

YOM KIPPUR
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Woody Allen said: “Life doesn’t imitate art; it imitates bad television.” Have you noticed how much entertainment deals with dysfunctional relationships? Think about the Book of Genesis: Cain and Abel, Sarah and Hagar, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. Peace in our homes, *shalom bayit**, is a huge concern because there is so much need for it.

There are two primary spaces in Judaism. The synagogue, *beit kenesset*, and the home, *bayit*. The Temple in Jerusalem was called the House of Holiness, *Beit HaMikdash*. Ezekiel’s vision of a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem has people from throughout the world coming to Jerusalem to pray together in peace. Our rabbis teach that there is a *Beit Mikdash* inside of each of us; there is a Holy of Holies inside every one of us. In other words, we are to create *shalom bayit* within ourselves. Judaism’s ultimate experience of peace is when we die and our souls return home to G-d; a Jewish cemetery is called a home of eternity, *beit Olam*. To have *shalom bayit*, one needs a home. Sadly, a significant percentage of homeless people in our country have been cast out physically from their family homes. For example, a very high percentage of homeless teenagers are gay and when they come out to their families they are thrown out of their homes. The essence of *shalom bayit* is compassion, respect, empathy, patience, generosity and forgiveness. The enemies of *shalom bayit* are resentment, anger, selfishness, callousness, jealousy and disrespect. There is another kind of homelessness: when we do not feel at home with ourselves because of guilt and shame. *Shalom bayit* requires us to accept the imperfections in others and in ourselves. *Shalom bayit* is a deep feeling of being at home wherever we are and not having to fight and argue. Forgiveness is what welcomes people home and what makes people feel at home. There can be no *shalom bayit* without forgiveness.

Psychologists know that for most, our pain and sorrow begin at the very beginning—with our family. Dr. Ernst Kurtz observes the paradox of family: “It serves as a shield and protection and also as the setting within which most of us suffer our first wounds.” William James’s notion of *zerrissenheit*, conflict-brokenness-disunity, extends to self and others. It is being at odds with and not being at home with. When we are not at home, we are weakened, vulnerable and volatile. What does it mean to be homesick? How often are the homes we

are homesick for no longer accessible or are homes where there is not *shalom bayit*? It is well documented how many abused people stay or return to the places of their abuse, to their homes. There is our existential sense of alienation and estrangement when we do not feel at home anywhere including when we do not feel at home in our own bodies.

Rabbi Simchah Bunam quoted the verse to his hasidim where Jacob tells Joseph to go and see if it is well with his brothers (Gen. 37:14) explaining that Jacob was really telling Joseph to quit looking for the bad in his brothers and to search out and find their good. Rabbi Bunam taught that too often we see what we do not like in others—often being what we do not like in ourselves—and do not make the effort to find the positive in others. To find the good in others is a prerequisite if there is to be *shalom bayit* in our families. We must also acknowledge what is good in us and what are our strengths if we are to have *shalom bayit* within ourselves.

Richard Curtis wrote the script for “About Time,” a time-bending tale about a father and son with magical ability to revisit and repair all the days of their lives. How many days would we like to repair, interactions revisit and conversations have again? If we took care of our physical homes the way we do our relationships what, for example, would our roofs and gutters look like or our lawns and landscaping?

A large part of *shalom bayit* is making the commitment to focus on fixing and healing more than on our hurt and resentment. *Shalom bayit* is not magic; it is forgiveness and work. *Shalom bayit* is a very big part of *tikkun Olam*; our homes and families are part of the *Olam* that we need to do *tikkun* on. Many of us talk about *tikkun Olam* but do not work on *shalom bayit* in our own lives. How is there going to be *tikkun* in the world without there being *tikkun* in our families, relationships and in ourselves?

Shalom bayit is altruistic; it is about doing for others. The chef, Leah Chase, said in an interview that she “loves living, not just existing. “Living,” she comments, “is when you get up in the morning looking forward to doing something for or giving something to another.” Being preoccupied with what others should be doing for us disrupts *shalom bayit*. Think of what our lives would be like, our homes and relationships if each of us thought more about what we can do others. The

Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas defines the entire *Musar* movement which is dedicated to living ethical-spiritual lives to: “You first.” What if we were not always concerned with being first? This is so counter intuitive given our culture that is so much about “me, my and I.” How much discord is there in our families and relationships because of our self-centeredness, selfishness and egos?

Shalom bayit is critically important in the raising of our children. The more *shalom bayit* a child experiences in growing up the stronger, healthier and happier this child will be. We know how function and dysfunction are passed down and how important role modeling is. The columnist Frank Bruni wonderfully illustrates this in a column about an 18 year old granddaughter and her 80 year old grandfather who are in New York together. He writes: “A family can pass its painstakingly nurtured closeness down through generations and there comes a moment when the values impressed on the youngest members of the brood become the values they actually elect when they grow older.” This grandfather thinks his granddaughter has spent enough time with him in New York. So, when he asks if she will join him for dinner he expects her to say that she is busy with friends. Instead she says she will be sure to end her visit with her friends in time to meet him for dinner. “Are you sure,” he asks. “Totally,” she responds. “Having dinner with you is much more important.” These are the fruits of working on family and building *shalom bayit*.

