



# Shalom Bayis

A Farbrengen  
With **Sara Morozow**

**I**n 1940, the Frierdiker Rebbe had just escaped from a fiery *gehinnom* in Europe. He arrived on American shores and realized that European Jewry was in grave danger while American Jews were in a spiritual faint. In the midst of all this chaos, with the fate of the entire Jewish people on his shoulders, the Frierdiker Rebbe found it important to write to a woman about *shalom bayis*. He had met this woman in Riga before he came to America, where they had a conversation on *shalom bayis* and the Rebbe was not satisfied with her attitude. The Frierdiker Rebbe writes <sup>1</sup>:

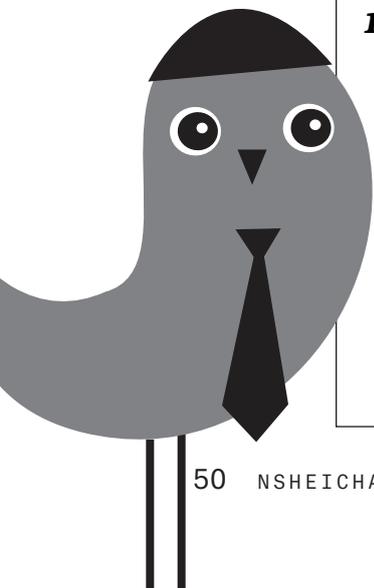
“A home is not just the house ... where people dwell. A home is ... the spiritual and moral values the home is built on, and this is dependent on the woman, as it says, ‘*Chochmas nashim bansah beisah*.’<sup>2</sup> The wisdom of women builds her home!... It pains me greatly to say this, but I was very upset to hear that you take your *shalom bayis* lightly, and that there has not been an improvement in this area.”

In the letter the Frierdiker Rebbe lists ten components necessary for a good marriage, mentioning each one briefly with no elaboration, but I would like to discuss them in more detail.

<sup>1</sup> Nissan 29, 1940. Igros Kodesh of the Frierdiker Rebbe, chelek 5, p. 57)

<sup>2</sup> Mishlei 14:1

1. **Farshtand** Proper understanding. In marriage, there are two sides. Try to understand your husband's perspective. Ask a question and you will hear a whole other side of the story.
2. **Energia** Energy. One must put energy into *shalom bayis* to keep it going smoothly. It must be on our to-do list. Everyone has a custom-made *shalom bayis* challenge. Every woman has something different she needs to do to improve her marriage. Sometimes women put great effort into making their Shabbos *seudos* delicious and beautiful, or their house look just right. Her husband must be her top priority.
3. **Ibergebenkeit** Devotion. One must put heart into it. Your marriage is your life.
4. **Geduld** Patience. It may take time for a relationship to flourish. When we put a roast in the oven, raising the flame to 550 degrees won't make it cook faster; it will only reduce the roast to a chunk of black ash. Nurture your relationship, provide the gentle warmth and watch it flourish. Also, one must wait for the other to calm down before bringing up any issues. One may just have to acknowledge that now might not be the right time.
5. **Gut Hartzigkeit** Good-heartedness. Do something good for the other person *just because*.
6. **Reinheit** Cleanliness. On a simple level, the house should be clean. This does not mean the house must look perfect at all times. Dirt should be removed, of course. But when you walk into a house and see *sefarim* on the table, you know that people are busy with good things. A home should be a happy place for people to be in. On a deeper level, *reinheit* means integrity, purity. Let your home be a place where the sanctity of marriage is respected, where people communicate with refinement and dignity.
7. **Gelassenheit** Easygoingness. It's not necessary to get worked up over everything. Let some things go. Take it easy.
8. **Ordinung gekleidet** Pleasant appearance. It's important to be neatly dressed not just when going out but also when staying in.
9. **Ah Freilichen Shtimung** A happy mood. **Gutte ponim** a good face, a pleasant facial expression.
10. **Chaveireshe batziung** Being a friend to her husband, to have good rapport with each other and be friendly. There's nothing more miserable for a man than being married to an unhappy woman. He doesn't want to come home from work, he doesn't want to get out of bed in the morning when his wife is clearly (or not clearly, but still) moody and dissatisfied. You might think you are "justified" in your unhappiness and that if only he would change this or change that, you would deign to bestow on him the gift of your smile, your happiness. Try it the other way around. First, smile and be his friend. Show him you are happy to see him, show him you are happy you married him. He will feel like the luckiest guy around.



**EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE**

In *Likutei Dibburim* (*chelek* 1, p. 4), the Frierdiker Rebbe tells a story. Reb Pinchos of Koritz wrote to the Maggid of Mezritch, “Thank you for mentioning that you remembered to keep me in mind in your holy thoughts on Yom Kippur. The Rebbe should know that at the moment I merited to be in his thoughts, I felt it here.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe explains that there are five levels of expressing love. The lowest level is a handshake. When one Yid meets another, they connect through a handshake and convey their warmth and connection to each other. Today this gesture can be empty, meaningless, a mere formality. In fact the Frierdiker Rebbe says that sometimes a *shalom aleichem* is more like a *gei gezunt*, “Go away.”

The next level is a kiss. When old friends who are very close meet, they may express their connection with a kiss. This is a deeper expression of love.

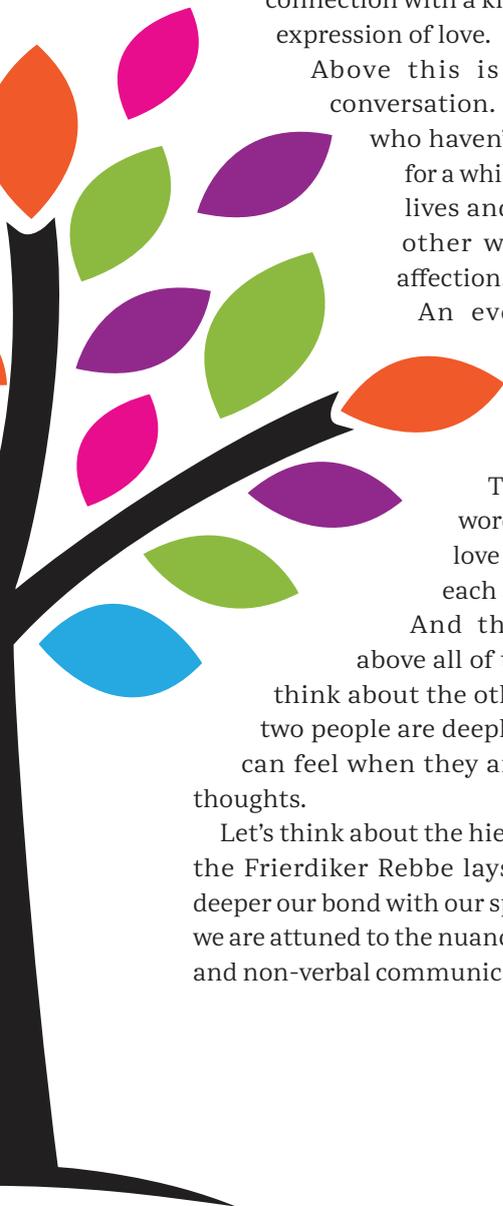
Above this is having a deep conversation. Two good friends who haven't seen each other for a while catch up on their lives and open up to each other with warmth and affection.

An even higher level is sitting together in silence, but with eye contact.

There is no need for words to express their love and connection to each other.

And the highest level, above all of them, is simply to think about the other person. When two people are deeply connected, they can feel when they are in each other's thoughts.

Let's think about the hierarchy of love that the Frierdiker Rebbe lays out. How much deeper our bond with our spouse can be when we are attuned to the nuances of non-physical and non-verbal communication. Imagine! We



ברכה ושלום!

בעפאר מיין אפפארן פון ריגא האב איך א פאר מאל געלאזט טעלעפאנירן אבער איר זייט ניט געווען צו חוימע און נאכדעם בין אין

געווען זייער פארנומען אז עס איז מיר געווען פשוט אומגעלין אפצוגעבן די נויטיגע צייט אויף צו ריידן מיט אייך דאס וואס איך האב איך געוואלט זאגן.

אין קורצע ווערטער האט איך אייך געזאגט אז דער פאמיליען לעבען מאנט בא דעם מאן און מערער בא דער פרוי מער אויפמערק: זאמקייט, איידעלע אויפריכטיקע איבערגעגעבענע בעציהונגען, וואס דאס מוז קאסטן פיל צייט און ענערגיע.

על פי תורתנו הקדושה און על פי שכל הבריא איז ניטא אין דעם מענשענס לעבען מער ווי דער ריכטיקער שיינער תורהדיקער סאצילע לעבען וואס איך אפילו די מצוה פון כבוד אב ואם ווערט דעם מענשען אין א געוויסען זין פארביטען אויף דער מצוה פון פאמיליען לעבען.

