



Published on www.bilvavi.net

[Home](#) > Getting to Know Your Home - 011 Pleasure & Pain in Marriage

Getting to Know Your Home - 011 Pleasure & Pain in Marriage

The Role of Physical Pleasure In Marriage

In the previous chapter, we explained that there is an inner source of pleasure, which is derived from our soul, and there is an external source of pleasure, which is the physical pleasure of the body. It was explained that when there is only physical pleasure with no element of spiritual pleasure, a person becomes disconnected from the root.

In this chapter, we will explain more about how to understand the role of physical pleasure in marriage.

Firstly, we will repeat, once again, the point which we always emphasize: the purpose of marriage, in all its details, is so that husband and wife “become one.” Thus, not only is spiritual pleasure in marriage a catalyst that brings husband and wife to *achdus* (unity), but even the physical pleasure in marriage is meant to bring husband and wife to *achdus*.

Without being able to derive spiritual pleasure, a person remains with physical pleasure alone, and this presents a danger to the person, as we explained at length in the previous chapter; we will not elaborate upon that here. Now we will discuss what needs to happen next, *after* a person has already uncovered the ability to derive pleasure from the spiritual; when he knows of both spiritual and physical pleasure in marriage.

One must understand that physical pleasure in marriage is also a tool that can enable husband and wife to reach *achdus*.

Earlier, we addressed the fact that the physical union in marriage, alone, can be a source of disparity in marriage. But now we will look deeper into this matter. Although physicality in marriage can certainly create disparity between them^[1], we also know that everything in marriage can serve to bring them to *achdus*. If so, there is a way for the physical pleasure in marriage to enable husband and wife to unify.

That is the basic concept, and now we will try to explain how it can be.

Oneg Shabbos - Two Kinds of Pleasure

As is well-known, Shabbos is termed by our Sages as the “mate” of the Jewish people. Let’s think into

what this means, and see how this “marriage” can apply to our own marriages.

Shabbos is a time for *oneg* (pleasure). It is a pleasurable time, as well as a time to bask in the spiritual bliss of Hashem. When there is pleasure, there is connection to what you are enjoying. The pleasure is coming from a feeling of connection to something. In addition, the pleasure itself creates a connection.

Which comes first? Does pleasure form connection, or does connection bring pleasure?

It depends on what kind of pleasure it is. If it is spiritual pleasure, it is a soul connection, and here the connection itself will bring pleasure. If it is bodily pleasure, it is the pleasure which brings connection (that is, when we examine the inner layer of the connection, and not the external and physical aspect of it).

Oneg Shabbos is a commandment to have physical enjoyment on Shabbos; Chazal say that it is an obligation to buy good food for Shabbos, and to have clean clothes and fine tablecloths, in honor of Shabbos^[2]. Shabbos is also about spiritual pleasure, “to bask in the pleasure of Hashem”, which is clearly not physical, for it is the soul’s connection to the Creator.

In *Shabbos Kodesh* lays two kinds pleasure. There is pleasure of the soul, in which the connection of the soul to the Creator results in a pleasurable feeling, and pleasure of the body, which we have through food, clothing, and other physical enhancements of Shabbos; this is a pleasure that enables us to connect to Shabbos.

With physical pleasure, the pleasure forms a connection. Even if it is a totally physical pleasure, the *connection* one feels to what he has enjoyed is coming from the *pleasure*. But when it comes to inner and spiritual pleasure, the person *connects* to the source of the pleasure, and he has *pleasure* as a result from this.

The Purpose of Pleasure: Connection

Now we will see how this applies to marriage, to which our bond with Shabbos is compared to. In marriage, there is a spiritual connection between the souls of husband and wife, and this results in pleasure; it’s a pleasure that comes from connection, as is the nature of spirituality. But we also find an opposite aspect taking place in marriage: the physical pleasure in marriage, in which the pleasure they feel with each other increases their closeness and connection.

This shows us the difference of nature between physical pleasure and inner pleasure in marriage. With *inner/spiritual* pleasure, it is rooted in the fact that their souls are connected; their *connection* is what brings about the *pleasure*. With *physical* pleasure, it is the opposite: it is the *pleasure* here which brings about the *connection*.

Thus, Hashem has designed us in a way that in marriage, we need physical pleasure, as a means to achieve connection. It is not about the physical act alone. It is to form an emotional connection, which comes from the soul.

