

SHALOM BAYIT

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For Rabbinic Ordination - Text Immersion

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A prayer for Torah study before we begin:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לִשְׁקוֹךְ בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָתְךָ.

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu, Melech ha-Olam,
Asher Kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.*

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe
who sanctifies us with mitzvot and commands us to busy ourselves with words of
Torah.

SHALOM BAYIT

Talmud Bavli: Yevamot 63

Yevamot 63a, begins with the quote, “any man who lives without a wife lives without happiness¹, without blessing², without goodness³.” This is a lovely thought, and at first, the reader may assume that the men who wrote the text obviously valued and loved their wives. However, most of the sugya focuses on the negatives of a wife and the difficulties she may cause to a man’s life. The sugya focuses on how grueling living with evil women can be. “An evil woman is more bitter than death.” The rabbis who are featured in the Talmud appeared to have lived with a great tension in their lives: that one could not fulfill the mitzvah of *pru u’revu*⁴ (be fruitful and multiply) without a wife, but they would be miserable with a woman. Why did the rabbis put forth these laws and ideals which told men to make certain to find a wife when it could turn their life into a gehinom (hell)? Why marry at all? Rashi says that a woman saves a man from sin (from sexual thoughts that would be inappropriate if they were not married). But would not marriage interfere with the study of Torah?

The conflict between marriage and Torah study is a recurring theme in Talmudic literature, seen in, for example, Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 50a, Ketubot 63b, and Yoma 72b. From the tension reflected in these texts, one can perceive that in the world in which the rabbis lived, there was societal pressure against marrying. “Celibacy provided an attractive ‘out’ from the world’s pain, and, moreover, the life of the purely spiritual seeker of wisdom was the ideal of much of the circumambient culture, both Jewish and non-Jewish.”⁵ By

¹ Deuteronomy 14:26

² Ezekiel 44:30

³ Genesis 2:8

⁴ Genesis 1:28

⁵ Boyarin, Daniel. Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture. p.136

understanding this social conflict, it is possible to understand a major part of Talmudic literature, and its many discussions, stories, and halachic arguments about a man's role, whether as a husband or scholar.

Daniel Boyarin, in Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture discussed this specific tension found within the Talmud's rabbinic community. Boyarin argued that rabbinic Judaism valued, as one of the most high, the body, and therefore, sexuality. Jeffrey Rubenstein also reflects upon the rabbinic importance of sexuality. The rabbis clearly saw marital sex as a mitzvah. Rambam, in his Mishnah Torah⁶, goes to the extent of detailing the husband's sexual responsibility to his wife on a weekly basis. However, the rabbinic ethic of Torah study created a huge pressure against all familial relations. Rabbinic maxims, such as "You shall meditate over it day and night (Josh 1:8)" helped facilitate this tension. Therefore, within the Jewish community, there existed a dichotomy in which men lived: marriage to a woman or marriage to Torah and God.

Jeffrey Rubenstein suggested that a compilation of rabbinic stories, found in bKet 62b, is the clearest expression of the rabbinic tension between domestic life and Torah study. The sugya in bKet 62b is comprised of seven stories of rabbis who spend time away from home in order to study Torah. What becomes apparent from Rubenstein's explanations of the stories is that they were not expressions of concern for the woman the sages left behind, but rather they were examples of how the sages viewed the dangers created by not studying Torah and the consequences resulting from extended absence. The stories explain that the benefit was years of study of the beloved Torah. The consequences of not studying Torah were possible Divine punishment of the sages or their loved ones. However, the costs resulting from consistently studying Torah were estrangement from their children and sexual

⁶ Rambam, Mishnah Torah. *Hilchot Ishut*, Chapter 14:1.

abstinence. Maimonides commented that sexual abstinence was problematic because it lead a man's *yetzer hara* astray, whereas a wife was able to manage it. This tension is so great, because both alternatives involve different mitzvot. It is a commandment to procreate, and educate one's son, but it is also the greatest mitzvah to become a learned Torah scholar. To fulfill both sets of commandments, simultaneously, required a fantasy world like that presented in the Rabbi Akiba story⁷.

Since becoming a great Torah scholar was such a valued profession and required a man to dedicate his entire life to study in, most likely, a separate house of study away from women or children, why then did some men choose the other and marry, thereby taking some of their focus away from God and Torah? "Rav said to Chiya: But isn't she troubling you! He said to him: It is enough that she raises the children and delivers us from [sinful sexual thoughts]."⁸ Rav's reasoning for a man to marry a woman is that the sin of improper thoughts is apparently worse than the time a wife will take him away from Torah. Additionally, every man is required to have children and therefore, needs someone to raise them while he occupies himself with Torah study. (Also, it was not acceptable to have children out of wedlock.)

