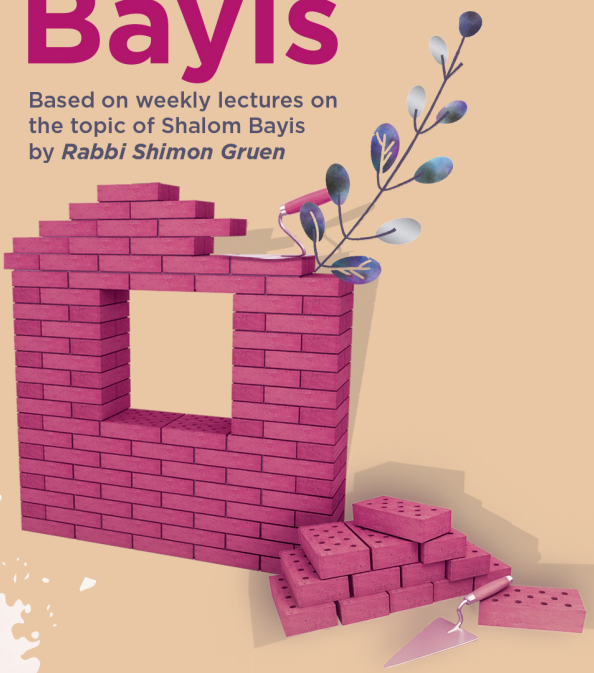
The Basics of Shalom Bayis

Based on weekly lectures on the topic of Shalom Bayis by ***Rabbi Shimon Gruen***

For married couples only



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Preview edition
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The Basics of Shalom Bayis





I begin with utmost gratitude to Hashem for enabling me to publish this book which I hope will be a help for countless couples who want to do the right thing, enhance their relationships, and would like to grow closer to Hashem as a couple, together.

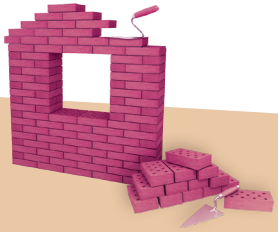
It's so apropos that this is first being published in honor of the Keiravtuni retreat. My appreciation for the organizers of this event, R' Eliezer & R' Mechy is limitless. What they've done for me personally is something I will forever be indebted for. But more than that, they enabled me to help so many people in many areas. If not for them, this book and many other of my activities would never have been brought to fruition. May Hashem repay them evermore with *ach tov v'chessed.*

At the same time I would like to thank the team of TorahAnytime.com who invited me to give classes online which have benefited many of their thousands of listeners. Their motto "Hashem's reason for the Internet", is very on target. Hashem should give them continued success in spreading the word of Hashem, *umal'ah ha'aretz de'ah es Hashem k'mayim l'yam michasim, bimheira biyameinu.*

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank those who have attended my classes, those that gave their input, and those that helped me with transcribing, editing, and finalizing the text. I'd like to specifically mention my mother Morah Rochel Gruen for her ongoing support, as well as for her input in each and every chapter. Mention must be made of my superb editors Mrs. Judy Gruen (no relation), and Rabbi Pinchas Wolhendler.

Last but certainly not least, *acharon chaviv*, I truly appreciate all that my partner in life and in my work, my Eishes Chayil תחי' does, in building my own home, and being such a strong part in helping to build so many other people's homes. May we be blessed to live for many long and happy years together with the *shechina sheruya beineinu.*

Shimon Gruen



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PREFACE

This short book is based on a series of popular classes I give to men and women about the fundamentals of creating and maintaining Shalom Bayis. They have been adapted in book form based on transcriptions from those classes.

It should be noted that there are currently over 90 classes available on TorahAnytime.com, and this condensed forum is obviously not adequate for sharing all that there is to say on this subject. Instead this 8 chapter book focuses on the first eight classes. If you learn better by listening than by reading, many of my classes are available for free in both English and Yiddish on TorahAnytime.com

As someone who regularly teaches both chinuch and shalom bayis classes, I can tell you that it's always more challenging to talk about shalom bayis than it is to talk about chinuch. It's much easier to talk to adults about children than it is to talk to adults about adults. As long as we're talking about children, everyone feels safe: It's not about us, it's about them! It's about trying to successfully work with our children and students, which everyone agrees is so important.

It's much less comfortable however, to turn the attention toward ourselves as husbands and wives. To ask ourselves how we are doing in this area, and to review what we are doing versus what we know we're supposed to be doing.

There is actually a very vital connection between chinuch and shalom bayis. A great deal of the dysfunction we see in children today stems from the discord



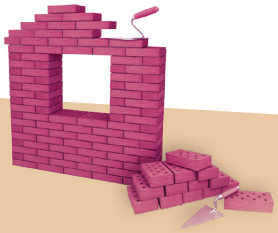
in their homes and the tension between their parents. The fact that we see so many troubled kids today – kids who are acting out, depressed, and at-risk, can oft be attributed to their parents' shalom bayis. It is therefore critical to create and maintain a harmonious atmosphere in our homes to the best of our capabilities.

We owe it to our children to provide them with a healthy home, ideally with two parents. The cost to children of a lack of shalom bayis is huge, with potentially lifelong impacts. They may be helped by therapy or tutors and other special things, but without two parents modeling a healthy relationship, the children will be stressed, disturbed, perhaps alienated from Yiddishket, and certainly alienated from you, their parents.

When we work on our marriages, we aren't just giving ourselves the opportunity to enjoy a happy relationship, we are giving our children the foundation of success – a healthy and happy home.

With regards to both chinuch and shalom bayis, we need to deal with issues responsibly and respectfully, understanding how each situation is different and how each person is different. Please read this book with the mindset of finding what you can do to better your marriage. If your focus is on learning what your spouse can do, this will be detrimental to your marriage. Even if as a couple you decide to read this book together, please make sure that the focus and mindset is on what "we" can learn as opposed to what one can point out to the other and say "That's just what I've been telling you for the longest time". With the good will and intentions of everyone who reads this book, and with the help of Hashem, we will succeed in strengthening our marriages – the foundation of our communities.

A note on the text: I vary using "he" or "she" when talking about spouses to avoid the awkward "he or she" and also to avoid the less personal use of "they" or "them." There is no intention to attribute any particular issue or problem to either gender, and I have tried to be as fair as possible in varying these pronouns.



1
The Basics of The Basics

WHAT IS SHALOM BAYIS?

Unfortunately, when people hear the phrase "shalom bayis" they think, "Oh, here comes advice on how to fix our problems." This is often true when the topic of chinuch comes up as well. With both topics, the focus should not be on problems. The focus should be on getting the foundations right. If the foundations are in place, great! You can now work on making things even better. Shalom Bayis and chinuch are not about fixing problems. Rather it's about becoming the most successful spouses and parents you can be.

Unfortunately, when people hear the phrase "shalom bayis" they think, "Oh, here comes advice on how to fix our problems." This is often true when the topic of chinuch comes up as well. With both topics, the focus should not be on problems. The focus should be on getting the foundations right. If the foundations are in place, great! You can now work on making things even better. Shalom Bayis and chinuch are not about fixing problems. Rather it's about becoming the most successful spouses and parents you can be.

Many people accept situations in marriage where there are obvious problems. As long as things are "okay," they're okay too. If there are major problems, they certainly cannot be ignored. But even when things are just "okay", people should work to add more "vitamins" to the ingredient list of the marriage. Why accept a mediocre situation? You wouldn't want to just accept it with a child and his achievements. You'd want to work to bring

out the best in him. Why wouldn't you do the same in the most important relationship of your life?

You can work to make your marriage even more successful and satisfying, and that is what this book is about.

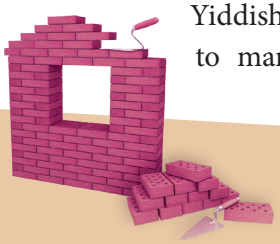
MARRIAGE REQUIRES ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Just yesterday I was talking to somebody who was having some marital issues. He complained to me that the man who taught him his chassan classes didn't prepare him well, he didn't teach him enough to live happily with a wife. "Now I feel like I'm lost and I don't know what to do about it," he said. Both men and women often feel they are not prepared well enough for marriage.

It's true, certain topics are not discussed enough by chassan or kallah teachers, topics that if covered more thoroughly would make matters much simpler. But as I told this young man, there always remains so much that needs to be learned on the job.

Remember when you went to sleepaway camp for the first time? You knew some of the activities and rules before you went to camp, but it's impossible to know every situation that may come up at sleepaway camp. You learn through experience, the good and the bad! Once you're there you'll learn what's supposed to be done and what's not supposed to be done. You need the hands-on experience.

Now marriage is not anything like camp, (although for some people maybe it feels like an Army Boot Camp!) But it is similar in that only after you are married do you begin to understand what's right and wrong for your relationship. There's a saying from the Bluzhever Rav, the Tzvi Latzaddik. It was said about Yiddishkeit in general, but I think it applies to marriage too. The idea was: Deep down



everyone knows what's right. Even the biggest *rasha* if he were to act the way he knows is right, would be the biggest *tzaddik*. It's not that people don't know what's right.

What's brilliant about this is that often, people assume that it's a lack of knowledge that causes problems. He just didn't know better. It's true that very often people need to listen to advice from people with more experience and greater insight. When people are not open to learning and listening it is difficult for them to improve. But when people are ready to learn, there's already a lot that they will pick up on their own. It's important to know that. Since every marriage is different, that's why much of what you need to know must be learned on the job. Many things are only relevant to your spouse or your marriage and nobody else's.

The person who keeps his eyes, ears, mind and heart open to what is going to work and what is not going to work, will be able to build a great marriage.

However, learning powerful ideas about shalom bayis is not enough. We have to be able to apply these ideas. The truth is that so many of these ideas we know already, and we may even be able to lecture others! The tough part though is to apply our knowledge.

Why does this present so much difficulty?

Well for starters, when it comes to our own marriages, we're blinded. After all, we are emotionally involved. The things we know logically easily get lost in the tumult of our feelings and escape us.

There's a funny story about a person who was taking an immigration test. The immigrations officer wanted to see if he knew some English. After seeing that he knew some basic words, the officer asked him, "Ca you spell the word cultivate?"

"Sure." He said, "C-u-l-t-i-v-a-t-e." Impressed, the officer asked, "Could you give me a sentence with the word cultivate?" "Sure." The immigrant responded confidently. "I vas vaiting for the bus. It vas too **cold-to-vait** so I took a texi."

This story really applies to us. We often know things, can spell out all the right terms and ideas, but when it comes to applying it, face complete derailment.

What's the solution? Sometimes we just need someone to show us how to apply ideas we already know to real life situations.

#1 DON'T COMPARE

It's tempting to look at someone else's marriage, which looks so outstanding from the outside, and be jealous. Never compare your situation to anyone else's. It's one of the worst things you can do in a relationship, and in marriage specifically. Yes, you can learn general ideas and concepts of shalom bayis by observing role models, but never compare! Not only are the individuals in the marriage different, but so are their needs, communication styles, and chemistry.

We make ourselves needlessly unhappy when we imagine how much better other marriages may be (we don't really know, do we?) and maintain unrealistic expectations. While we can try to emulate our role models in how kindly they speak to one another, how considerate they are of one another etc. Still, we should never compare marriages.

Now, some marriages are easier, and others are more difficult, but there's almost no such thing as a good or bad marriage, per se. What do I mean by this? The *passuk* says מאתי לא תצא הרעות והטוב. How can we understand the *passuk* that even good doesn't come from Hashem?



Our human perception is so limited, that we cannot really see what is good. From HaShem everything is good. When it rains, it's good. Now, if it rained on your nicest suit while you were on the way to an important meeting, you may not see it that way. But certainly rain is good, we have nothing without rain! Everything that is good or bad depends on our perception, whether we accept and appreciate that which the Almighty is giving, or not.

This is also true about marriage. Marriage is also from Hashem, and generally speaking, every marriage is good. Almost anything could and should be worked out. There are methods of improving your marriage, don't give up! When people understand how much really depends on how they interpret their situation and how they accept it, they come to realize how much is really in their control, and that they can turn every marriage into a happy and blissful relationship.

The gemara itself teaches us this concept! Chazal tell us that in Eretz Yisrael, *chassanim* would be asked on the morning after their *chasuna* whether their *zivug* was "Matzah" or "Motzah" – meaning; were their wives in the category of מצא אשה מצא טוב –was she a "good find" – or was she in the category of מוצא אני את האשה מר ממות – "a wife that is worse than death".

This *gemara* is so hard to understand! First of all, why would they ask about the status of his marriage the day after they got married? They just got married! Why didn't they give the *chassan* encouragement and tell him, "It's going to be great!" Why didn't they wait until the first anniversary to ask about the couple's married life?

I believe that the gemara here is teaching a deep message: You just got married. You're in a brand-new relationship; there's nothing that *could* be good or bad yet! However, we tell the *chassan*: Whether your marriage is going to be good or bad is

dependent on you. You are the one who decides whether your marriage will be מצא or מוצא. The same marriage can be both.

This is such a crucial message: Every relationship can work. Every relationship can be enhanced. Good ones could become better and even difficult ones can become good; if only we are ready to invest and put our heads and hearts into making it great.

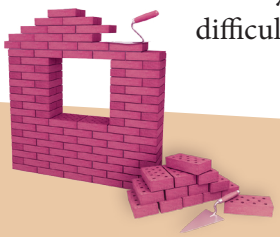
#2 DO YOUR PART

Sometimes, one spouse is ready to work on the marriage, while the other spouse is not as inspired or interested to make things right again. The willing spouse can feel resentful, thinking: "Here I am, putting all this effort and work into my marriage. But my spouse isn't ready to work, so what good is all my effort and all my good intentions? It's all a waste!"

This thought may seem logical, but the truth is that each spouse has the power to make the marriage work, even when the other spouse isn't (as) interested in investing in the relationship. There are certainly situations where two people are active in correcting the relationship, but it's amazing to see how much each spouse can accomplish on their own in a marriage. Obviously, it's much easier when both spouses are committed to the same goal, but the surprising truth is that difficult relationships can be helped by one spouse applying himself to learn what has to be done, and implementing what he has learned.

#3 THE FIRST TOOL: UNITY

When it comes to tools for a good marriage, what I think is the very first thing to talk about is the universal difficulty that each and every couple struggles with. Marriage is confusing – there's





the gender difference, difference in upbringing, the unfamiliarity with the person you married … there are so many reasons why marriage looks very difficult.

However, the truth is that marriage is actually very similar to other relationships we experience in life. If we look at the great Torah literature, we see that historically, the *sefarim* almost never discuss *shalom bayis*! They talk about concepts that apply to relationships, like *ahavas yisrael* and *middos tovos*, but the Torah literature about marriage has really only surfaced in the last few years. Why is that? It's not because marriage wasn't important to previous generations – the Rambam *paskens* that a person should love his wife just as much as he loves himself and honor her even more than himself! (He speaks similarly about how much a woman is supposed to respect and honor her husband.) But the actual marriage relationship isn't discussed much and emphasized in the *sefarim*. Why not?

The early *sefarim* explain a deep concept about marriage. Hashem wants us to elevate ourselves; to grow and become much bigger people, this is why He created the concept of marriage. Marriage is an opportunity for personal growth that we can never access as single individuals. But how do we grow through the relationship of marriage? Actually, what makes any relationship work for that matter?

GROWING FROM ME TO WE

Young children often have an egoistic attitude, everything is about them. Throughout life, each relationship we have – with a family member, classmate or friend – should help us grow out of our selfishness. The success of any relationship depends on how we are relating to another person. For example, how much

of the time am I thinking about *me* versus how much time do I think about *us,* about our relationship. Stepping out of the "me" box and into the "we" box doesn't mean you have to neglect yourself, but the degree to which we are willing to go beyond the "me" and make space for another person will determine how successful that relationship will be. A relationship that is focused only on what you can get, is not a real relationship.

Now we understand why the *sefarim* don't discuss marriage specifically – because the skills we acquire from general relationships as children/young adults train us in how to relate to our spouses.

Obviously, the necessity of having a good relationship is far more important in marriage than any other relationship. Chazal and the *sefarim* teach us that the presence of the *shechinah* in our homes depends on it; our happiness in *olam hazeh* and eternity in *olam haba* depend on the quality of our marriages. However, all of the tools you will need to apply to shalom bayis are the same as with any other relationship – to transcend the *me* and relate to someone else.

The major difference between marriage and other relationships is the level of commitment. Other relationships don't *have* to work – you can find another friend, you can borrow ketchup from someone else. But when it comes to shalom bayis, we don't have that luxury – we *need* to make it work. Without being ready to make it work, we will suffer. Obviously, Hashem gave us a way out of the relationship, but only in extreme situations. In general, He wants us to make our marriage work, because only when we are in a non-negotiable relationship can we truly work on our *middos* and refine our character. In disposable relationships, we don't have to work – we can always opt out. But the all-encompassing commitment we make to our marriages makes us grow.





LET'S GET PRACTICAL

We shouldn't be scared of the *avodah* of *shalom bayis*. Although the Torah does emphasize the critical importance of making the marriage relationship work. As previously mentioned, the tools we need to make it work are not really much different than the efforts we have made in all of our previous relationships.

So let's review this! The tool that is vital to all relationships, is the ability to step out of the "me" box and get into the "we" box – it's about *us*, not just *me*. So much of *shalom bayis* is based on how seriously we take our spouses. How much are we willing to understand our spouses? When we work together, when we try to understand each other and relate to each other, we can achieve a beautiful relationship of happiness and harmony.

THE NEWS ROUNDUP

The good news is that as mentioned earlier, every marriage *can* work. We can learn how to do it! The more effort we put in, the better it will become.

The "bad" news is, that marriage is a life-long project. A few months of therapy and counseling isn't going to do the job. Whatever we discuss here needs to be implemented constantly if we want the relationship to blossom.

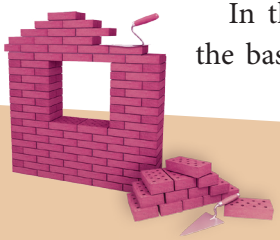
The great news is that it won't be tough forever – it will become easier as time passes. The better you relate to each other and appreciate each other, the closer and the more natural you become, at your great career of being the very best spouse you can be! So don't put this book down, read on and hopefully you'll pick up some good things.

