



Bayis Neman

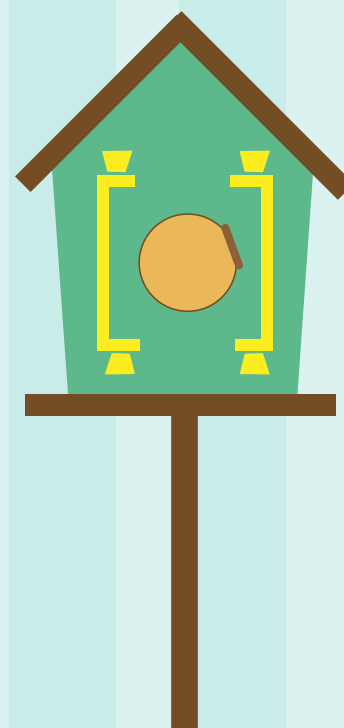
BUILDING STRONGER

MARRIAGES

THROUGH

*MUSIA KAPLAN
INTERVIEWS
RABBI SHAYA
SHAGALOW*

TORAH WISDOM



MK: What is Bayis Neman and how did it come to be?

RSS: Bayis Neman is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping couples improve their *shalom bayis*. Our goal is to make effective, affordable, and Torah-based marriage coaching available to everyone. Bayis Neman is endorsed by the Crown Heights Beis Din, and our *madrichim* are trained by Rabbi Yirmiyahu Katz, a distinguished Rav and widely respected authority on *mikvaos* and *shalom bayis*.

Rabbi Katz's ties to Lubavitch span more than four decades. He has overseen hundreds of *mikvaos* for *shluchim* around the world. More recently, he has overseen the building of the Mei Chaya Mushka *mikvah* and multiple *keilim*

marriage coaching. In recent years, Rabbi Katz noticed that more and more Lubavitcher couples were reaching out to him—and he couldn't help them all himself. So he took upon himself to train people, and he enlisted me, along with some others, to create an organization that would help Lubavitchers find marital joy and harmony. There is a team that does all the legwork—fundraising, website building, advertising, and more. Along with three other *madrichim*, both male and female, I coach couples.

What makes Bayis Neman different from typical marriage counseling?

We believe real-life experience in a successful marriage, and Torah-based training, are more

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mikvaos in Crown Heights. Rabbi Yosef Heller told me that years ago Rabbi Binyomin Klein, z"l, the Rebbe's secretary, showed him a note where the Rebbe wrote that they should bring Rabbi Yirmiyahu Katz to the *kollel* to talk to the *yungeleit*.

I got to know Rabbi Katz when I was involved in renovating a community *mikvah* in New Brunswick, New Jersey, where I am a *shliach*.

Rabbi Katz's father, Reb Yechiel Michel, was a successful businessman who had a *chush* in *shalom bayis*. He would designate most nights, from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m., to assist struggling couples. As he grew older, he shared his accumulated wisdom with his son, who ultimately took over the

important than any degree on the wall. Our methodology is derived from the wisdom of Torah and Chassidus, and practical experience working with many couples with diverse issues.

Another key difference is that none of our *madrichim* are doing this for *parnassah*. We all have full-time jobs besides Bayis Neman. We do it because we are passionate about building happier marriages, not because we are looking for more clients. As soon as a couple has the tools they need to nurture their marriage on their own, our work is done.

Finally, we make our services extremely affordable. Financial stress is a huge contributor to *shalom bayis* problems, but typical marriage

counseling costs a fortune. We want to help couples without adding to their burden. We keep our rate extremely low, and we provide even steeper discounts when necessary. Unlike a classic therapy session, we don't limit our conversations to a strict 45 minutes before time is up. Sessions last as long as needed, sometimes more than three hours. We take the time to get to know each couple, as individuals and as a unit, so we can properly support them.

How long does it usually take for a couple to transform their relationship?

The timeline is different for every couple, because every problem is different. Sometimes, when the problem is more surface-level, two or three meetings can help a couple get back on track. But more often, the problem runs deeper and it takes longer. People are not always forthcoming, and at times it can take five sessions before I even discover the true reason they are there. Only then can we begin the real work of healing the marriage.

