



■ ENRICHING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ■ FOSTERING EXCELLENCE IN RABBINIC LEADERSHIP ■

# The Sacred Encounter: Jewish Perspectives on Sexuality

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**CCAR Press**

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**Section One: Study Tracks**

Track	Title	Notes
1	<u><a href="#">Marriage</a></u>	Intended for those offering premarital counseling, married couples, marriage counselors, or an adult education course on Judaism and marriage
2	<u><a href="#">LGBTQ Inclusion</a></u>	Intended for a welcoming/inclusion committee to study together, or for an adult education course on LGBTQ inclusion in a Jewish communal setting
3	<u><a href="#">Reform Jewish Perspectives</a></u>	Intended for a confirmation or post-confirmation class,* Reform Jewish professionals, Reform Jewish lay leaders, or an adult education course on Reform perspectives on sexuality
4	<u><a href="#">Social Justice and Human Rights</a></u>	Intended for a social action committee to study together, or for an adult education course on social justice/human rights within the realm of sex and sexuality
5	<u><a href="#">Sexual Ethics and Values</a></u>	Intended for an adult education course on how Jewish traditions and beliefs can influenced sexual ethics, values, and behaviors
6	<u><a href="#">WRJ/Sisterhood</a></u>	Intended for a Sisterhood or Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) group discussion series and/or book club
7	<u><a href="#">MRJ/Brotherhood</a></u>	Intended for a Brotherhood or Men of Reform Judaism (MRJ) group discussion series and/or book club
8	<u><a href="#">Teen Learning</a></u>	Intended for teens and those who work with them*

**Each track lists several subtopics that are covered in one or more chapters of *The Sacred Encounter*. You can opt to study just one chapter from each subtopic, dive into a particular subtopic and cover every chapter, or use some combination of the subtopics and chapters covered in each track for a longer period of study.**

*\*Be sure to review the chapters and determine which (or perhaps which excerpts) are age-appropriate for your particular group of teens.*

**Track 1: Marriage**

<b>Subtopic</b>	<b>Relevant Chapters</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Chapter 24:</b> Reading the Jewish Tradition on Marital Sexuality
<b>Procreation and Fertility</b>	<p><b>Chapter 1:</b> Sexuality: Human Biology versus Rabbinic Decree</p> <p><b>Chapter 33:</b> Unplanned Fatherhood</p> <p><b>Chapter 34:</b> Go and Learn from Abraham and Sarah: Jewish Responses to Facing Infertility</p>
<b>Infidelity and Sexual Misconduct: Jewish Values and Ethical Complexities</b>	<p><b>Chapter 7:</b> Spirit of Jealousy, Spirit of Holiness: Timeless Insights from a Time-Bound Text</p> <p><b>Chapter 26:</b> CCAR on Marital Sexual Infidelity</p> <p><b>Chapter 27:</b> Scenes from a Marriage</p> <p><b>Chapter 39:</b> When Alzheimer's Turns a Spouse into a Stranger: Jewish Perspectives on Loving and Letting Go</p> <p><b>Chapter 40:</b> The Role of <i>T'shuvah</i> in Sexual Transgressions</p> <p><b>Chapter 41:</b> I Do? Consent and Coercion in Sexual Relations</p> <p><b>Chapter 44:</b> Questioning Sexuality in Caribbean Reform Judaism: Two Perspectives</p>
<b>Ritual and Legal Innovation</b>	<p><b>Chapter 23:</b> Jewish Marriage Innovations and Alterations: From Commercial/Legal Transaction to Spiritual Innovation</p> <p><b>Chapter 19:</b> Embracing Lesbians and Gay Men: Reform Jewish Innovation</p> <p><b>Chapter 25:</b> The Ritual Sanctification of Same-Gender Relationships in Reform Judaism: An Eisegetical Approach</p> <p><b>Chapter 28:</b> <i>Taharat HaMishpachah</i>: A Renewed Look at the Concept of Family Purity</p> <p><b>Chapter 29:</b> Getting Our <i>Get</i> Back: On Restoring the Ritual of Divorce in</p>

	American Reform Judaism
<b>Sexual Intimacy</b>	<b>Chapter 8:</b> The <i>Kavanah</i> of the Bedroom: Sex and Intention in Jewish Law <b>Chapter 9:</b> Alone Together
<b>Personal Reflections</b>	<b>Personal Reflection:</b> It Gets Beautiful—One Rabbi’s Perspective on Being Jewish and LGBTQ (p. 101) <b>Personal Reflection:</b> Marriage Equality—Thank You God for This Amazing Day (p. 421)

**Track 2: LGBTQ Inclusion**

Subtopic	Relevant Chapters
LGBTQ Equality	<p><b>Chapter 3:</b> A Reform Understanding of <i>To-eivah</i></p> <p><b>Chapter 4:</b> “A Great Voice, Never Ending”: Reading the Torah in Light of the New Status of Gays and Lesbians in the Jewish Community</p> <p><b>Chapter 13:</b> Blessed Is God Who Changes Us: Theological Que(e)ries</p> <p><b>Chapter 19:</b> Embracing Lesbians and Gay Men: A Reform Jewish Innovation</p> <p><b>Chapter 21:</b> Assessing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Inclusion in the Reform Movement: A Promise Fulfilled or a Promise in Progress?</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> It Gets Beautiful—One Rabbi’s Perspective on Being Jewish and LGBTQ (p. 101)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Marriage Equality—Thank You God for This Amazing Day (p. 421)</p>
LGBTQ Identity	<p><b>Chapter 11:</b> “Created by the Hand of Heaven”: Sex, Love, and the <i>Androgynos</i></p> <p><b>Chapter 12:</b> “Bisexual” Identity: A Guide for the Perplexed</p>
Homosexuality and the Rabbinat	<p><b>Chapter 20:</b> To Ordain or Not to Ordain: The Tale of the CCAR Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinat</p> <p><b>Chapter 21:</b> Assessing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Inclusion in the Reform Movement: A Promise Fulfilled or a Promise in Progress?</p> <p><b>Chapter 22:</b> Interview with Rabbi Eugene B. Borowitz</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> The Difference a Signature Makes (p. 317)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Change Is Possible (p. 321)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Coming Out All Over Again (p. 569)</p>
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**and Textual  
Innovation**

