

# Keys To A Holy Union

Contributed by Tzvi Fishman and Michael  
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As we mentioned, many people erroneously assume that Shmirat HaBrit [guarding the Covenant by observing the laws of proper sexual behavior] deals only with the problems that young people face. The truth is that married men also have to be on their guard to retain a high standard of sexual purity in their marital relations.

In the course of this book, we have seen several passages in the Zohar which emphasize the importance of sanctification during the marital union, especially in its influence on the offspring to come. The act of marital relations is a magnificently beautiful and holy mitzvah [commandment], strengthening the bonds of love between man and wife, and influencing all spiritual worlds. Precisely because of its supreme holiness, married men must be careful to guard their eyes and their thoughts with their wives, and to behave in a modest fashion, since these constitute the essence of holiness. To insure a holy, healthy, and happy marriage, a husband must sanctify himself in what is permitted to him, and not be with his wife daily like a rooster, as the Sages have taught. Some mistakenly think that Judaism demands performance of marital relations through a sheet or with a minimum of pleasure. Nothing could be further from the truth. The holy Kabbalist, HaRav Eliahu Leon Levi, shlita, has emphasized numerous times that a husband must perform the act of intimacy with great joy, enthusiasm and vigor. He must relate to his wife in the minutes leading up to the holy union with great love and sensitivity to arouse her enjoyment and make sure her pleasure is complete. In public and private forums, HaRav Leon has emphasized that the mitzvah of marital congress should not be carried out in a timid and fearful manner, but rather in a robust, loving, and joyous fashion, so that the souls which are brought into the world will be robust and joyful in their service of G-d. Referring to the Gemara that tells how Rabbi Eleazar would conduct his marital relations against his own will as if a demon were compelling him ("kfao shed" - Nedarim 20b), HaRav Leon takes vehement exception and warns that if a person engages in marital relations in such a way, then the offspring, G-d forbid, will be like demons. It is therefore of utmost import, before delving into the guidelines below, to keep in mind the overall Jewish approach to intimacy with one's wife. HaRav Leon has summed it up by declaring that a Jew should not be a nach nach or nebuch (weakling) in marital congress, but rather engage his wife with vigor and with the full extent of his masculinity.

Having marital relations at the permitted times, and in the permitted fashion, is a mitzvah that brings joy to the marriage and to all of Creation. A man is called upon to have relations with his wife, even if no offspring can result from the union, as when she is already pregnant, or barren, or after menopause. In all of these instances, there is no issue of wasting semen in vain when relations are performed in the proper, holy fashion, since the mitzvah itself affords Divine protection. Furthermore, the Kabbalah teaches that souls brought down through such holy unions, at times when the wife cannot conceive, become the souls of righteous gentiles.

At the outset, it is vital to mention that the laws of family purity (taharat hamishpachah) are the foundation of married life. While it is not in the scope of this book to discuss this subject in depth, these laws must be observed in all of their detail and stringency. It is not enough to learn the many laws in the weeks preceding a person's marriage. These laws should be studied again and again, including the laws governing the modesty of the sexual act.

Since the sexual urge is among man's most powerful lusts, it is easy to fall into laxity and error. A man can offer a thousand excuses, but the damage that occurs during momentary lapses must still be redressed like all other transgressions.

As a reminder of the holiness of the marital union, and to strengthen a husband in his service of G-d, we are listing some practical guidelines and stringencies from the books "Tzaakat Yisrael" and "Kedushat Yisrael," written by HaRav Eliahu Leon Levi, shlita. There are many laws that concern the performance of marital relations. Here, we are citing a few suggested guidelines, including stringencies that are emphasized in the Kabbalah. The reader is urged to study all of the normative halacha in full, in all of their detail, since the wellbeing of a marriage, and the wellbeing of one's children, depend on the holiness of the marital union. Kabbalists stress that in the area of sexual relations, one should not be content to observe the basic laws alone, or their leniencies, but rather each and every Jew should strive to uphold the more stringent applications of the law by sanctifying himself even in permitted matters. At the same time, they emphasize that this holy mitzvah should be performed with mutual happiness, enjoyment, and love.

1. It is a severe transgression for a husband to force himself upon his wife against her will, or when either of them is angry, for this results in children who are aggressive and crude. Rather, relations should be with the wife's consent, in holiness and mutual joy.

