

Sexuality and Family

Class 13

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1. “Of Marriage: Relationship and Relations” Tradition 39:2 (2005), pp. 7-35

I have written this piece, and I present it here, likewise, with a measure of ambivalence and trepidation... To some, it may appear to stand in violation of the Mishna’s admonition, as elucidated by the Gemara (*Hagiga* 11b), against public discussion of the arcane aspects of proscribed sexual liaisons... On a broader, and possibly deeper, front, the differences noted between attitudes expressed by Hazal and later formulations raise issues concerning periodization and continuity within the halakhic system; and, for readers not wholly satisfied with suggestions I have tentatively advanced, by way of resolution, the impact may be, again, possibly unsettling... Were I to respond, in full, to the overarching question presented to me—“What models are there in the classical rabbinic literature for relationships between men and women?”—I would preface my discussion with the observation that, as regards marriage (presumably, our primary focus), the models in evidence in Hazal are both few and partial...

There exist, admittedly, some directives regarding some of these concerns. For the most part, however, they have been relegated to the realms of *devar ha-reshut*, an area not axiologically neutral but neither fully normative, with regard to which personal preference, with a possible eye upon meaningful variables, is characteristic. In a word, they are subject to the discussion, predilection, and decision of individual couples... Thus, the familiar description of an *isha keshera* as a wife who performs the will of her husband (*retson ba’alah*),² in no way precludes a husband’s declaring that his *ratson* is precisely a desire for understanding and consensus. Or again, the Gemara’s suggested division between general and domestic, or between celestial and mundane, matters, as the domains of the husband and the wife respectively, does not obviate a desire to cross those lines where the proper qualifications exist...

Having, however, been accorded the prerogative of devoting myself to a discussion of one of the subtopics delineated, I shall exercise that option and focus upon a narrower, albeit perhaps thornier, issue: “How shall we view possible models of the marriage relationship (love and companionship vs. procreation)?” This formulation strikingly parallels the opening of the Rav’s essay, “Marriage,” in *Family Redeemed*. “There are,” the Rav notes,

two basic theories about the institution of marriage. One theory developed a *transeunt* axiology, that is, a value system that finds the meaning of matrimony *outside* of the matrimonial union. The other theory developed an *immanent* matrimonial value system, discovering meaning *within*... Seen from the halakhic viewpoint, matrimonial community is not realized without embracing three personae. At this level, marriage redeems the productive urge from its animal species orientation and turns it into a spiritual tragic longing of man for his origin or source.

Hence, this position rejects not only the narrowing of telos to one of the elements, but also the inclination to regard marriage as the pursuit of two independent and possibly divergent aims, to be somehow balanced, in theory and in practice. It rather bears the stamp of a covenantal relationship—entered into between the parties, and with reference to the broader covenant between God and man, generally, and between the *Ribbono shel Olam* and *Keneset Yisrael*, particularly—within and through which twin goals are interactively achieved. It is a stimulating piece, written with characteristic philosophic sophistication, psychological insight, and spiritual vision. Framed in simple terms, however, its central thesis, relating to the nature of marriage as both instrumental and intrinsic, is traditional, rather than innovative...

Whether, from a technical halakhic standpoint, marriage is necessary for the formal fulfillment of the mitsva of procreation, *peru u-revu*, is possibly a matter of debate...

The importance attached within Judaism to the mitsva of procreation can hardly be overemphasized. It is conceived in religious, rather than primarily social, categories; and this, not simply as an affirmative response to a normative commandment as any other mitsva, but as the implementation of the divine design in the creation of the world: “He did not form it for waste, but created it for habitation” (Isaiah 45:18).⁹ Hence, willful abstinence is not regarded as merely the failure to do good but is equated with the perpetration of evil (*Yevamot*

63b): “Ben Azzai said: As though he sheds blood and diminishes the divine image; so severe is the judgment passed upon the shirker.” However, procreation is manifestly not the sole *raison d’être* for marriage. The verse in Ecclesiastes (9:9) counsels, “Enjoy life with a woman you love,” clearly referring to the realization of life rather than to its creation. Hazal correspondingly note (*Yevamot* 62b) that “any man who has no wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness”—again, focusing upon personal bliss *per se*... The significance of the interpersonal element is further reinforced by the substance of a familiar proof-text, twice cited in the Gemara and codified by Rambam:

Whoever loves his wife as himself and honors her more than himself— of him Scripture says, “And you will know that your tent shall be in peace and you will visit your habitation, and not sin” (Job 5:24)...