**Chapter 6:** Preaching against the Text: An Argument in Favor of Restoring Leviticus 18 to Yom Kippur Afternoon

**Chapter 14:** Crafting an Inclusive Liturgical Mirror

**Chapter 23:** Jewish Marriage Innovations and Alterations: From Commercial/Legal Transaction to Spiritual Innovation

**Chapter 19:** Embracing Lesbians and Gay Men: A Reform Jewish Innovation

**Chapter 25:** The Ritual Sanctification of Same-Gender Relationships in Reform Judaism: An Eisegetical Approach

**Personal Reflection:** This Is the Way the World Ends (p. 231)

**Personal Reflection:** Queering *T'shuvah* for Everyone (p. 729)

### Track 3: Reform Jewish Perspectives

Subtopic	Relevant Chapters
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Sexuality and Spirituality	<p><b>Chapter 10:</b> “Your Love Is Sweeter Than Wine”: Erotic Theology in Jewish Tradition</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Living Waters—Making Mikveh a Regular Practice (p. 417)</p>
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Homosexuality and the Reform Rabbinat	<p><b>Chapter 20:</b> To Ordain or Not to Ordain: The Tale of the CCAR Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinat</p> <p><b>Chapter 21:</b> Assessing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Inclusion</p>

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**Chapter 22:** Interview with Rabbi Eugene B. Borowitz

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**Ritual and  
Liturgy**

**Chapter 14:** Crafting an Inclusive Liturgical Mirror

**Chapter 28:** *Taharat HaMishpachah*: A Renewed Look at the Concept of Family Purity

**Chapter 29:** Getting Our *Get* Back: On Restoring the Ritual of Divorce in American Reform Judaism

**Sexuality  
Education**

**Chapter 30:** Sexuality Education for Our Youth: *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics*

**Chapter 31:** The Magic of Sex-in-Text Education: A Key to Synagogue Relevance for Every Liberal Jew

**Chapter 45:** What Not to Wear: Synagogue Edition

## Track 4: Social Justice and Human Rights

Subtopics	Relevant Chapters
<b>LGBTQ Equality</b>	<p><b>Chapter 4:</b> “A Great Voice, Never Ending” : Reading the Torah in Light of the New Status of Gays and Lesbians in the Jewish Community</p> <p><b>Chapter 19:</b> Embracing Lesbians and Gay Men: A Reform Jewish Innovation</p> <p><b>Chapter 21:</b> Assessing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Inclusion in the Reform Movement: A Promise Fulfilled or a Promise in Progress?</p>
<b>Sexual Violence and Abuse</b>	<p><b>Chapter 29:</b> Getting Our <i>Get</i> Back: On Restoring the Ritual of Divorce in American Reform Judaism</p> <p><b>Chapter 41:</b> I Do? Consent and Coercion in Sexual Relations</p> <p><b>Chapter 42:</b> Sex Trafficking and Sex Slavery: History, Halachah, and Current Issues</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Sexuality on Campus—Notes from the Field (p. 565)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> <i>Kol Ishah</i>—Sexuality and the Voice of a Woman (p. 97)</p>
<b>Israel</b>	<p><b>Chapter 2:</b> The Real Sin of Sodom</p> <p><b>Chapter 16:</b> <i>Between Sodom and Eden</i> + 13: A Bar Mitzvah Look Back and Ahead</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> The Problem with <i>Tz’niut</i>—How Are Women (Not) Like Pastries? (p. 225)</p>

## Track 5: Sexual Ethics and Values

Subtopics	Relevant Chapters
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LGBTQ	<p><b>Chapter 3:</b> A Reform Understanding of <i>To-eivah</i></p> <p><b>Chapter 6:</b> Preaching against the Text: An Argument in Favor of Restoring Leviticus 18 to Yom Kippur Afternoon</p> <p><b>Chapter 22:</b> Interview with Rabbi Eugene B. Borowitz</p>
Healthy Relationships	<p><b>Chapter 9:</b> Alone Together</p> <p><b>Chapter 18:</b> Reform Jewish Sexual Values, CCAR Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality</p> <p><b>Chapter 33:</b> Unplanned Fatherhood</p> <p><b>Chapter 40:</b> The Role of <i>T'shuvah</i> in Sexual Transgressions</p> <p><b>Chapter 41:</b> I Do? Consent and Coercion in Sexual Relations</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Sexuality on Campus—Notes from the Field (p. 565)</p>

<p><b>Modesty for a Modern World</b></p>	<p><b>Chapter 45:</b> What Not to Wear: Synagogue Edition</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> <i>Kol Ishah</i>—Sexuality and the Voice of a Woman (p. 97)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> The Problem with <i>Tz'niut</i>—How Are Women (Not) Like Pastries? (p. 225)</p>
<p><b>Sexual Desire</b></p>	<p><b>Chapter 48:</b> Jewish Views on Sexual Fantasy and Desire</p> <p><b>Chapter 49:</b> Release From Bondage: Sex, Suffering, and Sanctity</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> The Rabbi and the Vibrator (p. 573)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Choose Life (and Be Not a Skunk)! (p. 735)</p>
<p><b>Teaching Our Teens</b></p>	<p><b>Chapter 30:</b> Sexuality Education for Our Youth: <i>Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics</i></p> <p><b>Chapter 31:</b> The Magic of Sex-in-Text Education: A Key to Synagogue Relevance for Every Liberal Jew</p> <p><b>Chapter 32:</b> One Model: A Sexuality Retreat for Teens</p> <p><b>Chapter 33:</b> Unplanned Fatherhood</p>

