

Jewish Literacy # 18 Sexuality and Your Questions

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Overview

- Sex and sexuality is not looked down upon
 - “Be fruitful and multiply” is the first commandment
 - Reproduction is primary but not only goal of sex
- Sexuality should be channeled through marriage
 - Marriage is the ideal
 - Relationship between God and Israel is symbolized by marriage
 - Israel’s faithlessness is compared with adultery
 - Key point of comparison is the exclusive nature of relationship
 - Rabbinic imagery of God marrying the Jewish people with the sky as the Chuppah and the Torah as the Ketubah
- Key element of marriage is to protect the rights of the woman
- Divorce is mentioned in the Bible – details in rabbinic literature
- Questions and controversy
 - Homosexuality
 - Polygamy
 - Adultery
 - *Mamzerut* – Illegitimate = offspring of forbidden relationship, not of marriage out of wedlock.
 - Premarital sex

Sex is Natural and Desirable

- “Not good for the human to dwell alone” – this is the first thing God describes in the Torah as being “not good.”
 - God makes an *Ezer K’negdo* for him (my translation: “helper in opposition”)
 - Made out of Adam’s *tzela* (could mean “rib” or side”)
 - Shame about nakedness comes with eating fruit of knowledge of good and evil
 - Term for sex is “knowing”
 - Implies intimacy
- Bible includes both polygamy and concubinage
- Children of concubines are full children
 - Several of the tribes are children of Rachel and Leah’s handmaidens

One Goal of Sex is Pleasure & Intimacy

- Marriage is allowed even where childbearing is not possible
- Men have sexual obligations to their wives
 - they may not swear not to have sex
 - frequency is a function of their job
 - Sailor: 2x per year
 - Camel driver: once per month
 - Ass drive: once per week
 - Man of leisure – scholar: every night
 - NOTE: only if woman is willing
 - Story of wife waiting for husband on Yom Kippur

Marriage & Divorce

- **Marriage: Protecting the rights of the woman**
 - *Ketubah* includes divorce settlement and set of obligations
 - Ways of creating a marriage
 - Contract
 - Gift
 - Cohabitation
 - We do all three in modern wedding
 - Modern wedding is combination of *Kiddushin* (engagement) & *Nisuin* (marriage)
- **Divorce**
 - Man grants *Get* to woman
 - Source of *agunot* problem in Israel
 - The way the Conservative movement treats this problem: The Lieberman Clause
 - Reform approach: religious divorce not required

Modesty and Pre-marital sex

- Traditional Jews have many laws relating to modesty
 - Couple never alone until married
 - Men and women don't touch
- Thus, premarital sex is out of the question!
- This said, the product of premarital sex is not a *mamzer* or bastard
- Definition of *mamzer*
 - Product of a forbidden union
 - Incest – adultery – etc.
 - Even technical adultery (i.e., remarriage without a *get*)
 - *Mamzer* can only marry another *mamzer*

Homosexuality

- **Biblical source of the prohibition**
 - Lev. 18:22 “Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman: it is an abhorrence (*toe-ey-vah*)
 - Not clear that either the Bible or Rabbis considered lesbian sex as sex
- Reform approach: *Toe-ey-vah* refers to ritual prohibitions
 - Deut. 14:3 “You shall not eat anything abhorrent (*kol toeeyvah*)
 - Scholars think that both these foods and sexual practices may have referred to pagan worship.
 - Bottom line for Reform is commitment of couple not sexual orientation
 - Many Reform rabbis
 - Are homosexual
 - Will perform same gender commitment ceremonies (I will)

Adultery & Bottom Lines

- **Adultery**
 - Traditionally only a married woman having sex with a man not her husband
 - Reform of course recognizes equality of men and women
 - Reform address 3 forms of adultery
 - Classic
 - Inadvertent: Result of deceit
 - Technical: Case of one partner having a lifelong illness
- **Rabbi Arthur Waslow's Perspective on Sexuality**
 - We have fulfilled the mitzvah “Be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth”
 - We've more that fulfilled it
 - Now model for sexuality is from Song of Songs



And Now...

YOUR OWN QUESTIONS!