

I

Starting a Conversation about Safe and Healthy Relationships and Jewish Sexuality

Before embarking on a conversation about Jewish sexual practices, ethics, and values, it is important to set some ground rules and understand our goals. First, we must acknowledge that Judaism places tremendous value in a good marriage. From the Torah to the Talmud and into the modern era, Jewish texts view marriage as a covenantal bond of mutual love and respect, marked by a formal commitment of monogamy in which both partners have responsibilities towards one another. Throughout *halakhic* history, Jewish marriage has been portrayed as a relationship that is expressed in the emotional, psychological, and economic realms in addition to the sexual realm. The *halakhot* surrounding marriage seek to serve these goals. And, in order to achieve a good marriage, we must establish the basic parameters of a healthy and safe relationship, as this will often be the entry point for conversations about sexuality. Second, it is important to look at two sources – one which expounds upon the Jewish value of *tzniut* and the other which argues for serious sexual education as a part of Torah learning – that must be held in tandem. We value *kedushah*, holiness, and, thus, it is essential to ensure that what follows in this guide is a reflection of that principle. At the same time, what we learn from the scolding of Rav Kahane to his teacher Rav is that sexuality should not be taboo or secret as it is a fundamental aspect of Jewish life, learning, and meaning.

MACHON SARAH

A Jewish perspective on marriage and healthy relationships – a jumping-off point

1

“Marriage is a Song for Two Voices in Harmony”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks • June 10, 2000

FOR MOST OF US life is just a long journey into the unknown. Rarely do we know in advance what the next bend will bring. The only certainty we had [Rabbi Sacks and his wife] was that we would be there for one another, and it was enough, more than enough. We knew – and surely that knowledge is what marriage means – that we would find strength in the unspoken presence of love, come what may.

That made the hardest moments bearable. Looking back, you realise the power of that slender bond by which two people pledge themselves to one another, turning love into loyalty and a source of new life. We have paid a heavy price for misunderstanding one of the key words of the Hebrew Bible, *emunah*, usually translated as “faith”. Because the Bible entered Western civilisation through the medium of Greek, and because to the Greeks the highest vocation was the pursuit of knowledge, we have for centuries thought of faith as a kind of knowledge, intuitive, visionary perhaps, but cognitive. On this view, to have faith is to know, or believe, certain facts about the world.

That is not the Jewish view at all. *Emunah* is about relationship. It is that bond by which two persons, each respecting the freedom and integrity of the other, pledge themselves by an oath of loyalty to stay together, to do what neither can do alone. It means, not “faith” but faithfulness, the commitment to be there for one another especially in hard times. In human terms, the best example is marriage. In religious terms, it is what we call a covenant, of which the classic instance is the pledge between God and an ancient people, Israel, on Mount Sinai 33 centuries ago.

Faith is a marriage. Marriage is an act of faith. So, at any rate, the Prophets of Israel believed. To this day, Jewish men, as they bind the strap of their phylacteries round their finger like a wedding ring, recite the lovely words of God quoted by the Prophet Hosea: “I will betroth you to me in faithfulness and you shall know God.”

I find it hard to say how sad it is that marriage is in decline. It was and is the single greatest source of beauty in ordinary lives – moral beauty, a song scored for two voices in complex harmony. Marriage is the supreme example of a religious concept translated into simple human terms. Faith is the redemption of human loneliness through the sacred bond of love.



- How does Rabbi Sacks define *emunah*?
- How is marriage an act of faith?
- What values are an essential part of a good marriage?

2

Characteristics of Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships

Excerpted from youth.gov

RESPECT FOR BOTH ONESELF and others is a key characteristic of healthy relationships. In contrast, in unhealthy relationships, one partner tries to exert control and power over the other physically, sexually, and/or emotionally.

Healthy Relationships

Healthy relationships share certain characteristics that teens should be taught to expect. They include:

- *Mutual respect.* Respect means that each person values who the other is and understands the other person’s boundaries.
- *Trust.* Partners should place trust in each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt.
- *Honesty.* Honesty builds trust and strengthens the relationship.

