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From Daughter to Wife:
Dynamics of Being a Newlywed in *Talmud Bavli Ketubot*

Sari R. Laufer
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Ordination Requirements
Winter 2006
Dr. Dvora Weisberg, Advisor

A few years ago, the Los Angeles campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion instituted an alternative to the traditional senior thesis. Designed for students interested in delving deeper into text and text study, this project is known as the Text Immersion option. Students selecting this option are expected to complete a certain amount of text, as determined with their advisor, and complete reflective writing pieces along the way.

In partial fulfillment of my obligations for ordination, I am submitting my text immersion project. For a year, working with Dr. Dvora Weisberg, I studied 4 chapters of *Talmud Bavli, Masechet Ketubot*. The writing presented here represents some of my reflections along the way. The first part is an academic essay based on themes developed in the 4th chapter of *Masechet Ketubot*. The second part is a more practical application, meant as a framework for a marriage enrichment curriculum—also based on themes of the text.

TheKnot.com, a popular wedding planning website, offers its visitors all sorts of tips and tricks when it comes to thinking about getting married, getting engaged, and planning the actual wedding. Along each stage, it offers checklists, suggestions, and of course, quizzes. One quiz asks its takers: Are you ready to get engaged? Breaking down the issues into: Relationship, Money, Sex, and Family, the quiz gives a list of statements; if you agree with or have come to a decision on all or most of them, the author of the quiz believes you are ready to be engaged. In the family section, one of those statements is as follows: You are willing and prepared to regard each other as your most important familial relationship after you get married.[1] In other words, TheKnot.com wants to know: Are you ready to define yourself and your spouse as your "primary family?" In this seemingly simple question, we read into the enormous life and family shift that the decision to marry creates, and that the act of marriage actually establishes. TheKnot.com is a thoroughly modern website, but the question, and its deeper issues go much further back. The fourth chapter of *Masechet Ketubot*, while negotiating the financial rights and responsibilities of a husband to his bride, also deeply engages in such questions—of familial relationships, of independence, and ultimately of marriage.

Generally, the modern world offers two views of marriage. In the first, it is a purely sacramental institution created by God; in the second, it is a voluntary association of man and woman—no more than a matter of contract. Jewish marriage seems to fall somewhere in between. While Jewish marriage is incredibly significant in a religious

[1] Alison Salat Bernstein, "Proposals: Are You Ready for Married Life?" (http://www.theknot.com/ch_article.html?Object=AI980914214900&keywordID=166&keywordType=2&parentID=533).

sense, it is at heart a social—meaning human-based—institution. Yet, while contract is clearly an important part of the Jewish marriage—and at the heart of *Masechet Ketubot*—the contract itself is not sufficient to enact a marriage.[2]

Clearly, the modern model cannot ring entirely true for a Jewish marriage, whose roots go back thousands of years. Judaism is not doctrinal, and nor is it a sacramental tradition in the way most religious thinkers understand that concept. Certainly, there is an important religious dimension to the Jewish marriage ceremony, but it is not wholly a religious institution. And while Jewish texts spend a lot of time investigating the legal wording, it seems that their notion of a marriage goes beyond the borders of a contractual relationship.[3] How, then, given the language of both *Masechet Kiddushin* and the language in this 4th chapter of *Masechet Ketubot*, can we understand the essence of Jewish marriage?

One important distinction is between act and action. Often, we talk about marriage as an act, but in Jewish tradition, at least, it is more of an action. With that, we can understand that marriage is not simply a civil contract, but rather a complex transition, largely centered on status. Marriage is a status that arises out of a formula which is incorporated into the act—the ceremony—of marriage. For women in particular, marriage marks a

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[2] Rabbi K. Kahana, The Theory of Marriage in Jewish Law, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), 27.
[3] Ibid, 14.

profound shift in status. In this society, when a woman gets married, her entire relationship to the world changes.[4]

This shift, this transition, is marked in the Mishnah, cited in b. Ketubot 48b-49a, and the ensuing Gemara probes the various dimensions of the shift in status:

> לעולם היא ברשות האב עד שתכנס לרשות הבעל לנשואין מסר האב
> לשלוחי הבעל הרי היא ברשות הבעל הלך האב עם שלוחי הבעל או שהלכו
> שלוחי האב עם שלוחי הבעל הרי היא ברשות האב מסרו שלוחי האב
> לשלוחי הבעל הרי היא ברשות הבעל:

> *In every respect, she is within her father's domain, until she enters her husband's domain in marriage. If her father transfers her to agents of her husband—in this case she is in her husband's domain. If her father goes with the husband's agents, or the father's agents go with the husband's agents—in this case she is in her father's domain. If her father's agents transfer her to her husband's agents—in this case she is in her husband's domain.*[5]

I would argue that this Mishnah, and its Gemara, provide the foundation for multiple important discussions—on issues of status and transfer, on issues of independence and the role of marriage in society, and on the relationship between one's family-of-origin and one's family-of procreation.[6]

I. Issues of Status and Transfer

Michael Satlow, a scholar of Jewish marriage in antiquity, notes that often in both *Ketubot* and *Kiddushin*, the language of marriage involves terms of transfer (here,

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[4] Ibid, 30-1, 37.
[5] Mishnah Ketubot 4:5. All translations in this paper, unless otherwise cited, are my own.
[6] This term is employed by psychologists and sociologists to define the family created by marriage.

masar) and transmission. He poses the question—what is betrothal (and subsequently marriage), meant to transfer? His answer is supported by this Gemara and others; "rabbinic betrothal is the legal means for the relinquishing of a right of male control over a woman."[7] In reality, it is less about relinquishing rights than, as he implies, transferring them. In the previous Mishnah, we watched the transfer of economic rights and responsibilities go smoothly from father to husband; here, we see the same with *reshuyot*—her status, or domain.

Yet the whole issue of a smooth transfer is the essence of the Gemara. The Mishnah begins with a definitive word, *l'olam*—in every respect, in fact, always. The cases presented in the Mishnah offer clear-cut situations. In the first, she stays in her father's domain until the minute she enters the *chuppah* to get married; at that moment, she enters her husband's domain. In the other cases, there is a physical transfer of domain—between father and husband, or, more likely, agents of fathers and agents of husbands. What these cases have in common in their clarity, or so it seems.

The Gemara takes what seems to be clear, and obfuscates it. On b. Ketubot 48b, the Gemara begins as follows:

> מאי לעולם? לאפוקי ממשנה ראשונה, דתנן: הגיע זמן ולא נישאו - אוכלות משלו ואוכלות בתרומה, קמ"ל: לעולם.
>
> *What is the meaning of 'in every respect?' This stands to contradict the earlier Mishnah, which taught: 'If the time arrives and they have not married, she eats of that which is his and consumes his terumah.'*

[7] Michael Satlow, Jewish Marriage in Antiquity, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 78.