It is, of course, logically arguable that the *raison d’être* of marriage is indeed purely instrumental, but that the message of the Gemara is simply a directive prescribing the desirable mode of attitude and conduct for a person who, by dint of whatever circumstance and for any reason, finds himself within its context. Nevertheless, it is surely difficult to sustain such a contention in the face of the Torah’s prelude to its establishment: It is not good for man to be alone, I shall make him a fitting helper (Genesis 2:18).¹² As the Rav noted in this connection, the term “good” is not confined here to subjective psychological gratification, but encompasses ethical and existential well-being as well...

We are confronted by a singular phenomenon, one which, historically, has been the subject of animated controversy within the world of religious thought: the symbol of unbridled lust, to some, and of quasi-mystical ecstasy, to others; almost unparalleled for sheer visceral intensity, and yet enveloped with romantic passion; its attendant denudation eradicating the line between the human and the bestial, on the one hand, while enabling maximal bonding, on the other; the most productive of human activity, in one respect, and, on most occasions, the most predictably fruitless endeavor, in another. The topic has generated much discourse and elicited polar responses as well as an intermediate spectrum; and indeed it does not rest easily. Contemplating our own Torah world, one is persistently struck by an apparent dissonance between the impression conveyed by Hazal and *rishonim*, respectively. In surveying the Gemara, we are struck by both its omissions and its assertions, general as well as halakhic. There is little in the way of either squeamish embarrassment or outright reservation. There is no revulsion from concupiscent pleasure nor recoil from romantic passion (*Sanhedrin* 7a):

One was wont to say: “When our love was intense, a bed the width of a blade was room enough for both of us to lie upon. Now that our love is less intense, a [king-size] bed the width of sixty cubits does not suffice.”

At one point, the Gemara in *Berakhot* (57b) explores the possibility that sexual activity constitutes one of a triad of elements which convey a sense of *me-ein olam ha-ba* (a taste of the world to come)...

“Why were the foremothers barren,” asks the Midrash; and, *inter alia*, it goes on to cite two complementary explanations related to our theme (*Bereshit Rabba* 45:5):

R. Azarya said in the name of R. Yohanan b. Papa that it was in order that women should endear themselves to their husbands with their ornaments. . . . R. Huna and R. Avun in the name of R. Meir say that it was in order that their husbands should derive benefit from them, for each time a woman conceives she becomes disgusting and forsaken.

Finally, in a more explicitly ideological mode, we are of course all familiar with R. Meir’s rationale for the prohibition of *nidda* (*Nidda* 31b):

Why did the Torah ordain that the impurity of menstruation should continue for seven days? Because being in constant contact with his wife [a husband might] develop a loathing towards her. The Torah, therefore, ordained: Let her be unclean for seven days in order that she shall be beloved by her husband as at the time of her first entry into the bridal chamber.

The assertion that, far from being meant to diminish the scope of marital sexuality, the injunction is rather intended to intensify it, speaks for itself.

Turning to halakhic contexts, we encounter a similar message. Relations on the holiest day of the week are not only permitted but encouraged, as “marital relations are part of the Sabbath delight.”...

This harvest stands in marked contrast to positions adopted by some of the foremost *rishonim*. In a major

chapter in *Mishneh Torah*, devoted to the rejection of excessive asceticism and positing the Mishna's dictum, *ve-kol ma'asekha yihyu le-shem shamayim* (all your deeds should be [performed] for the sake of heaven), as an overriding spiritual ideal, Rambam evidently found no place for either love or companionship as the *raison d'être* of marital sexuality:

So too, when one has sexual relations, he should act in order to maintain his health and to reproduce. Therefore, he should not have relations any time he desires, rather only during the time when he must produce semen as a medical need or for the sake of reproduction...

Ramban... gives vent to the same general attitude. Remarkably, he does so in direct contradistinction to R. Meir's rationale for the prohibition regarding relations with a *nidda*:

The verse prohibits [cohabiting] with a *nidda* for the reason I already noted. For the Torah allows cohabitation only for the sake of reproduction. The fetus, moreover, is formed from either fully or mostly from the woman's [real] blood; it cannot be formed from the menstrual blood...

Admittedly, a more balanced and even positive attitude finds expression in two loci classici, the fullest expositions of the subject in the writings of *rishonim*—the concluding chapter of Rabad's *Ba'alei ha-Nefesh* and the anonymous *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, often erroneously attributed to Ramban...