The purpose of pleasure is connection; but a person is not able to completely pursue pleasure with this pure intention. This is because *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations) always precedes *lishmah* (pure motivations), and there is always some *shelo lishmah* involved in our acts. We need to make sure that we are not acting 100% *shelo lishmah*, and try to increase the amount of *lishmah* into our acts, slowly but surely. In other words, when we are engaged in physical pleasure, we need to train

ourselves to do it more for the sake of connection, and not entirely for the sake of taking pleasure from the act.

There is no way for a person to withhold himself totally from the physical pleasure in marriage. If he does so, he is denying his nature, which requires physical enjoyment. None of us are Eliyahu and Chanoch, who totally divested themselves of all physicality. We are all affected by physicality, as we brought earlier from the possuk, “*With the sins of my mother I was conceived.*” Even Dovid HaMelech declared that he was born from physical desire. If anybody claims that he does the physical act *purely* for the sake of unifying with his spouse, and not for the sake of any pleasure, he is lying to himself.

So it is impossible for a person to free himself totally from this physical desire. What, then, can we do? It is upon us to introduce to ourselves a new kind of pleasure other than the physical: we can engage in the pleasurable act *with some motivation* for the sake of unifying, so that in this way, we are not entirely motivated to do it for the sake of feeling the pleasure involved.

When a person engaged in the act of physical pleasure 100% for the sake of experiencing pleasure, he is completely self-absorbed, and he’s stuck in a “world of disparity”; a world of separateness. But if a person makes sure to include some motivation in the act to increase the connection with his spouse, this is what purifies a person from the negative trait of being self-absorbed and from being entirely motivated to take pleasure.

This is really what lies behind the difference between the intentions of *shelo lishmah* and *lishmah*. The implication of *shelo lishmah* is that a person is being self-serving, and his motivation is for the sake of taking pleasure for himself. *Lishmah* is that a person is taking pleasure for the sake of connecting to where he’s getting the pleasure from. This does not mean that the person at the level of *lishmah* doesn’t experience pleasure. He does, but he is engaging [at least minimally] in the pleasure for the sake of forming a connection

Thus, we have learned here that physical pleasure in marriage is really given to us so that we can further connect and unify with our spouse. It is just of a different nature than that of spiritual and inner pleasure. Spiritual pleasure works in the opposite way: it comes from connection. When pleasure results from connection, it is totally pure [and in this as well, there are levels]. But with physical pleasure, it always involves some personal gain, and we have an *avodah* of turning it into an opportunity of connection, as opposed to being a completely self-serving act.

In this way, we sanctify the physical pleasure in marriage. It enables a person to use pleasure as a means of connecting to another. What would have been an entirely self-serving act is turned into an opportunity to reveal the spiritual light that is within it, a light which can unify. The more a person manages to increase his motivation for *lishmah* in this act of physical pleasure, the more he strengthens the inner light that is present in it.

This is a deep perspective contained in our soul, and it is relevant when it comes to all kinds of pleasures that we know of. It is to understand, that all pleasure is essentially a tool, which can bring us to have more connection. It is to realize that pleasure does not end with the pleasure itself. It is to take the act of pleasure, to enjoy it, and to do so for the sake of connection.

Times of “Oneg” and Times of “Nega”

Sefer Yetzirah says that “There is no good that is higher than *oneg* (pleasure), and there is nothing more evil than *nega* (‘affliction’)”. The words *oneg* and *nega* have the same letters, with the opposite arrangement, which implies that *oneg* and *nega* are two opposing matters. *Oneg* is about connection, and *nega* is the opposite of this: it is about separateness. We find the concept of *nega* by a *metzora* (a

leper), who gets a “*nega*” (affliction) of *tzaraas* (leprosy).

There is nothing else in Creation besides for *oneg* or *nega*. The text of *Sefer Yetzirah* does not simply mean that *oneg* is above and that *nega* is below, implying that there are many things in between. Rather, all of existence is filled with either *oneg* or *nega*. Either we are experiencing *oneg*, or *nega*.

In the same sense that “the flesh of the dead do not feel”, so is it that people usually do not feel either the *oneg* or *nega* in their life. The average person is living superficially, by rote; getting up in the morning and going about the day as usual, without ever thinking into what he is experiencing.

