

# Prohibitions During Niddah

Contributed by Tzvi Fishman  
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Married couples who observe the laws of family purity, known as "Niddah" and "Taharat HaMishpachah," bring a great holiness and Divine Blessing upon themselves, their children, and their homes. In addition, the time of separation when the couple is not allowed to have sexual relations, or even touch one another, creates a wonderful and exciting renewal to their marriage, making the wife a "bride" once again, each and every month.

It is widely known that compared to secular couples, the rate of divorce is much much lower in religious homes, where the laws of Niddah are respected and observed, and this monthly separation and "honeymoon" is one of the reasons. In contrast, in marriages where the laws of Niddah are not observed, G-d forbid, the husband and wife draw a terrible unholiness over themselves and their children, and the Divine Presence flees from their home. Without expanding upon the spiritual and physical tragedies this involves, suffice it to say that violations of the laws of Niddah are among the most severe transgression of the Torah.

The following article is excerpted from the abridged book, "The Road to Purity," based on the in-depth study, "Darkei Tahara," by the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu, of blessed memory. Since during the course of a marriage, couples can become forgetful and lax in the laws of Niddah, we are presenting here some of the main prohibitions that must be observed during the Niddah period. The reader should be aware that this is not a comprehensive study of the overall subject of Taharat Hamishpachah, and other vital matters like determination of Niddah, stains, vesatot, bedika, hefsek tahara, the seven days of purity, and ritual immersion, are not covered in this essay. Readers are encouraged to obtain the book itself, which was published through the holy efforts of Rabbi Moshe Bentov, of blessed memory. The translation is by Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Iskowitz.

## PROHIBITIONS DURING THE NIDDAH PERIOD

### Maintaining a Distance

The Torah states: "Do not come close to a woman who is a Niddah" (Leviticus 18:19). The Rabbis explain that "coming close" includes not only physical closeness and hugging, kissing, or lying in the same bed, but jesting and frivolous behavior as well. Hence, from the Torah, not only is it forbidden to have intercourse with a Niddah, but also to come close by touching and the like.

Though physical nearness and frivolous chatter are to be refrained from during the Niddah period (the menstruation period including the days specified by the Torah and the Sages), this is only in order to keep away from endearments which arouse sexual desire and could lead to touching, kissing, and even intercourse. The extra precautions, however, are not meant to distance the wife from the husband, or to prevent essential interaction. To the contrary, is the wife appears to be sad or withdrawn, it is a mitzvah to comfort her. A husband must love his wife as himself and honor her more than himself — even when she is a Niddah. One should not be stricter than what the Sages decreed in these matters, for it could have harmful consequences. The early Sages proposed that the wife in Niddah must not adorn herself with rouge or cosmetics, or wear colorful clothing, but Rabbi Avika came and taught: "If so, she will become repulsive to her husband!" decreeing that they are permitted. Therefore, it is important neither to be too lenient nor too stringent when applying these laws.

Approaching a Niddah is forbidden from the time when she discovered her blood until her Tevilla (immersion), even if the time elapsed between the two events is great. As long as she has not immersed herself in a mikvah, it is absolutely forbidden to approach her. Consequently, unmarried women are always in a state of Niddah (since they haven't been to a mikvah), and men are forbidden to approach or touch them, to be alone with them, or gaze at them, and the like.

The categories of prohibitions include the Torah command not to come close; measures to be taken to prevent sexual relations; measures to be taken to prevent touching and the like; activities which may lead to impure thoughts and the spilling of semen in vain.

The examples and laws of these cases are many, and will not be listed here. If the husband needs strengthening in any of the categories, he should adopt more stringent "fences" until he can abide the limitations set forth by the Sages. One should not say that he doesn't need these restraints- greater persons than he tried to do without them and failed to keep away from sinning (See Sabbath 12b re: Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha).

## LEVITY

One should not act frivolously with a woman in Niddah, lest they come to closeness, touching, or intercourse &ndash; or it may lead to impure thoughts and the spilling of semen in vain. Normal conversation is allowed, but not that which leads to jesting and levity which can bring a man to lewdness (Avot 3:13). Included in these prohibition is the pleasure of smelling her perfume, or her perfumed clothing, even when not being presently worn. It is also forbidden to light each other's cigarette and other similar fences.

## PHYSICAL CONTACT AND HANDLING OBJECTS

Not only must a husband not touch his Niddah wife, but he must not even hand her anything, lest he come to touch her. The prohibition of touching extends to the garments she is wearing as well. If it is impossible to lift a very heavy object alone, the couple may do so together. An example of this is carrying a baby and carriage downstairs if there is no one else around to help, who could be approached without making it obvious that the woman is in Niddah.

