

Harlotry in The Tanakh

By

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Harlotry/Whoredom is described today as a woman who takes money for sex. There are names that have been used alternately referring to them as whore, prostitute, among others. But what is the Hebrew word for Harlot or Harlotry and how is this word used in the Tanakh. Does it mean what it means to us today in English?

If we look at Bereshit (Genesis) chapter 38 starting in verse 15.

Bereshit/Genesis 38:15-18

15 When Judah saw her, he took her for **a harlot (lazunah)**; for she had covered her face. 16 So he turned aside to her by the road and said, “Here, let me sleep with you”—for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. “What,” she asked, “will you pay for sleeping with me?” 17 He replied, “I will send a kid from my flock.” But she said, “You must leave a pledge until you have sent it.” 18 And he said, “What pledge shall I give you?” She replied, “Your seal and cord, and the staff which you carry.” So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she conceived by him. 19 Then she went on her way. She took off her veil and again put on her widow’s garb.

It seems very clear that what appears here in this short section seems to support the modern definition of a harlot. But by reading all of chapter 38 we see that Tamar who was the wife of Er was widowed and was promised by Yehudah, Shelah his third son to give a seed (a child) to his dead brother. As we have seen in other places when someone is promised or betrothed it is like they are married in every way except the their having sex.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:22-27

22 If a man is found lying with another man’s wife, both of them—the man and the woman with whom he lay—shall die. Thus you will sweep away evil from Israel.

23 In the case of a virgin who is engaged 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 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 girl cried for help, there was no one to save her.

We see that if the girl is betrothed/engaged in verse 24 she is the engaged man's wife. Of course his is before the giving of the commandments to the children of Yisrael.

Lets return to Bereshit 38:20-23. The prostitute (tamar) disappears. We also see that the word used for her as a Harlot was changed when referred to as one who takes money for payment.

20 Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to redeem the pledge from the woman; but he could not find her. 21 He inquired of the people of that town, "Where is the **cult prostitute (qadeshah 6948)**, the one at Enaim, by the road?" But they said, "There has been no **prostitute (qadeshah)** here." 22 So he returned to Judah and said, "I could not find her; moreover, the townspeople said: There has been no **prostitute (qadeshah)** here." 23 Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. I did send her this kid, but you did not find her."

Then in verse 24-26 we see Tamar is now pregnant and is accuse of being a harlot. Yet we see that is this case she was not a harlot but played one.

24 About three months later, Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the **harlot (zanah)**; in fact, she is with child by **harlotry (liz'nunyim)**." "Bring her out," said Judah, "and let her be burned." 25 As she was being brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, "I am with child by the man to whom these belong." And she added, "Examine these: whose seal and cord and staff are these?" 26 Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more in the right than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he was not intimate with her again.

Now we have identified some Hebrew terms to look up and consider as we define " what is a harlot?"

Zanah (2181): It is a verb. (Zayin-Nun-Hey).

Bereshit/Genesis 34:31

31 But they answered, "Should our sister be treated like a **whore (harlot – hak'zonah)**?"

Here we have the case where Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite took Dinah the Daughter of Yakkov by force. The Sons of Yakkov, on the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males. This was their answer to their Father.

Here we see that the brothers felt she was mistreated as handled as one would do a harlot. In later times the children of Israel would see that indeed if one takes an unbetrothed virgin and has sex they become married.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:28-29

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 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.

We see that if he lies with her she becomes his wife.

Shemot/Exodus 34:13-16

13 No, you must tear down their altars, smash their pillars, and cut down their sacred posts; 14 for you must not worship any other god, because Yehovah, whose name is Impassioned, is an impassioned God. 15 You must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for **they will lust (they play Harlot – vazanu)** after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices. 16 And when you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters will **lust after (vazanu)** their gods and will cause your sons to **lust after (vahiz'nu)** their gods.

Here the seeking to serve other gods is considered harlotry and when the daughters of the land are still following after their gods they will cause the sons to follow after them too.

