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Incest and Other Uncleanness
18: 6-21

Incest and Other Uncleanness DIG: What is the meaning of holiness? Why is Molech listed here in the midst of an entire chapter about sexual immorality? What was so abominable about the worship of Molech? What sin is likened to the sin in the worship of Molech?

REFLECT: Why do you think that all these mitzvot, except Niddah (18:19), are directed at men? It's not that women are not sinners, but they are often abused. This chapter is very contemporary. Men have not changed much. Women are still abused. Just watch the news.

The way we express our sexuality should draw a clean line of distinction between us and the rest of the world.



Coming on the heels of the high, holy chapters of **purity** (**to see link click Bj – The Mitzvot of Purification**), it seems strange to plunge into a litany of forbidden **sexual** relationships. They are commandments which define **sexual** morality. The main thrust of the chapter is a lengthy list of detailed **statutes** (Hebrew: *hachukkim*, meaning *to write into law permanently*) and **ordinances** (Hebrew: *hammishpatim*, meaning *a judgment of the court*) about abstaining from the abhorrent **sexual** acts and **the curses** resulting from their violation **(18:6-23)**. It is

a jarring transition to go from the sublime imagery of the high priest emerging from the Most Holy Place to the blunt prohibitions on incest and other uncleanness. But these are also purity mitzvot. They are different from the previous ones because they come with a moral and ethical component.

The way we express our **sexuality** should draw a clean line of distinction between us and the rest of the world. As believers, we are still in the midst of the modern equivalent of **Egyptians** and **Canaanites**. Modern society is obsessed with **sex**, so **ADONAI** gave us **the seventh commandment** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Br – Do Not Commit Adultery**). Fed by the media, advertising images, the fashion and entertainment industry, the appetite for **sexual** display and deviance grows ever hungrier and more twisted. Free access to pornography, whether through the internet, television or print, has seared the conscience and sensibility of our culture. Immodest dress is the standard wardrobe for men and women even within churches and liberal synagogues.

The Torah tells us that **the sexual immorality** of **Egypt** and **Canaan** was practically legislated. This is why **God's Word** says: **You are not to engage in the practices . . . nor are you to live by their laws (18:3). Rashi explains that their practices refer to matters etched into the fabric of the society, so basic to the culture that they are observed as if they were laws.** It is against this backdrop of modern society that **ADONAI** calls us to not do as **the Egyptians** and **the Canaanites** did. We are to be a completely different breed of people.

In the First Century, **sexual** immorality was intrinsically connected to the popular worship systems. Devotees to the gods followed their **sexual** exploits and imitated their basic behavior in temple rituals which incorporated "sanctified" prostitution. Roman culture, for all its austere talk of moderation, was one of perversity, indulgence and depredation. In the midst of the **sexually** charged atmosphere of the First Century, the believers who lived at that time stood out as a people quite set apart.

Abstaining from **sexual** immorality was one of the warnings of the Jerusalem council and a frequent caution in the epistles. In passage after passage the apostles encouraged the disciples of **Yeshua** to live set apart and free from immorality. More than that, we are told to dress modestly. We are not to wear clothing that advertises our bodies. **Likewise, the women, when they pray, should be dressed modestly and sensibly in respectable attire, not with elaborate**

hairstyles and gold jewelry, or pearls, or expensive clothes. Rather, they should adorn themselves with what is appropriate for women who claim to be worshiping God, namely, good deeds (First Timothy 2:9-10). Believers are supposed to look different. According to biblical standards, it should be fairly obvious whether a person is one of faith.