While most of the sources we read focus on the sages' neglect of their wives and families, a few of the Talmudic stories take the opposite approach and present wives as actual obstacles to their husbands' noble pursuit. The only text that somewhat resolves the tension is that of the Rabbi Akiba story, where his wife supports him being away for twenty-four years to study. "The story expresses, as Smith says, 'the way things ought to be in conscious

⁷ Rubenstein, Jeffrey. The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud. p.110.

⁸ Talmud Bavli, Yevamot, 63b.

tension to the way things are.”⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith explains that just as ritual can be a means of performing how things ought to be, so too, the perfect rabbinic marriage, between R. Akiba and his wife were created as a fantasy.

In Yevamot 63a&b, there are three stories which also suggest a tension the rabbis felt between taking a wife who would be difficult and taking them away from something more important. In the first story Rav Hava explains to Rav Hiyya why he thinks his wife is “more bitter than death”. Rav Hava says that whenever he asks for one thing she gives him the opposite. Hiyya then follows with his own story about his wife who is difficult, yet he still always buys her presents because his thought is that she keeps him from sin and perhaps over time she will change for the better. Finally, written in the book of Ben Sira it says “an evil wife is like tzara’at (a skin disease) to her husband.”¹⁰ Therefore a man must divorce his wife and heal himself from the disease. Moreover, the concept of the study of Torah somehow substituted for sex was also utilized to deemphasize one’s commitment to a wife.

“Engagement with Torah apparently stimulated the sages with a powerful intellectual delight that competed with, or at least substituted for, bodily pleasure.”¹¹ Prov.22:18 states, “And that all of them be constantly on your lips.” This verse is used in Talmudic texts, by the rabbis, as proof text to encourage dedication to Torah study, and therefore, a reason for their lack of allegiance to their wives and families. The erotic symbolism that the rabbis gleaned from Torah study made the conflict less difficult. “Given Torah’s eternal youth, fertility, and virginity, we can perhaps understand why sages tended to neglect their wives.”¹²

⁹ Rubenstein, p.113.

¹⁰ Talmud Bavli, 63b.

¹¹ Rubenstein, p.118.

¹² Ibid, p.119.

However, at the same time, there are writings which can be seen as exacting pressure for husbands to have relationships with their wives.

Marjorie Lehman, a modern Talmudic scholar also found interest in the study of women's portrayal and the rabbis relationship to them in Talmudic study. She opines that it is important for students to realize that references to women are ways to uncover larger issues with which the rabbis faced. She tests the use of this theory by analyzing the Babylonian Talmud, bSukkot 27b.

In this text, a story is told of a student who visited his rabbi on a festival day. The rabbi sent him home citing Deuteronomy 14:26, "You shall rejoice, you with your household." In rabbinic literature "your house" often times signifies "your wife." Therefore, the rabbi was telling his student that in order to fulfill the commandment of rejoicing he must be with his wife. Additionally, this story suggests "that husband without wife jeopardizes the spiritual essence of pilgrimage festival observance which is defined in the home-centeredness of the celebration."¹³ According to Dr. Lehman, this text reinforces the argument that "gender" and "place" are interconnected and interdependent categories of Jewish identity. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the "your house" was another word for "your wife." Additionally, this text could be used by the rabbis as another proof of why they must find a wife and remain married, because without her they could not fully celebrate the holidays which they are commanded to observe. Therefore there are sages that clearly favor the relationship between husband and wife. But, which position ultimately prevailed?

The resolution to the above issue appears to have been reflected on in the final section of Yevamot 63b. In this discussion, there are a list of rabbis who each speak about the

¹³Lehman, Marjorie. *Examining the Role of Gender Studies in the Teaching of Talmudic Literature*. Journal of Jewish Education. p. 113

mitzvah of “*pru u’revu*” (be fruitful and multiply). Rav Asi says: Moshiach will not come until all the souls (which are predestined to be born) are born. Eliezer specifically states that whoever does not participate in this mitzvah acts as if he has spilled blood, that is, killed another human being. Accordingly, a man, who does not reproduce, is diminishing the Divine presence, preventing souls from being born, and stopping the Shechinah from resting on the Jewish people. Thus, it is apparent that ultimately, while the rabbis of the Talmudic period were unable to totally resolve the issue created by conflicting mitzvot, at least in theory, family and sex gave way for Torah study and abstinence. As, “our rabbis taught: one who loves his wife like he loves himself and honors her more than he honors himself... - about him it is written, ‘He will know peace in his tent.’”¹⁴

¹⁴ Talmud Bavli, Yevamot, 63a

Shalom Bayit

Maimonides on Marriage

It is taught in Pirkei Avot 1:6, “*Aseh lekha rav u'kneh lekha chaver*, = appoint for thyself a teacher and acquire for thyself a companion.” Many psychologists have commented that marital relationships can exist on two levels: 1. Friendship based on the physical relationship for mutual pleasure and mutual needs, such as, support for food, shelter and clothing. 2. Friendship and love based on trust - friendship between soul mates - a relationship in which the husband and wife can bare their souls, secrets and business affairs, both good and bad, without fear of harm or fear of hurting the relationship. This type of love is based on mutual caring and trust with common goals in life; one helps the other with his/her tasks. Their purpose is to give to the other rather than take from their partner in life. Therefore, it is apparent that spouses should attempt to reach the second level in their relationship. But how can this goal be reached when there is no level playing field between spouses, when the man’s position is far superior than the woman’s? Certainly the Tanach and Talmud do not come close to affording equal rights to men and women.