Our rabbis said that the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans because of Jewish infighting and enmity, *sinat chinam*. *Shalom bayit* applies to communal harmony and this is why we have concerns whenever there is contention among us. After King Solomon died there was a revolt and the kingdom split into two. During the Greek period the Macabees fought the Hellenist Jews; Chanukkah is about a civil war between Jews. There were the Sadducees and the Pharisees and then the Rabbis and Kairites. In the beginning of the 18th century there was the conflict between the Hasidim and their opponents, the mitnagdim, that still plays out. There are issues today between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews and denominations.

Every month when we bless the new moon we recite: “All Jews are friends, *kol Yisrael chaverim*.” This is not a statement of fact; it never has been. There has never been *shalom bayit* among all Jews—not in biblical times and not today. It is a hope, a prayer of what will be; namely, that all Jews regardless of our

differences will be bound together in respectful and supportive community. This is why the disrespectful rancor we often demonstrate toward each other is so concerning. If 2000 years ago the absence of *shalom bayit* resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple certainly, the absence of *shalom bayit* among us today is not going to rebuild anything. The Jewish columnist Simon Rocker wrote in the London Times: “Whenever Jews, Christians and Muslims meet in the spirit of reconciliation, a stone of the Temple is, symbolically, relaid.” How many more stones can we Jews lay if we would respect and accept each other?

Ezekiel’s and Isaiah’s visions tell us that at the time of redemption not only all Jews but all people will pray together in Jerusalem; Ezekiel’s vision includes non-Jewish priests co-officiating with Jewish priests in our Temple. President Lincoln told General Grant after the south surrendered to let Jefferson Davies and the other southern leaders escape and that there will be no hangings because the time for healing and peace is now. President Lincoln was thinking of *shalom bayit* for our country after the Civil War that tore us apart.

The 16th century kabbalist, Rabbi Chaim Vital, asks why the Torah doesn’t explicitly state that we are commanded to behave toward one another humanely and morally. His answer is that humanism is a basic condition for fulfilling the Torah. He taught that a person who lacks proper relationships with another human being has not stepped even into the doorway of Torah and that good deeds and character come before Torah—*derekh erez kadma laTorah.*” Much of Judaism is built on this proposition. Otherwise, how can we love another like ourselves, take care of the poor and needy, stand up and defend the persecuted and oppressed? We are told unequivocally that all of this is for one reason only and that is to increase *shalom* in the world. Here the *bayit* of *shalom bayit* is our world and there cannot be *shalom* in our world if there is not *shalom* in how we treat and care for others.

Studies done in a number of different countries show that those of us who interact with people different than us, have friends of different backgrounds and races, associate and converse with people different than us, expose ourselves to the ideas of people different than us are unquestionably more tolerant people. The more tolerance, the more understanding and acceptance there is and then the more peace there is in relationships both personal and communal.

Paulo Coelho wrote: “Life is too short to keep important words like ‘I love you’ locked in our hearts.” A rabbi tells the story of officiating at a funeral for a woman whose husband was standing by the grave crying his heart out long after everyone left. The rabbi tried several times to move him along but he continued crying. Finally the rabbi said to him that he really needed to leave. The husband looked at the rabbi and said: “But you do not understand. I loved my wife deeply and I even got close to telling her that I did.” *Shalom bayit* can sometimes rest on but a few moments and a few words.

There can be no peace without forgiveness and peace is the highest value we have. In the Mishnah we are told that we should all be disciples of Aaron loving peace and pursuing peace. Aaron is regarded by our rabbis as the paradigm of a peace maker. We are told that if two Israelites were fighting or if a husband and wife were not speaking to one another, he would go to the one and then to the other and tell each how heartbroken the other was and how there was nothing more the other wanted than to forgive and restore peace to their relationship. Of course, hearing this from Aaron, the one would run and search out the other meeting and embracing. To bring *shalom bayit* to a relationship puts one on the fast track to heaven. This being so, what, G-d forbid, is it when someone damages a relationship?

We are told that peace among people is so important that it is sometimes necessary and permitted to lie for the sake of *shalom bayit*. How do we know this our rabbis ask? Because G-d lied to Abraham when G-d did not tell him what Sarah really said about Abraham being too old to father a child. If *shalom bayit* is so important that at times we can lie when otherwise this is considered a sin, what do we learn from this as to building *shalom bayit* in positive and truthful ways?

Paulo Coelho writes: “The sun asks the rose who dreams of the company of bees, but none appears if she is tired of waiting for the bees to come and be with her. The rose says she is but if she closes her petals, she will wither and die.” It is with this same determination and hope, be it in our families, our neighborhoods, our Jewish community, our city, in Israel, in our world or within ourselves that we must pursue *shalom bayit*. *Shalom bayit* is not a fact; it is a hope and a responsibility. There are nations cooperating today that have been at war, there

are marriages and families that been distanced and divided that are together, there are individuals who have been hurt and abused who have healed. The greatest and most powerful name of G-d according to our rabbis is Adon HaShalom, the Maker and Ruler of Peace, and we are to be G-d's servants. Why did G-d make Eve promise never to tell Adam that she was created first? So there would be *shalom bayit*. There can be and, G-d willing, will be *shalom bayit* in our lives. What more would our loved ones for whom we are saying Yizkor want for all of us?

GUT YOM TOV.

*The correct spelling and pronunciation is "***shelom bayit***" and not "***shalom bayit***." This is a construct (when two nouns come together) and the first noun shortens from "***shalom***" to "***shelom***." The same as in "***beit kenesset***" where "***bayit***" becomes "***beit***." The popular usage is "***shalom bayit***" and therefore, I used this in my sermon.