



# A Torah of Sexual Ethics: Disappointment, Honesty, Growth

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## I. Honesty: Understanding the Problem(s)

### A. Defining Objectification

#### 1. Dr. Martha Nussbaum, *Citadels of Pride*, (2021), pp.12-13

“There are many ways in which humanity may be denied, so objectification should be viewed as a cluster concept, involving (at least) seven distinct ...ways to treat a person as a thing:

1. Instrumentality...
2. Denial of autonomy...
3. Inertness...
4. Fungibility...
5. Violability...
6. Ownership...
7. Denial of Subjectivity...
8. Silencing...

### B. The “Pollution” Model

<p><b>2. Ketubbot 51b</b> Said Shmuel’s father: The wife of an Israelite man who was raped is forbidden to her husband— <i>we are worried lest it started as coercion but ended as consent.</i></p> <p><b>3. Leviticus 18:24</b> Do not <b>pollute</b> yourselves in any of those ways, for it is by such that the nations that I am casting out before you <b>polluted</b> themselves.</p> <p><b>4. Numbers 5:13</b> another man has had carnal relations with her unbeknown to her husband, and it was secret and she has become <b>polluted...</b></p>	<p><b>כתובות נא:</b> אמר אבוה דשמואל אשת ישראל שנאנסה אסורה לבעלה חיישינן שמא תחלתה באונס וסופה ברצון.</p> <p><b>ויקרא יח:כד</b> אל־תִּשְׁמְאוּ בְּכָל־אֵלֶּה כִּי בְּכָל־אֵלֶּה נִטְמְאוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־אָנֹכִי מֵשַׁלֵּם מִפְּנֵיהֶם:</p> <p><b>במדבר ה:יג</b> וְשָׁכַב אִישׁ אֶת־שִׁבְת־זָרָעוֹ וְנִעְלַם מֵעֵינֵי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְנִסְתָּרָה וְהָיָא נִטְמְאָה...</p>
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## C. The “Property” Model

<p><b>5. Exodus 22:15-16</b>          15 If a man seduces a virgin who was not betrothed, and lies with her, he must make her his wife by payment of a bride-price.          16 If her father refuses to give her to him, he must still weigh out silver in accordance with the bride-price for virgins.</p> <p><b>6. Deuteronomy 22:28-29</b>          28 If a man comes upon a virgin who is not engaged and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are discovered,          29 the man who lay with her shall pay the young woman’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.</p> <p><b>7. Temple Scroll (11QT)66:8–11</b>          If a man <b>seduces</b> a young woman,          A virgin who is not engaged, and she is fit for him according to the statute, and he lies with her,          And he is found out, then the man lying with her shall give the father of the young woman fifty (pieces of) silver and for him          She shall be a wife because he <b>violated</b> her. He shall not be able to send her away all his days.</p>	<p><b>שמות כב:טו-טז</b>          וְכִי־יִפְתֶּה אִישׁ בְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אֲרֻשָׁה וְשָׁכַב עִמָּה מִקֵּדֶר מִהַרְבֵּה לֹדֹת לְאִשָּׁה:          אִם־מָצְאוּ יִמְצְאוּ אִבֶּיהָ לְתִתָּהּ לוֹ כֶּסֶף יִשְׁלַל כַּמֶּהֱרֵב הַבְּתוּלָתִי:</p> <p><b>דברים כב:כח-כט</b>          כִּי־יִמְצָא אִישׁ נַעֲרָה בְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אֲרֻשָׁה וַתִּפְשָׁה וְשָׁכַב עִמָּה וְנִמְצְאוּ:          וְנִתְּן הָאִישׁ הַשֹּׁכֵב עִמָּה לְאִבֵי הַנַּעֲרָה חֲמִשִּׁים כֶּסֶף וְלֹדֹתֶיהָ לְאִשָּׁה מִסֵּת אֲשֶׁר עָנָה לֹא־יִבְרַל שְׁלָחָה כָּל־יָמָיו:</p> <p><b>מגילת המקדש</b>          כי יפתה איש נערה בתולה אשר לוא אורשה והיא רוייה לו מן החוק ושכב עמה ונמצא ונתן האיש השוכב עמה לאבי הנערה חמשים כסף ולוא תהיה לאשה תחת אשר ענה לוא יוכל לשלחה כול ימיו.</p>
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## II. Tracing Seeds of Subjectivity: The “Consent” Model

### A. “Pollution Model” and Consent

<p><b>8. Sifre Bemidbar #7</b>  <i>“She was not caught.”</i> (Numbers 5:13) To exclude [from <i>sotah</i>] a woman who was coerced.</p> <p><b>9. Ketubot 51b</b>          It is taught in accord with Rava:  <i>“And she was not seized”</i> she is forbidden [to her husband] - thus if she was seized (coerced) she is permitted...</p>	<p><b>ספרי במדבר ז</b>          "והיא לא נתפשה." להוציא את האנוסה.</p> <p><b>כתובות נא:</b>          תניא כוותיה דרבא והיא לא נתפשה אסורה          הא נתפשה מותרת</p>
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### B. “Property Model” and Consent

