

Stories of Men and Women in the Talmud  
Class 5 – The Harlot and Spiritual Transformation  
Melton Gesher at the JCC – November 7, 2012

Book of Genesis chapter 38, especially verses 26, 27 - 29

Book of Joshua chapter 2, verses 1 – 16, 23 – 24; chapter 6, verses 24 - 25

Mechilta on Sefer Shmot

When Yitro saw that God has taken the Israelites out of Egypt, he exclaimed: 'Now I know that God is greater than all other gods!' (Shemot 18:11). Yitro himself had worshipped all manner of idolatry, for he states '...all other gods.' Naaman, however, acknowledged God even more, for he states 'Now I know that there are no other gods on earth save for the God of Israel' (II Melakhim 5:15). But Rachav the Zonah surpassed both of them, for she said 'For God your Lord is God in heavens above, AND upon earth below!'

Rashi's commentary to Sefer Yehoshua chapter 2, verse 15

The use of the definite article in the phrase 'She lowered them by THE rope through THE window' (2:15) is a reference to the very same rope and window that her paramours would use to ascend to her chambers. She thus proclaimed: 'Master of the Universe! By these very things I transgressed, let me now achieve absolution by them!'

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Megilla, page 14b

Rav Nachman said: 'Chulda the Prophetess (*see II Melakhim 22:11-20*) was a descendent of Yehoshua...Rav Eina the Elder raised an objection from the following text: 'Eight prophets who were also priests were descended from Rachav the Harlot. These are Neriah, Baruch, Serayah, Machseyah, Yirmiyah, Chilkiyah, Chanamel and Shalum' (*individuals all associated with the kin of Yirmiyah the First Temple Prophet and Priest, and almost all mentioned in Yirmiyahu Chapter 32*). Rav Yehuda added: Chulda the Prophetess was also one of her descendents.' Said Rav Nachman: Rachav converted and became married to Yehoshua.

**The Tzizit and the Harlot** - Sifrei Numbers 115. See also Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Menahot, page 44a

**I. Prologue**

Rabbi Nathan said:

“There is no commandment in the Torah, however light, whose reward is not given in this world; as for its reward in the world-to-come, I know not how much it is. Go and learn this from the commandment of *tzizit*!”

## II. His Quest: The Rendezvous

Once a certain man, who was scrupulous about the commandment of *tzizit*, heard that there was a harlot in one of the distant cities by the sea who took 400 gold pieces for her hire.

He sent her 400 gold pieces, and she fixed a time for him.

When his time arrived, he came and sat down at the entrance of her house.

Her maid entered and said to her:

"The man who sent you the 400 gold pieces has come, and is sitting at the entrance."

She said: "Let him enter."

When he entered, she had prepared for him seven beds, six of silver and one of gold, and between each bed there was a ladder of silver but the topmost ladder was of gold.

She ascended and sat on the topmost bed, she being naked.

He too ascended in order to sit naked beside her.

## III. The Slap in the Face

Came his four *tzitzit*, and slapped him on the face!

He slipped down, and sat on the ground.

She too slipped down, and sat on the ground.

She said to him: "By the Roman Capitol! [or by the goddess of love, Isis]

I will not let you go until you tell me what blemish you saw in me!"

He said: "By the [Temple] service! I have not seen a woman as beautiful as you!

But God has given us a certain commandment called '*tzizit*, 'and it is written twice regarding it: 'I am the Lord your God': I am the one who in the future will exact punishment, and I am the one who in the future will pay reward.

Now they have appeared to me as four witnesses!"

She said to him: " By the [Temple] service! I will not let you go until you tell me your name, the name of your town, the name of your teacher, and the name of your school where you study the Torah!" He wrote this down, and handed it to her.

## IV. Her Quest

She arose and apportioned all her possessions: a third to the [Roman] Government, a third to the poor, and a third she took with her in her hand. And she went to the school of Rabbi Meir [or Rabbi Hiyya].

She said to him: "Master, make me a proselyte!"

He said to her. "My daughter, perhaps you have set your eye on one of the students?"

She took out the writing, and gave it to him.<sup>1</sup>

*His Happy Ending (Version A):*

He [the Rabbi] said to him [the student]:

<sup>1</sup> Rashi explains that the information on the note would not have been sufficient to justify allowing the prostitute to convert in order to marry. However she retold the whole event that lay behind the note. Her motive for conversion was "the great miracle that occurred when the *tzizit* hit the student in the face."