Thus, it teaches: 'in every respect.'"[8]

The earlier Mishnah which is quoted here seems to set up a situation in which she would appear to be both in her father's domain AND in her husband's domain. The rabbis, concerned with this finite transfer of status, basically set a time limit between betrothal and marriage—one year for a virgin bride, and 30 days for a widow. In this time, the Mishnah teaches, she is responsible for her own provisions, just as if she was completely in her father's home. Yet, despite the Talmud's attempts to make clear distinctions in status between *reshut ha'av* and *reshut ha-ba'al*, Satlow notes that in this delay between betrothal and a wedding, a virgin bride "would live in her father's house and be subject to his authority, but would also be considered a married woman."[9] So, the Mishnah that the rabbis cite here offers us the case in which the domains are partially mixed. She is *birshut ha'av*, living in her father's house. But, suddenly the responsibility for providing her food is placed on her husband, and she is entitled to eat his *terumah*.[10] Therefore, faced with a blurring of distinction, the rabbis of the Talmud teach "*l'olam*," as if to suggest that, in fact, the domains do not mix. We are to understand that even if the time passes, and her husband is somehow providing for her, she is still **completely** in her father's domain.

The notion of such a complete transfer seems to have been an overriding social construct of the time. Documents have taught us that in Christian circles of late Antiquity, female asceticism gained in popularity, most likely as an escape from the dominant system in

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[8] Mishnah Ketubot 5:2 , cited on b. Ketubot 2a and in more depth on b. Ketubot 57a-b.
[9] Satlow, 69.
[10] Obviously, the bride in this case is marrying a *cohen*.

which women moved directly and completely from "daughter" to "wife." Certainly, these movements were not met with great excitement in Christian circles; profession of these beliefs was seen as an act of rebellion against the authority of the male figures in her life. However, these movements were not popular among Jewish women of the same time.[11] While there are surely many reasons for this, one could argue that it is because the Jewish system was, in some ways, less concrete. First of all, at every stage of marriage, a woman maintains some independent right of property,[12] along with certain other means of independence. But also, I believe that the Jewish system, despite its attempts to claim otherwise, saw the transition as far more fluid and far more comfortable.

Mishnah Ketubot 4:5 begins with an absolute. Yet, the Talmud[13] goes on to probe all of the situations offered by the Mishnah, problematizing them. At the heart of the probe seems to be that very question—can we really ever say "*l'olam*?"

Take the second case, in which the father hands over his daughter to her husband's agents. We are to assume, from the Mishnah, that the transfer is complete; in every sense, she is now in her husband's domain. Yet, the Gemara starts:

> אמר רב: מסירתה לכל, חוץ מתרומה; ורב אסי אמר: אף לתרומה.
> איתיביה רב הונא לרב אסי, ואמרי לה חייא בר רב לרב אסי: לעולם היא ברשות האב עד שתכנס לחופה! אמר להו רב: לאו אמינא לכו לא תיזלו בתר איפכא! יכול לשנויי לכו: מסירתה זו היא כניסתה לחופה.

[11] Satlow, 38.
[12] Kahana, 17.
[13] B. Ketubot 48b-49a

> *Rav said: She is transferred in every sense, except for terumah. Rav Huna refuted this to Rav Assi (though some say that it was Rav Hiyya bar Rav to Rav Assi), saying: 'In every respect, she is in her father's domain until she enters the chuppah!' Rav responded: No. I would say to you: make sure your argument can't be used against you! Based on your idea, we could say that this transfer is equivalent to entering the chuppah!*

Eventually, the rabbis come to a conclusion that this transfer—from father to agents of the husbands—effects the transfer of domains in many areas. Those areas include *terumah*, but not the issue of inheritance.[14] While the rabbis claim this to be a refutation of all the various arguments, it more accurately represents a middle ground. Again, the rabbis here seem to be struggling with those notions of *l'olam*, though they couch the argument in different words. In sum, the rabbis of the Gemara are forced to accept that there is an overlap between the domains. For a Mishnah that began with this absolute shift—the assumption that a woman shifts immediately and totally from her father's world to her husband's, the lesson we ultimately take is the one that I believe is borne out by experience. For a couple getting married, there is not a clean break between *reshut ha'av*—which can be seen as the modern family of origin, and *reshut ha-ba'al*, which corresponds with our modern "family of procreation."

II. Issues of Independence and the Role of Marriage in Society

Looking at that same Mishnah, let us turn our attention to what is actually happening amidst all these domain transfers.

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[14] This point, raised by Shmuel on 48b, probes the question of what would happen if the bride were to die sometime between the transfer to the agents of the husband and the actual entrance to the *chuppah*.

לעולם היא ברשות האב עד שתכנס לרשות הבעל לנשואין מסר האב
לשלוחי הבעל הרי היא ברשות הבעל הלך האב עם שלוחי הבעל או שהלכו
שלוחי האב עם שלוחי הבעל הרי היא ברשות האב מסרו שלוחי האב
לשלוחי הבעל הרי היא ברשות הבעל:

In every respect, she is within her father's domain, until she enters her husband's domain in marriage. If her father transfers her to agents of her husband—in this case she is in her husband's domain. If her father goes with the husband's agents, or the father's agents go with the husband's agents—in this case she is in her father's domain. If her father's agents transfer her to her husband's agents—in this case she is in her husband's domain.[15]

While Satlow concentrates on the nuances of the word transfer, it also seems valuable to look at the literal and physical ramifications of the word. In doing so, we can explore what the Mishnah and Gemara can teach us about the role of marriage in Talmudic society.

In a quote from the Talmud Yerushalmi, the Amoraim assert that marriage is the essence of adulthood.[16] Interestingly, a study of married women in the 1990s asserted the same thing. The participants said that they believed that growing up means marriage, or a long-term partnership.[17] Modern psychology seems to understand it as a sort of reciprocal arrangement, that marriage both signifies and guarantees independence. In other words, for modern psychologists, each is a necessary precondition for the other. One could ask: 'which comes first—the independence, or the marriage?' And in fact, our Gemara asks a very similar question. The Mishnah, in Ketubot 4:11, teaches that:

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[15] Mishnah Ketubot . All translations in this paper, unless otherwise cited, are my own.
[16] Based on *Yerushalmi Kiddushin 4:7, 66b.*
[17] Charlotte Mayerson, Goin' To the Chapel: Dreams of Love, Realities of Marriage, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 10.

בנן נוקבין דיהויין ליכי מינאי יהויין יתבן בביתי ומיתזנן מנכסי עד דתנסבן
לגוברין חייב שהוא תנאי בית דין׃

[If he did not write for her]: 'Female children which you will have from me will dwell in my house and derive support from my property until they will be married to husbands,' he is nonetheless liable [to support her daughters], for this is [in all events] and unstated condition imposed by the court.[18]

In the Gemara, Rav first understands this quite literally. He reads the Mishnah as saying that until they are married, daughters are to be supported from their father's property, and dwell in their father's house. Levi, however, offers a different explanation, saying that the support actually ends when the daughter reaches the age of maturity. The Gemara continues on b. Keubot 53b:

לרב אע״ג דבגר? ולוי אע״ג דאינסיב? אלא בגר ולא אינסיב

For Rav, is it regardless of whether or not she has reached the age of maturity? And for Levi, is it regardless of whether or not she is married? Rather, if she has reached the age of maturity but is not married, or is married but has not reached the age of maturity, every one agrees [that she is supported].

