



Nurturing Family

*Shalom Bayit, Peace and Wholeness
in the Home - Elul*



ELUL

Peace and Wholeness in the Home

What kind of home do you want to nurture and live in? Our Jewish tradition values *shalom bayit*, building a peaceful and harmonious home where relationships are a living laboratory for growth and reclaiming our wholeness. *Shalom* comes from the same Hebrew root as *shleimut*, wholeness, and *bayit* means home or house. In a home filled with contrasting personalities and competing needs, we strive to create a harmonious whole.

The Jewish month of Elul is a time of introspection as we begin to prepare for the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We review our actions from the year that has passed, and work on improving ourselves and our relationships. As mothers, we think about the happiness and wholeness of our home, and how we can improve the relationships between family members.

Family relationships are notoriously hard work, but they are also tremendous opportunities. While the context of each relationship is different, and some relational challenges are insurmountable, many family relationships offer a unique crucible for transformation and personal growth which allows us to repair our deepest selves, our communities, and ultimately the world.

In building a peaceful home, we learn the deeply life-enhancing skills of:

- Honoring the relational space between us
- Embracing conflict as a friend inviting us to grow
- Honing the ability to apologize and forgive
- Appreciating the best in others
- Sculpting ourselves into givers

Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:

- *How do I currently relate to members of my family? What are some practical steps I could take to bring more shalom into my home?*
- *For those who are married: How would it impact my relationship with my spouse to see our souls as forming one complete unit?*
- *Which values do I want to permeate our home? What can I do to make them obvious to my family and to anyone who walks through our door?*
- *Did I grow up in a home of shalom? If so, what were the keys to that peace? If not, what were the barriers to shalom that I don't want to repeat?*
- *As I prepare for a new Jewish year, what practices do I want to take on and apply to my relationships?*

PATHWAYS TO BUILDING A PEACEFUL HOME

Nurturing the Space in Between

Internationally known psychotherapist and relationship coach Hedy Schleifer says, “*The space between the couple is the playground of the child.*”¹

The relationship between parents is itself a third entity that needs care, like the loving care each individual deserves. When we nurture our relationship with our spouse and the space that rests between us, we feed a system that benefits both us and our children. Jewish wisdom teaches us to be attentive to the sacred presence possible in the space between two people.

It is taught that in the Temple in Jerusalem, God’s voice was heard “from between the two cherubs that crowned the ark.”²

The two cherubs – figures that were turned toward each other with outstretched wings – represent the notion that God dwells in a place where two people truly face each other, reaching toward their partner to view the spaces (and the differences) between them as holy rather than hurtful.

How does one nurture the “space in between” with one’s spouse? Building on the “Five Love Languages” developed by Gary Chapman, Hedy

Schleifer describes the following “Five A’s” that offer a “Universal Language of Connection”:

- 1. Affirmation** – verbal appreciation, praise, and encouragement; noticing and kindly commenting on the other’s positive actions, efforts, and qualities.
- 2. Attention** – setting regular quality time to do something enjoyable together, such as a date night; being available; giving uninterrupted, undivided, and focused attention; sharing memorable moments; self-revealing intimacy.
- 3. Action** – willingly (not forcibly) doing things for the other; timely and positive response to requests (not demands) of the other; acts of kindness, done with a loving attitude (not fear, guilt, or resentment); acts that reflect partnership; acts of service and giving.
- 4. Affection** – gentle physical contact at appropriate times and places; tender touch, hugs, or pats on the arm, shoulder, or back; back or foot rubs or massages; holding hands; holding while crying or comforting; intimacy.
- 5. Appreciation** – tangible gifts freely offered; visual symbols of thoughtfulness and love without strings attached.

1 To learn more about Schleifer’s work and her remarkable story, watch her Tel Aviv TEDx talk: <https://bit.ly/2vegcGU>.

2 Exodus 25:22.

Consider how you'd rate (on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the most nurturing) each of the items on the A-list above regarding the degree to which it nurtures your sense of connection.

- *Share your “ratings” with the women in your group. You’ll likely realize that different people have different preferences for what fills them with a sense of connection.*
- *How might this new information help you deepen the caring community bonds of your group?*
- *Invite others in your family to rate this list. Take the time to share and listen to what gives members of your family a sense of connection.*

Award-winning, renowned therapist and researcher, Dr. John Gottman, who conducted forty years of breakthrough research with thousands of couples, found that the presence of positivity in everyday interaction is crucial. While a healthy relationship includes both



positivity and negativity, his research revealed an ideal ratio of 5:1, in which there are five times as many positive interactions between partners as there are negative ones. This 5:1 ratio results in a more stable relationship over time. Even though some level of negativity is necessary for a stable relationship, positivity is what nourishes love.

- *How might you bring the Momentum message of “see good, say good” further into your family interactions?*

IN PURSUIT OF WHOLENESS

A Love Story

Rabbi Aryeh Levin (1885–1969) was known as the *Tzaddik* (righteous person) of Jerusalem for his devotion to the poor and sick. He was also called the “Father of Prisoners” for his weekly visits to imprisoned members of the Jewish underground during the British Mandate.