Vayikra/Leviticus 17:7

7 and that they may offer their sacrifices no more to the goat-demons after whom they **stray (harlotting – zoniym)**. This shall be to them a law for all time, throughout the ages.

The seeking to sacrifice to another god is Harlotry.

Vayikra/Leviticus 19:29

29 Do not degrade (**Profane 2490 – tachalal**) your daughter and make her a **harlot (lahaz'notah)**, lest the land fall into **harlotry (tiz'nah)** and the land be filled with **depravity (evil – zimah)**.

Here we see that profaning (making common to men) one daughter will make her a harlot.

Here is my paper on Profane, which will give you a background on Chalal and how I come to this definition. <http://www.geocities.com/labomb32/talks/Profane.html>

Profane (chahal) is when we take something set apart and make it common. For your daughter she is to be set apart for her husband (ish) and if she sleeps with many men then she profanes herself (common to men) thus, this is the concept of harlotry we are looking for. A woman who is common to men is a harlot regardless if money or payment is received. So let us look further at this.

Vayikra/Leviticus 20:5-6

5 I Myself will set My face against that man and his kin, and will cut off from among their people both him and all who follow him in **going astray (the harlotting - hazuniym)** after Molech. 6 And if any person turns to ghosts and familiar spirits and **goes astray (to harlot liz'not)** after them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from among his people.

The seeking after other gods is Harlotry as we have seen earlier but also seeing someone who does give his children over to Molech (sacrifice them). And not putting them to death was to be cut off for they too were committing harlotry, even seeking a spiritualist was to be cut off because that person was seeing knowledge from another power than Yehovah they were also doing harlotry.

Vayikra/Leviticus 21:7-9,14

7 They shall not marry a woman **defiled (profane – chalalah)** by **harlotry (zonah)**, nor shall they marry one divorced from her husband. For they are holy to their God 8 and you must treat them as holy, since they offer the food of yeloheynu; they shall be holy to you, for I Yehovah who sanctify you am holy.

9 When the daughter of a priest **defiles (profane - chalalah)** herself through **harlotry (liz'nut)**, it is her father whom she **defiles (profane – michalalat)**; she shall be put to the fire.

14 A widow, or a divorced woman, or one who is **degraded (profaned – vachalalah)** by **harlotry (zonah)** —such he may not marry. Only a virgin of his own kin may he take to wife.

This is for the priests and the high priest.

Bamidbar/Numbers 25:1-3

1 While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people **profaned (not used in Hebrew here)** themselves by whoring (**harloted - liz'not**) with the Moabite women, 2 who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshiped that god. 3 Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor, and Yehovah was incensed with Israel.

By having relations with the women of Baal-Peor they were attaching themselves to that people and they were making themselves attached to that other god by worshipping and sacrificing to it.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:20-21

20 But if the charge proves true, the girl was found not to have been a virgin, 21 then the girl shall be brought out to the entrance of her father's house, and the men of her town

shall stone her to death; for she did a shameful thing in Israel, committing fornication (**harlotry – liz’not**) while under her father’s authority. Thus you will sweep away evil from your midst.

Here the woman committed harlotry by having sex before her husband and proclaimed a virgin when she was not.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 23: 18-19

18 No Israelite woman shall be a cult **prostitute (qadeshah – 6948)**, nor shall any Israelite man be a cult **prostitute (qadesh (sodomite) – 6945)**. 19 You shall not bring the fee of a **whore (zonah)** or the pay of a dog into the house of Yehovah yeloheynu in fulfillment of any vow, for both are abhorrent to Yehovah yeloheynu.

Here we see the more traditional view to that of a whore (prostitute) in relationship to a Harlot. Verse 18 is female prostitute 6948 (qadeshah). Also (6945 –qadesh (sodomite or male prostitute)

Devarim/Deuteronomy 31:16

16 Yehovah said to Moses: You are soon to lie with your fathers. This people will thereupon go **astray (vazanah)** after the alien gods in their midst, in the land that they are about to enter; they will forsake Me and break My covenant that I made with them.

By seeking after other gods (elohim) we are not longer set-apart to Yehovah and Break his covenant which tells us not to seek and serve other gods.

