

## SEX, EROS, AND A SENSE OF VALUES

by Herbert M. Baumgard, Rabbi, D.H.L.  
Temple Beth Am, Miami, Florida

JUDAISM IS THE EVOLVING RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. THAT CIVILIZATION IS ABOUT FOUR THOUSAND YEARS OLD, WHICH MEANS THAT WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH MORE THAN A FEW HISTORIC PERIODS INVOLVING MORE THAN A FEW CHANGES IN SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND MORES. IT IS JUST POSSIBLE, THEN, THAT JUDAISM MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO SAY ABOUT OUR PRESENT SEXUAL REVOLUTION.

FIRST, LET ME POINT OUT THAT THE CLASSICAL JEWISH ATTITUDE TOWARD SEX IS NOT NECESSARILY THE CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE. THE TWO RELIGIONS HAVE SOME SIMILAR VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT AND SOME VERY DIVERSE VIEWS. THE FIRST JEW, ABRAHAM, WAS A MAN WHO, IF WE ACCEPT THE TIME TABLE OF THE BIBLE, WAS STILL ENGAGING IN SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AND HAVING CHILDREN WHEN HE WAS 100 YEARS OLD. JESUS, WE ARE TOLD, NEVER MARRIED, AND THE NEW TESTAMENT TELLS US NOTHING OF HIS SEXUAL LIFE. PAUL, THE CHIEF PROPAGATOR OF CHRISTIANITY, SEEMS TO BE PRESENTED AS AN ABSTAINER OR CELIBATE, WHO ADVOCATED MARRIAGE ONLY AS A SOMEWHAT BETTER ALTERNATIVE TO HELL-FIRE. IT WOULD NOT BE ACCURATE TO PROJECT THE NEW TESTAMENT ATTITUDE ABOUT SEX BACK INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT. IN FACT, FOR SOME PURITANICAL MINDS, THE OLD TESTAMENT CAN BE LOOKED UPON AS RISQUE IN PARTS. CERTAINLY, JUDAISM NEVER DEVELOPED THE IDEA THAT THOSE WHO WOULD BE GOD'S PRIESTS SHOULD ABSTAIN FROM BECOMING LOVERS OF WOMEN, HUSBANDS, AND FATHERS. WHAT WE MEAN TO SAY IS THAT BIBLICAL JEWS HAD A RELATIVELY ACCEPTING ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEX. THE "SONG OF SONGS", DESCRIBES THE HUMAN BODY IN TERMS THAT MIGHT WELL BE CALLED SEXUALLY AROUSING. WHEN THE BOOK FOUND ITS CRITICS, AFTER IT WAS INCLUDED IN THE BIBLE, RABBI AKIBA, ONE OF THE MOST CELEBRATED OF ANCIENT SCHOLARS, FORCEFULLY CONTENDED, "THE SONG OF SONGS IS THE MOST HOLY BOOK IN THE BIBLE". SOME SCHOLARS HAVE SAID THAT THE BOOK IS REALLY A PARABLE ABOUT GOD AND ISRAEL, BUT NO MATTER, THE RABBIS SAW FIT TO INCLUDE SUCH A PARABLE, EXPRESSED IN SENSUOUS TERMS, IN THE BIBLE.

FROM THE "SONG OF SONGS" WE LEARN THAT JEWS DID NOT CONSIDER IT WRONG OR UNETHICAL FOR MAN AND WOMAN TO ADMIRE EACH OTHER'S BODY. FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS, WE LEARN THAT GOD'S FIRST COMMAND TO ADAM AND EVE WAS "BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY" INDEED, THE VERY NAME FOR THE FIRST WOMAN, EVE, IN HEBREW, "CHAVAH", MEANS "SHE WHO GIVES LIFE". THE BOOK OF GENESIS IS NOT SQUEAMISH IN TELLING US THAT ADAM AND EVE MATED. THE TEXT READS, "AND ADAM KNEW EVE". TO BE SURE, HEBREW HAD OTHER WORDS FOR SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, BUT THE AUTHORS OF OUR BIBLE CHOSE TO USE "YADAH" MEANING "TO KNOW". THE CHOICE OF WORDS WOULD INDICATE THAT OUR FATHERS UNDERSTOOD THE MATING OF MAN AND WOMAN TO BE SOMETHING FAR MORE PROFOUND THAN A MERE PHYSICAL COUPLING OR A MANIPULATING OF ORGANS.

