

B"H
KosherTorah.com

Parashat Aharei Mot

Biblical Sexual Morality
Kabbalistic Insights Why Is It Included As Part Of Law

By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
Copyright © 2000 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.

This Torah portion, in the eighteenth chapter of Vayikra (Leviticus), outlines the laws against forbidden expressions of sexuality. The forbidden sexual activity is referred to in Hebrew as “Arayot,” which is commonly translated as “incest.” Yet, from the text we see that the Biblical definition of incest and the modern definition differ greatly.

According to the Torah, the sin of incest is not limited to forbidden sexual unions with one’s immediate family members; it also includes a greater number of other forbidden sexual unions such as sexual relations with a woman during her menstrual cycle (niddah), homosexuality and bestiality. All of these forbidden forms of sexuality are collectively called Arayot (incest) and considered by G-d to be on the same level of evil as the idolatrous ritual sacrifice (murder) of children (Molech worship, ref. Lev. 18:21).

Sexual “purity” plays a major role in the Torah concept of holiness. Indeed, the following parasha Kedoshim opens with the words, “You shall be holy for I HaShem you G-d am holy” (Lev 19:1). Rashi’s commentary interprets the close proximity of the commandments forbidding Arayot and the commandment to be holy to refer to one another. In order to be holy, the Torah states, one must first refrain from forbidden sexual practices.

One does not need to be a rocket scientist or Rabbi to realize that sexual temptations are oft times over whelming. Indeed, according to the Talmud there is even a secret set of teachings surrounding the spiritual meaning of Arayot. Violations of these forbidden sexual unions are considered such a grievous sin that the consequences of violation may be universal and not just personal. In the second chapter of Hagigah, the Mishna states that the secrets of Arayot are considered one of the three esoteric schools of the mystical Torah (Kabbalah), alongside of the Secrets of Creation (Ma’aseh Bereshit) and the Secrets of the Chariot (Ma’aseh Merkava). Throughout all Jewish mystical literature (Hasidic & Kabbalistic), there is constant reference to “Sod HaZivug,” correctly translated as the “secret of sex.”

According to the Torah, the act of sexual intercourse is much more than a mere coupling of two human animal bodies. Just as human beings are composite entities consisting of both body and soul, so too does the act of sex contain both a physical and spiritual element. Indeed, throughout the Bible the act of sexual union is referred to as “knowing”

one's partner. This act of knowing expresses an intimate connection of the ultimate level wherein which one's deeper most essence is revealed and shared.

Arayot on the other hand is described in another way. Arayot (forbidden sexual unions) are referred to as, "Galuei Irvah" (an uncovering of nakedness). Here, there is no knowing, there is only uncovering. The implication is that these forbidden expressions of sexuality are types of nakedness that need to be covered, i.e., concealed. The text is clear that this means that they are forbidden and must not be done.

In order to understand the difference between "knowing" and "uncovering" we must go back to the Garden of Eden and the original sin of Adam and Havah. What caused the fall of Adam and Havah was that the two of them partook of the forbidden Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil in violation of the Divine command. The immediate result of this action was that their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked (reference Gen. 3:7). Their immediate response was to cover their nakedness.

It is clear that Adam and Havah's receipt of Knowledge from the Tree brought into them an awareness of the concepts of right and wrong, which the Bible refers to as "good" and "evil." It is just as clear that the immediate consequence of knowing good and evil had to do with their sexuality, i.e., their nakedness, which they sought to quickly cover.

Here in Parashat Aharei we read about G-d's commands not to uncover nakedness. This is the same "nakedness" that was originally covered by Adam and Havah. This needs to be explained.

Prior to the fall into this world, Adam and Havah existed as spiritual beings. They had no awareness of physical desires, which the Torah refers to as the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil. Adam and Havah were like children in that they did not have within them a developed libido that urged them into sexual activity. This is why they could be naked (uncovered) and not be ashamed. The Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil enabled Adam and Havah to experience the physical world, with all its pleasures (good) and pain (evil). Thus when Adam and Havah ate the Forbidden Fruit it was as if they became adolescents, full of libido drive, yet lacking the good knowledge of how to control it. They were thus ashamed of their nakedness, which was their lack of knowledge of self-control and sought to hide it. Alas, G-d is not to be fooled. G-d sought out Adam and Havah making them realize the grievousness of their actions (reference Gen. 3:9).

Let us learn by example from human experience. Infant children of the opposite sex can play with each other in various modes of undress without any concern of sexual awareness simply because their young minds and brains have not yet developed a sexual consciousness. According to Rabbi Haim Vital (in his numerous lectures on this topic in Sefer HaLikutim, Sha'ar HaPesukim and in the Etz Haim) this was the level of Adam and Havah before the fall. They could have been called spiritual infants. Their normal manner of growing up was to have been accomplished by their eating of the Fruit of the Tree of Life. If Adam and Havah had done this first, prior to their eating the Fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, then the command forbidding the eating of the Fruit of the Tree

of Knowledge would have been moot. They would have been able to have then experienced Knowledge only as something good (pleasurable) and not as something evil (painful).

Yet, we know what happened. Instead of maturing spiritually in the proper manner, Adam and Havah became embroiled in good and evil. The Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge immediately made them aware that they now had within themselves powers and desires that were both good and evil. They thus sought to cover their nakedness, which was their desire for evil. It wasn't until after they were expelled from Eden that they experienced the good of the Tree of Knowledge in that Adam "knew" his wife Havah and they had a child.

We thus learn that because of our eating from the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, we indeed discovered both good and evil and its applications towards human sexuality. Part of the Sod HaZivug (secret of sex) is to be understood within the context of the mystical doctrines of the ten sefirot (emanations of G-d). The Divine power that rules over sexuality is called Yesod (this energy is said to reside in the genitalia). The Yesod is also called Tzadik (the Righteous) and is the appellation applied to Yosef in Genesis, in praise of his restraint in not committing adultery with Potiphera's wife.