Of the four motivations whose value Rabad acknowledges, the first two refer to procreation, the last to relieving pressures which might lead to sinful action and fantasy, and the third to responsiveness to a wife's romantic needs and advances:

The third . . . that she desires him and he recognizes her attempts to please him. She adorns herself that he should notice her.

This is still a far cry from R. Bar-Shaul's cadences.

In contrast, a genuinely enthusiastic tone pervades the discussion of the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*. After an introductory chapter explaining the purpose and direction of the manual, he confronts the axiological issue head-on:

Know that this essay is clean and holy and represents that which is appropriate at the appropriate time and with the correct intentions. One should not think that this appropriate essay contains shamefulness or nastiness. . . . All should believe that God created everything according to His wisdom and did not create anything shameful or disgusting. For if this essay says something shameful, behold the sexual organs are the shameful organs, yet it was God who created them with His word, as it says "He created you, and prepared you" (Deut. 32:6). . . . If the sexual organs were truly shameful, how could God have created something deficient or shameful, God forbid?

However, I believe there is little question but that this chord, music to modern ears, is, in the medieval context, decidedly in the minority— not quite sotto voce but surely pianissimo... And we have not so much as glanced at the renunciatory *Hassidei Ashkenaz*, with their delegitimization of virtually all passionate sensory pleasure... The graduated list of required *ona*, with vocation designated as a primary variable, opens: "The *ona* that the Torah requires refers to those *tayyalin* everyday." The Gemara then asks, "What are *tayyalin*," and in response, cites divergent conceptions (*Ketubbot* 62a):

What is meant by *tayyalin*? Rava replied: day students (*benei pirkei*). Said Abaye to him: [These are the men] of whom it is written in Scripture (Psalms 127:2), "It is vain for you that you rise early, and sit up late, those that eat of the bread of toil; so He gives to those who chase their sleep away." "These," R. Yitshak explained, are the wives of the scholars, who chase the sleep from their eyes in this world and achieve thereby the life of the world to come. Yet you say [that *tayyalin* are] "day students"! [The explanation], however, said Abaye, is in agreement [with a statement] of Rav who said that [a *tayyal* is one] for instance, like R. Shemuel b. Shilat who eats of his own, drinks of his own, and sleeps in the shadow of his mansion and a king's officer never passes his door. When Ravin came he stated: [A *tayyal* is one], for instance, like the pampered men of the West (Israel)...

These are, in effect, roughly the equivalent of contemporary kollel students. And yet, Rava did not cavil at the thought that they, of all people, would be charged with nightly relations. Moreover, Abaye does not challenge

this conception on philosophic or axiological grounds. He does not address issues of spiritual decadence or passionnal surfeit... Read in this vein, the passage expresses neither revulsion from the carnal nor ideological recoil from the manifest blend of the physical, the psychic, and the spiritual of which sexual experience is comprised. The issue rather turns upon the conflict of resources and the consequent need to budget time, attention, and energy...

Perhaps even more noteworthy is a parallel, and yet remarkably different, formulation in the Yerushalmi (*Berakhot* 3:4):

R. Ya'akov b. Avun said: the only reason they instituted this *tevila* (ritual immersion) was so the Israelites would not be like roosters, having relations, rising, then descending to eat...

We, for our part, are confronted by a quandary of our own; and it is dual. At one plane, we ask ourselves, within the context of our learning—it is Torah, and we must learn—a simple and straightforward question. In light of the predominant evidence we have noted from Hazal and, particularly, its halakhic component, how and why did Rambam, Ramban, and some other *rishonim*, deviate so markedly from their prevalent attitude? With reference to *yetser* (the inclination)—generic in connotation but defined by Rashi as *shel tashmish* (sexual desire)—Hazal identify it as one of a triad which, optimally, one should “let the left hand deflect and the right hand bring close” (*Sota* 47a). One sometimes gets the impression that the proportion was subsequently inverted. The allure of facile historicistic solutions—in our case, of ascription to Sufi or Scholastic influences, regarding worldliness, in general, or sexuality, in particular—is palpably self-evident. In dealing with giants, however, we strive to avoid succumbing to its alluring temptations. To be sure, post Hazal *gedolim*, *rishonim*, or *aharonim* may be affected by the impact of contact with a general culture to which their predecessors had not been exposed and to whose content and direction they respond. Upon critical evaluation of what they have encountered, they may incorporate what they find consonant with tradition and reject what is not. In the process, they may legitimately enlarge the bounds of their *hashkafa* and introduce hitherto unperceived insights and interpretations. No one questions Aristotle's impact upon Rambam or Kierkegaard's upon the Rav. In our case, however, we are seemingly dealing with apparent contravention rather than nuanced accretion; hence, while we may assign some weight to the historical factor, this will hardly suffice, and we must entertain other factors as well, seeking resolution in other directions. Probably the most promising is the suggestion that the sources I have cited were, in the eyes of some *rishonim*, qualitatively outweighed by others...