2
Flexibility

Sometimes I am asked for a specific definition of *shalom bayis*. Is it merely the lack of arguments, or is it people living happily together? After all, sometimes one person thinks there's *shalom bayis* but the other party is not happy. So is mutual understanding necessary for true shalom bayis?

I believe that *shalom bayis* is a relative term. For some people the absence of fighting alone, is already a big achievement and an improvement from what used to be the case for that couple. To others that is not even the baseline. True *shalom bayis* means that the couple is happy, that they love one other, respect one another, and take one another seriously. To some, *shalom bayis* is what it ultimately should be: two people who are fully integrated in an intimate relationship, sharing goals, feelings, and vision, and becoming one.

Ultimately, I don't think it's so important to define the term because of all the variations in marriages. Marriage is deeply personal, and varies from couple to couple. The point is for good marriages to become better and for weaker marriages to gain strength and unity. The tools I am about to share will bring about shalom bayis where it is lacking as well as enhance it where it already exists. They are the same tools, no matter the goal, and will help across the board.



In the previous chapter I wrote about how the basics of relationship building apply to all



relationships. In other words, someone who is successful at relationships with co-workers and friends should be able to get it right in *shalom bayis* as well. However, it is not always be that way. Sometimes people are great in dealing with almost everyone except their spouse. In general, I believe that you can only understand and succeed at a marriage when you understand and succeed at the basics of all relationships.

RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRE GETTING OUT OF YOUR OWN BOX

Being in a relationship means that an individual can step out of his own box, overcome his own ego, understand that it's not all about him, and genuinely relate to the other person. That's a relationship. In a marriage, this is true, but multiplied many times over. A marriage is all-encompassing, a long-term commitment, day in, day out. The core of the relationship is the same, however.

In this chapter we will discuss the vital ingredient of flexibility. I emphasize this in my counseling and my teaching and I emphasize it here: in a true relationship two people are bending towards each other, leaning in, so to speak. This requires flexibility. I actually believe this is the number one trait to look for in a *shidduch*. Flexibility means that two people can not only tolerate but also accommodate another person's way of thinking, their way of doing things and their unique interests. That's very important.

A SPOUSE IS NOT A SMARTPHONE

While discussing *shidduchim*, people have confessed to me; "I'm looking for somebody who is always going to be understanding. Somebody who will tolerate all of my

mishegaasin, my mood swings and my temper. I know I have to work on myself, but I'm looking for someone who is really going to tolerate me." It doesn't sound promising for a healthy marriage.

It reminds me of the joke: Someone is talking to a *shadchan* and says, "I need someone who is always going to be there for me, always going to look good, always going to be in the mood for me, everything will just be the way I want it and I want to know that I have this 24/7." So the *shadchan* says, "I think you should buy yourself a smartphone." It's a sad joke.

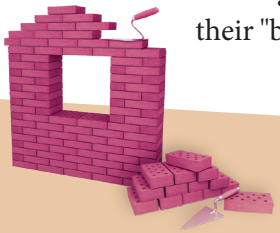
Anyone who is married for more than a few days understands that your spouse may not always be in the mood to humor you, or tolerate unpleasant moods, or whatever it is you need at the moment. It isn't all about you. When you're ready to relate to and lean in toward what your husband or wife needs, then you are ready to get married.

If you are looking for someone who is going to tolerate you, you're assuming that you could just stay the way you are. This is very wrong. Why would anyone want to do that? Why are you looking to inflict that on someone else? And yet, these days, this is what many people are looking for.

BUT WHAT ABOUT ME?

Sometimes people worry: If I'm so flexible and always accommodating for my spouse, then who's going to take care of *my* needs?

The first thing you have to understand is that when you expand to accommodate another person, you're really investing in yourself. Whoever is becoming more flexible, whoever is learning how to tolerate more, is expanding. And their "box" that was once very small and specific, is now broadening. Expanding





that space for the sake of another person, makes your own box more comfortable. If you are more tolerant and flexible, and you have the capacity to accommodate someone else, it builds your marriage. If you need to think about it in terms of doing this for yourself, go ahead and think of it that way. Ultimately this will make your life much more comfortable and easier.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FLEXIBLE?

People who are inflexible, often stay stuck. Stuck on their opinions, interests, goals, ideas, plans. If you cannot conceive of a different plan, goal, idea, etc., you are inflexible.

In contrast, the capacity to tolerate another person's ideas, opinions, interests, goals, quirks and ways of doing things, that's being flexible. This doesn't mean that you give everything to the other person or get swallowed by the other person. It's about understanding that there's another person who has just as many opinions, interests, needs and wants as you do. That's what it's about. When a person is stuck on their way of doing things or their way of thinking, it is damaging to any relationship, but especially to a marriage. In marriage, our goal should be to become flexible, to be able to really understand that there's another person here.

Inflexibility isn't just about the thought process or the decisions we make now, in the present. It's not just about where we should go this Sunday or where we should shop. Often, inflexibility is rooted in the past. For some people, it is very hard to get past hurtful episodes that took place some time ago. Whatever it was, the person cannot get over it, and will continually bring it up, consistently harping on that same negativity, hurt and disappointment, until you wonder, "How much longer are you going to bring that up?" An inability to get

past a particular incident and to put it behind you is also being inflexible.

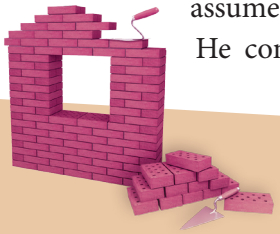
Many therapists say that the hardest thing to contend with in their practice are patients who stay stuck, who cannot move on. It's terrible to be stuck, both for the individual rooted in that emotional place, as well as for the people with whom they are in relationships. Look, it may be easier said than done, but "Let bygones be gone. Let it go. Say goodbye!"

Now, I'm not absolving anyone from asking forgiveness or making amends when they need to. If you caused hurt, you need to acknowledge it. You need to take responsibility for your actions. But when someone cannot let go of a past hurt, she continues to rehash it, or tells her spouse, "You always do that," or "I can't forget about that, it hurt too much", that is a type of inflexibility that can seriously damage relationships, especially marriage.

"BUT IT'S NOT ME!"

You may not be surprised to hear that very often, I deal with people who only see the inflexibility in the other person. "I want this, my wife wants that, but she's so inflexible about it, so unyielding. She won't give up on it even though she knows how much it means to me."

It's very easy to paint your husband as being inflexible when it seems he won't give up on something for you. But is it possible that maybe *you're* the one being inflexible? It's very hard for a person to see inflexibility in herself. Ironically, quite frequently I encounter situations where a spouse is dealing with an extremely inflexible partner, but he doesn't see it in his spouse. He sees it in himself! He, who is tolerant and flexible, will assume that he's the one who should really yield. He constantly surrenders, and lets everything





go the way his spouse wants. His rigid spouse, however, doesn't recognize the trait in herself, and mistakenly identifies it in her husband instead.

PAST AND PRESENT

Often, people who are inflexible about current issues are also inflexible about how they view the past. The person who is egotistically self-centered and inflexible right now, cannot let go of past disappointments or things that made him angry six months ago or six years ago.

Ask yourself: Are you constantly revisiting your past hurts, and nursing your grudges? Please be honest with yourself. It's not going to help to blame someone else for your resentments. You're the one who continues to hold on to the pain long after the incidents took place. Why would you want to do that?

As uncomfortable as it may be, identifying inflexibility within yourself is so important if it is there. Where can you be more flexible, more tolerant and more understanding of your spouse? Where you could be more accommodating of your spouse's interests, her needs and opinions? Try to identify opportunities to extend yourself, and seize them. They will help you expand your little box, and make it more comfortable in there.

Years ago there was a bestselling self-help book titled "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff (and it's all small stuff)." It's true: people get stuck on the smallest things. It is very liberating to let things go, you don't need to comment on everything. It reminds me of a joke about a couple who came for counselling. So the marriage counselor asks, "What are you here for?"

"Well," the husband says, "We just got married six weeks ago and there isn't a single issue we agree on."

His wife looks at the counselor and says, "Actually, it's seven weeks."

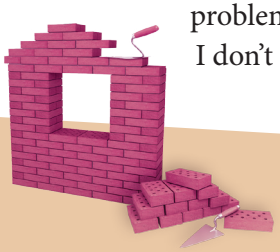
It's so important to know when to overlook something you don't like. "But it's wrong!" some people will tell me. "Why should I let that go when he was totally in the wrong?" My answer is that you should let it go because it simply isn't worth the stress on your marriage. It just doesn't pay to insist on being "right." So he remembers the event differently, or that the date was different. So he didn't retell the story with complete accuracy. What do you gain? You are only adding tension to your marriage and distancing yourself from your spouse. This is so vital!

HAVE YOU NOTICED THE GOOD LATELY?

There is a concept in psychology called "opposite action." It can be very useful. Instead of being stuck with your own ideas, and the way you want something done. Instead of pointing out all the negativity, try the concept of opposite action. Notice the good. Notice what you do agree on. Compliment your spouse on something, how hard she worked that day, how nice he looks, how sweet he was with the children despite his exhaustion. Pick up on the times your wife accommodated your wishes, especially when you know it wasn't easy for her. Make a big deal about that. And let the other things go! Life will be much easier for you.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE BOTHERING YOU?

A lot of times I talk to people and am struck by how many problems they list with the people in their lives. I don't think they realize it, but they will say that they have a problem



with their spouse, and also their mother-in-law, and their sisters don't understand them, etc. "I don't know what's wrong with people," they conclude. But really, if you are having problems with so many people, if so many people irk you, and you feel there is almost no one who understands you, if no one is nice enough, maybe the problem is... you.

People who are inflexible and need everything to go their way, will constantly be bumping into difficulty. They will always sound like the victim. "You don't know what I go through. You can't understand."

What they're actually saying here is that they are constantly bumping into things, situations and people, who upset them. They are so stuck in noticing only their own needs and their limited vision, that they have a chronic problem. Nothing is ever right.

I have often used this metaphor about the guy driving a car without a steering wheel. If you can't steer, you can't navigate. You can't figure out how to turn when there's a bend in the road. In a matter of moments, or maybe seconds, you're going to crash into something. Just like you can't drive a car without a steering wheel, you can't navigate a relationship without flexibility. You have to be tolerant. You have to be flexible, you must know how to turn. You have to be accommodating of others. You have to understand that while the people around you may not be right all the time, but perhaps you are wrong sometimes too. Try to view things with a broader sense of understanding and tolerance.

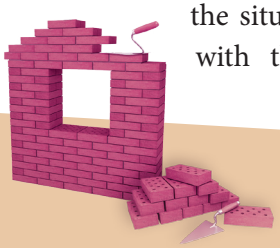
These issues require a certain intelligence. Not the kind of intelligence that you're born with, the kind you need in order to ace a math test. But a kind of intelligence that can be studied and learned. We're referring to emotional intelligence, or what

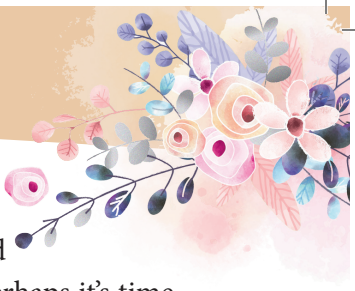
is known as EQ. That is, the ability to understand not just your own point of view, but the point of view of another person. If you only understand one way of thinking, you're not emotionally intelligent; you're stuck in your own head, your own ego. You may in fact have a higher IQ than someone else, but that's not going to help you in your relationships. To stay on top of the game, you need to see both sides of the story. When a child comes to her parent and complains, "He took my toy," you will know that perhaps she grabbed his toy first. You have enough emotional distance to see things more objectively. When you are too emotionally involved in a situation, you can lose perspective and understanding of the other person's mindset. This creates inflexibility.

If you are too snug in your own think box, and can only understand the way *you* see a situation and the way *you* feel about a situation, naturally it's very hard to tolerate and understand another person's views and feelings. But when you grow to the point when you can ask yourself, "What's he thinking now? Why does he want that? I may not agree with it, but I can begin to understand it," that is growth. You don't need to justify or agree with it, but you should validate it. Understanding and making room for another way of thinking creates more flexibility within you.

Having said all this, I want to clarify that if, after considering all that I have written on this topic, you still feel rightfully and justifiably that your spouse is really inflexible, and you really are flexible and tolerant, you should consider reaching out for help. In a later chapter I will discuss what to do in this situation, and how to find people who can help you.

Sometimes people wait too long before they try to improve the situation in their marriages. "I've struggled with this for years" is a statement I hear frequently.





Don't give up on trying to improve the situation. Consider whether the situation is one you should make peace with, because life (and marriage) is not a constant state of bliss, and perhaps it's time to learn to become more accommodating. Or, perhaps you've made peace enough and it's now possible to help your spouse learn more tolerance and accommodation.

So please, do your own homework before deciding which person in the marriage is the inflexible one – chances are that it's a little bit of both of you!

YIDDISHKEIT AS AN EXCUSE

Often, frum couples will use their religious commitment to deflect responsibility from being overly rigid on an issue. When the issue is related to their Y*iddishkeit,* suddenly it's for the Almighty. It's not about me, it's the *mesorah*! This is something that my great-grandmother taught us, how can I just let it go? This is a *deoroisa* or *derabanan* etc. People sometimes do things that would seem very wrong, but since they point to Y*iddishkeit* as their defense they seem to make sense.

This just reminds me of what the Chiddushei Harim says: *Kamtzanus* –Stinginess, is the worst *middah*. Because when a person is stingy, he not only did something wrong, but he's left with the *gelt in keshene*, he remains with his money at the end of the day. With other wrong attitudes, a person may feel bad afterwards, everyone has a conscience. But the stingy man believes he is doing the right thing being prudent and diligent with his assets.

In *Hilchos Yom Kippur*, the Rambam discusses the mitzvah of *Tosefes Yom Hakippurim* –adding on to the 24 hours of Yom Kippur. This is a *d'oraysah* he's discussing. So the Rambam writes there that you have to know how to say something at

home. If you see that your wife is not being so fastidious in her observance, sometimes it's *mutav sheyiyhu shogagim va'al yehi mazidin* – if she's not ready to hear something - just let it pass. He says *vechen bedevarim hadomeh lazeh* – the same applies to similar situations. There are a lot of similar situations when it's better just to keep quiet. And he writes this regarding a *d'oraysah.* We cannot lean on Yiddishkeit as a defense for taking a "my way or the highway" approach. It's not the way to do things. It's not what Hashem wants from us, and it's not what Y*iddishkeit* is about.

Now, flexibility doesn't mean that we accept everything. That is clearly not our way. But it does mean that we need to be tolerant of somebody else's difficulty. We have to be sensitive in how to say something, when to say something, and if we should say something at all. Sometimes it's better to be quiet, כשם שמצוה לומר דבר הנשמע, כך מצוה שלא לומר דבר שאינו נשמע. We need to tap into that understanding which is sometimes referred to as the fifth *Shulchan Aruch,* and it's so important to understand what a strong role this plays. You may think you're doing the right thing, but it could be working against you, and it could be working against what Hashem really requires of you.

There's an interesting *Shlah Hakadosh* in V*ayishlach*: When Hashem told Yaakov Avinu to tell his wives that it was time to leave Lavan, it states, וישלח יעקב ויקרא לרחל -he spoke in a pleasant manner, and made sure they were okay with it. He could have just said, "We're going. The Almighty told me it's time to go, and we are going." But Yaakov Avinu didn't do that, he spoke to them in a nice and gentle manner making them feel that it was all about them. That's the way the Almighty wants us to communicate on all matters, including situations that irelate to Y*iddishkeit*.





FLEXIBILITY IS A MINDSET

Tolerance, flexibility and understanding form the basis of a relationship. It doesn't matter what the topic is, whether it's where to go on vacation, where to send the children to school, or whatever. It's so important to learn how things should be said. In fact the *mishnah* says: There are three things that a person should say in his home to his family every *erev Shabbos*. So the *gemara* adds: צריך למימרינהו בניחותא, כדי שיקבלו ממנו. Whatever needs to be said, should be said with gentleness. That is not only *derech eretz*, but it also allows the other person to hear and absorb what you are saying.

DO YOU WANT TO BE SUCCESSFUL, OR DO YOU WANT TO BE RIGHT?

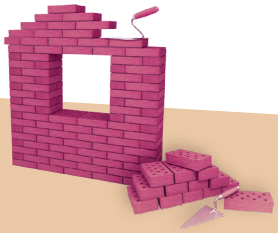
For success in your relationships, and in your Y*iddishkeit*, you need to be successful at home. This means your focus shouldn't be on being right; rather on being successful. This applies to every part of a relationship. You could feel you're right. You could feel that your spouse should bend more towards you. You could feel that you should be getting more out of this relationship. It doesn't matter; choose the happiness and success of being flexible over being unhappy and tense and completely "right".

Being accommodating of someone else is the smart and more rewarding thing for you in your relationships.

SEE THE BIG PICTURE

When it comes to *shalom bayis*, which affects not only you and your spouse but also your children, your Yiddishkeit, and even your parnassah, see the big picture. What are the individual issues really worth? Don't stay stuck in a rigid mindset. Bend a little. Don't stay rigid on your interpretations of right and

wrong, should and shouldn't. You will see how much it will enhance your marriage. And when your marriage is stronger, your children will be much happier, and they are much more likely to stay on track in *avodas Hashem*.



3
How and What to Give

In this chapter I would like to continue emphasizing a theme that runs through all of the previous chapters. To focus on what you as an individual, can do to strengthen and improve your marriage. Yes, everyone has shortcomings, and our spouses do, too. But if we point fingers at our spouses and blame them for our problems we are losing focus. This doesn't mean that the responsibility rests solely on you. It means that if we find ways to improve ourselves as spouses, then perhaps some of the problems we see in our husbands or wives will actually resolve themselves.

We've already discussed that marriage is about *us*. It's not about *me* anymore. There are two people in this relationship and both need to be taken seriously. In order to take another person's needs seriously, we need to change who we are. This is achieved by becoming a giver.

