

Cohabitation in the Tanakh

By Yochanan Zaqantov

Today in our society we see that many people treat sex as something that is to be treated as casually as one might change a pair of shoes. Is this what Yehovah would want? Did he want us to casually have sex with multiple partners? What does sex signify? When does a relationship become a committed one? We will try to answer these and more today.

First lets see some Hebrew for the words that indicate a relationship. The First one is 'Aras, which can be used for Engaged or Not Engaged. This is reference number 781 (Aleph-Resh-Sin) and found on page 172 in the New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance (NEHC) and on page 76 of the Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon (BDB).

Shemot/Exodus 22:15-16

15 If a man seduces a virgin for whom the **bride-price has not been paid (lo orasah לֹא-אָרְשָׁה)**, and lies with her, he must make her his wife by **payment of a bride-price (mahor yim'harenah 4117 מָהָר יִמְהַרְנָה)**. 16 If her father refuses to give her to him, he must still weigh out silver in **accordance with the bride-price (kamohar 4117 כַּמֹּהָר)** for virgins.

First we see that a bride price is paid for a woman then she becomes his wife through an agreement. A contract if you will. So a woman, who is a virgin, lays with a man then through that action he must take her as a wife. She is not contracted in an engagement but still the mohar must be paid. The Kaf would be "as" which would seem to indicate the payment was the same as one contracting marriage.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 20:7

7 Is there anyone who has paid the **bride-price (Eras אֲרָשׁ)** for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her. (JPS)

7 And who is the man that has betrothed a woman and has not (yet) taken her (in marriage)? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man take her! (Schoken)

We see from this that the Bride price is given and he has not taken her yet.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:23-27

23 In the case of a virgin who is **engaged** (**me'orasah** מְאֹרָסָה) to a man—if a man comes upon her in town and lies with her, 24 you shall take the two of them out to the gate of that town and stone them to death: the girl because she did not cry for help in the town, and the man because he violated another man's wife. Thus you will sweep away evil from your midst. 25 But if the man comes upon **the engaged** (**hame'orasah** הַמְאֹרָסָה) girl in the open country, and the man lies with her by force, only the man who lay with her shall die, 26 but you shall do nothing to the girl. The girl did not incur the death penalty, for this case is like that of a man attacking another and murdering him. 27 He came upon her in the open; though **the engaged** (**hame'orasah** הַמְאֹרָסָה) girl cried for help, there was no one to save her.

Here we see that an engaged woman was a wife in every sense except in the lying with her. So in both of these cases, the man have committed adultery.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:28-29

28 If a man comes upon a virgin who is **not engaged** (**lo orasah** לֹא-אֹרָסָה) and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are discovered, 29 the man who lay with her shall pay the girl's father fifty [shekels of] silver, and she shall be his wife. Because he has violated her, he can never have the right to divorce her.

Like we saw earlier the same situation except it does not say the father can refuse.

We see that a girl is either engaged or not engaged. She is the wife to her promised man and remains that until he puts her out.

To intimately know (sex) Yada (Yod-Dalet-Ayin) verb. This is reference number 3045 and found starting on page 500 in the NEHC and starting on page 393 of the BDB.

Here this word Yada is to intimately know. In the relationship between man and woman it means sex.

Bereshit/Genesis 4:1

1 Now the man **knew** (**yada** יָדָע) his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gained a male child with the help of Yehovah."

Bereshit/Genesis 4:17

17 Cain **knew** (**veyeda** וַיֵּדָע) his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch.

Bereshit/Genesis 4:25

25 Adam **knew** (**veyeda** וַיֵּדַע) his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, meaning, “Elohim has provided me with- another offspring in place of Abel,” for Cain had killed him.

In these three verses there is little disagreement that in these cases it means sex.

Bamidbar/Numbers 31:17, 18, 35

17 Now, therefore, slay every male among the children, and slay also every woman who **has known** (**yoda'at** יָדַעַת) a man carnally; 18 but spare every young woman who **has not had carnal relations** (**lo yada'u** לֹא יָדְעוּ) with a man.

35 and a total of 32,000 human beings, namely, the women who **had not had carnal relations** (**lo yad'u** לֹא יָדְעוּ).

In these verses, it references virgins or one who knows not a man.

To Lie or Lie Down (shakab) verb (Shin-Kaf-Bet). Reference number 7901 and found starting on page 1257 in the NEHC and starting on page 1011 in the BDB.

Mostly this word is used literally for lying down but in some cases it is use as a euphemism for sex.