It also depends on how committed a couple is to making changes and doing the work. It's like two kids who start guitar lessons at the same time—one might get much further than the other because of the amount of practice and determination, as well as talent. I can talk until I turn blue, but if the couple is not ready to put in effort, nothing will shift.

There are certain issues that Bayis Neman can't help with, and we are always upfront about that. If one or both spouses are dealing with severe mental illness or trauma from the past—especially abuse—we refer them to specialists in those fields. These couples often don't actually have a *shalom bayis* issue; they have a mental or trauma issue that is impacting their marriage.

What do you think is the key difference between how the secular world views marriage and how the Torah views marriage?

I haven't delved deeply into secular marriage counseling, but it seems to me that marriage is viewed like a business partnership. If you just work on ironing out your differences through communication and compromise, everything will be fine. But that approach is just problem-solving; it isn't marriage-building.

The Torah views a married couple as a single entity. Marriage is when two halves of one soul reunite under the *chuppah* and become one.

Unfortunately, many couples reach out to us because their union—their sense of “you and I are on the same team”—is shattered. In some cases, they never built that union in the first place. I once told a couple sitting before me, “I know that a ring was given under the *chuppah*, but you've never really been married.” The look of recognition that flashed through their eyes was heartbreaking, but it was also a moment of relief. It was the first step toward bridging the divide, toward building the relationship that could be.

A husband and wife are not roommates. In our community, young men and women who have never interacted with the opposite gender get married thinking it will be just like having another friend. “I've had female friends until now; now I will have a male friend,” or vice versa. It doesn't work that way! Hashem created men and women to be different, and that means we need to approach this relationship differently than we did with roommates and friends.

A man is a *mashpia*, a giver. His nature is to provide and protect. At the same time, it is essential for him to feel respected and needed. A woman is a *mekabel*, a receiver. Her essential need is to feel safe, appreciated, and cared for. It's important to mention that a *mekabel* is not a parasitic “taker” who just takes, takes, takes. A *mekabel* takes what she receives and uses it to cultivate a home and family. She provides extraordinary turnaround—children, a home—the gains are far greater than any investment.

In a healthy marriage dynamic, a man and a woman create a positive cycle where each spouse feels happy and fulfilled in their role.



“MY HUSBAND AVOIDED ME”

~Devorah's Testimony

I dated dozens of men before I met my husband. Most of them said the same thing about me: I was “too intense.” For me, Yiddishkeit wasn't simply another compartment of my life, it was my whole life. On my first date with my husband, Chaim, he took me to a theater in Manhattan. I was horrified! We sat in the front row, and I whispered *Tehillim* under my breath. Chaim sensed that I was uncomfortable, so during the intermission, he asked, “Do you want to leave?”

I exploded. “What do you mean, do I want to leave? Don't you want to leave? This is *assur!*” I went on a long tirade. And Chaim listened. “You're right,” he ultimately agreed. “We'll go.”

We spent the next four hours talking—about values, priorities, fears. Our *hashkafos* weren't identical, but he made space for mine. He took my concerns seriously. I felt seen in a way I hadn't before.

What I didn't understand then was that the very differences revealed on that first date would widen once we were married. I wanted Chaim to dress a

convicted the problem was him. I believed I was religiously superior. I believed I was right. I had no awareness of how my tone, my words, my

I had been so busy correcting him that I never truly met him.

certain way. He didn't. I wanted a larger family. He didn't.

We argued constantly. The warmth that had once felt so natural between us cooled into something brittle. Of course, I was

silences—even my body language—were landing on him.