**Track 6: WRJ/Sisterhood**

<b>Subtopics</b>	<b>Relevant Chapters</b>
<b>Modesty for a Modern World</b>	<p><b>Chapter 45:</b> What Not to Wear: Synagogue Edition</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> <i>Kol Ishah</i>—Sexuality and the Voice of a Woman (p. 97)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> The Problem with <i>Tz'niut</i>—How Are Women (Not) Like Pastries? (p. 225)</p>
<b>Marital Tension</b>	<p><b>Chapter 7:</b> Spirit of Jealousy, Spirit of Holiness: Timeless Insights from a Time-Bound Text</p> <p><b>Chapter 26:</b> CCAR on Marital Sexual Infidelity</p> <p><b>Chapter 27:</b> Scenes from a Marriage</p>
<b>Fertility and Infertility</b>	<p><b>Chapter 34:</b> Go and Learn from Abraham and Sarah: Jewish Responses to Facing Infertility</p> <p><b>Chapter 35:</b> Blessings of the Breasts and of the Womb: Jewish Perspectives on Breastfeeding and the Female Breast</p> <p><b>Chapter 36:</b> Weaning: Personal and Biblical Reflections</p> <p><b>Chapter 37:</b> Menopause</p>
<b>Sexual Violence and Abuse</b>	<p><b>Chapter 29:</b> Getting Our <i>Get</i> Back: On Restoring the Ritual of Divorce in American Reform Judaism</p> <p><b>Chapter 41:</b> I Do? Consent and Coercion in Sexual Relations</p> <p><b>Chapter 42:</b> Sex Trafficking and Sex Slavery: History, Halachah, and Current Issues</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> <i>Kol Ishah</i>—Sexuality and the Voice of a Woman (p. 97)</p>
<b>Ritual Innovation</b>	<p><b>Chapter 28:</b> <i>Taharat HaMishpachah</i>: A Renewed Look at the Concept of Family Purity</p>

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<b>Interfaith Sexuality</b>	<b>Chapter 15:</b> “What Kind of a Man Are You?”: Interethnic Sexual Encounter in Yiddish American Narratives  <b>Chapter 43:</b> The Impact of Catastrophe on Jewish Sexuality: Jewish Displaced Persons in Occupied Germany, 1945–1950
<b>Caring for Aging Parents</b>	<b>Chapter 38:</b> With Eyes Undimmed and Vigor Unabated: Sex, Sexuality, and Older Adults  <b>Chapter 39:</b> When Alzheimer’s Turns a Spouse into a Stranger: Jewish Perspectives on Loving and Letting Go
<i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i> — <b>Jewish Views</b>	<b>Chapter 48:</b> Jewish Views on Sexual Fantasy and Desire  <b>Chapter 49:</b> Release From Bondage: Sex, Suffering, and Sanctity
<b>Modern Topics</b>	<b>Chapter 46:</b> Sex and Technology: Creating Sacred Space in Cyberspace  <b>Chapter 47:</b> Judaism and Pornography

**Track 7: MRJ/Brotherhood**

Subtopics	Relevant Chapters
Interfaith Sexuality	<p><b>Chapter 15:</b> “What Kind of a Man Are You?”: Interethnic Sexual Encounter in Yiddish American Narratives</p> <p><b>Chapter 43:</b> The Impact of Catastrophe on Jewish Sexuality: Jewish Displaced Persons in Occupied Germany, 1945–1950</p>
Marital Tension	<p><b>Chapter 7:</b> Spirit of Jealousy, Spirit of Holiness: Timeless Insights from a Time-Bound Text</p> <p><b>Chapter 26:</b> CCAR on Marital Sexual Infidelity</p> <p><b>Chapter 27:</b> Scenes from a Marriage</p>
Sexual Violence and Abuse	<p><b>Chapter 29:</b> Getting Our <i>Get</i> Back: On Restoring the Ritual of Divorce in American Reform Judaism</p> <p><b>Chapter 41:</b> I Do? Consent and Coercion in Sexual Relations</p> <p><b>Chapter 42:</b> Sex Trafficking and Sex Slavery: History, Halachah, and Current Issues</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> <i>Kol Ishah</i>—Sexuality and the Voice of a Woman (p. 97)</p>
Parenting	<p><b>Chapter 30:</b> Sexuality Education for Our Youth: <i>Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics</i></p> <p><b>Chapter 33:</b> Unplanned Fatherhood</p>
Caring for Aging Parents	<p><b>Chapter 38:</b> With Eyes Undimmed and Vigor Unabated: Sex, Sexuality, and Older Adults</p> <p><b>Chapter 39:</b> When Alzheimer’s Turns a Spouse into a Stranger: Jewish Perspectives on Loving and Letting Go</p>
Modern Topics	<p><b>Chapter 46:</b> Sex and Technology: Creating Sacred Space in Cyberspace</p> <p><b>Chapter 47:</b> Judaism and Pornography</p>

**Track 8: Teen Learning**

<b>Subtopics</b>	<b>Relevant Chapters</b>
<b>Working with Teens</b>	<p><b>Chapter 30:</b> Sexuality Education for Our Youth: Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics</p> <p><b>Chapter 31:</b> The Magic of Sex-in-Text Education: A Key to Synagogue Relevance for Every Liberal Jew</p> <p><b>Chapter 32:</b> One Model: A Sexuality Retreat for Teens</p>
<b>Modesty for a Modern World</b>	<p><b>Chapter 45:</b> What Not to Wear: Synagogue Edition</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Kol Ishah—Sexuality and the Voice of a Woman (p. 97)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> The Problem with Tz’niut—How Women Are (Not) Like Pastries? (p. 225)</p>
<b>LGBTQ Inclusion</b>	<p><b>Chapter 12:</b> “Bisexual” Identity: A Guide for the Perplexed</p> <p><b>Chapter 14:</b> Crafting an Inclusive Liturgical Mirror</p> <p><b>Chapter 22:</b> Interview with Rabbi Eugene B. Borowitz</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Marriage Equality—Thank You God for This Amazing Day (p. 421)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Change Is Possible (p. 321)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Coming Out All Over Again (p. 569)</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> It Gets Beautiful—One Rabbi’s Perspective on Being Jewish and LGBTQ (p. 101)</p>
<b>Healthy Relationships</b>	<p><b>Chapter 9:</b> Alone Together</p> <p><b>Chapter 18:</b> Reform Jewish Sexual Values, CCAR Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality</p> <p><b>Chapter 33:</b> Unplanned Fatherhood</p> <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Sexuality on Campus—Notes from the Field (p. 565)</p>

