

October 7, 2018 - Lev. 18:1-30 - Sex and marriage partners
Torah Reading: Leviticus 18:1-30 - Sex and marriage partners
Psalm 82
Haftarah: Jeremiah 10:1-10

Sex, Marriage and Abominations

Leviticus 18:1-2 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD (Yahweh) your God (Elohim)."

As He told them at Mount Sinai. God is now about to command them about personal relationships rather than the regulations of the Tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifice and worship, but He re-emphasizes His sovereignty and asks them to recall the covenant they agreed to previously.

Rashi - I am the One Who said at Sinai, "I am the Lord, your God" (**Exodus 20:2**), and you accepted My sovereignty upon yourselves [at that time]; consequently, accept My decrees.

Rabbi [Yehudah Hanassi] says: "It is openly known before Him, that they would eventually be scourged by [transgressing the laws of] immoral relations, in the days of Ezra. Therefore, [concerning these laws,] God came to them with the decree: I am the Lord, your God! You should know Who is placing these decrees upon you - the Judge Who exacts retribution (אֲלֹקִים), but Who is faithful also to pay a reward (חַי)!" - [Torath Kohanim 18:138]

'I Am'

In commenting on the words, "I am — *Anochi* — the Lord your God..." the opening words of the Ten Commandments, the Midrash states: "The word '*Anochi*' is of Egyptian origin."

(Tanchuma (Buber), Yisro 16; Yalkut Shimoni, ibid.)

The word "I" is represented by a single character that looks like a tiny capital T written as a subscript. It's called "*Anochi*."

Being also the first word of the First Commandment (Exodus 20:2), *Anochi* encompasses the entire Torah. Moreover, *Anochi* — "I am" — refers to G-d's very Essence, "something that cannot be alluded to by any name or intimation." (Zohar II, 85b)

The other two words are in Hebrew: "Lord — *Yĕhovah*" the self-existent and eternal One; and "God — *'elohiyim*" - the creator-God with a plural ending depicting majesty.

The point is that we must know God on every level - from our daily mundane existence in this world (Egypt) to the rational and the spiritual and mystical understanding that the

other two names suggest.

(See https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2300790/jewish/The-Egyptian-Word-Anochi.htm)

We have to descend into Egypt - perhaps captured like Joseph or fleeing like Jesus' family - to completely embrace all that God is and to see his salvation and deliverance out of Egypt in our lives.

It is specifically through our service in the lowest levels, working in and refining the physical world, down to and including the "Egyptian language" that we become vessels and venues for redemption to flow through.

Jesus puts himself as one with God using a Greek form of "I am" -

John 8:58 - "Jesus said unto them, verily, verily, I say unto you before Abraham was, I am."

Leviticus 18:3 - "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances."

"doings" = *ma'āseh* - any general transaction, action, occupation, workmanship, something produced or created, like a song.

"ordinances" = *chuqqâh* - that which is established or defined; a law, practice, custom.

Both the social customs, laws and daily activities of Egypt and Canaan were all tainted by idolatry, and so were not to be followed.

Rashi - [This verse] informs [us] that the deeds of the Egyptians and the Canaanites were more corrupt than those of all other nations, and moreover, that the [Egyptians residing in that] region [of Egypt] in which the Israelites had dwelt, were the most corrupt of all. (and) those [Canaanite] peoples whom the Israelites conquered, were more corrupt than any other people, even the Egyptians — [Torath Kohanim 18:138]

Instead...

Leviticus 18:4-5 - "Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD."

'He Shall Live in Them'

Rashi - and live by them: in the World-To-Come. For if you say [that the verse refers to living] in this world, does he not eventually die? [Torath Kohanim 18:134]

“It is not said ‘priests, Levites and Israelites, but ‘the man; lo, you learn from this that even a Gentile that studies the law, is as a high priest.” (Babylonian Talmud, Avoda Zara, fil. 3.1.)

This passage is quoted both in the Prophets (**Ezekiel 20:11; Ezekiel 20:13; Ezekiel 20:21; Nehemiah 9:29**) and by St. Paul (**Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12**), who contrasts this promise made to works with the promise of the Gospel made to faith.

Romans 10:5 - “For Christ is the end (*telos* - goal, endpoint) of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.”

Paul then quotes **Deuteronomy 30:11-14**, which twice states the phrase "for us" or "on our behalf" - the seed of the idea of a substitutionary sacrifice “for us” that Christ had to perform, ascending to heaven and descending to the depths, because humans could not keep the Law and live.

