

# SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, MARRIAGE, AND HOUSEHOLD LIFE FROM A HEBREW PERSPECTIVE

*Parts Four Through Six — The Marriage Bed, Concubinage, and Household Dynamics*

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## PART FOUR: WHAT IS PERMITTED IN THE MARRIAGE BED

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### 16. What the Torah Permits Between Husband and Wife — The Full Picture

This section covers what may actually happen between a husband and his wife in the privacy of their bedroom. It is written plainly because the Torah addresses it plainly and because vagueness on these subjects has caused unnecessary guilt, shame, and confusion in covenant households. A man who does not know what the Torah permits is in danger of either violating it through ignorance or refusing what it allows through unnecessary restriction. A woman who does not know her rights within the covenant bed is in danger of either suffering in silence when her needs are not met or accepting behavior that actually crosses Torah boundaries. Both failures are preventable.

MINISTRY POSITION — MIQDASH BETHEL: The sources that follow in this section include the Talmud and **Rambam** (Maimonides). These are cited as historical commentary from Jewish scholars who studied the Torah. They are not binding doctrinal authority for Miqdash Bethel. The Torah and the Prophets — the Tanakh alone — are the sole doctrinal authority of this assembly. Where the Talmud and **Rambam** confirm what the Torah establishes, they are cited as useful corroboration. Where they go beyond the Torah text or contradict it, the Torah governs and this study will identify that departure clearly. This standard applies to all three religious traditions addressed in this study: Jewish commentary (Talmud, **Rambam**), Christian commentary (Church councils, Puritan writers), and Islamic commentary (hadith, classical scholars) are all treated as historical reference. All three traditions are examined for where they uphold the Torah and where they depart from it. The Torah always supersedes them all.

*Since a man's wife is permitted to him, he may act with her in any manner whatsoever. He may have intercourse with her whenever he so desires and kiss any organ of her body he wishes, and he may have intercourse with her naturally or unnaturally, provided that he does not expend semen to no purpose. Nevertheless, it is an attribute of piety that a man should not act in this matter with levity and that he should sanctify himself at the time of intercourse.*

—Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Issurei Biah 21:9

With that Ministry Position established, note what **Rambam's** ruling reveals about how far rabbinic commentary developed beyond the Torah text. **Rambam** states a man may act with his wife 'in any manner whatsoever,' and may have intercourse 'naturally or unnaturally.' This breadth reflects centuries of Talmudic legal reasoning, not the Torah's own language. The Torah text — **Beresheet (Genesis) 2:24** and **Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:22** — remains the governing

standard for Miqdash Bethel. Where **Rambam's** ruling confirms what Torah establishes, it is useful corroboration. Where it goes beyond Torah, Torah governs. The analysis below applies that standard clearly.

The Talmud's tractate Nedarim 20b — historical Jewish commentary, not Torah text — presents two cases of women who came to rabbinical authorities complaining about their husbands' unusual sexual preferences. In both cases the rabbis replied that the Torah has permitted him to act with you this way. The Talmud then uses the analogy of kosher meat: permitted meat may be prepared and eaten in any manner the owner desires. This is the rabbis' reasoning — not a Torah verse. Where Talmudic reasoning confirms what Torah establishes, this study cites it as corroboration. Where it goes beyond or contradicts Torah, Torah governs. The specific question of anal intercourse is addressed below with that distinction applied precisely.

### What 'Naturally or Unnaturally' Means in Torah Law

The Talmudic phrase 'bi'ah she-lo ke-darkah' — intercourse not in the usual manner — is a rabbinic legal category covering two acts: anal intercourse and oral stimulation. Both require separate analysis because they stand in very different relationships to the Torah text. This distinction is critical for Miqdash Bethel's Torah-only standard.

### Anal Intercourse — Where Talmud and Torah Diverge

The Torah text: **Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:22** prohibits a man from lying with a man 'as one lies with a woman.' The Torah's anatomical design of **Beresheet (Genesis) 2:24** establishes the one-flesh covenant as the joining of male and female — vaginal union is the specific act the Torah designates as ***echad basar***. The Torah contains no verse that creates a separate permitted category of anal intercourse between husband and wife. The permission for anal intercourse between spouses is a Talmudic ruling — it derives from rabbinic legal reasoning (Nedarim 20b) and **Rambam's** codification of that reasoning (Mishneh Torah 21:9) — not from a Torah text.

Miqdash Bethel's position: Because no Torah text permits anal intercourse between husband and wife as a distinct covenant act, and because the anatomical logic of **Beresheet (Genesis) 2:24** establishes vaginal union as the design of the one-flesh covenant, this study does not present anal intercourse as a Torah-permitted marital practice. The Talmud's permission is a rabbinic opinion that goes beyond what the Torah text itself establishes. Where commentary goes beyond the Torah, the Torah governs. Anal intercourse between husband and wife is documented here as a Talmudic position — for the reader's awareness of what the rabbinic tradition teaches — not as a position endorsed by this assembly.

Importantly, two of the three major religious traditions that all trace their roots to the Torah agree with this position. Islam: al-Baqarah 2:223 states 'Your wives are a tilth for you — go to your tilth as you will.' The tafsir (classical commentary) of this verse is unanimous across all major Islamic schools: the permission means any position, any manner — as long as it occurs in the vagina. The Prophet explicitly stated: 'From the front or from behind, as long as it is in the farj (vagina).'

Anal intercourse with a wife is explicitly cursed in authenticated hadith, classed sahih by al-Albani. Islamic law — despite permitting many things the modern world does not — explicitly prohibits husband-wife anal intercourse and its reasoning tracks the Torah's anatomical design.

Christianity: The mainstream Christian tradition, while often departing from Torah in other areas, has historically taught the same anatomical boundary. The Puritan William Gouge, whose *Of Domestic Duties* (1622) was the most widely gifted marriage manual of the 17th century, placed marital sexual intimacy within what he called 'matrimonial chastity' — sexual union as covenant gift — without extending that gift to acts outside the design of the created body. Two of the three traditions confirm what the Torah's design establishes. On this specific question, they

uphold the Torah. On many other questions in this study, they depart from it — and those departures are identified throughout.

### Oral Stimulation — Foreplay Within Torah's Design

On oral stimulation, the situation is different. The Torah contains no prohibition on oral stimulation between husband and wife as part of their marital intimacy. The Torah's prohibition structure in **Vayikra (Leviticus) 18** identifies specific forbidden acts — all of which involve sexual penetration of a prohibited partner. Oral arousal between covenant partners before the act of vaginal union does not appear in the Torah's list of prohibited acts. The Talmudic consensus permitting oral stimulation as part of marital intimacy is, in this case, consistent with the Torah's silence — it is not adding a permission the Torah prohibits. This study treats oral stimulation as a form of foreplay and arousal that is consistent with the Torah's covenant design: acts that prepare husband and wife for the one-flesh union, that fulfill the husband's **onah** obligation to arouse and satisfy his wife, and that fall within the covenant space of the marriage bed. The governing boundary remains: semen is to be emitted vaginally — the one-flesh union is the design, and foreplay serves that union rather than replacing it.

### The Requirement of Skin-to-Skin Contact

The Talmud (Ketubot 48a) establishes an important covenant principle: there must be genuine physical intimacy in the marriage act — not a performance at emotional distance. The Talmud records the ruling of Rav Yosef: 'There must be close bodily contact during sex. A husband may not treat his wife in the manner of the Persians, who perform their marital duties in their clothes.' Rav Huna went further: a husband who insists that both he and his wife remain clothed during intercourse must divorce her and pay her **ketubbah**. The covenant of the one flesh — **echad basar** — requires actual physical contact of flesh to flesh. A husband who withholds his body from his wife during the act of union has violated the intimate covenant the act is meant to seal.