Disparity in the relationship is the situation which is most often found in traditional Jewish texts that deal with marriage. However, after reading the article by Michael S. Berger, *Maimonides on Sex and Marriage*, I questioned whether this medieval philosopher was taking a slightly different perspective on the issue. Did Maimonides attempt to level the playing field and establish rights for women in marriage, at least in the area of sexual relations?

In order to answer this question Michael Berger looked at Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Ishut 14:8*. “*The wife who prevents her husband from having intercourse with her is called a rebellious wife, and should be questioned as to the reason for her rebelliousness. If*

she says, 'I have come to loathe him, and I cannot willingly submit to his intercourse,' [the husband] must be compelled to divorce her immediately, for she is not like a captive woman who must submit to a man that is hateful to her. "

Moses Maimonides, known as the Rambam, was born in Spain in the twelfth-century. As a rabbi, physician, and philosopher in Spain, Morocco, and Egypt he was a preeminent Jewish scholar who also influenced the outer world. In his summary of Moreh Nevuchim, Chapter 49, Rambam largely sees marriage and all the laws relating to it as a question of proper and improper sexual relations. One of the main reasons that Rambam mentions to justify marriage, is that it calms down one's sexual appetite. Rambam was very concerned about excessive sexuality as a distraction from more important areas of human experience. For example, a man would not be able to concentrate on Torah study if his sexual thoughts were at the forefront of his mind.

To truly understand how different Maimonides' view in Hilkhos Ishut 14:8 was, it is necessary to look at the history of Jewish tradition on the subject. "Traditional Jewish marriage law is predicated on a fundamental disparity of status between men and women."¹ Biblical matrimonial law was completely unilateral, referring to marriage as "buying" a wife (Deuteronomy 22:13). For example, Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 2a, opens with the Mishnah statement, "a wife can be acquired in three ways," the first of which is *bakesef*, "with money." Accordingly, inequality was the foundation for Jewish marriage.

The same variation is reflected in divorce, which was also unilateral, where only the husband had the power to end the marriage and the women had to accept it. This law subjugated a woman, in relationship to her husband, to being little more than property. Therefore, Maimonides' ruling in Hilkhos Ishut 14:8, "[the husband] **must be compelled to**

¹ Rayner, John D. "The Gender Issue in Jewish Divorce," Gender Issues in Jewish Law. P. 33

divorce her immediately” not only appeared to be quite a progressive stance, it was also remarkable in light of the culture in which he lived and the previous Talmudic texts on the subject. Moreover, Hilkhhot Ishut 14:8 appears to contradict Moses Maimonides’ other philosophical and non-legal writings, which tended not to favor women’s rights and portrayed a misogynistic voice (One should not be shocked that most of his writings were misogynistic, because belittling women and viewing them as second class citizens was actually the mainstream attitude of the Jewish and Muslim world in which Maimonides lived). Finally, what is most surprising is that the Talmudic text, upon which Hilkhhot Ishut 14:8 was based, was not as forgiving of a rebellious wife as Maimonides’ personal work appeared to be. Then, why does Maimonides appear to contradict himself and the writings and culture of his time? Isadore Twersky insisted that in order to understand Maimonidean legal passages on sex and marriage, one must look at his philosophical writings.²

But before reviewing Maimonidean philosophies, Berger opines that it is necessary to look back to the sources that Maimonides studied. The Talmudic sugyot which discuss the rebellious wife, are like many other Talmudic sugyot, full of conflicting opinions and attitudes. However, there appear to be two opposing views which were raised above the others with regard to the rebellious wife; one which offered her rights, and the other which clearly denied them. The position which Maimonides offered was not the Talmudic normative.

However, what one must realize is that the Talmud was not the only text or tradition on which Maimonides would have based his decisions. In fact, there were additional rabbinic ordinances of which Maimonides would have been aware and therefore, which may have influenced his position. For example, he was aware of the ruling made by the head of