One day, Rabbi Aryeh brought his wife to the doctor because she felt pain in her foot. He explained to the doctor, “Doctor, my wife’s leg is hurting us.”

- *Why did Rabbi Levin see his wife’s pain as his own?*
- *What does this story have to do with the Jewish concept of marriage?*

When Conflict Can Be an Invitation to Grow

What might peace/*shalom* offer our family relationships? Tziporah Heller Gottleib explains:

Peace isn’t what people think it is. It is too often confused with a mere lack of hostility in one extreme, or complete concord on the other. While there is absolutely no case to be made for overt antagonism, the absence of conflict leaves an empty space, which isn’t necessarily filled with peace. The word for peace, *shalom*, is related to the word *shalem*, which means “whole.” A peaceful relationship is one in which each

person welcomes the unique individuality of the other, and together they try to build something real. It’s dynamic, rather than passive.

Tziporah Heller Gottleib is an American-born Jewish studies educator, author, and speaker based in Jerusalem. She is a senior faculty member at the Neve Yerushalayim College for Women.

- *What is your approach to family conflict? What place do you see for it in attaining good relationships?*
- *When have you seen examples of conflict being “growth trying to happen”? When have you seen bewildering behavior of a family member as a cry for help?*
- *How could this new understanding of *shalom*, peace as a dynamic process, impact how you approach family relationships and challenging behaviors?*
- *Many Jewish texts juxtapose the values of truth and peace.³ Some texts explore the tension between them.⁴ Moses and Aaron worked as a team, the former focused on truth and the latter on peace. In pursuing peace in your home, especially at times of conflict, where do you experience this tension? What can support you in harmonizing these two values?*

³ For example, Zechariah 8:19

⁴ For example, Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 5:5

CREATING PEACE

Jewish teachings see our home and our family relationships as a place for *tikkun*, a Hebrew concept that combines the notions of repair, healing, transformation, and completion. When we embrace the adventure of building peaceful, healthy family relationships, it has ripple effects that contribute to the overarching health of our communities.

Avot d'Rabbi Natan 28:3

One who creates peace in their own home is considered by the entire Torah as if they had created peace within the Jewish people: upon each and every person.

כל המשים שלום בתוך ביתו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו משים שלום בישראל על כל אחד ואחד.

- How does peace in the home impact peace within your community and the world? What examples come to mind?
- How do your own family norms of relationships and communication influence how your children interact with other people?



- The great Jewish scholar and philosopher Maimonides (Rambam) taught that the Shabbat candles symbolize and generate *shalom bayit*. In making the case for why they are such a priority, he claims that the entire Torah was given in order to make peace in the world, and that peace begins with domestic relationships. What family rituals help you bring peace into your home?

SOULS IN SEARCH OF WHOLENESS



What can you glean from the Torah's Creation story of the first couple that can enrich your family life?

The Creation of Man and Woman

Genesis 2:7–8, 18–24

God formed the human out of dust of the ground, and blew into his nostrils a breath of life, and the human became a living being. God planted a garden in Eden to the east. There God placed the human that He had formed.... God said, “It is not good for the human to be alone. I will make a corresponding helper for him.” God had formed every wild beast and every bird of heaven out of the ground. God brought each to the human to see what he would name each one. Whatever the human called each living thing, that became its name. The human named every domestic animal and bird of the sky, as well as all the wild beasts. But for the human, there was found no corresponding helper. God then made the human fall into a deep slumber, and he slept. He took one of his sides (or ribs) and closed the flesh in its place. God built the side (or rib) that he took from the man into a woman, and He brought her to the man. The man said, “Now this is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She shall

be called Woman (*Ishah*) because she was taken from Man (*Ish*).” Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and unites with his wife, and they become one flesh.

וַיֵּצֵר ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה. וַיִּטַּע ה' אֱלֹהִים גֶּן בְּעֵדֶן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם אֶת הָאָדָם אִשָּׁר יֵצֵר....

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הָיְתָה הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה לוֹ עֹזֵר כְּגֹדּוֹ. וַיֵּצֵר ה' אֱלֹהִים מִן הָאֲדָמָה כָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל הָאָדָם לְרִאוֹת מַה יִּקְרָא לוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא לוֹ הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ. וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל הַבְּהֵמָה וְלְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא מָצָא עֹזֵר כְּגֹדּוֹ. וַיִּפֹּל ה' אֱלֹהִים תְּרִדְמָה עַל הָאָדָם וַיִּשָּׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצַּלְעוֹתָיו וַיִּסְגֹּר בְּשָׂר תַּחְתָּנָהּ. וַיִּכְן ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִן הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבְאֶהָ אֶל הָאָדָם. וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הִפְעַם עִצְמִי מֵעֲצָמֵי וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחָהּ-זֹאת. עַל-כֵּן יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ אֶת אָבִיו וְאֶת אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהִיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד.

- Why do you think God says that it is not good for the human to be alone?
- Why doesn't the human find a "corresponding helper" among the animals? What is he looking for?
- Why do you think the Torah tells us that woman and man began as one human? What message about the union between

man and woman might this story communicate to us?