This principle has practical implications for the bedroom. It means that the husband is obligated to be physically present in the act — not merely performing an obligatory function from a position of emotional or physical distance. The wife has a right to his full physical presence and engagement.

### The Requirement to Arouse the Wife Before Intercourse

The Talmud and the medieval halakhic literature are consistent and explicit on this point: a husband may not simply proceed to intercourse without first arousing his wife and ensuring she is willing and prepared. The Iggeret Hakodesh (13th century, sometimes attributed to **Ramban**) states:

*When you and your wife are engaged in sexual union, do not behave lightheartedly and regard this act as vain or idle. Therefore, first introduce her into the mood with gentle words that excite her emotion, appease her mind, and delight her with joy. Thus you unite your mind and intention with hers... Do not hurry in arousing passion. Prolong till she is ready and in a passionate mood. Approach her lovingly and passionately, so that she reaches her orgasm first.*  
—Iggeret Hakodesh, 13th century

Peninei Halakha adds: 'The Zohar states: A man who wishes to be intimate with his wife must ask her permission and speak to her in a way that makes her happy.' The Talmud (Pesachim 49b) uses harsh language for the man who does not:

*Just as a lion attacks and devours its prey and begins eating while it is still alive, so an ignoramus penetrates his wife and has no shame. He has intercourse with*

*her to satisfy his own urges and does not delay so that his wife can experience pleasure and joy as well. —Talmud, Pesachim 49b*

This is not rabbinic prudishness. This is the covenant standard for how a husband treats his wife in the most intimate space of their relationship. The man who simply uses his wife's body without regard for her arousal and pleasure has not fulfilled the **onah** obligation — he has violated its spirit even if he has technically met its minimum frequency.

### **A Husband Is Forbidden to Force His Wife**

The Talmud (Eruvin 100b) states explicitly: 'A man is forbidden to compel his wife to have marital relations.' Rabbi Joshua ben Levi adds: 'Whoever compels his wife to have marital relations will have unworthy children.' The covenant of the one-flesh union requires the willing participation of both husband and wife. Sex obtained through force or coercion is not the one-flesh covenant — it is a violation of the person **Yahweh** placed under the husband's protection.

This prohibition does not mean a husband cannot initiate, express desire, or gently pursue his wife. It means he cannot use force, threats, manipulation, or deliberate emotional pressure to obtain what the Torah calls the **onah** obligation — which is her right to receive from him, not his right to take from her.

### **The Prohibition on Sex During the Niddah Period**

**Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:19** states: 'You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her period of uncleanness.' **Vayikra (Leviticus) 20:18** adds the severe consequence: 'If a man lies with a woman during her menstrual period and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow and she has exposed her flow, and both of them shall be cut off from among their people.'

The **niddah** (נדדה) period begins when a woman's menstrual flow begins. Under the Torah's plain text (**Vayikra (Leviticus) 15:19**), the woman is **niddah** for seven days from the onset of blood. The rabbinic tradition extended this to a minimum of twelve days (the approximate length of the menstrual flow plus seven additional clean days) before resumption of sexual relations. This study acknowledges the Torah's plain text requirement of seven days but notes the additional rabbinic standard of seven clean days following the flow as a protective fence around the prohibition. The Torah's requirement is seven days. The rabbinic standard builds on that.

During the **niddah** period, vaginal sexual intercourse is prohibited. This is not a minor rule or a cultural custom — it carries the severe covenant consequence of karet (being cut off from the people) for both parties. The prohibition is serious, the reason is the sanctity of blood as a covenant substance, and the benefit to the marriage is documented: couples who observe the **niddah** separation consistently report that reunion after the period of separation brings freshness, desire, and passion that replicate the emotional quality of the early marriage.

The wife's immersion in a **mikveh** (ritual bath) following the clean period marks the transition back to permitted intimacy. The Torah does not specify **mikveh** — it specifies immersion in water (**Vayikra (Leviticus) 15:16-18** covers similar immersion requirements). The rabbinic application of the **mikveh** requirement for **niddah** purity is an established practice that serves the Torah's intent of marking the transition from prohibited to permitted status.

### **Positions and Physical Arrangements**

The Talmud addresses sexual positions in several places, primarily to note that all positions are permitted, with the preference for the man-on-top (missionary) position for procreative intercourse specifically. Peninei Halakha states: 'All possible positions are permitted, as long as

both spouses desire them. If changing position enhances the pleasure of either spouse, then doing so is a fulfillment of the mitzva of simhat ona [the joy of the conjugal obligation].'

The Talmud (Nedarim 20a) lists several physical practices that Rabbi Yochanan ben Dahavai claimed would cause birth defects in children — including various unusual positions, oral contact, and kissing certain body parts. The Talmud then records that the sages explicitly rejected his positions: 'The halakha is not in accordance with the opinion of Yochanan ben Dahavai. Rather, whatever a man wishes to do with his wife he may do.' The minority restrictive opinion was overruled by the majority permissive ruling.

The one consistent guideline from multiple authorities is that the husband should not approach sex in a position of dominance that diminishes his wife. The Iggeret Hakodesh specifically addresses the importance of the couple's mutual pleasure and mutual dignity in the act. The act of one flesh is a covenant meeting — not a performance or an assertion of ownership.

## 17. Sexual Positions and Practices — The Full Range of What Is Addressed

This section documents specifically what practices are addressed in the Torah and halakhic literature, what is permitted, what is prohibited, and what is not addressed. This is a factual catalog, written for adults who need accurate information rather than culturally filtered generalizations.

### Vaginal Intercourse — The Primary Act

Vaginal intercourse — the penetration of the wife's vagina by the husband's penis — is the primary sexual act of the one-flesh covenant (***echad basar***). It is the act **Beresheet (Genesis) 2:24** describes, the act the ***onah*** obligation requires, and the act from which all other sexual practices are measured. All other permitted acts are extensions or complements of this primary act, not replacements for it.

### Oral Stimulation — Permitted as Foreplay and Arousal

Oral stimulation of both husband and wife is addressed in the halakhic literature and is generally permitted within the covenant marriage. Oral stimulation of the husband to arousal — without ejaculation — is permitted by the majority of authorities under the Talmud's ruling in Nedarim 20b. Oral stimulation of the wife's vulva and clitoris (cunnilingus) is addressed in the halakhic literature and permitted as a means of arousing the wife and ensuring her pleasure, which the ***onah*** obligation requires the husband to provide.

The specific condition most authorities draw: ejaculation should occur vaginally, not orally. Oral stimulation that brings the husband to ejaculation without vaginal completion would fall under the question of hashhatat zera (wasting seed). The majority of authorities permit oral stimulation as part of the full sexual encounter that concludes with vaginal intercourse.

### Manual Stimulation — Foreplay and Arousal

Manual stimulation — using the hands to arouse the partner — is permitted and encouraged as part of the process of preparing the wife for intercourse. The Talmud (Nedarim 20a) specifically mentions preparation of the wife as a covenant obligation, and manual arousal is a natural part of that preparation. The husband is not prohibited from manually stimulating his wife's genitals, and the wife is not prohibited from manually arousing her husband, provided the act is part of the sexual union rather than a replacement for it.

## Anal Intercourse — Talmudic Permission vs. Torah Design

As documented in Section 16, the Talmud (Nedarim 20b) and **Rambam** (Mishneh Torah 21:9) permit anal intercourse between husband and wife as a matter of rabbinic law. This is a Talmudic position — a ruling by men reasoning beyond the Torah text — not a Torah text itself. Miqdash Bethel's standard is the Torah text alone. The Torah's one-flesh design in **Beresheet (Genesis) 2:24** is anatomically specific: the joining of male and female in vaginal union. The Torah's prohibition in **Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:22** is grounded in this same anatomical logic. No Torah verse creates a separate permitted category of anal intercourse between husband and wife. The Talmud goes beyond what the Torah text itself establishes, and where commentary goes beyond the Torah, the Torah governs. This assembly does not present anal intercourse between husband and wife as a Torah-endorsed practice.