- *Compromise.* In a dating relationship, each partner does not always get his or her way. Each should acknowledge different points of view and be willing to give and take.
- *Individuality.* Neither partner should have to compromise who he/she is, and his/her identity should not be based on a partner's. Each should continue seeing his or her friends and doing the things he/she loves. Each should be supportive of his/her partner wanting to pursue new hobbies or make new friends.
- *Good communication.* Each partner should speak honestly and openly to avoid miscommunication. If one person needs to sort out his or her feelings first, the other partner should respect those wishes and wait until he or she is ready to talk.
- *Anger control.* We all get angry, but how we express it can affect our relationships with others. Anger can be handled in healthy ways such as taking a deep breath, counting to ten, or talking it out.
- *Fighting fair.* Everyone argues at some point, but those who are fair, stick to the subject, and avoid insults are more likely to come up with a possible solution. Partners should take a short break away from each other if the discussion gets too heated.
- *Problem solving.* Dating partners can learn to solve problems and identify new solutions by breaking a problem into small parts or by talking through the situation.
- *Understanding.* Each partner should take time to understand what the other might be feeling.
- *Self-confidence.* When dating partners have confidence in themselves, it can help their relationships with others. It shows that they are calm and comfortable enough to allow others to express their opinions without forcing their own opinions on them.
- *Being a role model.* By embodying what respect means, partners can inspire each other, friends, and family to also behave in a respectful way.
- *Healthy sexual relationship.* Dating partners engage in a sexual rela-

tionship that both are comfortable with, and neither partner feels pressured or forced to engage in sexual activity that is outside his or her comfort zone or without consent.

Unhealthy Relationships

Unhealthy relationships are marked by characteristics such as disrespect and control. It is important for youth to be able to recognize signs of unhealthy relationships before they escalate. Some characteristics of unhealthy relationships include:

- *Control.* One dating partner makes all the decisions and tells the other what to do, what to wear, or who to spend time with. He or she is unreasonably jealous, and/or tries to isolate the other partner from his or her friends and family.
- *Hostility.* One dating partner picks a fight with or antagonizes the other dating partner. This may lead to one dating partner changing his or her behavior in order to avoid upsetting the other.
- *Dishonesty.* One dating partner lies to or keeps information from the other. One dating partner steals from the other.
- *Disrespect.* One dating partner makes fun of the opinions and interests of the other partner or destroys something that belongs to the partner.
- *Dependence.* One dating partner feels that he or she “cannot live without” the other. He or she may threaten to do something drastic if the relationship ends.
- *Intimidation.* One dating partner tries to control aspects of the other's life by making the other partner fearful or timid. One dating partner may attempt to keep his or her partner from friends and family or threaten violence or a break-up.
- *Physical violence.* One partner uses force to get his or her way (such as hitting, slapping, grabbing, or shoving).
- *Sexual violence.* One dating partner pressures or forces the other into sexual activity against his or her will or without consent. [Sexual coercion or manipulation of any kind, even if not explicitly violent.]

It is important to educate youth about the value of respect and the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships before they start to date. Youth may not be equipped with the necessary skills to develop and maintain healthy relationships, and may not know how to break up in an appropriate way when necessary. Maintaining open lines of communication may help them form healthy relationships and recognize the signs of unhealthy relationships, thus preventing the violence before it starts.



- Is there anything on either list that surprises you?
- Is there anything missing from either list?
- Do you think Judaism would encourage the same values as are expounded in this source? Why or why not?

In addition to the values above, Judaism adds one more key element to relationships: kedushah

3

Tzniut – A Universal Concept

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

THE “RAV,” AS he was known, offers a very trenchant insight: *kedushah* thrives in *he’elam*, in hiddenness, in obscurity, not *be-giluy*, in openness. (Indeed, the Torah’s euphemism for illicit sexual intercourse is *giluy arayot*, the exposure or baring to public view of nakedness.) These two concepts of hiddenness and openness are most relevant to *kedushah*, which flourishes only in the hidden.

For instance, the holiest place in the world in Judaism is the *Kodesh Ha-kadashim*, the Holy of Holies in the *Beit Hamikdash*, the Temple in Jerusalem. The holiest person in the world during the service in the Temple was the *Kohen Ha-gadol*, the High Priest. And the holiest day of the

year is Yom Kippur. No one may enter the inner sanctum of the Holy of Holies except the *Kohen Ha-gadol* on Yom Kippur. Here we have a converging of three forms of *kedushah*: the *kedushah* of place, the *kedushah* of time, and the *kedushah* of personality – only once a year, by one person, in one place. One would imagine that if *kedushah* is so important, we should insist on masses of Jews coming crowding the Temple with a great deal of fanfare, marching to the *Kodesh Ha-kadashim* to participate in this phenomenal concentration of holiness. Yet that is not the case at all because *kedushah* does not prosper in the presence of masses. It does not thrive under the gaze of many, in openness, in revelation, in exposure. Rather, it is the opposite of exposure – hiddenness – which is the natural environment of *kedushah*. Holiness grows in the unobtrusive recesses of the soul, not on the stage of one’s public persona.