- *We are told that a man “unites with his wife, and they become one flesh.” What do you think this means? How can two become one?*

One Soul

The Zohar – the foundational 13th century book of Jewish mysticism – delves into the question of how two people can become one. It explains that husband and wife are really two halves of one soul. At the time of marriage, the two half-souls unite, becoming one complete soul.

Lori Palatnik writes:⁵

Before you are born you are one soul, and God splits you. You are half a soul and go off into this world, and your other half, your soul mate, also goes off into this world. Later in life, there comes a time when you begin the search for a spouse. In truth, what you are looking for is your other half. The term for this ultimate soul mate, the missing piece that is your other half, is *zivug*.

If you imagine your original soul is like a circle, when God does the split, He does not split you exactly in half. Imagine a jagged split, like two pieces of a puzzle that fit together. That means both sides have qualities that the other does not. That’s because the goal in marriage is, through this union, to realize your potential. And you can’t realize your potential if you marry someone exactly like you. It’s just more of you. You might as well just go out and buy a mirror.

Thus the term “opposites attract” is by and large very true. Extroverts tend to marry introverts; organized people often end up with mates who are freer flowing. People who like the thermostat up marry people who like it down. Why? Because you are half a soul yearning for completion. You are missing qualities that are important to have in life, and so is your soul mate. You may look at the world with a certain perspective, but perhaps that is not getting you very far. Being with a person who wears different “glasses” and sees situations differently gives you a way of seeing life like you have never seen it before. And vice versa. You don’t just want each other, you *need* each other.

As you think about your current relationship, or a relationship you would like to have in the future, consider:

- *What do you think it means to become one complete soul with another person? How does this impact how you understand the Jewish view of marriage?*
- *Why do you think it is important for the soul-halves to be separate from each other before marriage? Why might this experience of separation be important?*
- *What are some things you can do to cultivate your soul-relationship with your partner?*
- *How are you and your partner opposites? How can these different characteristics help you create a whole together?*

⁵ For more about what to look for in a marriage partner and how to strengthen your marriage, see Lori Palatnik’s book *Turn Your Husband into Your Soul Mate*, from which this section is excerpted.

SPOTLIGHT ON ISRAEL

Watch a 5-minute video on YouTube, *You Are Part of the Story*, by ANU – Museum of the Jewish People.

- *Where are we each from – where did we, our parents, and our grandparents come from?*
- *What was home for different generations of your family?*
- *What was your grandmother's part in the Jewish story? How has her part affected yours?*
- *How do you envision your part of the story?*
- *What would you like your children's part in the story to be?*
- *What can you experience together as a family in your home and beyond that can help them find their part in the story?*





PATHWAYS TO RETURNING TO A PEACEFUL HOME

Every family will experience difficult situations. Jewish tradition tells us that we have the ability to change and renew ourselves and our relationships through the powers of atonement and forgiveness. A meaningful apology is a potent tool for restoring trust and rebuilding connections.

Sometimes what seems like an insurmountable challenge can become a growth opportunity, especially when we muster the courage to apologize and the wisdom to do it well. As Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught, “If you believe that it is possible to damage, believe that it is possible to repair.” Use the following invaluable Jewish tools to help your family maintain a peaceful, harmonious home even after the inevitable hurts and conflicts:

1. Talk things through with a friend. While we must avoid gratuitous gossip, we benefit tremendously from having a soul friend, a wonderful listener, with whom we can open our hearts, share our difficult emotions, “let off steam,” and return to our better selves.

2. Give your family the “Repentance Toolbox”⁶– the four-step process to return and “reboot”:

- **Step 1 – Recognize and discontinue the improper action.** Stop a destructive action or pattern you are engaged in. If, for example, you are losing your temper with members of your household, make a decision to hold back and cool down before responding.
- **Step 2 – Regret.** Take time to reflect on and feel regret for your error. Notice the cost to family members and to your relationship with them. Recognize the pain caused by your behavior; for example, by losing your temper. Part of this step may be taking time to ask others to share their experience with you. Take the time to listen and ask follow-up questions before you respond. It can be incredibly difficult to wholeheartedly listen to someone’s pain, especially if we are being accused or blamed for it. You may find you are listening for or wanting to react to what seems unfair or incorrect. Instead, seek to listen only for

⁶ The four-stage repentance process was articulated by Moses Maimonides, also known as the Rambam (Spain and Egypt, 1138–1204), a great Jewish scholar, philosopher, legal codifier, physician, and political adviser. Acclaimed relationship expert Dr. Harriet Lerner’s latest book, *Why Won’t You Apologize?*, upon which we drew in crafting this section, offers excellent further reading on this topic.



understanding (at a later time express how you see things differently). Being a good listener can involve setting limits (especially about tolerating unkindness or rudeness). If you are no longer able to listen and need to continue at another time, let the person know. Thank them for sharing their feelings and tell them you'll continue to think about the conversation.