## Section Two: Study Questions by Chapter

### Questions for Part 1: In the Beginning: Biblical and Rabbinic Contexts

1. In what ways does Torah guide your sexual values and ethics?
2. Consider the ways in which Wiener, Greenstein, Bender, and Brown respond to Leviticus 18. In what ways do their interpretations differ? Which responses resonate for you?
3. Has your opinion about any of the texts discussed in this section changed over the course of your life or in response to these authors?

### Chapter 1: Sexuality: Human Biology versus Rabbinic Decree

1. What are the benefits of yetzer hara? What are its dangers? How can we understand this tension with regard to sexual desire today?
2. How can we, in our communities and as individuals, celebrate human sexuality as a blessing?
3. How would you respond to Scheinerman's initial questions: "Is human sexuality good or bad? Does it lead to desirable behavior that promotes family and community or to dangerous behavior that is detrimental to both individuals and society? If sexuality is a matter of innate biology, to what extent is it possible, desirable, or obligatory to limit human sexuality? What does Torah have to say about human sexuality?" (7).

### Chapter 2: The Real Sin of Sodom

1. How does Greenberg draw an analogy between Jerusalem and Sodom?
2. How do Rabbinic commentators understand the sin of Sodom? What lessons does this hold for us today?
3. What are your personal associations with the story of Sodom? How are they influenced or altered by reading these commentaries?

### Chapter 3: A Reform Understanding of *To-eivah*

1. How do biblical sources understand and articulate the concept of *to-eivah*? What is God's role in actions classified as *to-avat Adonai*?
2. How does Rashi's observation that "what is acceptable to one may be abhorrent to another" (36) apply in our communities today?
3. How has the definition and categorical understanding of *to-eivah* evolved through biblical, Rabbinic, and modern sources? What new applications does this concept have for each era?

### Chapter 4: "A Great Voice, Never Ending": Reading the Torah in Light of the New Status of Gays and Lesbians in the Jewish Community

1. Greenstein states the following: "The Torah must still be able to speak to us in a meaningful and authoritative voice" (45). How would you respond to the question he poses: "Can we embrace [this] premise . . . as we reject those Torah texts that seem to be founded on older views of human reality?" (ibid.).
2. How have the major denominations (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist) differed in their interpretation of Torah values in guiding their inclusion of LGBT individuals?
3. How does Greenstein's understanding of Leviticus 18:22 allow us to hear the text in a new way? Do you agree with his interpretation?

### Chapter 5: How to Respond to Bible-Thumping Homophobia, Or: Judaism as Evolutionary If Not Revolutionary

1. Why does Bender describe "the Bible-thumping homophobe [who] holds Leviticus 18 and 20 as authoritative proof against homosexuality" (62) as selective fundamentalism? Where else have you seen examples of selective fundamentalism?
2. In what ways does Bender view our tradition as evolutionary?

## Chapter 6: Preaching against the Text: An Argument in Favor of Restoring Leviticus 18 to Yom Kippur Afternoon

1. Why was Leviticus 18 originally selected as the Yom Kippur afternoon Torah reading? Do any of the rationales presented resonate for you?
2. Why does Judith Plaskow argue for the inclusion of Leviticus 18 on Yom Kippur?
3. Which of the options that Brown proposes with regard to Leviticus 18 (80–81) would be effective in your community or for your personal practice?

## Chapter 7: Spirit of Jealousy, Spirit of Holiness: Timeless Insights from a Time-Bound Text

1. Grushcow asks, “For a modern reader . . . what insights—if any—can be gained from this ancient ordeal [the sotah ritual] and its interpretation?” (89). How would you respond?
2. What insights do you gain about jealousy in marital relationships from the Rabbinic texts Grushcow references?
3. Grushcow recognizes the power of sotah as a ritual, if not its intent. How would you envision a ritual “to reestablish trust when a relationship has been damaged by jealousy or infidelity”? (93).

## Questions for Part 2: God in the Bedroom, God in the Body: Theology and Identity

1. How would you articulate your personal theology? Do sexuality and/or the human body play a role in your theological beliefs? Is your theology influenced by Jewish texts or thinkers? What is God’s role in your understanding of sexuality, if any?
2. Is your sense of belonging and inclusion in your community or communities influenced by your sexual or gender identity?
3. In her introduction to this section, Grushcow artfully notes:

*My own experience is that as liberal as our synagogues may be, our discourse often assumes heterosexuality—whether it is expressed through mothers lighting candles and fathers doing Kiddush or through opposite-sex matchmaking for babies, only partly in jest. To move away from these models opens new possibilities for all of us in our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with God. (110)*

Does this statement reflect the practices, liturgy, and ritual of your community? How might your community begin to move beyond assumptions of heterosexuality?

### Chapter 8: The *Kavanah* of the Bedroom: Sex and Intention in Jewish Law

1. In what ways do Maimonides, the Raavad, and the *Igeret HaKodesh* agree about the optimal intent one may bring to sex? How do their opinions differ?
2. How does Katz account for the “male-centered and hetero-normative” (111–12) context for these attitudes on sexual intent?
3. Does the concept of intentionality elevate the holiness of sex? How so?

