud eim*, but in actual fact, there's an unspoken belief that this is my daughter! She is *mine!* There's a difference between "I'm teaching her the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'eim*" and "I'm drowning! I deserve her help!"

Your children and your home are your responsibility, not your daughter's. It is your duty to raise your family and take care of them, not hers. Chevi can help you and pitch in, especially during stressful times, but she should not be bearing the burden of managing the household. We must leave room for all our children, even our older kids, to experience their childhood fully, to enjoy what children enjoy doing, and to be preoccupied with normal childhood concerns. Even those children who are mature and seem to enjoy being the "little mommy" and are good at it need to experience real childhood.

There were times when it was customary for little children to go out to work to help the family survive. What worked then doesn't work now. In this generation before Mashiach, our children's *neshamos* are fragile, and they aren't equipped to bear the heavy load of taking care of

their parents' large families. It robs them of their childhood and creates incredible resentment. The price we pay for not being sensitive enough to this fact is disastrous, and the consequences are vast.

A Parent's Role

Years back, as a single girl, I attended a *sheva berachos* of the son of a *gadol hador*. I was fortunate to share a table with a number of *chashuve* women, all married to *talmidei chachamim*. One of the women was the wife of a tremendous *talmid chacham* and *masmid*. She brought up the topic of children's roles in the home and how they helped out. I will never forget how traumatic it was for me to hear her story. She simply exploded.

"I got married tired. My energy levels were majorly depleted during my childhood. I grew up in a large family, and I was the one who ended up raising my siblings. We were poor. My father learned day and night, and my mother worked hard to bring money home. She found it difficult to be gentle and was mostly tense and firm. The burden fell on the shoulders of myself and my two younger sisters. By the time I got married, I was already burnt out. I was missing the energy and the spark of a young newlywed. Where does it state in the Torah that this is how a girl is to be married off? And my poor husband! What did he do to deserve getting a wife in such a state?"

Yes, this may be an extreme situation, but it is true nonetheless. We, the parents, must sit up and take notice.

Our children are not ours, nor are they an extension of ourselves. We tend to feel possessive of our children, yet David HaMelech says, "*Hinei nachalas Hashem banim* — Children are the portion of Hashem"; they are not our possessions, but rather a loan from Hashem given to us to raise *l'Torah, l'chuppah u'l'maasim tovim*. This is their place in our lives and our place in their lives, respectively. We mustn't forget it. We must assume our role of being parents, of being givers rather than takers.

Nechama, you must drop the self-centeredness and instead operate from a place of a true mother, a mother who holds her daughter's hand on her new journey in life as she sets out full of hopes and dreams, yet lacking in experience. A mother who remembers that we are in a time where the Satan works extra hours to dismantle our Jewish homes. Need I say more?!

Where does Chevi fit into the picture? Unfortunately, we parents are only too ready to drop everything and take a child to the ER, *chas v'shalom*, but what about showering them with attention and care when things are fine and good? Our children need us to be available to them, especially after they are married. I will say this unequivocally and very bluntly: The mother needs to be the adult here. She is the one who needs to be mature and put her own “stuff” aside. She needs to be a rock, a support for her daughter, instead of looking for her daughter to be supporting her.

To her credit, Chevi realizes there's no second chance to make a first impression. But poor thing — as she's working so hard to create that impeccable first impression, she *nebach* has to worry that Mommy and Tatty are upset with her!

You must find a solution to your problems, Nechama, because Chevi isn't it. Renewing your battery, getting extra help, whatever it is you need, go out and do it — and fast, so you can give to your family! The reality is that your little girl is trying to focus on building her new home — and rightfully so! Her husband now comes before everything, yourself included.

Let Her Go

Marriage is a significant transition, such a big project that it requires tremendous momentum to get it going. When you want to start swimming, you give a big kick to the wall of the pool and that propels you forward. In this case, your daughter is giving that “kick” to push herself forward, and at times *you* may feel like the wall she just kicked! Instead of panicking, remember she is learning how to swim. Cheer her on and support her. Let her go, and she will eventually come around. But with one caveat: If you will be there for her so she knows she can trust you.

Rebbetzin Kanievsky, *a”h*, used to say: “Do you really want your kids to give you back that which you gave them?” You fed them, but do you want them to feed you? You changed their diapers, should they do the same should the need arise? “We never want our children to give back that kind of care to us, their parents. We want them to continue this habit of selflessness and giving toward their children, and it never stops.”

Children are like *tefillos*; you invest all your energy into them, yet at

the same time they are the source of all your energy. When we talk about giving selflessly and putting your daughter's needs before yours without seeking anything from her in return because she's a newlywed, you have to know: you always end up getting paid back. I watch the way my children treat their own children and the devotion that exists between the siblings, and that's my reward — it's my payback!

Bottom line: Give your daughter her space and *fargin* her this time in her life. Wait a year or so, however much time it takes. Believe me, it's the only way!

Rebbetzin Rochel Lubin is a noted teacher and mentor, as well as a sought-after speaker who travels extensively around the world, giving women *chizzuk* and clarity on many topics related to marriage, motherhood, and other aspects of life.



READERS WRITE

Happily Married — Miles Away

Nechama and Chevi's story touched me a lot. Being that I am only married for a few years, I can relate very much. Adjusting to married life can be very hard, and it is definitely a huge change. Since I was very close to my mother and also to my best friend, I had a hard time confiding in my new husband, whom I didn't know too well yet.

For the first few months, I didn't ask him his opinion very much. I called my mother on *erev Shabbos* to ask her what to wear and to ask her opinion on things. When we left the grocery with tons of packages and my husband wanted to help, I resisted. I totally didn't think that my behavior was a problem. But one thing I was sure of was that my marriage was not the perfect blissful scene I wished for. My love and respect for my husband was not developed yet, and I didn't know what to work on.

But then, after a few months, my husband and I moved to Eretz Yisrael. My marriage totally transformed. It became that blissful scene I had always dreamed of. I learned to rely on my husband and to seek