- **Step 3 – Verbalize.** Offer an effective apology – that is, take responsibility for the offense (or your part in it) and express remorse in a direct, personal, and unambiguous manner. Offer to make restitution, and make a commitment not to do it again. As you prepare your apology, consider what will work well with the person to whom you are speaking. People differ in the words they need to hear in order to accept an apology as sincere.
- **Step 4 – Make a plan.** What did you learn? How can you be sure that the mistake won't happen again? Make a practical plan of action. If you know that certain subjects are sources of conflict between you and the aggrieved party, talk with the person about it and perhaps make a pact to avoid those subjects for the sake of peace.

3. Apologize even when it is not completely your fault. Practice saying, “Oops, I blew it”

or “Wow, I sure got that wrong” to prepare yourself for the moments you'll really need to say them. Know that sometimes you can win the battle but lose the war. Valuing peace over the moral superiority of being right is a gift you give yourself. Apologizing for your part does not mean that you're wrong and the other person is right. It means that you value your relationship and take responsibility for your part. In a separate communication (not as part of the apology), you can discuss the other person's part of the problem.

- 4. **Be generous with forgiveness.** As a general rule, seek to accept apologies, without expecting the other person's apologies to meet all the ideal criteria. There will be exceptions and times you'll want to explain why you are not yet accepting an apology. But your relationships benefit when you err on the side of accepting peace offerings, offering forgiveness readily and kindly, the way you would like someone to respond to you if you asked them for forgiveness. When someone offers a good apology, it's significant for them to hear in response, “Thank you for apologizing. I appreciate it.” The great Jewish scholar and philosopher Maimonides writes:⁷ “When asked by an offender for forgiveness, one should do the inner work needed to forgive with a sincere mind and a willing spirit... forgiveness is innate to the mission of the people of Israel.”

⁷ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:10.

HELPING CHILDREN GENUINELY APOLOGIZE

1. Model the behavior you want your child to learn. Let your children hear you offer effective apologies to them and to others. Let the times we miss the mark as parents become learning opportunities by role-modeling the “repentance toolbox” (see pp. 78–79).

2. Choose your timing. The time to ask a child to say “sorry” is not during the heat of the moment, when you or they are upset or embarrassed. A perfunctory apology uttered begrudgingly misses the opportunity for the child to learn and for you to set healthy patterns. Brainstorm what you can say in the heat of the moment to communicate there’s an issue you’ll need to discuss when things are calmer.

3. Make space for feelings and ask questions. Ask your child how they’re feeling. Listen. Ask your child how they think the other person felt. Listen. How can you create a space in which your child can think about what they did, and perhaps admit the mistake rather than be told?

4. Offer guidance for what’s included in a genuine apology. Following the repentance toolbox format is helpful with children: “Name (whom the child is addressing; saying the name makes a connection, which often isn’t easy), what I did...(short description)

was wrong because...(reason). In the future I will...(plan for fitting behavior in a similar situation).”

5. Distinguish between guilt and shame.

Healthy guilt is the feeling we get when our behavior was unkind and irresponsible, when it violated our values. This type of guilt can propel us to apologize appropriately and make amends when we miss the mark. It can be productive to feel guilty, so jumping in to say to an offender, “It wasn’t so bad,” may not be helpful. Guilt can invoke *doing* better. What is not helpful is shame, which is about *being*. Shame is the feeling of being flawed or unworthy. Our sages likened shaming someone to murder. In your self-talk and in speaking with others, make a clear distinction between guilt and shame, and vigilantly guard against shaming. All people, and our children especially, are more likely to apologize from a place of self-worth, because apologizing requires looking squarely at one’s harmful actions and becoming accountable for them. Shame hinders our motivation and ability to do that.

6. When your child apologizes, say “Thank you for apologizing,” and stop there. Save any added advice and comments for another time. Let the apology be acknowledged and received so your child can experience “success.” This

will make them more likely to apologize in the future. Additional comments that underscore what they did wrong, or how they can apologize differently, are better saved for another time.

Writing Exercise

Take 5–10 minutes to reflect on the following sentences and write in silence, allowing your thoughts to flow freely, unedited. When you are finished writing, pair up and share with your sister some of the issues and ideas that came up for you in this exercise. Take turns listening to each other without offering advice.

- *What do I do well in terms of apologizing and forgiving? What would I like to practice in the coming week?*
- *What is one piece of advice I would like to give myself for those moments when shalom bayit, building a peaceful home, is challenging?*



- *Take time to reflect on the learning by writing responses to the questions on the chart on pages 90–91.*

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

The Jewish Philosophy of Love

As you may recall from the Momentum trip, the Hebrew word for love, *ahavah*, comes from the Hebrew root word *hav*, to give. Giving leads to love. Our experience as parents confirms this: Our children are born helpless, leading us to give more than we thought possible, with no expectation of anything in return – and we love them more than life itself!

In the following excerpt, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler explains the significance of becoming a giver, and how to bring more love into your life.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) was a Talmudic scholar and Jewish philosopher, best known for being the “spiritual counselor” of the Ponevezh Yeshiva in Israel. Collections of his writings were published posthumously by his pupils.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav me’Eliyahu*⁸

When the Almighty created human beings, God made them capable of both giving and taking. The faculty of giving is a sublime power; it is one of the attributes of the blessed Creator of All Things. God is the Giver *par excellence*; God’s mercy, bounty, and goodness extend to all God’s creatures. God’s giving is pure giving, for God takes nothing in return. This is how people were

created, as it is written, “God created the human in God’s own image” – able to be merciful, kind, and giving.