HERE OR THERE?

Some people walk into a room and it's immediately apparent that they are full of themselves. Their body language announces, "Here I am! Does everyone see me? Does everyone notice me? Does everyone respect me?" Others walk into a room and look to see who else is there: "There you are!" and go over to talk to them. The second type sees the other person as an opportunity to give, to help, to acknowledge. In marriage, we all need to be

a "There you are!" type rather than a "Here I am!" type, because the relationship is about *us*, not about *me*.

In every important relationship people help one another, but in marriage it's crucial. This truth can be found in the Torah, and the *kesubah*. A husband is supposed to prioritize his wife's needs above his own, and even make her will his will. The same is true for a wife; she should make her husband's will her will. That's truly becoming *we*, that's the natural outcome of a true "There you are!" attitude.

Focusing on the needs of the other is what makes a healthy marriage.

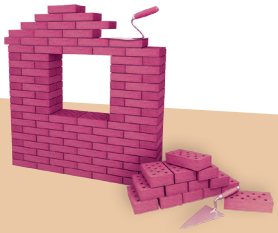
TWO FUNDAMENTAL ERRORS

Now that we've discussed what one must do in order to become a good spouse, let's look at some of the סור מרע, some of the pitfalls one must avoid. We begin with the following two common errors.

Mistake #1: Doing exactly what your spouse wants you to do. Now, "How can that be a mistake?" you're thinking, "isn't that what a good spouse must do?" don't worry, we will explain this very soon.

Mistake #2: Doing good things for your spouse. What we mean by this is when I vicariously fulfills my own needs through my spouse; if something is important to me, it must also be important to him. So let me do this good thing for him.

These two ways of thinking are not always out of place, but often they are. Let's go deeper and understand this.





WHAT IS YOUR SPOUSE NOT SAYING?

So often a person's needs go unaddressed, you're doing exactly what your spouse wants – exactly what he asked of you. But there's something vital that's missing. It might be something practical, like offering to pick up the children once a week, or something emotional, like making sure to say "I love you" on a regular basis. There's that one little thing that your husband never thought to ask, and you never thought to offer. And it's making both off you miserable!

Sometimes it can be a small, seemingly trivial thing that makes all the difference to your spouse feeling respected and loved. And yet, so often a spouse will complain, "I'm doing everything I can! I'm cooking his favorite foods/doing the errands on the way home from work/watching the kids Shabbos afternoon so she can nap/fill in the blank." Why is she still not happy?

This is a typical problem. A spouse is following his partner's list of requests to the tee, yet nothing helps. The spouse is unhappy. Why?

In these cases, you have to identify that one thing that will make all the difference.

Here's an example. I recently advised a young husband who had this problem, it seemed that *technically* he was doing what his wife wants, but he wasn't giving her the feeling that he is happy to do it. While the wife's wish list seemed to be long, and she was very articulate about her desires, my gut feeling was that she was really just looking for the feeling that her husband really cared for her. She wanted to know that he was acknowledging her needs, she needed him to make her feel important. "If she is not getting that," I told him, "her list will never end. It's not

about this or that. She's waiting for you to say, 'I love you. I care for you. I'm here for you. What could I do for you?'"

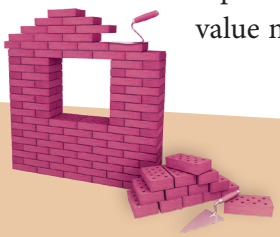
Once she gets that feeling of love and concern, her list will probably be cut in half, if not more. All she really, really needed was to hear her husband tell her that he cared about her, deeply.

So this was an example of where doing exactly what your wife wants was a mistake, because what she said she wanted was not really what she wanted. She wanted something she could not articulate, something her husband had to seek out and look for underneath the surface.

Let's look at another example; here the wife was fed up because she is meticulous about doing everything for her husband [everything that's important to her]: She keeps an immaculate house, makes delicious gourmet dinners, etc. Meanwhile, he wants her to go on walks with him after dinner. She can't understand it. "Don't I do enough already? Can't I relax after dinner?" This is the second error, the error of being nice to your spouse. It is also an additional example of how trying to do things for your spouse, and being very good at it, isn't enough. Here, the wife's perception of what was important to her husband was not, in fact, important at all. He would probably have been happy with a messy house and grilled cheese, if only his wife would have seemed happy to take walks with him after dinner. It took a lot of work on his part before it finally began to sink in: Oh, my husband really wants my company, not gourmet dinners and a dust-proof living room!

What Will Really Make My Spouse Happy?

It's always important to understand, that the things someone is deliberately asking for contain a hidden message. It's important to understand that the things that you value may not be what your spouse values. You need to identify what will truly make



your spouse happy and try to give her that. And when your spouse *is* able to tell you what she really wants, *listen*.

Again, so often a person is looking for the feeling behind the action. I once heard from an older woman, someone very important and special, that she and her husband were always poor. Her husband was never able to buy her much as far as gifts go. They lived in near poverty. She told me, though, that after she had a baby and couldn't fix her own food, her husband would get up and prepare her lunch. What was the lunch? He would take some bread and smear some oil on it, maybe a tomato. No cream cheese, no lox spread. When she could get up from bed, she saw he had left it for her in the kitchen. This happened each time after she had a baby.

"You don't know what it meant to me," she told me. "I even looked forward to the next baby because I knew that I would get that lunch from my husband." It's clear that her husband had added a "secret ingredient", his caring and love. That is what transformed that simple sandwich.

THE SECOND SON

The gemara in Kiddushin (31a) tells a tale of two sons. One seemed to treat his father very well materially, but was remiss in his attitude towards him. While the other was forced to act in a cruel manner, but he did so with as much love as his situation allowed for. Whom do you think the gemara praises?

We all know that a husband can give a very expensive present, but if it is obvious that it contains a message: "Here. Will this make you happy?" It is completely worthless and he has defeated the whole purpose! Unless the gift comes with a feeling of love and care, then it doesn't matter if it's a two-week cruise vacation or a new summer home, it won't make the

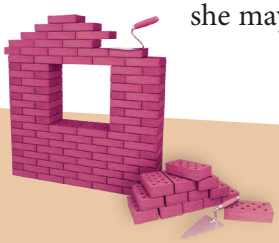
recipient happy. But you can give a $10 bouquet of flowers but with a loving note and a warm smile, and it means everything. It says, "I'm doing this because I care for you. I love you. I want to spend time with you. You mean so much to me."

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Many people have read the very popular book called *The Five Love Languages*. The author believes that couples often have trouble when they don't speak each other's love language. For example, some people need words of affirmation, others need gifts, others need physical touch, etc. These are the ways different people feel love, he contends. Many people relate to this, and I am not dispensing with the idea. However, in my experience most people who have read the book and relate to it are actually unhappy in their marriage. They may encounter something in the book, identify with it and say, "Aha. This is why I'm not happy, I have a different love language than my husband, that's the issue!"

While I do believe that there are different ways people "feel" love and different types of actions that demonstrate love, I also believe that if there is true love, the language doesn't matter. The reason many people feel this book speaks to them is because somehow along the way the loving feelings got lost. Even when people have different love languages, so to speak, as long as the love is there, it doesn't matter. The relationship is there. It's a healthy and solid relationship.

But if people are not feeling that connection, whatever language you use just isn't working. The true language is the language of the heart. And the heart knows whether you're sincere or not. When one spouse loses that feeling of connection, she may question the love language you're using



because there's something missing. That's when she goes looking for this language or that one.

Another point to consider is that people and relationships change over time. This means that the love languages people use in their 20's may not be the language they use in their 40's or 60's. Your life has changed and your needs have changed.

Over time one should continue to monitor oneself and one's marriage. Is my wife happy? Is my husband happy? Are his needs being met? Maybe three years ago he needed you to spend quality time with him several times a week. Maybe at this time he would rather some time alone, perhaps he would like to take up a new hobby now. People are not static and neither are relationships. Both change over time, and therefore the needs in the relationship will also change over time.

We've been discussing the idea of giving in the way that your spouse will value. I think it's clear by now that when it comes to the emotional aspect of giving to someone, it is possible to give in a manner that makes your spouse feel respected, that makes her feel that you are happy to give. Alternatively, you could give in a way that is burdensome. You're giving but it actually feels like you're taking. For this reason I ask people, "What do you think your spouse feels that you think of them?" Not what's your opinion, but what does your spouse think your opinion is?

LET'S GET IT RIGHT

We understand now that there are shades of grey when it comes to the emotional aspect of giving. It's so important to get it right. It's not only about what I'm doing. I could win Husband of the Year Award for all the things I do for my wife. But if the marriage isn't working, either your perception of what you are doing and giving is wrong, or in some way you are just missing

the boat. You need to make sure to give in a way that the other person will want to receive.

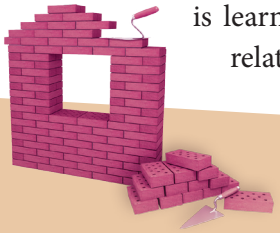
Pay close attention to what makes your spouse feel good or bad. Watch for clues about what other people do that makes your spouse feel good. If your wife comes home all smiles after an outing with her best friend, what is it about that relationship that is so satisfying? Is it the respect her friend shows her, or her ability to cheer your wife up when things are hard? Is it the fact that she's non-judgmental? Identify your competition and the methods that she's using and utilize them to beat her at her own game. You make your wife fell that way too!

If your husband comes away energized after talking with someone close to him, his boss or his Rebbe, what is it that he's getting out of that relationship? Is it the reassurance? The respect for personal space? It's good to look for clues and once you discover what it is that your spouse appreciates, try to provide it for him.

DON'T EXPECT YOUR SPOUSE TO BE A MIND READER

An innocent question posed with the best intentions can sometimes blow up in your face. If a husband asks his wife, "What can I do for you?", so it's a kind and thoughtful question. Unfortunately, many times it can backfire, as his wife hurls a question back in return: "What do you mean? How could it be that after seven years of marriage you still don't know what I want most? If you really loved me you'd know."

Please do not take offense at this question, and do not repay a sincere question with anger. Take the question at face value and give an appropriate response. Your husband is learning on the job, and that's OK. As your relationship grows and matures, so will your





understanding of each other's needs, as well as your relationship, flower and blossom.

Very often, what one person wants seems silly to her spouse. For example, I have frequently heard from young husbands, “My wife wants me to come home because she "needs me". I come home, but she’s taking care of everything and I’m walking in circles, not really doing anything. But if I leave the house for a few minutes she calls and says, ‘Where did you go? I needed you.” I don't know what to make of her!

In cases like this, the wife really needed her husband to be there. Not necessarily to accomplish a task, but to be there and support her. She is saying, “When you’re here I feel more secure. I know I have an extra pair of hands in case I need it.” Fulfilling the other person’s needs may require doing things that don’t make immediate sense to you. Or, it may be inconvenient. Your spouse may need a listening ear to hear all the complaints of the day. You don’t have to go into problem-solving mode; your spouse may just want you to listen. Just be there and acknowledge that he has a serious problem. Just listen and say, “Hmmm. Wow.” Learn how to do this if you don’t already. This is true giving

Fulfilling someone’s needs is not giving what you might want for yourself, or even what you think your spouse needs. It’s about giving what your spouse wants.

Don’t miss the clues given to you because you’re so busy with your own agenda. I overheard a conversation between two men. One of them was telling the other about a major achievement his son had, in getting accepted to a very prestigious yeshiva program. The father was beaming, and said, “They took my son right away. You don’t know what it meant for our family.” But his friend simply said, “Oh, I’ve been wanting to contact the head of that program. Can you give me the number of the guy who

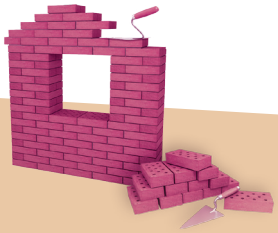
runs it?" What a missed opportunity. Couldn't he have asked for the number later, after first offering a mazal tov?

IN MARRIAGE, WHAT YOU DO IS WHAT YOU GET

We've all heard the expression, "What you see is what you get." But when it comes to marriage, I believe the correct phrase is "What you **do** is what you get."

I know, I have just been explaining that often, it isn't only the specific action of what you do for your spouse. I listed a few examples showing that following the specific list of requests still doesn't make a husband or wife happy! When you are looking for the clues to see what your spouse is really asking for, which is often, the feeling that you care, that you love, and that you simply are there for him or her, you will provide that feeling of emotional satisfaction that was at the root of all those long lists of what your spouse wanted you to do. Make sure you discover what your husband or wife needs from you, whether they be psychological, emotional or physical needs. Then you will have a well-fed spouse who will be able to reciprocate in kind.

Remember, what you do is what you get.



4
Healthy Communication

COMMUNICATION AND CONNECTION

One of the most important foundations of *shalom bayis* is healthy communication. In the previous chapter I wrote about how important it is to make time for one another, just to be together. Ideally, this time together will lead to natural and easy communication. It should be a time for sharing with one another about the day, and discussing the highlights and the frustrating points of the day. This is connecting.

"Communication" doesn't just mean talking. It also means listening -- and knowing how to listen. It means knowing what to say, and what not to say. Having proper communication is vital to the relationship. Sometimes people assume that they've already spoken about the most important things during *shanah rishona* and the early years of their relationship. But it doesn't stay that way without effort and investment.

Some couples end up only talking about the day-to-day business of life, such as "Who is picking up the dry cleaning? What time should we leave to get to the *chasuna*? How will we divide up going to the children's teacher-conference meetings?" If that is all your communication becomes, your Shalom Bayis will suffer. *Shalom bayis* requires connection. For that to happen, couples need to understand each other, feel for one another, come close together, and stay close.

My focus in this chapter is to offer positive ways wherein everyone can improve their Shalom Bayis. It's not about pointing fingers and saying, "If only my wife would know that, we'd have better Shalom Bayis." In the area of communication, every person can find ways to improve, to come closer to his spouse.

Hashem gave us the ability to communicate through speech. He wants us to use this ability to improve ourselves and our marriages.

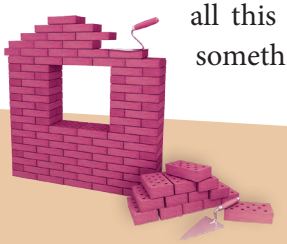
PARENTS NEED ATTENTION TOO

Today there is much more awareness than there used to be in the area of psychology and communication. With *chinuch,* for example, it is widely known that when parents don't make enough time for their children, the children may become estranged from them. It is commonly heard how important making time for your children is. That it's important to acknowledge their needs, and to show that you care.

What is often skipped over though, is that parents are people too! Parents can be so busy trying to satisfy the needs of their children – often, many children -- that they forget to take care of themselves. Parents need to be heard and listened to as well. Husbands and wives need to know that there's somebody who cares enough to listen to them, too. You can't always be a giver. You shouldn't always be taking care of the children, your parents, or someone else. You need to be taken care of sometimes as well!

WE'LL BE OK

Sometimes couples say, "No, it's fine. We'll be okay even with all this going on." But it's not okay. Eventually something will have to give, someone will begin





to break apart inside unless there is genuine caring and communication between the husband and wife.

When communication is missing in a marriage, very often the relationship begins to go stale. Sharing a house, your children, or running a business together is not enough. There must be a place, and a time, for a couple to get their own personal connection – when it's not about the children, the house duties or paying bills. Rather, it's about appreciating each other, talking to each other, listening to each other and enhancing the marriage.

The *gedolei Yisrael* model this for us. The eminent *Posek Hador*, Rav Wosner ztz"l, set aside a half hour each night to sit with his wife. Even at age 95, after spending a whole day and evening learning, he made time for his wife. I read this about the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *ztz"l*, as well. Everyone knows that he was a very busy person, often meeting with people all hours of the night. But he also made time for his *rebbetzin* each day. He even remarked once that it was like putting on *tefillin* where he never missed a day – it was that holy an obligation to him. We see that *erliche yidden*, *gedolei Yisrael* understood the importance of regular conversation with one's spouse. They understood that having a relationship includes healthy and regular communication. This is a lesson we cannot overlook.

GIVE IT ALL YOU GOT

It's not about the quantity, but the quality. Is it done in the right setting? Is it done at the right time? Is your cell phone turned off? Are you giving your wife your full attention? That's what's important. It could be ten minutes a day. It could be while you eat supper or over a cup of coffee in the morning. Whenever it is, make time for it. If you see that things keep coming up and it doesn't look like you'll have your regular time

to talk, bring it up. Say, “When are we going to talk? When can we make the time?” When that time comes, try to make it a relaxed conversation, without a focus on any particular topic or issue, just some relaxed "we" time.

Carving out this time has never been harder to achieve than it is nowadays. I sometimes tell this joke, about a man and a woman who meet on an internet chat room [obviously, they weren't Jewish!]. So they're chatting, and finding each other very interesting until they decide to exchange phone numbers. That's when they realize that they're actually husband and wife! He's texting from the living room, she's texting from the bedroom. But they're both "busy"- and can't find the time to talk to each other! That’s what it's like when there’s no communication.

Texting and writing emails should not be a substitute for face-to-face communication. Someone told me that he was happy to get WhatsApp, because now he could at least hear others’ voices in voicenotes. Too many people are using text and email as their primary means of communication, even with their spouse! Though it might be convenient during the day, make sure you are finding time to sit together each evening.

A child told her parent who was looking at his phone while she was talking to him, “Tatty, you need to listen with your face!” People can be right across the table from one another yet be millions of miles away!

IGNORING THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN THE ROOM

One thing that people find very hurtful is when their spouse is a great conversationalist, but never has anything to say when it comes to her husband. I hear this very often from *yungerleit*: “My wife can talk on the phone to her sisters or friends for hours, but when I come in,





it's 'Oh, hi. How are you? How was your day? Is everything okay? Good. Did you pick up the groceries like I asked? Why not?"

Your spouse will notice it if you have so much to say to other people but not to him. Some people make excuses, such as, "It's a women's issue; we love to talk about clothes." Or, "It's a men's issue, my wife wouldn't relate."