The medical evidence addressed in Part Seven reinforces this position: anal intercourse carries significant physical risks including tearing of the anal lining, elevated transmission rates for sexually transmitted diseases, and risk of fecal contamination. Islamic law agrees with Torah's anatomical boundary here — al-Baqarah 2:223's tafsir is unanimous that all positions are permitted as long as intercourse occurs in the vagina, and authenticated hadith explicitly curse anal intercourse with a wife. A husband who loves his wife with covenant love will honor both the Torah's design and the physical reality of how **Yahweh** built her body.

## What Is Categorically Prohibited

Within the covenant marriage, the following acts are prohibited regardless of mutual consent:

- Sexual intercourse during the wife's *niddah* period (**Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:19, 20:18**). This is a capital-consequence prohibition. The period of separation is not negotiable.
- Deliberate wasting of seed — the husband systematically ejaculating outside the vagina for the specific purpose of avoiding procreation or denying his wife the covenant completion of the act (**Beresheet (Genesis) 38:9-10**).
- Sexual acts performed under force or coercion. The prohibition on compelling the wife (Eruvin 100b) applies to all sexual acts, not only vaginal intercourse.
- Acts involving pain deliberately inflicted on the wife. The *onah* obligation is to her pleasure and satisfaction, not her suffering.

## 18. Frequency, Desire, and the Onah Obligation — How Often, Under What Circumstances

The Mishnah's frequency schedule (Ketubot 5:6) establishes minimum floors based on occupation. These are the starting point, not the ceiling. A husband who meets the minimum while showing no affection, warmth, or genuine attention to his wife's needs has technically complied while violating the spirit of the covenant completely.

### The Mishnah's Frequency Schedule

The schedule from Ketubot 5:6, Rabbi Eliezer:

- Men of independence (not employed in physically or schedule-demanding labor): daily.
- Laborers (manual workers who work daily): twice per week.
- Donkey-drivers (traveling merchants, short regional journeys): once per week.
- Camel-drivers (long-distance trade requiring extended travel): once in thirty days.
- Sailors (extended ocean voyages): once in six months.

These minimums apply when the wife desires intimacy. If the wife does not desire it on a given occasion, the husband's obligation is to be attentive to her signals and approach her with warmth and patience rather than mechanical fulfillment of his schedule. The Talmud is explicit: the obligation is to her pleasure and satisfaction — not to check a box.

For the practical household of today: most men in contemporary life fall into the laborer category or better. Twice weekly as a minimum is the relevant baseline for most households, with daily being the ideal for couples who are at home together with time and health to support it. The Shulchan Aruch notes that Friday night (Shabbat evening) is considered an especially appropriate time for intimacy — the day of rest and covenant renewal is the ideal context for the renewal of the one-flesh covenant.

### When Frequency Must Increase

The Talmud (Ketubot 63a) establishes that when a wife communicates increased desire through 'beauty enhancements' — the text describes her adorning herself — the husband is obligated to respond with increased attentiveness. The wife's expression of desire is a signal the husband is covenantally required to honor.

**Devarim (Deuteronomy) 24:5** establishes a specific first-year obligation: 'When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army or be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home for one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.' The new husband's first obligation is to his wife's happiness and sexual fulfillment for a full year. No military duty, no extended business travel, no extended absence from the household during the first twelve months of marriage. This is **Yahweh's** direct command establishing that the new marriage covenant must be given time to root and grow.

### When Frequency May Decrease

There are valid reasons a husband may temporarily be unable to fulfill the minimum frequency. Serious illness, unavoidable extended travel for essential purposes, extreme physical exhaustion from legitimate labor — these are acknowledged as circumstances where the wife can and should show understanding. What is not acceptable is a husband who systematically withholds intimacy as punishment, control, or because he has lost interest in his wife while still married to her.

A husband who withholds intimacy even once from the required minimum without valid reason violates the negative commandment: 'Onasah lo yigra' — you shall not diminish her **onah**. This is not a guideline. It is a specific Torah prohibition. A husband who persistently refuses to fulfill the **onah** obligation can be brought before a court and compelled to either fulfill the obligation or divorce his wife with her full **ketubbah** payment.

### Quality, Not Just Quantity

The Talmud's most pointed teaching on this subject comes from the analogy of the rooster, cited by Rabbi Yochanan: 'If the Torah had not been given, we could have learned... good manners from the rooster, who first coaxes and then mates.' The rooster courts before mounting. The man is expected to demonstrate greater attention to his wife than a rooster — which means that arousal, preparation, emotional connection, and attentiveness are expected components of the covenant sexual act, not optional additions.

The halakhic principle of simhat **onah** — the joy of the conjugal obligation — means the act is supposed to be joyful for both parties. If the wife is consistently unsatisfied, unroused, or left in pain after the act, the husband has not fulfilled the **onah** obligation regardless of the frequency. The standard is her satisfaction and joy.

## 19. When Sex Is Withheld — Its Effects on the Marriage and What Torah Says

Sexual withdrawal within marriage is one of the most destructive forces in any household. The research presented in the original 138-page study documented the medical and psychological effects of extended sexual abstinence within a committed relationship. This section addresses both what the Torah says and what the evidence shows.

### The Torah's Position on Sexual Withholding

The Torah addresses sexual withholding from both directions. A husband who withholds from his wife violates the **onah** obligation — **Shemot (Exodus) 21:10**'s 'he shall not diminish her **onah**.' A wife who systematically refuses her husband is termed a **moredet** (rebellious wife) — Ketubot 63a-64a documents the progressive reduction of her **ketubbah** rights and eventually the husband's right to divorce her for cause.

Critically, the Mishnah (Ketubot 5:6) establishes that a husband may not make a vow of abstinence lasting longer than two weeks (school of Shammai) or one week (school of Hillel) without his wife's consent. The Talmud (Ketubot 62a-b) addresses the consequences of a Torah scholar who leaves to study for extended periods without his wife's permission — her **onah** rights are not suspended simply because he has chosen to be away.

### What Extended Withholding Does to a Marriage

The research is consistent and extensive. Extended periods without sexual contact within a committed relationship produce:

- Decreased emotional intimacy and connection between partners. Sex in a committed relationship is a primary bonding mechanism, and the oxytocin and bonding hormones it releases are not produced by other forms of interaction at the same level.
- Increased irritability, mistrust, and negative self-perception in the partner being withheld from. Clinical research documents these as among the consistent signs of sexual deprivation within a relationship.
- In men specifically: increased likelihood of seeking sexual gratification elsewhere. This is not a moral defense of infidelity — it is a biological and behavioral pattern documented across cultures. The Torah's regulation of multiple wives and concubinage is partly a recognition of this reality.
- In women specifically: the factors that typically produce sexual withdrawal in women — interpersonal relationship issues, decreased testosterone as age increases, depression, medication side effects, and emotional disconnection from the husband — are all addressable. The medical research cited in the original study documents that in many cases of low female sexual desire, hormonal, medical, and relational interventions can restore desire. A husband whose wife has stopped wanting sexual intimacy should be asking why and working on solutions, not simply tolerating or punishing the situation.

The Torah's instinct is correct: the covenant couple should not enter extended periods of sexual separation except under specific recognized circumstances (**niddah**, serious illness, unavoidable travel), and even those circumstances have defined endpoints. The management of sexual distance in a marriage is a covenant responsibility — not a private matter to be suffered in silence.

### When Withholding Is Used as a Weapon

The deliberate withholding of sex as a means of controlling, punishing, or manipulating a spouse is a covenant violation regardless of which spouse does it. The Talmud addresses this

directly: using sex as a 'weapon' against a partner is identified as abusive behavior. The covenant of the marriage bed is a space of mutual giving — not a resource to be managed for leverage.

