

Sexual Ethics in Judaism (PHIL 4960)
Spring 2005

Professor: Rabbi Jonathan D. Schick

Course Description:

This course will serve as an overview of historical and contemporary Jewish perspectives towards human sexuality. Invariably, Judaism's view of sexuality is widely misunderstood or grossly misrepresented. Through text study, film vignettes, and animated discussion, a thorough understanding of Jewish sexual ethics will be fostered.

Required Texts:

1. Hebrew Bible with accurate English translation. Recommended: *Stone Edition Tanakh*, Mesorah Publications, 1998.
2. Sourcebook provided by Instructor.

Optional Texts:

3. Cohen, Seymour J. *The Holy Letter*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1993
4. Ellinson, Getsel. *The Modest Way- A Guide to the Rabbinic Sources*. Jerusalem, Israel: World Zionist Organization, 1992.
5. Bulka, Reuven P. *Judaism on Pleasure*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1995
6. Spero, Moshe Halevi. *Psychotherapy and Jewish Ethics*. Spring Valley, N.Y.: Feldheim, 1986.

Course Requirements:

1. Regular Attendance, preparation and class participation. (20%)
2. Brief response papers. (20%)
3. Midterm essay examination. (30%)
4. Final essay examination. (30%)

Course Outline:

1. Introduction: Judaism and Pleasure

- A. The “Pleasure/Pain” paradigm
- B. The dichotomy between Eastern and Western cultures
- C. Contemporary attitudes towards pleasure
- D. Unique role of Sex among all physical pleasures

2. Sexual episodes in the Biblical narrative

- A. Sexual crimes in the Noahide era
- B. Sodom and Gomorrah
- C. Sarah, Abimelekh and Adultery
- D. The rape of Dinah
- E. Joseph and the wife of Potiphar
- F. The prostitute on the way: Judah and Tamar
- G. Phineas and the killing of the Sexual offender
- H. Idolatry as a premise for Lust
- I. David and Bath Sheba
- J. Amnon, Tamar and incestual rape
- K. Esther and willful submission to the King

3. The Sexual Ethic

- A. Man’s nature and competing drives
- B. Grandeur and Degradation
- C. The Antidote
- D. Selected case studies
 - 1. Talmud
 - 2. Early Responsa
 - 3. Later Responsa

4. Sexuality within the Marital Context

- A. Intimacy and Enjoyment
- B. Procreation and Birth Control
- C. The menstrual cycle
- D. The “Nine Qualities”
- E. Sexual frequency
- F. Impotence
- G. Divorce and Levirate Marriage

5. Contemporary Ethical Issues

- A. Circumcision
- B. Puberty
- C. Masturbation
- D. Homosexuality
- E. Transvestitism
- F. Castration
- G. Androgyny and Transexuality
- H. Premarital Sex
- I. Abortion
- J. Intimate Seclusion
- K. Adultery
- L. Incest
- M. Prostitution
- N. Pornography

6. Summary: *The Song of Songs*-Love Poetry or Godly Communion?