² Berger, Michael S. *Maimonides on Sex and Marriage*, Marriage, Sex, and Family in Judaism. p. 150

the academy of Kairouan, Hananei ben Hushiel and those of Isaac Alfasi. He would have been knowledgeable of the teachings and rulings of the Babylonian geonim and those of the early North African and Spanish scholars. For example, a tenth-century ketubah found among the manuscripts of the Cairo Genizah apparently reflects that a wife had the right, in certain circumstances, to sue for divorce. According to a variety of sources and responsa, the early medieval Babylonian geonim instituted a taqqanah (rabbinic ordinance) which allowed a wife to receive a divorce nearly on demand, and with almost no waiting period. While there is no clear evidence regarding what specifically prompted this ordinance, it appears that it may have been a practical solution to a significant problem created by the Talmud. It was discovered that the Talmud's lengthy twelve-month waiting period did not lead to reconciliation of the couple (as had been hoped), but rather to very "unacceptable behaviors" on the woman's part; the women in limbo sometimes went to Muslim authorities, converted to Islam, and/or found other male partners.³

What is interesting to note is that through the multiple texts and scholars from which Maimonides' learned, he would have become aware that within Jewish tradition there is such a thing as evolution of law. First, there was the ruling of the Mishnah. Then, the Masters reexamined the law and may have created a new ruling. Finally, the geonim adapted the law to fit their time. Therefore, Maimonides' Mishneh Torah's ruling on the rebellious wife was just another stage in the evolving area of law. Moreover, it should be noted that it appears that Maimonides purposefully limited his definition of a rebellious wife to her refusal to have sexual relations.

While, in the Mishnah, Rabbi Yose extended the definition of *moredet* to both conjugal relations as well as to her responsibilities of household work, in his 1170s

³ Ibid., p. 154

composition of the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides limits the definition to refusal to engage in sexual intercourse. It states, in chapter 14 of Hilkhhot Ishut, that Jewish law characterizes conjugal relations as the wife's *right*; however, she also is *obligated* to him to participate in intercourse.⁴ While a husband can never force a woman to have sex with him, her act of refusal becomes an actionable cause to him, making her a *moredet*, because she must still enable him to fulfill his commandment of *pru u'revu*. This still applied even if he had children, because one never knew if those children would survive or have other undue circumstances which then would make the father negligent on this positive commandment. But the question still remains as to why Maimonides demands a husband to divorce his wife if she confesses "to loathe him"? In order to understand Rambam's reasoning, as previously stated, it is necessary to review his religious teleology.

Maimonides's religious teleology consistently emphasized that the human goal should be to attain knowledge and love of God. An ideal person is one who is engaged in this pursuit. "For Maimonides, '*isq*, a passion or love of God, where one contemplates the Deity at all times' like a man who is consumed with thoughts of a woman, is the aim of human beings."⁵ Maimonidean ideas about sex and marriage all must be viewed through the prism of a human attaining the highest goal, knowledge and love of God.

After studying the details of how often a husband and wife must have intercourse, in the Mishneh Torah Hilkhhot Ishut, chapters 14 & 15, I concluded that Rambam observed that men needed a push to go home and be with their wife and family, and I assumed he issued those directives to strengthen the family unit. However, Michael S. Berger's essay on "Maimonides on Sex and Marriage," reaches a conclusion which is quite different;

⁴ Ibid., p. 158

⁵ Ibid., p. 160

Maimonides was specific about these rules not as an attempt to help the family, but as a way to suppress human sexual appetite in order to refocus the human mind solely on divine intellection.

Maimonides categorized sex as both a biological need and an instrumental necessity for human beings. At the most basic level, one requires sex just as one requires food and drink. Additionally, it is essential for procreation, which creates another level, because procreation is commanded by God for men. However, according to Rambam, just because sex was an essential part of life, it must be kept to a minimum because "... the cultivation of the sexual impulse hampers one's spiritual development."⁶ These conflicting beliefs were so deeply felt that they created a deep tension within the rabbinic community: to marry or devote one's life to the study of Torah.

Maimonides saw Torah study not as a pursuit for an elite religious minority, but as the obligation of all. However, he acknowledged that every person, biologically, had sexual urges and those thoughts were an impediment to the study of Torah. The solution was that a man should marry as an outlet for his sexual thoughts. Since marriage would not totally control these urges, Maimonides specified additional restrictions to manage one's sexual appetite. These included Ezra's ordinance (reducing the frequency of intercourse), the minimum age to get married (dependent on the person's ability to withstand sexual urges), and the manner of performing sex with one's spouse (not to greatly excite one's sexual passion and minimize the frequency). These boundaries, elucidated by Maimonides, about sex and marriage create the image that sex within marriage was strictly instrumental.

Finally, to truly grasp Maimonides' view on the rebellious wife, one can look at Talmudic views on sex with slaves. According to Jewish law, slaves were not fully human

⁶ Ibid., p. 162

and therefore, could neither marry among themselves nor with Jews. In his writings, Maimonides distinguished thoroughly between legal persons and slaves. Slaves, he opined, did not have the capacity to achieve perception of God; slaves were “like cattle”. A reaction to this worldview was the basis for Maimonides’ concept of the rebellious wife. If a woman was repulsed by her husband and forced into sex, it would render her “like a captive woman who must submit to a man that is hateful to her. This crossed the boundary from human being to slave, and so, Maimonides insisted that the husband be forced to divorce her instantly... .”⁷

Sex and marriage are issues wrought with emotion and apprehension in rabbinic literature. The tension for Maimonides was that between the biological sex drive and the human ambition to achieve cognition of God. Maimonides viewed sex within marriage as an instrument in the fulfillment of procreation⁸, the satisfaction of physical needs, and the repressing of passions which could impede the religious pursuit of intellectual perception of God. This goal was shared by both men and women, and therefore, Maimonides could not allow one spouse’s behavior to be an obstacle in the path of the other’s quest.

