



REVISED &
EXPANDED!

*Chachmos Nashim
Bansah Beisah*

A Guide for the Jewish Wife

Michtav Haskama

תפארת גדליה



From the Desk of

RABBI AHRON LOPIANSKY

Rosh HaYeshiva

ד

סבת תשפ"ג

ישנם ענינים הנוגעים ליסוד עיני שלום בית, אשר רגישותם וצניעותם לכאורה מחייבים שדברים אלו ימסרו בע"פ וברמיזה. ברם, דא עקא, אשר בגלל ריבוי הציבור, ויחסית, מיעוט האנשים המוסמכים העוסקים בענינים אלו, ישנה הרבה בורות וידע מקוטע בענינים אלו, הגורמים הרבה עגמת נפש, ומאיימים על שלימות הבית.

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לקקטת היגיון החסון המזקני
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Chachmos Nashim Bansah Beisah Revised & Expanded

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¹ <https://dinonline.org/2010/09/05/altering-a-song-for-production/>,
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Part One
Relationship
Dynamic

Key to the Home

Harei at mekudeshes li. Such words; such incredibly powerful words! Which Jewish girl's heart is not moved by the mere mention of these words, let alone hearing them for real at a *chasunah*? And when it is her very own *chasunah*, the power defies description. What girl doesn't dream, even in her youngest years, about that longed-for day when she will have her very own unique, special moment under the *chupah*? There is something so sublime about it that it is hard - perhaps impossible - to capture it in words. The excitement, the anticipation; the rush of feeling and sense of fulfillment enveloped in the tangible sense of *kedusha*. A glorious rainbow of emotions.

Standing at the very root and base of this exquisite symphony of beauty is one word: *kedusha*. It is the awareness that this is not just about personal fulfillment or something we do because that's the societal norm and there really is no other choice; rather it is something that carries within it the most sublime purpose and meaning. To forge a true *achdus* with a husband, to create a dwelling place for the *Shechina* – to build a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael*.

It is the deeply rooted awareness of the singularly unique and special nature of each Jewish home that is firmly anchored in the innermost

chambers of the *Bas Yisrael*'s consciousness that moves her to such powerful emotion upon hearing those soul-stirring words: *harei at mekudeshes li...*

Every Jewish woman is acutely aware that her acceptance of that ring on her finger is something big; something very big. It is about cultivating and bringing *kedusha* into the world. Those deep emotions rushing and swirling in her moment of intense and exquisite joy propel her to forge a profound, indestructible commitment to following through with the charge that her innermost consciousness demands: applying her full, loving energies to this sacred mission of creating the kind of relationship with her husband that will truly serve as a fulfillment of bringing that *kedusha* into the world.

“But how am I to know if I am going about it in the right way? How will I be sure that the path I set myself on is the one that will achieve the lofty goal that I so intensely desire?”

These are questions that may arise in your mind when you deeply sense the intensity of your desire to build your very own *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael*. And the answer to these questions, of course, is *baruch sheh'nasan Torah l'amo Yisrael!* We are so incredibly blessed that not only does Hashem entrust us with the most privileged of roles, He also gives us clear, straightforward instructions and directions regarding how to successfully and faithfully fulfill those roles with which he has tasked us.

makeup is an important part of your toolbox that you use for achieving your goals in marriage and raising a Torah family.

There is no question that assertiveness definitely has its place, even for women. There's no reason why women should let themselves get pushed around or taken advantage of just because they are women. Respectfully but firmly insisting on your rights and privileges is, in many situations, not only ok, but the only proper course of action. For

It is reflective of the unique strength and fortitude of the Jewish woman that she is able to take a firm stand on matters of great consequence while at the same time not compromising her refinement.

example, advocating for a child – whether it be with a school, doctor, or secondary caretaker – is not something that can be overlooked. Even if it's something as mundane as insisting on fair and equitable treatment at a bank or health clinic, there is no reason why a woman should not assert her rights. This type of assertiveness, when done in a manner of respectability and refinement as befitting a *Bas Yisrael*, is not at all in contradiction to the feminine, Jewish character. On the contrary, as we see from the numerous examples above, it is reflective of the unique strength and fortitude of the Jewish woman

that she is able to take a firm stand on matters of great consequence while at the same time not compromising her refinement and grace.

