

JEWISH LITERACY
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Sexuality in Judaism

- 1) Overview
 - a) Sex and sexuality is not looked down upon
 - i) “Be fruitful and multiply” is the first commandment
 - ii) Reproduction is primary but not only goal of sex
 - b) Sexuality should be channeled through marriage
 - i) Marriage is the ideal
 - ii) Relationship between God and Israel is symbolized by marriage
 - (1) Israel’s faithlessness is compared with adultery
 - (2) Key point of comparison is the exclusive nature of relationship
 - (3) Rabbinic imagery of God marrying the Jewish people with the sky as the Chuppah and the Torah as the Ketubah
 - c) Key element of marriage is to protect the rights of the woman
 - d) Divorce is mentioned in the Bible – details in rabbinic literature
 - e) Questions and controversy
 - i) Homosexuality
 - ii) Polygamy
 - iii) Adultery
 - iv) *Mamzerut* – Illegitimate = offspring of forbidden relationship, not of marriage out of wedlock.
 - v) Premarital sex
- 2) Sex is natural and desirable
 - a) “not good for the human to dwell alone” – this is the first thing God describes in the Torah as being “not good.”
 - i) God makes an *Ezer K’negdo* for him (my translation: “helper in opposition”)
 - ii) Made out of Adam’s *tzela* (could mean “rib” or (side”)
 - iii) Shame about nakedness comes with eating fruit of knowledge of good and evil
 - iv) Term for sex is “knowing”
 - (1) Implies intimacy
 - b) Bible includes both polygamy and concubinage
 - c) Children of concubines are full children
 - i) Several of the tribes are children of Rachel and Leah’s handmaidens
- 3) One goal of sex is pleasure and intimacy
 - a) Marriage is allowed even where childbearing is not possible
 - b) Men have sexual obligations to their wives
 - i) they may not swear not to have sex
 - ii) frequency is a function of their job
 - (1) Sailor: 2x per year
 - (2) Camel driver: once per month
 - (3) Ass driver: once per week
 - (4) Man of leisure – scholar: every night
 - (5) NOTE: only if woman is willing
 - (6) Story of wife waiting for husband on Yom Kippur

- 4) Marriage: Protecting the rights of the woman
 - a) Idea of Ketubah as divorce settlement and set of obligations
 - b) Ways of creating a marriage
 - i) Contract
 - ii) Gift
 - iii) Cohabitation
 - iv) We do all three in modern wedding
 - c) Modern wedding is combination of *Kiddushin* (engagement) & *Nisuin*(marriage)
- 5) Divorce
 - a) Man grants *Get* to woman
 - i) Source of *agunot* problem in Israel
 - ii) The way the Conservative movement treats this problem: The Lieberman Clause
 - iii) Reform approach: religious divorce not required
- 6) Modesty and pre-marital sex
 - a) Traditional Jews have many laws relating to modesty
 - i) Couple never alone until married
 - ii) Men and women don't touch
 - b) Thus, premarital sex is out of the question!
 - c) This said, the product of premarital sex is not a *mamzer* or bastard
 - d) Definition of *mamzer*
 - i) Product of a forbidden union
 - (1) Incest – adultery – etc.
 - (2) Even technical adultery (i.e., remarriage without a *get*)
 - ii) *Mamzer* can only marry another *mamzer*
- 7) Homosexuality
 - a) Biblical source of the prohibition
 - i) Lev. 18:22 “Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman: it is an abhorrence (*toe-ey-vah*)
 - ii) Not clear that either the Bible or Rabbis considered Lesbian sex as sex
 - iii) Reform approach: *Toe-ey-vah* refers to ritual prohibitions
 - (1) Deut. 14:3 “You shall not eat anything abhorrent (*kol toeeyvah*)
 - (2) Scholars think that both these foods and sexual practices may have referred to pagan worship.
 - (3) Bottom line for Reform is commitment of couple not sexual orientation
 - (4) Many Reform rabbis
 - (a) Are homosexual
 - (b) Will perform same gender commitment ceremonies (I will)
- 8) Adultery
 - a) Traditionally only a married woman having sex with a man not her husband
 - b) Reform of course recognizes equality of men and women
 - c) Reform address 3 forms of adultery
 - i) Classic
 - ii) Inadvertent: Result of deceit
 - iii) Technical: Case of one partner having a lifelong illness
- 9) Rabbi Arthur Waslow's Perspective on Sexuality
 - a) We have fulfilled the mitzvah “Be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth”
 - i) We've more that fulfilled it
 - ii) Now model for sexuality is from Song of Songs

YOUR QUESTIONS ON ANY SUBJECT!