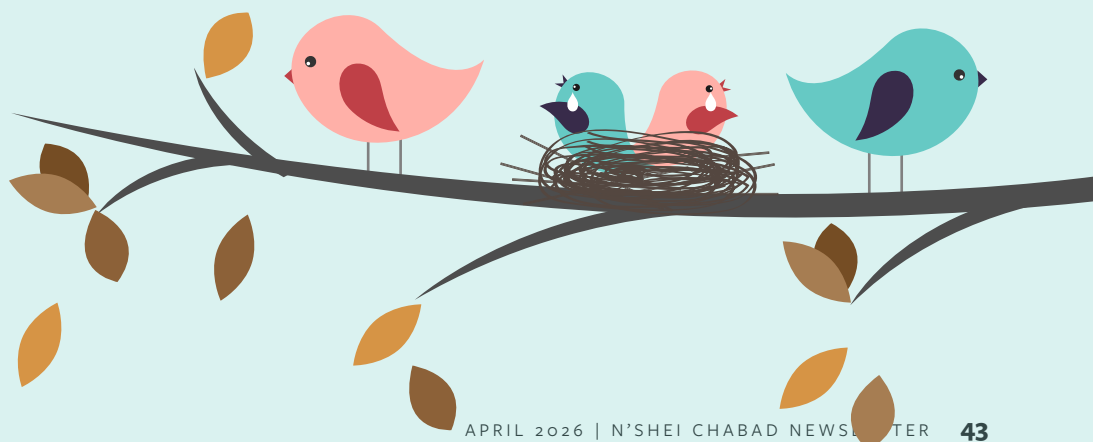
Chaim avoided me. He focused on the children when we were together so he wouldn't have to speak to me. Over the

years, we spoke to many marriage counselors and therapists. Some helped briefly, but they only put a Band-Aid on our issues. We always reverted to our usual pattern of judgment, resentment, and avoidance.

In 2024, our marriage blew up. I went on a vacation with our kids. He stayed home. When he texted me, “I miss you,” I couldn't write the same words back.

When I returned, we admitted the truth: Neither of us knew whether we wanted to stay married. He asked me if I would care if he died. Numbly, I answered, “The kids would be devastated.” That shattered him. It derailed us completely. It seemed like our marriage was dead.

We heard about Rabbi Shaya Shagalow from a Chabad friend. As a last resort, I asked Chaim if I could speak to him about



what was happening. He agreed. I spoke to Rabbi Shagalow a few times. Then Chaim spoke to him too.

Rabbi Shagalow helped me fundamentally shift

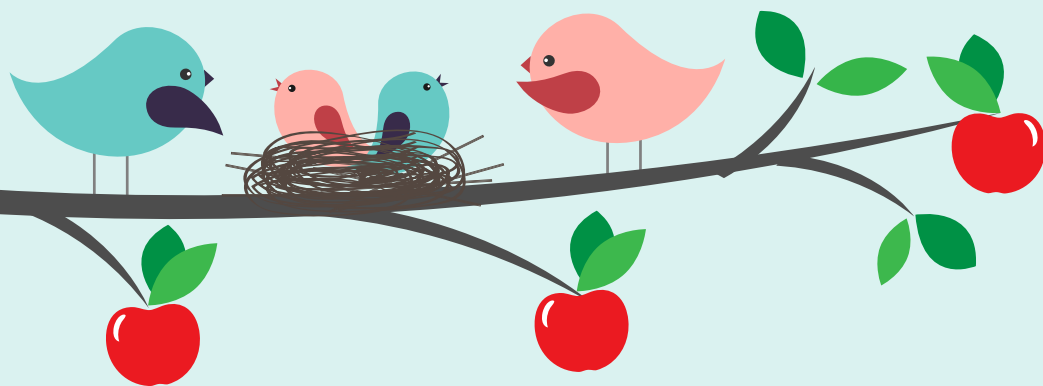
had slowly eroded Chaim's sense of himself. He felt emasculated, unseen, alone. I had been so busy correcting him that I never truly met him. I learned

him the same space he had offered me on our first date.

Rabbi Shagalow also allowed me to see that many of my husband's unhealthy behaviors were a result of

in a wheelchair. I couldn't fix him, but I could support him.

Once I softened and became receptive to Chaim, his behavior became kinder and more loving. The warmth returned to our marriage. Today, *baruch Hashem*, our connection is deep and steady. Our lives are both busy with kids and work, but we focus on preserving emotional intimacy no matter what. I am incredibly thankful to Hashem for giving me the gift of a second chance to save my marriage. And I want all women who read this to know that it is possible for them too.



my mindset towards my husband—which led to the complete transformation of my marriage.