A wife who withholds sex from her husband to control his behavior, to express anger, or to punish him for unrelated wrongs is using a covenant gift as a tool of harm. A husband who withholds sex from his wife for the same reasons is violating the *onah* obligation directly. Both patterns, if persistent, damage the covenant at its most intimate level and create the conditions for the household's eventual dissolution.

## 20. Sexual Problems in Marriage — Loss of Desire, Medical Causes, Practical Counsel

This section addresses the practical realities of sexual dysfunction within covenant households. The Torah's framework assumes two people who are capable of fulfilling their covenant obligations — but physical, emotional, and medical realities affect that capacity. Understanding what can go wrong and what can be done about it is part of the practical responsibility of the covenant household.

### Loss of Desire in Women — Medical and Relational Causes

Hypoactive sexual desire disorder (HSDD) — clinically diagnosed low sexual desire causing distress — affects nearly one-third of women aged 18 to 59. The causes are multiple and interactive:

- **Hormonal:** Testosterone levels in women peak in the mid-20s and decline steadily through menopause, when they drop dramatically. Low testosterone is directly associated with reduced sexual desire. Post-menopausal vaginal dryness further reduces the physical pleasure of intercourse.
- **Medications:** Certain antidepressants (SSRIs particularly), blood pressure medications, and oral contraceptives reduce sexual desire as documented side effects. A wife whose desire has dropped significantly after starting a new medication may find a medication change restores her drive.
- **Relational:** Loss of emotional intimacy with the husband, unresolved conflict, feelings of being taken for granted, and the husband's failure to court and pursue his wife are among the most commonly cited relational causes of female sexual desire loss. Women's sexuality is more relationally connected than men's — the emotional quality of the marriage directly affects the wife's sexual desire.
- **Life events:** The birth of a child produces a significant shift in a woman's focus from her mate to the infant. This is biologically programmed and not a rejection of the husband. The husband who understands this and supports rather than pressures his wife during postpartum recovery will find her desire returning more readily than the husband who makes her feel guilty.

### Loss of Desire in Men — Medical and Relational Causes

Men are not immune to sexual desire problems. Low testosterone (hypogonadism), depression, anxiety, chronic stress, obesity, certain medications, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes can all reduce male libido and produce erectile dysfunction. The cultural assumption that men always want sex is biologically inaccurate — and a husband who is experiencing low desire or

erectile problems often suffers in silence out of shame, which prevents him from getting help and further damages the covenant household.

A husband who cannot fulfill the **onah** obligation because of a medical condition is not automatically in violation of the covenant — the covenant requires fulfillment to the level of his capacity. But he is obligated to seek resolution: to consult a physician, to address treatable causes, and to communicate honestly with his wife about what is happening rather than simply withdrawing from her.

### What the Husband Can Do When His Wife Has Lost Desire

The Torah's framework gives the husband several tools:

- Court her. The Talmud's instruction to 'first coax and then mate' does not only apply to the immediate prelude to sex. It applies to the relational pattern of the entire marriage. A husband whose wife has lost desire should examine whether he is still courting her — expressing affection, showing interest in her as a person, offering non-sexual affection, expressing appreciation for who she is and what she does.
- Address relational issues honestly. If unresolved conflict, emotional distance, or accumulated resentment is driving the sexual distance, addressing the relational root will do more than any physical intervention.
- Seek medical counsel together. Both husband and wife can be evaluated for hormonal and medical causes of low desire. Treatments are available.
- If medical or physical causes make the wife unable to fulfill the **onah** in the conventional sense, the husband and wife together may need to find other forms of mutual intimacy that honor the covenant while accommodating the physical limitation. The principle that the husband must not be deprived of sexual expression — one of the Torah's honest acknowledgments of male sexual need — does not disappear because of the wife's physical limitation. The household must work out how to honor both the wife's condition and the husband's legitimate need.

For the husband who has genuinely done everything within his power to restore intimacy and his wife continues to refuse without valid reason, the Torah provides a legal remedy through the divorce process. This is not a first response or an easy exit — it is the Torah's final protection for a man whose covenant has been unilaterally broken by a **moredet** who refuses to honor her obligations.

## PART FIVE: CONCUBINAGE

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### 21. The Pilegish — Her Definition, Status, Rights, and Role

The pilegish (פִּילְגֵשׁ) — the concubine — is one of the most misunderstood and most deliberately distorted figures in the entire Torah legal framework. Christian tradition reduced her to a sex slave or a kept mistress. Modern culture has no category for her at all. The Torah's picture is neither of those: the pilegish is a covenant companion — a woman in a legitimate, defined relationship with a man — who has a specific status, specific rights, and specific protections under Torah law. She is a wife of a different and lesser formal standing than a full wife, but a wife nonetheless.

#### The Hebrew Word Pilegish

The word pilegish (פִּילְגֵשׁ) appears approximately 37 times in the Tanakh. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Ketubot 5:2) gives the clearest legal definition: a pilegish differs from a full wife (*ishah*, the woman with a *ketubbah* and full *kiddushin* ceremony) in the level of her formal legal protection — specifically in the *ketubbah* document and its divorce settlement provisions — not in her fundamental status as a covenant partner to the man.

According to Rashi (from the Jerusalem Talmud): 'Wives receive *kiddushin* and *ketubbah*; concubines receive *kiddushin* but without *ketubbah*.' The pilegish enters the household through *kiddushin* — the formal act of covenant designation by which the man sets her apart for himself and no other. She is not a casual girlfriend, a temporary arrangement, or a prostitute. She is designated and exclusive to her man. The Wikipedia article on pilegish notes that the word may derive from the Aramaic 'palgah isha' — 'half-wife' — which accurately reflects her intermediate status.

#### The Pilegish's Rights Within the Household

The pilegish's rights under Torah are grounded in **Shemot (Exodus) 21:10-11** and the precedents of the Tanakh's own narratives. While she does not have the full *ketubbah* protection of a formal wife, she has:

- The right to *sheer*, *kesut*, and *onah* — food, clothing, and marital rights — under the same general principle that governs the husband's obligations to any woman in his household. **Shemot (Exodus) 21:10** is not limited to formal wives — it governs the husband's treatment of any woman he has taken under covenant.
- The right to be regarded as an *eshet ish* — a man's woman — such that any man who has intercourse with her commits *na'aph* (adultery) against her man. The Talmud Yerushalmi makes this clear: the pilegish is halakhically considered a man's woman, and the prohibitions against sexual contact with another man's woman apply to her.
- The right to the protection of the household. The pilegish at Gibeah (Shofetim 19) — whose rape by the men of Gibeah produced a national civil war — illustrates what Yisra'el understood about the protection a man owed his pilegish. The entire nation rose against Binyamin in response to the crime against her. The Levite's failure to protect her adequately is part of the moral narrative of that chapter. But the nation's response to her violation establishes clearly that a pilegish was not a nobody whose body was available to others.

#### What Makes a Pilegish Different From a Wife

The key distinctions between a pilegish and a full wife (*ishah*) in the Torah and halakhic framework:

- The **ketubbah**: The full wife receives a **ketubbah** that specifies her divorce settlement — the financial protection she receives if the husband divorces her. The pilegish traditionally did not receive this document, or received a lesser version. This means her financial protection on divorce was less certain, depending on the man's voluntary provision.
- Formal ceremony: The full wife's marriage was preceded by **erusin** (betrothal) and **nissu'in** (marriage ceremony). The pilegish's relationship was established through **kiddushin** (designation/setting apart) but without the full formal ceremony.
- Social standing: The full wife had higher social standing within the household and within the community. The pilegish was recognized but ranked below the formal wife.
- Inheritance for children: The children of the pilegish were generally recognized as legitimate but might have been ranked below the children of the full wife in inheritance precedence, depending on the specific household arrangement (see **Beresheet (Genesis) 25:6** — **Avraham** giving gifts to his concubines' sons while Isaac received the inheritance).