Proverbs 30:4 asks: "Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands?... Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!" Thus the 'ascending and descending' idea is prominent even here in this passage, which speaks of the act of creation and of the Son of God.

Christ descended to become one of us in humility and self-emptying - (**Philippians 2:5-11**)

Paul in his letters uses over 160 times the phrase "to be in Christ". If we stray out of Christ, the "dogs of the Law," to use Luther's words, will tear us to pieces.

Jerusalem Targum: "O, would that we had a prophet such as Moses who would ascend into heaven and give us the Torah and proclaim to us its demands!"

"The Lord your God will raise up from your midst a prophet by the Holy Spirit who will be like me", and, "A prophet I will raise up from amongst your brethren, through the Holy Spirit."

- **1 Timothy 4:8** - "...godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Of course, the problem has been man's inability to keep God's ordinances, as Jesus declared on the Feast of Tabernacles:

- **John 7:19** - "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?"

"he shall live in them" - Only Jesus, who fulfilled the Law completely, has eternal life. If we are in Him, we share in that life.

Incest and Forbidden Marriages - Leviticus 18:6-20

Traditionally, the time after Yom Kippur was a time when young adults would go into the vineyards, seeking a potential spouse. The Feast of Tabernacles was itself a pattern for a Jewish 7-day wedding celebration. The reading of **Leviticus 18** served as a reminder of ethical sexual behavior as well as who would be acceptable marriage partners.

Leviticus 18:6 - "None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness: I am the LORD."

Rashi - [This comes] to admonish the female as [it does] the male. Therefore, it is stated in the plural form. — [Torath Kohanim 18:136]

These are also prohibited marriages - "to uncover their nakedness" includes marriage as well as illicit sexual intercourse.

Leviticus 18:16 - "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness."

An Exception

This prohibition, however, only refers to cases in which the deceased brother had left children; for if he had died childless, the brother not only might, but was required to marry his sister-in-law (**Deuteronomy 25:5**).

Menstruation and Vulnerability

Leviticus 18:19 - "Also thou shalt not approach unto a woman to uncover her nakedness, as long as she is put apart for her uncleanness."

Spiritually, and more broadly, this prohibition applies to any oppression of a woman who is in a weak place or is vulnerable in any way. This includes "hitting on" women who are in a position of dependency, or when the man is in a power position in authority over her (as employer, etc.)

Adultery

Leviticus 18:20 - "Moreover thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbor's wife, to defile thyself with her."

See **Numbers 5:12-31** for the test of suspected adultery in a wife.

The Talmud notes that if the husband is himself an adulterer, the "bitter waters" will have no effect on his wife, even though she too be guilty of the offense (Sot. 47b).

The Mishnah declares that this "scroll of the suspected adulteress" (megillat sotah) - whereby a wife suspected of adultery was forced to undergo the test of "bitter waters" - was cancelled when the Sages became aware of the ever-larger number of adulterers in general (Sot. 9:9).

Child Sacrifice to Idols

Leviticus 18:21 - "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD."

Molech, or Moloch, was the idol of the Ammonites, and later of the Phoenicians and Carthaginians. His devotees dedicated their children to him; and when this was to be done, they heated the statue to a high pitch of intensity by a fire within, and then the infants were either shaken over the flames, or passed through the ignited arms, after which some would die.

Spiritually we can be guilty of this with our own children, when we test them for approval by applying our own idolatrous standards, etc.

Homosexual Acts

Leviticus 18:22 - "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination."

Later we learn the penalty for this is death (**Leviticus 20:13**).

[NOTE: It was rare that the death penalty was actually ever imposed for any crime. Usually, the biblically mandated penalty was regarded as an index of the severity of the transgression, and the actual execution was avoided by strict insistence upon all technical requirements - such as *hatra'ah* (forewarning the potential criminal) and rigorous cross-examination of witnesses, etc.]

There are currently heated theological arguments concerning the nature of the acts that are forbidden by this scripture and others, whether homosexuality is a "lifestyle choice" or genetically imprinted, whether only "sacred" male prostitutes are referred to here, etc.

I will post additional notes exploring all this later. But there is an interesting procedure in the Talmud for dealing with questions in which an answer or solution is in doubt:

Genetic 'Duress'?

If science confirms that homosexual orientation is determined in the womb by hormone levels or by genetic or epigenetic markers - apart from or even against one's will (which is the direction current research on sexual orientation is going) - then homosexuals could be seen as under "duress" (in Hebrew: "*ones*"), a technical judicial term which has some support in the Talmud.

Normally, the claim of compulsion by one's erotic passions is not valid for a male, for any erection is considered a "token of his willingness" (Yev, 53b; Maimonides, Yad, Sanh, 20:3).