There is no person in the world without a spark of the faculty of giving. We can see this in a solitary person, whose joy is not complete, and who yearns for social connection. This yearning is the spark of giving.

Here we come to an interesting question. We see that love and giving always come together. Is the giving a consequence of the love, or is the reverse perhaps true: Is the love a result of the giving? We usually think it is love that causes giving, because we observe that a person showers gifts and favors on the one he loves. But there is another side to the argument. Giving may bring about love for the same reason that people love what they themselves have created or nurtured: They recognize in it part of themselves. Whether it is a child they have brought into the world, an animal they have reared, a plant they have tended, or even a thing they have made or a house they have built – people are bound in love to the work of their hands, for in it they find themselves.

I have been shown a source in the sayings of our Rabbis that may indicate that they held the

⁸ Adapted from *Strive for Truth*, the English translation of this mussar classic.

opinion we have just put forward: that love flows in the direction of giving. They say in tractate *Derech Eretz Zuta*: “If you want to keep close to the love of your friend, make it your concern to seek his welfare.”

An article called, “The IKEA Effect: When Labor Leads to Love,”⁹ reports on research that is remarkably consistent with Rabbi Dessler’s teaching. The research shows that consumers “feel loyalty and love toward items they successfully contribute to creating.” Both Rabbi Dessler and the IKEA Effect suggest that people place a disproportionately high value to the people and things they give time and attention to.

- *Assuming family members would place more value on rituals and routines that they help create or shape, how might this insight be helpful to your parenting and family life?*
- *Have you had an experience in your own life where giving led to love?*
- *What is a relationship that you would like to improve through giving?*
- *How can you encourage your children to become givers?*

9 Michael I. Norton, Daniel Mochon, and Dan Ariely, “The IKEA Effect: When Labor Leads to Love,” *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 22:3 (July 2012): 453–460.



LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

A Relationship Exercise from Chaya Lester¹⁰

We usually think of relationship as a move from separation to union. The gaps between us are seen as the irritating problem. But the Jewish Kabbalistic vision is the opposite. The 16th century Kabbalistic mastermind, known as the Arizal, reveals a model for marriage based on the creation of humans as described in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. In the first chapter, God creates the human as both masculine and feminine, merged together, standing back-to-back, as one entity. In the second chapter, the human is put to sleep for the “surgery” of crafting woman out of man’s very bones.¹¹

The Arizal elegantly explains that God is teaching us that love is a multi-phase process. We start out merged, and our task is to separate, turn to face each other, and reconnect.

The Kabbalistic reading reveals the arc of a movement from being in a back-to-back relationship to a face-to-face relationship. In the back-to-back state, we are one entity – one human, woven together by the spine, facing opposite directions. We have an enmeshed expectation that our partner exists as but an extension of ourselves. They exist for the sake of fulfilling our needs for self-esteem, love, and nurturing.

In this state we may very well “have each other’s back”... but we do not have true intimacy, because when we are woven at the back, we face

opposite directions, absolutely unable to behold who our partner truly is. The Kabbalistic goal is to detach and turn to face who our partner actually is – complete with all their likes and dislikes, similarities and painful differences.

In this process of unmeshing, we are able to embrace our own sense of self-love and care. We learn that we do not, after all, desperately need our partners to love and nurture us. There is much we can do to nurture ourselves. Only once we have mastered this work of self-care can we turn to see our partners for who they actually are. That is when we come into the grace of being face-to-face.

In the face-to-face, we cultivate a sense of curiosity and interest in the unique soul who stands before us. That culture of curiosity naturally breeds love, a flowing attraction to the other, and a deeper ability to know and care for the person we face.

From “Shoulding” to “Shouldering”

One of the most glaring alerts that we are in unhealthy enmeshment is when we find ourselves “Shoulding” all over our partners. Perhaps these Shoulds sound familiar: “He should be complimenting/respecting/caring for/listening to me.” These Shoulds inevitably leave us resentful, dissatisfied, and often steeped in conflict. When we “Should” on our partner, we lose touch with ourselves.

10 Chaya Lester and her husband, Rabbi Hillel, run the Shalev Center in Jerusalem, which synthesizes the best of Jewish wisdom and personal growth. They provide psychotherapy for individuals and couples, and offer a powerful couple’s workshop via Skype or in Jerusalem.

11 The Hebrew word, *tzela*, often translated in the Creation story as “rib,” is also the Hebrew word for “side.” In the kabbalistic vision, the surgery is not taking a rib out of man to create woman, but rather splitting apart the two back-to-back sides of the archetypal human.

Here is a quick de-Shoulding exercise that will help you turn from a place of back-to-back enmeshment to a place of face-to-face encounter and intimacy.

Step 1 – Get it out. Take out a piece of paper and write out all of Shoulds that you are holding against your partner. This list should be cathartic and thorough. Let the Shoulds spill out.