דער אויפריכטיקער תורהדיקער פאמיליען לעבען פארלאנגט פארשטאנד, ענערגיע, איבערגעגעבענע קייט, געדולד, גוטאראציקייט ריינקייט, געלעסענקייט, ארדענונג געקליידעט, א פריילעכן שטימוט מיט א גוטען פנים און חרשע באציהונגען.

אזוי דארפן זיך פירען ביידע, מאן און פרוי, אבער מערסטענס איז דאס אנבעלאנגט פון דער פרוי ווי עס שטייט חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה די הויז בויט די פרוי.

דער נאמען הויז מיינט ניט צו זאגן די געביידע אדער די וואהנונג דער נאמען הויז מיינט דעם מענשענס וואהנונג אין אלגעמיין, ווי עס שטייט כתפארת אדם לשבת בית, דאס מיינט ניט נאר די איינפאכע געשמיידיקע דירה נאר אויך די רוחניותדיגע מאראלישע דירה, און אויף אט דער הויז שטייט חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה.

געוויס מוז יעדער איינער און יעדע איינע נעמען אנטויל אין דעם געזעלשאפטליכען רעליגיעזען לעבען, און וואס דער מענטש איז ביה בא א מער בעסערן שטאנד בעדארף ער אלץ מער אפגעבען זיך צו דעם אבער ראשית כל איז דער בנתה ביתה, בויען די אייגענע הויז.

איך מוז זאגען דאס וואס טוט מיר זייער וויי צו זאגען, איך האב זייער פיעל צער געהאט – און לעת עתה איז מיר אין דעם זיהן ניט בעסער געווארן – פון אייער – האט ניט קיין פאראבל פאר מיין ריכטיקן אויסדרוק – גרינגשעצן דעם פאמיליען לעבען.

איר זייט נאך אז צו יונג און צו ניט ערפארען – און געוויס פעלט אייך אויך די נויטיגע תורה וויסענשאפט און וויסענשאפטליכע ערקלע-רונגען – צו וויסען די העכסט לעבנסוויידיקייט פון פאמיליען לעבען אין דעם מענשענס לעבען און זיינע רעזולטאטן לדורי דורות.

אלעס אן אויסנאם, תורה ומצות, געזונט, קינדער, פרנסה, פארשאפן נחת עלטערן און גוטע פריינד און זיין א אהוב ונחמד לבריות – כמאמר כל שרוח הבריות נוחה הימנו רוח המקום נוחה הימנו – איז אלעס תלוי אין דעם ריכטיגען פאמיליען לעבען.

איך ווינט אייך אז השי"ת זאל אייך דערלייכטען אייער פארשטאנד און ערוועקען אייער הארץ צו פארשטיין דאס אלץ וואס איך רייך צו אייך איר זאלט דאס אלעס אריינעמען אין קאפ און הארצען אויף צו מקיים זיין בהצלחה, והשי"ת יחזק בריאותה ובריאות ידידי הנעלה בעלה שי' וישמח את לבבם בזרעא היא וקימא ויתן לכם פרנסתכם בהרחבה גדולה בגשמיית וברוחניות.

המברכה.

Letter of the Frierdiker Rebbe to a woman in Riga, encouraging her to take her *shalom bayis* seriously.

can fill our homes with an atmosphere of peace and warmth with the power of our thoughts alone.

**SHALOM BAYIS, THEN AND NOW**

Is *shalom bayis* harder now than it was in the past? Did our grandparents (or great-grandparents) simply suffer in silence? They lived through times of war and starvation. If someone knew where her husband was, she was one of the lucky ones. It's hard to



understand or even believe the *mesiras nefesh* they had. *Chassidim* were fleeing for their lives and often didn't sleep in the same place two nights in a row. It was rare that a husband and wife were able to spend time alone together. Yet their *shalom bayis* was so strong that it was able to survive in spite of the deprivation. Their relationship was deeper, more refined.

In *Parshas Vayishlach*, the Torah tells how Yaakov was left alone and wrestled with Eisav's *malach*. During their fight the *malach* hit Yaakov on the thigh. In *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 4, p. 433, the Rebbe says, quoting the Arizal, that being hit in that area was a *remez* that at the end of *galus*, the *sitra achara* will work hard to prevent *shalom bayis*. The closer we come to

Moshiach, the more the Satan battles against *shalom*.