Unfortunately, believers within our modern **Egypt** and **Canaan** have adopted the dress and behavior of the **sexually** deprived culture around us. We live in a **sex**-saturated society today. **Sins** that used to be kept in the dark are now flaunted in public. Our sense of shame has been replaced with brazen defiance. Norms that used to be accepted are now being challenged; people living abnormal lifestyles now want to be accepted as normal. **Sex** sells everything today. It is in every industry, all the time, year after year, day after day, every minute, every second. We cannot escape it. Like Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah, we are swimming in an ocean of **sexual** excess and perversion while trying to stay clean. **Sex** crimes are at all-time highs, while infidelity, divorce, and perversion are now commonplace. We are obsessed with **sex** to a degree perhaps never seen before in the world. God's solution is a total break from this culture. We are to be completely different. We should look different, act different, and be different. That is the meaning of holiness.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being a **God** of Holiness, Wisdom and Love. It is a privilege to meditate on many awesome qualities. **You** desire **Your** children to act and to think like **You**. **You** are both absolutely just and **You** never lose control in **Your wrath**. **You** do have **wrath (Romans 1:18)** but **You** are also **patient**. **The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some consider slowness. Rather, He is being patient toward you – not wanting anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9). Your patience** is not the overlooking of **sin** but rather to bring people to **repentance**.*

You** graciously desire to give life to the full. **I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10)!** When people turn away from **Your** offer of salvation and choose to put themselves first, they store up your **wrath** for themselves. **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. In unrighteousness they suppress the truth, because what can be known about God is plain to them – for God has shown it to them (Romans 1:18-19).

*Thank **You** that in **Your** desire for us to live holy lives, **You** do recognize our frailty and our need of having **You** to help us live pure lives. **As a father has***

compassion on his children,
so Adonai has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows our frame. He remembers that we are but dust. As for man, his days are like grass – he flourishes like a flower of the field, but when the wind blows over it, it is gone, and its place is no longer known. But the mercy of ADONAI is from everlasting to everlasting on those who revere Him (Psalm 103:13-17b). ***You*** *are a wonderfully faithful* ***Abba*** *to stand beside* ***Your*** *children to help us resist* ***the temptations*** *of life.* ***No temptation has taken hold of you except what is common to mankind. But God is faithful – He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can handle. But with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, so you will be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13).*** *Thank* ***You*** *for being such a wonderfully loving and holy* ***Father****! In* ***Yeshua's*** *holy name and power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*

Believers who teach that the Torah has been nullified by the B'rit Chadashah still, paradoxically, point to the Torah when it comes to determining a standard for **sexual** morality. When necessary to take a stand against homosexuality or some other deviance, they find themselves scrambling to find **Leviticus 18**. Yet, those who advocate for their own favorite form of immorality will often respond by pointing out that the Torah has been done away with. Needless to say, the Torah has not been done away with, and the commands of **sexual** morality are still our blueprint for living, with the consequences still in place.

The implication of the mitzvot of **Leviticus 18** is not simply that certain **sexual** relations are prohibited, but that monogamous, heterosexual relations between a husband and **wife** are permissible and sanctioned by the Torah. This is the reason for the blessing in the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony: **Blessed are You, LORD, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us regarding forbidden unions . . . and permitted us to marry women through the chuppah and dedication (Blessing of Betrothal).**

Drawing near and nakedness (18:6): The Torah begins the mitzvot of **sexual** morality with a general statement. **None of you is to draw near** (Hebrew: *karav*) **to anyone who is a close relative in order to have sexual relations; I am ADONAI (18:6). The rabbis understand it, in this instance, to include both male and female because as Rashi points out, the following verb is cast in the plural, rather than in the singular, as one would expect.** A person might otherwise suppose that these prohibitions applied only to men, but

not to women. From **18:6** onwards, it has been understood that the prohibitions apply to both genders.