"Go and enjoy your acquisition!  
Those beds which she had prepared for you illicitly, she shall prepare for you permissibly!"  
Such is the [or your] reward [for observing the commandment of *tzitzit*] in this world; as for the world-to-come, I know not how much it is.

*Her Happy Ending (Version B):*  
He [the Rabbi] said to her [the newly converted woman]:  
"Go and enjoy your acquisition!  
Those beds which were prepared illicitly, shall be prepared permissibly!"  
Such is his reward in this world; as for the world-to-come, I know not how much it is.

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Book of Numbers chapter 15, verses 37- 41

- (1) An identity tag<sup>i</sup> on one's clothes showing one belongs to God
- (2) A pedagogic reminder to behave according to the mitzvot all day long.
- (3) A priestly garment to raise all Jews to the level of holiness, of holy community, a priestly kingdom.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Menachot, page 43a

The sages say: You can buy *tzitzit* from a non-Jewish merchant although they [the sages] said that it is forbidden to sell a *Tallit* with *tzitzit* to a non-Jew until one takes off the *tzitzit*. What is the reason? This is what they said: On account of a prostitute.”

Rashi's Commentary

A person should not sell his *tzitzit* to a non-Jew lest that non-Jew wear those *tzitzit* in order to visit a Jewish prostitute, who might mistake that man for a Jew.

The Seven beds and the Ladders

- 1) Seven Heavens
- 2) Jacob's Ladder
- 3) The Ladder of Rav Amram

**The Single Mitzva Theory** – Mishna, Tractate Kidushin, chapter 1, mishna 10

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ONE WHO PERFORMS ONE MITZVAH IS WELL REWARDED, HIS DAYS ARE PROLONGED AND HE INHERITS THE LAND.  
BUT ONE WHO DOES NOT PERFORM ONE MITZVAH, GOOD IS NOT DONE TO HIM, HIS DAYS ARE NOT PROLONGED AND HE DOES NOT INHERIT THE LAND.

Maimonides' Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance, Chapter 3

Accordingly, each person should see themselves during the whole year as if they are half innocent and half guilty. And they should see the whole world in the same way – as if it is half innocent and half guilty. If a person commits one sin, then they have brought themselves and the entire world to the judgment [literally, the scale] of guilt and has caused them destruction. If a person performs a single mitzvah, then they have brought themselves and the entire world to the judgment of innocence and caused them redemption and salvation.

Mishna, Tractate Makkot 3: 16/17

The Holy One wanted to grant merit to Israel, therefore God multiplied for them the Torah and its commandments

Maimonides Commentary on the Mishna, Makkot 3:16

It is one of the basics of the faith of the Torah that if a human being keeps even one mitzvah of the 613 performed properly without any other ulterior motive in the world, that is, performed out of love, then he merits the world to come. That is why Rabbi Hanania says due to the multiplicity of mitzvot it is unavoidable that one shall perform [at least] one of them in the course of one's whole life - perfectly. So by virtue of that act one merits the soul's immortality.

**B. The Pupil, the Harlot and the Fringe Benefits<sup>i</sup> (TB Menahot 44a)  
by Warren Zev Harvey<sup>i</sup> (Prooftexts 6 (1986), pages 259 - 264**

**"Who is a hero?" (Pikei Avot 4:1)<sup>i</sup>**

In at least some sense, the pupil is a heroic figure. He conquers his lustful inclination; and have not our Sages taught: "Who is a hero? He who conquers his inclination!" (Pirkei Avot 4:1)? **Having followed his heart (lust) all the way to one of the cities by the sea, and having followed his eyes up the precious ladders toward the woman who was more beautiful than any he had ever seen ("I have not seen a woman as beautiful as you"),**

**the pupil desists at the last moment, and refuses to go a whoring after them.** It is surely this heroic act of will power which impresses the harlot, inspiring her to give up her harlotry, to convert to Judaism, and to marry the pupil.

Yet the pupil is more a **comic figure** than a heroic one .... Who can easily forget the picture of this pupil, climbing excitedly up the ladders half-naked, and then getting slapped in the face by his fringes? ... What do we know about him, except that he was "scrupulous about the commandment of fringes"?.... We are not told of any other character trait of his which might induce us to think of him as a hero. Befitting a comic figure, he is absolutely ignorant of the process which brings him his reward at the end of the story. **He thought he was trading this worldly happiness for otherworldly happiness, when in fact he was trading a brief round of illicit this worldly happiness for a lifetime of permitted this worldly happiness.** He seems, moreover, to have had no suspicion why the harlot asked for his name and the names of his town, teacher, and school. We can easily imagine his surprise when Rabbi Meir tells him, "Go and enjoy your acquisition!" He presumably had no inkling that the harlot is no longer a harlot, that she has converted to Judaism, and that she intends to marry him. "What acquisition?" we can hear him saying. His unawareness gives rise to the comic irony of the whole situation.

