

1. ATTITUDES OF OTHER RELIGIONS TO SEXUAL RELATIONS

A. Eastern Religions - Most Eastern religions ( Buddhism, Hinduism) think of physical desire as a negative thing. Their emphasis is on eliminating this desire ( including sexual desire).

For the Eastern religions sexual pleasure is an illusion, deceptive, a trap, leading one away from the real truths.

B. Christianity is based on Judaism in many ways but it is influenced by oriental thought. The New Testament records that Jesus taught that lusting after a woman (other than your wife) was so bad as to make one worthy of hell-fire. (Matthew 5: 27:29) St. Paul seems to say that it is better not to have sexual relations at all, but it is better to marry than to burn. ( 1 Corinthians 7: 1-10). The statement begins, "It is well for a man not to touch a woman" ( 7: 1).

The development of a system of monks and nuns in Catholicism would seem to indicate that there is a greater holiness in refraining from sexual relationships.

It must be noted that liberal Christians have moved away from the traditional Christian position.

C. Pagan religions- look on sex in an entirely different way from the Eastern religions.

Pagans are those who make gods of aspects of nature. Pagans have generally taught that there is no law above the law of nature. Therefore they have emphasized free expression without restraint. Might makes right has been their ethic. They have seldom respected the right of personal privacy in sexual relations.

The Canaanites who inhabited Israel before the Israelites ( 3000- BCE on) were a fertility cult. That is, they used sexual practices in an effort to stimulate the gods to greater creativity, i.e. their worship service might include the sexual act between humans to incite the gods to give them more children. Or there might be a sexual act between a human and an animal to incite the gods to give them more flocks. Some scholars tell us that there was such an act vis a vis the earth, to seduce the gods to send more crops ( i.e. to fertilize the earth). Our Bible expressly forbids these sexual acts.

Those who encourage free sexual expression today have been called by some sociologists "modern pagans".

## II. THE TEACHINGS OF JUDAISM

The Jewish position can be described as mid-way between the Oriental ( anti-sex) and Pagan ( free sex) positions.

A. From earliest days, Judaism has had a positive attitude towards sexual relations between man and woman.

1. The Bible assumes that it is good for man and woman to have relations. It assumes that this is natural and desirable.

2. The Jewish Bible speaks of sexual intercourse as a very intimate act. The Hebrew word used for sexual intercourse comes from the root " to know". To have bodily intercourse is to come " to know" the other person in the most complete and intimate way.

3. Since the sexual act is a matter of intimacy, Biblical Jews reserved this act for man and wife. It was a part of marriage. No man had the right to take a woman by force for his own pleasure. Such pleasures were the right only of a husband.

4. The positive attitude of Judaism towards sex is spelled out in the Biblical Book, " Shir ha-shirim, The Song of Songs". Here a woman's body is described in sensual terms and a woman tells of her sexual desire for a man. The book seems to be an allegory, but the attitude towards sex is clear.

5. Our Bible teaches that man and woman are created " in the image of the Divine".

Judaism does not discriminate between the body and the soul. There is no higher and lower part of our being ( nefesh). The body, too, is part of the divine image . Its needs and desires are therefore good and from God. Its needs are not to be avoided but to be CHANNELLED for good and fruitful purposes.

For Judaism, the problem is not how to restrain sexual desire, but to channel it so that it serves man's higher purpose.

6. The Talmud teaches that it is a "Mitzvah" , a deed applauded by God, for man and wife to have sexual relations on the Sabbath. This is to teach that on this spiritualized day, the love of a man for his wife has its proper place.

7. Judaism places the sexual act in the realm of exalted deeds. It is not something casual. It is part of God's design to make the world meaningful. It is not merely a fun-act . For Judaism, sex is not a sport, like going to the movies or watching a football game, or playing tennis. Sex has to do with the very heart and secret of life, with LOVE, AND INTIMACY, AND CHILDREN, AND FAMILY, AND KINDNESS.

## The Inter-relation of Jewish Values

The Hebrew word "Ah-ha-vah, love" probably occurs more than any other value-word in our Bible, but it is frequently synonymous with "Emmet, truth", "Emunah, faithfulness", "Tz'dahkah, righteousness", "cheded, covenant loyalty". Jewish values run into one another because Judaism is a religion which accents action rather than faith. It is not what you say you believe that matters but how you act.

For Jews all of life is part of each detail. The ocean is reflected in the rain-drop, the universal in the particular. Therefore, sex cannot be detached from all the rest of life. It cannot be separated from all the rest of Jewish values.

Some moderns like to separate their activities into separate compartments. How one treats one's wife is one thing. How one treats one's girl friend is another thing. Judaism teaches, this is impossible. Whatever we do at one point of our life runs into every other thing. For Jews, then, love and marriage and sex and kindness and justice are all part of one another.

### Society based on covenant-relationships

The Bible teaches that all of life is made up of inter-connected covenant relationships. God and man have a covenant (agreement). God and Israel have a special covenant (brit, bris). Man and wife have a marriage covenant. Parent and child have an unspoken agreement of mutual responsibilities. Friend and friend have such an agreement.

Basic to the whole idea of Judaism is that society and the world cannot stand unless people are loyal to their brit-covenant responsibilities.

The Biblical word for covenant-loyalty (frequently translated covenant-love is CHESED or HESED. All the other virtues run into HESED. Let us review some of the examples of hesed in specific situations in our Bible.

1. Abraham's servant makes a promise of loyalty that he will find a wife for his master's son (Genesis, Ch. 24). Abraham dies. The servant nonetheless crosses a dangerous desert to get a wife for Isaac from Abraham's people (and not from the pagans). Discuss how this was an act of HESED.

David

2. Jonathan, King Saul's son, knows that the people want David to be king, yet Jonathan helps David escape Saul's anger (First Samuel, Ch 20: 18 ff). Discuss how sacrifice is sometimes a part of HESED.

3. The prophet Hosea married a prostitute (8th century BCE) and was loyal to her as a matter of HESED even though she was disloyal. Discuss how the stronger party in a BRIT may have to give more to a covenant than the weaker party and may have to forgive to keep the relationship going. (Hosea, Ch 1 and 3. Why does God forgive Israel even when she violates the commandments?)

SUMMARY - A. In Judaism, the body is not evil as in other religions.

Sexual desire is considered good.

B. The goal is to channel sexual desire to serve productive and purposeful ends, while enjoying love and pleasure.

C. Sex is considered the most intimate act and therefore is reserved for those in love with a futuristic relationship, such as is found in marriage. Loyalty, kindness, love are all part of each other.