We should also notice that the euphemism the Torah uses here for **sexual** intimacy in *karav*, meaning *to draw near*, the same expression that is used earlier in **Leviticus** to refer to entering **the Presence of God** in **His** Tabernacle. In parashah Vayikra (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Af – Parashah**) the same expression is used in **1:2** to refer to entering **the Presence of God** in **His Tabernacle** (see **Ai – The Burnt Offering: Accepted by God**). The book began with the words: **If a man will bring near** (*karav*) **from you something brought near** (*korban*) . . . From this we learn that entering the presence of **YHVH** is comparable to this, the most intimate and sacred level of human interaction. **The sages understood *karav* in this context to mean any behavior which might incite sexual activity; for example, even flirting, kissing, or caressing.** A second euphemism is the term **nakedness** (Hebrew: *ervah*). **Uncovering** one's **nakedness** is understood to mean engaging in **sexual** relations. **In rabbinic language, an *ervah* is any person with whom sexual relations is forbidden.**[304]

Your father's nakedness (18:7-8): The Torah euphemistically refers to **a man's wife** as **his nakedness**. **You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness.** Forbidding **a man** from uncovering **his father's nakedness** should probably be understood as a general prohibition against incest with one's **mother** or adultery with one's **step-mother**. **You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness (18:7-8).**

Your sister's nakedness (18:9): One's **sister** is forbidden, whether **she** is one's full **sister** or one's paternal or maternal **sister**. **You are not to have sexual relations with your sister, the daughter of your father or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home or elsewhere** (meaning born out of wedlock)**. Do not have sexual relations with them. Leviticus 20:17** sheds light on the punishment: **The man** was to publicly banished from the covenant community, **he has dishonored his sister and will be held responsible.** And if **his sister** consented, **she** would also be banished.

Your children and grandchildren's nakedness (18:10): You are not to have sexual relations with your son's daughter or with your daughter's daughter. Do not have sexual relations with them, because they are your

own flesh and blood. Naturally, this implies that **sexual** relations with **his** own daughter, a far closer relative, are forbidden as well.

Your half-sister's nakedness (18:11): Lest one suppose that **a daughter** born of the union of one's **father** and **a woman** other than one's **mother** is permissible, this verse prohibits it. **You are not to have sexual relations with your father's wife's daughter, brought up in your father's family, because she is** to be viewed as **your sister; do not have sexual relations with her.**

Your aunt and uncle's nakedness (18:12-14): This passage goes on to prohibit relations with one's **aunt**, whether paternal or maternal, and **the wife** of one's uncle. **You are not to have sexual relations with your father's sister, because she is your father's close relative. You are not to have sexual relations with your mother's sister, because she is your mother's close relative. You are not to disgrace your father's brother by having sexual relations with his wife, because she is your aunt. Leviticus 20:20** tells us that the penalty is not that **they** will be put to **death**, or even exiled, but that, at **death**, **they** will not have any descendants within **Isra'el** to carry on **their** name.[305]

Your daughter-in-law's nakedness (18:15): Relations with a **daughter-in-law** is prohibited. **You are not to have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law; because she is your son's wife. Do not have sexual relations with her** because **she** had become a close relative through marriage to **his** son. The prohibition is a great mercy for **the daughter-in-law**, who is therefore protected from becoming a **sexual** slave to multiple **men** in the household.

Your sister-in-law's nakedness (18:16): Relations with **the wife** of one's **brother** is forbidden. **You are not to have sexual relations with your brother's wife, because this is your brother's prerogative.** This prohibition is understood to extend even if **she** is divorced. The only exception would be the case of a levirate marriage (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Et – Levirate Marriage**).

A woman, her children, and granddaughter's nakedness (18:17): It is forbidden to have **sexual** relations with both **your wife** and any of **her** offspring. **You are not to have sexual relations with both your wife and her daughter, nor are you to have sexual relations with her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter. The daughter and granddaughters were close relatives of hers, and** had come under **the man's** roof for protection. To exploit

them **sexually would be shameful.**

A sister's nakedness (18:18): You are not marry a woman to be a rival (Genesis 16:4, 29:21 and 30:24; First Samuel 1:6) with her sister and have sexual relations with her while her sister is still alive. This verse is prohibiting **a man** from marrying **his wife's sister** while **his wife is still living**. Therefore, this verse is a general prohibition against polygamy.