**The real heroic figure in the story is, of course, the harlot.** While we do not know if the pupil is handsome, we know she is beautiful. We know also that she is eminent and wealthy: she asks 400 gold pieces for her services; is famed far beyond her city; employs a maid who announces visitors; owns silver and gold beds; has other "possessions"; and probably enjoys connections with the Government, to whom she gives a third of her wealth. In addition, we see that she is generous, for she gives another third of her wealth to the poor. While the pupil's act of will power consists in his refraining from one act of sexual intercourse, hers consists in giving up her lucrative practice and changing her entire life. While the pupil is ignorant of the events which lead to his this worldly reward, she has been actively responsible for them.

### **The Turning Point**

**The turning point in the relationship between the pupil and the harlot is the incident with the fringes.** Prior to that, it is he who pursues her: he hears of her; he travels to her city; he enters her house; he follows her up to the topmost bed. After that incident, it is she who pursues him: she follows him down the ladders; she sits down next to him; she travels to his town and to his school, and searches out his teacher; and she, finally, arranges to marry him. Prior to the incident, he is drawn from Torah to sin; after it, she is drawn from sin to Torah.

Immediately after that turning point, the harlot takes charge of the pupil; twice she tells him, "I will not let you go until . . .," and twice he complies with her request. The pupil, after his one dramatic act of will power, is never dynamic or impressive. Having descended from the beds, he does not explain himself to the harlot until prodded by her, and then refers not - as we might expect - to the religious duty of observing all of God's commandments (which, according to the biblical text, is what the fringes are supposed to remind us of), but to the issue of reward and punishment in the world-to-come; i.e., **he does not pit religious duty against hedonism, but explains himself on the grounds of hedonism....**

*What about the harlot's motivation?* While the pupil's motivation is stated in the story, hers is not. Is she too motivated by considerations of reward and punishment in the world-to-come? Possibly. However, if this were her whole motivation, she might have reason to give up harlotry and perhaps also to convert to Judaism, but why marry the pupil? Moreover, she is clearly impressed more by the pupil's power to refuse her carnal beauty than by his exegesis of Scripture. Significantly, she does not ask him about the world-to-come, but about his teacher and the school where he studies the Torah. Her decision to convert thus seems to be motivated primarily by an appreciation of the Torah and its

commandments as providing values more formidable than the material ones she had known, and her decision to marry the pupil seems to be motivated primarily by his plucky commitment to the Torah and its commandments. Rashi infers from the story that she converted "for the sake of God" (*leshem shamayim*), i.e., for disinterested religious motives; and this inference seems amply justified. Acting for the sake of reward, the pupil ironically inspired the harlot to act "for the sake of God."

### Role Reversal

....Rabbi Meir's [Rabbi Hiyya, in alternative versions] states, "Go and enjoy your acquisition!" "*Miqqakh*," the Hebrew word for "acquisition" (or "purchase" or "bargain" or "goods"), is derived from the root *lqlkh* ("to take"), used by the Bible with regard to a man's "taking" a wife.<sup>1</sup> The expression, "Go and enjoy your acquisition," was apparently a stereotyped charge given to the groom, particularly in cases where there was some question about the propriety or permissibility of the bride (cf. TB Ketubot 10a-b). Given that in our story it is the woman who has actively initiated the betrothal, the stereotyped expression is so out of place as to be effectively humorous. It is also true, however, that there is a good deal to say for the variant reading found in our editions of TB Menahot 44:

He said to her: "Go and enjoy your acquisition!" Those beds which she had prepared for him

illicitly, she now prepared for him permissibly.

