

Kosher Sex
By
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This orthodox rabbi is on a special mission: his goal is to keep lust and intimacy alive and thriving in marriage. His "how to" is captured in a controversial new book called "Kosher Sex"(Doubleday, \$27.95). U.S. born Rabbi Shmuley Boteach is Director of the L'Chiam Society, a high profile Jewish education organization in Oxford, Cambridge, and London, England. With seven printings of the popular "Kosher Sex" manual, Rabbi Boteach has rapidly become the "Dr.Ruth" of British media. When he was eight years old, his parents divorced. Ever since, the subject of marriage and happiness has been an obsession for him, always striving to keep two people together under the same roof for the duration of their lives. Along with numerous media appearances where he expounds his philosophy of how to maintain passion and intimacy in marriage, "Kosher Sex" has been serialized in the British tabloids. His popularity is mixed with controversy and criticism. Some disagree with his views, others feel this is inappropriate behavior and attention for an Orthodox rabbi. Rabbi Boteach has since resigned from his west London pulpit. He continues to counsel friends, students and couples on their relationships. The previous book he wrote is entitled "The Jewish Guide to Adultery". He and his wife have been married for 10 years and are the parents of six children.

MM: You claim "kosher sex" is better than "great sex". What's the difference?

SB: Great sex is about the interaction of two bodies, kosher sex is about the integration of two souls. Great sex is often just about pleasure. Kosher sex is about being sewn together as one flesh. Great sex is measured while you're in bed together with your partner. Kosher sex is measured in the period thereafter, when you are physically apart, but emotionally together. Great sex is an end to an encounter, while kosher sex is the beginning of a relationship. Great sex is a motion and kosher sex is a motion which brings forth emotions. The whole problem with sex is the great discrepancy between how people feel during sex and how they feel immediately after. There was a recent study done here in England that showed that 84% of women who had a night of passionate sex with a man, who didn't call them back within three days, was remembered as a very painful memory. They felt used and abused. Kosher sex does just the opposite; it engenders a sense of intimacy and trust.

MM: What role does kosher sex play in marriage?

SB: Kosher sex deals with the paradox which afflicts every marriage. On one hand, for a marriage to be successful, a couple wants to be best friends, companions. They want to be intimate partners, share each other's secrets and know that there is a certain predictability in their relationship. Yet, on the other hand, that is not enough. What people also want is the opposite, they want passion, fire, spontaneity, the end of that which is routine. Marriage should embody both. Since fire and water cancel each other out, how can a married couple be both lovers and best friends? Most couples aren't. Most couples

achieve one or the other. Kosher sex is fire which leads to water, great passion which induces a state of closeness and intimacy. It's loverhood leading to friendship.

MM: What does traditional Jewish thinking tell us about sexuality?

SM: The bible has no word for sex, so Kosher sex teaches you to use sex as a form of knowledge, a form of intimate communication, so that a man and a woman can overcome their differences. Only if a man and a woman harmonize their different sexual metabolisms are they actually going to connect in sex, instead of just doing physical things to each other. Firstly, Judaism says you can not think about anyone else while having sex with your spouse, which clearly shows that sex is about intimacy; it's not just about pleasure. It's actually about being focused on each other in thought, speech and action. I call it "mental decapitation" because you decapitate your sexual partner and put someone else's head there while using his or her body for friction. This is rightfully declared by Judaism as a grievous sin. Another concept that comes from traditional thinking is that a married couple actually has a 12-day period of sexual abstinence every month. A lot of people see this as a draconian law based around the woman's menstrual cycle, but really, it is quite ingenious. It achieves a number of things; it allows the couple to be lovers and best friends, but not simultaneously, because it is impossible for fire and water to co-exist. This is a recipe for two weeks of passion and two weeks of intimacy. Two weeks where you feed off of each other's bodies and two weeks where feed off each other's minds, personalities and characters. Also, all of us have a very limited libido. This is something that the sexual revolution overlooked; if you indulge in sex too much, sex can become a very boring experience. The greatest proof of this is in a recent study from the United States which showed that the average married couple has sex twice a week, but lasting only 3 to 4 minutes at a time. The reason for that is that our libido is so diminished, so depleted that it doesn't lead to great memorable sexual encounters with our spouse. It leads to short instantly forgettable encounters.

MM: Is jealousy considered kosher?