### Chapter 9: Alone Together

1. On your own, reflect and record your personal answers to Lehrman’s questions:

*How much do I want to let my partner in? How much am I able?*

*How much do I want to be let in by my partner?*

*What do we do when our needs and tolerances differ?*

*If intimacy is about opening parts of myself to my partner, how much access do I myself even have to such “core aspects” of myself?*

*Am I willing to risk meeting some aspects of both self and other in moments of physical relating? (123)*

2. How are aloneness and intimacy interconnected for Lehrman? How are they connected for you?

## Chapter 10: “Your Love Is Sweeter than Wine”: Erotic Theology in Jewish Tradition

1. How does the parallel example of the *Enuma Elish* help us understand the erotic relationship between God and Israel?
2. Which of Dennis’s examples of biblical images, metaphors, verses, and mystical ideas that represent erotic theology resonate for you? Which do not?
3. In what ways does the covenant between God and Israel play a role in erotic theology? How does this expand your understanding of the covenant?

## Chapter 11: “Created by the Hand of Heaven”: Sex, Love, and the *Androgynos*

1. Kukla asks, “How does the *androgynos*’s presence in marriage impact the way we have understood the gender hierarchy between husband and wife in traditional Judaism?” (147). How would you respond?
2. How does the *androgynos* challenge the gender binary? What are its implications for a Jewish understanding of the gender binary today?
3. In what ways could the categorical understanding of the *androgynos* influence our synagogue and communal inclusion of transgender individuals?

## Chapter 12: “Bisexual” Identity: A Guide for the Perplexed

1. Why does Litman provide Jewish textual sources for free will in the context of defining bisexual identity? How does this text ground or influence your perspective on sexual identity and choice?
2. How does Litman’s juxtaposition of Jewish identity and bisexual identity enhance your understandings of each?
3. Litman shares her own views of the theological implications of bisexuality. How does challenging the gender binary impact your personal theology? What is God’s role in this conversation for you?

**Chapter 13: Blessed Is God Who Changes Us: Theological Que(e)ries**

1. DeBlosi argues that “the full inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ Jews will require at the very least a deep theological examination of ‘the way things are’ Jewishly” (168). What theological questions does LGBTQ inclusion raise for you? How is your personal theology challenged by “queering” Jewish belief and practice? How is it enriched?
2. How does DeBlosi distinguish between “queering” Judaism and LGBTQ inclusion in Jewish institutions and ritual?
3. In what ways does the diversity of God’s creation influence emerging queer theology? Does this theological perspective resonate for you?

**Chapter 14: Crafting an Inclusive Liturgical Mirror**

1. Angel asks, “What are the relevant intersections between sexuality and liturgy?” (189). In what ways do words, prayer, and sexuality intersect for you?
2. How has feminism influenced the development of liturgy that is inclusive for LGBTQ communities and individuals? Have you observed this impact personally?
3. What “unblessed” (192) moments exist in your life or for your community? How could these be blessed and incorporated into your ritual and liturgy?

**Chapter 15: “What Kind of a Man Are You?”: Interethnic Sexual Encounter in Yiddish American Narratives**

1. How do these stories of Jewish men interacting with non-Jewish women “provoke the Jewish man’s contemplation about what it means to be both a Jew and a man” (196)?
2. In what ways do these stories explore ethnic and sexual boundaries? What can you learn about yourself from your reactions to fictional accounts of boundary crossing?

3. What applications do you see in these stories about sexuality and interethnic/interfaith encounters for today?

### Chapter 16: *Between Sodom and Eden* + 13: A Bar Mitzvah Look Back and Ahead

1. What has been unique about the LGBTQ community's political and social development in Israel? How have religion and Zionism influenced this process?
2. For those who have traveled to Israel, what personal impressions do you have of the openness (or lack thereof) to the LGBTQ community in Israeli society? Share an anecdote.
3. How has pop culture played a role in the development of the Israeli LGBTQ community's current profile?

### Questions for Part 3: “A Progressive Religion”: Sexuality and the Reform Movement

1. What insights do you gain about your own community by tracing the historical development of CCAR and HUC-JIR policy toward gay and lesbian rabbis and rabbinical students?
2. How does your home community reflect the broader trends of the Reform Movement? How do practices, culture, and inclusion in your community differ from these broader trends?

### Chapter 17: Mission Statement, Central Conference of American Rabbis Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality

1. Do these guiding principles resonate for you? What do they articulate? What is missing for you?
2. How would you prioritize these guiding principles—*B'riah*, *Am B'rit*, and *Daat*—in your decision making regarding sexuality and intimacy? Which principle influences you the most?

**Chapter 18: Reform Jewish Sexual Values**

3. Do these values resonate for you? What do they articulate? What is missing for you?
4. How would you prioritize these values in your decision making regarding sexuality and intimacy? Which value influences you the most? What value(s) would you add to the list?

**Chapter 19: Embracing Lesbians and Gay Men: A Reform Jewish Innovation**

1. What are the three factors that Eger believes “helped pave the way for the inclusion of gays and lesbians in Jewish life through the Reform Movement” (248)?
2. How did the conclusions of the Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Responsa Committee of the CCAR differ regarding the issues of marriage for gay and lesbian individuals? What accounts for these divergent decisions?
3. What was the impact and ultimate result of the WRN resolution? How did the Israeli Reform Movement and its rabbinical organization, MARAM, factor into this conversation?

**Chapter 20: To Ordain or Not to Ordain: The Tale of the CCAR Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinat**

1. After the 1977 CCAR resolution, in what ways was the Reform Movement “still torn” (273) regarding the civil rights of LGBTQ individuals in the synagogue and beyond? If you or a family member were involved in a Reform community at this time, what memories do you have of this period?
2. During the mid-1980s, what were the main concerns and hesitations of members of the CCAR Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinat with regard to ordaining gay and lesbian individuals?
3. What were the main areas of disagreement among the committee members as articulated by Rabbi Selig Salkowitz at the June 1989 CCAR Convention? How would you respond to these arguments?

## Chapter 21: Assessing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Inclusion in the Reform Movement: A Promise Fulfilled or a Promise in Progress?