To the extent that we do succeed in harmonizing the positions of Hazal and of *rishonim*, we ameliorate the pressure of one issue but exacerbate that of another. For we are brought, in turn, to a second quandary: our own. While I have conducted no empirical survey, I believe there is little question regarding the sensibility of the contemporary Torah world, irrespective of camp and orientation. We stand, fundamentally, with R. Bar-Shaul. We assert the value of romantic love, its physical manifestation included, without flinching from the prospect of concomitant sensual pleasure; and we do so without harboring guilt or reservations. We insist, of course, upon its sanctification—this, within the context of suffusive *kedusha* of carnal experience, generally. We do not, in any sense and form, join Blake, Lawrence, and their ideological confreres in celebrating lusty passion in isolation, and, on both halakhic and ethical grounds—which are, in a meaningful sense, themselves halakhic—reject non-marital sexuality as transient, vulgar, and possibly exploitative, devoid of interpersonal commitment or social and legal sanction. Moreover, even with reference to the context of marriage, we recoil from the supposed transmutation of the erotic into a quasi-mystical experience, bordering on the transcendental, encountered in some quarters. Conceptually and historically, such associations are idolatrous rather than Jewish. With regard to the basic phenomenon of sexual experience, however, our instincts and our attitude are clearly positive...

Relatively few are familiar—or, perhaps even comfortable with the substance or rhetoric of *Shelah's* formulation:

With respect to copulation, when enacted with holiness and purity, is most holy, bestirring [matters] above; a person sanctifies himself in the nether [world], and he is sanctified greatly from the upper, and he fulfills [the commandment], “You shall be holy, for I am holy, Hashem your God.” For every copulation resembles that of Adam and Eve, performed in His form and image.

But as to the fundamental attitude, we are very much attuned...

Towards the conclusion of *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham* [Rabbi Soloveitchik writes]:

Greek philosophy and Christianity never grasped the ethico-metaphysical nature of the sexual union. Only in halakha is this act based firmly in religious life—the commandment to “be fruitful and multiply” is the first commandment in the Torah. Marital life is blessed and pure. The “single life,” though not an eternal sin, stands in contrast to the perspective of halakha. One who remains without a wife is left without happiness, without blessing, without Torah.

Moreover, while the terminology and the rationale might vary—and the readiness to deal with the topic explicitly, at all, considerably limited—I have the distinct impression that the situation is not significantly different within the haredi world...

Assuming these facts to be correct—as regards my own spiritual environs, I can attest directly—we ask ourselves: How and why do we depart from positions articulated by some of our greatest—“from whose mouths we live and from whose waters we drink”—and, is this departure legitimate? Are we victims of the *Zeitgeist*, swept along by general socio-historical currents? Do we tailor our attitude on this issue to conform to appetitive convenience and erotic desire? Have we, in this case, adopted a self-satisfying posture of facile world-acceptance clothed in culturally correct garb? To the extent that I am capable of candid self-awareness, I trust these questions can and should be answered in the negative. Our commitment to sexuality, properly sanctified, redeemed and redeeming, does not derive from libidinous passion but is, rather, grounded in profound spiritual instincts—upon our recognition that “God saw all that He created, and behold it was very good,” on the one hand, and our quest for meaningful interpersonal commingling, on the other...

As to the basis of our attitude’s legitimacy within the context of authoritative tradition, several factors may be cited. At one plane, we are buttressed, be it only subliminally, by the conviction that we are siding with Hazal, and they with us. At another, we are assuaged by the sense that while, at worst, we may be disregarding the attitudinal counsel of some *rishonim*, we are not countermanding their *pesak*; and that, with respect to issues of *hashkafa*, reliance upon minority views is more of a legitimate option than as regards specific halakhic matters. Probably most significant, however, is our reliance upon our own mentors. Sensing that modern *gedolim*, “the judge of your era”—for our purposes, most notably, the Rav, but not he alone—have examined the issue and the evidence and adopted a positive stance, we, ordinary students of Torah, follow in their footsteps as we identify with their position...

I am left, nonetheless, with a lacuna. Even while adhering to the Rav’s position, one may freely concede wishing that he had done for us what we have been challenged and constrained to do here: examine the various tiers of tradition and elucidate the basis for his own judgment and commitment... As to Rambam, the Rav did relate to his views, and sought to enlist him in his own ranks. In a footnote appended to the passage I quoted from *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*, he adds:

In truth, even Rambam—despite his ascetic tendencies which emerged most uniquely in the *Moreh* where he describes the conflict between bodily desire and the spiritual yearning for God—reflects positively upon the sexual union. He denounced the sexual craze and aggression.

Our teacher (Rambam) demands that man elevate his sexual existence; its sanctification is accomplished by stamping it with halakhic purpose.

He then proceeds to list a three-pronged purpose for sexuality: physiological, procreative, as a social-religious end, and teleological, as a means to the realization of historico-spiritual destiny. It must be conceded, however, that the attempt is far from convincing, with the reference to excerpts cited highly selective, bordering on the tendentious...

That self-examination is, collectively and personally, a religious imperative. Nevertheless, with respect to our specific issue, we remain true to our abiding spiritual intuitions. We cannot, as *Shelah* could not, acquiesce in the sense that so fundamental an aspect of physical and psychic reality is, by and large, merely a snare. We cannot, as the author of the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* could not, abandon the conviction that so central a component of human nature is not part of the *tov me’od* of primordial creation. Consequently, impelled by our spiritual instincts and animated by the faith instilled in us by our Torah mentors, we opt for consecration rather than abstinence. In this most sensitive area, we strive for a life which is energized rather than neutralized—not

merely sterilized and sanitized, but ennobled and ennobling. We are challenged to sanctify—by integrating sexuality within total sacral existence, characterized by the systole and diastole of divinely ordained denial and realization, and by infusing the relationship itself with human and spiritual content. This is by no means the easier course. May we have the wisdom and the commitment to render it the better.

2. “On Raising Children,” VBM

It should be a truism that raising children is one of the most important things in a person’s life. Unfortunately, this is not obvious to everyone. There are people, even great people, who assign a higher priority to other matters.

There is, of course, a mitzva of *chinukh*, educating one’s children. Yet, the term *chinukh* can be understood in two very distinct ways. In the narrower sense, the term *chinukh* refers to *chinukh* for *mitzvot*, preparing a child for a lifetime of religious observance... For each respective mitzva, when the child reaches the appropriate age, you are obligated to train him to perform that mitzva...

In a broader sense, though, *chinukh* has to do with the molding of the identity and personality of the child. That itself breaks into two aspects. One aspect is the development of certain spiritual strengths, certain powers, skills, abilities, inclinations, and sensitivities. In trying to make a respectable person out of the boy or girl, the parents ask themselves: To what extent can and should we mold the child, and in which direction? Once the parents understand what the aims are, they can try to answer these questions.

There is a second, more relational aspect of the broad sense of *chinukh*. This entails developing what the Greeks called *paideia*, eliciting from the personality of the child that which is already there; moreover, this means developing not powers, but rather attitudes, relationships, commitments, involvement, and engagement. For example, part of *chinukh* is teaching the child the ability to relate to others... Teaching a child to “relate” does not just mean giving him or her a certain skill set in the realm of personal relationships; it also means teaching one how to relate to God, to one’s immediate environs, to one’s collective and national identity, to the past and future, and to the world at large. All this is part of *chinukh*...

Part of this aspect of education is vague because the exact values are not so clear. As opposed to the aforementioned concrete *mitzvot*, where a *lulav* is a *lulav* is a *lulav*, sensitivity (to name one value) can be variable: sensitivity to what, to whom, what you tolerate, what you refuse to tolerate, etc. When dealing with defined halakhic duties, people who are halakhically committed will roll up their sleeves and get to work. However, when we speak to them in general terms of raising a child, giving the child values and commitments, a plethora of possibilities emerge: they can take a low-key approach, they can act intensely and intensively, they can give it a high level of priority or a low level of priority. Unfortunately, where the matters clash with other priorities, the desire to downplay *chinukh* may overwhelm some.

The historical evidence in this regard is mixed. I come, indirectly, from Brisk and from Volozhin. In Brisk, a *very* high value was attached to raising children, and particularly to raising them with the paramount values that epitomize this community, specifically, the analytic approach to study... Not everybody did that. Many of the Torah giants in Eastern Europe, and not one or two, devoted themselves to their own studies, to writing their *chiddushim*, and let their children grow up as they might within their society. Some even grew up to be irreligious Jews; and I am not referring here to some local, isolated, unknown *rav*...