TO UNDERSTAND PART OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEX, WE WOULD HAVE TO KNOW THAT JUDAISM DEVELOPED IN THE LAND OF CANAAN IN WHICH THE FERTILITY CULTS FLOURISHED. SEXUAL ACTS WERE EMPLOYED BY THE CANAANITES AS A WAY OF COMPELLING THE GODS TO INCREASE CROPS AND FLOCKS. CANAANITE RELIGIOUS WORSHIP WAS MARKED BY INTERCOURSE BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN, BETWEEN MAN AND ANIMALS, EVEN BETWEEN MAN AND EARTH ITSELF. THE



DETAILED AND SPECIFIC LISTS OF SEXUAL TABOOS IN THE BIBLE ARE THERE TO DISCOURAGE THE IMITATION OF CANNANITE FERTILITY RITES. SINCE THE OLD HEBREWS WERE SO FAMILY AND SOCIETY ORIENTED, THERE WERE ALSO STRONG TABOOS AGAINST INCEST AND ADULTERY. WHILE HARLOTRY WAS DISCOURAGED FOR ISRAELITE DAUGHTERS, THE EXISTENCE OF HARLOTRY WAS ACCEPTED AS A FACT OF LIFE, AND HARLOTS APPEAR WITH SOME FREQUENCY IN OLD TESTAMENT STORIES, SOMETIMES PLAYING KEY AND FRIENDLY ROLES.

IN POST BIBLICAL JUDAISM LOVE-MAKING EXPRESSED BY SEXUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED. THE TALMUD TELLS US THAT IT IS A "MITZVAH", A POSITIVE RELIGIOUS DEED, FOR HUSBAND AND WIFE TO HAVE INTERCOURSE ON THE SABBATH. INDEED, SUCH INTERCOURSE IS DESCRIBED AS ONE OF THE EVENTS THAT GIVE THE SABBATH ITS SPIRITUAL NATURE.

THE MYTHS OF JUDAISM, BOTH BIBLICAL AND POST BIBLICAL, LOOK POSITIVELY UPON SEXUAL LOVE. IN THE MIDRASHIC COLLECTIONS, WE ARE TOLD BY ONE OF THE RABBIS THAT THE HUMAN CREATURE ORIGINALLY MADE BY GOD WAS BI-SEXUAL, THEN, IT WAS SUB-DIVIDED INTO MALE AND FEMALE. EVER SINCE THAT TIME, THE RABBIS SAID, MAN AND WOMAN HAVE SOUGHT EACH OTHER OUT AS IF TO BE REUNITED WITH PART OF ONESELF. IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS, ONE OF THE CREATION STORIES TELLS US THAT THE FEMALE EMERGED FROM AN ORIGINAL MALE (FROM ADAM'S RIB). THE POINT OF THIS MYTH IS CAREFULLY DELINEATED, "THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND CLING UNTO HIS WIFE FOR SHE IS FLESH OF HIS FLESH AND BONE OF HIS BONE". THE EMPHASIS HERE IS ON THE PRIORITY OF THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP TO THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP.

C IN ONE POST-BIBLICAL TRADITION, THERE IS THE MYTHIC STORY THAT REVOLVES AROUND MAN'S TWO BASIC IMPULSES, THE "YETZER HA-TOV", THE GOOD CREATION OR SPIRIT, AND THE "YETZER HA-RAH", THE EVIL CREATION OR SPIRIT. THE STORY GOES THAT THE RABBIS DECIDED TO CAPTURE THE "YETZER HA-RAH" AND TO IMPRISON IT, SO THAT EVIL WOULD BE FOREVER ELIMINATED FROM THE WORLD. THEY DID SO, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT ALL LIVING BECAME APATHETIC; BOYS NO LONGER SOUGHT OUT GIRLS; NO CHILDREN WERE BORN; CHICKENS LAID NO EGGS; ETC. WHEREUPON THE RABBIS DECIDED THAT THE "YETZER HA-RAH" WAS ESSENTIAL TO CREATIVE LIFE, THAT IT HAD ITS OWN POSITIVE MEANING, AND IT WAS, CONSEQUENTLY, RELEASED FROM ITS PRISON.

AFTER READING "LOVE AND WILL" BY THE PSYCHIATRIST, ROLLO MAY, I AM CONVINCED THAT THE ANCIENT RABBIS UNDERSTOOD, IN THEIR OWN TERMS, THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EROS, AS HE DESCRIBES THE "YETZER HA-RAH". HE CALLS EROS A DAIMON, A SPIRIT OR IMPULSE WHICH CAN BE BOTH DESTRUCTIVE AND CREATIVE. THE PROBLEM IS HOW TO HARNESS IT FOR CONSTRUCTIVE CAUSES. THE RABBIS UNDERSTOOD THIS FULL WELL.

IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THERE HAVE BEEN RELIGIONS CONTEMPORANEOUS WITH JUDAISM WHICH TEACH THAT GOOD COMES FROM ONE GOD AND EVIL, OR THE DAIMONIC, FROM ANOTHER. THE PERSIAN, ZOROASTER TAUGHT THIS IN THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C., AND THE NEW TESTAMENT SPEAKS OF SATAN, AT TIMES, AS IF HE WERE A SEPARATE GOD OF EVIL, (THAT IS, ABLE TO ACT WITHOUT GOD'S APPROVAL). ISAIAH (USUALLY CALLED "THE SECOND ISAIAH"), WHO LIVED IN THE TIME OF ZOROASTER, WAS CAREFUL TO SAY IN THE NAME OF GOD, "I, THE LORD, CREATE GOOD AND EVIL, LIGHT AND DARKNESS". THE WORD ISAIAH USES FOR CREATE, "YOTZA", IS FROM THE SAME VERBAL ROOT AS THE TALMUDIC WORD FOR THE GOOD (AND EVIL) SPIRIT. EACH SPIRIT (WHETHER CALLED GOOD OR EVIL) OR "YETZER" IS REGARDED AS HAVING THE POTENTIAL TO SERVE GOD'S PURPOSE POSITIVELY. THE "YETZER HA-TOV" IS THE DISPOSITION TO FOLLOW ACCEPTED



SOCIETAL NORMS, THAT IS CONSCIENCE. THE "YETZER HA-RAH" IS THE DAIMONIC, THE SOURCE OF SUBTERRANEAN FEELING, OFTEN IN CONFLICT WITH THE GOALS OF SOCIETY. THE LATTER COULD NOT BE COMPLETELY HARNESSSED, LEST LIVING BECOME PASSIONLESS, NOR COULD IT BE LEFT TO RUN COMPLETELY FREE, FOR SOCIETY WOULD BE OVERWHELMED AND CHAOS RESULT.

DR. ROLLO MAY USES A GREEK MYTH TO MAKE A POINT SIMILAR TO THAT HELD BY JUDAISM. THE GREEK MYTH TELLS US THAT EROS WAS THE CHILD OF TWO GODS, BUT HE DID NOT GROW AS OTHER CHILDREN. HE REMAINED INFANTILE, SMALL AND IMPISH. HE WAS THE ETERNAL BABY. HIS WORRIED MOTHER WAS GIVEN A WISE BUT AMBIGUOUS ANSWER TO HER QUESTION, "WHY DOESN'T THE CHILD GROW?" THE ANSWER WAS - EROS ( LOVE ) CANNOT GROW WITHOUT PASSION.

LATER ON, THE MOTHER GODDESS GAVE BIRTH TO ANOTHER SON. HIS NAME WAS ANTEROS, GOD OF PASSION. THEREAFTER, WHENEVER EROS AND ANTEROS WERE TOGETHER, EROS GREW AND FLOURISHED. WHENEVER THEY WERE SEPARATED, EROS RESUMED HIS CHILDISH FORM AND REGRESSED TO MISCHIEVIOUS HABITS.

(MAY, P. 95)

DR. MAY CONTENTS THAT THE MODERN LOVE-CULT IS IDENTIFIED WITH EROS BUT NOT WITH ANTEROS, THAT IS, WITH PLEASURE BUT NOT WITH PASSION. DR. MAY HOLDS THAT PLEASURE WITHOUT PASSION, WITHOUT DEEP FEELING, WITHOUT COMMITMENT TO SOME KIND OF FUTURE MEANING, IS INFANTILE AND SELF-DEFEATING. SUCH "LOVE" WHEN EXPRESSED SEXUALLY LEADS TO BOREDOM, TO ANXIETY, TO LONELINESS, AND, ULTIMATELY, TO SUICIDAL DESIRES.

IN THE MODERN SEXUAL REVOLUTION, SEX HAS BECOME JUST ANOTHER INSTANT GRATIFICATION SOURCE OF PLEASURE. TO MANY IN THE "HEP" GENERATION, THE SEXUAL ACT HAS NO GREATER SIGNIFICANCE THAN WATCHING A FOOTBALL GAME OR PLAYING A SET OF TENNIS. DR. MAY SPEAKS OF ONE OF HIS FEMALE PATIENTS WHO EXPLAINED WHY SHE SLEEPS WITH EVERY DATE WHO ASKS ; "IT ISN'T WORTH THE HASSLE TO SAY 'NO'", SHE SAID. IN OTHER WORDS, IT WASN'T A BIG DEAL ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. THIS IS THE WAY WE ARE GOING, DR. MAY CONTENTS. WE ARE SEPARATING HUMAN SEXUAL EXPERIENCE FROM LOVE AND PASSION, AND WHEN WE DO THAT, SEX SOON CEASES TO BE ONE OF THE MAJOR FACTORS IN THE ENJOYMENT AND MOTIVATION OF LIFE. NO WONDER THE YOUNG LADY WAS ANXIOUS AND DEPRESSED. SHE HAD NO FIRES TO LIGHT.