Step 2 – Trace it back to the roots. Next, we set about putting those Shoulds to good use, for every Should erupts out of a crucial, buried FEELING and offers up immense fertilizer for self-awareness. Take a red pen and write out in the space next to the Should the deeper feelings that prompted it.

For example, the statement, “My partner should compliment me more,” reveals the root feelings of: “I feel self-conscious about how I look. I want him to make me feel better.” Instead of projecting your inner frustrations onto your partner and expecting him to fix them, take the time to simply dig into yourself and discover the crucial inner truth that is generating the Should.

Another example: “My partner should spend more time with the kids” reveals the root feelings of: “I feel overwhelmed in my parenting and want my husband to relieve me of my parenting stress.”

Step 3 – Release your partner. Here is where we cut away from the back-to-back state. When we cease the coercions, demands, and projections of being back-to-back, we allow our partner to simply be themselves.

With your red-marked sheet and a fresh sense of self-awareness, now rephrase each Should with a new and improved formula of release. Instead of, “He should X,” insert, “He is not responsible for X.” For example, “My partner is not responsible for complimenting me.” Then add on the feeling part: “He is not responsible for saving

me from feeling self-conscious and ashamed of how I look.” Or, “My partner is not responsible for spending more time with the kids to make me feel less overwhelmed in my parenting.”

Step 4 – Take responsibility. Next, write out this formula for taking responsibility. Instead of, “He should X,” insert, “I should X.” Own that once-onerous Should. It is yours, after all. “I should compliment myself! I should save myself from feeling self-conscious and ashamed of how I look.” Or, “I should spend more time with the kids. I should feel less insecure about my parenting.”

Step 5 – Face-to-face. Share with your partner and soak in the benefits. Commit to sitting down face-to-face with your partner and sharing with them everything you have written above. Speak with the intention not of coercing or blaming, but of simply sharing who you are and what goes on inside of you. Share with an air of openness and vulnerability. After you share, inquire with a sense of curiosity what your process brings up for your partner. This act of seeing and being seen is the key to face-to-face intimacy.

The paradoxical prize is that the moment we stop Shoulding on our partners, we rake in the very rewards we were trying so desperately to receive. When we hoist the responsibility off of their shoulders and onto our own, then nine times out of ten, our partners are all too eager to join in helping us shoulder it. Suddenly, when you’re a sturdy shoulder instead of a Should’er, then the responses you have been pulling teeth for for ages are given freely.

Thus the magic Kabbalistic formula for getting everything you want in your relationship: Give up on ever getting it from someone else, and go about giving it to yourself. Your partner will most often eagerly follow suit. And if they don’t, well, you are already committed to providing it for yourself.

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Spotlight on Momentum Sister Jacqueline Volin

After Jacqueline Volin divorced her husband of ten years, she found herself lost and unhappy. In her quest for answers, Jacqueline traveled to Israel with a Momentum trip from Mexico, during which she discovered Jewish views on love and marriage. Jacqueline learned about the importance of showing her appreciation for her spouse and prioritizing giving over taking, and she was determined to incorporate these Jewish values into her life. She dreamt of doing so together with her ex-husband.

Jacqueline shared her feelings with her ex-husband, but he was still hurt from their divorce and did not want to get back together. Jacqueline tried to move on with her life, but continued to apologize for her mistakes and to remind him of the good times they had shared together. One day, her ex-husband admitted that he, too, wanted to get back together. The couple spent one day rehashing their old relationship and then decided that it was time to move on and start anew. After seven years apart, they married under a *chuppah* with a *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract).

“During our first marriage, I believed in love and freedom. But now, I understand the importance of commitment. I feel so thankful that our marriage is filled with Jewish values.”

Jacqueline’s Advice for Creating Happy Marriages

1. Pay attention to the little things

When couples divorce, it’s often because many little problems add up. For example, couples don’t pay attention when the other is speaking, or they speak rudely to one another. According to Rabbi Arturo Kanner, these “little things” are like thin crystal doors that stand between spouses and create mile-long separations. Today, I try not to discount the little things in our relationship, and I make sure to pay attention to my husband and to express interest in his thoughts.

2. Greet your partner at the end of each day

Lori Palatnik shares how important it is to prioritize one’s spouse. Everyone loves being warmly greeted. I have made this a part of my life by running to the door when my husband returns home and warmly embracing him. I’ve found that this simple act has transformed our nights by bringing us closer together.

3. Listen to your spouse's point of view

In every relationship, disagreements occur. But healthy communication is vital to ensuring that disagreements do not escalate. Instead of getting angry when my husband says something that I disagree with, I make sure to listen to him fully and then to validate his perspective by saying, "I understand your point." Only then do I share my own point of view. I am also much quicker to apologize now. Judaism teaches us to focus on giving to our partners instead of thinking about what we can get from them. Saying "I'm sorry" is an important part of this.

4. Express gratitude

My husband does so much for me and our child, and each day, I do my best to recognize this internally and to thank him. When I connect with my gratitude on the inside, I know that my thank yous will come from the heart – whether they're for the big things or for the little things. It's important to make our spouses feel admired and honored, and expressing gratitude is a wonderful way to do so.