If we examine the deeper layer of all our experiences, we are either experiencing *oneg* (pleasure) or *nega* (pain), at any given time or situation. Those who have a heightened sensitivity to spiritual feelings can sharply sense either the *oneg* or *nega* in their experiences. Whether we can sense it or not, though, we are always going through either pleasure or pain.

Understandably, there are times when the pleasure is a sharper experience, and there are times when it is felt more vaguely; there are times when we sharply feel like we are suffering, and there are times where we only feel it minimally. But we are always experiencing either of the two – pleasure, or pain – no matter how weak or strong we feel it.

As long as person hasn’t yet gotten to the depth of his soul, he doesn’t experience pleasure. He will feel pleasure at certain times, and it might be physical pleasure or spiritual pleasure, but he will only experience it temporarily.

Pleasure, in reality, is a very real place. And so is pain. But most people are not in touch with either of these feelings on a regular basis. When it comes to the experience of pain, there are a few people who regularly feel pain and suffering in their life. As for pleasure, it is usually not experienced on a regular basis. The average situation, in most people’s lives today, is to live in the external layer of life, and pleasure is only experienced every once in a while.

A Torah scholar is called “*Shabbos*”, and one of the reasons for this is because a true Torah scholar lives a kind of life in which there is always [spiritual] pleasure, resembling *Shabbos*. If there is such a kind of life, the opposite must also be possible. So either a person is experiencing pleasure, or pain.

This fact should not just be something a person knows. It can be sensed. Just like a person inhales and exhales when he breathes, and this is not just a knowledge, but something he can feel and be aware of (some are more aware of their breathing than others), so can a person always feel either the pleasure or pain of any given situation.

If a person is connected to the concept, he feels it on a more constant basis, whereas if his awareness is disconnected from it, he will only feel it sometimes. In any case, the reality stays the same: our soul is either experiencing *oneg* (pleasure) or *nega* (pain).

Thus, the concepts of *oneg* and *nega* are not just another fact of life – it is the actual makeup of our soul – it exists, and it can be felt all the time.

Alternating Periods of Pleasure and Pain - In Marriage

Marriage is also an ongoing process that alternates between *oneg*\pleasure and *nega*\pain. However, since most people are not aware to pleasure or pain they are experiencing, their marriage is no different. They are aware only at certain times to the pleasure in their marriage, and they are aware sometimes that there is pain, such as when a fight erupts with the spouse, *chas v’shalom*. So in most marriages, they are only some times in which they are clearly aware that they are experiencing either

pleasure, or pain, in the marriage.

But as we explained, if we look deeper into what's going on, we can always see how there's either pleasure or pain taking place, at any given situation. Let's think into this and see how it is true.

As we have explained in the past, the purpose of marriage is, "*And they shall become one [flesh]*", therefore, every situation in marriage is a possibility of bringing a couple to achieve greater *achdus* with each other. The day-to-day life that a couple goes through with each other, in all its events, can bring a couple closer and closer to *achdus*. How does it happen? As we have explained here, either it can be brought about through being aware to the *oneg* they are having - or even when they are in a situation of "*nega*".

To "become one" with a spouse means, that as long as a person is married, in the 24 hours of a day, he is in a situation where he can be brought closer and closer to unity with his spouse. It is just that a person has free will to choose if this unity will be achieved through pleasure, or pain. Either situation, though, can bring them to unity.

The purpose of pleasure, clearly, is to foster connection between a couple, which brings them closer to unity. However, if a person wants the pleasure for self-serving purposes, and he has no intention of unity with his spouse, this pleasure will not connect them; instead, it will separate them.

The same is true for the pain experienced in marriage: it can either be constructive, or it can make things worse. We see this from physical suffering as well: When a person is in pain, either this will cause him to become too absorbed in himself, or it can cause him to grow and elevate himself beyond the pain, giving him a new sense of connection with other people.

A *metzora* is required to sit in solitude outside of the camp. One of the reasons explained for this is because a person can come to feel closer to Hashem when he feels faraway and distant from Him, so that his yearnings for Hashem are reawakened. When the *metzora* is alone, he can deepen his bond with Hashem. He is separated from the nation, but he can understand that this separation is necessary for him [enabling him to re-evaluate his relationship with G-d and with others.] Here we see a kind of separation that can serve to unify.