...When there is too much exposure, holiness is extinguished. In this sense, *tzniut* is an indication that a human being possesses a *neshamah*, a soul, and the soul is an aspect of *kedushah*. *Tzniut* is therefore an acknowledgement that the human personality, which includes the human body, partakes of *kedushah*. It is not just a biological organism, the last of a line of a long evolution from some self-replicating organic molecule. It is not simply an accident. Man may be an animal, but man is also an angel because he has the *tzelem Elokim*, the divine spark; he possesses *kedushah*.



- What is Rav Soloveitchik’s understanding of *tzniut*?
- How are *tzniut* and *kedushah* related?
- Why is it important to establish this as a fundamental value before embarking on a conversation about sexuality?
- How can we have a conversation about Judaism and sexuality in a way that reflects this value?

Talmudic precedent for the importance of sex education

4

Talmud Bavli Berakhot 62a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות סב עמוד א

רב כהנא על, גנא תותיה פורייה דרב. שמעיה דשח ושחק ועשה צרכיו. אמר ליה: דמי פומיה דאבא כדלא שריף תבשילא. אמר ליה: כהנא, הכא את? פוק, דלאו ארח ארעא. אמר ליה: תורה היא, וללמוד אני צריך.

ON A SIMILAR NOTE, the Gemara relates that **Rav Kahana entered and lay beneath Rav's bed. He heard Rav chatting and laughing with his wife, and seeing to his needs** (i.e., having relations with her). Rav Kahana said to Rav: **The mouth of Abba [Rav] is like one who has never eaten a cooked dish** (i.e., his behavior was lustful). Rav said to him: **Kahana, you are here? Leave, as this is an undesirable mode of behavior.** Rav Kahana said to him: **It is Torah, and I must learn.** (Sefaria)



- What do you think R. Kahana hoped to learn from observing his teacher engaged in sexual intimacy?
- Is intellectual or even religious curiosity a justification for R. Kahana's behavior? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the proper way of acquiring information about sex?
- What do you do when you desire knowledge or understanding but don't know the proper way of attaining it?
- What do you think R. Kahana might have learned from what he witnessed?
- In this story, R. Kahana gets the last word. What is R. Kahana trying to teach Rav about sexual education?
- Why is sexual education a part of Torah study?

II

The Ethics of Sex

When having a conversation about sex and sexuality in Judaism, it is all too easy for the discussion to revolve around the negative discourse of violation and *halakhic* red lines, around obedience and disobedience. And while it is very important to know the practical *halakhot*, if they are the only focus, we lose the opportunity to actively develop as sexual moral agents who have strong ethical compasses grounded in Jewish values. Sexuality in most of its expressions involves significant ethical considerations and decisions that can get lost if we do not highlight them consistently as we develop as ethical beings. The theme we want to return to again and again throughout this resource guide is that Judaism can help us craft a sexual ethic as part of our personal and religious identity. In this section, we will consider the sources of morality and how it is communicated, why and how sexuality and morality are so intimately connected, and why, no matter how challenging, one must do the work of knowing oneself.

*Judaism can help us
craft a sexual ethic
as part of our personal
and religious identity*

1

Excerpt from Quora

IT'S NOT A big deal to ...to engage in any of the other physical acts people call "sex." It's incredibly commonplace. It's like eating, sneezing, yawning, chatting... It's an instinctual, biological behavior, common to our species and millions of other species.

-
- What message about sex is this excerpt trying to communicate?
 - Do you agree with these comparisons? Why or why not?
 - What does this source imply about ethics?
 - How do you think Judaism would respond to this idea?

An understanding of the ethics of human relationships

2

The Politics of Hope*Rabbi Jonathan Sacks*

MORALITY, LIKE LANGUAGE, is a social phenomenon. It is something we enter, not something we make. The family and its concentric circles of community are where we learn to speak, to share, to love, to trust, where we discover where we came from and of what history we are a part. They are where we acquire the arts of relationship without which we cannot survive for long.

-
- How does one develop a sense of morality?
 - What does Rabbi Sacks mean by "the arts of relationship"?
 - How would this apply to a "sexual ethic"?
 - Do you have a sense of your sexual ethic? Why or why not? Can you articulate it?
 - Who should be guiding conversations about sexual morality?

3

**Talmudic Rereadings:
Toward a Modern Orthodox Sexual Ethic***Dr. Jennie Rosenfeld*

ETHICS IS ABOUT a real respect for the other person even when circumstances and differences in rank and station might have us think otherwise—each and every person is created in the image of God and that fact overrides all others. Ethics is about treating the other as a subject and not as an object—the image of God within elevates the status of each individual. Ethics is about open communication, about giving a person the answers they deserve to be able to move forward in life—our words have the power to make or break other people who are intimately connected with us. These ethics may seem obvious or intuitive; however, they are also Jewish and talmudic, as they have been gleaned from that context (300-301).

-
- What is the difference between treating someone as an object and a subject?
 - How is communication connected to ethics?
 - How does communication's relationship to ethics manifest in the realm of sexuality?
 - How can ethics be both "intuitive" and "Jewish"?

**Does the world really need ethics
when it comes to sex?**

4

Talk to Me First
Deborah Roffman

QUESTION 1: WHAT Does Sexuality Have to Do with Morality?

All moral questions deal fundamentally with our obligations to our fellow human beings and to ourselves. In planning a lesson last school year around the concept of ethical obligation for my high school classes, I thought to ask the following question: Suppose there are two people who hardly know each other who decide to engage in sexual intercourse, totally consensually and with appropriate kinds of physical protection. What are their personal obligations to each other?

The majority of the students, not terribly surprisingly, essentially answered, “Well, none.” But – and this is the unusual part – when I went on to press them for an alternative point of view, if only for the sake of argument, they quickly became annoyed: “Hey, they’re okay with it, they’re each doing what they want to do, and that’s that.”

Well, that worked well, I said to myself, as I scanned my mind for another way to ask the question.

“Okay,” I said, “let’s change the scenario. Suppose there are two strangers who get on the train from Baltimore to NYC and end up sitting next to one another for two and a half hours. What are *their* obligations to each other?” The students, again, pretty much agreed: “None.” But I pressed them further with this one, and with only a simple prompt or two, the answers just kept on coming: Well, you should say “excuse me” and be careful not to step on their foot if you get up to go to the bathroom; keep your elbows from crossing the center line between the seats, and your stuff away from their feet; if you talk on your cell, keep your voice low... maybe you could offer to throw out their trash when you get up to throw out yours...”

“Hmm,” I said. “Here’s what I hear you saying: There’s a certain level of thoughtfulness and care people automatically owe a stranger they’re sitting next to on a train, but not someone they get (at least partially) na-

ked with and share intimate parts of their body. That’s an interesting contrast. I wonder why the contradiction. What are your ideas?” (141-142).



- How would YOU answer Roffman’s question at the end?
- According to Roffman, what does sexuality have to do with ethics?
- Did the students’ responses to either of Roffman’s questions surprise you?
- Why do you think Roffman’s students came to such different conclusions about the ethics of interacting with a stranger on a train versus with an intimate hookup partner?

**On the importance of self-knowledge
in developing a strong sexual ethic**

5

Sex and Sensibility:
The Thinking Parent’s Guide to Talking Sense about Sex
Deborah Roffman

HUMAN SEXUALITY is essentially not just about body parts and the way they fit together but is about the thinking, feeling, valuing, experiencing, growing, changing, decision-making, relationship-building people who are attached to them... Both as an intellectual construct and within the scope of human experience, it is hugely complex and interwoven and infused deeply with personal and interpersonal meaning (93-94).



- According to Roffman, how might we define “sexuality?”
- What does she mean that sex is “an intellectual construct”?
- What implications does her definition have for a discussion about sexuality and “personal and interpersonal meaning”?

6

Ritva's Commentary on Kiddushin 81
 חידושי הריטב"א על קידושין פא

הכל לפי יראת שמים. וכן ההלכה שהכל לפי מה שאדם מכיר בעצמו, אם ראוי לו לעשות הרחקה ליצרו עשה. ואפלו להסתכל בבגדי צבעונים של אשה אסור. ואם מכיר בעצמו שיצרו נכנע וכפוף לו ואינו מעלה טינא כלל, מתר לו להסתכל ולדבר עם הערוה ולשאול בשלום אשת איש... אלא שאין ראוי להקל בזה אלא לחסיד גדול שמכיר ביצרו. ולא כל תלמידי חכמים בוטחים ביוצריהם ואשרי מי שגובר ביצרו ועמלו בתורה.

ALL IS ACCORDING to reverence of Heaven. And similarly, the *halakhah* is that everything goes according to the extent of one's self knowledge. If one knows it is befitting for him to distance himself from his inclination, he should do so. And then, even to look at the colored clothing of a woman is prohibited. If one knows within himself that his inclination is subject to him, and does not tempt him, he is permitted to look at and talk to one of the *arayot*, and to ask another's wife how she fares... However, one should not be lenient about this, unless he is a great, righteous person who thoroughly understands his inclination, and not even all *talmidei hakhamim* know their own inclinations. Fortunate is he who reigns over his inclination and labors in Torah.



- Are you cognizant of "מכיר," your "יצר," your personal inclinations and drives?
- How does one's self-knowledge regarding sexuality impact one's overall sexual ethic?
- Why is it important for reflection and self-knowledge of one's sexual self to be an ongoing process?
- How can you know if your sexual ethic is "right"?

III

Sex Positive: Sexual Intimacy as an Essential Component of Marriage

Very often, when students are asked what they know about Jewish sexual ethics and values, they answer with a *halakhah* that they all seem to have heard: that Judaism forbids sex before marriage. But can that really be it? Can everything be boiled down to a single prohibitive statement? To many people, the experience of *halakhah*, unfortunately, is that it constantly forbids things. Especially when it comes to sex, one of life's greatest pleasures, the assumption is that Judaism goes out of its way to create as much restriction as possible. Thus it is important to highlight the sources that establish a framework in which Judaism is "sex positive," not in the ways that this term is often understood today, in which a variety of consensual sexual partners and exploration are encouraged, but in the sense that Judaism appreciates that sexual life is integral to one's greatest relationship and hence a significant experience. For that reason, Judaism does not advocate celibacy or asceticism but rather encourages romantic love and a pleasurable and meaningful sex life as integral to marriage.



1

+Bereishit 2:24
בראשית ב:כד

על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו וידבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד

THEREFORE MAN should leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and they shall become as one flesh.

- What verb is used to describe the relationship of a man and woman?
- What does this choice of verb teach us about sex?

2

Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships
Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

WE KNOW THAT wherever there is erotic love, the lovers are lonesome for each other even when sexual desire is silent. They enjoy each other's company. They like to converse, meditate, dream and rejoice together. "Ve-ha-adam yada et Havah ishto, Adam knew his wife Havah" (Genesis 4:1); "va-yeda Adam od et ishto, Adam knew his wife again" (Gen. 4:25). The Hebrew term *va-yeda* in its sense of knowing each other sexually connotes the metaphysical element involved in the sexual function. The term *va-yeda* points toward an act of cognition or recognition. The "I" recognizes the personal existence in the thou. The latter becomes real to the I.

- Why is the biblical verb for sexual intercourse "to know"?
- What does that particular verb teach us about the relationship of sexual partners?
- What does this idea contribute to our understanding of Judaism's approach to sex within marriage?

3

Iggeret Hakodesh
Ascribed to the Ramban
אגרת הקודש המיוחסת לרמב"ן

פרק ב

דע כי חבור זה הוא ענין קדוש ונקי כשיהיה הדבר כפי מה שראוי ובזמן הראוי ובכונה הנכונה. ואל יחשב אדם כי בחבור הראוי יש גנאי וכעור ח"ו. שהחבור הראוי נקרא ידיעה, ולא לחנם נקרא כן כאמור (שמואל א:א) "וידע אלקנה את חנה אשתו."

אבל כל בעלי התורה מאמינים שהשם ברא את הכל כפי מה שגזרה חכמתו, ולא ברא דבר שיהיה גנאי או כעור, שאם יאמר שהחבור הוא דבר של גנאי, הנה כלי המשגל הם כלי הגנות, והרי השי"ת בראם במאמרו דכתיב "הוא עשך ויכננך" (דברים לב:ו) ואז"ל במסכת חלין שבב"ה קב"ה כונניות באדם. ובמדרש קהלת אמרו אשר כבר עשוהו מלמד שהוא ובית דינו נמנו על כל אבר ואבר והושיבוהו על כנו.

Chapter 2

KNOW THAT sexual union is a holy and pure matter when it takes place in the correct way at the correct time and with the correct intent. A person should not think that the correct sexual union has any element that is shameful or dirty, God forbid! For correct sexual union is called "knowledge," and it was not for naught that it was called this, as it says, "And Elkana knew Chana his wife..."

