

# **Shalom Bayit**

## **Finding more happiness in your marriage**

**Rabbi Shia Aharon Leigh**

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### **Introduction**

This essay will explore some of the issues of shalom bayis and ways of improving the marriage relationship. Marriages are made in heaven, but in practice, many marriages do not live up to expectations. He does not get up on time, and gets to Kollél late. He's a slob and leaves his dirty washing all over the floor. She spends hours on the phone and making dinner is a peanut butter sandwich, even on Shabbos she buys all the food prepared. Unlike his Mother who makes all her own food and salads.

Singles have the notion, I just have to find the right partner and I will be happy ever after, where does this unrealistic notion come from? Finding the ideal partner is only the first stage, stage two is where the hard work really starts. Building a marriage relationship like anything else requires hard work with many difficulties. Marriage is not just a "bed of roses" with constant bliss; there will be times of anger, sadness and frustration.

There are many books and lots of advice on Shalom Bayit, yet the holy institution of marriage is threatened with many divorces and even more unhappy marriages. Clearly much of the advice is inadequate or just bad! Maybe part of the problem is an abundance of information.

I discuss ideas from Dr. William Glasser a psychiatrist who founded "Choice Theory, Dr John Gottman a professor of psychology and one of the most successful Rabbonim in Shalom Bayit – Rabbi Shalom Arush. Interestingly many important traits described by these authors are similar. All three mention one of most destructive bad traits criticism, especially damaging to a marriage when the husband continually criticizes his wife.

## Shalom Bayis

Achieving shalom bayis requires considerable investment in understanding, compassion and patience. Husbands and wives must devote time and energy to ensure their marriage works and grows continually looking for ways to draw closer together and serve Hashem.

*“Know full well – the most important thing in the service of Hashem is shalom bayit – peace in the home. Here a husband must invest all his efforts, for this is a mitzvah that obligates him the entire days of his life.”<sup>1</sup>*

Happily married couples behave like good friends, their relationship built on esteem, love and empathy. In the words of Dr John Gottman:-

*“In the strongest marriages, husband and wife share a deep sense of meaning. They don’t just “get along” – they also support each other’s hopes and aspirations and build a sense of purpose into their lives together. That is really what I mean when I talk about honoring and respecting each other”<sup>2</sup>*

Why do so many frum marriages end in divorce? One of the three pillars on which the Torah stands is Chesed<sup>3</sup>. Where is there a greater chesed then to one’s wife or husband? How come in Yerusalyim with a high percentage of charadim the there was a 9.7% increase in divorce rates during 2008? While the average rate for the rest of the country was only 4.7%? Maybe because couples face many difficulties in a world changing for the worse with diminishing moral values, lower standards of education and easily assessable porn from the web.

Previous generations had fewer divorces, was this indicative of those times where it was customary not to divorce, or did they understand marriage required hard work? Were their marriages’ better and happier, fulfilling for both husbands and wife’s? Rabbi Shalom Arush<sup>4</sup> quotes a leading Rav who says it was not true that their marriages began easily; all the young couples had great obstacles and difficulties. They were able to overcome their difficulties and build good shalom bayit with empathy, love and emunah.

*“Every good home that produced upright generations, righteous people and our nation’s spiritual leaders did so through much toil, effort and serous work. There isn’t a couple in the world, even amongst the very righteous, that had it easy from the start of their marriage with instant shalom bayis..”<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The Garden of Peace – Rabbi Shalom Arush

<sup>2</sup> The Seven Principles for Making a Marriage Work” – John Gotman

<sup>3</sup> Peke Avos 1:2

<sup>4</sup> Gan HaShalom – The Garden of Peace by Rabbi Shalom Arush

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Shalom Arush

### **Unrealistic Expectations**

A bochor who lived in a dormitory didn't have much responsibility or emotional attachment to the other bochorim. His meals were prepared and even his laundry done for him. Now he is married his true purpose of his mission in this world begins so in can improve his middos and character. He can no longer do what "he" wants, he has a wife and now has responsibility to help her and care for her.

Being married is a life job of learning how to control ones middos, easier said than done! If marriage is so difficult why is there so little training? Doctors and lawyers learn for years before starting to practice and only after extensive on the job experience do they receive certification. The majority young chasanim and kallot are taught the laws of Tarat HaMishpacha, but not how to relate to each other and build a relationship. How many chasonim understand the kasuvah that he signed? Is he aware of his obligations to love, cherish, honor and provide for his wife. The husband accepts the responsibility to provide parnosa and ensure his wife's happiness and needs are fulfilled - not his own.

Men and women are very different and have different emotions. Men are quick to look for solutions when most of the time women want to hear empathy, understanding and love. A husband must make quality time for his wife and really listen to so she knows he is listening. Falling asleep while his wife talks to him will only indicate he does not care and is interested in his own ego. His wife will interpret his lack of understanding and feel unloved and rejected. She will pay him back in kind and he will have no idea what he did wrong.

### **Choice Theory by Dr William Glasser<sup>6</sup>**

In Choice Theory Dr Glasser introduces two concepts: -

- 1) External Control
- 2) Seven caring habits<sup>7</sup> and Seven Bad Habits<sup>8</sup>.

In almost all relationship problems one or both of the partners blame the other partner. Not only do they use criticism and blame, they also try to control and manipulate each other. A term defined by Dr Glasser as "external control" which forms the basis for conflict in any relationship whether between husband and wife, father and son or boss and worker. Choice

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<sup>6</sup> See books by Dr William Glasser including Reality Therapy, Choice Theory

<sup>7</sup> Supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, negotiating

<sup>8</sup> Criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, bribing

Theory teaches the only person you can control is yourself; trying to control someone else is not going to work. The more one partner tries to control the other the distance between them will increase and the relationship will deteriorate.