The type of assertiveness that the *Bas Yisrael* does want to avoid is the type wherein a woman is being assertive primarily for the sake of being assertive. In other words, it is the masculine sense of authority and leadership, the “wearing of the pants”, if you will, that the feminist is going for. This type of domineering assertiveness is an outgrowth of the reckless and shameful attitude that the secular world espouses, it is that which stands in stark contradiction to the beautiful, feminine *eidelkeit* of the *Bas Yisrael*, and therefore it is that which the *Bas Yisrael* wants to avoid.

By way of example, when husband and wife are together and someone needs to speak up to “state their business”, it is not in consonance with the beautiful *eidelkeit* of the Jewish woman to speak up before or over her husband²⁴. It is a form of assertiveness that is unnecessary, unseemly, and smacks of the role-reversal outlook of the secular world. Of course, no frum Jewish woman is consciously thinking that she’s trying to effect a role-reversal. Nevertheless, it is important for a woman to make a deliberate effort to avoid and eliminate such behaviors, albeit unintentional; and proactively cultivate and maintain her beautiful, feminine

²⁴ Rashi Ki Seitzei 22:16

accomplishment of much, much more than the general *mitzvah* – important as it is – of avoiding causing another person to feel revulsion.

In fact, one could possibly argue that within the context of shared day-to-day living, details such as these may not even fall under the category of avoiding causing someone to feel revulsion since it is only understandable that within such a context such things can be inevitable.

And that is precisely the point, isn't it?

That is precisely the profoundly novel perspective that *Chazal* are conveying. That marriage is not something that must, by its nature, slip into a blasé rut of “day-to-day living”. On the contrary, marriage in the Jewish context is an enterprise of *kedusha* and achieving the highest levels of human achievement, and, as such, contains within it the potential to transcend the mundanity of routine life.

Attending to such details is not just the *mitzvah* of avoiding causing others revulsion. It is so much more. Because in the context of marriage, it's a whole different ballgame. It's not just an **added** dimension, it's an entirely **different** dimension. A dimension of being able to maintain, strengthen, and reignite the excitement and endearment of your relationship; the excitement and endearment that is

any question of chillul Shabbos since the dark colored ones color the water in a way that may fall under the prohibition of dying.

regarded it with respect and value and did her part to channel it accordingly.

There is a story about a much more recent *tzaddeikes*, Rebbetzin Chana Levin, the wife of the famous *tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, Rav Aryeh Levin, that similarly reflects this approach, yet with an added dimension.

Once his wife said to him, "Aryeh, I must tell you that I am jealous of Mrs. So-and-So, our neighbor." Reb Aryeh was puzzled. His good wife hardly knew what jealousy is. What reason had she to envy her neighbor? And who was this neighbor, anyway? He soon found out: There was a rich man in Yerushalayim, a person of standing in the community, who lost his wealth in the course of time. Creditors took all he had, until he was forced to move to the Mishkenot section – the poor, impoverished neighborhood where Reb Aryeh lived, where there were not even bathrooms in the homes but only outhouses in the courtyards.

To support his family, this formerly rich man now had to go climbing up on a scaffold to work as a repairman on the exteriors of buildings, fixing defects, to earn his small daily wages. Yet every evening the neighbors noticed his wife going out in the street dressed up in pretty clothes and finery. The neighbors were amazed to see

Asset or Liability?

Properly addressing this question means we are going to have to delve into what may arguably be the most enigmatic *Mishna* in the entirety of *Shas*.

“Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said there were no days more joyous for the Jewish People than the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur on which the Bnos Yerushalayim would go out dressed in white garments...and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? Young man, lift up your eyes and see what you shall select for yourself. Do not cast your eyes upon beauty, cast your eyes upon the family. ‘False is grace and vain is beauty, a woman who fears Hashem she shall be praised.’ And it says, ‘Give her from the fruits of her hands, and they shall praise her actions by the gates.’ And so too does it say, ‘Go out, oh daughters of Tziyon, and gaze upon the king Shlomo in his crown that his mother crowned him with on the day of his wedding and on the day of his heart’s rejoicing.’ The day of his wedding – this is Matan Torah. And the day of his heart’s rejoicing – this is the construction of the

Beis HaMikdash which should be rebuilt speedily in our days, amein⁵⁴.”

