

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

# Torah Lessons for the Home

## CONNECTING TO HASHEM, CONNECTING TO EACH OTHER

Parshas Naso includes the blessings the Kohanim give to Klal Yisrael. Following these *pesukim*, Hashem tells us, "I will place My Name on Bnei Yisrael and bless them." Bilaam Harasha wanted the opposite — to curse Bnei Yisrael — and tried to devise a way to achieve it, even though he knew that Hashem didn't want him to succeed.

The Panim Yafos explains that the reason Bilaam was not successful was because we have Hashem's Name in our own name. "Yisrael" contains the letters "aleph" and "lamed" which make up Hashem's Name. Likewise, "Yehudah" contains the letters of Hashem's four-letter Name. As long as we are connected to Hashem, we are simply immune to being cursed, and His blessing will rest upon us.

Being connected to Hashem is the foundation of success both in this world and the next. In order to achieve *shalom bayis*, we bring the Shechinah into our homes; without Hashem's presence, there is nothing of significance there at all. In general, wherever problems are found, a lack of Hashem's presence is at the root of things. This can mean a failure to follow *daas Torah* or simply ignoring or sidelining what the Torah tells us.

Sometimes, people think that they should put *shalom bayis* "before" Hashem, before Yiddishkeit, and that this will actually improve their relationship. This is a terrible mistake. While there are rare occasions when (as the Torah tells us), *ratzon Hashem* is actually to "wipe out Hashem's Name," such decisions can never be taken without Torah guidance.

Fundamentally, no one should ever think that he could possibly gain from placing anything other than Hashem and His Torah first. There is essentially no such thing as "putting Hashem before one's *shalom bayis*," because one's *shalom bayis* will only improve as a result of focusing on Hashem's *ratzon* and living according to the Torah. Putting Hashem first means putting yourself first too!

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Parshas
**Naso**
VOL. 6 | ISSUE 34




Good morning,

I recently came across your *shiurim* on TorahAnytime and I was so impressed with the advice you give on *shalom bayis* and *chinuch*. The answers you give are so clear and practical to use. I hope you can answer my question.

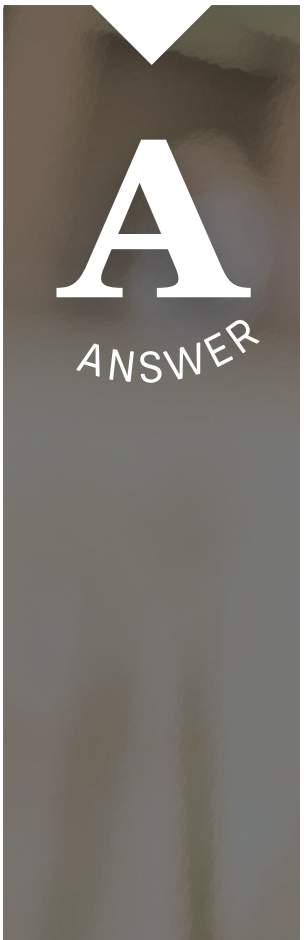
My husband and I plan to take a short vacation next month, and I'm feeling a lot of anxiety about it, because I'm worried that it's going to be just like our last vacation, when I felt so uncomfortable at certain things that my husband wanted. [The writer includes the details which are being omitted here.] I ended up asking a *she'ilah* but my husband wasn't happy with the response.

Not long afterward, I went on vacation with some friends and when I got back my husband accused me of enjoying it more than I enjoyed going on vacation with him. I denied it, but he said it was true, and eventually I admitted that I did feel more comfortable with them.

Now he wants to do the same kind of vacation as last time, though he said he'll do things a bit differently. I asked if we could make certain changes and go to a different place, and he responded by saying that I don't care about him and that I only think about myself.

I want to do what's best for both of us, and I hope you can advise me.

Thank you




I am assuming that by the time you see my response the vacation will be history. If anyone has a question that is time-sensitive, they shouldn't wait for a *shiur* or an essay to receive an answer. I use these platforms to draw attention to issues that affect many people and not to answer specific questions. In such situations people generally need individualized guidance. The details of the situation, the personalities involved, and the surrounding circumstances are all relevant when it comes to practical advice and real-time guidance.

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Everything we do must always start with what the Torah expects of us. True and long-lasting happiness only results when we are guided by the Torah. Even though people can feel fleeting satisfaction from giving in to their desires, this satisfaction never lasts. I've seen so many couples who tried following advice from non-Jewish or non-frum therapists etc., thinking that they would improve their *shalom bayis* — and instead the opposite occurred, being that the advice was not in line with Torah values and principles.

There are people who think they know better and sadly, ridicule those who follow the Torah "even in the twenty-first century" and don't feel

any need or wish to "adapt to the times." These are not people whose opinions we should respect.

