

FOLLOWING TORAH STANDARDS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah in both of these parshiyot of the week seems to place a great deal of concentration on issues of sexuality and intimacy. Human sexual behavior in the eyes of the Torah forms one of the three bases of civilization and of a human being's relationship to its creator. The Torah views it as a matter of both physical and spiritual life and death.

In a very detailed fashion, the Torah outlines for us the liaisons between humans that are permitted and forbidden. These laws have been the basis of Jewish life and of much of the rest of humankind as well for millennia on end. The world has witnessed great swings in what is accepted as acceptable social and sexual behavior. However the principles of the Torah have remained unchanged, proven safeguards to family and society.

The Torah recognized sexuality as one of the driving forces of human existence. It literally is the primary force of human creativity. Such a powerful force needs to be guided and harnessed for good purposes. Unchecked it can lead to destruction and disaster.

So the Torah regulated it and channeled it into productivity and creativity and away from wanton behavior and disastrous promiscuity. Today's society has set much looser norms in these matters and therefore the entire family structure, which is the backbone of society, is being endangered. The rabbis of the Talmud, foreseeing such a periodic decline in morality and sexual behavior, insisted that these laws be read publicly on Yom Kippur. The way to holiness and purity and to forgiveness lies in the observance of this code of behavior.

The Roman Catholic Church is currently deeply embroiled in its scandal of priestly pedophilia. Our society is also not free of this scourge that traumatizes and damages the lives of all involved, usually in a permanent fashion. When the perpetrators of such behavior hide behind religion and long frocks the damage done to society and faith is even greater.

There is no nice pedophile and these people should certainly not be protected at the potential expense of other victims. A society that tolerates such malefactors is complicit in the immorality and evil of their behavior. The Torah points out the severity of their behavior by indicating the severity of punishment that they are held to.

To the Torah it is clearly a matter of life and death that is involved and this type of serious judgment is intended to set a standard of behavior and of probity for the entire community. Because of the strength of this physical drive within us, the Talmud warned us that no one is above temptation or

abuse of trust. And, therefore, no one should be seen as being somehow above the law in these matters as well.

There is no escaping the standards of behavior that the Torah has set for us in these matters. And to emphasize the matter, these standards are repeated again in the Torah in order that we may benefit from this guidance and aspire truly to holiness and purity in ourselves, our families and community.

Shabat shalom,
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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com