

SEX AND SEXUALITY
The Philosophical Background and Some
Practical Guidelines for Orthodox
Jewish Teenagers

(1) I begin with the assertion that to discuss sex as such is already to distort any perspective that can give it meaning. For we must consider not only sex, as a purely biological act, but sexuality in the sense of maleness and femaleness that includes but far transcends the merely biological relationship, which bespeaks that infinitely varied and delightfully subtle interplay of personal factors that make the relationship between man and woman so endlessly interesting and fulfilling. Only with animals is the relationship between male and female restricted to sex; with humans, it must include sex, but must be built upon sexuality in its broadest ramifications. It is because sexuality is so inclusive, that your conduct and orientation towards this one area of life is really an index and a measure of your entire personality. Because sex cannot be separated(out) from all the rest of your life, therefore, how you conduct yourselves, how you speak, how you think, how you act in this area really tells us everything about yourself.

(2) The background. Ancient pagans -- sex glorification, fertility rites, example: frog-woman deity in ancient Egypt and the plague of frogs. Fertility rites as a tie-in of sex and economics.

Christian reaction: revulsion, as "reaction" pulling to the opposite extreme: celibacy and monasticism. Paul: "Better to marry than to burn." Marriage and sex as a concession -- therefore, marriage as a sacrament. The devil resides in the flesh. Sex as the original sin -- the relation of the serpent and Eve as an adulterous one. Hence, profoundly negative attitude towards sex. Jesus, Paul and other founders of Christianity were bachelors.

Today: on a conscious level, the New Morality is reversion to ancient paganism. But inwardly, I suspect the old Christian negativism towards sex remains in force. For the constant and determined effort to reach new lows of morality in such things as public display of nudity indicates a desire for compensation, for proving something that troubles me within. I suspect that the joyless pursuit of exhibitionism is not really a "liberation," but, on the contrary, a desire to deny what is a very real thing: an inner aversion to sex and sexuality, a fundamentally negative orientation and one that leaves a person deeply troubled. Curiously, therefore, we find both extremes meeting almost dialectically in so many contemporary men.

The Jewish attitude: reproductive mechanism and process is an occasion for wonder at God's marvelous creation. It is of the same order, but even more subtle and complex, than the wonders of the digestive or respiratory processes. But it is natural, and does not require of us either to glorify it or to negate it -- no sex hangups.

The two places to look for a Jewish view to sex are: the ceremony of marriage, and the story of Adam and Eve.

As part of the Sheva Berachot, blessings in which we thank God for having created "bride and groom," for having given the occasion to two human beings to be able to perpetuate the species in accordance with the Divine will and yet find great joy in so doing. In the first account of creation, we read in one verse of the creation of man in the Divine Image and: zachar unekevah bara otam. That is, there is no contradiction or inconsistency between man's creation in the Divine Image and his sexuality.

The second account of creation sees man not only as part of the natural order but as a separate and very human being. Here we find Adam as lonely and suffering because of his solitude. He sees that other animals has, each of them, a mate, whereas he does not. Hence, whereas up to now every act of creation was proclaimed as "good,"

חַי וְשֶׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית לֹא -- now we have the first adverse judgment.
"It is not good" -- בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּלֹא חֵן וְכָפֹר. The state of celibacy is simply not good. The state of living with a mate, of the opposite sex, is good.

Alternative interpretation of that verse: man, created in the image of God, resembles Him. Therefore, just as God is "good," and goodness means givingness ... so man has the potentiality and capacity for goodness. But such goodness cannot be expressed in the

absence of an equal, of a companion. Hence: man cannot be good while he is alone. He needs a wife, another human being, in order to be able to shower upon her his goodness, his affection, his love and concern and care and compassion. Marriage, the institutionalized relationship between a man and a woman, is Judaism's view of how to maximize man's potential for goodness.


(It is noteworthy that in humans the relation between man seems radically different from that amongst animals. In the animal relationship, male and female fit more closely to each other, there is less disproportion and disparity. The female, during her estrous cycle, stimulates the male, there is relationship, and that is the end of it. They seem made for each other. That is not true with the human species. Later we will discuss this in greater detail, also some of the consequences. Whereas in animals sex is reserved for a particular part of the cycle, with humans it is sexuality, it is ever-present in many subtle nuances. Further, men and women have different rates of expression, different ways of expression, and different times when this expression comes to the fore. Some sociologists have made the mistake of assuming that this is a kind of flaw in nature or creation. Yet, from a religious point of view, they could not be more profoundly mistaken. It is precisely because men and women do not entirely merge and are not completely compatible in their sexual experiences and needs that makes them human. Were they totally

comptaible, they would just satisfy each other immediately and be done with it. Because there is incompatibility from a natural vantage point, it therefore taxes and challenges their humanity, their concern and compassion and sympathy and understanding for someone who is different. The incompatibility and disparity between man and woman in the human species is what humanizes them, and evokes from them that selfless understanding that makes a human being something quite different from an animal.)