TRY IT OUT

PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Ideas for bringing the value of Shalom Bayit, Peace and Wholeness in the Home, into your family life

For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on MomentumUnlimited.org.
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card, and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases you could consider:
 - I pursue peace and wholeness
 - I apologize and forgive easily
 - God dwells between us; I nurture the relational space
- Seek a family ritual that helps bring *shalom bayit* to your home. Consider lighting Shabbat candles. Plan to let the workweek come to closure, settling unresolved issues to the greatest extent possible. Shift your intentionality to rest and connection. Allow a deeper level of soul to enter you and to support you to nurture peace in your home.

For Families with Children of All Ages

- **Set special time with each family member.** Ten minutes daily (or a few times a week) of 100 percent attention for quality connection can serve as an antidote to the cultural stress. It offers time for bonding and expressing

feelings that might otherwise come out in less fitting times. Turn phones off. Tell your child, “This is our special time for play/conversation.” You may want to have some things, such as screens (or even reading), off bounds. Seek laughter, giggling, play, even roughhousing. A great resource is Dr. Lawrence Cohen’s book, *Playful Parenting*.

- **Leave a basket for phones** by the kitchen counter. In order to encourage conversation and peaceful chat, there should be no electronic devices allowed at the table during meals. Anyone who breaks this rule cleans the kitchen!
- **Create a family mission statement** which lays out what you stand for as a family. If someone steps outside the framework of values, you can refer to the mission statement instead of nagging or being confrontational.
- **Do not embarrass each other.** Families can outline what causes them embarrassment (for example, singing in the car during carpool) and try to respect each other’s boundaries even when they seem arbitrary. This is a great *mitzvah* and a key element to *shalom* in the home!
- Learn the words to *Oseh Shalom*, the Jewish prayer for peace, and sing along. <https://bit.ly/2EHkEgy>.



For Families with Young Children

- **Watch the animated series for kids**, Episode 9: “Get-Along Gang,” about sibling rivalry in the Plony home and the importance of *shalom bayit*. <https://bit.ly/2v5xZ2V>.
- When small children have playdates, arguments often break out over special toys or possessions that your child does not want to share. **Have a special box for these items**, and put them away during the playdate. This will help your children learn to anticipate situations that may destroy the peace, and preplan to avoid them.
- Teach your smaller children the expression, “You are my guest, you get to choose!” This might mitigate another battle young children have during their play, which is deciding which game or toy to play with, or which fantasy scene or character each gets to choose. **Teach your child that when they are the host, their guest gets to choose.** This teaches both *shalom bayit* and *hachnasat orchim*, hospitality.
- Another useful expression to arm your kids with is: **“Different house, different rules!”** This helps them have on-hand language for moments when their friends want to do or eat something that is not permitted in your

house. It also implies no judgment, but rather a spirit of understanding that everyone is different!

- Cups and utensils can be purchased in sizes that work for little hands so that your children can be trained to bring you a glass of water or juice, or some fruit on a plate. **Serving one’s parents** brings peaceful feelings of respect and gratitude into the home.

For Families with Older Children

- Privacy makes peaceful homes. And privacy is a two-way street. Teach your children to **knock before coming into your room**, and to wait for you to tell them to come in. Do the same for them!
- Children over the age of ten can be taught to **prepare simple meals** so they can make themselves something if they do not want to eat the family meal. This avoids arguments about menu planning and hurt feelings on the part of the cook!
- Help children learn not to interrupt their parents. Leave sticky notes with pens around so that if you are on the phone, talking to your spouse, or otherwise engaged, your child can slip you a note in order **not to interrupt!**

 **USE THIS CHART TO PLAN AND TRACK YOUR PROGRESS REGARDING *SHALOM BAYIT*, BUILDING A PEACEFUL HOME**

Acknowledgment

To what extent are you building *shalom bayit*?
What examples from your life come to mind?
What have been your victories and challenges?
To what extent do you return to peace when conflict arises?

Vision

What is your vision of a peaceful home? What, if anything, gets in the way of creating that?

Goals

What is one small, actionable step toward a peaceful home that you can do in your daily life? Make it something that is realistic, is easily scheduled, and will support you in growing toward your vision of building *shalom bayit*.

Accountability

Who can help hold you accountable to your goals? How? When? What evidence can you collect to know you are making progress?

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

In this session, we explore the value of shalom bayit, building a peaceful home

The guiding questions in this unit are:

- *How do I currently relate to members of my family? What are some practical steps I could take to bring more shalom into my home?*
- *For those who are married: How would it impact my relationship with my spouse to see our souls as forming one complete unit?*
- *Which values do I want to permeate our home? What can I do to make them obvious to my family and anyone who walks through our door?*
- *Did I grow up in a home of shalom? If so, what were the keys to that peace? If not, what were the barriers to shalom that I don't want to repeat?*
- *As I prepare for a new Jewish year, what practices do I want to take on and apply to my relationships?*

Meaningful Vocabulary

<i>shalom bayit</i>	שְׁלוֹם בַּיִת	cultivating a peaceful home
<i>shleimut</i>	שְׁלֵמוּת	wholeness
<i>tikkun</i>	תִּקּוּן	a combination of repair, healing, transformation, and completion

Facilitating the Session

1. Seek Participant Input

Well before the session, invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading it. For example:

- Planning an activity to kick off or supplement the session (see **Extra! Program Ideas**)
- Hosting the event
- Co-facilitating the learning on any of the topics
- Sharing how they brought home the learning from your last gathering

Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning, and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!