Shofetim/Judges 2:17

17 But they did not heed their chieftains either; they went astray (**zanu**) after other gods and bowed down to them. They were quick to turn aside from the way their fathers had followed in obedience to the commandments of Yehovah; they did not do right.

Just as Mosheh had stated in Devarim they went harlotting after the other gods.

Tehillim/Psalms 106:34 – 41 (specifically verse 39)

34 They did not destroy the nations as Yehovah had commanded them,

35 but mingled with the nations and learned their ways.

36 They worshiped their idols, which became a snare for them.

37 Their own sons and daughters they sacrificed to demons.

38 They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters,

whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; so the land was **polluted (chanef 2610)** with bloodguilt.

39 Thus they became **defiled (harlots - vayizanu)** by their acts, **debauched (unclean – vayitameiu)** through their deeds.

40 Yehovah was angry with His people and He abhorred His inheritance.

41 He handed them over to the nations; their foes ruled them.

We can see that again that the act of being a harlot in worshipping other gods makes us unclean and the blood guilt of the sacrificing children polluted the land.

Mishlei/Proverbs 6: 23-29

23 For the commandment is a lamp, The teaching is a light, And the way to life is the rebuke (reproves –tauk'chut 8433) that disciplines (of instructions - musar).

24 It will keep you from an evil woman, From the smooth tongue of a forbidden woman.

25 Do not lust for her beauty Or let her captivate you with her eyes.

26 The last loaf of bread will go for a **harlot (zonah)**; A married woman will snare a person of honor.

27 Can a man rake embers into his bosom Without burning his clothes?

28 Can a man walk on live coals Without scorching his feet?

29 It is the same with one who sleeps with his fellow's wife; None who touches her will go unpunished.

One who touches his fellow wife makes her common (profane) and stops being set-apart thus become a harlot. There is a punishment for adultery.

Mishlei/Proverbs 7: 10-27 is another account of a harlot as a woman who is married and sleeping with other men.

Mishlei/Proverbs 23: 27

27 A harlot is a deep pit; A forbidden woman is a narrow well.

28 She too lies in wait as if for prey, And destroys the unfaithful among men.

A harlot is one who plans for her encounters.

Here we see that a harlot is a woman who is someone who makes herself common to men. A worshiper of other gods is a harlot who has made themselves common in their worship to other gods. Taking on the practice of other elohim makes us no longer set apart to Yehovah. We can see this in the verses that this is used in reference to Israel.

Yirmeyahu/Jeremiah 3: 1,2, 9

1 [The word of Yehovah came to me] as follows: If a man divorces his wife, and she leaves him and marries another man, can he ever go back to her? Would not such a land be **defiled (tachanaf)?** Now you have **whored (zaniym)** with many lovers: can you return to Me?—says Yehovah.

2 Look up to the bare heights, and see: Where have they not lain with you? You waited for them on the roadside Like a bandit in the wilderness. And you **defiled (vatach'niym)** the land With your **whoring (biz'nutaikha – harlotry 2184)** and your **debauchery (evilness)**.

9 Indeed, the land was **defiled (tachanaf)** by her **casual immorality (harotry - zanutah)**, as she committed **adultery (vatin'af -5003)** with stone and with wood.

Yirmeyahu/Jeremiah 3: 3,6,8

3 And when showers were withheld And the late rains did not come, You had the brazenness of a **street woman (ishah zonah – a harlot woman)**, You refused to be ashamed.

6 Yehovah said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what Rebel Israel did, going to every high mountain and under every leafy tree, and **whoring (tiz'niy)** there?

8 I noted: Because Rebel Israel had **committed adultery (ni'fah)**, I cast her off and handed her a bill of divorce; yet her sister, Faithless Judah, was not afraid—she too went and **whored (vatizan)**.

Other areas to look at this are:

Yehezqel/Ezekiel 6: 9; 16:15-17, 26, 28, 30-35, and 41; 23:3,5,and 43

Since harlotry is a form of adultery what is the term for adultery in the Tanakh?