Sex is an enormously powerful drive in mankind. Because it can effect and realize human goodness, because it can through the search for companionship form a married couple, the model for the human community; because it can allow man to imitate his Creator through his goodness, it is something that is enormously constructive -- and therefore, potentially, enormously destructive. Whatever can achieve greatness, can achieve corruption. That which allows one to become angelic, can if misused make him a demon. (Example: the human being during lifetime is the crown of creation on earth, yet during death is "avi avot ha-tumah.") Thus the Talmud: $\aleph k - \aleph k$ Take out the Name of God, and you are left only with $\aleph k$, consuming passion which destroys. Sex is natural -- but it can easily mislead man and cause him his downfall precisely because it is capable of such greatness and such constructive achievement.

(3) The goal and purpose of sexuality is not health. It may be true, or it may not be true, that excessive indulgence in

sex is healthy or unhealthy, it is simply beside the point. Frankly, I would completely deny that abstention in the limited way that Judaism requires of us, can in any way be damaging to health. But it is as irrelevant to the Jews concern as is the problem of trichinosis, with regard to kashrut. Psychologically I think that our laws are healthful, but there again I prefer not to discuss it as fundamentally not germane to the whole structure of our concerns in this area.

The goal of conduct in areas of sexuality is: kedusha, holiness. It does not mean that everyone will attain it, most people will not. It does mean that unless we strive for it, we can never raise ourselves beyond the lowest level. Holiness is not, as in paganism, unrelated to sexuality, or related to its glorification; and, unlike Christainity, is not an expression of anti-sexuality. Rather, it is an expression of man's ability to transcend his own appetites and control them in accordance with the will of God. It does not mean the suppression of a natural instinct, and it does not mean submission to it. It does therefore mean the human being who, out of a commitment to God, comes into the fullness of his own humanity and learns to master himself. Kedusha is defined as prisha  Hence, reading on Yom Kippur.

(4) The Yetzer. Wherever our literature speaks of yetzer hara, it noramlly refers to primal sexual energy, what psychologists call the libido. Actually, the yetzer is not really so bad. Rabbis:

when God created him and saw that man was "good," -- that refers to -- yetzer tov. But when He saw that it was "very good," that meant -- the yetzer hara. Rabbi Meir explains this rather astounding statement by saying: if not for the yetzer hara, a man would not marry a woman or build a house or plant a vineyard.

Now we understand why the lack of a yetzer hara would result in failing to marry: but what are the other two elements, building a house and planting a vineyard? The answer comes in an idea elaborated by Freud but anticipated by the Jewish tradition by hundreds and even thousands of years: sublimation, redirecting and rechanneling one's energy from sexual ends to other more constructive ones. If not for this primal sexual energy properly sublimated, a man would not compete in the professions or in studies or in business or in athletics. Great achievements in the arts or in the sciences, in scholarship or business or professions, usually requires tremendous dedication, and tremendous dedication requires energy, and energy is, in its rawest state, primarily sexual. You may therefore conclude that if you see a man who is very intense in achieving great and constructive goals, no matter in what field, then he is primarily a man possessed of great sexual energy. The Rabbis meant this when they said: 87

ה'תש"ח Thus sublimation is the way of diverting sexual energy from empty and sometimes dangerous channels to those that can prove of benefit to man himself and to all of mankind. The greatest such channelization is through the study of

Torah. The Jerusalem Talmud -- תלמוד ירושלמי
לגבי חז"ל

(5) In order to appreciate the proper role that one must play in the drama of sexuality, it is important to understand more about the differences between maleness and femaleness. For the male, the sex urge is an overwhelming, powerful desire that comes on suddenly and can be triggered by the merest suggestion or sight or sound or smell. But when it is over, it is done with, and it does not seriously control or determine the other aspects of a man's life, on which he may place far greater value. In other words, it is a tremendously powerful surge of energy, but it is secondary in importance to such things as career and competitiveness. With a woman, however, the urge, while much less powerful in the short run, is much more important in the long run. Sex for her means not simply a biological act, but a whole existence -- husband and children and family and home. And the awareness of this difference places special obligations on both the boy and the girl.