2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

Remember: You know what will best engage your participants, and we encourage you to tailor the session to their interests and needs. **Soul Sparks** activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible!

3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the room, for example, by displaying a *shofar*, which is blown to awaken our souls on weekdays during the Hebrew month of Elul after morning services. Arrange the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need, and make sure you have everything prepared.

4. Welcome and Warm-Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. Consider engaging your sisters in a short stretching exercise; or in a guided visualization of relaxing in a beautiful place in nature and seeing a wise woman who offers a private message on bringing more wholeness to their home and family. Allow women a moment to jot down the message they receive.

Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

Remind everyone that they are in the Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

5. Intro and Inspiration

Introduce the women to the Jewish month of Elul, the month-long prologue to the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This month is our chance to review patterns, relationships, and what we have accomplished in the past year; to awaken to what we need to repair; and to envision growth in the new year. Introduce the term *shalom bayit*. Ask the women to share a time they have felt a sense of *shalom bayit* in their own home or in someone else's home. What were some of the elements that gave the home a feeling of peace?

6. Soul Sparks Activities

There are different activities you can try that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest choosing one or two for your session. Below are some of our favorites:

Nurturing the Space in Between (pp. 70–71)

How can we best nurture our relationships with our partners? Internationally known psychotherapist and relationship coach Hedy Schleifer teaches that the first step is to become aware of the “relational space” between two people. Each individual is in his or her own world, and between them is the space where their relationship lives. *Shalom bayit* is in that space. As a group, watch Schleifer's

TEDx Talk and discuss which pieces resonate most: <https://bit.ly/3aPatJe>. Unpack the five A's and discover each participant's connection preferences, an exercise that can help build community as well as help the women bring this tool back home to foster better family connections.

In Pursuit of Wholeness

Use the story of Rabbi Aryeh Levin and his wife (p. 72), and Tziporah Heller Gottlieb's piece on the same page, to give participants an opportunity to unpack the concept of *shalom* as wholeness. You may refer to the creation of humankind (p. 74), and to Lori Palatnik's "One Soul" teaching (p. 75). Pair the women, and use the guiding questions on pages 73–75 to facilitate a conversation about how these ideas can affect their behavior and their home.

Spotlight on Israel

Watch the two videos together (pp. 76–77), discussing the questions after each one. How are the two videos related? What can we learn from each one, and how can we share those lessons with our families?

Pathways to Returning to a Peaceful Home (pp. 78–79)

Depending on your familiarity with your group, if the women want to dig into the Elul work and the Jewish process of repentance, you can invite them to each consider a relational behavior they have and want to change. Plan to share a personal example, one that is thoughtfully vulnerable and that the women can relate to. Go through the steps laid out on the pages, as you explain and model with your example. Then pair each woman with someone she trusts and feels close to. Guide participants to listen without offering advice as their partner explores the behavior she seeks to change through the lens of the repentance toolbox. Have journaling paper available. Let women know that this work is a process and not often resolved in one sitting. Close by inviting women to share with the full group something they are taking away from the experience and may use again.

7. Reflection and Closing

Recall the main ideas explored in the session, and create an opportunity for reflection.

Reflection Suggestion: Consider inviting each woman to hold the *shofar* as she shares: "I'm choosing to awaken to..." or "One way I'll bring *shalom* to my home this week is..." or "One thing I plan to bring to my family from today's learning is..."

Invite sisters to respond to the prompt by writing, drawing, or thinking silently. After individual reflection time, you might ask them to partner with one other participant and share their reflections, which can be followed with voluntary group sharing.

Direct the women's attention to **“Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families”** (pp. 88–89). These suggestions will help them bring home to their families the learning they have done today, in fun and interesting ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and to report on how it went at the next session. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Provide participants with the opportunity to schedule a time with their learning partner before they leave the session today (see **“Learn With Your Sister,”** pp. 86–87). Let the women know when you'll be meeting again and what theme will be explored. Encourage them to continue to share with each other how they plan to bring the ideas and practices of *shalom bayit* into their lives.

Extra! Program Ideas

To enhance your session, you may consider one of the following activities:

Create a “Meaningful Date Night” workshop by hosting a relationship expert who can speak about creating peace in the midst of challenges in marriage.

Along these same lines, host a parenting expert who can speak to the concerns the women have about raising children in today's society.

Lead a how-to program on the High Holiday services, explaining different components and talking through with the women how best to mark this special time.

Play a quick game that sensitizes people to focus on small, positive changes that others make. Have each woman choose a partner. Then tell them to turn their backs on their partners and make a small change to their appearance (e.g. untying a shoelace, pushing up a sleeve, removing earrings). Have partners face each other and try to identify the change made. Debrief by exploring ideas regarding how easy it is to overlook changes another person is making, and how change often happens incrementally.



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