Niddah (18:19): You are not to approach a woman in order to have sexual relations with her when she is unclean from her time of niddah (see **Cn – Female Menstrual Uncleanness: Niddah**)**.** This would make **him** equally ritually impure **(15:24** with **15:19-23)**, thereby increasing the chances of spreading ritual uncleanness in the camp. That was a risk that no-one was to take **(15:31**.

Adultery and uncleanness (18:20): For good measure, the Torah reminds us that to lie with another **man's wife** is adultery, and it is forbidden. This is **the seventh commandment** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Br – Do Not Commit Adultery**). **You are not to go to bed with your neighbor's wife and thus become unclean with her.** To do so is to contaminate oneself. We learn here that ritual uncleanness can be caused by **sexual** immorality. No purification from uncleanness arising from immorality is given. We will learn before the end of the chapter that uncleanness arising from **sexual** immorality can defile both the people and the land.[306]



Molech (18:21): The Torah anticipated the despicable worship of **Molech**. **You are not to let any of your children be sacrificed to Molech, thereby profaning the name of your God; I am ADONAI. Molech** was an old **Canaanite** idol, into whose worship the Israelites gradually became drawn. The usual

description given of this god is that of a hollow image made of brass, and having a human body with the head of an ox. The idol was made of bronze with hands extended. In sacrificing it, the image was heated by a fire within. The parents then place their babies into the red-hot hands of the idol, while the noise of drums and cymbals drowned out the cries of the little sufferers. It is also said that there were seven chapels connected with the idol, which were to be entered according to the relative value of the offering presented; only those who offered children being allowed to enter the seventh.[307]

We must ask, why is this mitzvah listed here in the midst of an entire chapter about **sexual** immorality? Wouldn't it be better placed in a passage dealing with idolatry? Obviously, the sacrifice of the children to **Molech** and the abominable practices of **sexual** immorality are not completely disconnected. Both were practiced by **the Canaanites**. Both had defiled the land and **the Canaanite** nations. Both are reasons why **the Canaanites** were expelled from the land. But one thing is for sure, the more immoral a society becomes, the more disposable the children of the society become. Today, abortion is the most obvious example of this.

The main reason the Adversary so desires to twist our **sexuality** away from the healthy, monogamous marital relationships is that he desires to hurt, damage and destroy the nuclear family. To the wicked one, no child is better a conceived one, an illegitimate child is better than a legitimate one, a defected child of incest is better than a whole child and an aborted child is the best of all. The Torah means to teach us that **sexual** immorality and the sacrifice of children are not at all unrelated issues. To indulge in **sexual** immorality is to sacrifice children, in one way or another.[308]

All these mitzvot point to the need of a Savior. **And the Torah came into the picture so that the offense would proliferate; but where sin proliferated, grace proliferated even more (Romans 5:20).** One of the reasons **YHVH** gave **the Torah** was to cause us to **sin** more (see the commentary on **Exodus Dh – ADONAI and the Torah**). No matter how great our **sin** becomes, **God's grace** overflows beyond it and abundantly exceeds it. No wonder **Paul** wrote that **God's grace is enough for** us **(Second Corinthians 12:9a). The Torah** has never been a means of salvation during any Dispensation. **Paul** has already declared that **Abraham** was righteous completely apart from any good works **he** accomplished, and several years before **he** was **circumcised** and centuries before **the Torah** was given by **Moshe** (see the commentary on **Romans Be – The Sign of Justification**).

All this happened so that just as sin (Greek: *a ‘amaptia,* meaning, *sin nature*) **ruled by means of death, so also grace might rule through causing people to be considered righteous, so that they might have eternal life** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**)**, through Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord (Romans 5:21).** Here, we see our **[sin nature]** being personified, since **it reigns** as king. Thus, two realms or kingdoms are spelled out. No middle ground is given. This prepares us so that, as believers, can live a holy separated life, disengaged from our **[sin nature]**, no longer compelled to obey it.