## EATING AT THE SAME TABLE

Since eating together promotes intimacy, our Sages stated that during the Niddah period, a husband and wife who are eating together alone must make a reminder to avoid coming too close together. This could be a change of the place one normally sits at the table, or a change in the items on the table for a sign.

## EATING HIS WIFE'S LEFTOVERS

A husband should not eat or drink his Niddah wife's leftovers in her presence because of the affection which this implies. However, she may consume his leftovers, even in his presence. It is possible to eat from the same central serving plate, such as a large salad bowl, if one first serves it onto his own plate or bowl. If it is impossible to transfer the food to one's own dish, some authorities allow eating from the common central dish, provided that a third party is eating with them as well.

## SITTING OR LYING ON HER BED

A husband should neither sit nor lie on his Niddah wife's bed, even when she is not present. This prohibition is due to the possibility of arousing his desirous thoughts and what might ensue. She too is forbidden from lying on his bed, even when he is not lying on it.

## SITTING ON THE SAME BENCH

They may not sit on the same bench if there is a possibility that they may touch or come too close together. It is advisable to refrain from pleasure trips or walking alone through parks and the like, even if they avoid sharing the same bench, because of feelings of romantic closeness which may arise.

## SLEEPING IN THE SAME BED

They should not sleep in the same bed, even if it is wide and has separate mattresses. This is true even if they are clothed and do not touch each other. The beds should be separated so that their blankets don't meet, and so that they can't touch one another with an outstretched arm while sleeping.

## MODESTY

The husband must not gaze at normally covered parts of his Niddah wife's body, lest this lead to desirous thoughts and sin. He may, however, enjoy her appearance when she is fully clothed; since she will be eventually permitted to him, this will not lead him to sin. Since the husband is allowed to look at her and she may dress up nicely during her Niddah period, it is appropriate that she set aside certain clothing for this time, as reminders to both of them. She should not wear ugly clothing and thus become despised in her husband's eyes, but she should also avoid wearing apparel which would be overly attractive to him.

It is improper for a husband to hear his wife sing during her Niddah. If she sings lullabies to put her child to sleep, he may listen if he has no place else to go. If he is praying or reciting the Shema when she begins to sing, he need not interrupt his prayers, but he must not learn Torah out loud. Regarding singing at the Sabbath table, a Niddah should only mouth the words. If guests are present, she should even do so when not a Niddah, for it is not permitted for other men to hear her singing.

## FILLING HIS CUP AND SERVING

It is forbidden for a Niddah to perform certain tasks for her husband which normally lead to affection and intimacy, such as filling his cup of wine, making his bed in his presence, or washing his face, hands, or feet. She is allowed to fill his cup with wine but not to put it in front of him directly. He should also refrain from pouring wine for her. He may not pass to her a cup from which he drank. This applies to a cup over which a benediction has been recited, such as Kiddush. If the cup is not given directly to her, but first passed around to others, when it reaches her, she may drink from it. On Friday evening, after he has drunk from the Kiddush cup, he should put it down near him and not pass it to her; she may then lift it and drink. If it is their custom to pour from the Kiddush cup to small glasses for all present, he may do so, providing he does not give her one directly. (If in doing these things it will be obvious to guests that she is in Niddah, they should be done in a discreet, unnoticeable manner.) In general, these restrictions of pouring and serving apply to all forbidden relations, so that it is best that men serve men and women serve women.

## MAKING THE BED

It is improper for a Niddah to make her husband's bed in his presence. This prohibition applies to arranging sheets and blankets, which is a display of affection and may lead to intimacy. Arranging heavy mattresses is burdensome and thus permitted, since it does not imply an act of endearment.

## POURING WATER

She should not even pour even cold water on her husband for the purpose of washing his face, hands, or feet, even without touching him, because this is a display of intimacy. Likewise, he may not do so for her. She may bring him water to ritually wash his hands, both before and after the meal.

## ILLNESS

There are three sins which must be avoided, even if it costs one his life. One of these is "giluy arayot" - forbidden sexual relationships. This includes relations with a Niddah. Consequently, physical closeness between the couple, even if one of them were critically ill, should have been forbidden. However, the ways of the Torah are ways of pleasantness. It therefore forbade only approaches associated with affection, while permitting other types of closeness. When one or the other is ill, and there is no one else to care for him or her, they may minister to each other's needs. This should be done through an intervening cloth, however, not by directly touching.

## THINGS FORBIDDEN TO A NIDDAH

It is inappropriate for a woman who is a Niddah to go to a cemetery, because of the evil spirits connected with it. The Kabbalah, however, recommends that women in general do not go to cemeteries, particular in a funeral procession, because it is dangerous for them to do so (and not good for men to look at women during a funeral.)

