

Celibacy and Religious Traditions Edited by Carl Olson Quotes

To a degree, the popular conception that Jews have always rejected celibacy as an option is correct--but only to a degree. We have documentation for communities of celibate Jews for the late Second Temple period (second century bce–first century ce); however, this practice was limited to small and marginal sects. From the time of the temple’s destruction and onward we have no record of a celibate community of Jews, although we hear occasionally of individual Jews who did practice celibacy. Moreover, rabbinic Judaism, which slowly became the dominant form of Jewish religious expression from 70 ce onward, understood Genesis 1:28, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it,” to be not only a blessing but also a commandment. The sages also interpreted Exodus 21:10 as establishing an obligation for a husband to have conjugal relations with his wife on a regular basis. The rabbis, who were nothing if not punctilious about detail, even defined the frequency required of men in different professions and social classes. To remain celibate, therefore, was viewed as sinful, as if, say some sages, one had spilt blood or diminished the divine image. To be celibate within marriage, even if one had already had progeny, constituted a breach of the marital contract as defined by the rabbis. - Eliezer Diamond¹

[RU.org notes: This is directed at monks:] It would be better . . . if your penis had entered the mouth of a terrifying and poisonous snake than a woman’s vagina. . . . It would be better . . . if your penis had entered a charcoal pit, burning, blazing, aflame, than a woman’s vagina. Vinaya III.20–23, attributed to the Buddha²

[RU.org – Here is the quote with more context:] Haven’t I given many teachings for the fading away of lust, for the clearing away of intoxication, for the removal of thirst, for the uprooting of attachment, for the cutting off of the round of rebirth, for the stopping of craving, for fading away, for ending, for extinguishment? Haven’t I in many ways taught the abandoning of sensual pleasures, the full understanding of the perceptions of sensual pleasure, the removal of thirst for sensual pleasure, the elimination of thoughts of sensual pleasure, the stilling of the fevers of sensual pleasure? It would be better, foolish man, for your penis to enter the mouth of a highly venomous snake than to enter a woman. It would be better for your penis to enter the mouth of a black snake than to enter a woman. It would be better for your penis to enter a blazing charcoal

¹ 41.

² 201.

pit than to enter a woman. Why is that? For although it might cause death or death-like suffering, it would not cause you to be reborn in a bad destination. But this might.^{3]}

As these rules indicate, Buddhist monks are forbidden to have anything to do with sexuality, either for themselves or for the benefit of others. The ideal is asexual indifference to worldly attractions, and many of the lesser rules relate to acts leading up to coitus, all of which are forbidden. Anyone who commits these lesser offenses is required to confess the transgression during the fortnightly recitation of the Pratimoksa. Those who have remained pure should stay silent when asked if they have broken any of the norms they have just recounted. If any member of the assembly has violated a rule, he or she should publicly confess, and in some cases this is sufficient. More serious matters require a meeting of the monastic community (sam. gha-karma) to decide on the seriousness of the offense and to mete out punishment (often a period of suspension for actions relating to sexuality). Commentaries on the Vinayas go into even greater detail regarding exactly what constitutes an offense and the proper punishments. According to one Vinaya text, sexual intercourse involves penetration of any orifice “as far as the width of a sesame seed,” and so even if one begins intercourse and subsequently calls it off, one is still guilty.⁴

Buy the book: <https://www.amazon.com.au/Celibacy-Religious-Traditions-Carl-Olson/dp/0195306317>

³ Theravāda Collection on Monastic Law. "The Great Analysis: The Chapter on Offenses Entailing Expulsion, The First Training Rule on Expulsion." In Vinaya Piṭaka <<https://suttacentral.net/pli-tv-bu-vb-pj1/en/brahmali?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=none&highlight=false&script=latin>>.

⁴ 206.