But all who are of our Torah believe that God created all according to His wisdom, and He did not create anything that is shameful or disgusting. For were one to say that sexual union is a shameful matter, then the sexual organs are shameful things, and behold God was the one Who created them, as it says, "He created you and established you," and the Rabbis have interpreted this to mean that He has created every organ of man on its proper foundation.

- What is the Iggeret HaKodesh's approach to sex?
- The Iggeret HaKodesh seems to be responding to thinkers who did, in fact,

take a more ascetic approach to sex. How could two such different approaches emerge in Jewish thought?

- What does the Iggeret HaKodeesh mean by the “correct” way, time, and intent?
- Is his meaning of “correct” surprising to you?
- What notion is he trying to debunk?

4

“On Marriage: Relationship and Relations”

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein

OUR COMMITMENT to sexuality, properly sanctified, redeemed and redeeming, does not derive from libidinous passion, but is, rather, grounded in profound spiritual instincts – upon our recognition that “God saw all that He created and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31), on the one hand, and our quest for meaningful interpersonal commingling, on the other. It is, for us, not merely an instrument for parallel intense enjoyment, nor a vehicle for reciprocal consumption. It is, rather, a fundamental component in a comprehensive relationship – at once, both itself an aspect of that relationship and a means toward molding its totality. This is our honed perception of “cleaving to his wife that they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) – partly carnal, in one sense, and yet powerfully existential on the other.

- How does Rav Aharon Lichtenstein understand sexual union as grounded in “spiritual instincts”?
- What does “not merely an instrument for parallel intense enjoyment, nor a vehicle for reciprocal consumption” mean, and what is the difference between these two ideas about the sexual relationship?
- Rav Lichtenstein notes that the sexual relationship in itself is important, while also serving a higher goal. How does the sexual relationship help “mold the totality” of a marriage relationship?
- What does this source teach us about Judaism’s understanding of sex and sexual ethics?

5

Shemot 21:10

שמות כ"א:י

שְׂאֵרָהּ כְּסוּתָהּ וְעִנְתָּהּ לֹא יִגְרַע

...HE SHALL NOT diminish her sustenance, her clothing, or her marital relations.

- Why do you think the Torah equates the necessity of a sexual relationship with the necessity of food and clothing for one’s spouse?
- What can we learn about what marriage requires by the inclusion of “sustenance and clothing,” more mundane elements of care in a relationship, in addition to the more intimate “marital relations”?
- What does this source tell us about the importance of maintaining a healthy sexual relationship within a marriage?

6

Peninei Halacha, Simhat ha-Bayit U’virkhato, Chapter 1

פניני הלכה שמחת הבית וברכתו פרק א

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

THE ESSENCE OF Their union is expressed through the *mitzvah* of *onah* (marital sexual relations), through which they become completely united, in body and spirit, making their marriage whole. The *mitzvah* must be fulfilled with passion and ecstasy, the husband trying to bring his wife as much joy and pleasure as possible, and the wife trying to bring her husband as much joy and pleasure as possible. For this reason, the *mitzvah* is referred to as *simhat onah*, the joy of marital sexual relations. There is no greater joy in this world; it is a foretaste of the euphoria of the World to Come.

- Why is the *mitzvah* of *onah* crucial for a good marriage?
- What does this source teach us about Judaism’s understanding of sex and sexual ethics?
- What does Rav Melamed imply about the ethics underlying sexual acts?

7

Peninei Halacha, Simhat ha-Bayit U'virkhato Chapter 3

פניני הלכה שמחת הבית וברכתו פרק ג

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

THERE ARE TWO LEVELS in the sanctity of marriage. The basic level is when a couple upholds their marriage vows, remaining faithful and not betraying each other. The higher level is when a couple also tries to deepen their love, makes efforts to please and satisfy each other to the best of their ability, and intend to have children and raise them for a life of Torah and *mitzvot*. The more mindful and intentional they are, the higher they rise through the levels of sanctity... The two levels of marriage reflect the two meanings of the word “*kadosh*” (“sacred”): a) separate and distinct, and b) transcendent, eternal, and divine. When a marriage is at the basic level, the husband and wife separate themselves from all the other men and women in the world. When a marriage is at the higher level, the couple’s intimate connection reveals the spark that is divine, eternal, and transcendent.



- What is the meaning of *kedushah* in a marriage?
- According to Rav Melamed, how is *kedushah* fully achieved in a marriage?