Thus, while it appeared that Rambam’s dictate,, which commands a man to divorce his wife, immediately, if she will not willingly submit to intercourse, was intended to strike a blow for sexual equality and render null marriages which could never reach a level of friendship and love based on trust, his ruling was nothing more than a practical decision, which was in line with his teleological beliefs. Notwithstanding this fact, Hilkhhot Ishut 14:8 permits a woman who is miserable in her marriage to escape that sad relationship and gives her a second chance to find friendship and love based on respect. This parallels the wisdom

⁷ Ibid., p. 174

⁸ Genesis 1:28 “be fruitful and multiply”

of Ecclesiastes (4:9), which says, "Two are better than one." It is signified by the description of the relationship as the Jewish wedding blessing refers to them: *re-im ahu-vim*, (beloved friends). Under the chuppah, as we recite two of the seven blessings, we are reminded of the joyous celebrations of companionship: "Cause beloved friends to rejoice greatly, as of old You rejoiced Your creatures in Paradise..." and "Who has created joy and gladness, bridegroom and bride, mirth and exaltation, pleasure and delight, love, fellowship, peace and companionship..."

Shalom Bayit

Creating a Shalom Bayit

There is a vast amount of literature in the Orthodox/frum world which responds to questions about dating, marriage, and the relationship between man and woman. Two books, Tranquility in the Home, written for men by a rabbi, and Right from the Start, written for women by a rebbetzin, reflect upon, and give guidance for, many issues which confront the frum community. Some examples of the subjects which are covered include, but are not limited to, finding a shidduch, the first year of marriage, a wife's power, modesty, and arguing. While the way the authors answer these questions might be quite different from our modern liberal world view, the subject matter of this literature made me think how we, as Reform rabbis, might deal with the topics.

In the frum world, there is an openness and willingness, at least through texts, to discuss personal issues dealing with love. While one may disagree with the answers, the approach to the issues can be very helpful. Therefore, I have attempted to create different text studies which can be used by Reform rabbis in pre-marital counseling. The purpose of using texts in these sessions is a way to deal with topics which seem uncomfortable to many.

The concept of having a Jewish manual as a guide to love and marriage is nothing new. Rabbinic literature spends a lot of time dealing with these issues and finds its sources in the Tanach. While much of that literature may be outdated for the society we live in, we can still learn from the ideals of our tradition. We are *Israel*, the people who struggle with God, the people who are constantly striving for the good. This struggle, this continuous learning, is the essence of Jewish marriage.

The development of a peaceful and harmonious relationship among all the members of a household is called *shalom bayit*. The peaceful home (*shalom bayit*), where harmony

and good will between husband and wife reign, must be an overriding value, concern, and aim of every couple.

The literature of traditional Judaism is rife with comments of the importance of a relationship between man and woman. For example, In Genesis it is declared that, in the beginning, God set about creating a wife for Adam because

“it is not good that the man should be alone... I will make him a help-mate...”¹

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ, עָשֵׂה-לּוֹ עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:

In the Talmud, companionship and the love and goodwill necessary for that relationship are presented as the first and primary purposes of marriage.² Therefore it is obvious that from its very beginnings Judaism was concerned about well being of families and assisting Jews in their personal relationships.

With this in mind, I have chosen five topics to create text studies for pre-marital counseling. These topics are:

1. *Ezer Knegdo* עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ - a helpmate
2. *Ketubot* – the marriage contract
3. Sexual intimacy
4. Children
5. *Kavod* כְּבוֹד - honoring one's spouse

¹ Genesis 2:18

²“One who does not marry dwells without blessing, without goodness ... without peace” (Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 62b).

“A man must love his wife at least as much as himself but honor her more than himself” (Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 62b)

“Who is rich?” Rabbi Akiva said: “He who has a wife whose ways are pleasant” (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 25b).