Quite a *Mishna*, isn't it?

Addressing the fact that there seems to be a contradiction in what the dancing “Daughters of *Yerushalayim*” would say to the young men who came to watch them, the *Gemara*⁵⁵ explains that the *Mishna* is actually describing three distinct groups of young women. Here is how the *Gemara* explains those three groups.

The pretty ones, what would they say? “Focus on beauty, for a woman is only for beauty.” The ones with excellent lineage, what would they say? “Focus on family, for a woman is only for children.” The unattractive ones, what would they say? “Take your pick l’sheim Shamayim, but only on condition that you will crown us with gold jewelry.”

The first two groups of young women we can easily understand. Each group is playing to its strength. If a woman thinks that beauty is a strong asset of hers, it is understandable that she will try to leverage it for her benefit. Likewise with a woman who has impeccable *yichus*. It is only to be expected that she would try to leverage that for her benefit.

⁵⁴ Taanis 4:8

⁵⁵ Taanis 31a

Yisrael areiveim zeh ba'zeh), and the closer one is and the greater one's ability to have had a positive

The minhag that the kallah encircles the chassan under the chupah embeds in their consciousness: here is where it begins and here is where it ends.

influence, the greater is one's share of the responsibility for a fellow Jew's infractions⁶⁷. So, in that sense, if a woman would simply neglect the whole subject of physical attraction, she could certainly carry some responsibility in terms of her part in the greater picture of shared responsibility.

But there is no question that when someone does a sin, bottom line, it is *his* sin. And he's the one who needs to deal with that.

That does not detract, however, from the fact that a woman can and does afford a great benefit to her husband in the form of providing him with a source of strength and protection against sin, and the wise woman will seek to capitalize on that aspect of her role in life.

A practical example of this is the story of *Abba Chilkiya's* wife that we learned about previously. Every day when he would come home from work, she would come out to greet him all dressed up. The

⁶⁷ Shabbos 54b and Sukkah 29b.

No comparison

Particularly in our generation, it would not be helpful for a woman to “stick her head in the sand” and pretend that there is no danger to their *shalom bayis* when her husband exits the doors of their house. Nowadays, that danger can lurk inside the house as well. Even an internet that is filtered and equipped with a reporting system will almost never avoid *all* inappropriate images⁷⁵.

From time to time, it is practically inevitable that a man will be exposed to images that can arouse his *yetzer hara*, and the wise woman will want to do everything she can to strengthen him from falling prey to these snares. Both for the sake of helping him by being his protective wall, as well as for the sake of her *shalom bayis*⁷⁶.

⁷⁵ The strongest filter that I am aware of is Netfree (and for smartphones, Hadran). It is highly recommended if feasible.

⁷⁶ It is usually counterproductive for a woman to say anything to her husband about this topic. The best, and usually the only thing that she can and ought to do is to simply do her part by putting forth her best effort to consistently maintain an attractive appearance for him. It would seem that this is also true even if a man has fallen into extremely negative viewing behaviors. But in such a situation, it is very important to reach out to get expert advice, in particular if there is “off-screen” inappropriate behavior going on. Ideally, someone struggling with inappropriate behaviors – particularly if they are “off-screen” behaviors – would reach out for expert help himself, or herself if that is the case, and would do so long before it becomes

As we've emphasized before, all this does *not* mean that it is primarily the wife's responsibility to ensure that her husband does not stumble in the sins of forbidden gazing, thoughts, etc. The point here is *not* to put the burden of a husband's *ruchniyus* on his wife. It is most definitely *his* responsibility to keep his *yetzer* in check and control his eyes, thoughts, and body. Nevertheless, the point being made here is that it is a *chachmas nashim* to recognize the power that she wields to assist in easing the severity of her husband's *nisyonos* where and when possible, and she will thus act accordingly.

Now, perhaps you consider yourself a simple type of girl who has never been into makeup, jewelry, and dressing smart. That may have been fine as a single girl⁷⁷, but part of getting married is learning to adjust to the demands of this new situation.

Boys are notorious for their last-minute Shabbos plans. It is not at all uncommon for boys to call people up on Thursday night or Friday morning (sometimes even Friday afternoon!) regarding Shabbos plans. Truth be told, it's plain inconsiderate. Especially if it's "repeat offenses". Of course, not all

entrenched. But that unfortunately does not always happen, and if a spouse discovers that his or her spouse is engaged in inappropriate behaviors that s/he feels directly impact the marriage relationship, then it is crucial to reach out for expert help and guidance as soon as possible.

⁷⁷ Also, as a married woman, when you are in public and not with your husband, that is a great way to go.

Part Four
Secret
Garden

Kedusha & Simcha

First and foremost, one thing needs to be made exceedingly clear: marital intimacy is *not* a necessary evil. It is *not* something *tamei* that we have no choice but to do. On the contrary, it is actually the most *kadosh* thing in the world. The intimate unification between husband and wife is a private *Kodesh Kodashim*⁹⁴ and brings down the presence of the *Shechina*⁹⁵.

Also vitally important to know is that marital intimacy is not supposed to be done in a serious or solemn manner. On the contrary, it is meant to be done with joy, pleasure, and passion.

Of course, it is only natural and normal that not all intimate experiences will be the same. As in every part of life, there are ups and downs, twists and turns. Sometimes better, sometimes less so. There can also be disappointing experiences. It's part of life, and part of the learning and growth experience that we are all meant to have. But what a couple should be aiming for is most certainly a mutually, very enjoyable, gratifying, and fulfilling experience.

The *Rambam* explicitly states that a couple should come to intimacy through mutual desire and joy⁹⁶.

⁹⁴ Yoma 54a

⁹⁵ Sotah 17a

⁹⁶ Hilchos Ishus 15:17

Indeed, the *Gemara* in *Brachos* 62a says that when *Rav*⁹⁷ would engage with his wife in intimacy, he would first converse and laugh with her. *Rashi* explains that *Rav* was deliberately doing so to arouse desire, and the *Gemara* likewise makes it clear that the level of passion that he was trying to arouse was that of a fresh *chassan* who is completely new to it!

In a similar vein, the *Gemara* in *Nedarim* 20b concludes that it is permissible for a husband and wife to converse during the act of intimacy as long as the conversation is strictly limited to their act of intimacy. The *Rosh*⁹⁸ there explains that the purpose of this form of conversation is in order to increase the man's feelings of desire and passion⁹⁹. This statement is codified as *psak halacha* by the *Tur*¹⁰⁰ and *Shulchan Aruch*¹⁰¹.

⁹⁷ One of the greatest of the *Amoraim*, from the first generation thereof.

⁹⁸ One of the great *Rishonim* whose conclusions form one of the basic pillars of *psak halacha*.

⁹⁹ Possibly the reason why reference is not made to the wife in this context is that women, once they have already gotten their full share of "schmoozing" during *piyus*, are mainly stimulated through the sense of touch, which is certainly in abundance during the actual act of intimacy, and, as such she does not need any "talking about it" to supplement her state of arousal. Men, on the other hand, are mainly stimulated by their sense of sight which, during the actual act of intimacy, can be lacking, and, as such, they may need to "talk about it" in order to increase or maintain arousal.

¹⁰⁰ Orach Chaim 240

¹⁰¹ Even Ha'Ezer 25:2. This exposition sheds great light on that which we find in *sifrei Mussar* (and *Poskim* for that matter) that

In all likelihood, it was that knowledge that her father endowed her with that equipped *Rava's* wife to be ahead of the curve and not be thrown off by the curve ball of her husband feeling a need to engage in intimacy as a result of having been aroused by some other woman.

The daughter of *Rav Chisda* understood that her husband had not deliberately stared or fantasized. She knew him well enough to know that he most certainly averted his eyes as quickly as would be humanly possible and would not allow his thoughts to dwell on that which is forbidden for him to think about. *Rava's* wife likewise knew

There was an extremely brief moment of seeing an arousing sight, and the arousal remained lodged in place as an open-ended urge to experience sexual gratification.

that, while engaging in intimacy with her, there is no way that *Rava* would be thinking about *Chuma* or any other woman, as such a thing is strictly forbidden¹³⁷.

So, then, what did happen?

What did happen is that there was an extremely brief moment of seeing an arousing sight, and, even after

¹³⁷ Nedarim 20b

removing his eyes and thoughts from that experience, the arousal remained lodged in place as an open-ended urge to experience sexual gratification.

Not an urge for a specific person, but a sexual urge nonetheless.

After all, like the many other systems of the human body, the reproductive system is to a large part involuntary and includes an automatic response mechanism to arousal triggers¹³⁸. Coming back to the story of *Rava*, the *mefarshim* explain that because he was particular to maintain an extremely high level of *kedusha*, he felt that he needed to address that urge development immediately and not leave it to fester.

What we see, then, from this story – in regards to this current discussion – is that points of acute arousal, even if a man immediately removes his eyes and thoughts from the source of the arousal, will tend to remain lodged inside of him in the form of a generalized sexual urge.

It only stands to reason, then, that the more points of arousal that a man experiences, the stronger that generalized sexual urge may become. It can be unhealthy (spiritually, and possibly physically as well¹³⁹) if an individual's arousal does not manage to

¹³⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2712633/>

¹³⁹ See, for example the Feb 2022 article published by Medical News Today that states, “While sexual frustration can present differently among individuals, it can cause negative health effects and lead to

Out of the box

Continuing with the aforementioned *Midrash*, let's take note of the fact that the *nashim tzidkaniyos* went to the apple orchards to meet their husbands and engage in intimacy there¹⁴⁹. Why couldn't they just wait until their husbands came home and then do the mirror activity? Furthermore, what do they need the mirrors for anyway? Is a woman's mirror-image more alluring than the woman herself? Yet another question: why this play-talk, "I am more beautiful than you"? Isn't a beautiful woman in and of herself enough to arouse a man's desire for intimacy?

A possible approach to dealing with these questions is as follows.

The men in *Mitzrayim* were so terribly exhausted from their back-breaking labor and torturous treatment that the standard fare would just not work for them. To achieve the requisite state of arousal, which obviously requires a good deal of energy, the women had to come up with some creative, even fun idea that would spark their husbands' desire through a fresh, invigorating, and exciting experience.

¹⁴⁹ Rashi on Vayakhel 38:8 and Naso 5:17, Tanchuma Pekudei 9, and Sotah 11b with Rashi.

Bridging gaps

Differences between men and women are abundant, and, in regards to intimacy, there is a particular difference that is quite important for couples to be aware of. Generally speaking, men get aroused quite easily (meaning, they reach erection and readiness for intercourse quickly) and can ejaculate very quickly (meaning, the *zera* comes out and they are effectively finished with the act of intercourse).

Women, on the other hand, need time to be gradually "built up" towards arousal (with pleasant, intimate conversation, hugging, kissing, etc.) and it can take them significantly longer to reach orgasm. Therefore, were a man to just do what comes natural to him without any awareness and concern for feminine needs, his wife would likely be left feeling unfulfilled, frustrated, and maybe even deeply hurt.

Many *chassanim*, hopefully most, are taught about this and instructed as to what they need to do both before and during intimacy in order to ensure that they do in fact perform this *mitzvah* in a manner that their wives will experience great pleasure and fulfillment. But some unfortunately are not taught about this, and even those that are taught may not really "get it". Understanding feminine needs in intimacy can be so difficult for some men that,

Addendum One: Regarding the male draw to visually attending to feminine attractiveness

In her book, *The Male Brain*, on pages 63-64 and pages 67-68, Professor of Neuropsychiatry, Dr. Louann Brizendine makes the following assertion.

The lust center in the male brain automatically directs men to notice and visually take in the details of attractive females. When they see one that lights up their sexual circuit board...[it is] like a bright, colorful hummingbird [flying] into his line of vision...For many men, this can happen several times a day...because this is an autopilot behavior for the male brain...Researchers at the University of California found that it takes the male brain only one fifth of a second to classify a woman as sexually [attractive] – or not. This verdict is made long before a man’s conscious thought processes can even engage.

A close look at Dr. Brizendine’s sources indicates that she sometimes exaggerates the scientific evidence that she references, and she has in fact come