



The Sexual & The Sacred

Opening Question

- How do you define the word "Sacred/Kadosh"?

Source 1 – **Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berachot 24a**

This excerpt from the Talmud comes within the context of a larger conversation regarding whether or not one may pray or recite the Shema prayer near a naked person.

Two [unclothed] individuals who are sleeping in a single bed, this one turns their head [aside] and recites [the Shema prayer] and that one turns their head [aside] and recites [the Shema prayer].

שנים שישנים במטה אחת זה מחזיר פניו וקורא וזה מחזיר פניו וקורא

Questions for Discussion:

- What might the concern be regarding a person praying near a naked bedmate?
 - Does this reasoning resonate with you?
- What does this text imply about the ability of mixing prayer and nudity?

Source 2 – **Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) 1:2-4 & 10-16**

The Song of Songs is an unusual text in our Torah cannon. It depicts a love story, however the romantic partners in the text are never given names, nor are we offered any real background on when or where this story takes place. While there are many ways to interpret this text, one of the more traditional interpretations of this text is that it serves to illustrate the love between G-d and the Israelites. Therefore when you read these verses, read the lines from the character of the male King (in pink) as representing the voice of G-d, and lines from the character of the woman (in blue) as representing the voice of the Israelites.

(1) The Song of Songs, by Solomon: (2) Oh, give me of the kisses of your mouth, For your love is more delightful than wine. (3) Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance, Your name is like the finest oil— Therefore do maidens love you. (4) Draw me after you, let us run! The king has

(א) שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה: (ב) יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דְּדִיר מִיָּין: (ג) לְרִיחַ שְׁמֵנֶיךָ טוֹבִים שְׁמֵן תִּירֵק שְׁמֶךָ עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֶהְבֶּיךָ: (ד) מִשְׁכְּנֵי אַחֲרֶיךָ נִרְוָצָה הֵבִיאֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו

brought me to his chambers. Let us delight and rejoice in your love, Savoring it more than wine... (10) Your cheeks are comely with plaited wreaths, Your neck with strings of jewels. (11) We will add wreaths of gold to your spangles of silver. (12) While the king was on his couch, My nard gave forth its fragrance. (13) My beloved to me is a bag of myrrh lodged between my breasts. (14) My beloved to me is a spray of henna blooms from the vineyards of En-gedi. (15) You are fair, my darling, you are fair, with your dove-like eyes! (16) And you, my beloved, are handsome, beautiful indeed!

נְגִילָה וְנִשְׂמַחָה בְּךָ נִזְכִּירָה דְדִירָךְ מִיַּיִן
 ... (י) נֶאֱוָו לַחֲיִיר בְּתַרְיִם צֹאֲרֵךְ
 בְּחֶרֶזִים: (יא) תֹּאכִיר זֶהֱבָ נַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ עִם
 נִקְדֹּת הַכֶּסֶף: (יב) עַד־שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ בְּמִסְבּוֹ
 נִרְדִּי נִתֵּן רִיחוֹ: (יג) צְרוּר הַמֶּרֶץ דּוֹדִי לִי
 בֵּין שְׂדֵי יְלִין: (יד) אֲשַׁלֵּל הַכֶּפֶר אֶדְוִדִי לִי
 בְּכַרְמֵי עֵין גְּדִי: (טו) הַנֶּךְ יִפָּה רַעִיתִי
 הַנֶּךְ יִפָּה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים: (טז) הַנֶּךְ יִפָּה
 דּוֹדִי אֶף נָעִים...:

Questions for Discussion

- ❑ What is the tone of this text? What imagery does it use?
- ❑ Does this text fit your impression of what one's relationship could or should be with G-d?
 - ❑ Why might one use sensual language to relate to G-d? What might relating to God in this way offer that a different relationship model would not?
- ❑ Do you see a possible tension between this source and source 1?

Source 3 – Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Menachot 44a

*This excerpt comes in the middle of a discussion about how the reward for performing a Mitzvah (a commandment from the Torah) is enjoyed in this world, and even more so in the world to come (ie: the afterlife). The example given to prove this point is the following story regarding the Mitzvah of Tzitzit (wearing four fringes on a four cornered garment). *See below for the biblical source of tzitzit).*

Once a man, who was very scrupulous about the commandment of *tzitzit*, heard of a certain harlot in one of the towns by the sea who accepted four hundred gold [denars] for her hire. He sent her four hundred gold [denars] and appointed a day with her. When the day arrived he came and waited at her door, and her maid came and told her, 'That man who sent you four hundred gold [denars] is here and waiting at the door'; to which she replied 'Let him come in'. When he came in she prepared for him seven beds, six of silver and one of gold; and between one bed and the other there were steps of silver, but the last were of gold. She then went up to the top bed and lay down upon it naked. He too went up after her in his desire to sit naked