MAKE YOURSELF INTERESTED

It's true; some topics aren't of great interest to your spouse, but what about the topics that *do* interest him? If something is important to your spouse, make it important to yourself as well! You don't have to "schmooze" for hours and hours each day, but it is essential to make the time to sit (or walk!) and connect and communicate. Enjoy talking to each other. Take an interest in what is of interest to your spouse.

If you've forgotten how to talk to your spouse, here are some ideas: Did you see someone do something nice that day? Tell your wife about it. Did you read or hear a great insight from a *shiur?* Come home and repeat it! Don't assume your spouse is not interested. Don't compartmentalize Torah learning as something you only speak about with your *chavrusas*. Talk about what happens in your life, what you learn and see and do, your life is worth sharing. It sends the message: You are important to me. Sharing what happens in my life with you is important to me.

Some people are hard to communicate with because they are so busy talking themselves. Ask yourself, "Am I frequently interrupting another person, or jumping to offer answers to the problems my spouse is sharing?" Don't do this to your spouse -- or to anyone else.

WHAT DOES SHE WANT?

Very often, when people are talking, all they want is for the other person to acknowledge or validate their feelings. You can achieve this by simply hearing someone out, even when they are *kvetching*. Alternatively, the other person may be contemplating a decision of some sort, and they're looking to air the question. They are not looking for your vote one way or the other. So if you go into problem-solving mode too quickly, or answer the questions before they are even asked, you're defeating the purpose of the conversation, and turning your spouse away. Maybe all she wants is to spend time with you and tell you how she feels. Maybe he just wants your reassurance that he's doing the right thing. All you needed to do was listen.

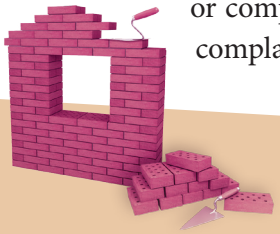
Someone once noted that the letters in *listen* are the same as the letters in *silent*. That's a good tidbit to keep in mind.

BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER

Now, part of listening is *acknowledging* that you're listening. It's great to say, "Hmmm, I understand." Or, "Could you say that again? I missed something," to show that you are listening actively. Your partner should know that he is being heard. This is very validating. It's much more satisfying to talk to someone when you know that she's really listening to you. So try to be conscious of your active listening skills next time you're talking to your wife. Keep track of what you're doing, "Am I nodding and indicating that my mind is fully present?" It makes all the difference.

OH NO, NOT AGAIN!

What if your spouse keeps bringing up the same issue or complaint over and over again? What if he is complaining about the same thing that you've



heard 100 times already? Well, you need to ask, "Why does my spouse need to keep saying this?" Obviously, there is a problem that is not resolved yet. Perhaps, instead of pushing the issue under the rug yet again, you should try to find a mutually satisfying resolution. There is a reason that the issue keeps coming up. There is a message your spouse is sending you; get the message.

Don't just retort, "Why are you mentioning this again? I don't understand what you want!" He might respond, "Well, you *should* understand, after all the times I've mentioned it! How can you not understand?" And you know what? Maybe he's right. Perhaps you *should* know by now.

Perhaps you should have questioned him further earlier on to uncover what was bothering him. Or, maybe you did understand, but you weren't ready to really "get it."

BE A MIND READER

In Chapter 3 I wrote about the many ways that spouses drop clues about what they want and need. If you feel stuck in your communication, and can't seem to figure out what the problem is, you may need to speak to someone objective who will be able to help you figure it out.

It can be a messy process to figure out what your spouse wants. It may feel tedious to hear the same complaints over and over again. But, it is the right of every spouse to say, "This is bothering me, this hurts." You cannot expect your spouse to really understand what is bothering you unless you're very, very clear. Try to make it easier for him, you didn't marry a mind reader.

Say what you need. Don't assume that your spouse truly understands.

"Well, you should know already. I said it 10 times!"

"Say it again, please. Maybe I didn't realize what you were really saying. Maybe you didn't present your point as well as you thought you did. Maybe for whatever reason I forgot. I'm human."

It's good to express yourself, to say what you need. It is extremely important.

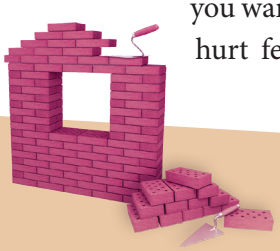
DON'T BE AFRAID

Some people find it very difficult to explicitly express what is bothering them, or what they need. They are afraid to be vulnerable. They're worried that expressing their needs or insecurities will make them look weak or silly. They don't want to appear insecure. Or perhaps, they're afraid of being rejected yet again!

But the truth is, stating your needs is not a sign of insecurity at all. On the contrary, a person who is comfortable enough to express exactly what it is that she needs, is showing confidence and security. She is stating her needs without embarrassment. It's ok to need. Hashem didn't make us self-sufficient. We get married because we need each other, and Baruch Hashem there are healthy ways to express our needs.

REMEMBER WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Communication should not be reserved for complaints and negativity only. But it's definitely a key component in getting what you need and being clear about it. Learning to state your needs in a calm way, without coming across as accusatory may in itself, resolve a lot of negativity and misunderstanding. If only you would have told your spouse what you need, or what you want from her, you could have avoided many hurt feelings and much negative energy, truly improving the relationship.



DON'T OVER-COMMUNICATE

Although good communication is important, some things are better left unsaid. Not everything that comes to mind must be expressed.

We know that everything Hashem created has a good purpose, כל פעל ה' למענהו. So why was שקר created lying and cheating is so hurtful and damaging, why does Hashem allow it to exist? The *Chovos Halevavos* explains that dishonesty is actually meant for us to utilize it for the good. Sometimes you shouldn't be completely honest. Don't tell your wife, "You look ugly". Don't tell your husband "I hate you," that's not אמת, that's just plain hurtful. So Hashem created dishonesty, and gave us the ability to lie a bit here and there so that we shouldn't say hurtful things. Some things should not be said.

However, if you learn how to phrase things diplomatically, you can say almost anything. Think about what you want to say in advance, and phrase your message so that it is not accusatory or hurtful. The planning and thought are very important. Most problems originate when someone feels he needs to grab the opportunity to "get it off his chest" when the emotion is rising. But if you think it through and say it at the right time and with the right attitude, you can be successful. Put the emphasis on yourself, what you would like. Rather than complaining about what you perceive your spouse has done to you, and you will get so much further.

Not speaking up about a deep hurt, and allowing the hurt to fester, is not an option. Neither is speaking up impulsively. This is an advanced skill in the art of communication, and it must be studied: How to say what you want to say – in a way that your words will be heard.

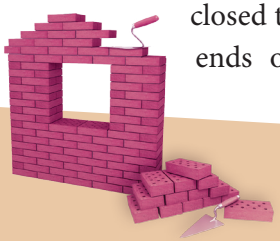
NEVER STOP – KEEP THE LINES OPEN

We can't talk about communication without touching upon something that is both very common and also very damaging; Giving the silent treatment, the cold shoulder. Shutting your spouse out.

Unfortunately, people do this often and they justify it for many reasons. "I can't talk to you now, I'm too upset." "If I talk to you now it's going to come out the wrong way so I would rather not to talk to you now." "I'm giving you the cold shoulder for a good reason: I don't want to hurt you."

Giving someone the silent treatment should be off limits. It's both disrespectful and hurtful. Just like other *aveiros*, you may feel bad doing it the first time, but soon enough you will find a reason to do it a second time, or a third, and you won't feel guilty about it at all. Then it becomes a very damaging mode of communication. Don't think, "I'll just do it just this one time to teach her a lesson." It's too painful and too dangerous. It's off limits.

There's a *medrash* about Moshe Rabeinu and Korach. The *medrash* talks in very interesting terms about the רשעות, the ill-will of Korach. גדול רשעותו של קרח, the *medrash* says. Why? Because Korach knew that if he would talk to Moshe, Moshe Rabeinu would win him over. So Korach ignored him, he gave Moshe Rabeinu the silent treatment. He didn't talk, because he knew his position was weaker. That was the great, sin of Korach the *medrash* says. And that's what bothered Moshe Rabeinu so much, ויחר אף משה! Moshe Rabeinu was upset that Korach wasn't accepting the opportunity to save himself because he closed the lines of communication. The *medrash* ends off stating that it is wrong not to let





yourself be influenced. Let yourself get into the conversation, maybe we'll work it out!

If you are unable to discuss a delicate or emotional situation at that moment, because you're too tense or stressed to get into the conversation about this issue, don't avoid it. Acknowledge it. Say, "I don't feel that I could discuss this now. I want to discuss this later. Perhaps I'll feel calmer after supper. Are you okay with that?" This is a way where you can acknowledge that a conversation is necessary, but you cannot have it now. It shows that you are not ignoring the situation. Make up a time to talk about it, which keeps both people accountable. You'll both feel better knowing that it is on the table to discuss later. Whatever you do, don't give the silent treatment, it's one of the cruelest things you can do to your spouse.

COMMUNICATION TO STAY AWAY FROM

Another communication skill is knowing how to avoid negative conversations. It's an art of communication, to dodge an argument by identifying its early onset signs. Sometimes people make comments that are best left unanswered. Suppose your husband says something that makes you feel ready to explode. Why give him the satisfaction of a good argument? Pretend that you didn't hear him. If your wife didn't greet you when you walked in, don't complain, and get into an argument. If the greeting is so important, greet yourself, and go on. Don't get into needless arguments.

Keep away from negative communication! There's something about knowing how to respond in a calm manner while being brief and to the point. I talk about this a lot in my classes so I'm just going to touch upon it briefly here.

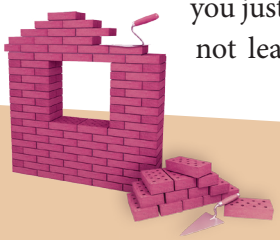
If you find yourself in a situation, where you feel that your spouse is constantly "baiting" you and looking to pick fights, there are ways to deal with that. In such situations I recommend the approach suggested by Bill Eddy, author of the book *BIFF: Quick Responses to High Conflict People, Their Personal Attacks, Hostile Email and Social Media Meltdowns*. His acronym BIFF stands for *Brief, Informative, Friendly* and *Firm*. It is very valuable to learn how to respond to something negative or hurtful, and the best way is by staying "brief, informative, friendly and firm". Stick to the point and answer the question, do not get lured into any other conversation. If you see the conversation is leading in a direction you don't want to go to, say, "We can discuss that at a different time. For now I just want to inform you about something," and offer a brief, factual, informative response.

THE UNSPEAKABLE INVITATION

Poor communication habits, often leads to needless conflict. Couples with poor communication may avoid a situation they both know is coming up, rather than be forced to communicate and share their feelings about it. But actually, they're just getting themselves into trouble by avoiding it. Without discussing an issue, you may assume you know what your husband thinks about the situation (of course, he agrees with you!), but you may be in for a rude surprise.

For example, if your in-laws invited you two months before Yom Tov, and you wait until the last minute to discuss and make plans. Now you discover that while you would love to go, and assumed that "of course we're going", your spouse does not want to go at all!

Being forced to make a decision at the last minute because you just discovered your conflicting views – does not lead to healthy conversation. Two months earlier when





the invitation was first extended, was the time to ask your spouse how he feels about it, and it would have given you each ample time to calmly come to a decision together. But because of your lack of communication, you end up with a sense of frustration and failure which could have easily been avoided.

IN SHORT

There is so much to say about the importance of studying the art of communication, and these ideas are among the most important of them for *shalom bayis*. Let's review the main points.

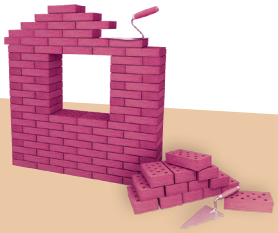
1. Spending time together each day, just to share each other's day, enjoy each other's company and to connect, is part of the glue that keeps marriages strong. It is invaluable. Don't let communication be about life's technicalities only. Make this time for connection an integral part of your marriage every day.
2. Your spouse is the most important person in your life. Keep his feelings uppermost in your mind. Demonstrate your love and concern by listening to him and making time for him. It is hurtful when you find so many things to talk about with other people, but not with your husband.
3. Learn how to listen. If your wife continues to bring up something that is painful or aggravating to her, it means that a situation has not been resolved. Decide to try to hear what it is that she needs. If you cannot understand it, recruit someone to help you communicate more clearly over this issue.
4. We understand how important it is to give time and attention to our children, in order to keep them close to us. Modeling this with our spouses is not only very nourishing

to our *shalom bayis*, but very reassuring to our children as well. When we communicate with our spouse in a healthy manner, we set a very healthy example for our children. It also adds to the positive energy in our home. What a priceless lesson for our children, and a gift to our own family harmony!

5. Positive communication – both speaking and listening -- creates so much good feeling. People need to be listened to. People need validation. We can use the power of speech that Hashem gave us for the good.

Communication is not the only key to *shalom bayis*, but it is essential in taking care of and enhancing your marriage. Healthy talking and listening shows your spouse, "I care about you. I love you. What's important to you is important to me."

When both spouses understand and practice these principles, you will have added much strength and beauty to your *shalom bayis*.



5
Appreciation and Compliments

POSITIVITY INFUSIONS

Good communication should involve the showing of appreciation and generosity with compliments. You may be speaking together about a number of things very nicely, sharing thoughts and observations, and getting along well in general. You never fight! That's good, but it's not great.

It is expressing an appreciation for your spouse and his qualities that helps infuse your relationship with bursts of positivity. When there is a lack of appreciation in a relationship, the relationship is unhealthy, it's missing vitality. Tensions and resentments will surely find room to fester and grow.

It's not enough for a relationship to be clean of negative communication. A healthy relationship must have the positive and energizing aspects of appreciation, and compliments. In order to keep the fire of love burning, you need to constantly add fuel. Appreciation is "positivity fuel". Too often, people don't take this seriously enough. I've heard people say, "My wife should know that I love her – We're married, we're close! There's a good feeling between us! Why do I need to do anything more?"

People who say this are making excuses for not showing proper appreciation. Your generalized ideas about "love" and "commitment in your marriage" will not be enough to sustain the marriage with *shalom bayis*. Think about any relationship that you have ever been in that has been really emotionally

satisfying. If you are honest, you will realize that those relationships involved another person who took you seriously and appreciated you.

Nobody should have their efforts go unnoticed. Every person deserves to have their efforts recognized. It's funny, yet sad, that often, when I mention the importance of appreciation, a person will say, "Yes, that's right. I wish my wife would be more appreciative. She should really watch this class!" we're not talking about what she should do or he should do. When we talk about being appreciative, we mean that *you* should be appreciative.

DON'T BE A FAILURE!

Before we go into the details of what it means to show appreciation and how to express it, I want to underscore an important point: A relationship without the element of appreciation, will be a failed relationship. This is true in any relationship, but especially true in marriage. A man or a woman that is married is giving a lot, you have to invest a lot in order to be married! And each husband and each wife needs to hear and know that their efforts are appreciated, that their *middos* and their words and gestures are appreciated.

It is wrong to take for granted even the things we come to rely on, things that "just happen" each day. Do you have clean shirts hanging in the closet? The children were sent off to school with lunches packed? Does your husband work hard so that the bills paid on time? Are groceries purchased and magically transformed into nutritious dinners every day? Do these things happen on their own, or is there someone that makes them happen?



Each day we make more than 100 *brachos* to thank Hashem for things He gives us each day,

such as our sight, our hearing, our *da'as*, our health, our food. Do we only say thank you once a month? No! We are called *yehudim* –from Yehuda, הפעם אודה את השם – we're "Thankers", that's what we are! We understand that the "attitude of gratitude" towards Hashem must be practiced, every day, several times a day!

We need to apply this to our spouses too. Find something to appreciate, or to compliment; or both, each and every day! Appreciation is not for special occasions. Compliments should not be used sparingly, if you want a successful marriage. Keep throwing them out and enjoy the wonderful positivity such an attitude brings.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

The truth is, that as mentioned, *hakaras hatov* is at the very heart of *Yiddishkeit*! Isn't this common knowledge? The *sefarim* are full of discussions about how *hakaras hatov* is the basis of a *yid*'s relationship with Hashem. When a person doesn't express gratitude in her interpersonal relationships, it will also affect her attitude toward Hashem. A person who withholds appreciation for other people will withhold appreciation even for Hashem. This is why we need to pay extra attention to this topic.

Unfortunately, it is human nature to take things for granted, and to take people for granted. We so easily come to expect things that we feel are due to us. "My wife makes me supper and manages the house? Well, of course, who else should?" "My husband goes out and works all day to make money to support the family. That's natural. That's his job. It's what we agreed when we got married!"

Even if your husband is "only" carrying out his agreed-upon role, isn't it right to acknowledge the work involved? He's

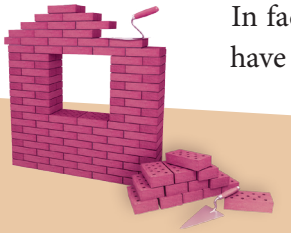
working hard. Say thank you! Don't you see how these remarks trivialize and downplay the daily efforts each person invests to fulfill these jobs?

REASONS FOR INGRATITUDE: #1- BUT IT'S NOT PERFECT!

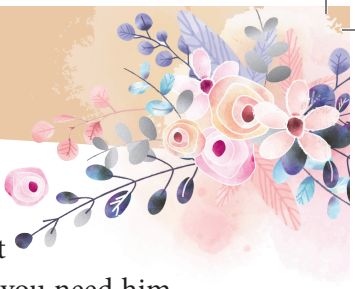
Often there is an underlying problem in the marriage that keeps people from being able to offer sincere appreciation. Something is bothering them about the relationship. They may think, "Sure, it's nice that she makes Shabbos meals and manages the children, but there are many things that really bother me about what she does. What I want from her most, she's not giving me. So why should I show appreciation?"

The person who is holding grudges like this is also afraid that if he *does* express his appreciation, then he will look like he is happy. But he doesn't want to appear happy, because he is missing something he really wants from his wife. So he doesn't want to give her the satisfaction of showing appreciation. Maybe she'll think that he's happy and won't ever give him what he really wants.

It is damaging when people make these kind of *cheshbonos,* and it works against their *shalom bayis* in a big way. Withholding appreciation will not help you get to the root of your problem. Remember that as a married person, it is very likely that there is nobody doing more for you than your wife. Your spouse is your partner in life and she is committed to building a life with you. For the constant effort she invests on your behalf, she deserves appreciation. Her weaknesses or the gaps in your relationship will not improve by refusing to acknowledge what she does for you.



In fact, this approach will actually *backfire*. I have spoken and written about this at length



regarding children, but it is also true with adults. When a child gets the message, "I am good!," she is motivated to become even better. If you want to encourage him to do more than he is doing, you need him to know first that you appreciate what he is already doing. This will energize and empower him to become even better.

If all he gets is knocks and put-downs, such as, "Pinny, that's not what we want from you. It's cute, but that's not it," he will feel put down. Why should he try harder to please you when nothing seems good enough?

The same psychology holds true with adults. Did your husband clean out the garage, or take the kids out for the afternoon so you could rest? Thank him! Don't minimize what he did by saying, "I'm glad you finally got around to it, you've been putting it off now for two months. And you know that I really want you to take me away for a whole Shabbos!"

Nobody should have his efforts go unnoticed. When you notice what your spouse is doing for you and show that you appreciate it, your chances of getting the other things you want, will inestimably improve, I promise you.

If you still feel your resentments and hurts are so strong that you cannot overcome them, you should consult with somebody who can help you. I do not suggest that serious issues should be ignored. But I do suggest that you make every effort to convey your real appreciation for the things your spouse does for you that make your life easier, and more pleasant.

REASON #2- I'M INDEPENDENT!

Some people hesitate to show appreciation because doing so makes them feel like they are takers. They have a need to feel independent, and they don't want to feel indebted (Tosafos actually discusses this in Avodah Zarah 5a).

Yet the truth is that when you show appreciation, you're *giving*. A huge part of building *shalom bayis*, is giving, as discussed in Chapter 2. So much of what your spouse needs – and what you can give -- is appreciation! He wants you to notice and appreciate his efforts, even when they are "expected." Being a "Recipient" is not a sign of weakness or insecurity. On the contrary, by taking -- you're actually *giving* your spouse the opportunity to give!

BE A TAKING GIVER

Do you know one of best ways to make a friend? It isn't by giving a gift. It isn't saying something nice. The best way to make friends is actually by asking for a small favor!

Doing a small favor for someone lets you feel like a giver, which is a wonderful feeling. If I ask you to help me in a small way, I demonstrate that you're important, you can help me, and I need you. The other person enjoys feeling needed. It creates a bond. In marriage, we should constantly be in a cycle of giving and receiving, taking and appreciating.

MEAN WHAT YOU SAY, AND BE EXPRESSIVE

Remember that דברים היוצאים מן הלב, נכנסים אל הלב – "Words that flow from the heart, enter the heart." In order to express your feelings, you must first feel them. Before you get the words out of your mouth, you have to feel them in your heart. Start thinking about how much your wife does for you, regardless of what it is or whether you may feel that you "deserve it."

Saying "Thank you" is nice, but you should also try to graduate to a more mature level of gratitude, a more personalized way of showing appreciation. The more specific your thanks, the more meaningful





it is. "Thank you for taking the kids for their check-up today. I would have been so much more stressed at having to finish that project that is due tomorrow."

"Thank you for making those calls to look into changing the car insurance. You saved me so much time and you are always so thorough when do you this kind of research." "I appreciate that you took the time to pick up dinner tonight because of my headache. It means so much to me." These distinctive forms of thanks are very powerful and go a long way. They show that you take the time to think about your wife. This thoughtfulness also shows the depth of your appreciation.

The more spouses appreciate one another, the more they build mutual trust. You will not be shortchanged by giving to your spouse in this way. You will be paid back *mida k'neged mida*.

EXPRESS YOUR GRATITUDE HIS WAY

Sometimes people have a hard time expressing appreciation in the way that their spouse really needs. For example, a husband might say, "I don't feel that you appreciate all that I do," Don't respond, "But I tell you all the time how much I appreciate you!," getting into an argument is pointless! Think about what your husband said, consider it: *Why* does the husband not feel the gratitude? You feel like you're constantly expressing it. A smart wife could ask, "Please tell me what a meaningful expression of appreciation would look like or sound like." Listen to him.

Are some people's expectations about receiving appreciation a little inflated? Probably. But I have found that often, the real issue is that a wife, for example, thinks she said thank you when in fact, as far as her husband is concerned, she said nothing at all. Maybe she said it too quickly or too quietly. Maybe she

said the words, but her manner was apathetic or even cold. Do your words match your expression? Do they match your tone of voice, facial expression or body language? Giving appreciation is not something you can do because you "have to", like you are taking care of an unpleasant chore. It has to be sincere.

WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

The *gemara* in *Yevamos* (53) tells about a certain woman who was a terrible wife. When her husband was asked how he tolerated her, his answer was די לנו שמצילות אותנו מן החטא ומגדלות בנינו לתלמוד תורה. He was able to look past her offenses – and they were grave ones – but he was able to look past them, and find a variety of things that he was grateful for, and that's what he focused on!

Nobody would want to be in this situation, but there is a very important lesson to be gleaned here. No marriage is perfect, life has ups and downs. Making the extra effort to focus on what is right and good in the relationship, might help you overcome much of the negativity you are feeling.

I know that people struggle with difficulties in marriage. There are tensions, disappointments, irritations, and sometimes even a general lack of compatibility. These are serious problems and I do not minimize them, don't think I'm taking your problems lightly. But often, if you can try to focus on the good, on what your spouse *does* do or give – things that may be going unnoticed, you can reframe the situation and feel better about it.

This is true outside of marriage also, of course. If you have a terrible boss, it's easy to focus on how irrational or unfair his rules are, instead of the steady paycheck and perhaps other nice things he may have done for you. It's very easy to zero in on the negative and remain stuck



in that mindset. We should endeavor to build a positive feeling in our homes and a sense of gratitude towards our spouses and children. This will go a long way and accomplish so much for our *shalom bayis*.

How we speak and behave is teaching our children lifelong lessons. When we model healthy communication and sincere appreciation, our children easily learn these skills and *middos*, and it will be incorporated into their own marriages one day. They grow up understanding that the world doesn't revolve around me, they grow up knowing how to say thank you, and they are healthy members of society.

BE A GOOD GUEST

Related to this, there is a *gemara* in Berachos that says, אורח כל מה שטרח בעל טוב מה הוא אומר? –"What does a good guest say?" הבית לא טרח אלא בשבילי –"Whatever the host did, he did only for me." Now, this is a great *chiddush*, it's a novel idea! After all, my host was already hosting his whole family and other guests as well, did he prepare the gefilte fish for me? He cooked a roll of gefilte fish and baked a challah. My one slice doesn't matter to him, I was just one of many guests!

But the *gemara* teaches us that this is the wrong attitude to have. You have the opportunity to delight in life, to go through life full of happiness – for the slice of challah, for the gefilte fish, for the folded laundry. Why not? Should you focus on what you're not getting, and constantly harp on the negative? Why would you do that? A good guest takes the attitude that "Whatever you did, you did for me, thank you so much!" A host who get that feeling of sincere gratitude from his *orach tov* will certainly want to host that person again!

Like in every chapter in this book, I am trying to help people take the focus off themselves and place it on their spouses. Offering sincere appreciation helps nourish a marriage by infusing it with constant bursts of positivity.

WHAT MAKES HER ATTRACTIVE TO ME?

There is an issue nowadays with men who must go out to work in the secular world, or even in the *frum* world where they interact with other women whom they may naturally find attractive. Now it must be stressed that they're not bad people, they aren't looking for it, but men are naturally wired in a way, that close interaction with attractive females may cause difficulties. They then come home and feel less attracted to their wives; it's subconscious. These men may start thinking, "Actually, my wife and I are not a good match. She's not for me."

Now, it is true that marriages have their own emotional seasons and rhythms. At times a man will feel more attracted and at times less. Often, I find, the lack of feeling attracted is connected to a lack of appreciation. It is of utmost importance to think about how much you are benefitting from your marriage; spend time, think about it! Make a list of all the things your spouse does for you. Think about what you liked about him before you were married! You need to make an effort toward greater appreciation, and the physical attraction will return.

And by the way, if you begin to think, "So-and-so would be better for me," you are living in dreamland. Every single person has pluses and minuses. It is quite probable that her husband is looking at your wife and being jealous of you! Remember that Hashem runs the world and you are married to the person you were meant to be married to. You are obligated to give *your* marriage and your *shalom bayis* your maximum effort.





Thinking about what your spouse does for you will create a cycle of appreciation in your head, and then, in your heart. You can draw close again when you focus on the right things.

WHAT ARE COMPLIMENTS?

I think that we often downplay the centrality of compliments to a relationship, but compliments are very important, and deserve to be considered carefully. Complimenting a person is a way of emphasizing his qualities and his virtues.

Here is the main difference between appreciation and compliments. *Appreciation* is being thankful, being grateful for what you're getting. It is related to something that somebody did for you, or for someone else. *Compliments* are specific statements about a great quality the other person has: "I think highly of you because you are so ethical." "You're so kind, I never hear you say an unkind word." "I admire how consistent you are about attending the *shiur*. You never lose focus of *chashivus haTorah*."

The purpose of a compliment is to make the other person feel good about herself. It's unrelated to anything she did for me. It's not a way of giving back. A compliment is a way for you to offer praise to someone based on who they are, and their qualities as an individual.

Think about this question, "What do you think your husband thinks that you think of him?" Did you ever share with him how you feel about him and his qualities? This is important because so much of the strength of a relationship depends on how you make the other person feel that you feel about them.

Compliments help to assure your spouse that you admire, respect, and love her for who she is. A sincere compliment says, "I notice how helpful you are, how generous you are, how

patient you are." Imagine how great this makes your spouse feel! You are noticing something good about her that is independent of any obligations.

THE BRUSH-OFF-ER

Some people are uncomfortable receiving compliments. I'll let you in on a little secret here: *These are the people who need it most*. Remember that. If you offer a compliment and they try to dismiss it, saying, "Nah, it was nothing. It wasn't such a big deal." You can be sure that this person needed that compliment.

Now why they brush it off is a different story, perhaps they feel it below their dignity to show you that they appreciate it; that would mean that they need you." Or it could be because they are insecure and therefore skeptical that you really meant it. It could be because they don't want to feel indebted. There are so many reasons why people will avoid taking a compliment, it doesn't matter, but generally when someone doesn't accept a compliment, it means that you should keep it up, keep on complimenting!.

THE RIGHT WAY TO GIVE A COMPLIMENT?

I will explain how to go about complimenting people, because like all facets of interpersonal relationships, complimenting is a skill that needs to be learned. But first, here is a joke about how *not* to do it.

Shimon invited Chaim to his house for dinner. Chaim, who was studying photography brought along photographs he had recently taken. "Look at these shots. What do you think?"

Shimon looks at the photos and said, "Wow, awesome! You must have a great camera!" When dinner was over, Shimon asked Chaim,





"So, how was the food? Did you enjoy?" "It was great", Chaim answered, "You must have great pots!"

A compliment shouldn't be about your camera, or your pot. It's about you the photographer, you the cook, you the individual.

COMPLIMENTING THE BRUSH-OFF-ER

So what about people who start acting squirmy and resist accepting compliments? You can compliment them indirectly. You could say, "I was planning to eat in that new restaurant but it's a good thing I didn't. Your food is so much more superior."

You can also relay a compliment through a third-party. That's another method of indirect complimenting. "Chani told me that you stepped in to help organize that *bikur cholim* blood drive at the last minute. That was a tremendous thing for you to do." When the compliment is given through a *shaliach*, so to speak, the person will feel less uncomfortable, and will certainly not feel indebted to you in any way.

Here's another example of how to compliment in an indirect manner. If you know that Leah did a big favor for her neighbor, instead of saying, "Wow, I saw what you did, you're so kind." you could say instead, "When you did that for the neighbor, her face just lit up. She was so happy, it was obvious that you really made her day." You are talking about her through the eyes of somebody else. It's a great way to help build someone up.

BE LIKE ACHASHVEROSH

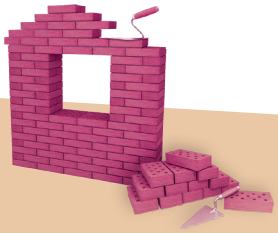
Appreciation and compliments are additional building blocks in your storehouse of *shalom bayis* tools. Take the time to think about things other people are doing for you which you

have not expressed appreciation for. And make sure to think about things your spouse is doing too! Sometimes the things that are most obvious are overlooked. Make it a habit to make your expressions of appreciation specific and distinctive. It will go a long way!

Even if you are uncomfortable listening to appreciation or compliments, don't push them away. Know that others sincerely respect, admire and love you for who you are and what you do.

If you are in a stressful relationship that has soured, still make the effort to be appreciative, and to be a *makir tov.* You may see improvements in your relationship you would not have expected.

Show appreciation and admiration for others, and with Hashem's help, your connection and feelings of love will grow in *shalom veshalvah* with real *ahavah verayus*.



6
Healthy Boundaries for a Healthy Marriage

BOUNDARIES: A NECESSITY

In order for a relationship to be successful, there must be boundaries in place. This applies to any relationship, whether it's a relationship between neighbors or friends, a parent-child relationship, employer-employee relationship, or whatever it may be. A good relationship requires boundaries. Obviously, this applies to spouses in a marriage as well.

While obviously, marriage is *bez"h* closer and longer lasting than most other relationships, it is not different than other relationships with regard to boundaries. Boundaries are not barriers to closeness. In fact, healthy boundaries can increase trust, and therefore encourage more closeness and emotional intimacy.

What do boundaries do? They help to clarify the parameters of which aspects in this relationship are managed by whom and which decisions are made by whom. Boundaries also assist in defining the concepts of *yours*, *mine*, and *ours*. It needs to be clear that there are certain things that are *yours*, some are *mine*, and some are *ours*. This will be explained it a bit more, later on.

WHY BOUNDARIES?

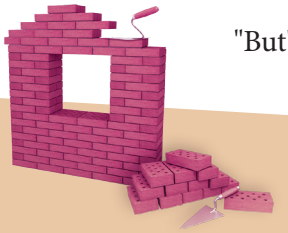
Some people don't appreciate this concept. Didn't we become One in our marriage? Isn't boundary-setting the polar opposite of what we're looking to achieve?

The answer is no. Any relationship where two people relate to one another and share something – a yard, the chores, a business partnership – requires them to take responsibility and help one another. If one is not careful, it is very easy to fall into the trap of taking advantage of the other, or of being taken advantage of. Boundaries are there to ensure that each person's autonomy and individuality are respected. Boundaries ensure that both people can safely remain in the relationship without getting hurt.

Now, it's not about protecting me, so that I don't get hurt. Boundaries are necessary for the relationship, for both of us. Understanding the limits on how much I'm willing to do, which decisions belong to me and which decisions belong to you, etc. protect both spouses. They are like *gedarim*, fences which protect each person from possibly taking advantage of the other, or, *chas v'shalom*, abusing them.

WHEN THERE IS A LACK OF BOUNDARIES

There are some people who are likely to ignore their innate need for autonomy. They may not understand why they need boundaries, but they do. What happens to people like this is that often, their spouse, who is the stronger personality in the marriage will take advantage of them. Let's say for example you are hurt by your spouse, but you don't react. You think, "I can take this, I'm very tolerant, I'll just swallow it this time." But subconsciously, it's eating away at your relationship. You begin to experience a certain uneasiness. You're not so happy but you're feeling unsure as to why. Probably you are feeling squeezed, a little claustrophobic. Your personal space has been intruded on in an unacceptable manner.



"But", you might ask, "What's all this business about

setting boundaries? Why can't I just tell my spouse that what she's doing is making me very uncomfortable?" Well, you can stick up for yourself, but you are already in conflict. You may already be hurt. Or, you may feel tension and be unable to identify the cause, you can't tell your spouse what's bothering you, because you're not sure yourself! This build-up of tension is very unhealthy.

This is why you need to establish boundaries. When the boundaries are clear each party knows what to expect from the other and there's less of a chance for you to be hurt. With healthy boundaries in place, both sides are happier.

EXPECTATIONS MUST BE CLARIFIED

We understand this when it comes to a job, for example. When I counsel people who are considering different jobs and careers, I always ask, "Were you given a written job description? Do you understand what exactly is going to be expected of you?" Often people tell me, "They didn't explain it exactly, but I'm sure it will be fine." No, it may not be fine. I always tell people to be very clear about what will be expected of them in their new job, to make sure they can meet the challenge and that the expectations are reasonable.

WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE

Now, just because you have boundaries doesn't mean that you should be inflexible. There must be clear and defined boundaries, but a couple still must recognize the importance of flexibility.

I sometimes quote this *passuk* regarding our subject. The *passuk* says, השם גבוליך שלום. In order to have *shalom*, in order to get along, you need *gevuleich*, you need those boundaries. And the boundaries need to be put in the right place too, השם

גבולין, you need to know where to place them, and that's when you get שלום. In English there is a saying, "Good fences make good neighbors." It's a similar idea.

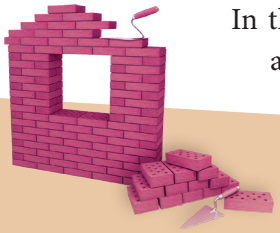
FINDING A PARKING SPOT AND BECOMING ONE

People often talk about "becoming one" in marriage. It sounds very nice and romantic. And yes, a feeling of closeness, of intimacy, is definitely important. You should definitely become one in the sense that you're always on "the same team," you're always there for each other, and want only what is good for your spouse. This is the "oneness" aspect of marriage and having this goal makes for a beautiful union. Shared goals, shared interests, love and understanding, are all beautiful.

But you have not parked your individuality under the *chuppah*. You are each unique individuals. You must not lose your "self". It's unhealthy, it's not *Torahdig*, and it's not the way it's supposed to be. While practicing respect, love, honor and caring, each person's uniqueness still needs to factor in the relationship.

DEFINING BOUNDARIES

Defining boundaries is not always so easy and both husband and wife need clarity on what those boundaries should be. If a couple cannot agree on what the boundaries should look like, they need to speak to a Rav or an objective third party. The very fact that the couple doesn't agree on the boundary itself just goes to show that it's a good thing we're having boundaries, obviously you have differences of opinion which may lead to conflict, and so you need good boundaries.



In the Shulchan Aruch there are clear ideas about who should be deciding what in a



marriage -- where to live, what to eat, how to run the home and how to educate children. It's all there. It would be nice if we could just check in the book and follow the guidelines. But our lives are too complicated for that. And don't want to constantly call your rabbi asking, "What do we do now? Who decides?"

HOW DO WE DECIDE?

In practical terms, choosing boundaries requires you to define the concept of "Mine, Yours and Ours". Some things in this relationship belong only to me. Some things in this relationship belong only to you. Some things in this relationship belong to both of us.

Now this isn't always the case, but usually in our circles, it's the Mommy who chooses what stroller to buy, and the Tatty decides what *daled minim* the couple should buy for Sukkos, (even though the wife is also going to be shaking the lulav and esrog). These may sound like simple and clearly defined issues. But couples may have "turf wars" about issues like this too. Who decides about who decides?

MINE, YOURS AND OURS

Let's look at the mine, yours and ours idea.

Mine means things that relate only to me: the way I express myself, the way I dress, the way I do something. That belongs to me. I need to be assertive about the things that belong to me. As an example, when I give my classes; the way I sit belongs to me. Somebody in the audience may say, "I would appreciate it if you would sit straighter, speak louder or remove your hat when you talk." You can express that wish, but those decisions and self-expressions belong to me.

Yours involves things that relate only to you. If you run a business, the decisions you make about what products to sell, which clients to see, are yours. Yes, it can spill over into "ours" if you are working so many hours that you are not available for your marriage or your children, but deciding on how to run the business that is yours, and should remain yours.

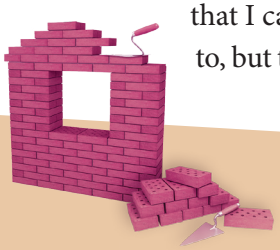
I have often heard of a wife telling her husband, "I don't want you *davening* in that *shul*. I want you to *daven* in a different *shul*." She will also usually try to give a compelling excuse, it embarrasses her that you go there. She's taking something that belongs to you and making it about her. This is manipulation. Unfortunately, manipulative spouses often go on to accuse their husband of selfishness. They say, "You only care about yourself. You don't take my feelings into account."

What I tell people to answer when this happens is this: "I don't "only care" about myself, I "also care" about myself. Where I *daven* is a decision that belongs to *me*. I understand you have an issue with it, but I cannot let you control decisions that affect only me. That is wrong, it's unhealthy."

THEY'RE MY SHOES

When a wife tells her husband that she doesn't like his hat or his shoes, that she is embarrassed when he wears them, then she is overstepping a boundary. The wife can nicely suggest a different pair of shoes, but she can't tell him what to buy. The ultimate decision is his, the shoes are going on his feet. He has to be comfortable in his own shoes.

When you are holding firm about an area that belongs to you, an example of healthy communication is saying, "I feel bad that I can't accommodate you. I really would like to, but this issue is important to me. I hope you're okay with it."





The same goes for a man who doesn't like his wife's pocketbook or the style of her sheitel. He's allowed to express his opinion, but ultimately the decision is hers.

When a spouse doesn't keep these boundaries and tries to control an area that belongs to his wife, resentment can build. If you do things only because your spouse wants you to, you will resent him. Respect one another's boundaries.

Ours is defined by any case where the decision affects both of us. It could be minor, such as the temperature of the room where we are sitting together. It could be "medium," such as whether to accept an invitation to Shabbos somewhere. Or it could be major, such as deciding which school to send the children or whether to move. Things that affect both of us should be decided in a way that will make us both as comfortable as possible.

Different marriages have different settings and different circumstances, and couples will have different definitions about these terms and where the boundaries should be. The important thing is to respect the opinions and feelings of one another, and to respect the autonomy of your spouse. Don't be pushy.

What belongs to us? Where we live. What our home looks like, where we eat, where we travel, where our children go to school. When it comes to "our" topics, each person's view must be respected, even if they tend to be the ones to give in.

When two people want different things in the area of "ours" they must find a fair path away from conflict. Perhaps there is a compromise. Maybe this time we'll do it my way, the next time your way. It could be meeting in the middle or coming up with a whole new approach or solution.

But if you think, "I'll just be *mevater*, I'll just be nice and give in, I don't feel so strongly about it," then watch out, it's going

to blow up one day. Maybe not in six weeks or six months or even six years but eventually, the person who has been *mevater* for so long will rebel and want to assert his or her long-held frustrations. Issues that are **ours** should not always be decided by the person who has the stronger personality. It's an unhealthy dynamic, and under the surface, tensions are rising. While you are being overly tolerant, the other person is taking over more of your territory, stepping on your autonomy, and your marriage will become shaky.

There was a cartoon once in one of the Yiddishe publications that demonstrates this idea. It showed one person complaining to the other, "I fell down a flight of stairs and I knocked into someone else and we both went flying and needed stitches. It was terrible!"

The other one says, "You think that's something? I was walking on the street and I tripped and I scratched my elbow."

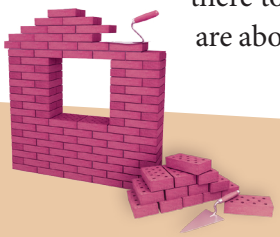
"How was that worse than my needing stitches?"

"Because it happened to me!"

Our emotions make us biased in our own favor. We let our emotions overtake us, and then we rationalize our opinions: This is so much more important to me, so it outweighs everything you're saying. This is wrong thinking. You have convinced yourself that you are right based on emotions, and we cannot afford to make decisions that way, especially if we are stepping on someone else's boundaries.

WHERE TRUST GROWS, CLOSENESS GROWS

Remember, boundaries are not barriers to closeness. They are there to protect each person's individuality. They are about healthy and reasonable expectations of privacy. Each person needs



to feel they have space to breathe, to think, to be who they are.

Also, when boundaries are respected, trust grows. Where trust grows, closeness grows. When I know you are not out to control me, I will want to take your opinions and concerns seriously. I will want to hear what you want, and what you think.

OVERSTEPPING BY MICRO-MANAGING

One way of overstepping boundaries, is trying to micromanage your spouse. Some people try to act as their spouse's *mashgiach* or *mechanech*. Of course, if the issue relates to *halacha*, you should discuss it with your Rov or mentor. These issues need to be handled with *chochmah* while also respecting *halacha*.

But if it's not an issue of *halacha*, you just feel your husband is slacking off in his *kevias itim laTorah*, let's say, or that you feel your wife doesn't seem as *machmir* as she used to be in something, do not become your spouse's *mashgiach*. Do not say, "You are doing it wrong. You should do it the way you used to."

Why is this wrong? First, it doesn't work. Whoever has tried it knows this. Beyond this, you are violating certain boundaries, especially when the issues do not pertain to you. What can you do instead? You can make suggestions that are polite, tactful, respectful, and gentle. Do not be pushy or demanding. When you demonstrate that you only have your wife or husband's best interests at heart, and it's not about you, you stand to have a greater influence. Your suggestions must be made with loving encouragement. The minute your spouse believes you are trying to control him or her, you may win the battle, but have lost the war.

Remember this: when you overstep boundaries, not only do you push your spouse away from you, and make her feel controlled and distant, you are also hurting your relationship with Hashem.

Aside from not being the other person's *mashgiach*, it's important that in your efforts to be *frum* you are also *erlich* and a *yarei shamayim*. Don't take on *chumras* at your spouse's expense. You don't want to buy anything pre-made for Pesach because you are so *machmir*? You want everything made from scratch at home, from the matzos to the gefilte fish? Roll up your sleeves and get ready to do the work with your wife. You're not making Hashem happy by imposing *chumras* on your family.

Obviously, there are exceptions to every rule. What I think may not work for most couples and families may in fact work well in certain circumstances. My main point is that in general, having healthy boundaries can only enhance every good relationship and can intensify the love and closeness you have for each other.

PROTECTING BOUNDARIES

One final point. It's not only extremely important to establish boundaries, it's just as important to protect them. There are people who are vulnerable, less confident, and they may have their boundaries violated more easily. If somebody is hurting you in any way or violating your boundary, you must be assertive and stand up for yourself. Remember this clearly. People will do to you only what you taught them you will tolerate.

It is common to see one person who takes advantage of another person all the time, selfishly and even abusively, but this same person, this abuser, would never dare to do it to another person. What's the difference? The individual who is being taken advantage of hasn't





stood up for her boundaries. The person who is not taken advantage of has projected confidence and strength, showing that she would not allow that sort of invasion of her boundaries.

A man was telling me how his wife treats him, and it was clearly out of bounds. I asked him if she treated her boss like that, and he said, "Oh no, of course not. She knows that he would fire her."

"She may not know that you could also fire her, right?" I knew I really startled him, and of course I'm not suggesting that anyone "fire" their spouse, chas veshalom. But every person has the right to be respected and have their autonomy respected. Every person must be clear about what they will not tolerate. This isn't being mean-spirited. It will enhance the other person's respect for you.

If somebody is making a nasty joke on your cheshbon, or somebody is hurting your feelings, or somebody is controlling you, it is because you have allowed it to get to that point. That's why the person is doing it.

Spouses should ideally love and protect one another's interests, no question. But ultimately, each person is responsible to protect their boundaries, especially if your spouse is not doing so. You must learn what your boundaries are for yourself, if you are not sure. If you don't know how to define them, but only know you need help, reach out.

Both husbands and wives must feel respected, protected, and that they have their emotional *daled amos* around them, their own space to be who they are, to make decisions that affect them, to be individuals. With Hashem's help, we will have "*Hasam gevuleich shalom*" and attain true *shalom bayis*.

7
Callenging Situations

BUMPS IN THE ROAD

Even a couple that has gained new insight, and tools to help them with essential marriage skills. They understand the importance of clear and sensitive communication, showing appreciation, and respecting boundaries, still it is inevitable that difficult situations will arise. When they do, you may not know which tools or insights will be the most useful to help resolve them.

It is normal for a marriage to go through occasional stressful periods. Some episodes may be brief, and some may be longer-lasting and require more "healing". The important thing to remember is that when both spouses are committed to one another and to finding a peaceful solution, you will get through it.

Marriages go through difficult times for various reasons. Some are circumstances beyond your control, such as unexpected financial hardship or illness. These add their own stresses to a relationship. But couples face problems because they may believe in one of two myths about marriage. The myths are somewhat contradictory and equally untrue.

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS

Myth #1 – "Every marriage is difficult. This is marriage. Nobody is really that happy anyway."



This is a very destructive and false belief. Yes, it is true that every marriage can have its rocky terrain and difficult times. Your situation is not abnormal, but this negative attitude will in no way build anyone's *Shalom Bayis*.

Marriage is your life. Marriage is your home. You will not be happy if your marriage is troubled. You can't afford to think, "Well, everyone else also has these problems. I'll just try to ignore it, sweep it under the rug." If you sweep too many things under the rug, you won't be able to stand on it anymore, you'll lose your balance.

If the problems in your marriage are ongoing, you are obligated to try and fix them. You owe it to your spouse and you owe it to yourself. Don't give up on the prospect of a happy marriage. Plenty of people have happy, loving and satisfying marriages, and in most cases, yours can become that way too! Don't accept the status quo when it can be improved.

YOU'RE NOT A LOSER

Myth #2 – "Everyone else I see is happy in their marriages. They all know how to make it work, I just can't figure this "."marriage" thing out. I guess I'm a loser

This is equally destructive and false. People who think this way may blame the fact that their parents' marriage was also unhappy, and that they have issues as a result, they didn't learn how to be in a good marriage, etc. There may be some truth to some of these arguments, but it's not an excuse to accept the situation. *Everyone* has some "issues" that are related to their self-esteem, confidence, ability to communicate feelings, and the like. *Nobody* had a perfect upbringing. You are not the only one struggling. Not everybody else is fine.

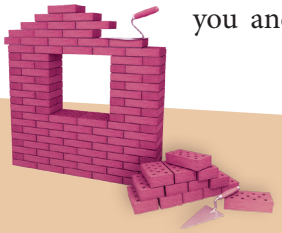
One of the dangers of thinking that you're the only one with these problems is that you won't realize how much help is available. "Why would there be so much help available to my unique issue?" You may not know to whom to turn, or where to ask about finding someone who can help you.

THERE IS HELP

The truth is that many marriages can struggle for a short while, or for years, *but can and do improve. There is help*. But before it can improve, you have to *believe* that it can become good. You must *want* it to become good and feel motivated to do something about it. You could and should do everything possible to make it work. There is so much at stake: your happiness, your spouse's happiness, your children's happiness, and even your *chinuch habanim*. Many children who grow up and go off the derech come from highly dysfunctional homes.

I understand how difficult conflict in a marriage can be. There is an extreme statement of *chazal*, אינו רואה פני גיהנם. -"One who suffered through a difficult marriage does not need Gehinnom", he already went through it. Something has to be pretty bad in order for Chazal, who knew what *gehinnom* is, to compare it to *gehinnom*. If somebody is struggling at home, it's a terrible thing. It's so painful and damaging, you cannot go on like that. You need to know that it's unacceptable and you should try everything possible in order to improve the situation.

It's okay for your marriage to need work, whether it needs a little work or a lot. It's worth the effort. It's worth putting in whatever *kochos* you have to get to a place where you and your spouse are feeling happy in the relationship.



STICK TO YOUR PART

After my classes on *Shalom Bayis*, I get a lot of emails from people who say, "If only my spouse would listen to you. If only she/he would change." You know what? He/She didn't come to my class, you did. So how about **you** try implementing it? You have to stop looking at what your spouse is doing and focus on your part. What can **you** do to improve things?

Each individual must take responsibility for their own role in the marriage. Now, "taking responsibility" puts some people off because they assume that means they are accepting blame. They think it means they did something wrong. There is a difference between accepting blame and taking responsibility. You don't necessarily have to accept blame, but you must take responsibility.

You know the old saying, "It takes two to get into a fight," and it's true. Any conflict between two people will require both people to work towards its resolution. It's important to understand this. This isn't about blame; it's about finding solutions to interpersonal conflicts. Chances are that even if it was your spouse who ignited the conflict, there could be a lot that you could do to resolve that difficulty.

Remember, this isn't about who did something wrong. It's about what you can do to help restore peace.

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

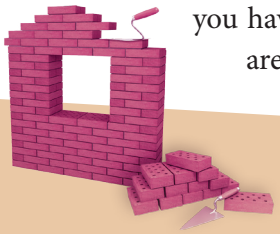
Now, can you accept the idea that possibly, you contributed to the conflict? Part of being an emotionally mature adult is to be able to take a step back and attempt to see a situation from an objective perspective. It is possible that you may have, if only unintentionally, helped to bring about conflict. If when you

think about it, you realize that perhaps you did have a role in this," then you're a few steps ahead. You're helping yourself.

Relationships are challenging. It's okay to accept that you may have played a role in a conflict. You should want to be honest with yourself and face it, so that you can grow from it. It's so important to do some introspection once in a while. It doesn't mean you're bad, *chalilah*. It means you are human, and all humans have their blind spots about themselves, and about others.

I understand that when you're in an emotionally charged situation, it's hard to see things objectively. It's hard to see yourself objectively. Maybe you've experienced a similar problem in another relationship as well, think about it. "Why do I always get myself into these situations?" Maybe you are a little bit too rigid, a little difficult to get along with. Maybe you are only hinting at what you want to say but you don't say it directly, and then feel angry or disappointed when your spouse doesn't understand your needs or feelings.

Let's assume that this is not the case, that you are really not to blame at all. Your spouse really is difficult, or outside circumstances have made things difficult. Many things outside of you and your marriage can cause conflicts. Whatever the situation, you must put your ego aside and ask yourself, "What role am I playing in this situation? Am I being supportive of my spouse who is unwell? Am I hearing my spouse's concerns about our difficult teenager?" Or, are you instead doing things that are escalating the situation? Are you tolerating the situation but resenting it inside, which is also making things worse? Even when it's not your fault, you need to realize that if you are in this situation then there are certain aspects of it that you have the power to improve, make sure you are taking advantage of these opportunities.



TRY SOMETHING NEW

I know a woman who had fallen out of step with her husband. They were not talking to each other, just living in the same house, taking care of their duties. One day she bought a card, a simple greeting card, and wrote a sweet and loving note to her husband. You cannot believe what a lift he got from it, and because he got a lift, they as a couple got a lift. From a simple greeting card!

Do something that sends a message to your spouse that says, "I love you. I support you. I believe in us and we will get through this." Can you imagine how powerful this would be?

It's important to try something new to demonstrate support. And to give the benefit of the doubt. It has been said that the definition of insanity is "Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". If the things that you have been doing until now didn't work, do something else. You may need help pinpointing the source of the problem, and that is why I encourage people to try counseling. A good therapist or counselor can make all the difference.

RELATIONSHIP OR LOGIC WARS?

Difficulties may arise in relationships when people think in terms of logic and not emotion. Maybe you're *right* and your solution is more logical, and maybe you think the issue should be solved by *proving* who is right. But when you have exhausted your logic and your spouse still does not see things as you do, it's time to recognize that the issue is not based on logic.

The issue is not about logic, and it is not about who is *right*. It is based on emotions, so don't try to prove your point; try to understand where your spouse is coming from. Focus on taking care of the emotional aspect of whatever difficulty you have. Once you address that, chances are you will both be happy.

COMMUNICATION AND UNDERSTANDING

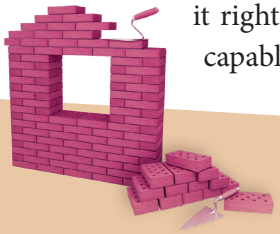
The path to achieve mutual satisfaction is focusing on communicating in a way that you are each heard. It is as much about *how* something is said than *what* is being said. It's also about how your spouse hears what you are saying, which may be very different from what you mean! You'll be surprised at how differently people think! There could be issues from their past that trigger them to react a certain way to something. We must respect the role of emotions, and how we can learn to understand and manage them better.

Emotions make us highly subjective. When our emotions kick in, it's very hard to see things from the other person's point of view. Once we understand this, we can see why people shlep out their arguments and prolong the fight. Their emotions block them from thinking clearly or logically. You must respect and acknowledge your spouse's emotions, or he or she will never be willing to see the issue the way you see it.

When people feel understood, much of the static will clear. When people have the comfort of knowing others understand their feelings, they will be more receptive to another point of view. This is because they understand that you care about how they feel. Focus on letting each other feel good instead of proving points. Win through empathy.

DO IT ANYWAY

I was talking to a *yungerman* who fought with his wife a lot. I said, "Look, instead of fighting her, why not make her feel good for who she is now? Show her the respect that she thinks that she deserves, even if you don't think that she deserves it right now. As long as you fight her, she's not capable of doing what she wants to do and what



she could do. Your wife is providing for you and your family now. Make her feel good for what she is doing and then she will be more receptive to what you want her to do."

This advice has been proven correct over and over again. *Don't wait till your spouse is doing what you want him or her to do to offer appreciation, support and gratitude.* This isn't about tolerating intolerable situations. It is about being creative and coming up with something that could actually help. Positive reinforcement is much more successful than badgering someone about his or her faults. That only further hurts the foundation of your marriage.

PROBLEMS OR OPPORTUNITIES?

We don't like it when our egos get stepped on, but when we get those egos out of the way, we are better positioned to understand where our spouse is coming from. This will help us make progress in finding peaceful resolutions to conflicts. Like I wrote before, we need to be able to ask ourselves in all honesty, "Is it possible that I contributed to this situation? Or even if not, can I look past my spouse's faults to find our common understanding?" If we can do so, we are building *Shalom Bayis*, it's a beautiful thing.

So often, adversity becomes a gift in hindsight. For example, the person who goes to the doctor for a routine procedure and they discover an early stage of cancer that is still completely treatable? *Baruch Hashem*, it was caught in time. The small problem became a gift. How about the couple that nearly signed papers to buy an apartment they really wanted, and the deal fell through, but then they found a better apartment in a nicer community? The disappointment and stress of the situation led to a search for a solution, which turned out so much better than they would have imagined.

In your marriage, too, you should look at the problems as opportunities for you each to grow. You can learn more about how your spouse thinks and feels, which gives you the opportunity to be giving, understanding, and connect to him or her. We know that the painful situations are those that bring the most growth!

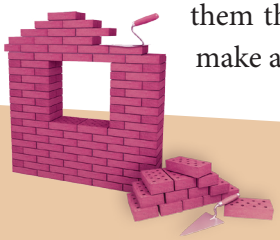
FIX IT BEFORE IT REQUIRES OPEN-HEART SURGERY

Many newly married couples discover unhappily that all those wonderful ideas about *Shalom Bayis* that you heard in your *chassan kallah* classes or read in books are not so easy to apply. They sound good, they look good on paper, but they don't line up with your experience. Also, when things are going well, you feel pretty confident that you are doing everything right: offering appreciation, being flexible, and trying to communicate, but suddenly when you have a conflict your toolbox seems empty. You don't know what to do. This is stressful. You want to avoid conflict, but you also don't know how to talk about the subject without being afraid you will actually create conflict.

Have the conversation anyway. Don't make the mistake of thinking, "This will pass. It's nothing." It's not nothing. When you have a difficult time, deal with it.

There's a joke about a mechanic who was fixing a car for a guy, and he asks the customer, "What do you do for a living?" The customer answers, "I'm a cardiologist."

The mechanic says, "Oh, that's interesting. Look, I'm doing the same thing you're doing. I open the hood and take care of the heart of the car. I'm taking out the valves and reconnecting them the right way so it works. How come you make all the big bucks and not me?"





The cardiologist answers, "I want to see you do that while the car's heart is pumping. Let me see you fix the engine while it's running."

It's much harder to operate on the heart when it's pumping, when it's an emergency. Don't wait till things are so chaotic and stressful to deal with it.

HOW TO LOOK FOR HELP

If you are emotionally exhausted and do not know what to do to resolve your conflict, *go for help*. A good therapist can be a lifesaver, but sometimes, you may have success with a trusted and wise objective third party who knows both of you fairly well.

When you do go for advice or therapy, and the person offers a suggestion, don't rush to say, "I did that already. It didn't work." Maybe you didn't actually do it the right way. Maybe your words or actions weren't understood. Instead, try to explain what you think you have done already to help the situation and ask, "What do you think I could do better?" Be open-minded.

There's a story I heard about a company that had a multimillion dollar machine that manufactured a lot of products. One day the machine breaks. They fly in a technician from the manufacturer, and everyone is standing and watching to see what he will do. He comes in with his tools and opens two little compartments in the machine. He takes out a screwdriver and gives a little turn. He tinkers with it here and there and quickly the machine is working again.

The manufacturer sends a bill to the company for $100,000 for fixing the machine. The CEO is incensed. He demands an itemized bill. He complains that the technician fixed it in two minutes with a screwdriver. How could they charge $100,000? They send the itemized bill. On it, they have charged one dollar

for tightening the screw, and $99,999 for knowing which one to tighten.

When your relationship needs help, and you are at a loss to repair it, go to the person who knows which compartment to open, where to make the adjustments. Human nature is complex. Marriage is complex and it is dynamic. People change over the course of time and so do marriages. It is so important to find someone who has the clarity and expertise you cannot be expected to have.

REMEMBER: THIS IS IMPORTANT!

Don't sit and struggle. Don't think there is anything embarrassing or shameful about getting help. You could be saving your marriage, your children's happiness, your spiritual health. Don't sweep problems under the rug until you have lost your balance trying to stand on it.

Normal life has enough stresses without added *Shalom Bayis* issues. Our lives are complicated and we need to be realistic that things are not always smooth in a marriage, and that is okay. But do not let problems fester.

Hashem *says,* שמי שנכתב בקדושה ימחה להשכין שלום בין איש לאשתו. Hashem is willing to be *moser nefesh, kaviyachol* and have His Holy Name be erased for the sake of *Shalom Bayis*. If Hashem is willing to push aside the honor due to His Name for that, then how much more should we? We have no problem hiring consultants to fix our businesses and dentists to fix our teeth. When our marriages need work, don't skimp on the investment of a lifetime, which is your marriage.

If you both are willing to go for counseling, beautiful. Go with the commitment and the clarity that yes, we're going to listen to what this person has to say. Let's take his advice and go for it.



DO IT FOR YOURSELF

If you have decided to go for help but your spouse isn't willing, you should still go. Don't t r y to force your spouse to go along. It's always a mistake to *force* someone to do something they don't want to do. It will also fail. If it is only you who will go, you will still benefit greatly from getting clarity on the issues, as well as suggestions on how improve communication.

Chazal say קשה לזווגן כקריעת ים סוף, -"Keeping two people from different genders together, is as difficult as splitting the Sea!" We know it can be difficult to make a marriage work, but it can work, with commitment and good will on both sides. Do it for yourself and your children. Do whatever you could and with Hashem's help, you'll reach a point of *emeseh ahavah, achvah, shalom verayus.*

8
The Intimate and the Sacred

THE UNIQUENESS OF THIS RELATIONSHIP

There's one subject that is very basic to marriage that we didn't touch upon yet. But it's impossible to discuss *shalom bayis* without mentioning it. But since it's a delicate and sensitive topic, I'm going to have to be a little careful with what I say, and I apologize if I'm not clear enough. There's only a certain amount of clarity that we can give in a class that's public. What we're about to talk about is the topic of *kedushas habayis*, the topic of physical intimacy. And it's all about understanding how to go about being close and connected in the most intimate way.

We've previously mentioned numerous times that *shalom bayis* is a relationship like all relationships. Of course, it's the most important relationship, and the closest one. And with Hashem's help the most longstanding one. It's all encompassing, but at the end of the day it's a relationship. All that we've discussed up to now, be it communication, appreciation, flexibility, making the other person happy – whatever it may be, these are all relationship skills, they hold true for all relationships. It's true that marriage is permanent and can't be easily dropped or replaced like most other relationships. But at the end of the day, whether it's marriage or other relationships, it's all about relating to the other person.

But when we come to intimacy – to issues that are *bein ish leishto*, that's where *shalom bayis* actually does differ from any relationship. Here, you're talking about an issue, a topic, that is specifically between spouses. It's specifically between a husband and his wife, it's something that will never ever be touched upon in any other relationship. Here's where we find the uniqueness of *shalom bayis*. This is where it differs for any other relationship.

MARRIAGE IS NOT ABOUT PHYSICALITY

Certain "*Shalom Bayis* Experts" will focus exclusively on this topic. They mistakenly assume that since here lies the uniqueness of a marriage, that this is the key to all relationship problems. This is actually a mistake, and that's one of the reasons I kept this topic for the last chapter. *Shalom bayis* is about so many different things; relating to your spouse and understanding your spouse, meeting his needs, emotionally, mentally and every other way. There is so much to a relationship besides for the physical!

But let's not negate the importance of this topic. There is no doubt that without this component no marriage could be successful. In fact, some of the first words of the Torah regarding marriage is: על כן יעזוב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד. –"One must abandon his parents and connect with his wife so they become one body." The Torah here emphasizes the physical aspect of the relationship. The *passuk* doesn't say that a couple should become "one soul". No, they "connect and become one body", that's what marriage is all about according to the Torah.

Additionally, we note the *taharah* that the Torah wants this to be prefaced with. The Torah wants this to be prefaced with a *mikva*, and a *tahara*. This goes to show the importance the Torah

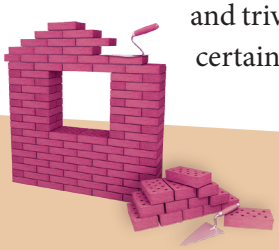
sees in this and how it should be viewed. There's no question that this component of marriage is something that's vital and something that's crucial. Without it, there's no marriage. It's something that is very important and something that is "holy", "sacred". The intimacy of a husband and wife is something that has to be understood with all those adjectives – it's *kadosh* and *tahor*. And we'll be discussing how to make it *kadosh*.

There's no question that physical intimacy must be considered a very important part of marriage and it should never be overlooked. As a matter of fact, it can probably be referred to as the basis of the entire relationship.

#1 - THE TORAH GOVERNS THIS AREA AS WELL

This is not a *hashkafa shiur*, so we'll leave out most of the Torah, we're discussing this topic in how it pertains to *shalom bayis* specifically. Interestingly however, very much of what pertains to *shalom bayis* is based on the *hashkafah* because it goes together. That which the Torah wants from us is also that which is the best for us, and that which will enhance and improve our marriages and relationships. But we're going to be discussing everything in the context of *shalom bayis*.

The first thing that's so important to understand, is that we have a Torah. The *Zohar Hakadosh* writes that the word תורה means הוראה –"instruction" and the מצוות are עצות and advice on how to live life. There is nothing, absolutely nothing that pertains to our lives and how we do things, that is not specifically addressed in the Torah. Anything, especially when it comes to marriage, but actually in anything that's important in life, will be discussed by the Torah. Even what's seemingly "unimportant" and trivial, is discussed. But what's important can certainly be found in the Torah and we have to look to the Torah



to find the answers. When we do what it says in the Torah, we will be best off, in *ruchniyus* and even in *gashmiyus*. There is no better way than the Torah way of life.

Now, what it is that the Torah says, the details, is not something we're going to delve into here. Everyone has their own *rav* and I'm not here to give *hashkafic* or *halachic* instruction. So if you have any question on the specifics, it should be discussed with someone that you rely on, somebody who knows what they're talking about. But with regard to the topic of *shalom bayis* it's important to remember that everything is in the Torah. Even when it comes to such an issue as intimacy, everything is discussed in the Torah, in the *poskim,* in the *sefarim*. It's all there.

#2- WATCH WHO YOU LEARN FROM

When it comes to something like this, something that has to be sacred and *heileg*, and the way Hashem wants it to be – We must remember that the "how", and the "what", and the "when", and the "how much", and the "how little", and *everything* is discussed in the Torah. Coming up with your own ideas about this is not a good idea at all and won't help anyone.

There are people that look into secular literature for things like this, which is a shame. Very often you're going to be reading books about this topic or other topics about relationships and the author may pride herself in having a lot of experience. If you want a read a book on marriage you should certainly read one written by somebody who was married four times. She has a lot of experience! כל מקדש שביעי. So bear in mind, that when it comes to marriage advice, we have a Torah for all that.

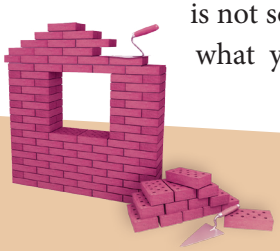
So instead of investigating other sources, and seeing what they have to offer, it's important to hear what the Torah says,

"What is the *emesdig hashkafah?"* which is the best way of life for anyone. There are so many sad cases which I have seen, so many problematic situations. And so often people assume that "If only we'd do this and if only we'd do that" or "If only we look for it this way" or "that way" and they come up with their own ideas about what is definitely going to save them. But it doesn't help, it doesn't help. Anything that you're going to be doing, if you're not going about it the Torah way, will backfire. It's going to ruin you. It's going to ruin your relationship. There's a reason the Torah wants us to abide by its Torah rules. The rules are there for our benefit, and it works! It doesn't fail.

Don't assume that you could do things differently for the sake of saving your marriage, now you have a *hetter*. It doesn't work. Even if it did work, it wouldn't be a reason to go against what the Torah says because the Torah takes into account every situation that could come up, and the Torah is there to help us better our relationships and better our lives. Don't assume that you came up with something that compels you to do differently than the Torah's instruction, something other than what Hashem would want, and it's going to help you! That's a big mistake! The Torah way of doing things is the best. That's always the first thing you have to know, and it's important to know what it is that the Torah wants from us.

#3 IT'S NOT UP FOR DISCUSSION!

It's a shame that this is not discussed often enough. There are other, perhaps lesser topics that are discussed more often, while this is always pushed under the rug. People are not comfortable discussing it with their Rov. But it's important to know that there are answers and that it should be discussed. This subject is not something that you just assume you know what you're doing. Particularly if you have a



question or if something arises, one must know that he has somewhere to turn.

Now, a great problem arises when people do discuss their intimate lives, but they discuss it with the wrong people! People discuss the most private parts of their lives with a friend, an acquaintance, a brother, a sister, etc. And it causes so much damage. Aside for it being inappropriate, because you're sharing things that are not meant to be shared with these people – But you're getting your ideas and your understanding of very important concepts, very critical issues from people who are not educated, to put it mildly. It's going to work against you.

It's so important to know who you're discussing these issues with, who the right person is, who you're going to rely on and who's going to teach you right from wrong. Don't assume that doing things the right way is ever going to be to your disadvantage. You don't lose out by following the Torah, and you don't gain by going against the Torah.

#4 REMEMBER THAT IT'S A MITZVAH

They say that if the *lulav* and *esrog* were to be used at home only and never brought to *shul*, while the *kzayis maror* would be eaten in public, at *shul*; People would come to *shul* with a huge *kzayis maror* and a little *esrog* that you're not sure if it's kosher or not. Maybe some people would use a lemon… But since you take the *lulav* and *esrog* in *shul*, everyone is busy showing off so that all their friends see what a nice set of *daled minim* they procured. While with the *kzayis maror* you buy some green thing in a bag and you eat a little piece of it, and it's ok because nobody notices.

When it comes to issues in marriage that are בין איש לאשתו, strictly between the couple, it's private. Nobody knows. That's why some people tend to feel comfortable doing things their

own way, however it may be. They tend to feel comfortable, nobody knows, nobody sees. I don't have to ask. It's taboo.

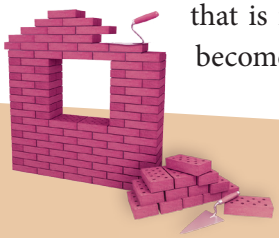
But that's wrong. The fact that nobody sees doesn't mean that Hashem doesn't see. In the very first *siman* of *Shulchan Aruch*, the Rema warns against this type of thinking. שיויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד –Don't ever assume that nobody is looking. Hashem sees everything. Especially when it comes to something that is meant to be *heileg*, it's meant to be sacred. Something that's a דוגמא of יחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתי. The חיבור of a couple is קודש קדשים!

Don't say: "It's trivial, we will do whatever we want. Slowly, as time goes on people change, things change, it's okay however it's done." Don't assume so! This is a *mitzvah* of the Torah. Make sure you're doing what's right. I feel that it's important to share this, people should hear it. "Make sure you're doing what's right and discuss it with someone who knows what's right. Understand that doing what's right will always be to your benefit and your best advantage."

#5- WHEN STRINGENCIES ARE WRONG

There's a Torah way of doing things. The Torah is specific in how to behave regarding the matter that we are discussing. "Specific" means that all leniencies and stringencies are explained. Generally speaking, regarding other Torah issues, it's usually commendable to be stringent. If it's being done in the right way, and it's coming from a healthy place, a place of love and devotion, then of course, certainly one should be *machmir*.

But when it comes to this area, one must be very careful. When people start being *machmir* on an issue that is relevant to someone else as well, then it becomes a problem. If you want to be *machmir* on



something and it only pertains to you, it won't be on anyone else's *cheshbon,* that's generally okay. Generally we say, because nothing is black and white, but generally okay. When you're going to do something that you feel is *chashuv*, it's a *chumrah* or something extra, that's great. But when you may be hurting someone at the same time – in any which way – that's something to be very, very careful about. Proceed with caution.

So finding the balance and getting it right is the key element here. Don't be too lenient or too stringent. We have a Torah way of doing things and everything should be done in that light. Everything should be done with the attitude and understanding that there's a Torah way of doing things and that's how we do things.

It's especially important to discuss this, because it's not only something that's between you and your spouse. The whole *kedushah* of our homes depends on this. A *yiddisher* home is influenced by how a husband and wife behave in this area. This is a topic that touches upon the very basis of *kedushah* and *taharah.* The *sefarim*refer to this as the יסוד the very basis and foundation of a *yiddishe shtub.* Whatever you want to have in your home, so much of the attitude and the *chinuch*, the mood and the spirituality that you want to have at home is affected by how you behave in matters of *kedushah*. Don't underestimate the importance of understanding it, getting it right and making it work.