Ezer Knegdo – A Helpmate

Text Study:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הָיִיתָ אָדָם לִבְדּוֹ אֵשֶׁלָּה-לוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ
 וְהָאָדָם לֹא-מָצָא עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ... וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים תְּדַמָּה עַל-הָאָדָם וַיִּשָּׁן
 וַיֵּקֶח אֶת הַצִּלְעָה יְסָדָה בָּשָׂר כִּרְתוּמָהּ וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָעֶצֶם
 אֲשֶׁר-קָצַר מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבָאֶה אֹתָהּ-הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הִנֵּה רִפְעַם
 עָצָם מִעַצְמִי וְכַשֵּׁר מִבְּשָׁרִי לִיאָהּ יִקְרָא אֶשֶׁר בִּי מֵאִשׁ לְכֶסֶת-יֵאָדָה עַם-בִּן
 יִקְרָא אִישׁ אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵת-אִמּוֹ וְדָבָר בָּאֵשֶׁת יִקְרָא כְּבָשָׂר אֶחָד כֶּה וְהָיוּ
 שָׁרֵיבָה עֶרְוָתָם הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ יָדָם וְכָרְסָם וְכָל יָדָם וְכָל יָדָם

And God said, “it is not good for a person (*adam*) to be alone: I will make a helpmate (*ezer k’negdo*) for *adam*. . . But for *adam* no fitting helper was found. So God cast a deep sleep upon *adam*, and, while he slept, God took one of the ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And God fashioned the rib taken from *adam* into a woman (*isha*), and brought her to *adam*. Then *adam* said, “this one at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called *ishah*, for from man (*ish*) she was taken. Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.”¹

Notes from *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*²:

(1) “*helpmate*” Heb. *Ezer k’negdo*, literally “a helper as if opposite [or: in front of] him/it,” that is, “a helpful counterpart.” In the Bible, the word *ezer* (helper) typically refers to God, and lacks any overtone of inferiority. And *negdo* (opposite him/it) suggests a spatial and metaphorical otherness, someone whom one confronts. Psalm 16:8 envisions God in this position, illustrating the positive sense of the word.

Some scholars, who assume that God seeks a remedy for human loneliness, conclude that God creates woman to comfort and ease man’s life. But, God’s involvement implies that the human spirit of aloneness requires a counterpart. Since the *adam* both is inferior to God and superior to the animals, neither suffices as a partner. Only an equal who is both “other” and “alike” provides the necessary dialogue for human maturation, meaning, and joy.

Rabbi Tanchum said in the name of Rabbi Chanilai: Any man who does not have a wife lives without happiness, without blessing, and without goodness. Without happiness – as it is written “and you will rejoice in your house³.”⁴ Without blessing – as it is written “to enjoy blessing in your house.”⁵ Without goodness – as it is written “it is not good for a man to be alone.”⁶ In the West they said: “Without Torah and without moral protection.” . . . Rabbi ben Ulla said: “And without peace.”⁷

¹ Genesis 2:18, 2:20b-3:24

² Translation from *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*. Ezkenazi, Tamara Cohn and Weiss, Andrea. URJ Press, New York: 2008. p 12.

³ House is a euphemism used throughout Biblical and rabbinic literature to refer to a wife.

⁴ Deutoronomy 14:26

⁵ Ezekiel 44:30

⁶ Genesis 2:8

⁷ Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 63b.

Two are better than one.⁸

God waits impatiently for man to marry.⁹

Discussion:

1. What does it mean to become *ezer knegdo*?
2. Why do you think God might say that it is not good for a person to be alone?
3. What are some ways that your partner brings joy, blessing, and goodness to your life?
4. When becoming *ezer knegdo* (a helpmate) to another person, what is it that you are expected to do? What do you expect from your partner?
5. While the text clearly promotes marrying and becoming one flesh, how will you make sure not to lose your own identity so that two strong individuals can come together and be better than one?
6. In relation to your partner, reflect on some of the “other” qualities and some of the “alike” qualities.

⁸ Ecclesiastes 4:9

⁹ Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 29b.

Ketubot – The Marriage Contract

Text Study:

Traditional Ketubah

On the [...] day of the week, the [...] day of the [Hebrew] month of [...], the year [...] after the creation of the world, according to the manner in which we count [dates] here in [...], the bridegroom [...] son of [...] said to this [...] daughter of [...], “Be my wife according to the law of Moses and Israel. I will work honor, feed and support you in the custom of Jewish men, who work, honor, feed, and support their wives faithfully. I will give you the settlement of [...] silver *zuzim*, which is due you according to [...] law, as well as your food, clothing, necessities of life, and conjugal needs, according to the universal custom.”¹

Ms. [...] agreed, and became his wife. This dowry that she brought from her father’s house, whether in silver, gold, jewelry, clothing, home furnishings, or bedding, Mr. [...], our bridegroom, accepts as being worth [...] silver pieces (*zekukim*). Our bridegroom, Mr. [...] agreed, and of his own accord, added an additional [...] silver pieces paralleling the above. The entire amount is then [...] silver pieces.

Mr. [...] our bridegroom made this declaration: “The obligation of this marriage contract (*ketubah*), this dowry, and this additional amount, I accept upon myself and upon my heirs after me. It can be paid from the entire best part of the property and possessions that I own under all the heavens, whether I own [this property] already, or will own it in the future. [It includes] both mortgageable property and non-mortgageable property. All of it shall be mortgaged and bound as security to pay this marriage contract, this dowry, and this additional amount. [it can be taken] from me, even from the shirt on my back, during my lifetime, and after my lifetime, from this day and forever.”