מעשה באדם אחד שהיה זהיר במצות ציצית שמע שיש זונה בכרכי הים שנוטלת ד' מאות זהובים בשכרה שיגר לה ארבע מאות זהובים וקבע לה זמן כשהגיע זמנו בא וישב על הפתח נכנסה שפחתה ואמרה לה אותו אדם ששיגר לך ד' מאות זהובים בא וישב על הפתח אמרה היא יכנס נכנס הציעה לו ז' מטות שש של כסף ואחת של זהב ובין כל אחת ואחת סולם של כסף ועליונה של זהב עלתה וישבה על גבי עליונה כשהיא ערומה ואף הוא

with her, when all of a sudden the four fringes [of his *tzitzit* garment] struck him across the face; whereupon he slipped off and sat upon the ground. She also slipped off and sat upon the ground and said, 'By the Roman Capitol, I will not leave you alone until you tell me what blemish you saw in me'. He replied, 'By the Temple service, never have I seen a woman as beautiful as you are; but there is one precept which the Lord our God has commanded us, it is called *tzitzit*, and with regard to it the expression (*Numbers 15:41): '*I am the Lord your God*' is twice written, signifying, I am the G-d who will exact punishment in the future, and I am the G-d who will give reward in the future. Now [the *tzitzit*] appeared to me as four witnesses [testifying against me]'. She said, 'I will not leave you until you tell me your name, the name of your town, the name of your teacher, the name of your school in which you study the Torah'. He wrote all this down and handed it to her. Thereupon she arose and divided her estate into three parts; one third for the government, one third to be distributed among the poor, and one third she took with her in her hand; the bed sheets, however, she retained. She then came to the house of study of Rabbi Hiyya, and said to him, 'Master, give me instructions and convert me'. He replied: 'My daughter, perhaps you have set your eyes on one of the disciples?' She thereupon took out the note from her hand and gave it to him. He said: 'Go, and take possession of your purchase'. Those very bed sheets which she had spread for him for an illicit purpose she now spread out for him lawfully. This is the reward [of the precept] in this world; and as for its reward in the future world I know not how [great it is].

עלה לישיב ערום כנגדה באו ד' ציציותיו וטפחו לו על פניו נשמט וישב לו ע"ג קרקע ואף היא נשמטה וישבה ע"ג קרקע אמרה לו גפה של רומי שאיני מניחתך עד שתאמר לי מה מום ראית בי אמר לה העבודה שלא ראיתי אשה יפה כמותך אלא מצוה אחת ציונו ה' אלהינו וציצית שמה וכתוב בה (במדבר טו, מא) "אני ה' אלהיכם" שתי פעמים אני הוא שעתיד ליפרע ואני הוא שעתיד לשלם שכר עכשיו נדמו עלי כד' עדים אמרה לו איני מניחתך עד שתאמר לי מה שמך ומה שם עירך ומה שם רבך ומה שם מדרשך שאתה למד בו תורה כתב ונתן בידה עמדה וחילקה כל נכסיה שלישי למלכות ושלישי לעניים ושלישי נטלה בידה חוץ מאותן מצעות ובאת לבית מדרשו של ר' חייא אמרה לו רבי צוה עלי ויעשוני גיורת אמר לה בתי שמא עיניך נתת באחד מן התלמידים הוציאה כתב מידה ונתנה לו אמר לה לכי זכי במקחך אותן מצעות שהציעה לו באיסור הציעה לו בהיתר זה מתן שכרו בעה"ז ולעה"ב איני יודע כמה

Questions for Discussions:

- What transformation do we see happening to which of the characters?
- Compare and contrast the role of Tzitzit and the role of the bedsheets in our story. How do each of these garments relate to the concept of sacredness?
- The sexual encounter that was forbidden at the beginning of the text, is ultimately sanctioned by the end of the text.
 - What, if any, is the change that happened here?

- ❑ Is there an actual difference in the relationship or the sexual experience shared between these two people the second time around?

- ❑ What might this text imply about the relationship between sacredness and sexuality?

***Tzitzit Source - Numbers 15:39-41**

*Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. **That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the LORD and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge.** Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God. I the LORD am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I the LORD am your God.*

דְּבַר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם
 וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית עַל-כַּנְּפֵי בְגָדֵיהֶם
 לְדֹרֹתָם וְנָתַנּוּ עַל-צִיצִית הַכַּנָּף פֶּתִיל
 תְּכֵלֶת: וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית וּרְאִיתֶם
 אֹתָיו וְזָכַרְתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה
 וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא-תִתְּרוּ אַחֲרַי
 לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-אֲתֶם
 זָנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם: לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם
 אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי וְהִייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים
 לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם: אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר
 הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵהָיוֹת
 לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: