If You Give Me My Share: Partnership in the Laws of *Niddah*

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**The laws of *niddah* are taught by women and stem from the woman's body, but they directly impact the lives of both partners.**

It is a commonly accepted view that the laws of *niddah* are entrusted to women and passed down from mother to daughter, from friend to friend, and from teacher to student. Therefore, these laws are identified as a feminine domain and are sometimes even perceived as the exclusive province of women.

There are men who initially avoid studying this field, except for acquiring a general acquaintance with theoretical aspects, based on the perception that a man should not engage in or rule on “women’s” issues. Paradoxically, though, there is no concept of *niddah* without a man.
This set of laws is relevant to both partners, and in the verses from which these laws are derived the commandment is directed specifically at the man, not the woman.

Photo: Tamar Herzberg-Shosiov

**The Body Is Feminine, the Commitment Is Mutual.**

With marriage, the laws of *niddah* become part of the lives of both the wife and the husband. Even though the primary halakhic practice is incumbent upon the woman, since her body is the site where the physiological processes occur, the obligation of the *mitzvah* is inherently tied to married life.

The level of closeness and distance between spouses is directly influenced by the laws of *niddah*, and there are women who expect their partners to show interest in the day-to-day details: the precise time of their menstrual cycle, the physical changes in the woman’s body, and the implications of all these. As with any matter that impacts the lives of both partners, observing the laws of *niddah* too deserve shared involvement and partnership. Involvement is created through study, reading, and the accumulation of knowledge, as well as through conversation and partnership in experiencing and navigating the practical and emotional significance of the different stages of the month.

Bottom of Form

**Involvement, not Interference**

A constructive attitude and healthy interest stem from care, mutual respect, and complete trust. A relationship characterized by supervision or interrogation indicates a lack of trust and harms the marital relationship. It can create a sense of harm and an atmosphere of doubt and suspicion. Involvement does not mean interference. It is important to be mindful of this, especially if there are differences in halakhic expectations between you, or if you are observing the laws of *niddah* within a mixed observant-and-nonobservant relationship.

A healthy marital relationship grows from a sense of complete partnership and is based on the ability of the couple to rely on and trust each other. The husband’s expertise and knowledge do not come at the expense of the wife’s expertise and knowledge, but rather alongside them, as a gesture of partnership and support. A shared bearing of responsibility for observing the *mitzvah*'s laws greatly eases the burden of that observance and provides not only stability, order, and a positive feeling in daily life, but also significant emotional support for the wife. It reduces the tension around observing the laws of *niddah* and allows her to perform various tasks with a sense of well-being and tranquility.

The spouse becomes a listening ear and the ultimate partner in any situation that requires halakhic consultation or deliberation. This is a deep partnership of the couple in the path of *Torah* and *mitzvot*, upon which they build the foundations of their home. That partnership brings holiness into marital life, enhancing the sense of covenant and the cohesiveness of their relationship.

We began with the paradox that the laws of *niddah* are perceived as a women’s domain yet depend on a relationship with a man, and we will conclude with another paradox, one that is encouraging and instills optimism: the laws of *niddah* indeed create physical distance between the couple, but emotional closeness can actually be strengthened because of them. Marital communication, care, and partnership in observing the laws of *niddah* can bridge the physical distance. The couple’s choice to observe these halachic guidelines out of mutual respect can ease their shared journey in upholding the halachic commandments.

Photo: S. Hermann & F. Richter

You can listen with a touch of humor to Aharon Razel's song that connects the joy of marriage and the celebration of a couple’s union into one. The song, as I heard directly from Aharon Razel, describes the idea from Bereshit Rabbah that “there should be no man without a woman, nor any woman without a man, nor either without the Divine Presence.” This is usually understood as referring simple to providence provided by the Divine Presence (*shekhina*) itself, but for this to be realized, each couple must recognize the entire realm of the “man” and the “woman.” Without this, how can there be a complete connection? Just like all the ingredients that need to be combined when making coffee, without the bitterness of the coffee and the sweetness of the sugar canceling each other out, together they create a new flavor.

Photo: Mae Mu