It is a mitzvah and obligation for women to pray when in Niddah, as it is when they are not, and they may go to synagogue. Some refrain from attending synagogue during actual menstruation, but even those women should not be stringent in the following cases: the 10 days from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur, during joyous occasions when staying away would cause her anguish, if she suspects she will not pray properly at home or not at all.

In any event, she should not gaze into an upraised Torah, nor touch the Western Wall while during menstruation, not because of a prohibition, but of respect for the Torah and Beit HaMikdash.

She should not study Torah or pray while wearing a blood-soaked, malodorous, or soiled sanitary napkin. If the blood remains within her, as on a tampon, these activities are permitted. If she feels a discharge of blood, she must stop learning holy subjects, except if this would cause her great sorrow, as when she is teaching or learning in a group.

## Question:

With all of the problems I have in my marriage, do you really expect me to keep all the laws of family purity? Isn't it enough not to have relations with my husband during my period without having to immerse in a mikvah?

Answer:

For certain, many of your marital problems stem from your attitude toward this supremely holy commandment. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Jewish women guard the laws of family purity and enjoy it!

Ask any Orthodox woman if it's a burden or a pleasure. Chances are she will tell you it's the best thing that ever happened to her marriage. Thank to the laws of family purity, Jewish wives are brides ever month! As the old saying goes: "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Having to refrain from sexual relations during the period of menstruation brings a constant renewal of intimacy and love to what can otherwise become a stale and loveless act.

In addition, the period of separation adds a powerful spiritual aspect to the marriage, bringing about deeper, more meaningful communication between husband and wife, and preventing the wife from becoming a mere object of the husband's ever-waning lust, as too often happens in secular marriages.

But mere separation isn't enough. Menstruation brings about a state of spiritual impurity that can only be purified through immersion in a mikvah. The Kabbalist, Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, explains that many marital problems, including grave illnesses, lack of shalom bayit, problems with children, and economic woes, derive from not keeping the laws of family purity, which have been the holy foundation of the Jewish Nation ever since the time of our forefathers. He explains that when a couple doesn't respect the laws of family purity, the devastatingly negative spiritual forces of Niddah wage a war of havoc and revenge on the household. Very often, Hashem brings it about that the couple argues and fights until they divorce, for their benefit, even though the tragedy of divorce causes Hashem figurative tears, rather than to have to inflict the severe Divine punishment that befalls transgressors of the laws of family purity and Niddah.

While it would be best for you to keep the laws of family purity out of recognition of their positive value to your marriage and your family's health and wellbeing, it is important to understand the consequences of treating this sacred commandment lightly.

Regarding the difficulty in learning and keeping the many laws surrounding family purity, it really isn't so complicated. Millions of women have learned them, and you can too. If there aren't classes at your local synagogue, there are many excellent books on the topic, and the wife of any Orthodox rabbi can find a woman who will be happy to teach you. To get you started, here is a list of links which explore the different facets of "Taharat HaMishpachah." Don't put it off till tomorrow. Get started today and enjoy all of the benefits you will discover!

#### Basic Family Purity

[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/680218/jewish/Family-Purity.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/680218/jewish/Family-Purity.htm)

#### The Essence of Ritual Purity

[http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article\\_cdo/aid/1542/jewish/On-the-Essence-of-Ritual-Impurity.htm](http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/1542/jewish/On-the-Essence-of-Ritual-Impurity.htm)

#### Laws of Family Purity

<http://www.jewishsexuality.com>

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[http://www.breslev.co.il/categories/judaism/practical\\_halacha/the\\_laws\\_of\\_family\\_purity.aspx?category=37&chapter=123&pageid=1&language=english](http://www.breslev.co.il/categories/judaism/practical_halacha/the_laws_of_family_purity.aspx?category=37&chapter=123&pageid=1&language=english)

Renew Your Marriage Every Month

[http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/1762/jewish/The-Monthly-Marriage.htm](http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1762/jewish/The-Monthly-Marriage.htm)

What's a Mikvah?

[http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article\\_cdo/aid/1541/jewish/The-Mikvah.htm](http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/1541/jewish/The-Mikvah.htm)

A Woman's Mikvah Experience

[http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article\\_cdo/aid/404905/jewish/Transforming-Waters.htm](http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/404905/jewish/Transforming-Waters.htm)

Benefits of Family Purity

[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/142442/jewish/Purifying-Waters.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/142442/jewish/Purifying-Waters.htm)

Mikvah Directory

[www.Mikvah.org](http://www.Mikvah.org)