If a marriage is build on the seven bad habits with lots criticism and blaming the relationship will not be smooth. The partner who is threatened and punished will withdraw and stonewall, (see The four horsemen), and counter with his own criticism and threats. Couples who are aware their behavior is not working have the opportunity to conduct themselves differently. If they choose to use the seven caring habits and endeavor to keep control out of the relationship they will certainly see a big improvement. However, if the couple continues to criticize, blame and complain unhappiness will increase.

### **The Four Horsemen<sup>9</sup> - Dr John Gottman**

Dr Gottman describes the breakdown in marriage, as a kind of negativity, which if allowed to run rampant is lethal to a relationship. He calls them “The Four Horseman” – Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness and Stonewalling. I do not have the space to elaborate on the first three but the fourth stonewalling is very interesting and very damaging to a relationship.

*“Eric and Pamela were nearing rock bottom. Exhausted and overwhelmed by Pamela’s attacks. Eric eventually stopped responding, even defensively, to her accusations. Their marriage went from bring by poor communication to bring virtually destroyed by none. Once Eric stopped listening to Pamela, their relationship become extraordinarily difficult to repair”<sup>10</sup>*

*During a typical conversation between two people, the listener gives all kinds of cues to the speaker that he’s paying attention. He may use eye contact, nod his head, say something like “Yeah” or “uhhuh”. But a stone waller doesn't give you this sort of casual feedback. He tends to look away or down without uttering a sound. He sits like an impassive stone wall. The stone waller acts as though he couldn't care less about what you're saying, if he even hears it.<sup>11</sup>*

### **Stop the downward spiral**

Once the relationship has started to sink the couple must get back on course. According to Dr Glasser it is important the couple sees good points in their relationship. Two of the five questions Dr Glasser ask couples are: -

*What is good about your marriage? – Dr Glasser is talking about the present not the past*

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<sup>9</sup> The Seven Principles for Making a Marriage Work – Dr John Gottman

<sup>10</sup> Why Marriages Succeed or Fail – Dr John Gottman

<sup>11</sup> The Seven Principles of Making a Marriage Work – Dr John Gottman

*What is one thing you can do this week to improve your marriage?*

If the couple cannot perceive something good about their relationship, Dr Gasser says he cannot help. However, Gassers perspective is a secular view lacking belief and emunah. We know Hashem controls everything and it is Hashem who makes shiduchim. If a couple is married it is because of the divine will and their job to do everything to build a happy Torah based home.

**Ideas for helping Couple get back on track<sup>12</sup>**

- 1) Focus on the quality of the relationship
- 2) Five ways for husbands to make their wife's happy
  - a. Gifts (many small inexpensive gifts are as good one expensive present)
  - b. Service
  - c. Compliments / Appreciation
  - d. Empathy / Understanding / Time to share
  - e. Intimacy / Touch
- 3) Think of ways to your partner happy
- 4) Know your spouse's tastes both good and bad – favorite food, flowers, having fun, best times for intimacy etc etc
- 5) Make your spouse your best friend
- 6) Husband's need to show their wife is the most important person in their life
- 7) Quality time together
- 8) Look for little things to show affection
- 9) Disagree is OK, but use a soft startup

*“Our research shows that the way you start your conversation makes a big difference in the overall quality of your marriage. Harsh startup that is, beginning*

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<sup>12</sup> First Aid for Jewish Marriages by Rabbi Daniel Shonback NY

*with criticism or contempt – cause the interaction to go downhill fast. Partners become defensive and withdrawn. Leading to emotional distance and loneliness”<sup>13</sup>*

10) Stop or at least reduce

- a. Control
- b. Criticism

### **Couple Awareness**

One of the problems is many young couples ask for help too late. Conflict is already rooted in their relationship and it is very difficult to break out of the negative behaviors and attitudes both partners have developed. Couples need to be taught more relationship issues before and during marriage and have an understanding person available who can help and offer advice, not just questions about Taharat HaMishpacha.

### **Shalom Bayis coaching, counseling and Therapy**

Once couples finally reach an upstanding they need help, to whom do they turn? Do they ask friends or relations who give bad advice or enhance the conflict by taking sides? Dr Glasser is very careful that the coach be on the side of the marriage not to “take side” with any one of the partners. Finding good coaching / counseling is not easy.

### **The Garden of Peace - Rabbi Shalom Arush**

Interestingly, Dr Glasser, Dr Gottman and Rabbi Arush all discuss criticism as a major cause of marital conflict. Removing or least reducing criticism will greatly enhance a couple’s relationship. Rabbi Arush is unique in extending the concept by placing the entire responsibility for the relationship on the husband. A husband must:-

*“never make any remarks, comments, or criticism about anything she does, even if she’s done a gross misdeed”*

Rabbi Arush teaches a second principle the wife is a mirror of the husband; any deficiency he sees in her is actually his own deficiency. The concept comes from the Arizal who taught that if a person sees a fault in another he is seeing a mirror of a fault found within him. All the more so one’s wife who is one’s own flesh and blood, a husband sees his own shortcomings reflected in his wife.

Criticism and comments is devastating to a wife, a wife can never stand criticism.

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<sup>13</sup> 10 Lessons to Transform your Marriage – Dr John Gottman

*“The reason a wife is so sensitive to comments and criticism is because HaShem don’t want him to criticism her in the least, only to correct himself”*

*“comments detract from a wife’s honor, make her feel inadequate and rob her of her self-confidence. Complements, love and praise, on the other hand, increase her self-confidence”*

**Conclusion**

The foundation of Jewish life and Halacha is based on happy, healthy marriage where children can be raised in the proper Torah atmosphere. If couples are able to learn from the works of Dr Glasser, Dr Gottman and Rabbi Arush their marriages will be greatly enhanced.