### The Tanakh's Pilegish Examples — A Brief Survey

The Tanakh records multiple pilegish relationships across multiple household types, all without moral condemnation of the institution itself:

- **Hagar**: **Sarai** gave **Hagar** to **Avram** as a concubine (**Beresheet (Genesis) 16:3**). The narrative is complicated by **Sarai's** jealousy and the subsequent expulsion — but the arrangement itself is presented as legitimate. **Yahweh** protected **Hagar** and her son, confirming that the pilegish and her child were under His covenant care.
- **Keturah**: Listed as **Avraham's** wife in **Beresheet (Genesis) 25:1** and as his concubine in *Divrei HaYamim* (*Chronicles*) *Alef* 1:32. The dual status confirms what the Talmud documents: the boundary between wife and concubine was sometimes fluid, with a woman's status potentially shifting over time.
- **Bilhah** and **Zilpah**: **Rachel** and **Leah** each gave their handmaids to **Ya'akov** as pilegish. Twelve sons resulted across the four women, all of whom became tribal patriarchs of *Yisra'el*. **Yahweh's** covenant with **Ya'akov** and the twelve tribes was established through this multiple-partner household structure.
- **Rizpah**: **Sha'ul's** pilegish (*Shemuel Bet* 3:7). Her devotion to her sons after their death — standing guard over their bodies against birds and animals — is one of the most powerful expressions of maternal love in the entire Tanakh. She is presented with dignity and honor.
- **David's** ten concubines: *Shemuel Bet* 15:16. When **David** fled *Yerushalayim* during **Avshalom's** coup, he left ten concubines to keep the house. **Avshalom** violated them publicly — a political act of usurpation (claiming the harem of the king was claiming the kingdom). The ten concubines are subsequently kept in confinement as widows alive (*Shemuel Bet* 20:3) — **David** neither returns to them nor releases them. Their story is one of victims of political violence, not a statement about the institution of concubinage itself.

## 22. How a Man Takes a Concubine — The Process, the Obligations, the Limits

The Torah does not prescribe a specific ceremony for taking a pilegish. What it establishes are the obligations that govern the relationship once established. The process is simpler than formal marriage precisely because the formal protections are fewer — and that simplicity carries corresponding responsibility for the man taking the concubine.

### The Scholarly Debate on the Pilegish Today

This study acknowledges an important scholarly debate within the Hebrew legal tradition about whether the institution of the pilegish is currently permitted for commoners. The **Rambam** (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Melachim (Kings) 4:4) holds that concubines without **kiddushin** are reserved for kings only, and that a commoner who has a woman without **kiddushin** is in violation of Torah. The Rashba, the Meiri, and Rabbeinu Yonah (Jonah) agree with this restrictive position.

However, Nahmanides (**Ramban**), Rabbi **Ya'akov** Emden (18th century), and Rabbi Yitzchak Toledano (20th century) disagree — holding that the pilegish relationship is permitted for commoners provided the woman is designated exclusively to the man (**kiddushin** in the sense of being set apart for him) and that she observes the **niddah** laws. Rabbi Emden wrote explicitly: 'All that is required of the pilegish is that she go to the **mikveh** and remain faithful to her man, and the relationship is not only permitted but may be beneficial.'

This study does not resolve the scholarly debate — that is for the individual household head to examine with study and prayer. What this study does establish is the framework: if a pilegish relationship is entered, these are the obligations that govern it.

### The Required Elements for a Legitimate Pilegish Relationship

Drawing from the consensus of authorities who permit pilegish for commoners (**Ramban**, Emden, and others), the minimum requirements for a covenant-legitimate pilegish relationship are:

- Designation (**kiddushin** in its sense of setting apart): The man designates the woman specifically and exclusively for himself. She is not available to other men. This is not a casual arrangement or a rotating situation — it is a covenant commitment to one specific woman.
- Exclusivity on her part: The pilegish is sexually exclusive to her man. If she has sexual intercourse with another man while designated to him, she commits the equivalent of **na'aph** and the relationship is violated at its foundation. There is no asymmetry on this point — the woman in a pilegish relationship owes the same sexual faithfulness to her man that a wife owes to her husband.
- **Niddah** observance: The woman observes the Torah's **niddah** prohibition. This is not negotiable. Sexual contact during the **niddah** period is prohibited regardless of the formal status of the relationship.
- **Sheer** and **kesut** provision: The man provides for the woman's sustenance and covering. A pilegish who is not being cared for materially has not been properly taken into the household covenant.
- **Onah**: The man attends to the pilegish's sexual needs as he does his wife's. The minimum frequency of **onah** applies to the pilegish as it does to the wife. A man who takes a concubine and then neglects her sexually while attending only to his wife has violated the covenant of the relationship.

## The Limits of the Pilegish Relationship

What the pilegish relationship is not:

- It is not a license for casual sexual access without covenant commitment. The man who treats a woman as a pilegish while making no provision for her, maintaining no exclusivity, and taking no responsibility for her is not practicing pilagshut — he is practicing **zanah**, which the Torah condemns.
- It is not a relationship entered into secretly from the man's existing wife or wives without eventually becoming known. The Torah's household structure is transparent within the household. Secrets within the household violate the covenant of trust that governs the **beit av**.
- It is not a financial arrangement where the man pays for access. That is harlotry, which is a different category entirely.
- It is not permanent enslavement. The pilegish who is not being provided for under the covenant obligations of **Shemot (Exodus) 21:10-11** has the right to go free — just as the wife who is deprived of **sheer**, **kesut**, or **onah** has the right to go free without payment. The pilegish is not a possession. She is a covenant partner with fewer formal protections than a wife, but with real protections nonetheless.

## 23. The Pilegish's Sexual Role in the Household

The pilegish's sexual role in the household is to be the man's covenant intimate — sharing his bed, bearing his children if **Yahweh** so provides, and receiving from him the **onah** that **Shemot (Exodus) 21:10** requires. The sexual relationship with the pilegish is governed by the same principles as the sexual relationship with the wife: it must be willing, must involve the man's attentiveness to her needs, must respect the **niddah** prohibition, and must not involve force or coercion.

The primary historical use of the pilegish, as documented in the Tanakh, was as a solution to specific covenant household needs: a wife who was barren and wanted to provide children for the household through a surrogate (**Sarai** and **Hagar**, **Rachel** and **Bilhah**, **Leah** and **Zilpah**); a widow who needed covenant protection and a household; or a woman who, for legal, social, or financial reasons, could not enter a full formal marriage but could enter a recognized covenant relationship. These were not purely sexual arrangements — they were household solutions with a sexual component.

The man who takes a pilegish is not adding a sexual toy to his household. He is taking a woman under covenant responsibility. Her wellbeing, her sexual satisfaction, her material provision, and her protection from harm are his responsibility from the moment he designates her as his.

## 24. The Wife's Relationship to the Concubine — Dynamics, Jealousy, Covenant Order

The Torah is honest about the difficulty of this relationship. The Hebrew word for co-wife — **tzarah** (צָרָה) — literally means trouble, distress, rival. The Torah uses this word in Shemuel Alef 1:6, describing Peninnah as Chanah's **tzarah** — her rival wife — who provoked her grievously. The language is unflinching: having a co-wife produces rivalry and pain. **Vayikra (Leviticus)**

**18:18** prohibits taking a wife's sister as a co-wife 'to be a rival (litzror)' — acknowledging that co-wives are in tension by nature. The question is not whether rivalry will arise but how the covenant household manages it.