I feel very strongly about the need for personal attention in child-raising, and have tried to put it into practice. I, too, was raised that way. A number of my *rebbe'im* also used to speak of the value of learning with one’s children. The Rav once said that when one gets to *Olam Ha-ba*, he is going to be asked, “Based on what do you deserve entry to *Olam Ha-ba*?” Personally, he mentioned three things, one of which was that he learned with his children.

I remember a *derasha* that Rav Yitzchak Hutner *z”l* gave around *Shavuot* one year when I attended Yeshivat Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin. He discussed the *gemara* in *Bava Batra* (21a) that “Yehoshua ben Gamla is to be remembered for the good,” because he founded a network of Jewish education. Before his time, everybody had studied with his own child or hired a private tutor, but he founded schools. The *rosh yeshiva* said that historians, secular historians in particular, think of this as a great event, resolving the chaos of home education with something systematic: schools, buildings, educational infrastructure. To the contrary, Rav

Hutner said, it was a sad day; the ideal is to follow the literal meaning of the verse, “You shall teach them to your children” (*Devarim* 11:19). The *rosh yeshiva* would frequently discuss with us the need to study with one’s son or one’s daughter, just as verse states.

According to the Rav, *talmud Torah* is an important aspect of the interpersonal, emotional, and existential bond between a parent and a child. When the love for Torah embraces an intergenerational link, that enhances the learning...

One pays a price for this attitude to child-raising. I am not telling you that were it not for my children I would be a “*gaon olam*,” but you pay a price. However, that is a price that you should be very well ready and willing to pay, and thank God every morning for the ability to pay it. It is a source of joy beyond words...

Raising children is a lot of work, and it is one of the greatest joys in the world – one of the greatest responsibilities and greatest privileges. There are very few people about whom it can be genuinely be said that there is something objectively more important in their life than raising children. Every child is a world unto himself, and should be treated with sensitivity, understanding, warmth, and love.

These things are not in textbooks; you will not find instructions about what kind of mixture to have between the assertion of authority, on the one hand, and warmth and love, on the other. People often presume that Halakha has the answer to everything. Press the right key, push the right button, open up to the right page, look it up, and it is there... This attitude is absolutely incorrect! We do not do any favors to God, or to the world of Halakha, by pretending that it has what it does not have, and what – from my point of view – it does not need to have and does not want to have... There are certain elements of marriage which are *halakhot*, and so many elements that are not Halakha. What kind of relationship do you have with your spouse? How intense, how superficial, how cordial? Halakha does not tell you... what kind of parent are you? Do you intend the relationship to be formal or chummy? The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 32a) teaches that a father who foregoes the honor due him *may* do so; does it say anywhere whether a parent *should* do so?...

To be sure, a parent must have the ability to be assertive and to radiate and communicate authority. A parent is not just a playmate, an older sibling. The parent represents values, represents the world of Judaism; a parent is to the young child, and subsequently to the adolescent child, God’s plenipotentiary. He represents the *Ribbono shel Olam* in his home! Parents represent moral, spiritual, and religious values. As such, to some extent, one must speak with a voice of authority...

Every person must provide his own answer... Brisk was very, very authoritarian... they set a very high standard. It was very demanding, and the result was like “swinging for the fences” in baseball: more home runs and more strikeouts. In almost every generation there were people who paid a price, a price in simple mental health, because they cracked and could not advance. But, at the same time, this environment produced Torah giants.

Parents must ask themselves to what extent they want to “swing for the fences.” The night before one of my children married, he raised this issue with me. I described to him how I saw other contexts where a steep price had been paid for swinging for the fences, and I said that a double is also enough. But it is a personalized, individual decision...

Vince Lombardi coached the Green Bay Packers. Lombardi’s results from his players were unparalleled, astounding! But they hated him. Perhaps if you are a football coach and you are hated, it is one thing. However, if you are a parent and you are hated, it is something else. And if you are an educator who is hated, it is something else entirely... At one time, if you were very hard on students, and they didn’t like you, they left your school, and went from one educational framework to another. Today, a child drops out of school, he drops out of Shabbat, he drops out of God. Teachers, and even more so parents, must find the proper combination of communicating values and making demands but radiating love; this is the mix that defines raising children...