I am not suggesting that anyone should be overly nervous or restricting. We're talking about understanding what's correct and making sure you're doing things the way Hashem would want you to do it.

#6- DON'T FORGET THE LAWS OF TAHARA

I would like to mention something, even though this may not be the right place, but due to my experience talking with many couples, I feel that I have to mention this. I find that for whatever reason, either over time or because of circumstance people sometimes tend to get lax in the area of *taharas hamishpachah,* in *hilchos niddah,* the *halachos* of *harchakos.* Although there is a lot of *chazarah*, a lot of awareness, and it's spoken about relatively often, still, for whatever reason, sometimes as time goes on, a couple gets used to married life and slowly they start being a little more lax, a little more lenient in things that are עומדים ברומו של עולם. It's not something that's optional. It's something important and something that touches upon the *kedushah* of a *yiddishe shtub*. It's not something you want to compromise on.

Sometime, when it's too late, people begin to wonder "What happened here, how come things are falling apart?" If you want things to be good, do it the Torah way. Aside from the *shalom bayis* aspect, the very fact that this is what Hashem wants of a person is enough of a reason to be fastidious with it. But the fact is that there is an added advantage; when you do things right, it's going to be your benefit and with Hashem's help it will strength your home and your *shalom bayis*.

#7- DON'T TWIST YOUR RELIGION

Another thing: It's so important not to use Hashem as a source of conflict. Not to use "Yiddishkeit" as something that is going to break your marriage. Of course, something that is so vital and so important as the *kedushah* of your home, certainly needs to be dealt with responsibly, with the seriousness that such a topic deserves. But never use it as something that is going to break up your marriage, something that will actually be contrary to השכנת שלום בין איש לאשתו. If you see an issue in



your marriage that needs help, we've already mentioned; talk to someone about it. Don't pick fights over your spouse's observance.

Machlokess and distance between a married couple is *assur al pi* Torah. Just as wrong as it is to do things that are inappropriate or wrong, it is wrong to fight over it. Hashem doesn't want you to use Him כביכול, as a reason to disturb the harmony of your marriage. It's important to understand how to get things right, and what do you do when things get difficult. There is a way to get things right when it really means so much.

I have seen many people who use religious issues to literally destroy their marriage, and it's all in the name of Hashem! And it's wrong! I'm not saying that in the name of *shalom bayis*, you can do whatever you want, but you can't do whatever you want for the sake of religion either. Hashem wants you to make it work, and to do so in the most healthy way, as prescribed by the Torah. We find this concept in many *sefarim*, to keep our priorities straight. Don't ruin your marriage and blame it on the Torah.

#8- INTIMACY BELONGS TO US

Earlier, we had a whole chapter about boundaries, about the *mine*, the *yours* and the *ours*. When it comes to this topic, it is definitely ours. In such an area where we clearly know that "it takes two to tango", it's not a question. So if you decide to eat supper on your own, that's something you could do. There are many things that you can do on your own, regardless of whether it's correct or not. But when it comes to this area; this is something that is meant to connect and bind two people. This is definitely something that has to be done together.

Since this definitely goes into the category of *ours*, two people must be on the same page about this. Nothing at all should be

decided by one person when it comes to this matter; the Torah decides for us. The practicalities, the technicalities should not be decided by one person. This is an issue in which two people must understand each other, make room for each other, and understand how important it is to take each other seriously. I can't emphasize this enough.

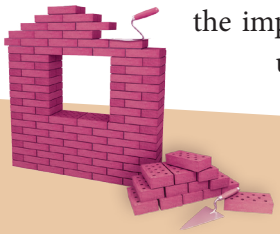
So many times, I have dealt with situations where one spouse was not taking the other one seriously. It must be understood that there's another person here who is to be taken into account, and everything must be decided by two people. Everything must be understood or agreed upon.

#9- LET'S GET PRACTICAL: AN ATTITUDE OF GIVING RESCUING FROM SIN

What I want to discuss now, and focus a bit more on, is the attitude with which we approach *mitzvas onah*. The attitude that *chazal* teach us is the proper attitude, and the healthiest attitude. The teachings of Chazal should guide us in accomplishing that which Hashem wants us to accomplish.

We clearly find in the Torah and *chazal* that there is a very important element to *mitzvas onah.* And that is, ensuring that both husband and wife are getting their respective needs met, that they're having their needs fulfilled. In the *gemara* (יבמות דף סג.) we find that the great *tanna* Rabbi Chiya, said about wives מצילות אותנו מן החטא- that a wife who steadfastly attends to her husband's needs and desires saves him *min hacheit,* from doing things that he shouldn't.

I wish I could emphasize enough what this means. So many situations and cases came my way that underscore the importance of this *chazal*. Many times it is underestimated or not understood clearly



enough or just not taught and emphasized enough. If only the women would understand what this really means. מצילות אותנו מן החטא is something real.

I'd like to point out something that may be overlooked. In *Parshas Pinchas* Rashi talks about שבטי י-ה עדות לישראל. Hashem added a *yud* and a *hey* onto the names of each *shevet* עדות לישראל -to testify about Yisroel. That what? That לא שלטו מצרים בנשותיהם – the Egyptians didn't defile the Jewish women. Why not? What protected them. I believe it can be explained by a different Rashi.

In parshas Ki Sisa Rashi talks about the mirrors that were used to form the Kiyor of the Mishkon. Rashi says that these were mirrors that the women used *in order* to beautify themselves for their husbands. They would beautify themselves and then go out in the fields where their husbands were forced to stay. תחת התפוח עוררתיך – They went out and did what must be done and they had children in *Mitzrayim.* It's interesting to see the connection, when there was a healthy relationship and the women went out of their way to satisfy the men, they were protected from falling prey to the advances of the Egyptians.

WHAT DOES THE TORAH SAY?

On the other hand, don't think that the sole responsibility lies on the woman. Actually, the basis of it all, the actual *mitzvah* in the Torah is, ושמח את אשתו –the husband must make his wife happy. עונתה לא יגרע – "He shouldn't detract from her special time" he must give her happiness and enjoyment. It is certainly the husband's obligation to satisfy his wife.

And so we clearly see in the Torah that each spouse deserves to have his or her needs met and feel satisfied and fulfilled. Nobody should ever compromise on that which the Torah says needs to take place. Don't say that you're testosterone is low or

that your libido is low. Physical intimacy is a very important part of married life, and should not be negated.

HIS ATTITUDE AND HER ATTITUDE

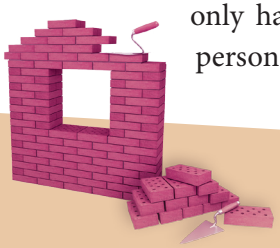
So if it's important for our needs to be met, perhaps we should insist on getting our needs met. After all the Torah insists on it! But that's not true, the Torah tells us what our roles are, and although both spouses have needs, the role of the husband is to satisfy his wife, and the role of a woman is to satisfy her husband. She shouldn't work on his attitude and he shouldn't work on her attitude.

In fact, that's the only way it can be done. As long they are each focusing on satisfying each other, then it will happen. But if they're focusing on what the other person is supposed to be doing for them, it won't work. It doesn't work, anybody that ever tried it knows! It's like JFK said "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." We need to apply this to marriage in general, and intimacy specifically.

When somebody is looking to have his needs met – yes they are "supposed to be" met. But if that's what he is focusing on, that's what he is emphasizing, then not only will that not happen, but actually he will not even be getting what he's so focused on getting.

TRUE LOVE AND INTIMACY

When this is done correctly and each person truly focuses on his spouse, then they both come to a place of true connection, true intimacy and closeness, which is what the Torah wants. This is the importance of the physical connection. This is what the Torah intended – that feeling of being truly one. And this only happens when each person has the other person in mind and there's a connection, a deeply intimate and



true connection. This doesn't happen otherwise. This is not possible otherwise.



LUST KILLS LOVE

When people are self-absorbed and think about themselves, it may be that she's thinking about her husband too, but if they're thinking about themselves, it turns into lust and self-absorption. It turns into something that is unhealthy and has the potential to destroy a relationship.

With all the self-help books out there and all the ideas that people share and discuss, I think we know that when it comes down to it, society has unfortunately totally distorted the whole idea of intimacy and closeness. Now why? There are so many good ideas. There are so many therapists and so many people that are trying to guide people. Why can't they get it right?

The answer is that love takes selflessness. I'm not talking about a big *madreigah*, but it takes selflessness and focus to get it right. And selflessness is something that is not being taught. That's not what people are focusing on in today's society. But when we learn the Torah way, and both people have their other half in mind, then their intimacy becomes something close and real, something that really connects two people.

IS IT REALLY PHYSICAL?

So much of *mitzvas onah*, and I would actually venture to say, most of it, has nothing to do with physical needs. So much of this is actually about the emotional element behind it. When you have someone else in mind and you're trying to connect with someone else and give the other person what they need. When you endeavor to cause that pleasure, cause that closeness and good feeling, it's an emotional feeling. That's what your spouse feels.

When somebody buys you a gift, we all know that it's the feeling that counts. It's not the gift. As much as the action of giving over the gift is necessary in order convey that feeling of appreciation. Really, it's not the gift, it's the feeling behind it. Similarly, when you try to connect with someone and you try to meet their needs and satisfy them, there's a feeling behind that. That feeling is what connects two people. When two people have that feeling of giving, when they feel toward each other," I'm here to make you feel good, and I want to do things the way that's going to be best for you." That's what leaves you with a good feeling afterwards – it's the emotions behind it.

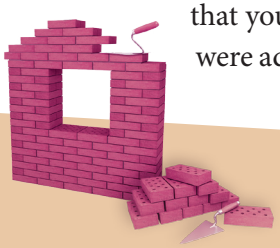
When it comes to physical, when it comes to raw lust, it can never truly be satisfied. Chazal teach us, יש לו מנה רוצה מאתיים. We can never satisfy our physical desires. But our emotional needs *can* be met. And when our emotions are in order, we aren't bothered by physical lusts.

YOU GOTTA BE REAL

Now, obviously there can't be a contradiction. You can't be giving and taking at the same time. If you're going to contradict these emotions with other emotions or these messages with other messages, it's going to work against you. Relationships are all one big puzzle, everything is connected. And understanding the emotional element behind it is so important and so crucial. When two people share this mindset, that's when it could work.

CAN I WORK ON US

Up until this chapter, we provided advice to an individual in a marriage. Whoever you are, whether male or female; you could be accommodating, you can be appreciative. These are all things that you can do on your own. All of these things were advice for someone looking to do their part to improve their



married life. However when we come to this area, we are apparently dealing with something that has to be shared.

Of course this is true, ultimately it *should* be shared. This should be something that a couple discusses and understands and are on the same page about. Both must be educated in the right way, in a way that is going to benefit the two of them. But in truth so much can be done by the individual. If even one of them is understanding and getting it right, much can be accomplished. When one person has the right mindset, the right focus, and is doing it the right way. Obviously, it goes without saying but I'll just repeat it anyway – it must be done the *Torahdik* way – the way that Hashem wants it to be done – and then a lot can be accomplished following the guidance of the Torah.

THE FISHOPHILE: WHAT IS LOVE?

I heard in the name of Rav Leib Chasman, he was the *mashgiach* in *Chevron Yeshivah*. He once saw a boy who was eating fish with real *cheishek* –with gusto. So he asked him, "Why do you eat the fish like that?" The boy was really into it. So he said, "Why are you eating the fish like that?" "Ah, I love fish." Was the boy's reply. The Rav said, "Oh, you love fish? You don't chew up and swallow and spit out the bones of something you love. That's not love. You love yourself, not the fish. Since you love yourself, you're eating the fish."

In any relationship, but especially marriage and especially when it comes to intimacy, many times people will love themselves and it's normal. Don't get me wrong. It's normal for people to love themselves and be somewhat self-absorbed. For people to think about themselves and their own interests, it's normal. Remember that. Don't ever accuse someone of being crazy because they love themselves. However, in order to get

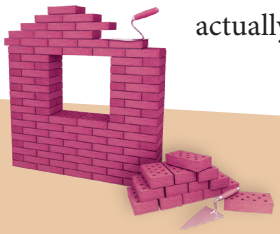
this right, in order to be a good spouse, you have to be able to step out of your box and make room for another person.

When you think about what the word love means, it's not about chewing up a piece of fish. Love means that you love someone else – someone outside of "you". This has become so distorted in today's culture and society. Love and anything that has to do with the word love is usually interpreted as self-indulgence and self-interest. About yourself, and not about the other person.

But we must know that, the Torah clearly stays away from different areas. [I apologize for being a bit vague, but not everything is for a public forum]. The Torah specifically sets certain limitations and there are certain reservations in the manner that the act is achieved. When you analyze these *halachos*, you'll see how the Torah was specifically staying away from self-indulgence and loving yourself. The Torah was specifically focusing on what you can do for the other person. That's what love is about. Anything that has to do with love and connection and relationship, is about someone else. It's not about you.

THE ERROR IN MAKING IT ABOUT YOU

When somebody approaches anything in a relationship with the attitude of "What's in it for me?" it's going to work against him. Let's explain: When people get self-absorbed and they think about themselves. They won't be able to focus on what they're supposed to be doing, because they're always waiting for that "ahh" moment, so they won't even achieve what they set out to get. But besides for that, since their spouse will sense their feelings, there will be a certain barrier that's actually going to withhold that which a person is looking to get. By being self-absorbed



you're actually withholding yourself from getting what you want.

Another thing: When somebody is thinking only about themselves, things get boring. He decides when yes, when not. Everything is all about myself so there's no one else here. If there's no one else here, what's the point? This is something that supposed to be about togetherness.

The *gemara* in *Niddah* says that the Tanna R' Meir explained the reason for the *tumah-tahara* cycle every month. And he explained that it's so that it should be ככלה שנכנסה לחופה. Every month there's a break in the physical connection of the couple, and then they get a fresh start. It's exciting! It's not something that's boring; that happens when I'm in the mood or when I want. It's not about me. It's about having that connection and making it strong. The Torah is at work to help us get it right. It's important to appreciate what the Torah wants and how it should be done. We should try and acquire that attitude so that it will build and enhance the relationship, with Hashem's help. It will make it something that will always be there to strengthen that connection and build a home of שלום.

DON'T PRETEND IT'S OK

It's important to add the following here, when we say that you need to put the focus on your wife's needs, it's not about looking away from your own needs. When we talk about the focus and the attitude, we don't mean that you should be a martyr and say, "Ok *nisht,* it's not about me. I give up." It is true that the more you think of your spouse, and the more you're connecting, the more you'll be able to get for yourself. You'll feel much closer, much more comfortable, and much happier.

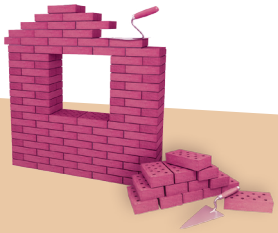
However, it is important to make sure that your needs are met. It's not about keeping your focus on yourself. But it must be

understood that sometimes in order to get your needs met, you have to be clear about it. Sometimes you have to be assertive. Sometimes you have to be open and vulnerable and only then will you be able to convey that which is necessary to be said. The fact that you're no getting what you want shouldn't detract from what you're sharing. But it's important to understand that in order to get your needs met, you must sometimes ask for it. Don't fool yourself and not think that it's not important. I've seen many people suffer because they assumed that "Okay, it's not so important. It's fine. It's okay." Don't say that. It's important, only it's not "Most important". Most important is that you have an attitude of "What can I bring to the table? What can I share, how can I give?" and if you have that attitude hopefully everything will straighten out on its own. Of course, if it doesn't straighten out, then be assertive, you're important too.

It's not about getting. It's about giving. That is truthfully a general rule in relationships. It's about giving, not about getting. When you give, you get. Especially in this area where both are intended to get, it's important to understand that you'll be getting most by giving. When you give, that's what is going to work best.

THIS IS IMPORTANT!!!

There is the importance of understanding how critical and how crucial the area of physical intimacy is to a marriage. It is important for this area to be as healthy and as *Torahdik* as possible. It adds to the coChallenging Situations



Even a couple that has gained new insight, and tools to help them with essential marriage skills. They understand the importance of clear and sensitive communication, showing appreciation, and respecting boundaries, still it is inevitable that difficult situjust the simple relationship part. If there's something that you need, reach out for help. Go to someone that you trust. Don't go to your neighbor or your sister. Don't go to your *chavrusa* or your brother-in-law. Don't go to someone who is just going to give you ideas and put things into your head that will confuse you. Go to someone that cares for you, someone who has clarity and someone who could help you and guide you through it, and teach you the best way to do it.

With Hashem's help, we should get this right. We should be able to have a healthy ודבק באשתו and from the other side of the *mechitza* as well we should have a healthy מצילות אותנו מן החטא. We should have a healthy *kiyum* of all the Torah and *mitzvos* that Hashem wants and a healthy *shalom bayis*, *ahavah, achvah, shalom erayus.*

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

Founder of Leha'ir

Together, Rabbi and Mrs. Gruen offer classes, workshops, teleconferences and individual counseling to teach a unique methodology which promotes interpersonal understanding and builds relationships.

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His recent book **Get Along With Everyone; Especially those you find most challenging**, sets forth a revolutionary idea which provides a novel approach on avoiding and resolving any and all conflicts. He is also the author of **The Fragile Factor**, which discusses how to prevent and reverse what became known as the unfortunate OTD crisis.

Many of his lectures on interpersonal communication, education, parenting, and marriage are available on TorahAnytime.com.

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"Rabbi Gruen hits the bullseye when he identifies one particular personality type that can be both difficult and deep; sensitive to their own feelings but also wonderfully perceptive about the feelings of others. . . 'Get Along With Everyone' offers an astute and practical roadmap to achieve this crucial understanding, teaching the communication skills and how to adopt healthy boundaries that can heal and enrich the most important, and perplexing, relationships in your life."

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