Na'af 5003 verb (Nun-Aleph-fey sofit) commit adultery.

Shemot/Exodus 20:13

13 You shall not murder. You shall not **commit adultery (tin'af)**. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Vayikra/Leviticus 20: 10

10 If a man **commits adultery (yin'af)** with a married woman, **commits adultery (yin'af)** with another man's wife, the **adulterer (hanef)** and the **adulteress (vihanafet)** shall be put to death.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 5: 17

17 You shall not murder. You shall not **commits adultery (yin'af)**. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Ni'ufim 5004 verb Adulteries (Num-Aleph-fey-yod-mem sofit)

Yehezkel/Ezekiel 23: 43

43 Then I said, "To destruction with **adultery (na'afim - adulteries)**! Look, they are still going on with those same **fornications (taz'nuteyha - harlotry)** of hers."

Na'afufim 5005 Noun Masculine pg. 610 BDB, Pg. 782 NEHC (Nun-Aleph-Fey-Vav-fey-yod-mem)

Hosea 2: 4

4 Rebuke your mother, rebuke her—For she is not My wife And I am not her husband— And let her put away her **harlotry (zanuneyha)** from her face And her adultery from between her breasts.

We can see the unfaithful act of adultery is tied to one who is committing harlotry. When looking at harlotry, whether done between a married woman and another man regardless if married or not. It makes the woman profaned and no longer set-apart for the husband. When referring to us as a nation he related this relationship with that of us going and laying with other gods.

So what does Yehovah want from us?

1. Faithfulness (fidelity between us and him)—no other god but him—Shemot 20: 3
2. Faithfulness (Fidelity between man and wife)—Shemot 20 14
3. Set apart (as a people) – Devarim 7: 6

Thus when we think of Harlotry we should also think of adultery with both being acts of unfaithfulness and making one profaned (common) and thus no longer set-apart.

So is there a type of dress in the Tanakh that is used to identify a harlot (zonah), or a temple prostitute (dadesh/qadeshah).

Some will allude to the fact that Tamar put on a veil.

Bereshit/Genesis 38:14-16

14 So she took off her widow's garb, covered her face with a veil (batza'iyf 6809), and, wrapping herself up (vatit'alaf 5970) , sat down (vateshev 3427) at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife. **15** When Judah saw her, he took her for a harlot (zonah); for she had covered her face. **16** So he turned aside to her by the road and said, "Here, let me sleep with you"—for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. "What," she asked, "will you pay for sleeping with me?"

It tells us that there was a distinct dress for a harlot or in this case a temple prostitute was they were inquiring about her. It simply says two things

1. She used a veil.
2. She wrapped herself up. This in Hebrew is "and she fainted" or "lied down".
3. She dwelled not sat down.

It is the same word for veil used for Rivkah when coming before Yitzchaq. So this tells us that having a veil does make one a harlot. She may have lied down at the entrance of the city.

Bereshit/Genesis 24:64-65

64 Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel **65** and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil (hatza'iyf) and covered herself.

So was it because she was lying on the ground outside the city? It just says she did it.

So she was then referred to as a temple prostitute.

Bereshit 38:20-23

20 Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to redeem the pledge from the woman; but he could not find her. **21** He inquired of the people of that town, "Where is the **cult prostitute (qadeshah 6948)**, the one at Enaim, by the road?" But they said, "There has been no **prostitute (qadeshah)** here." **22** So he returned to Judah and said, "I could not find her; moreover, the townspeople said: There has been no **prostitute (qadeshah)** here." **23** Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. I did send her this kid, but you did not find her."

Now this word is derived from the masculine version which is qadesh. Now we know that qadesh is used to describe the male version. So what were these associated with?

Melekhim Bet/2 Kings 23:4, 6-7

4 Then the king ordered the high priest Hilkiah, the priests of the second rank, and the guards of the threshold to bring out of the Temple of Yehovah all the objects made for **Baal** and **Asherah** and all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and he removed the ashes to Bethel.