Vayiqra/Leviticus 15:18

18 And if a man **has carnal relations** (**shikh'vat** שִׁכַּבְתָּ) with a woman, they shall bathe in water and remain unclean until evening.

You can see that this is a case where the chapter of Vayiqra is dealing with Sexual relations that this verse is referencing one lying.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:23-27

23 In the case of a virgin who is engaged to a man—if a man comes upon her in town **and lies** (**vashakhav** וַשְׁכַּב) with her, 24 you shall take the two of them out to the gate of that town and stone them to death: the girl because she did not cry for help in the town, and the man because he violated another man's wife. Thus you will sweep away evil from your midst. 25 But if the man comes upon the engaged girl in the open country, and the man **lies** (**vashakhav** וַשְׁכַּב) with her by force, only the man **who lay**

(shakhav שִׁכַּב) with her shall die, 26 but you shall do nothing to the girl. The girl did not incur the death penalty, for this case is like that of a man attacking another and murdering him. 27 He came upon her in the open; though the engaged girl cried for help, there was no one to save her.

Again like the verses we saw earlier to lie or lay is a way of describing sex in some cases of this word.

To take (Laqach), which is a verb (Lamed-Kaf-Chet). It is reference number 3947 and found starting on page 644 in the NEHC and starting on page 534 in the BDB.

In this case you could argue that this loosely refers to sex also. It is shown in the sense that a man takes a wife or possesses here.

Bereshit/Genesis 4:19

19 Lamech **took** (vayiqach וַיִּקַּח) to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah.

Lamech took or possessed his wives.

Bereshit/Genesis 6:2

2 the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and **took** (vayiqachu וַיִּקְחוּ) wives from among those that pleased them.

Here we see the daughters of men were taken as wives.

Bereshit/Genesis 12:19

19 Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I **took** (va’eqqach וַאֲקַח) her as my wife? Now, here is your wife; take her and begone!”

Now the question is whether this was literally taken or like betrothal. In the sense of this word it would be consistent that it was take like the other accounts here.

Bereshit/Genesis 19:14

14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, **who had married** (loq’chei לֹקְחֵי) his daughters, and said, “Up, get out of this place, for Yehovah is about to destroy the city.” But he seemed to his sons-in-law as one who jests.

Here we see even Lots daughters had husbands.

Shemot/Exodus 6:25

25 And Aaron's son Eleazar **took (laqach לקח)** to wife one of Putiel's daughters, and she bore him Phinehas. Those are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their families.

Eleazer took a wife or possessed her.

Shemu'el Aleph/I Samuel 25:42-43

42 Then Abigail rose quickly and mounted an ass, and with five of her maids in attendance she followed David's messengers; and **she became** his wife.

43 Now David **had taken (laqach לקח)** Ahinoam of Jezreel; so both of them became his wives.

Here we see that Avigail became the wife of David through his possessing her.

Bereshit/Genesis 34:1-24

1 Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. 2 Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, **and took (vayiqach ויקח)** her and lay with her by force. 3 Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly.

4 So Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as a wife."

5 Jacob heard **that he had defiled (time 2930 אַמֵּט)** his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. 6 Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. 7 Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel **by lying (lish'kav לשׁוּב)** with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done.

8 And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. 9 Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves: 10 You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it." 11 Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, "Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me.

12 Ask of me a **bride-price (mohar מוֹהָר)** ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife."

13 Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile because **he had defiled (time 2930 אַמֵּט)** their sister Dinah—14 and said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a

disgrace among us. 15 Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. 16 Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. 17 But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, **we will take** (valaqech'nu וְלִקְחָנוּ) our daughter and go.”

18 Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 19 And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father's house. 20 So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, 21 “These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. 22 But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. 23 Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us.” 24 All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town, were circumcised.

In this account we see that before torah was given in the case of someone outside of the immediate family the taking of a daughter by the outsider was not the same as one taking a woman in Devarim. Shechem took Dinah and then wanted to make her a covenant wife. Clearly, the brothers felt this was the improper way to do this.

Shemot/Exodus 21:7-11

7 When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be freed as male slaves are. 8 If she proves to be displeasing to her master, **who designated** (ya'adah יַעֲדָהּ) her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders, since he broke faith with her. 9 And **if he designated** (yiy'adennah יִיעֲדָנָהּ) her for his son, he shall deal with her as is the practice with free maidens. 10 If **he marries** (yiqach יִקַּח) another, he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. 11 If he fails her in these three ways, she shall go free, without payment.

