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INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of creation, man was commanded to leave his parents and cleave to his wife, thus escaping the solitary life so antithetical to his very being.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הָיְתָה הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:
עַל כֵּן יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ אֶת אָבִיו וְאֶת אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד:

G-d said, 'It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a compatible helper for him.

A man shall therefore leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

(Bereishit 2:18,24).

This union has a dual purpose.

First, it provides companionship. More than simply ridding a person of their loneliness, companionship creates a space for the individual to give and (consequently) to love. Indeed, as Rav Dessler writes, love can *only* be achieved through wholehearted and altruistic giving and generosity.¹

Secondly, marriage is the framework within which man is commanded to procreate and, thereby, to populate the world.

1 *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, vol. 1, pp. 36–39.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ:

G-d created man in His image. In the image of G-d, He created him; male and female He created them.

G-d blessed them. G-d said to them, 'Be fertile and become many; fill the world and conquer it.

(Bereishit 1:27,28)

As with every facet of a Jewish life, this union is governed by the intricate details of halacha – the laws of *niddah*. These laws ultimately function for the good of the couple as they continually imbue the marriage with renewed freshness and vitality. Furthermore, the pleasure derived from marital intimacy is heightened and magnified by the abstinence and refrain demanded by the halacha.²

היה רבי מאיר אומר: מפני מה אמרה תורה נדה לשבעה – מפני שרגיל בה, וקץ בה, אמרה תורה: תהא טמאה שבעה ימים, כדי שתהא חביבה על בעלה כשעת כניסתה לחופה.

Rabbi Meir would say: For what reason does the Torah say that a menstruating woman is prohibited from engaging in intercourse with her husband for seven days?

It is because if a woman were permitted to engage in intercourse with her husband all the time, her husband would become accustomed to her, and would eventually be repulsed by her. Therefore, the Torah says that a menstruating woman shall be ritually impure for seven days, during which she is prohibited from engaging in intercourse with her husband. Thus, when she becomes pure again, she will be as dear to her husband as at the time when she entered the wedding canopy with him.

(Niddah 31b)

However, these laws can be exceedingly challenging at times. For instance, the Midrash relates the story of a couple who were prohibited from being together on their wedding night.

² See Rabbi Avraham Peretz Friedman, *Marital Intimacy*, pp. 53–55.

אדם נושא אשה בן ל' שנה בן מ' שנה, משמוציא יציאותיו הוא בא לזקק לה, והיא אומרת לו כשושנה אדומה ראיתי, ופורש ממנה מיד.

מי גרם לו שלא יקרב לה? איזה כותל ברזל יש ביניהם, ואיזה עמוד ברזל ביניהם, אי זה נחש נשכו, איזה עקרב עקצו שלא יקרב לה?
דברי תורה שרכין כשושנה.

It often happens that a man takes a wife when he is thirty or forty years of age. When after going through great expense, he wishes to associate with her, and she says to him, 'I have seen a rose-red speck [of menstrual blood].' He immediately recoils... What made him keep away from her? Was there an iron fence, did a serpent bite him, did a scorpion sting him? Only the words of the Torah... which are as soft as a hedge of roses...

(Shir HaShirim Raba 7:3)

In commenting on this Midrash, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik brings to life the immense tension and heroism involved in the submission of human desires to halacha.

Bride and bridegroom are young, physically strong and passionately in love with each other. Both have patiently waited for this rendezvous to take place. Just one more step and their love would have been fulfilled, a vision realized. Suddenly the bride and groom make a movement of recoil... [this] heroic act did not take place in the presence of jubilating crowds; no bards will sing of these two modest, humble young people... it happened in the sheltered privacy of their home, in the stillness of the night.³

This beautiful idea of the Rav is explained further by Rabbi Reuven Zeigler:⁴

According to the Rav, G-d does not desire that man live an otherworldly ascetic existence, nor does He wish for man to adopt an ethereal and abstract spirituality. Rather, G-d wants man to lead a full and enjoyable natural life. However, he must instill it with meaning and direction, thus grounding his spirituality in his concrete life.