1. Where do you think your community falls on the continuum Kushner introduces regarding LGBT inclusion (hostile, indifferent, tolerant, inclusive, and embracing)? Share relevant examples.
2. How does the case study of Reuben Zellman's admission and experience as an HUC-JIR rabbinical student inform or compare with your community's transgender inclusion policies (de facto or official)?

## Chapter 22: Interview with Rabbi Eugene B. Borowitz

1. How does Rabbi Borowitz explain his halachic and theological decision-making process?
2. What would you have done if you were Rabbi Borowitz?
3. What would you have done if you were Rabbi Adelson?

## Questions for Part 4: Beloved Companions: Jewish Marital Models

1. Grushcow asks in her introduction to this section, "What does marriage actually mean? How has it changed over time? What is its significance, both to the individuals who enter into it and to the society in which they live? What are its challenges and its opportunities? How can it be renewed over time, and how might we mark its end?" (331–32). How would you respond to these questions?
2. What theological and ideological tensions do you observe in the different understandings of marriage held by traditional Jewish law, early Reform Judaism, and Reform Judaism today? What common features do you observe?
3. Reflect on your personal ethics for marriage and divorce, either as a married individual or as a friend or clergy member offering counseling and advice to a married couple. Which values and ethics addressed in these chapters overlap with your personal values? Which values would you add?

### Chapter 23: Jewish Marriage Innovations and Alterations: From Commercial/Legal Transaction to Spiritual Transformation

1. What legal and ritual innovations did the Mishnah introduce with regard to marriage? What role do each of these rituals and legal structures play in the marriage process?
2. In what ways did medieval Ashkenazi Jewish communities alter Jewish marriage law? How do these changes reflect the social environment of their time?
3. How have modern feminism, LGBTQ inclusion, and intermarriage impacted the conversation and practice of *kiddushin* in Reform Jewish communities? How do these cases differ, and in what ways are they similar?

### Chapter 24: Reading the Jewish Tradition on Marital Sexuality

1. What are the nine principles of Jewish marital sexuality that Borowitz identifies? Which of these resonate for you?
2. What modern challenges to his principles, particularly those applicable for Reform Jewish communities, does Borowitz identify?
3. In what ways does Borowitz encourage incorporating a modern covenantal perspective into Jewish marital sexual ethics?

### Chapter 25: The Ritual Sanctification of Same-Gender Relationships in Reform Judaism: An Eisegetical Approach

1. How does Stein differentiate between an exegetical and an eisegetical approach to determining one's position on officiating at a same-sex marriage?
2. What historical examples that Stein presents reflect the eisegetical decision-making process of the Reform Movement? What three considerations does Stein believe Reform Judaism has taken into account in this process?
3. How does Stein use this decision-making model to express his opinion on sanctifying same-sex marriage?

## Chapter 26: Marital Sexual Infidelity, Central Conference of American Rabbis Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality

1. What are the main teachings from Rabbinic Jewish tradition on marital infidelity that this piece identifies? What challenges do these principles present for you today?
2. How does Rabbi Daniel Schiff distinguish between the five types of adultery that he identifies? What characterizes each type?
3. Which values shape the Ad Hoc Committee's Statement of Values to Marital Sexual Infidelity (385–88)?

## Chapter 27: Scenes from a Marriage

1. What are your initial reactions to the story Marder tells at the beginning of the chapter? Does it hold any personal resonance for you?
2. How does Marder utilize both Jewish texts and modern examples to unpack the nuances of adultery? What new insights do you gain from these examples?
3. How does Marder's concluding image of the chuppah highlight her key ideas? What else could a chuppah represent?

## Chapter 28: *Taharat HaMishpachah*: A Renewed Look at the Concept of Family Purity

1. What previous associations do you have with the concepts of *niddah* and *taharat hamishpachah*, if any? What images or ideas influence your opinion?
2. What are the three values as conceptualized by the CCAR Committee on Human Sexuality that are applicable to a redefinition of *taharat hamishpachah*? Which, if any, of these values speak to you?
3. What are your previous associations with mikveh, if any? How does Eger reinterpret the use of mikveh in a modern Reform Jewish context? Read and respond to Rabbi Schorr's personal reflection, "Living Waters—Making

Mikveh a Regular Practice” (417–19). Share examples of modern mikveh usage that you have encountered.

### Chapter 29: Getting Our *Get* Back: On Restoring the Ritual of Divorce in American Reform Judaism

1. What are the reasons that nineteenth-century American Reform Jewish leaders sought to eliminate the need for a *get* to obtain a divorce? Do these reasons (or others?) resonate for you today?
2. What reasons does Washofsky cite to argue for the reintroduction of divorce ritual into modern Reform Jewish practice?
3. What requirements for “a divorce process that corresponds to our Reform Jewish conceptions of equity and justice” (412) does Washofsky outline?

### Questions for Part 5: Ages and Stages: Sexuality throughout Our Lives

1. Beyond or before reading the perspectives in these chapters, consider how your relationship with both Judaism and sexuality has shifted over the course of your life. Do you recall any particular moments that encapsulate these shifts?
2. What kinds of educational or informal programs does your Jewish community offer regarding sexuality? Do you think there is a role for sexuality education and conversation in a Jewish setting? How might discussing topics related to sexuality in a Jewish community enrich these conversations?
3. Browsing the topics in this section, which most surprises you? Which chapter addresses a topic you have never discussed or considered in a Jewish setting before today?

### Chapter 30: Sexuality Education for Our Youth: Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics

1. How could you apply some of these educational concepts in your community? Do you already incorporate sexuality education into your youth programming?

2. Which of the essential questions in the *Sacred Choices* curriculum (p. 439) do you think are most challenging for preteens and teens to answer? Most important?
3. What is the role of parents in implementing and reinforcing this curriculum? If you are a parent, share any relevant experiences.