Here we see that whether the man who buys a daughter of Yisrael as a slave and then takes her for himself or his son as a wife she is no longer a slave but a free woman.

Shemot/Exodus 34:15-16

15 You must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for they will lust after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices. 16 **And when you take** (velaqach'ta וְלִקְחָתָּ) wives from among their

daughters for your sons, their daughters will lust after their gods and will cause your sons to lust after their gods.

You can see from here that when you take a wife from these daughters among you here it is referring to it in the sense of a covenant. This is something we are told not to do.

Shofetim/Judges 14:1-4

1 Once Samson went down to Timnah; and while in Timnah, he noticed a girl among the Philistine women. 2 On his return, he told his father and mother, “I noticed one of the Philistine women in Timnah; please **get (qechu you take קָחוּ)** her for me as a wife.” 3 His father and mother said to him, “Is there no one among the daughters of your own kinsmen and among all our people, that you must go and **take (laqachat לְקַחַת)** a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson answered his father, “**Get (qach חַק)** me that one, for she is the one that pleases me.” 4 His father and mother did not realize that this was Yehovah’s doing: He was seeking a pretext against the Philistines, for the Philistines were ruling over Israel at that time.

We see that Samson also wanted to take a wife. We see several forms of the verb here.

There is another word used for engage or betrothal. Ya’ad (Yod-Ayin-Dalet), which is a verb. It is found starting on page 545 in the NEHC and starting on page 416 in the BDB. It can also mean to appoint but not in betrothal the same as the earlier.

Shemot/Exodus 21:7-11

7 When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be freed as male slaves are. 8 If she proves to be displeasing to her master, **who designated (ya’adah יָעַדָּהּ)** her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders, since he broke faith with her. 9 And **if he designated (yiy’adennah יִיעַדְנָהּ)** her for his son, he shall deal with her as is the practice with free maidens.

The first usage is the Kal Preterite and the second is the Kal Future. In both of these we see that the Hebrew slave girl is not to be treated the same. After engaging she becomes free if she is not pleasing to the owner.

So what was the process of Marriage in the Tanakh?

For the Covenant Wife:

1. Offer is made by the man’s family for her directed to her family. Though after torah was given it seems that the father was the permission holder. (Bereshit 24, Genesis 29, Exodus 22)

2. The woman in the earlier example was asked whether she wanted to go. We have no later example of this but it is not unimaginable that a father might ask the daughter or even be swayed by her. (Bereshit 24)
3. The agreement is therefore made and she becomes his wife even before they have become intimate with each other. We see this very clearly in Devarim and from earlier references. (Bereshit 24, Deut. 20:7,
4. Next, the man and woman consummate the relationship. The man comes into the woman and lies down with her, possesses her, has sex with her. She and him become bound in that only a divorce will remove them from the relationship. (Duet. 24)

What about the concubine? How is she different than the covenant wife?

First we know that the wife talked of earlier was through an agreement. So now, lets look at concubines.

Bereshit/Genesis 25:1-6

1 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. **2** She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. **3** Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim. **4** The descendants of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Enoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. **5** Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac; **6** but to Abraham's sons by concubines (hapilageshim) Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East.

We see that pilegsh or in this case Avraham has at least two since it was plural. Hagar and Keturah. These had children whom Avraham cared for but they did not receive inheritance for their sons. Avraham made other arrangements.

Pilegsh is (Pey-Lamed-Gimmel-Shin) and it is a feminine noun. It can be found on pages 1017 and 1018 in the NEHC and starting on page 811 in the BDB.

Bereshit/Genesis 22:20-24

20 Some time later, Abraham was told, "Milcah too has borne children to your brother Nahor: **21** Uz the first-born, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram; **22** and Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel"—**23** Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. **24** And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

Here we see that Nahor also had a concubine. Nothing is mentioned in the cases of Keturah and Reumah that they were slaves first like Hagar. They we just wives also but we see later that they has no agreement.

Bereshit/Genesis 35:22

22 While Israel stayed in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine (pilegish); and Israel found out. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number.

Here we see that Bilhah who was also a slave to Rachel was given to Yaaqov.

Bereshit/Genesis 30:4-5

4 So she gave him her maid Bilhah as concubine (ishah), and Jacob cohabited with her.
5 Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

The question of inheritance is tested with Bilhah and Zilpah. Both of these were wives and concubines and it appears in other cases concubines don't get inheritance but the descendants appear to because all the sons of Yaaqov did get an inheritance. While the mothers would have left with nothing the offspring would get something.

