

Make Your Wife Happy

Contributed by Michael
Monday, 25 September 2006
Last Updated Monday, 25 September 2006

Question:

I would very much like to follow the counsel of our Sages and the teachings of the Zohar by limiting marital relations to Sabbath night. However, my wife is unhappy with this and wants to have relations several times a week. What should I do?

Answer:

Just as a man has the obligation to sanctify himself in his marital relations, he also has a mitzvah to please his wife and to satisfy her needs. A man cannot adopt a course of saintly behavior for himself if it will cause friction with his wife. If this is the case, then his conduct is not saintly behavior at all. It is selfishness.

In his book, "Darke Tahara," HaRav Mordechai Eliahu writes that while it is important for a man to strive for sanctity during marital relations, one must approach this level of saintliness gradually, and not at the expense of his wife:

"In order to reach this holy level, a man must ascend the ladder of holiness slowly, and be careful not to 'sanctify' himself by saintly behavior and abstinence, and in doing so, nullify mitzvot which the Torah commands, or bring himself to spill semen in vain, which is a very serious transgression. Relating to this it is said, 'An ignoramus cannot be a saintly person,' (Avot, 2:5.) It is a mitzvah to avoid such a person, so that one shouldn't learn from his behavior.

"A man is obligated to make his wife happy by having marital relations with her at the appropriate times, and even at other times, when she so desires. This is an obligation from the Torah, as it says, 'Her food, her clothing, and her duty of marriage relations he shall not diminish,' (Shmot, 21:9.) Someone who abstains from relations with his wife to cause her chagrin transgresses a Torah commandment, and even if he abstains without the intention of causing her chagrin, there are authorities who say that this too is a Torah transgression. In any event, in doing so he transgresses a rabbinic injunction."

To illustrate the severity of improper saintliness concerning one's wife, Rabbi Eliahu cites the case of Rav Rachumi who would learn Torah with his teacher, Rava, and come home on the eve of Yom Kippur,

(Ketubot 62B.) Once he became so preoccupied with his studying that he forgot to return home. His wife waited expectantly every moment for him to arrive. Eventually, she became grief-stricken and started to cry. Because of her grief, the roof of the study hall collapsed and her husband was killed.

Hence, while it is meritorious for a man to ascend in degrees of holiness, he should not do it at his wife's expense. Rather they should rise up the ladder of holiness together.