Boys in their teens have especially difficult problems with the yetzer hara. It sometimes seems so overwhelming as to be frightening. Especially at the age of puberty or shortly thereafter, the awareness of the mighty surges of energy within one's person can be most disconcerting. It is not easy to control them -- but it is vital to do so. And having controlled it once is no assurance that it will not return again, for it always does. (The Talmud says

that the yetzer hara is like a fly, and Rabbi Israel Salanter explains that when you chase a fly away from your hand, it immediately comes back again and again and again; so the yetzer hara...) So neither the Torah and its tradition nor your teachers and parents are out of sympathy with the problems you have in the struggle with the yetzer hara. I would suggest that you be patient, that you realize that before long things will work out, that you plan to marry early, if at all possible, that you learn the value of discipline and restraint with the consolation that it is not a permanent feature. It means that you must channel your energies, sublimate them, especially into the study of Torah and into all your other studies. When you achieve distinction in these areas, you will become all the more desirable and worthy as a human being.

a Jewish young man must also realize the ethical obligations that sexuality places upon him. Generally, our society defines masculinity as roughness, power, strength, obstinacy, pride. Perhaps it does contain something of these elements. But real masculinity is not these, but rather the qualities of gentleness, fineness, self-control, sympathy, consideration, and respect for a woman and especially for her femininity and the dignity which she possesses. איצט געט
173' אל ערשט. Real gevurah or masculinity comes from self-restraint, from being able to corner the yetzer hara, contain him, express him in constructive fashion, and meanwhile show profound respect for a young woman. This respect will reveal itself also in

the language that is used and in the subjects of conversation. I refer to the kind of talk that goes on between boys and girls. It doesn't have to be solemn, it does not always have to be heavy. But it should never be frivolous or light, flirtatious. When the Mishneh said *אל תהי כעל*, do not engage in too much *על* with a woman, it meant specifically this lightheartedness, this frivolousness, which reveals the attitude of disrespect for a woman, as if she were an inferior who cannot sustain a serious conversation at any length. As if it were an adult speaking to a child, or a person to a toy. Masculinity, *gevurah*, from which the word *gever* comes, means to be able to avoid this tendency towards talking down to a woman and recognizing in her the *tzelem Elokim*.

Girls too must keep in mind these differences in biology and psychology. The essence of femininity is to evoke in the young man you are with the kind of masculinity of which we have been speaking. If you can encourage him away from vulgarity and towards refinement, away from sex to sexuality, away from roughness to tenderness -- then your femininity is successful. Not every boy has these qualities fully developed as a young man. Girls generally are more advanced at the same age as boys. Then you must use this maturity to help bring your male friends to their masculinity in the Torah fashion. Remember that women, intelligent and mature women, have always been the civilizers of men.

(6) From here we go to a topic which is of the utmost

importance: tzeniut. Normally, this word, which is translated as modesty, brings to mind the quantitative problem of how many square inches of skin may or may not be exposed on the female body. It would be a pity to see things in such a restricted and narrow fashion. For the question of tzeniut touches the very foundations of our whole faith.

All ethical attributes the Torah demands of us are based upon imitatio Dei -- והלכת אחריו. If, therefore, we are to practice tzeniut, that means that God too is a צניע. But of course it is impertinent and ludicrous to speak of God as not exposing His body! Tzeniut, therefore, must have a far deeper meaning than mere refraining from indecent exposure.

What does it mean? (See my article in Judaism on the Fourth Amendment.) It refers to a sense of privacy. God's privacy is indicated in His refusal to permit man, even Moses, to completely know Him. God permits us to gaze at Him intellectually only to a certain point; thereafter, He protects His privacy and refuses to allow man entre into His essence. והוא יחסי

והוא יחסי. Thus too the famous words of the prophet Micah, הוא יחסי. The sense of privacy, as the expression of tzeniut, is further reduceable to a sense of dignity, (in the sense of value) or self-respect, the awareness of one's own worth. God Himself possesses this privacy because He is the Source of all value. Similarly, His Image, man, will attain ^{dignity} privacy when he too