[St. Augustine, however, says the opposite is true - that because erections can happen *unwillingly*, it is a proof of man's original sin.]

If the genetic predisposition of the homosexual is considered as "duress," homosexual acts may possibly lay claim to some mitigation by the Halakhah.

Rava (circa 300 A.D.) one of the most-often cited rabbis in the Talmud, asserts that it is valid to categorize a prohibited sex act as "duress" if someone is overcome by uncontrollable passions. His (strange) example is a married woman who is raped, but in the course of the act becomes a willing participant (Ket, 51b). Other rabbis disagreed with him, and the debate has reappeared in modern times. But Rava's solution remains available in the Talmud.

Another Talmud story seems to apply here about how to determine leprosy:

Leviticus 13:3,10,30 says if a white patch appears it might be leprosy. Two white hairs growing from it proves it is a leprosy. But if the hairs were white before the white patch appeared, he is clean. How can this be determined?

Rabbah bar Nahmani's Ascent to Heaven

Rabbah bar Nahmani fled from the pursuit of a king's officer, and took refuge in a marsh, where he sat down on the trunk of a palm-tree and began to read. "Now, there was a dispute in the assembly of heaven whether, if the bright spot comes before the white hair, the person is unclean, and if the white hair comes before the bright spot, he is clean. The Holy One, blessed be he, says he is clean; but all the assembly of heaven say he is unclean. Then they say, 'Who shall decide?' 'Rabbah bar Nahmani shall decide' (for Rabbah bar Nahmani had said, 'I am alone (i.e., an unequalled authority) in regard to "plagues"; I am alone in regard to "tents" (i.e., cases of uncleanness caused by the presence of a corpse).'

They sent the messenger after him. The angel of death could not manage to approach him, because his mouth never ceased reading, until a breeze blew and rustled among the reeds. He thought it was a troop of horse, and said, 'May I die rather than be delivered up to the government.' While he spoke he died saying, 'Clean, clean.'

i.e. the heavenly scholars, having been humans and knowing intimately the human susceptibility to self seeking, are inclined toward judging any doubtful instance as leprous. And usually the majority opinion would win.

But to God, leprosy - like sin - is an anomaly. He created everything "good." Where

there is doubt, His divine perspective is inclined to declare him pure - to which Rabbah bar Nachmeini who is "singularly knowledgeable on leprosy," agrees.

At present, how to interpret these scriptures concerning homosexuality are up in the air for me. None of the arguments have been fully convincing.

Dealing with people who have a homosexual orientation this way, with compassion - at least for now - is not the same as celebrating or affirming the acts themselves.

But it's worth remembering that in Paul's lists of "vices," the homosexual acts he condemns sit right next to lying, greed, jealousy and gossip. To "live" in God's precepts (**Leviticus 18:5**) can only be achieved by going to the cross to die to self, and seeing the Law fulfilled in Christ.

Bestiality

Leviticus 18:23 - "Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion."

Herodotus writes that in Ancient Egypt goats were trained to have sex with both men and women as part of fertility rituals (Herodotus II:46). The same was true with the Canaanites.

The Canaanite epic poem, *The Baal Cycle*, describes how Baal rapes the goddess Anath while she was in the form of a calf:

"Mightiest Baal hears; He makes love with a heifer in the outback, A cow in the field of Death's Realm. He lies with her seventy times seven, Mounts eighty times eight; [She conceiv]es and bears a boy."

Hittite Law 199 states, "If anyone has intercourse with a pig or a dog, he shall die. If a man has intercourse with a horse or a mule, there is no punishment. If an ox spring upon a man for intercourse, the ox shall die but the man shall not die.... If a pig spring upon a man for intercourse, there is no punishment."

That's one reason why God later ordered Israel to kill "everything that breathes" in Canaanite towns (**Deuteronomy 13:15; 20:16**). Many of the animals after participating in these idolatrous rituals were conditioned to have sex with humans.

[See <http://www.clayjones.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/We-Dont-Hate-Sin-PC-article.pdf>]

The iniquity of the Canaanites was now full! (**Genesis 15:16**)

"confusion" - *tebel* - to overflow boundaries, mix, confuse, mingle, thus unnatural bestiality, pollution, profanation, to commit adultery or incest.

Leviticus 18:28 - "That the land spew not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spewed

out the nations that were before you."

For us, the equivalent to all these abominations is when our deeds show us to be lukewarm about Jesus and His kingdom:

Revelation 3:15 - "I know your deeds; you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were one or the other! So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."