6 He brought out the [image of] Asherah from the House of Yehovah to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem, and burned it in the Kidron Valley; he beat it to dust and scattered its dust over the burial ground of the common people. 7 He tore down the cubicles of the male prostitutes in the House of Yehovah, at the place where the women wove coverings for Asherah.

The qadesh (male temple prostitutes) conducted their service at the House of Yehovah.

“**Asherah** (from [Hebrew](#) אֲשֵׁרָה), generally taken as identical with the [Ugaritic](#) goddess **Athirat** (more accurately transcribed as **Aḫīrat**), was a major northwest [Semitic mother goddess](#), appearing occasionally also in [Akkadian](#) sources as **Ashratum/Ashratu** and in [Hittite](#) as **Asherdu(s)** or **Ashertu(s)** or **Aserdu(s)** or **Asertu(s)**.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asherah>)

Asherah is also related to the goddess Ishtar/Inanna.

“The Sumerians were the first literate people, and their written remains provide a glimpse into their world view. Some of the clay tablets, fragments and seals which they inscribed exist to this day, to tell fascinating stories, including the fragmentary story of Inanna. Of all the deities, most of whom were personifications of various aspects of nature, Inanna was the most revered for a long period. Hers was the realm of love and procreation, in which she was a forerunner of Anath of Canaan, Isis of Egypt, and the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar, with whom she is sometimes identified. Inanna herself, it is clear, rejoiced in her sexuality.” (<http://www.ishartemple.org/myth.htm>)

Parts of this worship was sacred prostitution. Both by men and women.

“The sacred priestesses were not alone in undertaking sexual rites in the temple. Any number of other women, including those from the highest families in the land, would also prostitute themselves in the temple at least once during their lifetime. Indeed, there was at one stage a law which required a woman to do so before she married. This was a precautionary measure to deflect the wrath of the goddess, for she did not hold with monogamy. The Greek historian Herodotus gives us an excellent, if not wholly approving, description of the practice:

“The worst Babylonian custom is that which compels every woman of the land once in her life to sit in the temple of love and have... intercourse with some stranger... the men pass and make their choice. It matters not what be the sum of money; the woman will never refuse, for that were a sin, the money being by this act made sacred. After their intercourse she

has made herself holy in the sight of the goddess and goes away to her home; and thereafter there is no bribe however great that will get her. So then the women that are tall and fair are soon free to depart, but the uncomely have long to wait because they cannot fulfill the law: for some of them remain for three years or four.”
(<http://www.ishtar temple.org/myth.htm>)

“Temples to Ishtar, at Erech and other places, were also served by male prostitutes. They were referred to as men “...whose manhood Ishtar has changed into womanhood.” (<http://www.ishtar temple.org/myth.htm>)

“Cult prostitution was practiced in the worship of Astarte, but there were also eunuchs among the temple attendance. The eunuchs were reported to have castrated themselves in worship of the goddess; thereafter they would dress in women’s clothing (Cavendish 134).”

ⁱ(<http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/~tomshoemaker/StudentPapers/canaanite.html>)

Thus, a man who is made to serve as a woman is a male temple prostitute. We are told that no money from a male or female temple prostitute is acceptable for a vow.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 23:18-19

18 No Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute (qadeshah), nor shall any Israelite man be a cult prostitute (qadesh). **19** You shall not bring the fee of a whore (zonah) or the pay of a dog (kelev) into the house of Yehovah Eloheykha in fulfillment of any vow, for both are abhorrent to Yehovah Eloheykha.

My thoughts on this were that this was also letting them know that this practice was not to be done for Yehovah. Yet, it was this very practice they our Father’s did.

What we can see is while men and women were involved we can’t find many references to a suggested dress or makeup, which was worn. That does not mean there was not any. Even reliefs do not show women in special dress that would identify them as temple prostitutes. It does show men nude in many reliefs. Thus without further research I could not identify a particular style of dress that would identify a woman as a zonah or qadeshah and a man as a qadesh.

1. ⁱ Cavendish, Richard. Man, Myth & Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion, and the Unknown. Marshall Cavendish Companies, 1995.