3 "Catharsis," pp. 45-46.

4 "Sanctity and the Body - The Catharsis of Physical Existence" - etzion.org.il.

For example, if unrestrained and unredeemed, the sexual act can be brutish and dehumanizing. Man succumbs to a frenzy of primitive passions and treats his sexual partners as things, as mere means to fulfill his desire. However, within the framework of marriage (and at the permitted times), sexuality becomes something beautiful and sacred. Hedged in by prohibitions, it turns into an act conforming to G-d's will.

Between husband and wife, it expresses love and commitment (which are also desired by G-d). Furthermore, it actually becomes a vehicle for fulfilling mitzvot, such as procreation (*pru u'rvu*) and the obligation of conjugal relations (*onah*). Thus, one's physical life becomes the fountainhead of *kedushah*.

In other words, the submission itself is what redeems the sexual act from its "brutish and dehumanizing" potential, elevating it to an expression of "love and commitment," simultaneously both "beautiful and sacred."⁵

As such, when issuing halachic guidance in this realm, the halachic authority, or "*posek*," must be immensely sensitive to both the needs of the individuals who seek his assistance and to the requirements of the halacha. In charting his course, it is imperative he avoid the relevant prohibitions as these can be extremely severe.⁶ Equally, the *posek* must not adopt unnecessary stringencies; these too can carry grave consequences,⁷ as is evident from the fact that the Gemara holds Yehoshua accountable for unnecessarily forbidding relations before the battle of Yericho.

דאמר רבי אבא בר פפא: לא נענש יהושע אלא בשביל שביטל את ישראל לילה אחת מפריה ורביה.

Rabbi Abba bar Pappa said: Yehoshua was punished only because he had prevented the Jewish people from fulfilling the commandment of being fruitful and multiplying for one night.

(Eiruvin 63b)

5 Ibid.

6 See Vayikra 8:18.

7 Note that this consideration is still extremely pertinent even when procreation is not relevant; a needless stringency can lead to marital strife and tension. For practical applications of these concerns see Responsa *Yabia Omer*, E.H. 10:24 and Y.D. 5:17.

Such a task demands great dedication and exertion. This is exemplified by David HaMelech who, though he was King of Israel, describes his primary endeavor as finding ways to permit a wife to her husband.

כך אמר דוד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבונו של עולם, לא חסיד אני? שכל מלכי מזרח ומערב יושבים באגודות אגודות בכבודם, ואני ידי מלוכלכות בדם ובשפיר ובשליא כדי לטהר אשה לבעלה.

David said the following before the Holy One, Blessed be He:

Master of the Universe, am I not pious? For all of the kings of the East and the West sit in groups befitting their honored status, but as for me my hands are soiled with blood, embryos and afterbirths which I examine in order to permit a woman to her husband.

(Berachot 4a)

It was with these considerations in mind that this book was written on the practical laws of *niddah*. In the following pages, the aim is to present couples with an uncompromising picture of the halacha, drawing from the Gemara and the unbroken chain of *poskim*, which reaches to our very generation. At the same time, within the boundaries of the halacha, the goal is to try to be as sensitive as possible to the needs of the couple, especially in light of the trials that they may face in the modern age.

It is important to note that in the realm of *Hilchot Niddah*, as in most areas of halacha, there are a wealth of different opinions that one may follow. The positions stated in this work are the opinions I recommend based on the teachings of my rabbis and teachers, my understanding of the halachic literature, and my experience from guiding couples in this area, but clearly there are other legitimate opinions in this area that are not always mentioned in the book.

It is my fervent prayer that this work will achieve its goal of presenting the halachot of *niddah* as a beautiful hedge of roses. At times perhaps challenging, but always preserving the couple's physical and emotional relationship in absolute *kedushah* and *taharah*, so that they will remain as beloved to each other as when they first entered the *chuppah*.⁸

8 Cf. *Niddah* 31b.