Raising children is part of an educational endeavor, both in terms of Torah learning and in terms of ethical, religious, and spiritual growth. What kind of person is this child going to be? That is very often a direct educational endeavor. But no less important is the indirect educational endeavor. How you behave towards the child, what climate you create in the home, impacts him definitively. Children are very smart. If you bluff, they will see straight through you. You cannot expect a child to study Torah if you do not learn yourself. But I don’t want to focus too sharply, too exclusively, on the cognitive development: communicating

knowledge, love of Torah, love of knowledge. Developing character is more important than knowledge. That is true in a yeshiva, and it is true in a home. This is what we mean by “*yirato kodemet le-chokhmato*,” one’s fear of Heaven must precede his wisdom...

Unfortunately, not everyone experiences this joy and privilege. Nechama Leibowitz, one of the most prolific and influential educators of her generation, once said she would give up *everything* – all her studies, all her books, all her teaching – to have had a child. The tragedy of childlessness is one which is mentioned in *Tanakh*, *Chazal* are sensitive to it, and one should be cognizant of it...

As I mentioned, when my sons were in high school, I used to devote several nights a week to learning with them. Once I met one of the *ramim* at their high school, and he remarked, “What a wonderful thing! As busy as you are, you find time to come learn with your sons.” I looked at him, and could not understand: “If I can’t find time to learn with my sons, for what *will* I find time? What is my time for?” But he did not seem to understand a word of what I had told him, so I let it be...

In the family of Rav Ahron Soloveichik z”l, the first three children were boys, born relatively close together. At the bar mitzva of one of his sons, Rav Ahron quoted his mother – an idea he later found in Chizkuni – about the reason for Levi’s name: “This time my husband will accompany me” (*Bereishit* 29:34). Why did Leah think that specifically “*this* time” her husband would accompany her?... When the first child was born, Leah figured she would take care of him; Yaakov was busy with other things. When the second child was born, she could still carry them both on her own, one child in each arm. But then, soon after, Levi arrived, and she said, “This time my husband will accompany me”: now Yaakov has no choice, for she only has two arms... When his [Rav Ahron’s] children were born, he figured his wife would take care of them as infants, and when they were ready to learn Gemara, he would enter the picture. But he soon came to see how wrong he was. When I was in his *shiur* in Yeshivat Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, his first child was born, and he used to come to yeshiva with diaper pins still in his shirt pocket. You cannot start being an involved parent too early.

But you do not play the professional parent; you play the human parent, who works at parenting out of the depth of his love and commitment: the love of the child, the love of the family, and the love of God...

Your heart has to be in the right place. You have to be willing to give, and willing to receive. Family life is all about giving and receiving reciprocally, to children, to parents, to a spouse, in all areas of life. Superficially regarded, raising children is massive giving. But I tell you that it is massive receiving, but *massive*! The joy and *nachas* are beyond words.

3. “Perspective on Homosexuals,” Pages of Faith

This post is based on the second part of a session held with Rav Lichtenstein on Friday, 17 Marcheshvan, 5773, November 2, 2012.

Question: There has been some discussion recently concerning what our attitude as Orthodox Jews should be toward homosexuals in our community. Some of the debate revolves around the meaning and significance of the Torah’s designation: *to’eivah* [abomination]. Could Rav Lichtenstein relate to these issues, addressing both the individual and communal levels?...

This, as you know, is a hot issue, and one which has surfaced in our world as, simultaneously, it has surfaced within the general world. There was a time when it was taken for granted that if you were homosexual you couldn’t be in the army, you couldn’t run a business, you obviously couldn’t set up a home, and you obviously couldn’t apply for getting whatever money is distributed by the government for a mate. All of that was taken for granted. In the background was a judgment, which is grounded in the Western adherence to Biblical tradition, that there’s something wrong with this morally and spiritually... Some people have said that homosexuality is something which is a distortion of nature, it’s not the way the *Ribbono shel Olam* built the world, it’s no good – and because it’s no good, there’s a *pasuk* [verse] in *Acharei Mot* which tells you to stay away from it. Others say no, it’s a neutral phenomenon, but neutral things, once the Torah “deneutralizes” them, so to speak, and set it up as an *issur* [prohibition], even if it’s a *chok* [non-rational law] and not something beyond that – we have to subscribe to it if we are believing Jews, or, להבדיל, believing Christians.