But if a person does not see unity as the goal in marriage, then he engages in pleasure for self-serving purposes, to take pleasure for himself; and disparity in the marriage ensues from this. And when he has pain, instead of seeing this as a way to further unify with his spouse, he becomes self-absorbed in his pain, and he feels even more separated from his spouse than before.

Connection In Marriage Is Always Possible

Thus, the true and inner perspective is, that either *oneg*\pleasure or *nega*\pain can foster connection and unity. It is just that when *oneg* and *nega* are misunderstood, they cause separation.

These concepts are very relevant throughout the day, as follows.

If a person is at a time of pleasure in his marriage, he should realize that this is an opportunity for him to further connect with his spouse. If he encounters pain in his marriage, whether it is physical suffering from his spouse, arguments with his spouse, fighting, and other forms of stress - he needs to also understand that these times of tensions are also a tool that can bring about unity between them.

This is a very deep perspective. The simple perspective towards marital disputes is that they need to increase their *Shalom Bayis* (peace in the home). That is true, of course, but there is more depth to it.

The reason that this fight has ensued between them is for a different reason entirely. An argument with a spouse is meant to become a tool that will lead them closer to *achdus*. Not only is pleasure in marriage a tool that enables husband and wife to further their connection and unity, but even friction between each other is a tool that can unify them.

Of course, this does not mean that one should intentionally get into a fight with a spouse for this reason. Rather, the point is, that once they are already in a situation of a fight with each other, they should see it as an opportunity to ultimately become closer, as opposed to just trying to make peace with each other so that they can get the fight over with.

There is a rule brought in our holy *sefarim* that “something which becomes damaged needs to be rebuilt from a higher point”. We can learn from this that the purpose of a couple solving their fights is not just so that they will return to what they were like before the fight, but so that they should return to a higher point than they were before.

This is the inner reason why fights break out between a couple [so that they can now work even harder at their marriage than before, which brings them closer to *achdus*].

Although they must certainly not fight on purpose for this reason, they need to be aware that fights will inevitably happen, and when those fights do happen, they need to see it as a way that will allow them to become closer. Chazal said, “There is no *kesubah* (marriage document) that doesn’t involve disagreement.” There is always some degree of strife in every marriage, but the fighting can always be seen as a way to further their unity.

This is a very deep concept, and they are very relevant to daily life in marriage. There is always either *oneg* (pleasure) or *nega* (pain) in marriage, no matter the situation. There is no such thing as a marriage in which a couple has no fights; there are always some moments of tension between them. Those stressing moments needs to be seen as possible opportunities for more *achdus*, and during those times, a couple can try to think how the situation of discord they are in can somehow be a way for them to get closer.

Pleasure Within Pain, and Pain Within Pleasure

There’s also a concept that everything in Creation is unified at its deeper root; this is called the *sod ha’achdus* (the ‘secret unity’). Therefore, even in *oneg* (pleasure) you can find some degree of *nega* (pain), and in *nega*, you can also find a degree of *oneg* in it.

In *oneg*\pleasure there is still some *nega*\pain, and we find an example of this from the custom at a wedding by the *chuppah*^[3] to remember the destruction of Jerusalem, to show that even when we are happy, we are not able to achieve complete happiness in the current state of mankind.

Furthermore, all marriages are rooted in the very first marriage in Creation, Adam and Chavah, when they had perfect happiness together in Gan Eden. Before the sin, there was no pain yet. After the sin of Adam, pain began, and the “marriage” was no longer the same. When we stood at Har Sinai, our “marriage” with Hashem was complete again, until the sin with the Calf, when we were once again separated from our perfect bond. Up until this day, there is no happiness which is complete, so there is always some level of pain even within the happiness.

But the same is true with *nega* (pain): even when we are in mourning, we find consolation. On *Tisha B’Av*, when we mourn all of our destructions, we also acknowledge the fact that Moshiach is born on this day, and in fact, this affects *Halacha* as well: we don’t say *tachanun* on *Tisha B’Av*, because it will become a festival in the future.

So there is no *oneg* without some *nega*, and there is no *nega* without some *oneg*. They are always interconnected.

Why There Must Be Pain Within Pleasure

Let's examine why there cannot be pleasure without some degree of pain. Why must it be that way?

It is because man, by nature, is comprised of two opposing natures: activity, and non-activity. Pleasure feels like something active has happened, and pain feels like something is lacking, which is an absence of positive activity. Both of these aspects in man, activity and non-activity, are needed.

If a person would only know of pleasure, he would be like a man riding a horse missing one of the ropes; he will be only to whip the horse to move forward, but he has nothing to stop the horse from running.

Thus, there is no such thing as pleasure which has no pain in it. The degree of pain involved is what enables the pleasure to be stable. Even inner pleasure wouldn't be good for a person if it was endless. At some point, there has to be limitation to the pleasure, and this is accomplished through a degree of pain.

The degree of pain that is within all pleasure is needed for a person; as the Sages state, "*It is forbidden for one to fill his mouth with laughter on this world.*"^[4] One is allowed to laugh, but he cannot become filled too much with laughter. Even in the future, when we will be allowed to let our mouths be filled with laughter, it will still be somewhat limited.

Pleasure represents the concept of expansion, and pain is contraction. Both expansion and contraction are the two different aspects taking place all the time in Creation. Contraction is necessary so that proper limitations are ensured. If a person would have endless pleasure, whether it's physical or spiritual, he would totally leave the limitations of his body and be divested of it.

This was the depth behind the punishment given to Nadav and Avihu. The holy *Ohr HaChaim* explains that they died out of their great love for Hashem, for they had entered an endless kind of spiritual bliss, which had no boundaries to it. Their souls expanded so much to the point that they were totally divested of body, because their body could not withstand the expansion.

As far as physical pleasure concerns, if there are no limitations on a person's physical pleasure, there are a few problems created from this. First of all, being that a person needs limitations, breaking the limits will result in a feeling of rebelliousness, as the *posuk* says, "*And Yeshurun got fat and kicked.*" The nature of a person is that when he becomes too pampered from the pleasure, he loses a sense of authority over himself. Another problem with indulgence in physical pleasure is that it strengthens the body's physicality, and in turn weakens a person from spirituality.

Therefore, it is necessary that there be certain limitations placed on pleasure, whether it's spiritual or physical pleasure.

Why There Must Be Pleasure Within Pain

Until now it was explained how there is both pleasure and pain, within pleasure. Now we will see the other side of the coin, which is that in pain as well, there is always pleasure as well as a degree of pleasure.

When a person sees suffering purely as suffering and nothing more than that, he misses the purpose of the suffering. He views suffering as something that is coming to destroy him, rather than as something which can build him. An example of this is that there are people who survived the Holocaust, who went through indescribable suffering, which brought them to deny the reality of G-d (*rachamana litzlan*). Their pain brought them nothing but pain; they saw the “*nega*” aspect in the “*nega*”, and they couldn’t see beyond the *nega*.

In contrast, seeing the “*oneg*” in *nega* is when a person sees that *nega* is given to him as an opportunity to increase his connection and unity with something. When a person achieves a greater understanding because of *nega*, this is the *oneg* that is contained in *nega*.

Thus, we have seen how *oneg* (pleasure) and *nega* (pain) are always interconnected. In *oneg*\pain, there is both *oneg*\pleasure and *nega*\pain; and in *nega*\pain, there is both *nega*\pain and *oneg*\pleasure.

Becoming Attuned To Our Experiences

Therefore, in order for a person to reach the intended purpose of marriage, he needs to live the reality of the *oneg* or *nega* that he’s in.

The ongoing process of *oneg* and *nega* really implies that a person is always attuned to what he is experiencing. When a person doesn’t realize what he’s experiencing as he’s experiencing something, he is not aware if he is experiencing *oneg* or *nega*. He is living by rote. When a person uncovers the ability to experience, he will see that either he is experiencing *oneg*, or *nega*.

We are always going through some event, at any given moment. Why is it that most of the time a person does not see the opportunity of *achdus* in what he’s experiencing? It is because he is usually not attuned to what he is experiencing. We can compare this to a person in jail who doesn’t know he’s sitting in jail. He has no wish to go free from jail, because he doesn’t even know that he’s in jail. If he knows he’s in jail, he will be bothered by this, and he will want to leave it.

When a person doesn’t experience what he’s going through, he never comes to feel the meaning of the *possuk*, “*Release from captivity, my soul*”; he has no will to leave his situation, because he does not realize the situation that he is in. For this reason, there are people who don’t want to get married, because they do not realize what they are missing in their life. And even when a person is married, that doesn’t mean he’s experiencing his marriage; he doesn’t necessarily realize if he’s going through either pleasure or pain.

Of course, when a person is away from home, he’s not thinking about what’s going on inside his home right now; he has other parts of his life he has to deal with. But when a person is in the home, or when he’s thinking about what’s going on inside his home, he needs to realize that these are not mere thoughts. They are experiences! If it is an experience, it is either one of two things: *oneg*, or *nega*.

Marriage is entirely a parable, which teaches us a greater lesson; as we see from *sefer Shir HaShirim*, that marriage is a parable to the bond between man and his Creator. In the next chapter we will speak more about this; right now, we are addressing the parable itself, which is marriage.

The parable which marriage serves is to show us how we can experience what we are going through. When a person goes through various experiences, his feelings will have sharpened and become more sensitive. Marriage is an *experience* of the relationship of *ahavah* (love) *achvah* (brotherliness), *shalom* (peace), and *reyus* (friendship) that it is. If there is no love present, it is a sign that there are negative feelings between them. In any case, there are always feelings involved, which need to be experienced.

To illustrate the concept, when a person is alone, and he is enjoying this feeling of solitude, this is usually a quiet and calm kind of feeling. It is an inner experience, so it is calmer. Most people, though, when they are alone, have a hard time enjoying the serenity. This is true even in people who don't hate themselves, and they have a positive self-image of themselves. The person doesn't know how to experience what he is feeling.

When a person gets married, there is a new world he is entering – a world of live emotions. There are outer and inner layers to the emotions. (There are some individuals who are very in touch with their emotions even before they are married, but with most people, it is marriage which develops their emotions.) The outer layer of the emotions in marriage is the “*ahavah* (love), *achvah* (brotherliness), *shalom* (peace) *v'reyus* (and friendship)” between husband and wife; the inner layer is when they are *experiencing* those feelings.

In order to experience the love and peace in the marriage, a person has to develop the power to experience in the first place.

Excitement Cannot Build A Marriage

Now we will discuss an issue that is usually the cause for marital problems. When a couple is married and living together for several years with each other, whether it's a year, two years, ten years, twenty years, and beyond, there's going to be differences of opinion between them. Problems ensue, and a person looks for solutions to the issues that arise. *Baruch Hashem*, today, marital therapy is a big business. A person goes to a marriage counselor, and lays down all of this issue he is facing.

The marriage counselor will tell him something like, “You're not seeing the situation exactly as it is...even if you are right, you need to make peace with your situation....” Sometimes the advice will be that he has to change his personality and behavior patterns, or to become more positive, or to stop having too many expectations from his marriage. There are many different kinds of strategies that can be employed. It's possible that any of these strategies are true, but there's really a deeper root of all the issues that is usually lying beneath the surface.

Usually, when a person gets married, there are certain feelings that he has towards his spouse; if he wouldn't have those feelings, he wouldn't have married his wife. Naturally, though, those feelings begin to lose their taste after some time, and it no longer feels new and exciting. The infatuation that was here until now is gone, and now, there are new feelings that need to be awakened.

The first feelings that one has for his spouse are based on excitement. Those exciting feelings can certainly be enough for one to wish to get married to his spouse, but it won't be enough to build lasting feelings in the marriage. As we see from all other things, excitement usually dies down after some time.

There is a well-known story that Rav Chaim Volozhiner wanted to open his first yeshivah, and he asked his teacher, the Vilna Gaon, for advice on the matter. The Vilna Gaon told him not to open the yeshivah. Half a year later, he came back to the Vilna Gaon and asked him again for advice, and this time the Vilna Gaon told him that he should open the yeshivah. Rav Chaim asked him, “What changed since half a year ago?” The Gaon answered him, “Half a year ago, I realized that you were excited about this endeavor. Excitement doesn't build anything. Therefore, I wanted you to wait some time until the excitement dies down, and then pursue the endeavor.”

(In another version of the story, the Vilna Gaon said to him that half a year ago, I suspected that this idea of yours came from the *yetzer hora*. On a deeper note, this is really the same idea as the first version of the story!)