### Chapter 31: The Magic of Sex-in-Text Education: A Key to Synagogue

#### Relevance for Every Liberal Jew

1. How could you apply some of these educational methods in your community? Do you already incorporate sexuality education into your preschool, youth, or adult education programming?
2. Respond to this statement: “The celebration of ourselves as sexual beings is a glory of Judaism. Having in place a comprehensive sex-in-text education program, a gift for every age—preschoolers to seniors—is to offer modern synagogue relevance to every Jew” (450). After reading this chapter and drawing on your own experiences, do you agree? Disagree? Why?
3. Which of the many classical Jewish texts on sex that Lee shares is most surprising or enlightening for you? Which text or story will you still be thinking about tomorrow?

### Chapter 32: One Model: A Sexuality Retreat for Teens

1. Why does Dreskin argue for the use of a retreat format to address sexuality with Jewish teens? How does this differ from conversations in a secular or religious classroom?
2. How can addressing sexuality with Jewish teens strengthen their lifelong connection to the Jewish community?
3. Would you consider applying some of these educational methods in your community? Do you already hold a sexuality education retreat or similar event for your teens? If so, how can Dreskin’s insights enhance your community’s existing program?

### Chapter 33: Unplanned Fatherhood

1. Block asks, “While we emphasize the male’s responsibility to avoid unintended pregnancy, ought we also to address the plethora of questions that arise if and when a male learns that his sexual activity has resulted in an unplanned pregnancy? . . . In short, what is the responsibility of a Jewish man toward a child that he never planned to conceive, much less parent?” (480). How would you respond?
2. How can Jewish values, both traditional and those discussed in CCAR responsa, guide us in understanding the role of the male partner in an unintended pregnancy?
3. How does Block address the role of male partners in ensuring the Jewish identity of a child of an unintended pregnancy? How does the Reform Movement’s principle of patrilineal descent complicate this issue?

### Chapter 34: Go and Learn from Abraham and Sarah: Jewish Responses to Facing Infertility

1. Kirzane and Pelc Adler pose a challenging question: “If fertility is the most basic seed of God’s covenant with Israel, why are so many matriarchs and patriarchs, heroes of our tradition, plagued with a compromised ability to bear children? And what can we learn from them in our own similar struggles?” (492). How would you respond?
2. The authors propose three paradigms through which to view cases of infertility in the Bible: challenge, piety, and retribution. Are these models helpful for you? How can we move beyond these models?
3. What is the role of sexuality in situations of infertility? How do Jewish values and texts enhance our understanding of this complex issue?

### **Chapter 35: Blessings of the Breasts and of the Womb: Jewish Perspectives on Breastfeeding and the Female Breast**

1. How do the descriptions of breasts in Song of Songs differ from those of the prophets Ezekiel and Hosea? Why do you think their perspectives differ?
2. What do the traditional Jewish sources that Forman shares have to say about breastfeeding? Are these perspectives applicable today?
3. Do your personal experiences (or those of a partner or loved one) differ from or relate to the Jewish texts explored in this chapter?

### **Chapter 36: Weaning: Personal and Biblical Reflections**

1. With what insights do the few biblical examples of weaning provide us? How did biblical authors and characters view and relate to weaning?
2. Read both Kahn-Harris's (518) and the JPS translation (519) of Psalm 131. How do these translations differ? Which resonates with your personal experiences (or those of a partner or loved one) with breastfeeding and weaning?
3. How does the metaphor of weaning enrich and describe your relationship with God?

### **Chapter 37: Menopause**

1. In describing menopause, Fox notes, "It is the gateway to the end of life and, as such, has long been a taboo subject" (528). Have you discussed menopause with family or friends? Publicly? In a synagogue or other Jewish communal setting? Have you found it to be a "taboo" topic?
2. Why are there relatively few references to menopause in biblical and traditional Jewish sources? Can you imagine how biblical characters or Rabbinic voices might have addressed menopause?
3. What are some of the possible positive outcomes and experiences for women entering this stage of life? How can Jewish communities play a role in facilitating and celebrating this transition?

### **Chapter 38: With Eyes Undimmed and Vigor Unabated: Sex, Sexuality, and Older Adults**

1. What are the emerging challenges that Address presents with regard to older adults and sexuality? Have you encountered or experienced any of these challenges?
2. What are some of the possible positive outcomes and experiences for individuals in this stage of life, particularly in our modern era of “three-plus decades of post-65 life” (538)? How can Jewish organizations and synagogues play a role in facilitating and celebrating these members of our communities?

### **Chapter 39: When Alzheimer’s Turns a Spouse into a Stranger: Jewish Perspectives on Loving and Letting Go**

1. Read and respond to the anecdote described in the first paragraph of this chapter. Have you or a family member ever been in this situation? How did you/they respond? If not, how could you imagine responding? How would you respond as a clergy member providing counseling to “Sarah”?
2. What are the four halachic responses that the authors suggest to understand sexuality and Alzheimer’s from a Jewish perspective? Do you agree or disagree with applying each of these suggested frames? What potential challenges and what potential opportunities do each of these suggested frames present?
3. What conversations do the authors encourage spouses and families to have? Would you consider having such a conversation with your partner or facilitating this conversation for parents or other older relatives? How could their proposed rituals and other Jewish texts inform or augment this conversation?

### Questions for Part 6: There Be Dragons: Issues, Ethics, and Boundaries

1. Read the table of contents for this section. Which topics are surprising, unfamiliar, or perhaps uncomfortable for you? Which topics are intriguing?
2. What do you think Jewish text and tradition will have to say about these topics? How might Reform Judaism differ or add to traditional texts on these topics?
3. Is there value in discussing these topics in a Jewish communal setting?