→ והוא יחסי

feels that he has a core of ^{Invulnerable, worthy selfness:} ~~dignity or value or~~ self-respect. Self-dignity means to be fully aware of what one is worth, without having to have the approval of anyone else. Just as a man who brags and boasts reveals that he feels inadequate and inferior within, so the man or the woman who abandons privacy and exposes himself or herself whether physically or psychologically reveals that he lacks the sense of self-respect and desperately needs the approval of the passer-by and the onlooker in order to feel worthy. What a pity! So that when a young woman overexposes herself, she not only violates the whole purpose of Jewish living, which is the imitation of the Almighty, but also reveals more than she thinks she does: more than flesh, she reveals an inner inadequacy, an inner lack of self-respect and dignity. This self-exposure takes place not only physically but also verbally -- obscene language. Obscene language is not magical. It does reveal an inner hangup, an inner problem which is unresolved with regard to sex and sexuality, that reveals itself in the constant use of foul language. So that obscene language is a violation too of one's own privacy and dignity. Furthermore, it is a practical mistake. The one redeeming value of obscenity, its one practical asset, is that it serves as a harmless release for sudden anger or temper. But if it is constantly used, then it is abused, and it is meaningless when you have to use it to release the pressure of sudden anger.

Orthodox Jewish young women should realize that this sense of tzeniut does not require of them to dress outlandishly. Style, fashion, modishness, are important for ~~important~~ appearance, and

they should be followed -- up to the point where they violate this inner dignity and sense of privacy which Jewish law demands of all of us. Of course, tzeniut has standards which differ in time and place. The kind of clothing that may be modest on the beach is not modest in the dining room, and what is modest for the dining room is not modest for the Synagogue or for the study of Torah.

I wish to emphasize once again that the requirements of tzeniut not only do not violate the need for attractiveness, but go along with it. *תפארת אשה*. The Talmud constantly emphasized the beauty of the Jewish woman and her need to preserve this beauty -- not only before marriage, but afterwards even more. But there is something that young women fail to realize, although some are blessed with a healthy intuition that perceives it automatically. Beauty is an aesthetic experience, and it is a purposeful deception in which all of us participate. Anyone who is unkempt may be natural -- but never attractive. To become attractive requires work, concentration, and effort. But the process of attaining this attractiveness is not in itself beautiful. In fact, it may be downright repelling. For young women in a camp setting, therefore, to appear in curlers in mixed company is enough to make a young man feel so revolted, that even afterwards, when she appears truly beautiful, he will fail to notice it because the memory of the previous appearance will haunt him. I might suggest that in the wintertime this sense of privacy in the attainment of beauty should follow you as well: the putting on of cosmetics at a table, so common with so many otherwise cultured

and refined women -- is a violation of that inner dignity that, speaking as a man, I find terribly distressing.

Tzeniut, as we have developed it so far, therefore has a religious root -- the imitation of the Almighty; a psychological root -- the sense of dignity and self-respect; an aesthetic root -- privacy not only preserves but enhances beauty (and, incidentally, the more a girl reveals of her body, the less the sense of mystery -- and the sense of mystery is what adds immeasurably to the beauty of a woman); and, finally, one more item that ought to be brought to your attention. You are, all of you, fundamentally moral young people. You may occasionally push to the limit of permissibility because of a sense of adventure and thrill, but all of you know your ultimate limits. Yet let me say this: when you dress in a manner that violates tzeniut, you add a fourth element that you may not realize. Again I call to your attention the difference in psychological makeup between men and women. A boy is triggered into emotion and even passion by such things as excessively brief uniform by a girl. When you do this, you, in gesture and dress and action, suggest that you are willing to give more than you really are. You are leading him on, only to disappoint him. You, as it were, are promising a great deal more than you are prepared to offer. This is nothing more than cruelty, a lack of integrity, and a breach of personal ethics, as well as morality.

So that tzeniut has religious roots, psychological meaning, aesthetic dimension, and it is also a matter of simple integrity.

(7) A niddah - some of the elements I mentioned in the Hedge of Roses -- especially the humanizing of man: woman as a "thou." The problem that agitates Orthodox boys and girls, that of hand-holding or physical contact. The halakhah: if for erotic reasons, it is a violation, but it should be seen in its total context, for social reasons, such as a handshake, I can see nothing wrong with it.

(8) Ethics - there is also the question of a proper attitude towards a date: politeness, punctuality, the kind of conversation engaged in, respect for the intelligence of a date, no exaggeration afterwards in speaking to friends, and finally -- no lashon hara even against a boy or a girl!