

Love, Lust and Longing: Men and Women in the Talmud
Class Two: Passion and Love – Of Torah and of Women
Melton Gesher at the JCC, October 17, 2012

Tosefta Tractate Yevamot 8, 7

Rabbi Akiva says: ‘Anyone who commits murder diminishes the image of God, as it says, “One who spills the blood of a man, because of that man his blood will be spilt, for in the image of God He made man”’ (Genesis 9:6)

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah says: ‘Anyone who does not engage in procreation diminishes the divine image, for it says, “for in the image of God He made man” and it is written immediately following’ “And as for you, be fruitful and multiply.”

Ben Azzai says: ‘Anyone who does not engage in procreation is a murderer and diminishes the divine image, for it says: “One who spills the blood of a man, because of that man his blood will be spilt, for in the image of God He made man, and as for you, be fruitful and multiply.”’

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said to him: ‘Ben Azzai, words are fine when accompanied by practice. There are those who interpret well and practice well, and there are those practice well but do not interpret will. You interpret well but do not practice well’.

Ben Azzai said to them: ‘What shall I do? My soul desires Torah. Let the world be sustained by the efforts of others!’

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kidushin, page 29b

Our Rabbis taught: If one has before him the commandment to study Torah and the commandment to marry a wife, he should first study and then marry. But if he cannot [live] without a wife, he should first marry and then study. Rav Yehudah said in Shmuel's name: The halachah is, [A man] first marries and then studies. Rabbi Yohanan said: [With] a millstone around the neck, shall one

study Torah! Yet they do not differ: the one refers to ourselves [Babylonians]; the other to them [those who live in Israel].

Rav Hisda praised Rav Hamnuna as a great man in the presence of Rav Huna. Said he to him, 'When he visits you, bring him to me. When he arrived, he saw that he wore no head-covering. 'Why have you no head-covering?' asked he. 'Because I am not married,' was the reply. Thereupon he [Rav Huna] turned his face away from him. 'See to it that you do not appear before me [again] before you are married,' said he. Rav Huna was thus in accordance with his views. For he had said: He who is twenty years of age and is not married spends all his days in sin. 'In sin' — can you really think so? — But say, spends all his days in sinful thoughts.

Rava said, and the School of R. Ishmael taught likewise: Until the age of twenty, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and waits. When will he take a wife? As soon as one attains twenty and has not married, He exclaims, 'Blasted be his bones!'

Rav Hisda said: I did better than my colleagues in that I married at sixteen. And had I married at fourteen, I would have said to Satan, An arrow in your eye.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ketubot page 61b – 63a

MISHNAH. IF A MAN FORBADE HIMSELF BY VOW TO HAVE INTERCOURSE WITH HIS WIFE BETH SHAMMAI RULED: [HE CAN DO SO UP TO A MAXIMUM OF] TWO WEEKS; BETH HILLEL RULED: [ONLY FOR] ONE WEEK. STUDENTS MAY GO AWAY TO STUDY THE TORAH, WITHOUT THE PERMISSION [OF THEIR WIVES FOR A PERIOD OF UP TO] THIRTY DAYS; LABOURERS [ONLY FOR] ONE WEEK.

THE TIMES FOR CONJUGAL DUTY PRESCRIBED IN THE TORAH (EXODUS 21:10) ARE: FOR MEN OF INDEPENDENCE, EVERY DAY; FOR LABOURERS, TWICE A WEEK; FOR ASS-DRIVERS, ONCE A WEEK; FOR CAMEL-DRIVERS, ONCE IN THIRTY DAYS; FOR SAILORS, ONCE

IN SIX MONTHS. THESE ARE THE RULINGS OF RABBI ELIEZER.

GEMARA ... STUDENTS MAY GO AWAY TO STUDY etc. For how long [may they go away] with the permission [of their wives]? — For as long as they desire.

But what is the proper behavior? — Rav said: One month studying and one month at home; for it is said in the Scriptures, “In the matter of the labor brigades, one goes and one comes month by month throughout all the months of the year.” (1 Chronicles 27:1) Rabbi Yohanan, however, said: One month studying and two months at home; for it is said in the Scriptures, “A month they were in Lebanon and two months at home.” (1 Kings 5:28)

THESE ARE THE WORDS OF R. ELIEZER. Rav Beruna stated in the name of Rav: The halachah follows Rabbi Eliezer.

Rav Adda bar Ahavah, however, stated in the name of Rav: This is the view of Rabbi Eliezer only but the Sages ruled: Students may go away to study Torah without the permission [of their wives for] two or three years. Rava stated: The Rabbis relied on Rav Adda bar Ahavah and act accordingly.