Looking back at the modern question, the Talmud seems to understand the relationship not as reciprocal, but as somehow equal. For them, either marriage or adulthood signifies a sense of independence. The discussion then moves into a Tannaitic one, where the same question is posed. A baraita teaches:

עד מתי הבת נזונית? עד שתארס, משום רבי אלעזר אמרו׃ עד שתבגר.

Until what point is a daughter provided with food? Until she is betrothed. But according to Rabbi Elazar, they say: Until she comes of age.

[18] Mishnah Ketubot 4:11, Neusner translation.

When Rav Yosef offers another determinant, the conclusion is ultimately: *Teiku.* Here, there is no answer to whether age or marriage determines independence.

This ancient theory is validated by modern psychological and sociological studies, which maintain that a young adult must become independent of his/her family-of-origin in order to establish a family-of-procreation.[19] At the same time, marriage almost always provides a way to gain that independence from parents. In an experience that is far from ideal, one woman describes her life before marriage as follows:

> My parents separated when I was in 11th grade, and my mother and sister and I moved out of our house. Them my dad remarried and brought the new family to live there. This house on the beach had been my home, and then it wasn't anymore. I started realizing I had to make my own home.[20]

It is the end of this story, not the beginning, that is in many ways a universal experience. One of the primary outcomes of marriage is the creation of a new family, and a new home.

In their writings, which were not plentiful on the subject, ancient Greeks saw this as the main purpose of marriage. One married in order to create an *oikos*—which is best translated as a household. In Greek society, a man was not a full member of society—entirely an adult—until he married and established this *oikos*. Jewish Palestinian sources, reflecting the Greek and Roman culture amidst which they lived, also saw

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[19] Bernard Farber (ed), Kinship and Family Organization, (New York: John Wiley and Songs, 1966), 218.
[20] Mayerson, 10.

marriage as a vehicle for creating a household. While Satlow argues rightly that the Babylonian sages often held a profoundly different view of marriage, he cites Gemara from b. Yebamot 61b-64a to argue that the underlying assumption, even in the Babylonian Talmud, is that marriage is not only about procreation, but about the creation of a new household, a new family unit.[21] This theory is supported by the very language of marriage and wives; often in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, a man refers to his wife as his house.

This new household is both a physical and a psychological construct, as evidenced by our rabbinic texts. Psychological literature notes that the establishment of one's own "family-of-procreation" can help re-establish and redefine a relationship with one's family-of-origin.[22] Yet, experience both modern and ancient shows that the relationship is, by definition, different. One cannot have the same relationship with one's parents once married that one did before marriage. In b. Ketubot 49a, we are confronted with the case of a woman who is widowed or divorced between the time she leaves her father's home and the time she enters the *chuppah*. While the discussion focuses on the technical questions of the validity of a vow that she might make, it ends with what can be understood as a rather poignant statement on the role of the married adult child vis-à-vis his or her family-of origin. We read:

כיון שיצאה שעה אחת מרשות האב, שוב אינו יכול להפר.

Because she went out, even for one moment, of her father's domain, he is no longer able to nullify her vows.

[21] Satlow, 5,12, 14.
[22] Farber, 218.

In the immortal words of Thomas Wolfe, 'you can't go home again." This piece of Gemara seems to suggest just that; since she has stepped out of the bounds of her father's domain, even for a moment, her status is permanently altered[23].

As we consider this psychological shift, manifested largely as a shift in status, let us turn to a short piece in b. Yoma 75a. While not in a context discussing weddings, marriage, or in-laws, this piece suggests that while a woman's status is permanently altered when she leaves her father's house for marriage, the actual psychological shift does not come as easily. The text reads:

> וכן איש ואשה שבאו לפני משה לדין. זה אומר: היא סרחה עלי, והיא אומרת: הוא סרח עלי. אמר להם משה: לבקר משפט. למחר, אם נמצא עומרה בבית בעלה - בידוע שהיא סרחה עליו, נמצא עומרה בבית אביה - בידוע שהוא סרח עליה.
>
> *And thus in the case where a man and his wife come before Moshe in judgment. The husband says: She offended me! And the wife says: He offended me! Moshe says: Tomorrow, I will visit and render judgment. If her omer is found in her husband's house, it will be known that she offended him. If her omer is found in her father's house, it will be known that her husband offended her.*

Nestled in a discussion about the foods provided by God in Exodus 16, the Gemara uses the metaphor of manna "hidden in clefts and holes" to explain how toappropriately assign blame in an argument. In the section quoted above, a husband and wife are clearly in the midst of an understanding. The notion behind the text is that the *omer*, in

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[23] In a feminist reading of the text, this Gemara has an added dimension worthy of study. It is interesting to note that, even though the point of the Gemara seems to suggest a certain sense of independence for the married daughter, the language is solely focused on the father. Even in her independence, then, the Gemara seems to understand a woman as subject to men's actions.

any case of dispute, will be found in the possession of the one who deserved it. The offended party ends up with the *omer*.

In this discussion of marriage, one important implication of this text, stated outright in Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz's translation, is that, even though she is married, she continues to use her father's house as a place of refuge. It is to her father's house that she flees when she has been wronged, and her choice to do so is legitimated by the fact that the *omer* will be found there.

And while these few lines provide a psychological portrait of the situation, to some extent, they also provide a physical portrait. For, in the context of both modern marriage and marriage in antiquity, location is also both a physical and a psychological state.

III. Physicality of Transfer and In-Law Relations

In his book on the nature of kinship, sociologist Bernard Farber writes:

> The breakdown of parental authority, the decline of the three-generation household, and extensive social and residential mobility have made the nuclear family the apparent social unit associated with birth and marriage in contemporary society.[24]

The 4th chapter of Ketubot, in many ways, manifests this view. While not a breakdown of parental authority, we have already been witness to the transfer of parental authority.

[24] Farber, 33.

And the second two trends, which are innately linked, are implicitly a part of the process of marriage in antiquity.

Looking again at our initial Mishnah, the imagery becomes incredibly physical. The implications of agents, and transfer, and the use of the word *halach*, suggests that this was not a case of proximate marriage. While modern sociologists decry mobility in the American Jewish community, and relate it—as above—to the decline of the three generation household, it seems clear that a sort of mobility was a part of marriage in antiquity as well. The process of marriage entails a physical journey, and we know that, in Babylonia at least, new couples lived with—or at least near—the husband's father's family.[25]

The Gemara (b. Ketubot 48b), in trying to define the scope of the transfer, cites a Baraita that draws an even more powerful picture of the process:

> הלך האב עם שלוחי הבעל, או שהלכו שלוחי האב עם שלוחי הבעל, או שהיתה לה חצר בדרך ונכנסה עמו ללין

> *If the father goes with the agents of the husband, or the father's agents and the husband's agents go together, or if she has a courtyard along the way, and she enters with him in order to stop for the night...*

While the focus of the Gemara is on the nuances of inheritance, and thus of status, it seems important to note the sense of mobility here, in both the physical and the psychological sense. The language of movement here, I believe, suggests that actual move from one town to another, but also, for the families involved, the shifts in status which accompany the act of marriage.