<p><b>10. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael Nezikin 17</b>  <i>If a man seduce a virgin.</i>          The verse is coming to teach regarding the case of a seduced woman that he pays a fine because of her.</p>	<p><b>מכילתא דר"י נזיקין יז</b>          וכי יפתה איש בתולה. בא הכתוב ללמד על המפוחה שישלם עליה קנס;</p>
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<p>And logic would dictate: Since a seized woman is in her father's domain and a seduced woman is in her father's domain, if you learned, regarding the case of a seized woman, that he pays a fine because of her, so too, in the case of the seduced woman, he should pay a fine because of her.</p> <p>No – if you say regarding a seized woman, <b>where he has violated her consent</b> and her father's consent therefore he pays a fine because of her, would you say the same for a seduced woman where he only violated her father's will? Therefore he should not pay a fine because of her.</p> <p>Behold – since I did not merit to derive [the law] from logic, the verse needed to bring it.</p>	<p>והדין נותן, הואיל ותפוסה ברשות אביה ומפותה ברשות אביה, אם למדת על תפוסה שמשלם עליה קנס, אף מפותה משלם עליה קנס;</p> <p>לא, אם אמרת בתפוסה <b>שעבר על דעתה</b> ועל דעת אביה, לפיכך הוא משלם עליה קנס, תאמר במפותה שלא עבר אלא על דעת אביה, לפיכך לא ישלם עליה קנס, הא לפי שלא זכיתי מן הדין צריך הכתוב להביאו.</p>
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### III. Regaining Subjectivity: Narrating the Problem(s)

#### A. The Power of Disclosures

<p><b>11. Leviticus 14:35</b> The one whose house it is [that looks afflicted] comes and tells the kohen, “Something like an affliction appeared to me in the house.”</p> <p><b>12. Sefat Emet Tazria 1875</b> ...As there is a teaching - <i>metzora</i> means <i>motzi ra</i> - brings out the bad. This means that through the affliction the bad is drawn out from a person's interior to the outside (see <i>Kli Yakar</i> commentary). And certainly, a person who is whole should take joy in seeing his lowliness. And through this one will merit to be purified from the pollution being buried inside them. Therefore, when the <i>kohen</i> sees the affliction the pollution is drawn outward.</p>	<p><b>ויקרא יד:לה</b> וּבָא אֲשֶׁר-רָלוּ סְבִיית וְהִגִּיד לַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר כָּנָנַע נִרְאָה לִי בְּבֵיתִי:</p> <p><b>שפת אמת תזריע תרל"ה</b> כדאיתא מצורע מוציא רע. פי' שע"י הנגע נמשך הרע מפנימיות האדם לחוץ. כ"פ בס' כלי יקר ע"ש.</p> <p>ובוודאי אדם השלם ראוי לו לשמוח בזה שרואה שפלותו. ושע"ז יזכה להתטהר מלהיות הטומאה טמונה בפנימיותו. ולכן ע"י ראיית הכהן נמשך הטומאה לחוץ.</p>
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#### B. Embracing Uncertainty in Disclosures

<p><b>Sifra Metzora Parashah 5:10</b> <i>An affliction</i> - why does the verse say “like” an affliction? Even a sage who knows that it certainly is an affliction should not decree and say “An affliction appeared to me in the house”.</p> <p><b>Brachot 4a</b> As the Master said: Accustom your tongue to say: I do not know, lest you become entangled in deceit.</p>	<p><b>ספרא</b> נגע - מה ת"ל כנגע אפילו תלמיד חכם ויודע שהוא נגע וודאי לא יגזור ויאמר נגע נראה לי בבית אלא כנגע נראה לי בבית</p> <p><b>ברכות ד.</b> דאמר מר: למד לשונך לומר איני יודע, שמא תתבדה ותאחז</p>
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**Dr. Martha Nussbaum, *Citadels of Pride* (2021), p. 51**

“...we must listen to the narratives of victims and give their account of their own experience some degree of priority. That epistemic correction is important, since members of subordinated groups have typically been denied an equal status as knowers and givers of testimony. Listening never means listening with no critical questions...”

## C. Listening Carefully as Victims-Survivors Narrate the Problem(s)

### 1. “Pollution” as Experience of Filth/Stigma

**Interview with Gisele Pelicot (victim-survivor in France), Feb 2026**

*You write that “a wave of shame swelled up inside me” after this revelation. Can you talk me through why you felt shame at that moment?*

I think all victims feel this shame. You feel dirty, you feel degraded. There’s nothing human about it. I spent hours in the shower trying to wash away this filth, this dirt that makes you feel dehumanized. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/13/magazine/gisele-pelicot-france-rape-case-story.html>)

### 2. Problems Our Jewish Communities Face - Beyond High Drama Headlines

**Dr. Guila Benchimol, “Hearing Survivors’ Voices when Reading About Dinah” *Times of Israel*, Dec 3, 2025**

“The spiritual impacts of sexual harm in Jewish spaces [in 2024 research study] were profound, with participants experiencing a loss of place, faith, and spiritual people. Many survivors left Judaism or changed their spiritual affiliations. For example, one participant experienced “loss of belief in the institutions that had formed the basis of my Jewish life.” Another “left the institution of Judaism for 30 years.” Some participants experienced a “loss of faith,” questioning their connection to God, spirituality, and organized religion. One participant acknowledged, “I’m not religious at all anymore...I don’t have any interest in being in a community where victims of sexual violence are treated horribly... So yeah. I went off the *derech* (religious path) relatively immediately.” Another stated, “I lost a lot of faith and am still tending to the spiritual harms of being abused in the presence of *sifrei Torah* (Torah scrolls).” Others experienced a rupture in their relationships with spiritual leaders, and the very acts of attending synagogue and prayer, once sources of comfort, became sources of stress and pain... Participants noted that institutional betrayal made adherence to Jewish values feel like “an empty promise,” deepening their sense of disconnection and further harm.”

(<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/hearing-survivors-voices-when-reading-about-dinah/>)

See full article:

Ackerman, A.R., Benchimol, G. “I Went off the Derech”: Pathways to Relational Disconnection after Sexual Harm in Jewish Spaces. *Cont Jewry* 45, 66 (2025). (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12397-025-09681-y>)