The role reversal here is striking! Addressing the stereotyped charge to the woman, Rabbi Meir uses it in accordance with the facts of the case, but contrary to the stereotype; and this serves to underscore her exceptional personality. Furthermore, the expression, addressed to the ex-courtesan, is especially apt: **the pupil had set out to acquire her services, but she wound up acquiring him; she has been transformed from purchaser to purchaser!**

Whichever ending you prefer, it remains clear that the harlot is the active, heroic figure in the story. It is also clear that the incident with the fringes changed her life more thoroughly than the pupil's; and if it also changed his, it is only as a result of its having first changed hers. If you wish, moreover, to say that the "reward" for the commandment of fringes mentioned by Rabbi Nathan is hers as well as his, then it is worthwhile to call attention to the use of the word "*sakhar*" in the Hebrew text. This word is used to designate both the harlot's "hire" and the commandment's "reward." The harlot exchanged the *sakhar* of prostitution for the *sakhar* of the commandments. Even in this world, there are rewards greater than 400 gold pieces.....

### The Impersonal: When Lust meets Greed

#### - Towards a Jewish Sexual Ethics of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century

by Rav Eliezer Berkovits, A Jewish Sexual Ethics (1976, *Essential Essays on Judaism*, Shalem Institute)

The story begins with a full recognition of the almost irresistible force of the sexual instinct. The young man is a talmudic scholar, a pious man. ...His sexual desire in this case is not a momentary temptation. The prostitute is extremely expensive, and he has to sacrifice a small fortune in order to get to her. He has to wait for the appointed day, and he has to go on a long journey, for she lives in a city "by the sea." When he arrives, he has to undergo the indignity of having to sit at her door until he is admitted. None of this deters him. He is like one **possessed**. ....Sexuality is that instinct in man which is most likely to lead him astray

after "his own heart and his own eyes." If our young Torah student dedicated himself to the strictest observance of the *tzitzit* commandment, it was due to the fact that **he realized his own weakness in the face of temptation and was struggling to overcome it.**

As he enters the prostitute's boudoir there is no meeting between them. It is **nudity that meets nudity; his sexual desire meets her greed.** It is an accommodation between a man who has been reduced to the pleasure principle, and a woman who has been reduced to cupidity. It is sex in its classically impersonal manifestation. What could be more impersonal than an appointment between lust and greed?

### ***Teshuvah*: Recalled from the Impersonal to the Interpersonal**

The fringes that take on a life of their own and slap his face are the symbolic expression of his own resistance. The merit of the mitzva saves him from complete failure. As he is about to sink into **the ecstasy of impersonality, a kind of an ego death**, he is called back to the personal level of his being, and tears himself away and sits on the ground. The sight of him on the ground calls her from the impersonality of prostitution. She sits down with him on the ground. They sit there, still naked, but no longer in the nudity of lust and desire, but in **the nakedness of their frail humanity, amidst the ruins of their human dignity.** And now, *mima'amakim* – "from the depths" – to use a phrase of the psalmist, they call to each other. "She said to him" and "he said to her," and so again and again. When he first heard about her, she was the celebrated prostitute whose fame was spread across the lands. He had not even set eyes on her; she was the anonymous symbol of sex to him. But now, sitting opposite each other on the ground, he recognizes her as the most beautiful woman he ever saw. **He acknowledges her in her full feminine dignity and is able to appreciate her beauty without the eyes of lust.**

When he first appeared at her door, he was **nameless**. He was "that man who sent her the four hundred pieces of gold." That was enough, nothing else mattered. But now she asks him about names: His name, the name of his city, the name of his rabbi, the name of the house of study where he learns Torah – so many names! Having emerged from the wilderness of impersonality, she is longing for personalization: Who are you, where do you come from, who made you what you are, and how was it achieved? **As she meets him as a person, she finds herself as one.** It is one of those revelational **I-Thou** encounters about which Martin Buber has taught us and which have within themselves the mystery of sudden transformation. It is redemption from impersonality. She comes out of it a changed human being. And so, we assume, does he. Finally, his struggles with the heart and the eyes that lead one astray are over. He has gained himself a new heart and he sees with new eyes. Now, the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* is fulfilled, not only in ritual observance, but also in recovered personal dignity.

### **The Note: A Pledge to be Redeemed**

The understanding between the man and the woman is subtly hinted at in the story. She says to him: Tell me your name and all the other names. But he does not tell. He writes it all down for her on a piece of paper, and "placed it into her hand." The text does not simply say that "he gave her the note," for that would have meant the mere technicality of conveying an object from one person to another, the purely physical act of handing over a piece of information. "He placed it into her hand" is the entrusting of something precious into safekeeping. It is not just handing over, it is communication. He did not answer her questions by word of mouth. He wrote it all down. "Please, do not forget – this is who I am. That is where I come from. This is how I became what I am. All this I place into your hand. Keep it."

