

THOUGHT CATALOG®

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I Bet You Didn't Know Orthodox Jews Have Smokin' Hot Sex Lives

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Two little drops of reddish brown on my underwear. *Here we go again.*

Since I had kids my cycle is irregular, which wouldn't be a big deal except that I'm an Orthodox Jew and I can't even pass the salt to my husband — let alone touch, kiss, or have sex with him — for 12 days after my period starts.

We

never know when we'll have to sleep in separate beds or place a vase with a single rose between us on the dinner table as evidence of our separation.

I was beginning to hate the rigid restrictions on my sex life until the other day, when I was sitting on a blanket with my two toddlers in a suburban Detroit park, eating pretzels from Ziploc bags and listening to other moms talking about their sex lives.

"We haven't had sex since we conceived the twins," said one mom. "And they're a year-and-a-half old. Add nine months to that."

"I just don't feel like it since I had my baby," confessed another, stroking her 15-month-old's hair.

Then came the really shocking admissions. "I'd love to have sex," a third mom said, "but I'd have to do all the work. My husband isn't interested." A fourth mother described her marriage as being more like a brother-sister relationship than a passionate or fierce one.

As I listened to one woman after another bemoan her sad sex life, I thought about how, after five years of marriage, Avy and I are hotter than ever.

Suddenly, I felt very religious.

When I was a horny college senior in love with a Catholic boy from the East Coast, I never would have believed that one day I'd be an Orthodox Jewish wife with two beds in my room. "No way," I'd have said, if you'd told me that my husband would sleep in a twin bed shoved against the wall and I would check the color of mucus in my underwear until seven "clean" days had passed since my period and I could dunk in the ritual bath, or mikvah.

I've always been Jewish, but I didn't become Orthodox until I was in my twenties. I chose this way of living because I liked the way Orthodox husbands looked at their wives—with smoldering sensuality, hidden knowing, and reverence. They spoke sweetly and didn't play games, and I never saw the flicker of distance in their eyes.

After years of dating guys who didn't pay for my dinner, much less pay attention to me, I was ready for a real connection. Hooking up wasn't getting me what I wanted: love. It was time to try something else, and this looked like a world I could get into. There are many elements of Judaism that keep me religious, but the most compelling one is observant marriage.

The night before my wedding, my mother and sister came with me for my first dunk.

By the Orthodox Union's estimate, there are roughly 300 mikvahs in America, but they aren't listed in the phone book, and they don't have big signs proclaiming their purpose. Hidden from the road by tall fencing and overgrown shrubs, the mikvah's bricks held secrets. Bayla, a rabbi's wife, was waiting for us.

Brides can dunk first, before sunset, while other women don't start preparing until they see three stars in the night sky. Bayla led my mother and sister on a tour. "Try it," she said.

pointing to an empty tub. “Walk down the steps. You’ll see how it would feel.” They stepped down hesitantly and looked back, half-smiling, before retreating to wait with folded hands on stiff chairs.

I carried my backpack into the changing room and latched the door behind me. I washed my hair and combed out tangles, flossed my teeth, filed my nails. I stared in the mirror, wondering if this ancient ritual would keep my marriage alive through decades of humdrum, everyday life.

It’s not just the mikvah that makes Orthodox sex so great: The entire system creates over-the-top intensity.

To start with, you’re *shomer n’giyah*, so you don’t touch anyone of the opposite sex—no handshaking, air-kissing, or friendly hugs. In my world, every touch is electric. Then there are the laws of *yichud*, whereby a man and woman who are not related are never alone in a private place. When my neighbor’s husband came to help with the sprinklers when Avy wasn’t there, he walked around to the backyard instead of taking the shortcut through the house.

We do this because it’s part of God’s laws, but also because, as my rabbi explained before our wedding, “It’s about noticing the details.” After my monthly mikvah, it takes several days for Avy and I to get used to handing things to one another. “I forgot that I don’t have to put down the keys first,” he’ll say. “I like putting things right into your hand.”

Before I became religious, I never saw car keys as sexy.

