

Shalom Bayit

Peace in the Home

*Jewish Values for the New Moon, New Month and New You
Middah for the Hebrew Month of Cheshvan 5774*

Background Texts

**Shalom bayit* means peace in the home. In Judaism, our homes are our *mikdash miat*, our small sanctuary. They are meant to be our greatest source of holiness and peace.

*Jews put a mezuzah on the doorposts of the home in order to remind them of God's presence in their midst. The mezuzah reminds us of the holiness in our homes.

*In the Talmud there is a debate about how the mezuzah should be affixed. Some of the rabbis argue that the mezuzah should be placed horizontally while others argue that it be placed vertically. But ultimately it is placed at an angle because the most important value in Judaism is making compromises so that there can be peace.

*The Rabbis of the Talmud understood that people have a tendency to be less sensitive to their spouses than to those outside of the home. They lose their

temper more often with those closest to them, or take their family members for granted. Hence, the rabbis put the responsibility of keeping peace in the home upon all members of the family, but primarily upon the husband. "If your wife is short," one Talmudic passage teaches, "Bend over to hear her whisper."

*Rabbi David Wolpe, once wrote, that "*shalom bayit* – household harmony – is a treasured value. *Shalom bayit* radiates outward. "One who creates peace at home builds peace in all Israel" said Simeon Ben Gamliel. Goodness inside one's home is no less exalted than greatness outside it."

**Oseh Shalom Bimromahv*, O God who makes peace in the heavens above, among the angels where that peace is not needed, bring peace upon this city and upon the children of our world.

*I do not recall a Jewish home without a book on the table. - Elie Wiesel

Stories from our Sacred Texts Capturing This Value

Genesis 18:1-15

The notion of *Shalom Bayit* emerges from the stories of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is just recuperating from circumcision when three men, who are actually God's messengers, come to visit Abraham and Sarah in their tent. Abraham and Sarah run to them, greet them, invite them into their home, and quickly provide for them an elegant meal.

While Sarah is in the tent, the angels speak to Abraham and predict that his wife will soon have a son. Sarah, overhearing the conversation laughs. She says, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment – with my husband so old?"

Stories From our Sacred Texts Continued

When my brother suffers,
I will comfort him.

When my sister is lonely,
I will seek her out.

When my brother seeks
solitude,
I will respect his right to
privacy.

When my sister is attacked,
I will defend her.

When my brother is
oppressed,
I will relieve him.

When my sister is needy,
I will gladly give to her.

When my brother gives to
me,
I will accept graciously from
him.

When my sister prospers,
I will rejoice with her.

The text states: God said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, "Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?" Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Sarah had said that she could not have a child because her husband is old. But when God spoke of Sarah's statement to Abraham, God misquoted her as saying that only she was old. According to the Talmud, God changed Sarah's comments to safeguard Abraham's feelings and to preserve domestic peace. In Judaism, this concept of *shalom bayit* allows one to alter the truth, or tell white lies if you will, in order to preserve peace.

Leviticus 14:33-57

The Torah portion, Metzora, speaks about a plague which, when unchecked, has the ability to destroy a home. When we enter the land of Canaan, the text tells us, and God inflicts an eruptive plague upon a house, the owner should go before the priest and say "Something like a plague has appeared upon my house."

The priest shall examine the plague and if the colored streaks go deep into the wall, the house should be closed for seven days. If the plague continues to spread, the priests shall have the stones with the plague upon them pulled out and cast outside the city. The house shall be scraped and re-plastered. But if the plague breaks out again in the house, the house shall be torn down -- it's stones, and timber and all the coating on the house."

Reflections and Discussion

How is your home like a *mikdash miat*, a small sanctuary?

What changes do you need to make in order for your home to be a greater place of holiness and sanctuary?

Elie Wiesel talks about the value of Jewish books in making a home complete. How can Jewish learning bring peace into your home?

In Genesis 18, God alters Sara's words in order to keep peace between Abraham and Sara. In what ways could you alter your language to keep greater peace in your home?

The text from Leviticus speaks of how the ancient plague of leprosy destroyed houses. Today, the modern plague of domestic violence can devastate a home. Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior aimed at gaining and then maintaining power and control over an intimate partner. Domestic violence steals away childhoods. Domestic violence destroys futures. Domestic violence kills self-esteem. Domestic violence ends lives. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, if you or someone you know needs support, you can find help through Shalombayit-nc.org.

Jewish Values Workout for the Month

Jewish Values Meditation

To daily remind yourself to work on embracing the Jewish value of *Shalom Bayit*, peace in the home, select one of the following quotes to say every morning. You can rotate the quotes:

Home sweet home.

It is a joy to live in one's own house. – The Jerusalem Talmud

Where we love is home - home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts. – Oliver Wendell Holmes

Home is the nicest word there is.” - Laura Ingalls Wilder

Jewish Values Exercise

To daily remind yourself to work on the Jewish value of *Shalom Bayit*, peace in the home, place a mezuzah on the doorpost where you most often enter your home and touch it as you enter and say, “May my home be a place of peace.”

BIRKAT HABAYIT A BLESSING FOR THE HOME

May this home be a place of happiness and health,
Of contentment, generosity, and hope,
A home of creativity and kindness.
May those who visit and those who live here
know only blessings and peace.