### Why the Torah Acknowledges the Difficulty

**Yahweh** did not design the regulation of multiple-wife households while being unaware of human emotional reality. The Tanakh's own narratives are full of the pain that can accompany these arrangements: **Sarai's** cruelty to **Hagar**, **Rachel** and **Leah's** competition for **Ya'akov's** attention and for children, Chanah's weeping before **Yahweh** over Peninnah's taunting. These are not editorial failures — they are part of the Torah's honest picture of how regulated structures play out in real human households. The Torah's regulation of polygynous households does not promise they will be emotionally smooth. It promises they can be governed justly.

### What the First Wife Is Owed When a Second Woman Enters

**Shemot (Exodus) 21:10** was written specifically for this moment: 'If he takes another wife for himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights.' The first wife's covenant protections do not diminish when a second woman enters the household. Her **onah** frequency does not decrease. Her material provision does not decrease. Her status as covenant partner to the husband does not change.

The husband who allows the first wife's needs to be crowded out or minimized by the arrival of a second woman has violated the covenant with the first wife, regardless of how much he loves the second. Equal treatment — **sheer**, **kesut**, and **onah** equally distributed — is the Torah's non-negotiable standard. The man who cannot fulfill this standard honestly should not take a second wife.

### How to Manage Jealousy — Practical Guidance

From the author's own experience in a multiple-wife household, and from the patterns documented across the Tanakh's polygynous narratives, the following principles emerge for managing the jealousy and competition that will inevitably arise:

- Transparency about time and attention. The husband who spends time with one wife must be honest with the other about where he is and what he is doing. Secrets within the household amplify jealousy. Transparency, even when the truth is difficult, is better than concealment.
- Individual recognition. Each woman in the household is a specific person with specific gifts, qualities, and ways of loving. The husband who treats his wives as interchangeable units has failed to see them. When each wife knows the husband values her specifically — not just in comparison to the other — the comparative competition loses much of its fuel.
- Equal provision without identical treatment. **Shemot (Exodus) 21:10** requires equal provision — not identical provision. A wife who is pregnant needs different things than a wife who is not. A wife who prefers quiet time needs different attentiveness than a wife who needs social engagement. Equal treatment means equal care for each woman's specific needs, not identical treatment regardless of individual differences.
- Addressing jealousy directly and early. When jealousy arises — and it will — the husband must address it directly rather than ignoring it and hoping it resolves. A woman who feels her husband is pulling away, giving more attention to the other wife, or being unfair in some dimension needs to be heard and responded to. The husband who dismisses her feelings as unreasonable makes them worse. The husband who listens,

acknowledges, and adjusts where he has been unjust builds the trust that makes the household stable.

- The wives' relationship to each other. The two or more women in a household are not required to be close friends, though it is a blessing when they are. They are required to behave with covenant respect toward each other — not to compete destructively, not to undermine each other with the husband, and not to create the kind of poisonous atmosphere that makes the household a place of strife rather than peace. The husband's role is to model the standard of covenant treatment for everyone in his household, including how he talks about one wife to another.

### When the First Wife Strongly Objects

The Torah does not require a husband to obtain his first wife's permission before taking a second wife or concubine. There is no such requirement in the Torah text. However, as this study notes from personal experience and from the wisdom of the covenant household: a husband who proceeds without any acknowledgment of his first wife's feelings and without doing everything possible to prepare her and bring her into the process will face a household in crisis rather than a household in expansion.

The fact that the Torah does not require permission does not mean a wise husband ignores his wife's response entirely. The prohibition on causing unnecessary pain to another person — the covenant obligation of love that runs through the entire Torah — requires the husband to handle this transition with as much care and honesty as the situation allows. He is not bound to remain in monogamy because his wife objects. He is bound to love his wife as himself even while exercising his covenant authority to expand the household.

## 25. Female Sexual Gratification Within the Household — Torah's Silence and Its Meaning

The Torah is silent on the subject of sexual gratification between two women within a covenant household — and that silence is itself significant, carefully considered, and carries specific meaning that this study addresses directly.

### What the Torah Does Not Prohibit

The Torah's specific sexual prohibitions for women are:

- Sexual intercourse with any man other than her husband (*na'aph* — adultery — **Vayikra (Leviticus) 20:10**).
- Sexual intercourse during the *niddah* period (**Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:19**).
- Bestiality — lying down with an animal (**Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:23, 20:16**).

The Torah does not prohibit sexual gratification between two women. There is no verse in the Torah — in **Vayikra (Leviticus) 18**, in **Vayikra (Leviticus) 20**, or anywhere else — that specifically prohibits female-to-female sexual activity. This is not an oversight. **Yahweh's** Torah is precise. The silence is intentional.

### Why the Silence — The Anatomical Reality

The silence is grounded in the anatomical and covenant reality of Section 6 and 16: sexual intercourse is defined in Torah as *shakav* and *echad basar* — the one-flesh union through penetration. Two women cannot become *echad basar*. They cannot complete the one-flesh covenant as defined by *basar* in **Beresheet (Genesis) 2:24**. They cannot procreate. They

cannot fulfill the primary covenant purpose of the sexual act. Because the specific Torah prohibition is about the specific act of sexual intercourse — penetration of the male organ — and two women are anatomically incapable of that act with each other, the Torah has nothing to prohibit.

### **What Remains True Despite the Silence**

The Torah's silence does not mean sexual activity between women is without any limits or considerations:

- A woman must always desire her husband first. The silence on female-female activity does not mean a wife can replace her husband with another woman. The woman was made as a helpmate for the man (**Beresheet (Genesis) 2:18**). The covenant of the household places her sexual primary orientation toward her husband. She may have physical gratification with another woman in the household — a co-wife, a concubine — but if this becomes her primary sexual attachment and her husband becomes secondary or unwanted, she has moved into the territory of Lesbianism as defined in Section 33, which is prohibited by the Torah's design even if not by its explicit text.
- Consent and covenant framework. Sexual activity between women in a household context — between co-wives, or between a wife and a concubine — occurs within a covenant structure that the husband governs. It is not random or secret. The husband is the *rosh beit av*. Activity within his household that he does not know about and has not acknowledged undermines the covenant structure he is responsible for.
- Health considerations. As documented in Section 33, certain sexually transmitted diseases can be transmitted between women through sexual contact. The same standard of health awareness that governs all sexual activity in the household applies here.

This study's position, grounded in the Torah's silence and in the covenant design of **Beresheet (Genesis) 2**, is that sexual gratification between women within a covenant household is not prohibited by the Torah's explicit text. A loving husband who cannot provide his wife the sexual satisfaction she needs — whether because of medical incapacity, temporary absence, or the physical realities of the household — and who has a co-wife or concubine who can provide that gratification to his wife, has the covenant authority to permit and arrange that within his household. This is an act of love, not an act of abandonment. He must always remain his wife's primary sexual covenant partner. But the Torah does not require that she remain entirely unsatisfied when circumstances prevent him from meeting all her needs.

## PART SIX: PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR THE MULTIPLE-WIFE OR CONCUBINE HOUSEHOLD

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### 26. Building the Multiple-Wife Household — Preparation, Process, and Communication

This section is written from the standpoint of practical covenant wisdom — the kind that comes from the Tanakh's own narratives, from the Torah's regulatory framework, and from the lived experience of households that have actually tried to build this structure. It will not pretend the process is simple or that wanting to do it right makes it easy. What it will do is give you the honest framework for approaching it with as much wisdom as the covenant affords.

#### Self-Examination Before Taking a Second Wife or Concubine

Before a man takes a second wife or concubine, he must honestly answer several questions. Not rhetorically, not defensively — but actually, before **Yahweh** and before himself:

- Am I currently fulfilling the **sheer**, **kesut**, and **onah** obligations to my first wife at the Torah's standard? If the answer is no, taking a second wife will not solve the problem with the first — it will compound it.
- Do I have the material resources to provide food, clothing, and housing for an additional woman and potential children without diminishing what I currently provide? The Torah requires equal provision. A man who cannot sustain what he currently has should not expand.
- Do I have the physical capacity to provide **onah** to two or more women at the minimum Torah frequency? Twice weekly per woman is the minimum for most men's occupation category. Four times weekly minimum if there are two wives. This is not a small commitment.
- Am I pursuing this for covenant reasons — to build a household, to provide for a woman who needs the covenant protection of a **beit av**, to have children, to fulfill the purposes **Yahweh** designed — or am I pursuing this primarily for sexual novelty? The Torah permits the structure. It does not guarantee that sexual novelty is the right motivation for entering it.
- Have I been honest with my first wife about who I am, what I want, and what the Torah says — before I am already committed to another woman? Surprise is not covenant. Transparency is.