The importance of the note is revealed at the end of the story. The rabbi asks her: is it perhaps that one of the students appeals to your eyes? Once again the eyes appear in the story as doors of temptation, against which the young man sought protection by means of the *mitzva* of the fringes. Now, this is actually what she wants, one of the rabbi's students. But she does not answer, she does not explain, she does not defend herself. She is silent. And as he, without answering her questions, entrusted the note into her keeping, so now she, in silence, hands over the note to the rabbi. And once again the phrase is used which corresponds exactly to the phrase used for his entrusting the note into her hands. The text does not say, "she gave the note to him," but instead, that she brought the note out from her hand and gave it to him. The rabbi sees<sup>i</sup> it and accepts her. "Go and take possession of what you have acquired." It would seem to us that these words are chosen intentionally to make the point of her transformation. Originally, in her state of impersonality, she wanted possession in its impersonal form. She did not want him, but his gold pieces. But now that **the impersonality of their relationship has been redeemed**, it is person who takes the place of possession.

Though redeemed from his lust, the man is fully open to the woman's beauty. She, on the other hand, does not hide the fact that she desires the man, but the whole man, in his bio-psychic completeness. The story ends with a statement of the sensual enjoyment of their union, that is seen as the this-worldly reward for the careful observance of the *mitzva* that protects a man against going astray after his "heart" and his "eyes."

### **The Moral of the Story: The Epitome of Jewish Sexual Ethics**

This story contains **all the basic principles of a Jewish sex ethics**. It recognizes the force of the sexual instinct while illustrating how this instinct in its impersonal givenness depersonalizes a human being. It need not be repressed. Indeed, it can be raised to the personal level of human existence as the natural outcome of the personalization of the relationship between a man and a woman who encounter each other in the completeness of their bio-psychic being. Finally, personalization is twofold. It is accomplished between the Jew and his God, and between the man and the woman. Thus they are rejoicing together in the presence of God. Once redeemed from the bondage of the impersonal, neither the eye nor the heart has to be denied. They lead, but do not lead astray.(p. 117- 120)

**The fully personalized sexual union is the fully humanized one.** It relates one at the same time to the Creator as well as to a fellow being in the wholeness of each other's humanity.<sup>i</sup> What in nature is assumed to be purely biological is integrated in its humanized form into the bio-psychic structure of man. However, since humanization implies also the acknowledgment of the divine purpose of the sexual function, the personalized and thus humanized sex act becomes a *mitzva*, legalistically formulated, a divine commandment; in its existential quality, it is an ethical deed within the structure of a deocentric personal life. In fact, talmudic texts occasionally call the sex act a *devar mitzva*, a matter of mitzva, not only in its God-relatedness, but also as what takes place on the interpersonal level between a man and a woman. (p. 112- 113)

The humanizing of the impersonal does not in any way take away from enjoyment of the sexual act. It does not attempt to "spiritualize" the act. It wants what it says, to humanize it, including also its full enjoyment within the bio-psychic human reality. In fact, the enjoyment itself is part of the living realization of Judaism. In talmudic times, a talmid hacham, a Jew who leads a life of piety informed by Jewish learning, would engage in the sexual act once a week. But it was customary to do so on the night of the Sabbath. R. Shlomo Yitzhaki (Rashi) explains the reason: "It is the night of joy, of rest, and of bodily pleasure." The context into which humanized sensuality is integrated brings about its joyous sanctification....The spiritual in man is never purely spiritual, as the biological is never purely biological. Thus,

we may say that it is not only the pleasure of the body that enhances the *oneg shabbat*, the joy of the Sabbath; it is also the joy of the Sabbath that dignifies the pleasure of the body. (p. 114-115)

Jewish sexual ethics can perceive the sexual act in its most humanized and personalized transformation as an act of sanctification. To sanctify oneself at the moment of intercourse is the ideal of sexual fulfillment. One may even say that the humanized transformation of the impersonal quality of the sexual instinct is the climax in man's striving for **sexual liberation**..