There is some discussion in the time of *rishonim*, and later – about the whole world of *arayot* [sexual prohibitions] in general – is it a *chok* or a *mishpat* [rational law]. It’s an old question. Aquinas deals with this

issue in *Summa Theologica*, and, להבדיל, the Ramban deals with this issue: is it *chok* or is it *mishpat*. That would probably make some difference in terms of how you relate to it. If you relate to it as *mishpat*, it has a rational basis: somebody who engages in it, you are doubly severe in judging him... one who engages in homosexuality is: 1) violating the natural order and 2) violating the *parsha* in *Sefer Vayikra*. If you think it's a *chok* – the first element falls out, but it's [still] out of line, it's part of the *issur*.

The question you raise is not just a question with regard to a particular ban, but the label of *to'eivah*, does that add a more serious dimension. To make that judgment you need to do two related things: 1) check a computer or a concordance for wherever the word *to'eivah* appears – and see, to what does it apply. So you discover that *to'eivah*, in the *pasuk* in Yechezkel, refers to people who don't feed עניים [poor] properly (Ezekiel 16:48-50), or, you open up a *chumash* in *Ki Tetzei* – if you are dealing with weights and measures, and you cheat a little bit on the weights and the measures, that's *to'eivah* also (Deuteronomy 25:13-16). Having done that, find for me a community which responds and relates to homosexuality as if you are doing something terrible – just like it responds to those who are cheating a little bit on weights and measures. But that's not the case, and that is because of the revulsion which, apart from its being called *to'eivah* – the revulsion which is felt by the Western world toward homosexuality probably would have existed in large measure nonetheless.

If you ask me: should the term *to'eivah* be meaningful to us? Of course it should. We are מאמינים בני מאמינים [believers]. We think that if the Torah refers to something as *to'eivah*, the *Ribbono shel Olam* regards it as *to'eivah*. But to be fairer and more honest with ourselves and with our communities, let us understand that if you deal only with the use of the term *to'eivah*, you can only push that particular envelope as far as you push the cheating on the weights and the measures – so all the revulsion, the moral energy, that you bring against that, you should bring against this, too.

That's not what happens today. I have an argument with some people about this. Don't get me wrong: I'm not in favor of homosexuality, הם ושלום. But we do need to agree to abide by a greater measure of honesty in dealing with that community than I think at present applies...

If I open a *gemara* in *Sanhedrin*, or if I open a *chumash*, for that matter – leaving aside the term *to'eivah* – what is a more serious *aveirah*, *chillul Shabbat* [Shabbat violation] or homosexuality. Or, for that matter, there are people who worship *avodah zarah* [idolatry] who march in the parade, too. Is it proper, is it fair, and I say this without relenting in our position to homosexuality – to decide that all the sins which the whole entire Jewish community has – all of that we can swallow and march with them, with pride and with their flags and everything that they want, but this is the שער לעזאזל [scapegoat] – dispatched to ארץ גזירה, that's what happens to the שער לעזאזל (Leviticus 16:22). I discussed this point with people for whom I have the highest regard and I asked them this question.

I'm not so nimble-minded not to know the answer. Much of the answer is: the *mechallelei Shabbat* of America don't want to march in the parade under the banner of *mechallelei Shabbat* of America – they are going to march as the Kiwanis club or the Rotary club, the junior high school of Great Neck, or whatever you have, and that will pass muster – they will not □aunt. The homosexual community today has created such a ferment because it is very aggressive. The response to that has been – on our part – many people have also been aggressive. That's something which I think should be avoided...

When we talk about response, are we talking about: feeling warmly and with sympathy to that community, or are we talking about steps actually to be taken? The question of steps to be taken is also a more recent phenomenon. Fundamentally, the *issur* of homosexuality is a personal *aveirah*; I don't know – maybe I'm wrong – of places in *Tanakh* or in Chazal which single out, as a communal sin, homosexuality.

Today it's become a public issue and it's part of a public debate. What you do in relating to a homosexual – beyond either feeling revulsion or feeling sympathy – do you let him into *shul*, do you give him an *aliyah*, do you let him *daven* for the *amud*, if he adopts a child, do you let the child attend your yeshivah...

There, different people have different emotional responses and different practical responses.

If you ask me for my own response: obviously, I don't approve in any way, but emotionally, the fire that burns in many hearts today, and the fears which go beyond the revulsion, are beyond what I think is proper, and particularly, as the phenomenon becomes more prevalent, which is unfortunate in itself, but at the personal plane it has become a more common *aveirah*, it is less of an *aveirah* on the part of the particular individual.