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The correct approach whenever we want to know whether something is okay or not is to ask a rav. Sometimes, we really don't know if something is a *chumra*, a *geder*, or basic *halachah*. Looking for clarity in any area is never something to be ashamed of.

In situations such as the one you describe, generally the best way to respond is: "I would like to make you happy and I understand what you're saying. I want to ask a rav and find out what the right thing to do is. I hope we can both really be happy and feel good about what we'll do."

This should never be said in a way that presents you as holier-than-thou and more *ehrlich.* You should also take care not to give the impression that you think your spouse doesn't care about what's right. But you should speak up with confidence, and not apologetically or fearfully. No one should feel intimidated by others to the point that they don't do what they know is right. In most cases, when you speak with confidence, others will automatically respect you more and be more open to hearing a different opinion.

I'm reminded of a certain lawyer who had a reputation for never losing a case. He was once asked how he did it, and he responded that whenever he enters the courtroom, he reminds himself that the judge is just a human being who can't harm him, and that there's no need to be afraid of him. With that frame of mind, he goes into each trial calmly and confidently, and this brings about positive results.

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Addressing one's spouse with confidence isn't always as easy as it sounds on paper, of course. Whenever a situation arises where one spouse feels intimidated by the other, it's important to recognize the dynamics that have led to that situation. Here, there seem to be two issues at play.

One is that the husband seems to be attempting to impose his wishes on his wife, and when she tries to protest, he tells her that she is only thinking of herself.

The correct response here is to point out where she's seeing things differently. It isn't all that complicated. He wants one thing; she wants another. Each of them has the right to take their own wishes into account. Taking your feelings into account, before making a final decision, is not being selfish. In general, people should think of themselves — as well as of other people. So, in this case, when the husband accuses his wife of "only" thinking of herself, she can clarify, "I'm thinking about myself *as well*. I want us *both* to be happy." No arguing or debating, no proving or retaliating. Just a bit of confidence should do it.

The other issue to be aware of is codependency. While we should try to make others happy and comfortable and be the best we can to those around us, the results aren't always in our hands. You may not be able to make everyone happy all the time, and frankly, you aren't obligated to.

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Any husband or wife, faced with a situation where their spouse wants them to do something they're not comfortable with, has to address the situation and not simply give into it. That means being brave about confronting it, but it should never mean that you have to become aggressive or confrontational in any way. You must communicate using gentle terms and in a caring manner to ensure that it doesn't look like you only care about yourself.

It's also important to realize that you have different preferences and perhaps different personalities and to express your understanding and consideration. "I understand where you're coming from, and I realize why this is important to you." Speak with sensitivity, and speak calmly and gently.

Clarify that you aren't more right; rather, it's about your feelings: "I really want to make you happy. I also want to feel happy about the things that I am doing. I'm trying to find the best way to do that, and for me, that means asking a rav for clarity before we decide what to do."

It can also be very helpful to point out that when you feel comfortable with what you're doing, both of you will benefit. "When I'm reassured that I'm doing the right thing, I'm so much more relaxed. Maybe with my friends I was feeling more comfortable about how we spent our time, but what I really want is to be relaxed and enjoy my vacation *with you*. Nothing compares to a great vacation with you."

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Some topics remain taboo and the elephant in the room, until they crop up at the wrong time, when a quick decision is needed. There's no need to wait for that. Even if it seems easier to avoid the topic and not bring it up, generally, if you introduce it yourself, at a calm moment, by telling your husband how much you're looking forward to the vacation, the entire atmosphere of your discussion will be different. You can then continue by saying, "I'd really like to resolve this one issue beforehand," and emphasize how much you would appreciate it if he could take your preferences into account, and how both of you will benefit as a result.

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In any situation where husband and wife have a difference of opinion, it's so important to use sensitivity, humility, and understanding. It's also important to take the background picture into account.



It's normal for people to struggle with their own personal choices, and yet in a healthy relationship, built on mutual respect and a strong connection, it will be easier for each spouse to overcome their temptations when they feel connected and understood.

Certainly no one should impose his or her will on anyone else, and no one should ever think that getting his own way will lead to true satisfaction. But when a person feels loved and respected, it's easier for him to push distractions and temptations aside.

A husband who keeps raising the issue of the vacation and keeps hearing his wife objecting to his requests is likely to get stressed and upset. If, however, it's his wife who raises the issue and tells him how much she's looking forward to it, he will approach the question in a more relaxed frame of mind, and be more open to hear what she has to say.

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Hashem has given women a special wisdom to know how to deal with any issues that arise in the home, as it states: *Chochmas nashim bonsah beisah*. When a wife uses this wisdom to show her husband love and respect, and receives the correct, Torah'dig guidance, she will have the *siyatta diShmaya* to build her home and enable both herself and her husband to do *ratzon Hashem* with confidence.

In this way, we can take even difficult and uncomfortable situations and use them to connect with each other and bring Hashem into our homes and our lives.

## **TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME**: NASO 5784

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