The obligation of this marriage contract, this dowry, and this additional amount was accepted by Mr. [...] our bridegroom, to Ms. [...] daughter of [...], regarding everything written and stated above, with an article that is fit for such a *kinyan*. And everything is valid and confirmed.

Egalitarian Ketubah

On the _____ day of the week the ____ day of _____ five thousand seven hundred _____ since the creation of the world as we reckon time here in _____ The bride _____ daughter of _____ and _____ promised _____ the groom, son of _____ and _____. You are my husband according to the tradition of Moses and Israel. I shall cherish you and honor you as is customary among the daughters of Israel who have cherished and honored their husbands in faithfulness and in integrity. The groom _____ son of _____ and _____ promised _____ the bride, daughter of _____ and _____. You are my wife according to the tradition of Moses and Israel. I shall cherish you and honor you as is customary among the sons of Israel who have cherished and honored their wives in faithfulness and in integrity. The groom and bride have also promised each other to strive throughout their lives together to achieve an openness which will enable

¹ Exodus 21:10

them to share their thoughts, their feelings, and their experiences. To be sensitive at all times to each others' needs, to attain mutual intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual fulfillment. To work for the perpetuation of Judaism and of the Jewish people in their home, in their family life, and in their communal endeavors.²

Discussion:

1. What would you change, leave out, add, or keep from the texts we just read?
2. Write, in list form, what you would like your Ketubah to say about your commitment to one another. What do you owe one another?
3. Share the text from question two, any challenges that you had in writing it, and anything in particular that you find relevant in either of the above ketubot.
4. Discuss the meaning of the Covenant you are making with one another.
5. What place does God have in the creation of a Covenant?

² Diamant, Anita. *The New Jewish Wedding*. p 92.

Sexual Intimacy

Text Study:

Conjugal duty¹ it is said in the Torah – for every man, according to his strength and according to his work. What does this mean? Healthy, pampered, and leisurely men who do not have work which weakens their strength but rather they eat, they drink, and they sit in their house – conjugal duty is every night. Workers, for example, tailors, weavers, builders, and the like – if they are working in the city their conjugal duty is twice a week. And if they work in another city their conjugal duty is once a week. Donkey drivers, once a week. Camel drivers, once every thirty days. Sailors, once in six months. The conjugal duty for students of Torah is once a week. But Torah study weakens their strength. It is the way of wise students to “use the bed” every Shabbat.²

Where there is no union of male and female, men are not worthy of beholding the *Shechinah* [Divine Presence].³

May these loving companions rejoice as have Your creatures since the days of Creation. We praise You, Adonai our God, who causes bride and groom to rejoice.⁴

Discussion:

1. According to the above Maimonides text what do you think your conjugal duty would be?
2. What does it mean to you to rejoice as bride and groom?
3. How would you rate the importance of sex in your relationship?
4. Are your “needs” similar? Different? How so? How do you negotiate that?

Many married people find that there is an ebb and flow to sexuality in a marriage.

People have different needs, different desires. Sexuality (frequency, types of intimacy,

¹ Conjugal rights in rabbinic literature refer to a man's obligation to respond to the sexual needs of his wife.

² Rambam, Mishnah Torah. Hilchot Ishut, 14:1.

³ Zohar, volume 3, Acharei Mot, p.50a

⁴ Sixth of the seven wedding blessings (Sheva Brachot)

when, where): our reactions to all of this are connected to our self-image, societal pressure, etc. Few of us are taught how to speak about this.

Judaism has mixed teachings on sexuality. The Biblical book of *Shir HaShirim* [Song of Songs] is a collection of lyric love poems abounding in sensuality and unabashed sexuality (you could try reading it some night together). The book offers a description of an ideal relationship, both loving and mutually accepting, in which both lovers initiate sexual intimacy. Both partners' voices are prominent. Perhaps our sages were just as uncomfortable with the subject, because they re-interpreted the book as an allegory of the love between God and Israel.

Children

Text Study:

The man is commanded about *pru u'revu'* (to be fruitful and multiply) but not the woman. And when is a man obligated by this commandment? From when he is 17 years old. And when he has passed 20 years and not taken a wife he has thus transgressed and been neglectful of a positive commandment. And if he was busy with Torah and distressed by it and therefore was afraid to take a wife because he would not be able to work for sustenance for his wife and therefore neglect Torah – [for this reason] it is permitted to delay [marriage]. Busying oneself with one commandment exempts one from another commandment, and surely this applies with the study of Torah.²

How many children must a man have to fulfill this commandment by his hand? Male and female. As it is written, “male and female [God] created them”³. . .⁴

Discussion:

In general, the Jewish tradition’s attitude toward marriage is that procreation, the begetting of children, is one of its major purposes. To produce children is to fulfill the Biblical commandment, “Be fruitful and multiply” “פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ” (Genesis 1:28). It gives meaning to the Divine blessing; it fulfills the Divine purpose; it makes us partners with God in the ongoing process of creation.