The union between a husband and wife is likened to the relationship between the Yidden and Hashem. When there is *shalom* down here, there is also *shalom* above, at which point we will merit the arrival of Moshiach. Just as the *malach* succeeded in wounding Yaakov in the thigh, the *sitra achara* will succeed in sowing discord among people and especially between husband and wife. The *sitra achara* is putting forth tremendous energy and, the Rebbe adds, we are surely given the *kochos* to overcome it. We can acknowledge that it's difficult and that it requires exceptional effort.

## Tips For Shalom Bayis

At the *farbrengen* with Sara Morozow, women shared tips on conflict resolution that work for them:

### In a marriage, common ground

needs to be established over time. From time to time we may need to recalculate and move forward in a different direction. Just as children may have an individualized education plan, an IEP, for school, every couple has to have an "IEP" that is tailor-made for them. "*Ein deioseihen shavos*." Our thoughts and ideas are not the same; we all have different needs.

**Know how to** bring up an issue. What would be the most effective way to address this with my husband?

Is this something he is ready or willing to work on right now? If one spouse is hungry, tired, or preoccupied, then that is not the time to try to deal with issues. It can wait for the opportune time. A woman should also keep her cycle in mind. Is this a good topic to discuss during a time when she might be feeling more emotionally fragile? Perhaps next week you'll feel stronger about it?

### Be aware of how much advance

notice your husband needs before addressing a sensitive issue. Keep your husband's preferences and personality in mind. Some people don't like spontaneous talks. Some couples like to have set times to go over problems; other couples like to address issues as they come up.

In today's age, when we send a text, we expect an answer right away. "Why isn't he responding?" Don't expect instant responses. People need processing time. Your husband may need time

to think through what you told him and how he wants to respond. Think before you talk, and give your husband time. Not all problems need to be solved immediately. Wait a day or two until he's ready. **Some problems can never be solved. They require acceptance and a refocusing on what's good.**

### The way you word things can and

will make a big difference in the way your husband receives your message. Think of each attempted conversation as a rough draft. If it doesn't go smoothly, revise and try again. If you feel you've been having the same conversation for three months with no change, say, "Let's go ask for help." Make it clear that it's a joint problem. It's not a power struggle, you just need some guidance.

Having good conflict resolution mechanisms is crucial for everyone, but especially in marriage. Sometimes we have a distorted view, so ask a *mashpia* who can see things in an objective light. A good role model is needed in marriage.

## **NOT RESPONDING TO INSULTS**

**A**t the Rebbe's wedding, the Frierdiker Rebbe gave out a copy of a *ksav yad*, a handwritten letter of the Alter Rebbe, as a memento to all the participants. The Frierdiker Rebbe added a note of his own: "It should be a *segulah* for all matters of goodness, spiritually and physically."

This letter was written in the height of the battle between *chassidim* and *misnagdim* in the times of the Alter Rebbe. What was going on then? Some of the young men wanted to speak out against the *misnagdim*. The older *chassidim* told them not to get involved and just to accept the *yissurim* (suffering). However, the younger *chassidim* didn't want to allow the

abuse from the *misnagdim* to continue. There was one *chossid*, Reb Moshe Meisels, who was very pained by the way the Alter Rebbe was being mistreated. He planned to stand up to the *misnagdim* and demand a change for the better. However, the Alter Rebbe wrote him a letter urging him to keep the peace. "You are right! But the mind rules the heart, and this is the *avodah* of Anash, to control their emotions. Their hearts pump blood to the entire body [the Jewish people] with *middos tovos* and *ahavas Yisroel*. In the end Hashem's honor will be put in place. When you spread the wellsprings of Chassidus, this is how you fight this darkness."

In Elul of that year, the Alter Rebbe sent

We didn't all grow up with good role models. Ask a *mashpia*.

### **READING**

**There are many *sefarim* out there** with practical tips on marriage. But not everything written in every book will apply to you. Select carefully. If one particular part speaks to you, read it aloud to your spouse and see where that takes you.

### **ENDING YOUR DAY**

**When the day ends, you say good night** to your husband and then to Hashem by saying *Hamapil*. First thing in the morning, you greet Hashem by saying *Modeh Ani* and washing *negel vasser*, and saying good morning to your husband. We start and end our day with what's most important to us.