2. It is the man's duty to please his wife, to make her feel loved, and to take the time needed to make sure that her pleasure is complete.
3. Before marital relations, a husband should ask G-d to forgive him for all transgressions to the Brit [of a sexual nature] which he committed in the past, including brazen conduct with his wife, which gave strength to the Sitra Achra [negative forces] and caused pain to the Shechinah [Divine Presence]. His intention should be that in engaging in proper and holy marital relations, the souls which fell captive to the realm of impurity through his sins should be rectified and returned their Maker. Both husband and wife should have the intention to bring a holy soul into the world. They should long to unite the Holy One Blessed He and the exiled Shechinah. By guarding his eyes and his thoughts, the husband will radiate holiness and blessing to all of the spiritual worlds that were damaged through his former wrongdoings.
4. In preparation for the exalted holiness of the marital union, it is proper to wash one's hands from a vessel, first pouring water over the right hand, then over the left, repeating the procedure another two times &dash; similar to the washing of hands in the morning, but without reciting a blessing.
5. During marital relations, the husband and wife should not think of anyone else, for in addition to damaging spiritual worlds, this brings great harm to the children who are born from such unions.
6. The exclusive position of the marital union is with the wife lying on her back, facing up, and the husband lying upon her, facing down. This way of union is the select and most perfect union, which the Torah desires. This is called, "the face to face union." Any other position is almost certain to bring about the spilling of semen in vain. If the woman is on top of the man, this is considered brazenness (Shulchan Aruch, 240:5) and the pull of gravity will surely cause the wasting of semen. The same is true if they are standing or sitting. Anal intercourse is considered an act of loathsome brazenness. Besides the absolute spilling of semen in vain, this is considered in the Kabbalah like sacrificing one's children to the idol Molech. Intercourse from the back is also brazenness, even if the organ of the Brit is inserted into the proper place, and the pull of gravity will cause the spilling of semen in vain from the wife, since she lies on her stomach. Furthermore, because the strongest of klipot surround the buttocks of the woman, when the Brit passes by this impure area, it will be polluted by klipot and these klipot will be transferred to the wife's sexual organ and to the offspring of such a union. Only in the case of physical handicap or advanced pregnancy may this positioned be approved by a qualified rabbinic authority.
7. Oral sex is certainly not kosher, causing the eyes to see what is forbidden to see, and causing the spilling of semen in vain.
 

Rabbi Levy adds: "Please know my brother and friend that all of these unholy unions that are mentioned above, if they are engaged in, they are not kosher in their very essence since they bring about the wasting of semen, and this in turn creates a multiplicity of evil spiritual forces which bring sickness, tribulations, and damage to one's livelihood, for all of the pain and sorrow that befall the Jewish People in this world stem from unholy unions like these, may the L-rd save and guard us from them. Make an accounting of your soul, how much you will have to pay, and what needless sufferings come from these matters, that were done without thought, without a reverence for G-d, and without a feeling of shame, all of which cause sorrow to our Father in Heaven, and bring about a lessening of light and beneficence from the Shechina."
8. The use of condoms is forbidden for this is an absolute waste of semen.
9. As a warning, the wife should continue to lie on her back after marital relation for approximately ten minutes, and not turn on her stomach or side, and not immediately rise from the bed to go the bathroom, so that her husband's semen should not flow out from her and cause the wasting of semen.
10. Similarly, the husband should not withdraw from his wife immediately after relations, but rather remain lying upon her another several minutes, and not withdraw while his organ is rigid, for this causes drops of semen to spill out.
11. The marital union should not be engaged in during the day. Children resulting from such unions, when the klipot are strongest, will be afflicted with sufferings throughout most of their lives. If a man cannot control his lust, and if there is thus a danger of spilling semen in vain, then relations may be conducted in a dark room, under blankets or sheets.
12. It is forbidden to look at the sexual organ of a woman, and also that of a man. This damages the eyes both physically and spiritually, and one will not be able to see the face of the Shechinah when the L-rd returns to Zion.
13. Having relations in a lighted room, whether by lamplight, candle, or moonlight, causes suffering in the children who are born from such unions. Rather, the marital union should be in a dark room at night, preferably after midnight when the klipot are weakened, and the couple must cover their bodies with a blanket or sheet out of modesty. Sabbath night after midnight is the most suitable time for a holy union.
14. A wife should not dress or undress in the presence of her husband during the time of her menstrual impurity, for this causes him difficult temptations, and it could lead to his having an emission of semen in vain.

15. When a woman is in her menstrual period (niddah) it is best to separate the beds of husband and wife as much as possible, preferably 45 centimeters. Couples who take leniency with this are tempting the yetzer hara.

16. It is a very great mitzvah to engage in marital relations on Sabbath night. It is also fitting one other night during the week, also on Rosh Chodesh, and on holidays when relations are permitted. A Torah scholar should endeavor not to engage in marital relations during weekdays, but rather on Sabbath night after midnight. On the night of the wife's ritual immersion, or when she hints that she would like his favor, he can engage even during the week, preferably after midnight. It is known that marital relations on weeknights are more accessible to the influence of klipot, therefore one should strive for added holiness.

17. After going to the bathroom, it is proper for both husband and wife to wait ten minutes before engaging in marital relations. Otherwise impurity will be transferred to the offspring of such a union, adversely influencing their spiritual make-up.

18. A man who regularly experiences unintentional seminal emissions, should take extra precaution in guarding his eyes from looking at women. He should recite the full order of verses and prayers of the Bedtime Shema with extra intention, word by word. He should sleep wearing his tallit katan, and he can even wear it during relations, if it doesn't interfere. These things will help him to guard his eyes, and thoughts in holiness, and to cleave to the Blessed One, so that he will not fall to harm.

[The aspiration to endow marital life with holiness is one of life's greatest challenges. It is helpful to remember that when a man comes to purify himself, he is aided from Above. May it be G-d's will, that He assist all of us to sanctify our lives before Him.]