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The 7th Commandment

All anyone talks about anymore is sex. As well as being a multibillion-dollar industry, sex has become an unrestrained and evolving concept in the modern world, and is highly reflective of the moral attitude of a generation. But, even as society changes, as practices once unimaginable become commonplace, the torah, and the teachings and the lessons the torah imputes on people, will always remain the same. Thus, I believe, that by studying the torah and specifically the 7th commandment (you shall not commit adultery) the potential to reduce rates of adultery in the United States could exist for both Jews and people of other denominations alike. I am not proposing that everyone convert to Judaism or even become a torah scholar. But, to fix a predominant social problem of our era, I do believe studying the 7th commandment in depth and questioning the actions of a generation through the lens of a thousand year old law could potentially reduce rates of adultery in the modern world.

Before I delve into the specifics of the 7th commandment and evaluate how applying it to daily life could be beneficial to many people, it is important to know and analyze the facts surrounding contemporary divorce rates in order to investigate what popular opinion is about the subject. Beginning my search, I typed, “cheating” into Google. One of the first articles that popped up was [The Truth About Deception](#), the first quote in the article being “While the desire to cheat is a fundamental, and unconscious, part of our human nature, not everyone will be unfaithful. Like most of our behaviors, infidelity is not intentional, but, for the most part, it is situationally driven.” Is this really the thought process being propagated throughout popular society? How could adultery,

cheating on the person to whom your soul has been matrimonially bonded, be subject to influence by something as trivial as a situation? And why is the desire to cheat a fundamental? Evidently, with these opinions so easily obtained, it is not hard to see why adultery has become so normalized and easily excused in society. According to the article [The Young and Restless: Why Infidelity is Rising Among 20-Somethings](#), “Between 1991 and 2006, the numbers of unfaithful wives under 30 increased by 20% and husbands by a whopping 45%. These numbers come from a study conducted by David Atkins of the University of Washington Center for the Study of Health and Risk Behaviors.” This outstanding statistic only further proves how commonplace adultery has become. Rates of adultery are steadily rising in the United States. Once again, this phenomenon has been credited to being “a matter of opportunity.” But, if our love lives, the parts of our being that are meant to be so deeply spiritual, connecting, and ephemeral are now subject to situational folly, than I would argue that as proof that the moral attitude of this generation has begun to stray from laws that should be fundamental to human nature, such as the 7th commandment.

Thus, I believe that it is important to study and understand the 7th commandment, in order to use it as a moral reference point to analyze and potentially fix the growing rates of adultery in the United States. Wisdom from the torah is not infused with jaded cynicism, as most sources of knowledge and advice are, and can provide fantastic insight. A good place to start understanding Jewish views of adultery is in the Talmud. There is a statement in the Talmud, which says, “A person does not commit a transgression unless the spirit of folly enters him,” and the text, which is cited in support, is a phrase from the Torah, “If any man’s wife goes aside” (When One Goes Astray p. 1). The connection in

Judaism is between the spirit of ill will and the act of cheating itself. Judaism sees this transgression as the one that is irrational, while all other sins are not. In this way adultery is the prototype of all sins. As the Zohar explains, “when a soul descends to this world, half of it descends into one body (the body of a man) and half of it descends into another body (the body of a woman). This is why we find the expression half a body since within each them there resides no more than half a soul.” (Wisdom From Sinai p. 120). Thus, if human beings were joined in marriage to have one soul, then adultery would rip that spiritual connection, and therefore taint the divinity and sanctity of the marriage and their souls. Marriage is also seen as the union between the Jewish people and god. According to the article When One Goes Astray, “the Jewish people as a whole are regarded as the “wife” of G-d. The bond forged between them at Sinai was like a marriage. And so every time a Jew commits a sin, however slight, he is betraying the covenant, the “marriage contract” between himself and G-d. He is guilty of spiritual adultery, unfaithfulness to his Divine partner. Therefore breaking the bond of marriage by committing adultery is breaking a bond with god. Sins such as adultery are folly and ill natured because they serve to sever the link between man and god. With these interpretations of the 7th commandment, one can derive the moral underpinnings for how to keep institutions such as marriage sacred, and thus apply them to people’s lives.

With this in mind, I would like to extract some of the wisdom and information that is born from analyzing and studying the 7th commandment and show its contemporary application in aiding the rising divorce rate in the country. If people were to view marriage as a sacred unity of the soul with another and with god, than they would be able to reflect upon their actions in a more profound way and critically think about their

potential to engage in extra marital activity. I believe that it is the reflexive thinking process that will allow people to view their own lives in a more deep and profound way, and thus make adultery seem less enticing. I also believe that if people were to understand stories from the torah like *isha sotah*, (the wife who is suspected of adultery), learn from its interpretations, and internalize some of the moral teachings, than the rate of adultery would be reduced. This would aid in reducing the divorce rate in the United States. For example, the Kabbalist interpretation of the *isha sotah* story “sees the story as a cosmic metaphor of the “marriage” between god and the “wayward” Jewish people, who are tested and eventually exonerated through the “bitter waters” of exile.” (Tasting Life’s Bitter Waters p. 2). If people were to learn, question, and internalize interpretations such as this than I believe adultery would become less commonplace.

In conclusion, I believe that studying the 7th commandment, and the torah, can provide contemporary insight into some of today’s social problems. It is important to look back upon history, on texts and knowledge that is far older than us and will far outlive us; in order to gain greater understanding of mans meaning and purpose in life. In this way, applying Jewish law and the teachings of the torah can aid people in their search to maintain morality, and to provide meaning in their own lives. Judaism and the torah act as moral guidelines and reference points and transcend age because their wisdom can always have contemporary applications.

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