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[25] Satlow, 40.

Though much is made about the creation of a new household, and while I believe that much of *Masechet Ketubot* is deeply involved in negotiating the boundaries of that new household, we know that the society was structured along kinship lines. Sociologists and anthropologists have identified two different systems of kinship. Societies in which membership is **either** in the husband's or the wife's kinship group are considered unilineal. In a bilateral system, both the husband and the wife's kinship groups are considered equal in terms of rights and responsibilities. Adding to the tension of unilineal systems, the patrilineal system often works to the new wife's disadvantage. Often, the maintenance of societal norms "sustains the identity of the daughters-in-law as either outsiders or as second-class lineage members." In other words, marriage does not provide complete membership into the spouse's kinship group.[26]

Fitting ancient Jewish society into this model is difficult. Certainly, the fact that it was common for a wife to move into her husband's family's home suggests a strong current of patrilineality. The notion of unilineality also, of course, infuses our understanding of family lineage of Jewish tradition—the designations of *cohen, Levi,* and *Yisrael,* while Jewishness passes matrilinealy.

But, there are many discussions—usually about differing customs between husband and wife—where the outcome is that if her custom is "better," the new family follows her

[26] Farber, 33-36.

custom, and if his is better, she must adapt to his ways. Take the discussion about nursing on b. Ketubot 61a[27]:

> היא אומרת להניק והוא אומר שלא להניק - שומעין לה, צערא דידה הוא; הוא אומר להניק והיא אומרת שלא להניק, מהו? כל היכא דלאו אורחה שומעין לה, היא אורחה והוא לאו אורחיה, מאי? בתר דידיה אזלינן, או בתר דידה אזלינן? ופשיטנא ליה מהא: עולה עמו ואינה יורדת עמו.
>
> *If she says she wants to nurse, and her husband says he does not want her to nurse, we listen to her, since it is her pain! He says he wants her to nurse, and she says she does not want to—what do we do? In every case where it is her family's custom [not to nurse], we listen to her. But, if it is her family's custom [not to nurse] and not his family's custom—what do we do? Do we follow after him, or after her? And it was explained simply thusly, from a Baraita: She ascends with him, but does not descend with him.*

In addition, most Jewish textual discussions of those issues which can be seen as kinship related—Levirate marriage, incest, inheritance, and laws of testimony—indicate that, at least to a large extent, women remained a part of the kinship system of her family-of-origin. In terms of marriage, it also suggests (as does most psychological literature) that each partner must form a kinship relationship, on some level, with his or her spouse's family members.

While the above *sugya* seems to come to a conclusion about the question of divided loyalties, vague as it may be, the very discussion itself places this society in a difficult position. Some societies, and this one seems to be as such, are considered matrilineal but patrilocal. Norms are passed through the female side—hence the notion of her family's custom—but the wife and children reside in the husband's village, thus exposing them far more often to the norms and ways of his family. It is in this combination—

[27] This appears in the 5th, not the 4th, chapter of *Masechet Ketubot*.

matrilineality plus patrilocality—that women feel the most conflict; there is a strong sense of split loyalty between their husbands and their parental home.

While the sense of split loyalties might be more tangible for the wife, the reality is that in marriage, each partner comes into a marriage with a well-established relationship with his or her parents.[28] The act of marriage in antiquity immediately created a three-way economic relationship between the families of the spouses and the spouses themselves. Sometimes, the relationship could be problematic. Through the literature on marriage, we see that women's fathers sometimes manipulated rules of inheritance to keep property away from a son-in-law.[29] But, the relationship is not purely economic. Upon getting married, the couple essentially belongs to three families—both partners' families-of-origin, and now, the new family-of-procreation—immediately created upon the marriage. The task of a newly-married couple is to form a stronger autonomous bond than the two bonds from which each partner originated.[30] This modern psychological language has its roots in early Jewish textual traditions. In Genesis 2:24, we read:

> על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד
> *So shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

A midrash from *Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer*[31] expounds this point further, bringing it even closer to our modern understanding:

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[28] Reuven P. Bulka, Jewish Marriage: A Halakhic Ethic, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc, 1986), 99.
[29] Satlow, 199, 204.
[30] Chalandra Bryant, Rand D. Conger, and Jennifer Meehan, "The Influence of In-Laws on Change in Marital Status," Journal of Marriage and Family, (Volume 63, August 2001), 615.
[31] *Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer,* chapter 31.

שלש שנים היה יצחק מתאבל ולאחר שלש שנים לקח את רבקה ושכח אבל אמו, מכאן אתה למד עד שלא יקח אדם אשה אהבתו הולכת אצל הוריו, לקח אשה אהבתו הולכת אחר אשתו, שנ' על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו, וכי יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ממצות כבד, אלא שאהבת נפשו דבקה אחר אשתו

For three years after Sarah's death, Isaac mourned his mother. Then he married Rebecca and his mourning ceased. From this we learn that until a man marries, his love is directed toward his parents, but when he marries, his love is directed toward his wife. Thus it says, "So a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife" (Gen. 2:24) – does a man's responsibility to honor his parents end when he marries? No, but his love is now directed first toward his wife.

In this midrash, we see the both the task that modern psychologists set out, as well as the challenges that task poses. Certainly, these new bonds create a certain amount of tension. This tension is one that the rabbis, at least parly, couched in the language of *reshuyot*. In that sense, then, the question of domain becomes one of loyalty. Take, for example, this discussion on b. Ketubot 46b:

התם גבי אדון נפקא לה מרשותיה לגמרי, יציאה דאב אכתי מחסרא מסירה לחופה; מהפרת נדרים מיהא נפקא לה מרשותיה

In that case [of a freed Israelite slave-girl], she goes out entirely from his [her master's] domain. Here [in the case of a girl becoming betrothed], her leaving her father is incomplete when she enters the chuppah. But, she does leave his domain with regards to the nullification of vows.

Rashi, commenting on this, explains that the meaning of the exit being incomplete is that she is still in her father's domain with regards to inheritance and her wages. Further, he explains that the father does not entirely relinquish the power to nullify her vows, but rather now shares it with her husband. One does not have to stretch to imagine a situation in which that shared authority could become complicated for a woman. To look at it in modern terms, one could easily imagine a situation in which a woman might be torn between her husband's wishes and those of her family-of-origin.