The point we are trying to bring out is not that a person shouldn't get married if he feels excited about his spouse. Rather, the point here is that those feelings of excitement cannot become the basis of marriage.

Excitement Vs. Reality

We will explain a little about what is wrong with the mentality of excitement, and how destructive it is to one's life; what the problem with it is, and what we can do about it.

At first, a newlywed will have some feelings of excitement towards his spouse, and he feels deeply that "this is *it*". After some time, those feelings go away. They are based on excitement, so they don't last. Then he begins to feel that he has lost all his feelings. He begins to rationally approach his marriage, knowing that he has lost his emotions towards it. He starts to take apart his marriage, using his rational intellect: "Did I marry the right one?"

Whether he concludes "Yes" or "No", he is still disappointed, because he no longer feels the excitement he used to have when he became a *chossan*.

According to the statistics, most people after getting married conclude that they married the wrong person. Even those who thought they married the right one will still feel that their excitement is gone, and they wonder where the feelings have gone.

The person is left without excitement for his spouse anymore; he has lost his original feelings he once had. Married life goes on, and various issues come with it, just like in any other undertaking; and when he encounters issues in his marriage, he will seek to get out of it, just like with anything else that is unsuccessful. Even if he doesn't come to the conclusion of divorce, he will be living a divorceable kind of a marriage.

Why does this destructive attitude happen? It is because he based his marriage on the exciting feelings which first come to him at the beginning.

Excitement is not reality. Usually when a person is excited, he is not experiencing the reality in front of him; he is experiencing 'sparks', with nothing substantial in it. Even if there is something substantial in what he is experiencing, he is experiencing 'sparks' of reality, and nothing that is a tangible reality.

Thus, the feelings of excitement that one originally has, upon getting married, are not coming from reality. It certainly provides a person with emotion, and it feels sparked and alive, but when those emotions begin to fade, there are no feelings of it left.

Experiencing Yom Tov Cannot Come From Excitement Alone

To give another example of this, when it comes the *Seder* on Pesach night, some people were used to a noisier *seder* when they were younger, and when they get older and are now at the age of 20, 25, 30 and beyond, they lose that spark they had as children; they find that they have lost their feelings for the *seder*.

A child can sleep for 2 hours before the *seder*, so he can come into Pesach refreshed and awake, whereas a married adult has a family to take care of, in addition to the fact that there's a lot of hard work to be done before Pesach, which do not allow him to rest on *Erev Pesach*. By the time the *seder* arrives, he is fairly exhausted, and he does not feel excitement for the *seder* that he used to have.

He might try to inspire himself by picking up a new *sefer* about Pesach, or by going to a *shiur* from a

speaker that has come to town. But nothing works. The festival of Pesach cannot be felt properly through just hearing a nice 'mussar' thought which a lecturer has thrown into the audience on the night of Pesach.

What is the mistake he is making? It is because excitement only works for a child. When he was a child, as long as he had a new suit, and the table was set nicely, and the *matzah* smelled delicious, he felt Pesach. As an adult, he still retains those feelings, but it doesn't help him feel the Yom Tov anymore. He is left without a taste for the Yom Tov. When he bites into his *matzah* on Pesach, it feels dry and tasteless, nothing more than the mix of water and flour that it is. That is all he's feeling...

To truly experience Yom Tov, the feelings have to come from a whole new source than from until now. It is not about a child's excitement anymore. The adult needs to experience the essence of the Yom Tov, and connect to it. There is nothing else for him to connect to.

Within this, there are two parts - there are concepts he can think about which are intellectually stimulating and cause him to think, and there are other parts to the Yom Tov which he feels emotionally connected to; but those 'emotional' aspects do not necessarily have to come from excitement.

Singing *Halel* by the *seder* at the top of his lungs, even screaming the words, will still not be enough to satisfy the adult's need to experience the essence of the Yom Tov. A person can only connect to the essence of the Yom Tov when he can feel it in his soul.

The same is true for all other things as well: A true 'feeling' for something is not an emotionally charged kind of feeling. A true 'feeling' is when it is a feeling of the reality. It can be felt on a daily basis, and throughout any given time of the day. This doesn't mean of course that a person should analyze the reality all day and write it down into a notebook in his hand. Rather, it just means that a person needs to breathe the reality that's taking place in front of him - to feel it and live it.