Thus illicit sexuality is an expression of evil "knowledge" referred to Biblically as "uncovering" whereas appropriate (kosher) sexuality is an expression of good "knowledge" and the one practicing it is called a Tzadik (righteous one).

Due to the dual physical-spiritual nature of the sexual act, all sexual activity has spiritual consequences. It is because of these spiritual consequences that there exists a category of forbidden sexual unions. Due to the dual potential inherent in sexuality HaShem ordained these Laws for the sake of safeguarding our souls. Proper sexual conduct enables us to touch the Divine. Forbidden sexual contact disconnects the violator from any connection to HaShem. All this is a result of us being under the influence of the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil.

One point that must be made very clear: the commandments defining and prohibiting incest were spoken directly by HaShem, Himself. It is imperative for us to understand and accept that this chapter relates the direct Word of G-d and are not admonitions of Moses (as we find later in Devarim-Deuteronomy). The chapter begins with the words, "HaShem spoke to Moshe saying . . ." (Lev. 18:1). HaShem begins by saying, "I am HaShem, your G-d. Do not perform . . . Carry out My Laws and observe my decrees to follow them, I am HaShem your G-d (Lev.18: 2-4). It is important that we recognize the source of the laws prohibiting Arayot because today we unfortunately witness that forbidden sexual practices are totally out of control.

In our day and age, the very fiber and definition of Biblical morality is under fire. In generations gone by people also acted in gross immoral ways, yet they never attempted to justify their actions, even more so be proud of them. In the past, sinners always knew to "cover" their shame. Today we see just the opposite, immoral behavior on the part of

men, women and even minor children (who are sexually active and who seek abortions) is applauded and protected by secular laws, whereas those who cling to the teachings of the Torah are viewed with reproach. Biblical morality is today under serious attack from the secular elements in society today. Even certain so-called “enlightened” religious groups (Jewish and Christian) have abandoned the clear and undeniable Words of Torah and jumped on the secular bandwagon to drag the sacred Biblical teachings through the proverbial mud of public opinion.

Yet, whether we like it or not, it is HaShem, G-d Himself who ordained what is forbidden and what is an abomination in His Eyes. As for those people who do not like this, they decide to undermine the entire Torah. They say that the sacred Words of Torah were (G-d forbid) authored by either Moses or some later authors. By making such claims, the secular community thereby denies that forbidden sexual unions have any spiritual ramifications.

By denying the Divine authority of G-d’s Word and Law, the secular community has claimed itself emancipated from Biblical morality. The secular motto is to be “free” from all religious restraints. The secular community should be more honest and say what they mean that they seek freedom to follow their sexual depravities and they do not want to be told that what they do is wrong in G-d’s Eyes. They want G-d to accept their abominable deeds. What the secular have done is to reinterpret G-d’s very clear and overt Word. The secular thereby are uncovering the primordial nakedness originally concealed by Adam and Havah.

Unfortunately, their actions and their beliefs cause them to become disconnected from G-d. This is by G-d’s own Word. “For if anyone commits any of these abominations, those souls doing so will be cut off.” (Lev. 18:28). The secular community thus embraces the concepts of uncovering nakedness instead of proper “knowledge” which brings one to “know” G-d.

The prime example where this is applicable today is the secular public’s embrace of the forbidden practices of homosexuality, a sin that G-d has called an abomination (Lev. 18:22). Today practitioners of this Divinely ordained abomination call out for their “rights” to practice their sexuality as they choose and to be protected under law to do so. Western secular society rallies to support the homosexual status and to protect it as a viable and “natural” choice for those so inclined.

While I will not use this forum to comment upon inclinations or what is to be defined as “natural”, I will comment upon actions. Clearly stated, HaShem Himself has stated in the Torah (Lev. 18:22), “You shall not lie with a man as one lies with a woman, it is an abomination.” What part of this needs interpretation? The language is clear. Homosexuality is an act forbidden by G-d and viewed as an abomination in His eyes.

Over the years, I have had contact with many individuals who proudly declare their abominable homosexual state with applaud. For the most part, the homosexual men whom I have met appear to be otherwise decent individuals. They may be moral and

even righteous in every other respect. Yet, what they cannot be is holy or in anyway close to G-d.

This is not because I say so or believe so. It is because that is what G-d Himself has said in the Bible! Read it for yourself. Deal with it. Do not respond to me; rather respond directly to G-d, through prayer! This is His Law, not mine. G-d sees both the spiritual and physical realms and knows what physical acts of ours blemish our spiritual source. This is why G-d ordained these Laws of Torah for us to observe. He wants us to be holy. He wants us to “know” Him. G-d wants us not to uncover the primordial nakedness of the human lack of true spiritual insight. G-d wants us to eat of the Fruit of the Tree of Life, which is His Torah and not to continue to partake of the Forbidden Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil.

One can deny this all one wants. Yet, one thing is clear and only the dishonest will deny it: the Bible clearly states that homosexuality is forbidden and that it is an abomination to G-d. Those who practice this form of incest are cut off from G-d. The homosexual may be in every other way a good individual, but it will be this one act that G-d will judge in balance against all the rest. Personally, I wish this was not such a serious issue in today’s society, but unfortunately, it is.

Therefore, as a Rabbi, I must properly represent the Biblical position on this matter and let each reader decide for him/herself: do you wish to follow public opinion and modern social norms, or do you wish to follow G-d and His Torah Law?

Be careful how you answer, your source of blessing in this world, and your home in the world to come depend upon your answer.