



Humiliation is in The House!

Shalom Bayis, (peace in the home), can be understood at several levels. At its simplest, we envision our immediate family members getting along under one roof. Through the mitzvot of Shmiras Halashon, we learn at least two additional meanings for the phrase. Our physical body is the individual “house,” for our *nesama* (soul), so

shalom bayis refers to the peace of mind we have when doing right. Expanded, Jews are frequently referred to as “The House of Israel,” so peaceful relationships with fellow Jews is also symbolized by this tranquil metaphor and is of utmost importance.

Lashon hara is *ossur* (forbidden), since, by participating, we commit *ona’a devarim* (verbal abuse) to our fellow Jews. “Do not bear a sin because of him.” (Vayikra 19:17) is the commandment to protect fellow Jews’ dignity. Lashon hara is in 180° opposition to *shalom bayis* in our “houses” with ourselves and others, especially when it occurs in public. The Chofetz Chaim reminds us that, “one who shames his friend in public does not have a portion in Olam Haba.” (Avos 3:11) and that, “a man shall not cause hurt to his fellow.” (Vayikra 25:17). It is a sad truth that, “joking” and sarcasm within our direct families or extended House of Israel is an all-to-common abuse. Experienced verbal hurts linger and often take on lives of their own, denying us peace as they manifest in further *avayros*.

In a related vein, the Chofetz Chaim understands “flattery” to be an interaction during which a Jew hears and fails to correct lashon hara because he is overly concerned about his image. The Chofetz Chaim points to, “You shall not pollute the land in which you are.” (Bamidbar 35:33). As a Jew’s failure to correct the aveyrach of lashon hara upon hearing it (regardless of whether it is true or false) or, worse, embellishing these tales. Behaving this way, for this purpose simply admits that favor from another person is more vital to him than Hashem’s favor! It shows a lack of emunah (faith) in Hashem because the person is more centered on his “image control” and dependence on the favor of others than Hashem. The well-known and repeated adage of, “And you shall love your fellow as yourself.” (Vayikra 19:18) reminds us that observance of shmiras halahon is a critical and active way to exhibit love of our fellow Jews in order to bring peace to the house. Refraining from flattery demonstrates that, just as much as we spend a lot of effort to minimize *our own* faults and flaws to put our best self out there, so we should remember to do this for others. We would be *humiliated* to overhear discussions of *our* weaknesses. To this same degree, we must guard the dignity of others.

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