Shemu'el Bet/II Samuel 16:21-22

21 And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Have intercourse with your father's concubines, whom he left to mind the palace; and when all Israel hears that you have dared the wrath of your father, all who support you will be encouraged." 22 So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom lay with his father's concubines with the full knowledge of all Israel.

David too had concubines. Avsalom took his fathers wives, which Torah teaches we should not do. This was considered a political thing to do. How did David treat these concubines later?

Shemu'el Bet/II Samuel 20:3

3 David went to his palace in Jerusalem, and the king took the ten concubines he had left to mind the palace and put them in a guarded place; he provided for them, but he did not cohabit with them. They remained in seclusion until the day they died, in living widowhood.

Since another man slept with his concubine wives he no longer slept with them.

So a concubine is simply a wife with an agreement for her. We know that when a man sleeps with a woman without an agreement she becomes his ishah.

So what about pre-marital sex? Well looking through the Tanakh I don't find a situation where this was happening. Women were the properties of their father until given to a husband who possessed her and she became a part of him and some might say his property. Thus, a widow or divorced woman was in a precarious position. So lets look at

a widow and see how she handled the situation. We have already looked at Tamar and so let's look at Ruth.

Rut/Ruth 3:1-

1 Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. 2 Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight. 3 So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do." 5 She replied, "I will do everything you tell me." 6 She went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. 7 Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grainpile. Then she went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back—there was a woman lying at his feet! 9 "Who are you?" he asked. And she replied, "I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread your robe over your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman." 10 He exclaimed, "Be blessed of Yehovah, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich.

Here we see that as a widow if it were only sex that she and he could have done something here. Yet, he was also a redeeming kinsman. Thus, to give a son to her dead husband like that of Tamar. So like Tamar with what was to happen with Onan Yehudah's son. Boaz was to fulfill this role showing that just because she is without a husband it is not ok to have sex. We saw with Tamar that Yehudah felt that one who had sex even as a widow was adultery because she was further promised to Yehudah's third son.. Rut is not promised and so she is instructed how to approach him.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 25:5-10

5 When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and leaves no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married to a stranger, outside the family. Her husband's brother shall unite with her: he shall take her as his wife and perform the levir's duty. 6 The first son that she bears shall be accounted to the dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out in Israel. 7 But if the man does not want to marry his brother's widow, his brother's widow shall appear before the elders in the gate and declare, "My husband's brother refuses to establish a name in Israel for his brother; he will not perform the duty of a levir." 8 The elders of his town shall then summon him and talk to him. If he insists, saying, "I do not want to marry her," 9 his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull the sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and make this declaration: Thus shall be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house! 10 And he shall go in Israel by the name of "the family of the unsandaled one."

If a woman's husband died it was the responsibility of the brother or close kinsman to take her and make her his wife through taking her in sex. Providing a first son to his dead brother.

When a man sleeps with a woman and latter gives her a get (divorce). That would assume a relationship was established between them. Since a get is the recognition of some form of binding relationship. Therefore, a man and a woman are not shown to have casual sex like we see much of today. If a woman goes out and has a relationship with more than one man at a time she is considered a harlot. She is married to the first man even if there is no agreement and establishing a relationship with the second man at the same time. A man on the other hand may acquire many wives by simply having sex and making them his women. But then he also has to care for them, feed and cloth them, and continue to have sex with them. There is no commandment in the Tanakh that shows one should not have premarital sex. Yet we have seen here that sex in of it self binds you as man and woman. It means there no way in my mind for a man and a woman to have even a one-time encounter. Therefore, while a command is not there the evidence throughout the Tanakh indicates that sex is the binding element that makes a man and woman bound.

Bereshit/Genesis 2:22

22 And Yehovah Elohim fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. **23** Then the man said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, For from man was she taken." **24** Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh. **25** The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.

We see that as the first ish and ishah were of the one basher (flesh) not that they literally are one flesh but become one of each other. We have lost sight of this in that before giving of Torah to the Children of Yisrael and after. The woman must be attached with only one man at a time. A woman once attached to another man could not return to a previous man. Were there was sex without a relationship it was seen as harlotry / whoredom. If you are single in a sexual relationship together as a man and woman then you are no longer single, but married. In today's society, we call that a common law marriage. In biblical times, that was a concubine. A marriage with ceremony and vows is a covenant marriage and the ketubah or prenuptial agreement is a contract. Therefore, you are both single and not having sex or married and having sex. In the Tanakh, I see no middle ground.