#### Communication With the First Wife

The Torah does not require a husband to obtain his wife's permission to take a second wife. It does require him to love her as himself (the general covenant principle of treating others as you would be treated), to maintain her **onah** without diminishment, and to not cause her unnecessary suffering. These obligations create a practical framework: the husband who is considering a second wife must communicate with his first wife — not to receive permission, but because he loves her and she deserves to know what is happening in her own household.

The difference between telling a wife what is happening and asking for her permission is significant. The first is covenant transparency. The second cedes authority **Yahweh** gave to the man. A husband who says to his wife: 'I am the head of this household and I have decided to take a second wife — you have no say in this' has exercised his authority while violating his love

obligation. A husband who says: 'I want to talk with you about something important, because you are my covenant partner and I love you, and I want you to understand what I am considering' has exercised both his authority and his love. The second approach does not guarantee a smooth outcome. But it honors the woman.

### **Introducing the Second Woman to the Household**

How the second woman is brought into the household matters enormously for the stability of what follows. Several principles from the Tanakh's household narratives and from practical wisdom:

- The first wife should meet and know the second woman before the covenant relationship is formalized if at all possible. A stranger appearing in the household overnight creates shock and maximum jealousy. A woman the first wife has already encountered, spoken with, and formed some assessment of creates less shock and at least some ground for the relationship that follows.
- The household structure should be communicated clearly to all parties: who has what status, what the expectations are, what the husband's obligations are to each woman, and how the household will be organized. Ambiguity breeds competition. Clarity creates the possibility of order.
- The second woman must understand what she is entering. She is not taking someone's husband — she is entering an existing covenant household as a secondary member. Her relationship with the first wife will either become a source of mutual support or a source of ongoing conflict. The second woman who enters with the attitude that the first wife is an obstacle to her relationship with the husband will produce exactly the crisis she fears. The second woman who enters with genuine respect for the first wife's position and history with the man creates the possibility of a household that functions.

### **Separate Spaces and Shared Spaces**

The biblical record shows that multiple-wife households in the ancient Near East often involved separate living spaces for co-wives — maintaining each woman's individual domestic sphere while sharing the common household resources. This practical arrangement reduced the daily friction of two women occupying the same intimate space continuously. Where resources permit, separate living spaces for co-wives — at minimum, separate bedrooms — reduce the intensity of competition and allow each woman the dignity of her own domestic space.

The husband's time allocation should be structured — not left to improvisation. Improvised time allocation produces the perception (and often the reality) of favoritism. A regular schedule of evenings and nights with each wife, communicated transparently to both, removes much of the daily uncertainty that drives jealousy. Each woman knows when she will have the husband's presence and can plan around that knowledge rather than living in anxious competition for his attention.

## **27. Managing Jealousy and Competition Between Wives**

The Hebrew word *tzarah* — co-wife and trouble simultaneously — was not created by accident. The Torah writers understood exactly what they were naming. This section is about how to manage what will arise, not how to prevent what cannot be prevented.

### **The Root of Co-Wife Jealousy**

Co-wife jealousy is rooted in the fear of scarcity — specifically, the fear that the husband's love, attention, time, and resources are a fixed quantity, and that what goes to one woman is taken from the other. This fear is understandable and in some respects accurate: time is finite. A night spent with one wife is a night not spent with the other. The husband cannot be in two places simultaneously.

What is not accurate is the fear that the husband's love itself is a fixed quantity. A father of two children does not love the second child less because he has added the second — his capacity to love expands to encompass both. A man with the covenant maturity to build a multiple-wife household must have the emotional and spiritual capacity to love each woman as an individual — not as a competitor in a fixed-sum game, but as a specific person with specific needs and specific gifts whom he has covenanted to provide for.

When the husband communicates this — consistently, through behavior as much as through words — the root fear of scarcity begins to lose its grip. It never disappears entirely. But it becomes manageable.

### **The Husband's Role as Active Mediator**

The patriarch of the multiple-wife household is not a passive bystander watching his wives compete for his attention. He is the active builder of the household's covenant culture. That means:

- He does not allow one wife to speak disrespectfully about the other in his presence. Not once, not casually, not as humor. The man who laughs at his first wife's cutting remark about his second wife has just communicated that the second wife's dignity is negotiable within his household. The standard of respect runs in both directions.
- He does not share one wife's private conversations or complaints to the other wife. Confidence is the foundation of trust. A wife who tells her husband something in the intimacy of their private time must be able to trust that her words will not be weaponized against her in the household's politics.
- He addresses conflicts between co-wives directly rather than allowing them to fester. When two women in the same household have a conflict, the patriarch's responsibility is to hear both sides, identify what is actually happening, and make a clear decision that is consistent with the Torah's standard of equal treatment. He does not take sides. He adjudicates.
- He invests individually in each relationship. The wife who consistently gets only the husband's leftover attention — the time after he has already given his best energy to the other wife — will feel the diminishment even if the formal **onah** schedule is being met. The covenant obligation of **onah** is qualitative as well as quantitative.

### **When Co-Wives Become Genuine Allies**

The highest expression of the multiple-wife household — and it is achievable, though it requires time and mutual goodwill — is when the co-wives move from being rivals to being genuine covenant partners with each other. When two women who share a husband choose to see each other as allies in building the household rather than competitors for its resources, the entire dynamic shifts. The children gain two mothers. The household gains two women's gifts rather than one's gifts and one's constant opposition. The husband gains a household of peace rather than a household of strife.

This does not happen through the husband commanding it. It happens when each woman experiences the other as genuinely caring about her children, genuinely helpful in the household, and genuinely respectful of her position — and when the husband consistently models the standard of covenant care for each of them that makes the other's security feel real

rather than theoretical. The author of this study writes from personal experience: the moments when a multiple-wife household functions as designed — two women who have chosen to love each other as covenant sisters rather than rivals — are among the most beautiful expressions of **Yahweh's** household design that a man can witness.

## 28. Equal Treatment — The Standard Yahweh Holds the Patriarch To

**Shemot (Exodus) 21:10** establishes the floor. But the full covenant standard of equal treatment runs deeper than the minimum of food, clothing, and marital rights. This section addresses what equal treatment actually looks like in the lived reality of a multiple-wife household.

### Equal Does Not Mean Identical

Two women are not the same woman. Their needs are different, their personalities are different, their histories with the husband are different, and their current life circumstances may be very different. Equal treatment means that both women receive from the husband the same quality and caliber of attention to their specific needs — not that both women receive exactly the same things.

A wife who is postpartum needs different things than a wife who is not. A wife who is working outside the home needs different scheduling than a wife who is home full-time. A wife who is emotionally struggling needs the husband's attentive presence in a different way than a wife who is thriving. Equal treatment means the husband is paying equally careful attention to both women's needs and meeting them with equal commitment — not dispensing identical parcels of time and material resources without regard for individual circumstance.

### The Onah Obligation in a Multiple-Wife Household

As established in Section 14, each wife is owed her individual **onah** separately. This is both a mathematical reality and a covenant one. The husband with two wives must be honest with himself about whether he is physically and emotionally capable of fulfilling the **onah** obligation to both women at the minimum Torah frequency. For a man whose occupation puts him in the laborer category, that is twice weekly per wife — four times weekly minimum total. For a man in the independence category, it is daily per wife.