**Nowadays we see something very off.** We say good night but then we are busy on the phone corresponding with everyone else. And when we wake up in

the morning, it's straight to our phone to find out what we missed overnight. Your husband should be the last one you talk to at night and the first one in the morning. He's the most important. Make a rule—no phone in the bedroom! Each couple needs that sense of security, that they are the most important person in their spouse's life.

**A chossid used to say, "A chossid hut ein Eibershter, ein Rebbe, un ein froi."** (A chossid has one *Eibershter*, one Rebbe and one wife.) We need to show total devotion to all three. The rest of the world is less relevant.

### **BUILDING CLOSENESS AND TRUST**

**During the shidduchim process,** a couple may spend a lot of time discussing philosophies and goals in life. As their relationship progresses they may open up and discuss more personal issues. This type of sharing and communication should continue throughout your marriage. All your

life you will be constantly learning and finding out new insights about each other and about yourself. You will help each other grow and expand to become who you never thought you could be.

**The biggest task you and your husband will do together is building a home, a family.** Building a healthy family dynamic takes thought, planning and hard work. It doesn't happen by itself. Show your husband unconditional love. It makes such a difference in *shalom bayis*. Meet him on his level. Show concern over things he's worried about (even if you don't think they're a big deal). Show excitement over things he's passionate about (even if you think they're boring). His excitement will shine through when he sees you validate his feelings. Every man likes to know he is cared about. Be there for him, even if you don't understand.

another letter to Reb Moshe: “My request to you is to arouse a spirit of *taharah* [purity], to forego your feelings, to accept insult without insulting back. Additionally, ask *mechilah* in public from Reb Meir Refoels [one of the elder *chassidim*, whom Reb Moshe had argued against] because *shalom* will not come from fighting back. Most fights are because people think that their fight is *l’shem Shamayim*.”

The Alter Rebbe implores Reb Moshe: “Do not throw my words over your shoulders.”

The way to end *machlokes* is not by fighting back but by spreading light and shining positive energy. Please note that in the context of *shalom bayis*, this advice works when we are dealing with two basically healthy, functional people. In the case of people who

are unwell, abusive and/or severely dysfunctional,

normal advice about ignoring insults, etc., do not apply.

If you suspect you are in such a marriage, get help from a professional.

Don't ask your mother, your friend, your next-door-neighbor and certainly not someone on the Internet.

#### **IT'S NOT ONLY YOU**

**A** couple had written to the Rebbe about problems they were experiencing in their marriage. The situation got so bad that they wanted to separate. The husband wrote a lot of things that bothered him about his wife, and she wrote the things that bothered her about her husband. The Rebbe answered, “This same [situation] has happened to other wives and husbands. It is difficult but can be worked out.”

It's important to know when we are experiencing ordinary problems that

are shared by many people. For example, on a chat people are sharing cute things about their children. Meanwhile you just found out your child is failing second grade. You are upset and worried, thinking that there is something awfully wrong with your child. Really this is a common problem; many children struggle with academic difficulties.

This is one of the problems with social media. The pictures that people choose to post reflect the most positive view of themselves. They only post pictures when they're having a good time and everyone looks beautiful. This can give a distorted and false image of what their life is really like. If you look at the pictures and compare your life to theirs, it can lead to unrealistic expectations.

Hashem put us on this world *l'ovdo u'l'shomro*, to serve Him and guard His Torah. If you feel resentful of your own life, reach out to the proper people. Your problems can be easier to solve than you imagine.

In the case of the couple who wrote to the Rebbe, both sides understood that they wanted to fix things. The relationship between them was very stressed, with each side bringing complaints against the other. The Rebbe recommended that they seek counseling. “You should go to a Rav or *frum* doctor who can help restore *shalom bayis*. If you can't find someone with all these qualifications right away, at least find someone who has influence over your wife and can explain to her the importance of *shalom bayis* which is one of the most important matters in Torah.”

If you need marriage counseling, choose someone both of you trust and speak about what's bothering the two of you. Don't go to a therapist just so you can vent about your spouse. Approach the counselor *with the goal of problem solving*. Therapists can be very skilled, but they must have a basic knowledge of your lifestyle so that there can be no misunderstanding. The therapist should be *frum* (or at least one who sincerely respects your lifestyle, if there is no other option).

During the first year, *shanah rishonah*, the man is obligated to stay home with his wife to rejoice with her. A newly married man



