THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: Socialization or strategic planning?

We continue with some thoughts about the Seventh Commandment: “You shall not commit adultery”. Last Thursday we talked about the difficulties a Jewish person has in maintaining his code of moral conduct in a society with opposing codes. We explain that sexuality in Judaism takes place exclusively in the intimacy of marriage. This not only has to do with the Jewish view on premarital relations or adultery, but also with the phenomenon of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the sexual industrialization that characterizes modern society. Take as an example the hyper-sexualization of girls, a phenomenon of which modern society still ignores the consequences in the long run. Girls 8, 9 or 10 years old use make up, dress in a seductive way and behave like adult women. And all this comes through the influence of the media, television, internet, and smartphones.

What should we do then with this media invasion that threatens to transform Jewish values and the Jewish codes of sexual behavior?

SOCIALIZATION: Socialization means that people absorb the values of the society in which they live without evaluating or questioning those values (since it is usually the only values they know) and integrate them into their personality. Many Jews do not know enough about Judaism, or have not been well informed, and have no other frame of reference to evaluate what surrounds them. These people are probably “socialized”. And that state one assimilates to what he sees and happens around him. When we talk about assimilation we should not only think about mixed marriages. It is the assimilation of values, of non-Jewish moral codes, which must first concern us.

Now, when you study Tora and learn the morality and the codes of the people of Israel, you develop an awareness of what is going on around you. And then you can look at it and evaluate

the reality around you “from the balcony” (an expression used in psychology to describe an objective view, from outside of oneself, and in this case, from outside the culture that surrounds us). Only then one is able to compare one moral code against the other and make an informed evaluation.

But, is there anything that can be done once one is aware of the negative impact of sexual banalization?
Following the example we mentioned before, parents who do not want their children to be “socialized” into the modern moral codes, there are at least two possible strategies.

FILTERS: There are parents who will let their children have and use computers, smartphones and the Internet, but with certain limits. I’m not talking about time-limits but content limits. Examples: today there are routers that can be programmed to limit access to adult material. There are also free virtual filters like K9. And the most popular and effective ways of controlling internet are the “Jewish” Internet providers, which will filter out inappropriate material (see here). TAG, for example, is one of the most important companies in this area and has offices in many cities around the world. See http://www.taghelpline.org/. Another provider is KOSHERNET www.koshernet.com which also has subsidiaries all over the world. There are also “parental control” apps for smartphones. See THIS. All these filters would drastically reduce the exposure of our children to sexual mediatic banality, and other distortions of modern society.

BLOCKING: Many Jewish families would choose not to have access to TV or internet or cell phones with internet, altogether. These families establish these virtual barriers since they think that otherwise it would be impossible to avoid exposure to modern moral trivialization. While it is not easy to close your home hermetically to your cultural surroundings, these Jewish families, without electronic screens in their homes, create their own environment, where studying, reading and relaxed family conversations fill the spaces that other homes

occupy with the internet.

It is not my intention to pass judgment on which strategy is the best or the most effective. I think both have their logic and merit. And both require great effort and sacrifices. What is most critical is the understanding of the problems of socialization in modern society, and the sense of urgency to avoid the trivialization of something as intimate, sacred and delicate as sexuality.

It is true that society exerts an influence that seems impossible to overcome. But after all, we are descendants of Abraham Abinu. A man who, convinced of his values, was able to resist social pressure and was willing to make huge sacrifices to turn away from what separated him from HaShem, and stay on the side of truth.