The Talmud (and practical reality) acknowledges that the quality of the **onah** obligation matters as much as the frequency. A husband who is going through the motions of the schedule without genuine warmth and attentiveness toward the woman he is with has not fulfilled the covenant even if the schedule is technically met.

### Gifts, Material Expression, and Visible Affection

From the author's personal experience in a multiple-wife household: women will notice and compare gifts, attentions, and material expressions of the husband's care. Whether or not they mention it, they notice. A dress purchased for one wife and not the other. A dinner out with one wife but not the other. Time spent helping one wife with a project but not the other. These visible expressions of care and investment carry enormous emotional weight in a multiple-wife household.

This does not mean every gift must be purchased in duplicate. It means the husband must be aware that each woman is watching whether she is equally valued — and demonstrating that she is, through visible and consistent expressions of care, is part of the equal treatment covenant. A husband who lavishes one wife with attention and material care while the other is

consistently overlooked has communicated his ranking clearly, regardless of what he says about loving them equally.

## 29. Children in a Multiple-Wife Household — Inheritance, Identity, Covenant Standing

Children born to wives and concubines in the covenant household are legitimate children of the father. The Torah's treatment of the children of multiple-wife and concubinage households is consistent: they are the father's children, they bear his covenant identity, and they stand within the covenant community.

### Inheritance — The Torah's Rule

**Devarim (Deuteronomy) 21:15-17** establishes the inheritance rule for multiple-wife households: the firstborn son — regardless of which wife he was born to, regardless of whether the father loves that wife — receives the double portion of the inheritance. The father may not transfer the firstborn status from the son of an unloved wife to the son of a loved wife. The birthright belongs to the biological firstborn.

This rule was established specifically to prevent the kind of favoritism that **Ya'akov** showed in the **Beresheet (Genesis)** narrative — where **Yosef**, born of the beloved **Rachel**, was treated as the heir in the father's heart even though he was not the firstborn son. The Torah corrects this pattern explicitly. The son who was born first to the father receives the double portion, period.

For the children of concubines (pilegshot), the Tanakh's example is **Beresheet (Genesis) 25:6** — **Avraham** gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from **Yitzchak**, confirming that **Yitzchak** received the primary inheritance while the concubines' sons received provision but not the primary covenant inheritance. This is consistent with the pilegsh's own status: she and her children are covenant members of the household with real standing and real provision, but below the formal wife and her children in formal inheritance rank.

### Children's Identity and Covenant Belonging

Children of all the women in the household — wives and concubines — carry the father's covenant identity. They are circumcised if male (**Beresheet (Genesis) 17:12-13** — the circumcision applies to those born in the house, including sons of concubines and servants). They are part of the covenant community. There is no status of illegitimacy in the Hebrew covenant framework for children born to a pilegsh or a secondary wife — illegitimacy (*mamzerut*) applies specifically to children born of prohibited relationships (incest, adultery), not to children born to concubines.

The father's responsibility to all his children — including those born to concubines — is real and ongoing. **Avraham** provided for his concubines' sons before sending them away. King **David** maintained his concubines' sons as part of the royal household. The man who takes a concubine and then abandons the children she bears him has violated the covenant of the household.

### Relationships Between Half-Siblings

In a multiple-wife household, the children of different mothers are half-siblings — they share a father but not a mother. The covenant household structure treats them as brothers and sisters. They are not strangers. The father's covenant with each of his children extends to his household as a whole, and the children of the household — regardless of which woman bore them — grow up as a family under one patriarch's roof.

The Torah's incest prohibitions (**Vayikra (Leviticus) 18**) apply between half-siblings: a man may not marry his father's daughter even if she was born of a different mother (**Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:9**). The household relationship creates the same prohibited closeness as full siblings in terms of the sexual prohibitions.

## **30. Betrayal Trauma — Understanding the Wife's Response and How to Lead Through It**

When a woman discovers that her husband has taken — or intends to take — another wife or concubine, she often experiences what clinical psychology calls betrayal trauma: a profound violation of trust by someone she relies on for her physical, emotional, and psychological security. Understanding this response is not about validating it as a permanent veto over the husband's covenant authority. It is about understanding what his wife is going through so he can lead her through it with genuine love rather than dismissiveness or frustration.

### **What Betrayal Trauma Is and Why It Happens'),**

Betrayal trauma theory, developed by psychologist Jennifer Freyd, describes what happens when a person's trust is violated by someone on whom they are fundamentally dependent. The defining feature is the dependency: the wife who has built her life, her security, and her identity around the covenant of her marriage is not simply disappointed when the husband takes another woman — she experiences it as a threat to her survival. Her nervous system responds accordingly.

The clinical presentation of partner betrayal trauma includes: hypervigilance (constant monitoring of the husband's behavior, communications, and emotional state), intrusive thoughts and images, sleep disturbance, altered self-esteem (feeling that she was not enough, that she failed, that she is being replaced), difficulty trusting in the relationship going forward, and in many cases symptoms meeting the clinical criteria for PTSD.

A husband who responds to this response with 'You're overreacting — the Torah permits this' has failed to understand what is happening to his wife. He is not wrong about the Torah. But he is using a legal correct argument in a moment that calls for pastoral love. The Torah that permits him to take a second wife also requires him to love his first wife as himself. The two truths must be held together.

### **Why Society's Framework Makes This Worse**

The wife's response to her husband's polygyny is not only about her internal attachment needs — it is also shaped by decades of cultural formation that have told her that a husband who wants another woman has already rejected her, that her worth is measured by her husband's exclusive desire for her, and that a woman who 'accepts' her husband's second wife is either a fool or a victim. These cultural narratives are false from a Torah standpoint. But they are deeply embedded. The wife who is experiencing betrayal trauma is not just fighting her own emotional response — she is fighting 2,000 years of Christian monogamous doctrine that has shaped her entire framework for understanding her value as a woman.

A husband who understands this will not tell his wife to stop feeling what she feels. He will give her the time and the consistent covenant care to experience that she has not been diminished — that she is still valued, still provided for, still sexually attended to, still the object of genuine love — and allow that consistent experience to gradually rebuild the security that the initial shock disrupted.

## Practical Steps for the Husband

Leading a wife through betrayal trauma while maintaining the covenant authority of the household requires the following:

- Do not withdraw from her emotionally as the conflict escalates. The instinct when a wife is angry and in pain is to pull away to protect yourself from the friction. Pulling away confirms her worst fear — that she is losing you. Stay present. Stay engaged. Weather the anger with steadiness.
- Continue to fulfill the **onah** obligation consistently. The most powerful covenant communication that she has not been replaced is the husband's continued attentive presence in her bed. The husband who stops being intimate with his first wife after taking a second wife has confirmed her fear with his behavior.
- Be honest about what you are doing and why. Not defensive or legalistic — genuinely honest. If she asks you why you wanted another wife, tell her the truth. Not the theological explanation of Torah permission, but the actual truth of your heart. She can work with the truth. She cannot work with evasion.
- Give it time. The transition from the initial shock of betrayal trauma to a functional household arrangement does not happen in weeks. It takes months and sometimes years of consistent covenant behavior. A husband who expects his wife to be emotionally reconciled to the arrangement within a few weeks has not understood the depth of what she is processing.
- Counsel and support. Where available, counseling from a Torah-grounded advisor who understands the covenant framework — not a secular therapist who will simply validate the wife's objection to the arrangement as the final word — can help the wife process her experience in a framework that honors both her feelings and the Torah's reality.

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## End of Parts Four Through Six

*Parts Seven through Ten — Prohibited Acts, Divorce, Special Topics, and Conclusion — continue in the next document.*

### Miqdash Bethel — The Sanctuary of the House of Yahweh

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*The Torah and the Prophets are the sole doctrinal authority of this ministry.*