Thus Rav Rehumi who was frequenting [the school] of Rava at Mahuza used to return home on the eve of every Yom Kipur. On one occasion he was so engrossed in his studies [that he forgot to return home]. His wife was expecting [him every moment, saying.] ‘He is coming soon, he is coming soon’. As he did not arrive she became so distraught that tears began to flow from her eyes. He was [at that moment] sitting on a roof. The roof collapsed under him and he was killed.

How often are scholars to perform their marital duties? — Rav Yehudah in the name of Shmuel replied: Every Friday night — “That bringeth forth its fruit in its season.” (Psalms 1:4) Rav Yehudah, and some say Rav Huna, or again as others say, Rav Nahman, stated: This [refers to the man] who performs his marital duty every Friday night.

Yehudah the son of Rabbi Hiyya was the son-in-law of Rabbi Yannai. He went to study and every Sabbath eve he came home. Whenever he arrived the people saw a pillar of light moving before

him. Once he was so engrossed by his studies [that he forgot to return home]. Not seeing that sign Rabbi Yannai said to those [around him], 'Turn over his bed, for had Yehudah been alive he would not have neglected the performance of his marital duties'. "This [remark] was like an error that proceedeth from the ruler" (Ecclesiastes 10:5) for [in consequence] Yehudah's soul returned to its eternal rest.

Rabbi [Yehudah haNasi] was engaged in the arrangements for the marriage of his son ... into the family of Rabbi Jose ben Zimra. It was agreed that he should spend twelve years in study. When the girl was led before him he said to them, 'Let it be six years'. When they made her pass before him [a second time] he said, 'I would rather marry [her first] and then proceed [to the academy]'. He felt abashed before his father, but the latter said to him, 'My son, you have the mind of your creator; for in Scripture it is written first, "Thou bringest them in and plantest them" and later it is written, "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8) [After the marriage] he departed and spent twelve years at the academy. By the time he returned his wife had lost the power of procreation. 'What shall we do?', said Rabbi. 'Should we order him to divorce her, it would be said: This poor soul waited in vain! Were he to marry another woman, it would be said: The latter is his wife and the other his mistress.' He prayed for mercy to be vouchsafed to her, and she recovered.

Rabbi Hananiah ben Hakinai was about to go away to study towards the conclusion of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai's wedding. 'Wait for me', the latter said to him, 'until I am able to join you'. He, however, did not wait for him but went away alone and spent twelve years at the academy. By the time he returned the streets of the town were altered and he was unable to find the way to his home. Going down to the river bank and sitting down there he heard a girl being addressed thus: 'Daughter of Hakinai, O, daughter of Hakinai, fill up your pitcher and let us go!' 'It is obvious', he thought, 'that the girl is ours', and he followed her. [When they reached the house] his wife was sitting and sifting flour. She lifted up her eyes and seeing him, was so overcome with

joy that her soul departed. 'O, Lord of the universe', [the husband] prayed to Him, 'this poor soul; is this her reward?' And so he prayed for mercy to be vouchsafed to her and she was revived. Rabbi Hama ben Bisa went away [from home and] spent twelve years at the house of study. When he returned he said, 'I will not act as did ben Hakina'. He therefore entered the [local] house of study and sent word to his house...

[Here appears the story of Rabbi Akiva and Rachel]

Rav Yoseph the son of Rava [was] sent [by] his father to study under Rabbi Yoseph. They arranged for him [to stay there for] six years [after his marriage]. Having been there three years and the eve of the Day of Atonement approaching, he said, 'I would go and see my family'. When his father heard [of his premature arrival] he took up a weapon and went out to meet him. 'You have remembered', he said to him, 'your whore!' Another version: He said to him, 'You have remembered your dove!' They got involved in a quarrel and neither the one nor the other ate of the last meal before the fast.

Midrash Genesis Raba, Parshat Vayigash 95, chapter 46, verse 30 (from manuscript, brought in the Albeck page 1232)

Hananiah the son of Hakinai and Rabbi Shimon the son of Yohai went to study Torah with Rabbi Akiva in Bnei Berak. They were there for thirteen years.

Rabbi Shimon the son of Yohai used to send letters to his wife, and used to know what was happening to his family. Hananiah the son of Hakinai did not send letters to his wife and did not know what was happening to his family. His wife sent to him, "Your daughter is grown; come and find her a match." Rabbi Akiva perceived with the Holy Spirit and said, "Anyone who has a grown daughter should go and find her a match."

[He wished to enter his house but found that it was turned in a different direction.] What did he do? He went and sat by the well. He heard the voices of the water-drawers saying, "Daughter of

Hakinai, fill your pitcher and ascend."

She went, and he went after her, until he came into his house. Just as his wife saw him, her soul left her. {There are those who say that it returned.}