The first Mishnah of the 8th chapter of Pesachim, addresses precisely this tension:

> האשה בזמן שהיא בבית בעלה שחט עליה בעלה ושחט עליה אביה תאכל
> משל בעלה הלכה רגל ראשון לעשות בבית אביה שחט עליה אביה ושחט
> עליה בעלה תאכל במקום שהיא רוצה

> *A woman, when she is in the home of her husband—[if] her husband slaughtered [a Passover offering] in her behalf, and her father slaughtered [a Passover offering] in her behalf, [she] should eat of that which is slaughtered by her husband. [If] she went to observe the first festival [after marriage] in her father's house—[if] her father slaughtered [a Passover offering] in her behalf, and her husband slaughtered [a Passover offering] in her behalf, let her eat in whichever place she wants.*[32]

Here, we see that the assumption is that it is completely logical, certainly in the early years of marriage, that a woman might want to continue to celebrate the holidays with her family. In the whole notion of letting her eat in whichever place she wants, her husband seems to relinquish his pull on her, letting her define her own loyalties. With the focus on the first festival after marriage, I think we are meant to assume that as the marriage progresses, holidays will be spent within the family-of-procreation more and more.

In fact, a Mishnah and its Gemara in the seventh chapter *Masechet Ketubot* uphold this very conclusion. Mishnah Ketubot 7:4 reads:

> המדיר את אשתו שלא תלך לבית אביה בזמן שהוא עמה בעיר חדש אחד יקיים
> שנים יוציא ויתן כתובה ובזמן שהוא בעיר אחרת רגל אחד יקיים שלשה יוציא ויתן
> כתובה

> *One who vows to prevent his wife from going to her parental home: if he[her father] is in the same town, for a duration of one month,[this vow] can be upheld. After two months, he must release her with her ketubah. If he is in a different town, for a duration of one festival*

[32] Mishnah Pesachim 8:1, Neusner translation.

[season], this vow can be upheld. After three, he must release her with her ketubah.

From the Mishnah, it is clear that it was entirely common for a woman to want to maintain a relationship with her family-of-origin. Yet, like the Mishnah from Pesachim above, the Gemara here (b. Ketubot 71b) anticipates that this relationship will change over time. Notice that in the Mishnah above, the *halacha* is explicitly stated for one festival season—the vow can be upheld. In the case of three seasons, the law is also explicit; he must release her with her *ketubah*. The rabbis of the Talmud, in reading this, immediately ask the question: What happens in the second festival season? The rabbis come to the following conclusion:

לא קשיא: כאן ברדופה, כאן בשאינה רדופה.

(שיר השירים ח) אז חייתי בעיניו כמוצאת שלום - אמר רבי יוחנן: ככלה שנמצאת שלמה בבית חמיה, ורדופה לילך ולהגיד שבחה בבית אביה.

(הושע ב) והיה ביום ההוא נאום ה' תקראי אישי ולא תקראי לי עוד בעלי - אמר רבי יוחנן: ככלה בבית חמיה ולא ככלה בבית אביה.

There is no difficulty. Here (where he must release her with ketubah), where she is anxious (to return to her parents' home). Here (where the vow is upheld), she is not anxious (to return to her parents' home).

(Song of Songs 8:10) "So I became in his eyes as one who finds favor:" Rabbi Yochanan says: This is like the bride who has been found to be perfect in her husband's paternal home, and is anxious to rush and report the praise to her paternal home.

(Hosea2:18) You will call me "Ishi," and no more will you call me "Ba'ali." Rabbi Yochanan says: This is like the bride who is in her in-law's house, and not like the bride in her parental home.

This idea seems to echo what was taught in Mishnah Pesachim as well; the marital relationship grows over time.

In the first part of this Gemara—up through Rabbi Yochanan's comment on Song of Songs—they seem to be imagining the early years of a marriage. These are the years in which a woman is more tied to her parental home. The end of the Gemara, Rabbi Yochanan's comment on Hosea, reflects the shift through which the marital relationship has become the primary kin relationship.

For the husband in this ancient marriage, the tension is less-pronounced, but also different in nature. Reuven Bulka, a prominent Canadian rabbi and psychologist, who has written much on the psychology of Jewish marriage, notes that "it is a legally binding, unconditional duty to respect the parents of the spouse, even as one must respect one's own parents."[33] In general, kinship systems demand that spouses form familial bonds with their in-laws, who attain the status of non-blood kin. Because spouses naturally have such emotional and psychological loyalties to their own kin, data suggests that in-laws actually play a huge role in either creating or negating this sense of divided loyalty. The working hypothesis of the study that produced that data was that the quality of spouses' relationships with their parents-in-law would in fact predict the spouses' marital success.[34] What the data shows is that it is worth the emotional investment to create a good relationship with one's in-laws.

The Mishnah, in Baba Batra 9:5, seems to anticipate this data—by thousands of years. The Mishnah reads:

> השולח סבלונות לבית חמיו שלח שם מאה מנה ואכל שם סעודת חתן אפילו
> בדינר אינן נגבין לא אכל שם סעודת חתן הרי אלו נגבין שלח סבלונות

[33] Bulka, 100.
[34] Bryant, et al, 614.

מרובין שיחזרו עמה לבית בעלה הרי אלו נגבין סבלונות מועטין שתשתמש בהן בבית אביה אינן נגבין:

He who sends gifts to his father-in-law's household—[if] he sent gifts worth a hundred manehs and consumed a wedding feast of even a dinar—[if he divorced his wife], [the gifts] are not recoverable. [If he did not eat a wedding feast at all], lo, they are recoverable. [If the husband] had sent many gifts, which were to be returned with her to her husband's house, lo, they are recoverable. [If he had sent] few gifts, which she was to use in her father's house, they are not recoverable.[35]

While the focus of the Mishnah seems to be on the worst-case scenario, in which there is some reason to return the gifts, the underlying assumption is perhaps more important. The ritualized gift-giving suggested by this Mishnah seem to be a way to establish kinship bonds, since the husband is sending gifts not only to his prospective bride, but to her family as well.[36] This sense of bonding does not cease at the moment of marriage. Again, the rabbis seem to anticipate modern psychology, which suggests that "while women give priority to relations with their own parents, men actually feel pulled both to their parents and their in-laws."[37]

In addition, the laws of mourning seem to deeply reflect the notion of non-blood kinship relations. In b. Moed Katan 20b, we read:

מי שמת חמיו או חמותו - אינו רשאי לכוף את אשתו להיות כוחלת ולהיות פוקסת. אלא כופה מטתו, ונוהג עמה אבילות. וכן היא שמת חמיה או חמותה - אינה רשאה להיות כוחלת ולהיות פוקסת, אלא כופה מטתה ונוהגת עמו אבילות.

It is taught in a Baraita: A man whose father-in-law or mother-in-law

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[35] Mishnah Baba Batra 9:5, Neusner translation.
[36] Satlow, 165.
[37] Eunju Lee, Glenna Spitze, and John R. Logan, "Social Support to Parents-in-Law: The Interplay of Gender and Kin Hierarchies," Journal of Marriage and Family, (Volume 65, May 2003), 396.

> *dies, he does not have the right to force his wife to put on eyeliner or do her hair, but he should overturn his bed and comport himself as a mourner with her. And so too, she whose father-in-law or mother-in-law dies, she may not put on eyeliner or do her hair, but she should overturn her bed and comport herself as a mourner with him.*

This image seems to illustrate the bond that has been forged between husband and wife, in addition to the bond formed amongst in-laws. Their autonomous relationship—set in motion by the transfer of domains of Mishnah Ketubot—supercedes the bonds of their familial relationships.