THE BIBLICAL HEBREWS CONTENTED THAT SEX WAS LUSTY AND BEAUTIFUL, BUT IT WAS TIED TO HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT THINGS. IT WAS TIED TO MARRIAGE, TO CHILDREN, TO THE STABILITY OF SOCIETY. WHEN DINAH THE DAUGHTER OF JACOB WAS RAPED, HER BROTHER CONSIDERED IT AN ATTACK ON HER PERSONAL RIGHTS AS A WOMAN, AN ATTACK ON THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE, AND AN ATTACK ON THE STABILITY OF THE WHOLE PEOPLE. THEY COULD HAVE SAID WITH DR. MAY'S PATIENT, "IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER", BUT THEY HAD OTHER VALUES IN MIND.

DR. MAY CONTENTS IN HIS WONDERFUL BOOK THAT PASSION IS NOT SIMPLY BLIND EMOTION ; IT INVOLVES, ALSO, SOMETHING CALLED INTENTIONALITY. "INTENTIONALITY", HE WRITES, "IS THAT WHICH GIVES MEANING TO EXPERIENCE". IF SEX IS JUST A MATTER OF GETTING AND SPENDING, IF IT IS JUST A MATTER OF TENSION AND RELEASE, THEN, IT IS AN EXPERIENCE WITHOUT MEANING. IF IT IS TIED TO THE PROSPECT OF HAVING CHILDREN, TO THE PROSPECT OF A LIFE'S



COPANIONSHIP, THEN, IT TAKES ON MEANING. WHEN CREATIVITY AND CONTINUITY ARE INVOLVED, THE SEXUAL EXPERIENCE BECOMES MORE PROFOUND, AND, THEREFORE, MORE CHARGED WITH FEELING AND PASSION.

DR. MAY CLAIMS THAT HE IS ABLE TO DOCUMENT THIS ON A CLINICAL BASIS. THE PATIENTS WHO MOST OFTEN INDULGE THEIR SEXUAL APPETITE ON A "PLEASURE OF THE MOMENT" BASIS ARE THE ONES TENDING MOST TO APATHY, TO IMPOTENCY, AND TO SUICIDE.

THE PRESENT ADVOCATES OF THE SO-CALLED "SEXUAL FREEDOM" APPARENTLY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE ANCIENT HEBREWS OR THE ANCIENT GREEKS KNEW. EROS WITHOUT ANTEROS, SEX WITHOUT PASSION, WITHOUT A FUTURISTIC ORIENTATION, REMAINS INFANTILE OR SICK. IT CANNOT GROW.

THE JEWISH PHILOSOPHER SPINOZA HAS WRITTEN, "FREEDOM IS THE RECOGNITION OF NECESSITY". THAT IS TO SAY, ONLY THAT PERSON IS TRULY FREE WHO RECOGNIZES THE LIMITATIONS OF THE WAY IN WHICH HE WAS CREATED. MAN WAS CREATED IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE CANNOT LIVE HAPPILY AND HEALTHILY WITHOUT BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE. TO LIVE ONLY FOR THE MOMENT IS TO DENY WHAT ONE IS. HE WHO LIVES ONLY FOR THE MOMENT ENSLAVES HIMSELF TO ANXIETY AND EMOTIONAL ILLNESS.

"FREEDOM IS THE RECOGNITION OF NECESSITY". THE RABBIS UNDERSTOOD THE NECESSITY OF THE "YETZER HA-RAH", FOR THEY HAD MIGHTY THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE, AND THEY SAW THE SEX DRIVE AS A CREATIVE ALLY TO BRING ENTHUSIASM TO LIFE.

WE MIGHT PUT IT THIS WAY - THERE IS SEX FOR THE MEN AND SEX FOR THE BOYS. SEX "FOR THE MOMENT", WITH NO THOUGHT OF FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS IS FOR THE BOYS, THIS IS EROS. THE ANCIENT RABBIS HAD NO TIME FOR KID'S STUFF, AND THOSE WHO ARE CAPABLE OF DEEP FEELING WILL NOT BE SATISFIED WITH THIS SHALLOW AND DANGEROUS SUBSTITUTE.