### Chapter 40: The Role of *T'shuvah* in Sexual Transgressions

1. Read the three case studies that Einstein presents (585–86). How do the actions and behaviors with regard to *t'shuvah* differ in these three cases? How would you respond or proceed with these individuals if you were on the CCAR Ethics Committee? How would you respond if one of these individuals were your friend or family member?
2. Do you believe that rabbis and other Jewish professionals should be held to a different ethical standard with regard to sexual transgressions and misconduct? How can the case studies inform a broader *t'shuvah* process?
3. Do you believe that *t'shuvah* is possible in situations of sexual misconduct? Can an individual ever truly repent? If so, how? If not, why?

### Chapter 41: I Do? Consent and Coercion in Sexual Relations

1. How do traditional and modern Jewish sources view rape among non-married partners? What are the four categorical understandings of rape that Dratch introduces?
2. How does Jewish law define coercion, and how does this nuance your understanding of rape in Jewish text and tradition? What are the three Jewish categories of sexual relations?
3. How do the Jewish framework and textual sources on rape among non-married partners provide a backdrop to understand rape and sexual violence among married individuals? What new texts and scenarios does Dratch

discuss? Which values or prohibitions discussed inform your own behavior as a partner, spouse, individual?

### **Chapter 42: Sex Trafficking and Sex Slavery: History, Halachah, and Current Issues**

1. What biblical examples of slavery, sex slavery, and prostitution does Lerner detail? Are any examples surprising to you? How does this reading change your perspective on these biblical stories? What do the Rabbinic sources and commentaries add to Lerner's interpretation of these stories?
2. Who was Alphabet Browne? What role did he play in the history of sex trafficking and slavery? What can we learn from his example?
3. What are the Jewish responses to sex trafficking and slavery throughout the world today? How have Reform Jewish institutions played a role in ending these practices? What more does Lerner believe should be done by Jewish leaders and organizations?

### **Chapter 43: The Impact of Catastrophe on Jewish Sexuality: Jewish Displaced Persons in Occupied Germany, 1945–1950**

1. In what ways was the sexuality of Jewish women and men impacted during and after the Holocaust? How did these traumatic experiences and effects differ for men and women? Which examples or cases that Feinstein cites stand out for you?
2. How does Feinstein understand both the role and lack of discussion of homosexuality during and after the Holocaust?
3. How did sex, sexuality, and marriage factor into life in the DP camps that Feinstein describes? What does this add to your understanding of life for Jews in DP camps after the Holocaust?

## Chapter 44: Questioning Sexuality in Caribbean Reform Judaism: Two Perspectives

1. Kaplan and Carpenter discuss sexuality in a non–North American Jewish community. What experiences or interactions have you had, if any, in other Jewish communities outside North America that demonstrate a different normative opinion about sex and sexuality?
2. How do race, class, religion, and gender factor into the marital and sexual behaviors of Jamaicans? Where does the Jewish community fit into this social structure?
3. What perspectives do Kaplan and Carpenter believe the Jewish community can bring to the Jamaican community at large regarding sex, sexuality, and marriage? What Jewish values do they cite? What do we learn from the historical example of Rabbi Hooker?

## Chapter 45: What Not to Wear: Synagogue Edition

1. Grushcow says:

*One might expect that the Reform Movement would be silent on this question, leaving it in the realm of individual choice. However, clothing is not merely in the realm of individual choice. Above all, this is apparent in synagogue life. When we come together to pray and to celebrate, should there be any guide? Many Reform congregations have policies, formal or informal, regarding appropriate dress. Rarely, however, are these policies explicitly grounded in Reform Jewish values. (661)*

How would you respond to her description of the interaction between the individual and the community with regard to clothing, particularly in Reform Jewish contexts? Do you agree that clothing is “not merely in the realm of individual choice,” or do you disagree? Does your synagogue or Jewish community have any policies on dress and attire?

2. What are the traditional Jewish perspectives that Grushcow introduces to speak to the topic of modesty in dress? Which of these traditional texts are challenging for you? Which texts resonate for you?
3. How do these traditional texts inform Grushcow's understanding of Reform Jewish perspectives on clothing? In what ways does Grushcow differentiate Reform Jewish values from these traditional texts? Would you consider adopting a dress code for your synagogue, organization, or community? Which values or texts would shape your policy?

### **Chapter 46: Sex and Technology: Creating Sacred Space in Cyberspace**

1. How has the creation and spread of new technologies altered our societal perspectives on sex and sexuality? What changes have you observed in your lifetime?
2. Which Jewish texts do Wood and Herbenick cite as applicable to “to navigate our ethical understanding of the personal use of pornography” (677)?
3. In what ways does technology contribute to the creation of social connections today? How does this impact our Jewish communities, particularly with regard to sex and sexuality?

### **Chapter 47: Judaism and Pornography**

1. What biblical and Rabbinic examples does Crane provide to illustrate his statement that “seeing nakedness is in some instances a morally fraught experience” (687)? How do these examples relate to modern perspectives on nakedness and pornography today?
2. How does Jewish textual tradition respond to sexually explicit speech?
3. How do the examples and issues that Crane raises influence your personal perspective on pornography? Is there a role for Jewish perspectives in this conversation?

**Chapter 48: Jewish Views on Sexual Fantasy and Desire**

1. Mencher writes, “The Genesis accounts of Eve and Cain show us that desire leads to injustice” (701). Read these original biblical texts and her interpretation of them in light of this statement. Do you agree? Disagree?
2. How does Mencher view *Fifty Shades of Grey* and its popularity through a Jewish textual lens? What is the role of fantasy in Jewish tradition and text?
3. What are the gender implications of sexual fantasy and desire? How have Jewish thinkers responded to the role of gender in sexual fantasy?

**Chapter 49: Release From Bondage: Sex, Suffering, and Sanctity**

1. Lehrman asks, “(1) What is there about BDSM that Judaism can help us to understand? (2) In exploring BDSM from the perspective of Judaism, what aspects of our tradition come to the fore and reveal themselves with particular clarity?” (714). How would you respond to these questions?
2. In what ways does Lehrman argue that Judaism enables us to approach a topic of human behavior and sexuality without prejudgment? What insights can we glean from biblical and traditional examples in this regard?