For years, my judgment

that instead of controlling or criticizing, I needed to approach him with curiosity. With compassion. With respect. I needed to offer

tremendous inner pain. He was emotionally crippled. Instead of seeing him as an enemy combatant, I was able to see him as someone

When a man provides emotional, practical, and financial security, it causes his wife to respect and appreciate him. This makes him want to keep giving more. And when a woman is receiving—compliments, emotional support, practical help—she can flourish in her role as wife, mother, and homemaker, and this beautiful cycle goes on.

What advice do you have for couples who feel disconnected from each other?

Something I always recommend is to start dating each other again. A date doesn't necessarily require spending money, going somewhere fancy, or even hiring a babysitter. It can be as simple as eating ice cream together in the kitchen. It can be playing a board game or listening to your favorite music. Simply enjoy each other's company and have fun. The sillier the activity, the more you'll laugh together.

If a couple forgets how to have fun, and how to spend time together without discussing money or kids, their marriage can easily become similar to the business partnership I mentioned earlier. And that's not what marriage should be.

Each spouse embracing their role as a *mashpia* or *mekabel* is also critical to restoring the balance in a marriage.

I often use the analogy of a cup. A cup with a hole in its bottom will always leak and eventually be empty—no matter how much water you pour into it. If a husband does not make his wife feel safe and loved, her cup will have a perpetual leak. She will not be able to receive, and everything her husband tries to give her will drain away. Once he patches up that hole, by making her feel safe and loved, she will find joy in her marriage, and her cup will be full.

When speaking to men, I say: "Sorry, you



might not like this, but as the *mashpia*, you must take the initiative in your marriage.” Just like on that first date, when the man went to pick up his future wife in a car, he needs to make her feel just as important today. That might look like taking her on a date, sending her a text from work, and, especially, putting away his phone to truly listen while she speaks.

Is every marriage salvageable? Would you ever recommend that a couple get divorced?

The *Gemara* says the *mizbe'ach* cries when a couple gets divorced. This unique language isn't used to describe anything else. A marriage is two *neshamos* coming together to fulfill a Divine destiny. When that doesn't work out, it's a spiritual tragedy. And, of course, there are many practically tragic components to divorce for everyone involved. As a policy, my job is to do whatever I can to save a marriage. It is not my place to end it.

When he was training me, Rabbi Yirmiyahu Katz told me about a couple he had coached many years earlier. They seemed doomed. The husband had completely abandoned the ways of the Torah and couldn't or wouldn't control his impulses. The wife was *frum* and absolutely miserable. Eventually, they got divorced. A few years later, the husband did a 180-degree turnaround, became *frum* again, and married a different woman. Rabbi Katz always felt regret about this. Of course, we can never know what would have happened had they stayed married. One can only wonder. As a matter of principle, we do not recommend divorce. If someone feels that they must get divorced, then so be it, but that is not our job.

The one exception to this rule is when a spouse is being abused. In those cases, we try to help the victim get out. Unfortunately, abused spouses are often more terrified of being alone than of their abusers. Ironically, the marriages that are damaged beyond repair are the least likely to end in divorce.



Rabbi and Mrs. Shaya and Chayale Shagalow.

Can you share any encouraging words with our readers who might feel hopeless about their own marriages?

In many cases, I have found that unhappy marriages—even those on the brink of divorce—can become joyful and tranquil. Many people were simply never given the tools and education to build a happy marriage. Some of the couples who contacted Bayis Neman already spent thousands of dollars going to many different kinds of marriage therapists and counselors who didn't help them. They're surprised when our approach is more effective than all the years of therapy combined! Getting the right guidance can make all the difference.

What I would tell every *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* reader is that while life is full of challenges, marriage shouldn't be one of them. On the contrary, marriage should make the difficult times easier and the good times even better. Having a spouse alongside and supporting you through the journey of life means that everything becomes more manageable. Because it's not just your stress—it's his too. Instead of two shoulders carrying the load, it's four.

And if you don't feel that in your marriage yet, it's not too late. 🌿

For assistance, please visit bayisneman.com or call/text 718.316.6090.