IV. CONCLUSION

Masechet Ketubot, while couched in the language of contracts, money, and inheritance law, is deeply engaged in the issue of making marriage work. Anyone who has been in relationship knows that this is not always an easy task. In fact, while we often use terms like of easy and difficult, even when it comes to relationships, it is not so defined. Psychological research shows that while some social ties are experienced as solely "close," meaning entirely positive, far more are classified as both close and problematic. Further, the same research shows that it is far easier for more distant relationships to be "solely close;" it is in our relationships to those closest to us that we often experience the tension of having both a close and a problematic relationship. Most family relationships are classified as "ambivalent," meaning in this case that they are extremely close, but problematic as well. Three of the main factors present in ambivalent family relationships are:

1) Dependence versus autonomy
2) Conflict in norms for the relationship
3) Solidarity versus conflict

First, one could argue that the entire issue of women in the Talmud is one of dependence versus autonomy. In the issue of marriage and *ketubot*, those issues play out in the discussion of *reshuyot*, certainly. In that case, it is a question of dependence versus independence from the father. In questions of extended family, the question of dependence and independence appears in the attempted resolution of divided loyalties. Even more, these issues are at the heart of the discussions of money and inheritance, which form the core of the *masechet*. This becomes a question of dependence and independence vis-à-vis the marital relationship.

Also within the discussion of the marital relationship in *Masechet Ketubot*, though not in this paper, is the conflict in norms for the relationship. This topic is of core importance to the fifth chapter. In the question of extended family however, it is once again an issue of divided loyalties. The Talmud seems to take for granted that couples come into relationships with different norms, handed down by their families-of-origin. The task then, for the Gemara as well as for couples, is to negotiate those conflicts, and develop a system in which norms are defined within the family-of-procreation.

Solidarity versus conflict seems to be the ultimate issue behind relationships with in-laws. By nature, a person's primary familial relationship before marriage is that with his/her family-of-origin. It is with that primary relationship that all discussions of marriage begin; this is all the more true for women of antiquity. The entire enterprise of

marriage for a Jewish woman in ancient Israel/Babylonia was centered on a shift from the primary relationship to a new relationship; it is her status that is most affected by the marriage. But, as our Gemara shows over and over, the shift is not always so simple. The solidarity of the marriage consistently comes into conflict as the relationship to the family of origin reacts with the new family-of-procreation.

While the Mishnah begins with that finite word—*l'olam*— navigating the Gemara of Chapter 4 is anything but finite. It is Gemara of negotiation, of crossing boundaries and creating relationships. The psychological literature offers three main factors present in complicated family relationships. *Masechet Ketubot*, in playing with contingencies, tries to anticipate and solve precisely these issues, among others.

TheKnot.com asks what seems to be a simple question: Are you ready to define you and your spouse as your "primary family?" The fourth chapter of *Masechet Ketubot* reminds us that the question and its answer are anything but simple.

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A Guide for the Newly- Married:

Life and Lessons from *Masechet Ketubot*, Chapter 5

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Anecdotal evidence shows that Reform Jews in particular turn towards the specifics of their religious tradition for two major lifecycle events—weddings, and funerals. It is at these times that we are most concerned with "doing it right," and the most open to learning from our sacred texts and historical customs. As such, I believe that the Reform Movement has developed incredibly strong pre-marital programs, ranging from extensive meetings and counseling one-on-one with a rabbi, to the more systematic programs such as the URJ's new *The Alef-Bet of Marriage*. We take great care in preparing people to lead Jewish lives as a married couple. Often, these pre-marital programs come with a year's free membership to a synagogue; perhaps we hope this will be an enticement for the couple to lead the type of Jewish life for which our counseling has prepared them.

In a recent posting to HUC-Alum, a listserv for the alumni of the various programs of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, a poster posed the following question:

> A member of my community recently asked me if the synagogue would consider doing a "marriage encounter" workshop/retreat. I know that many churches do such things, which is where my congregant got the idea, talking with a non-Jewish friend who was raving about how much a church marriage encounter weekend had strengthened her relationship. And I rather like the idea. But I definitely don't feel qualified to lead such a thing. Does anyone have experience with anything like this, and suggestions regarding content and/or who might facilitate such a workshop, in an (obviously) Jewish context?

The reality is, aside from Brandeis-Bardin's Newly-Married Couples weekends, and other isolated programs of this sort, the Jewish community—and certainly the Reform

Movement—has not in any concerted manner addressed the question of how to maintain and strengthen relationships in a Jewish context. On the other hand, programs like *Making Marriage Work* and the Reform Movement's own *The Alef-Bet of Marriage* provide an excellent framework for how such a program might work.

The following grew out of an intensive study of chapters 4-7 of *Masechet Ketubot* of the Babylonian Talmud. These chapters, in their content and in their language, trace the development of a marriage from betrothal through a least a year of the marriage—addressing many of the issues which our pre-marital counseling programs address. With this curriculum guide, I hope to provide the framework—using texts and lessons from *Masachet Ketubot*—for a program for those already married.

I agree with the poster above, that there seems to be a need for some sort of Jewish "marriage encounter" program. In addition, I do not believe that simply giving a newly-married couple a membership at the synagogue is enough to guide them along the way of a new Jewish marriage. With this, I hope to provide rabbis and educators with the bare bones of a Jewish textual response to questions such as: How do I (and my spouse) make Jewish decisions about the things that affect our lives as a couple? How do I live out a Jewish marriage? What can my Jewish text and tradition teach me about how to handle the everyday questions and larger challenges of married life?

Many of the issues and questions raised in a program like *Making Marriage Work* or *The Alef-Bet of Marriage* will appear in this curriculum as well. However, what distinguishes

them is the difference between the theoretical and the practical/reflective. The Clinical Pastoral Education program works on a model of learn, do, reflect; I see this curriculum as complementing something such as *The Alef-Bet of Marriage* in the same way. Embarking on a program of pre-martial counseling allows couples to learn—that is, to consider some of the issues that may arise during their engagement, their wedding planning, and their marriage. The doing part, of course, is living the actual marriage. And the questions and exercises provided in this curriculum guide offer a change for reflective. Rather than project challenges, questions, and solutions, this curriculum allows couples to work through those that they are living in the moment.

The majority of the published pre-martial programs were written with and facilitated with social workers and licensed therapists. To run this program most effectively, I would imagine a similar pairing. While this curriculum solely focuses on lessons provided by *Masechet Ketubot*, I hope that rabbis and educators would sit with a therapist or social worker in their community, and flesh out a combined curriculum based on established therapeutic principles as well as the Jewish textual exercises and ideas contained here.