1. Do you want to have children? When?
2. How many children would you like to have?
3. If you do not want to have children, what if one of you changes his/her mind?
4. What makes you most excited/nervous about having children?
5. What is your attitude about adoption?

1 Genesis 1:28

2 Rambam, Mishnah Torah. Hilchot Ishut, 15:2.

3 Genesis 1:27

4 Rambam, Mishnah Torah. Hilchot Ishut, 15:4.

It is a fact that some couples have difficulty becoming pregnant. While this may be the case, there is no need to rush it, because once the kids come, they are here forever. Know that should you face difficulty becoming pregnant, there are rabbis/synagogue/support groups/books and prayers, to offer support. We are here.

Review with couple information about “Jewish” genetic diseases. Just as they would always bring in a structural engineer when they buy a home to find out how everything works, so too check yourselves out. You still will “buy the house” (get married) but do so with complete information. Get these tests NOW, because you probably will not later.

Kavod – Honoring One's Spouse

Text Study:

בְּיָמָא אִמְרַן אִזְדַּרְזִי קָבֵד
 דְּקוֹמַד מִכָּל אֲדָבָה שְׁנֵאמַר [תְּהִלִּים ד'ט']
 מִכָּל מַלְמַדֵּי דְשִׁמְעִיתִי בִּי עֲדוּתִיךָ שִׁקְרָה לִּי
 אִזְדַּרְזִי גְבוּרָה דְּכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יָצְרוֹ שְׁנֵאמַר [מִשְׁכִּי ט']
 טֵיב אִין אַפִּיס מִגְבוּרָה יִמְשַׁל בְּיָדֵי מַלְכָּה עֵת
 אִזְדַּרְזִי עֲשִׂיָּה דְשִׁמְעָה בְּהִלְקָה שְׁנֵאמַר [תְּהִלִּים קכ"ח]
 יֵשֶׁע כָּפִיד בִּי תִּהְיֶה אֲשֶׁרֶץ יֵטִיב לָךְ
 אֲשֶׁרֶץ בְּעֵלִים דִּיכָר יֵטִיב לָךְ קְשִׁילִים תִּבְנֵה
 אִזְדַּרְזִי מַכְבֵּד דְּמַכְבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיתָה שְׁנֵאמַר [שְׁמוּאֵל א' ב']
 כִּי מַכְבֵּדִי אַכְבֵּד יִבְזִי וְקִלְכֵּי

Ben Zoma teaches, who is wise?

One who learns from everyone, for it says, (1)

"from all my teachers I grew wise." (2)

Who is strong? One who subdues oneself, for it says, (3)

"Patience is better than strength, and self-control is superior to controlling armies." (4)

Who is rich? One who loves what is, for it says, (5)

"Praise and contentment belong to those who eat from their own labor."

You are praised in this world, and content in the World to Come.

Who is honored? One who honors others, for it says, (7)

"Those who honor Me are honored; and those who scorn Me are degraded."¹ (8)

Notes from *Ethics of the Sages: Pirke Avot*:

(1) People are unique but not different. What makes you happy may not make another happy, but happiness itself is the same. Observe the behavior of others and learn what brings harmony and what brings discord.

(2) Psalm 119:99

(3) The self cannot subdue itself, for the self that is subdued is only a projection of the self doing the subduing. This is only the spiritual cleverness of narrow mind. Rather, see that "you" can do nothing. When this is known, narrow mind naturally and effortlessly opens to spacious mind, and then there is nothing to do.

(4) Proverbs 16:32

(5) Wealth is based not on what you can hold, but on what you can receive. Loving what is, you receive all that is, and rejoice; loving only what you want, you still receive all that is, but recoil.

(6) Psalm 128:2

¹ Pirke Avot 4:1. Translation and annotation from *Ethics of the Sages: Pirke Avot*. Pp 60-61.

(7) Just as a cube of sugar sweetens a whole cup of tea, so honoring the One honors all, and honoring all honors the One; there is no separation between the two.

(8) I Samuel 2:30

And thus the Sages commanded that a man should honor his wife more than himself and love her more than himself. And if he has a lot of money he should make good for her according to his money. ... And thus it is commanded for the wife that she honors her husband the most and she will be in awe of him and do all deeds according to his word. And he will be in her eyes like a minister or king. ...²

Discussion:

1. What are the main points that we can take from this text?

2. Turn to your partner and tell them:

One way in which I see that you are wise is...

One way in which I see that you are mighty is...

One way in which I see that you are rich is...

One way that you honor me is...

3. How can remembering the Pirkei Avot text help you honor your partner?

² Rambam, Mishnah Torah. Hilchot Ishut, 15:19 & 20.