There’s more. In the Aramaic wedding contract that spells out my husband’s obligations, my sexual satisfaction is among them. Our religion allows birth control, as long as it doesn’t serve as an actual barrier between us, and we consult a rabbi to determine which method we should use, and for how long. For Jews, sex isn’t just about making babies—although pregnancy is one of the sexiest times, since we are never off-limits to each another.

As for those 12 days of separation, they’re hard, but the mandated time off is a gift. I don’t have to say no; he doesn’t have to be grossed out by period sex; and we can watch basketball games, read books, or talk on the phone to out-of-state friends without feeling guilty. We spend different time together: we go for coffee, but don’t hold hands. I look at him with the yearning I felt when we were dating. I start to fantasize. My husband’s hands look stronger to me, and I think of his touch. Here’s what we’ll do; here’s how he’ll touch me.

So there I was, on the lawn between two play structures, my children taking drags of water from sippy cups and ambling off to climb and slide and squeal. My heart ached for these women who were so lonely in their relationships, who felt desexualized from breastfeeding babies, whose hormones had killed their libido. I couldn’t imagine 27 months without Avy’s touch—12 days is an eternity.

Every system can strangle you if you let it, and I had just been complaining to Avy about the strictures of our religious sex life.

“So what if I pass you the ketchup!” I spat. “It’s not going to make me have sex with you right here.”

“I kinda like having these nuances,” my husband said quietly. “I miss you, but it’s exciting when I can just come up behind you at the sink, lift your hair, and nuzzle your neck. Hell, holding your hand makes me want you. Would that happen if we didn’t do this?”

I was quiet. Religion is hard, which is why so many people don’t practice it. But there is joy in it, too — which is why I joined the thousands of ba’alei teshuvah, Jews who abandon secular life for the incredible passion that results from devotion to the Torah. And Avy was reminding me of one of the greatest joys: sex.

I am ready. I take off my clothes and fill the bathtub.

After a 45-minute soak, full of peaceful reading, then scrubbing, combing, and rinsing, I am ready to descend into the mikvah’s waters. I follow a woman down a silent, tiled hall until I reach an unmarked door and walk through it. Bright light bounces off the white ceiling. I take off my robe and step in until the water reaches my shoulders. I can hear my breath echo against the wall.

I go under; the water gulps. I bend my knees, burying myself in it. I emerge, and the mikvah attendant says, “Kosher.”

I dunk a second time, a third time. “Kosher.” “Kosher.”

When I am finished, as always, I ask for a moment by myself. The kind woman who assisted me steps outside to wait. I face the wall and talk in whispers. I have conversations, but I am alone. It is my most religious moment.

“Please,” I whisper to the tiles, and emerge into cold air.

Afterward, I whip off the towels and pull on the pink, see-through underwear that rides low on my hips. I dry my curly hair until it’s long on my back, paint my eyes with brown pencil. By the time I leave, I have sprayed perfume, brushed my teeth, and smoothed lotion over my newly shaven legs.

My husband is waiting at home.

He’s put the kids to bed, turned off the game, lit candles in our bedroom, poured two tall glasses of apple wine. I drive into the garage and, before I kill the engine, the door swings open. He is backlit by our house, our life, and he seems larger than ever, dressed in the shirt he knows I love. I smell cologne. We’ve been married for five years, but my heart is pounding: I am so ready to be home.

There’s no blessing over sex, but every time I go to the mikvah I think about all the Hebrew blessings: the one for the first time you see the ocean, the one for overcoming

danger, the blessing for a major purchase (a house, a car, an Armani suit). There are blessings for rainbows, lightning, mountains, truly ugly or beautiful people.

Each Hebrew phrase thanks God for creation, connection, and knowledge. The blessing for the mikvah is no different— it is simple and straightforward, a woman thanking God for commanding her to immerse herself. I think about how the best sex in my life has come from total immersion, and I start to wonder if perhaps all these blessings apply equally to my marriage: truly ugly, truly beautiful, the roll of the ocean over and over again until it's quiet. **T**