SM: Judaism says that there should be a sprinkle of jealousy, just a hint in every marriage. All the great secular marriage and relationship gurus say that jealousy is a very destructive emotion because it is based on human insecurity. I couldn't disagree more. Like too much of anything, jealousy would destroy a relationship. The whole problem of a man losing interest in his wife is that she becomes too available to him and he takes her for granted. None of us are excited about anything to which we are incessantly exposed; therefore you need to see your husband or your wife through someone else's eyes and that is what jealousy is. It affords you a new look, a new perspective on your spouse. I am not saying you should go out of your way to flirt. What I am saying is, if a husband and wife go to a cocktail party together, instead of the woman just hanging onto her husband's arm the entire time, she should show a touch of greater independence. Women should preserve their modesty and their mystique, keep a sense of mystery. One of the essential Jewish laws about kosher sex is that a husband and wife should not parade around their bedroom naked. Think of it this way; you don't want to face the nightmare scenario

where your husband is in bed reading the newspaper and you undress and he continues to read the paper. His eyes aren't transfixed on you because he has seen your body a thousand times. I maintain that any man that first doesn't want to mentally undress a woman will not want to physically undress her either. Kosher sex is all about the involvement of the mind in the sexual act because our principle sexual organ is indeed our mind, not our genitalia. So when we exclude the mind by making things too accessible, too revealed, too open; there is no room for fantasy or eroticism. You see, the difference between a boring sexual act and an erotic sexual act is the degree in which the mind is allowed to participate.

MM: Why do you suggest that a couple only have sex with the lights out?

SB: Sex should be about our bodies peeling away and what remains is this incredibly warm, vibrant personality which is capable of joining with another personality. Everything we do in life is always about doing, not about being. When I go to my job, I'm working. When I go to University, I'm studying. Human beings are their happiest when they are at their most natural. The only time we actually put ourselves on autopilot, the only times we actually behave completely and instinctually is during sex. Sex is the only time people do not do, they just revel in the art of being. They revel in the art of existence. When sex becomes a performance, when a man is concerned that the woman he has been with has had many lovers before him and she is an expert in sex, and therefore she can actually determine whether or not he is good in the sack or has a nice body, or she feels that he is rating her body, the lovemaking loses, it's no longer natural. You are trying to impress, it's a performance, it's like a job interview. That is why sex with the lights off allows for sex to be a much more pleasurable, much more intimate experience, because I am not worried about what my body looks like. We are a generation, which is so transfixed on just one of the senses, the sense of look, that we deprive ourselves of the sense of touch, scent, and sound. In the dark, all the senses are magnified many times over.

MM: What is not kosher in a relationship?

SB: Infidelity, infidelity of the mind, fantasize about your spouse, not somebody else. A husband should never fantasize about another woman. Masturbation is not kosher because the beauty of sex is that it creates a very strong dependency between husband and wife. It makes us rely on each other in the most powerful possible way. I believe that sex is a real human need. Sex is the only thing which really requires somebody else, I can eat on my own, I can watch TV on my own, I can even talk to myself if really wish. The one thing I can't do is have sex with myself. Masturbation is a subversion of what sex is all about. Sex is supposed to create a link between me and someone else. Again, if the whole definition of kosher sex is something which leads to intimacy; masturbation subverts this intimacy. The beauty of the two week period of sexual abstinence is that when they reunite, it's volcanic, explosive, a mini honeymoon. If they both engage in masturbation all the while they have been separated, they don't hunger for each other as much and they are not as reliant or dependant on each other. If the purpose of sex is to bind me with someone, then pre-marital sex is a subversion of that. It's about 'I want to have

sex and not feel tied to this woman' 'I'll even lie to her, I will mislead her, I will tell her she's beautiful just to get into her bedroom.' I think pre-marital sex is something that is which is incredibly destructive. Pre-marital sex makes us experts in sex. To be an expert is to be able to spot the flaws. Today we are able to spot the flaws in our spouses, their sexual performance, their bodies, and their passion. This is a very bad thing because we are no longer subjective.

MM: What about oral sex?

SB: There are Rabbis that have said you should never look at your wife's genitals or kiss that area. That was not law, it was a minority opinion, very much a minority opinion. The other belief was that oral sex on a man would lead to ejaculation and refers to the prohibition in the bible, about wasting the male seed. This is, indeed, a strong prohibition, which is why male masturbation is not allowed in kosher sex. Having said that, what I show in the book, is that what the rabbis really prohibited was the intentional destruction of seed. That is contempt for having children, which is contempt for the whole impregnation process. It actually lessens a man's pleasure in order not to get her pregnant. That's not what oral sex is about at all. To only practice oral sex is definitely not kosher, but as a means of a couple doing something new, to expand what can otherwise be, a sometimes boring repertoire is acceptable. If the intention is not to destroy seed, but simply to do something pleasurable with your wife or your husband and to feel closer to them, then that's fine. It is just when this becomes the principle sexual act because you are afraid of having children. We don't believe in having contempt for children.