A last note that seems important for a Reform context involves language and definitions. For the rabbis of the Talmud, of course, marriage was between a man and a woman. In most, though not all ways, the man was the dominant partner in the marriage. The rabbis did not conceive of equal partnership in the way that we do today. Nor could the rabbis conceive of same-gender couples sharing in the commitment of marriage, as we can today. While in translation, I will remain faithful to the text and use the terms man and

woman, or husband and wife, this is done with the understanding that those terms can be adapted as appropriate to whatever couple is participating in the class. More often that not, each term could be replaced with partner or spouse.

Rabbi Ben Bag-Bag famously said of Jewish texts: Turn it, and turn it again, for everything is in it.

Here is one turn of *Masechet Ketubot*, Chapter 5. I expect to continue turning, and learning, from these texts.

A Note on Organization

Based on a year-long study of 4 chapters in *Masechet Ketubot*, this project is, like the entire project of Talmud study, a work in progress. Rather than a complete curriculum, or extensive lesson plans, this paper rather envisions the way that specific texts might be used in a more comprehensive study of marriage and relationship in a Jewish context.

I envision that a class or program based on these texts—in this particular section entirely from the 5th chapter of *Masechet Ketubot*—the sessions would be broken down into larger categories. Here, those categories are **Money, Household Responsibilities, Intimacy and Sex,** and **Conflict**. Within each of these categories, naturally, there are various questions and topics to consider. What is represented here is only a sample. It is also important to note that for the rabbis, as for us today, these issues were often interconnected.

Also unrepresented here are creative lesson plans and scenarios. While I envision a dynamic and interactive learning environment, the material presented here is simply basic text studies—texts to use and questions with which to probe them. I believe these are text studies on two levels. First, by separating the Mishnah and the Gemara for each section, participants are on some level participating in a process of creating their own "Gemara," asking and answering the questions that are important to them. Secondly, the goal of all of these text studies is to make the text relevant; I hope that participants would come

away with a sense of how to use text and tradition to negotiate the questions of relationship in their own lives.

MONEY

Questions to Consider:

- What is the financial situation with which each partner came into the marriage?
- Who oversaw the money before marriage?
- Who is currently overseeing the money?
- How is the money merged or not merged within the marriage?

SAMPLE 1:

Shifting from Dependent to Dependent:

(Or, how you go from being independent to shared independence)

Mishnah Ketubot 4:7:

The father retains control of his [minor[daughter as to effecting any of the tokens of betrothal: money, document, or sexual intercourse.. **And** he retains control of anything she finds, of the fruit of her labor, and of nullifying her vows. **But**, he does not dispose of the return [on the property received by the girl from her mother] during her lifetime.

[When] she is married, the husband exceeds her father, for he disposes of the return [on the property received by the girl from her mother] during her lifetime. **But**, he is liable to maintain her, and to ransom her, and to bury her...[1]

Questions:

First, the rabbi or educator should explain the social context and confusing terms. For example, participants may not know the three ways in which a woman was betrothed in ancient Palestine.

- What are the responsibilities that a parent has for their child? Financially, what does the parent get in return?
- What does it mean that "the husband exceeds her father?" (Have participants make a list of the husband's "benefits" from marriage. On the other side of the page, make a list of the responsibilities that a husband has towards his wife).
- What does this Mishnah suggest about the financial transition from childhood to marriage? What are the transitions that we make financially going into marriage.

[1] Translations from the Misnah are provided by Jacob Neusner, unless otherwise noted.

Talmud [Bavli Ketubot 47b]:

Mishnah: [The husband is] liable to maintain her

Gemara: Our sages taught: 'They established [the requirement] maintain her in place of [the benefit he receives] from the fruit of her labor and [the requirement[to bury her in place of [the benefit he receives] from her bride price [which is explicated in the *ketubah*]. Therefore, the husband [has the right] to use the return.'

The [question of] the return? Who mentioned its name [was this item mentioned earlier in the text?!?]

The text is surely lacking, and this is how it should read: 'They established [the requirement] to maintain her in place of [the benefit he receives[from the fruit of her labor; the [requirement] to redeem/ransom her in place of [the benefit he receives from the use of] the return, and [the requirement] to bury her in place of [the benefit he receives] from her bride-price, Therefore, the husband has the right to use/dispose of the return.[2]

Questions:

- What is the relationship of this Gemara to the Mishnah?
- What does the wife contribute to the relationship? The husband?
- What expenses does this Gemara see being crucial in life?
- How does this Gemara understand the financial relationship between husband and wife?
- What are your monthly expenses? Are some "yours" and some "his/hers?" What is the source of the money for those expenses?
- Looking at your own budget, does one partner's money "pay for something" for the other partner? What? How did you come to that agreement?
- Have you talked about emergency situations? Is there money set aside for those? Where might that money come from?

[2] All translations of the Talmud are my own, unless otherwise noted

HOUSEHOLD TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Questions to Consider:

- What was the model of household responsibility with which you came into the marriage? Has that changed?
- What are the factors that decide who does what around the house?
- How explicitly are your responsibilities stated? Are they fixed or fluid?

Sample 1:

Sharing Household Responsibilities:

(Or, Can We Have a Work Wheel?)

Mishnah Ketubot 5:5

These are the kinds of labor a woman performs for her husband:
She: 1) Grinds flour; 2) bakes bread; 3) does laundry; 4) prepares meals; 5) feeds her child; 6) makes the bed; 7) works in wool.

If she brought with her [into the marriage] one slave girl, she does not 1) grind, 2) bake bread, or 3) do laundry.

If she brought with her [into the marriage] two slave girls, she does not [do the three above and] 4) prepare meals and 5) feed her child.

If she brought three, she does not [do the above and] 6) make the bed or 7) work in wool.

If she brought four, she sits on a throne!

Questions:

- Have participants break down the tasks above into categories. Have them share with the group the categories they chose, and then where each task fell.
- What do these tasks represent? Why do you think the rabbis set that these are the tasks a woman should fulfill?
- Imagine that you were writing a complementary Mishnah to this one. It would begin: These are the kinds of labor a man performs for his wife. Using your categories, and imagining that you are a rabbi in antiquity, finish the Mishnah.
- Now, using those same categories, write out a list of your household and life tasks. Note who generally does what.

Talmud (Bavli Ketubot 61a):

Mishnah: If she brought with her one slave girl, she does not grind, bake bread, or do laundry.
Gemara:
And the rest of the tasks? Who does them?
And if she says to him: I brought you this other woman....
He says to her: "She will be burdened [with work] for me and for herself. For your needs, who will trouble?"
Mishnah: If she brought with her two slave girls....
Gemara:
And the rest of the tasks? Who does them?
She says to him: "I brought you two other women. One to trouble herself on your behalf and on her behalf, and one to trouble herself on my behalf."
But, he will say to her: "And for the children and guests and other people around the house? Who will trouble themselves for them?"

Questions:

- Looking at the list of tasks, are their tasks that are solely for you? Solely for your partner? Who does them?
- What happens to miscellaneous tasks? How is they handled?
- Do you have someone who helps with your housework? Do you agree with that decision? Why or why not? How might changing that decision affect either of your lives?
- How did you decide who does what? Are you both satisfied with the decision? Why or why not?