Contemporary sexual rebellion that wishes to do away with the taboos of this civilization has its justification. ...However, liberation from sexual codes that can no longer be supported by the basic affirmations of contemporary society throws man back once again into the domain of the biologically impersonal. Because of the **tremendous power of the sexual instinct**, man falls into the thrall of mighty impersonal forces when he liberates himself from social taboos. The sex act is not so much an act as a letting go. It is not man who acts; rather it is something that happens (the impersonal does not act) through man. This, of course, may be enjoyable for a while, but as man allows free entrance to the impersonal into his life, and as the impersonal gets hold of him with its powerfully driving energy, in the long run it cannot but depersonalize man as a whole, "dehumanizing" him far beyond the sexual aspect of his life. Freedom, like love, is of the very essence of personal existence. He who submits to the biologically impersonal is held captive by necessity, the essence of the impersonal. It is not enough to free oneself from meaningless taboos. If one wishes to be human, one has to commit one's freedom to personalizing the impersonal within man's biopsychic reality. (p. 114)

### **An Ethical Conversation in the House of Prostitution**

**by Jennie Rosenfeld**, *Talmudic Re-Readings: Toward a Modern Orthodox Sexual Ethics* (PhD, CUNY, 2008), pp. 216 – 226, 294 - 300

*He slipped down, and sat on the ground. She too slipped down, and sat on the ground.*

*She said to him: "By the Roman Capitol! [or by the goddess of love, Isis]*

*I will not let you go until you tell me what blemish you saw in me!"*

*He said: "By the [Temple] service! I have not seen a woman as beautiful as you!*

*But God has given us a certain commandment called 'tzizit' ..... Now they have appeared to me as four witnesses!"*

*She said to him: " By the [Temple] service! I will not let you go until you tell me your name, the name of your town, the name of your teacher, and the name of your school where you study the Torah!"*

*He wrote this down, and handed it to her.*

This is strange as we would have expected him to leave once he realizes what he was about to do and decides that he is not going to do it. There is nothing that mandates that he stay, and caution would dictate that he leave the situation as quickly as possible. However, by sitting down on the floor, the man simultaneously indicates that their intended sexual congress is over, while also making it clear that something has been left unfinished. He cannot simply leave the prostitute naked and alone on the top bed. Until this point there has been no direct communication between the man and the prostitute, though the context of their encounter has been laden with meanings for both. And the scholar just can't leave; he needs **conversation and closure, and he wants to speak, feeling that he owes it both to himself and to her to give an explanation.**

**The conversation which ensues is completely unexpected in the retinue of standard communication between man and prostitute;** it is fairly unique that the Torah scholar and the

prostitute engage in conversation beyond negotiating a price.<sup>1</sup> There is no haggling over money, nor any bawdiness and banter. They speak, face to face, whether naked or clothed the text does not say. The scholar speaks to the prostitute—human being to human being—and shares with her the epiphany which brought him running to the floor. Naked, the prostitute hears the words of Torah that can speak to this man from within the throes of desire, and can keep him doing what he feels is right even as his desire is still there. He shares the Torah with her as he might share it with a learned study partner. In that moment of speech, of revelation, of sharing, the differences between them are erased and all that remains is the **basic humanity** of each.

This woman revealed herself to him and he owes her an explanation. She is not Jewish and not learned, she is a prostitute who routinely agrees to the objectification which sex for money entails and who routinely reveals herself in this manner, she swears by a Roman deity and she is naked—and yet, he owes her an explanation and shares with her the motivating force that is closest to his heart. And she learns his name; we who read the story never learn his name, though the prostitute does. She has the discretion to conceal it. The fact that there is open conversation between them defines the encounter and relationship as one of individuals—of subjects communicating with one another through speech, rather than a subject using an object for a limited purpose.

The story has a fairytale ending of the prostitute's conversion and their marriage and life happily ever after with the same beds that she suggested to him illicitly now being used as the sanctified marital bed. It is a marriage of integrity. They felt desire and had a forbidden encounter on some level; and **rather than turn away from that past due to shame, they embrace it while transforming it**. The events of the story and the rabbi's relationship with the prostitute are **ethical from both sides**. The prostitute treats the rabbi as a human being when she gets off the bed and sits with him on the floor as an equal. And the rabbi treats the prostitute as a human being in speaking with her, face to face, and in giving her his name, breaking the anonymity of prostitute and client. Theirs is an ethical relationship throughout, despite the elements of transgression contained within it; the context of transgression in no way impacts the ethical treatment that they give to each other, as it potentially could.

The communication between the Torah scholar and prostitute in Menahot 44a is more open and real than [many other] communications between husband and wife in the Talmud<sup>i</sup>...This brings out is that being in **an ethical relationship doesn't always correlate to the halakhic legitimacy of the relationship**. The Talmud itself shows that just as a relationship between spouses can be unethical and dehumanizing so too can a forbidden relationship be ethical and uplifting, though it remains forbidden.