MM: What are your feelings about sex toys and pornography?

SB: I am very much opposed to pornography for two reasons. Firstly, once a marriage loses its sexual spark, once we become a desexualized society, once husband and wife are no longer drawn to each other by this mysterious force call "attraction", the marriage is never going to be as strong. They may continue as friends, they will raise kids together, but they stay together for ulterior motives, but not because of each other. What we need to do, therefore, is always ensure that sex maintains its power. The essence of sex is about mystery, eroticism, about taking things off in order to expose something even deeper. Pornography is all about, being in your face. It leads to great boredom. The greatest proof of this is, find me one pornographic publication that will use the same models two weeks in a row. They always have to use a new body, because you have grown bored of last week's model. You have seen her. What else is there, what's left. It is also unfair to your wife to have to compete against images of these beautiful women, who don't have to do all the things a wife has to do and can sit and hone their bodies day in and day out. Besides, it's not even real. A man then starts to compare his wife to some playmate. An average pornographic magazine takes 20,000 pictures in order to choose 50 pictures. With those kinds of angles and that kind of expert setting, anyone is going to look amazing. It leads people to be dissatisfied with their spouses. Celluloid images don't bring couples closer to each other. Sex toys are different because it is about them doing something new for each other, so I think the sky is

the limit. That's the rule, passion that leads to intimacy is kosher; if these sex toys make a couple feel really close to each other, that's fantastic.

MM: If you don't believe in pre-marital sex, prostitution and masturbation. What are those, who never marry or marry late suppose to do?

SB: I am realistic. I know that not everybody is going to listen to everything I say in this book. They may have pre-marital sex, masturbate and go to prostitutes, but you still have to define ideals that people should bring into their lives any way they can. I think a husband that goes on a business trip and doesn't masturbate is a romantic, because he is saving all that passion that is building up inside him for an incredible explosive night with his wife. That's the romantic thing to do. If you don't have a spouse, I believe in contingencies. I am not saying that this the law and to hell with all you who can't live by it. I believe that religion has to be compassionate. We all have to be logical and compassionate. There are degrees of kosher sex as well. For example if a couple is going to have a sexual relationship outside of marriage there are other elements of kosher sex that they can follow. Don't think about other people even then. Don't lie to each other. For guys, don't tell her your going to call her, then don't call. For the women, don't lie about how much you care for the guy when, in actual fact, you are just on the rebound and you just want to feel good or attractive for a few days. Kosher sex is not all fun and games. It means bringing humanity and intimacy to the sexual process.

MM: Do you believe that sex is only for procreation?

SB: Judaism rejects Catholicism's extreme position that contraception is always morally wrong. There are many instances in which a couple is permitted to use contraception. Judaism, of course, insists that children are always a blessing and therefore, discourages a couple from using devices that impede pregnancy (at least until they have a boy and a girl who can themselves one day propagate the species). But if pregnancy will cause any kind of physical or mental health problems, such as where a marriage will be severely strained mentally, emotionally or financially, they can, of course use contraception.

MM: But, not condoms?

SB: No, for a married couple, absolutely not. If they want to use contraception should use the pill or a diaphragm. The condom is a barrier to intimacy. As a single person, if you ask me, is it better to die than to use a condom. Of course, use a condom.

MM: How has the fallout from the controversy surrounding you and your book affected your life?

SB: I resigned from a position that was similar to being a designated preacher. I wasn't forced to resign, I choose to resign because I feel that what I am saying is extremely important because it is geared primarily to a younger audience. I am trying to show them the application of ancient Jewish ideas to their lives and to show that Judaism is speaking their language. To be restrained or straightjacketed by antiquated communal norms, like a Rabbi can't talk about this and not be able to address myself to young people I thought was a mistake.

MM: What do you think are the keys to a happy marriage?

SB: A very passionate sex life, great verbal communication, lots of patience, always trying to judge each other favorably, don't take yourself too seriously, humor. The essence for marriage is the love for human company over a love for perfection. There is nobody perfect. I also say, "Love is far more important than being right, lose the argument and win back your spouse."