SAMPLE 2:

Household Tasks as a Path to Intimacy

(Or, Making Housework More Fun)

Based on the same Mishnah used above, the rabbis have the following discussion:

Talmud (Bavli Ketubot 61a)

Mishnah: If she brings in four....she sits on a throne!
Gemara:
Rav Yitzchak bar Chanina said, quoting Rav Huna: Even though they said she sits on a throne, she still would mix his wine, make the bed, and wash his face, hands, and feet.

QUESTIONS:

- The rabbis seem to understand these three tasks as different from the ones above. Why do you think they are different?
- An important aspect of these tasks for the rabbis seems to be presence—i.e. that both husband and wife are present when they occur. Do you and your spouse have tasks that you do together? What are they?
- The message of this piece of Gemara seems to be that intimate tasks can lead to intimacy. For the rabbis, this is a cautionary tale. For you and your spouse, brainstorm some ways to use this notion in a positive way.

INTIMACY

Questions to Consider:

- Has your intimate relationship changed since marriage? How? Can you think of why?
- Are both of you satisfied with your current level of intimacy?
- How comfortable do you feel raising questions of intimacy with your partner?
- What are the factors, both internal and external to the marriage, that affect your intimate relations?

SAMPLE 1:

Setting Sexual Expectations

(Or, How Much is Enough?)

Using this rather popular Mishnah, we will address questions of frequency, satisfaction, and different expectations when it comes to intimacy.

Mishnah Ketubot 5:6

He who takes a vow not to have sexual relations with his wife—the House of Shammai say: "[He may allow this situation to continue] for two weeks." And the House of Hillel say: "For one week."

Disciples/students go forth for Torah study without [the wife's] consent for thirty days. Workers go out for one week.

"The sexual duty of which the Torah speaks (Exodus 21:10]: 1) those without work [or independent means]—every day; 2) workers—twice a week; 3) ass-drivers—once a week; 4) camel drivers—once in thirty days; 5) sailors—once in six months," the words of R. Eliezer.

Talmud (Bavli Ketubot 62a):
Mishnah: Workers—twice a week
Gemara: But wasn't it taught in a *Baraita*: "Workers—once a week?" Rabbi Yosi, quoting Rabbi Haninah, said: This is not a difficulty. Here [where it says twice a week], it is those who do their work in their own city. Here [where it says once a week], it is those who work in another city.

Questions:

- How do the rabbis understand the idea of sexual obligation? How is it different from our understanding? How is it similar?
- For the rabbis, what is the main factor that affects sexual obligations?
- As a group, come up with the most "common" occupations today. Based on those, and comparing with the rabbis, how would you assign "sexual responsibilities" today?
- What are the factors that the rabbis left out? How do they affect issues of intimacy today?

SAMPLE 2:

Changing Expectations and How to Handle It

Based on the above Mishnah, the rabbis offer the following situation:

> **Talmud (Bavli Ketubot 62b):**
> Rabbah bar Bar Hanna said to Abbey: [If he is currently] an ass-driver and [wants to] become a camel-driver. What [does he do]? Abbaye said to him: A woman prefers one *kav* and her husband's presence to 10 *kavs* and long separations.

Questions:

- Look back at the Mishnah. Why does the change from being an ass-driver to becoming a camel driver pose a problem? How do the rabbis identify the problem? If you were to set it up as a question of competing values, what values would you use?
- Using that list of competing values, imagine you or your partner consider a similar career change. Make a list of pros and cons for the change.
- How do the rabbis seem to understand marital intimacy in this passage? Who is mainly affected by a change in marital intimacy? Do you see a similar pattern in your relationship?
- If one person is more or less concerned with questions of intimacy than the other, brainstorm ways to handle the discrepancy.

CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Questions to Consider:

- In what areas and on what subjects do you sense the most conflict with your partner?
- What methods do you use for conflict resolution? Do you both engage in the same sort of conflict and conflict resolution?
- Are there areas in which you actively avoid conflict? Why?

SAMPLE 1:

Fighting Fair:

(Or, The Lysistrata Method Only Goes So Far)

Using Intimacy as a Weapon

Mishnah Ketubot 5:7
She who rebels against her husband [declining to perform wifely services]—they deduct from her marriage contract seven *dinars* a week. R. Judah says: Seven *tropaics*.

How long does one continue to deduct? Until her entire marriage contract [has been voided]. R. Yose says: "He continues to deduct [even beyond the value of the marriage contract], for an inheritance may come [to her] from some other source, from which he will collect what is due him."

And so is the rule for the man who rebels against his wife [declining the husband's duties]—they add three *dinars* a week to her marriage contract. R. Judah says: Three *tropaics*.

Questions:

- What might cause a man or a woman to "rebel," then and now?
- How do the rabbis suggest we deal with a woman or a man who "rebels?"
- I think most of us would agree that the financial aspect is not a fair penalty. Do we use forms of coercion today? What are they?

Talmud (Bavli Ketubot 63a):
Gemara:
Rebels from what?
Rav Huna says: [She rebels against] having sexual relations.
Rav Yose, quoting Rabbi Haninah, says: [She rebels against] her wifely labors.

But the Mishnah also teaches: "And so is the rule for the man who rebels against his wife..." Which is fine for the one who says that [the rebellion in question] is about sexual relations. But for the one who says that it is about spousal labors, does he have responsibilities to

her? Yes—in saying: "I won't maintain you, and I won't provide you with spending money."

But, Rav says: "The one who says [to his wife]: 'I won't maintain you, and I won't provide you with spending money'—he must release her and give her the *ketubah*."....

[The resolution]: When it comes to the question of sexual relations, there is no dispute [everyone agrees that this constitutes rebellion].

Questions:

- With these texts, the rabbis seems to understand two different ways in which a husband or a wife can rebel. Do you think one is more serious than the other? Why or why not?
- Here, the rabbis seems to be setting some boundaries, in terms of what sorts of disagreements and refusals are acceptable and which are not. In your relationship, what behaviors/rebellions might be beyond the realm of acceptability?
- Since you have been married, have you ever felt your partner has been rebelling in some way? How did you handle it then? Given this text and these discussions, how might you handle it in the future?

SAMPLE 2:

When to Stop Fighting

(Or, Is There a Point at Which There is No Resolution?)

Based on the same Mishnah as above, the rabbis have this conversation.

Talmud (Bavli Berachot 63b):
Gemara:

What does this rebellion look like? Someone said: That she says: "He asked me [to have sex], and I [am trying] to cause him pain."

But, in the case where she says: "He disgusts me," we do not coerce her [to return to normal sexual relations].

QUESTIONS

- Here, the rabbis seem to suggest two different reasons for rebellion. How do you understand these reasons?
- In the first scenario presented here, it seems that the rabbis did not set an official policy on how to deal with this case. In small groups, discuss the scenario. How would you counsel this couple?
- In the second scenario, the rabbis imagine this to be the end of the marriage. What does this suggest about their understanding of intimacy and sexual relations in a marriage? What sets this scenario apart from the first one?
- Do you agree with the rabbis' ultimate conclusion here? Why or why not?