Heightened Sensitivity In Marriage

Marriage consists of many kinds of experiences that husband and wife face together. This is not a worst-case scenario of marriage; it is the way it is supposed to be. Experiences build the marriage.

Sometimes they don't fight, but this is usually because they aren't paying attention to each other, so they aren't in touch with their own differences.

It is only when husband and wife begin to experience each other's differing viewpoints and wishes, that they become aware of each other, and then they discover problems that they never realized until now. Indeed, the possuk says, "*An increase of knowledge, is an increase of pain.*"^[5] The more a person's sensitivity increases, the more challenges he will encounter, for he is aware of reality, as opposed to living in a fantasy.

Compare this to a person who needs to get glasses. If he doesn't get glasses and he needs it, he won't be able to tell if his house is messy or not. Can we say it's better that way, being that he'll be spared the stress of seeing a messy home? If he gets glasses, he'll see the messiness in his house, which is distressing, but at least he gives himself the ability now to do something about it. If he wouldn't get glasses, he'd be living in a fantasy, completely unaware of what needs to be done in his house.

When a person becomes deeper, his sensitivity heightens, and he begins to feel more and more what's going on around him. This is going to bring some suffering with it. It enables a person to see issues and thus become aware of reality, and it is certainly distressing, because he will start to see

problems that he was previously oblivious to. This will present a difficulty, but it is the way we need to live. If not, then we live in delusions, oblivious to what's really going on in our life.

Thus, the basis of marriage, the solid ground which a couple needs to stand upon and build their marriage, is to experience and feel each other. That is what enables them to develop their bond further.

When their sensitivity and feelings are heightened, they will find themselves dealing with situations that are much more emotionally charged, and it will test their love. They will be tested, time and time again, if they have reached intrinsic love with each other, or if their love is completely limited to either love for similarities or love for differences.

It will all depend on how much they are experiencing the reality of each other - whether it is a situation of *oneg*, or *nega*, they need to be attuned to what they are experiencing. The desired purpose of marriage is for a person to become constantly attuned to what he is experiencing. It is not simply to arrive at love and peace in the home. Love can only be an expression of something greater: that they be able to always feel each other.

If one reaches this kind of awareness in his home, it can begin with marriage, and extend into raising the children, and then, into one's bond with Hashem; then it can be extended towards the rest of the Jewish people, and beyond that, to the rest of the Creation.

Thus, the purpose of marriage is *not* love! Love is only one step in the process of bringing a couple to deeply experience each other. The more a person is attuned to the reality he is experiencing in his marriage, the more he can deepen his love and expand it further.

An unmarried man is called *palga d'gufa* ("half a body"). What is he missing? He is missing what it means to experience another's existence. Marriage enables a person to begin to see that there is someone else in the world besides for his own existence. But that's just the beginning. The purpose is to sharpen that feeling, more and more, so that one's feelings are sensitive to the reality he goes through.

We can see this in physical terms: At the beginning of marriage, there are no children yet, and there is just the husband and wife. Then come children, and later come grandchildren. They begin as one point, and their 'end' ends at many other points which have expanded from the original point.

This parable helps us understand the inner perspective we are describing. The marital bond between husband and wife is not the end - it is the beginning! The love and peace together that they reach is not the goal. It is a means to a greater end: it enables them to have increased awareness of their experiences. The more they are experiencing what they are experiencing, the deeper their love towards each other can become.

Therefore, in order for marriage to succeed, there must be two steps that husband and wife traverse. The first step is to arrive at love with each other and to live together peacefully. This is just the external layer of marriage. The inner layer of marriage is reached when their feelings have deepened and become sharper. If their feelings haven't deepened, their feelings get rusty and old, like a sealed barrel, which remains in its place (and sometimes, the barrel tips over backwards...).

If one's feelings are not deepening as his marriage continues, this is a sign that he is not in touch with the depth of his soul, and that means that his marriage hasn't been based on solid ground yet. But if we can see on him that he has become deeper, that he is experiencing what he goes through, it shows that his marriage is built on a stable basis.

In the next chapter, we will explain, with the help of Hashem, the lesson which marriage teaches us, which expresses the entire purpose of all of marriage.

[1] As explained in Chapter Three

[2] Shabbos 118b

[3] canopy

[4] Berachos 31a

[5] Koheles 1:18

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-home-011-pleasure-pain-marriage>