

MARITAL PARTNERS - COMPATIBILITY OF MISSIONS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

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In the context of several discussions on the characteristics and compatibilities of marital mates, the Talmud (Tractate Sotah 2a; Tractate Sanhedrin 22a) cites the statement of Rabbi Yochanan, "V'koshe l'zovgon k'kriyas yam suf" - that matching appropriate mates is as difficult as splitting the Red Sea. Many commentators have pointed to the apparent difficulty of this passage due to the lack of an obvious connection between marriage and the splitting of the Red Sea. I thought of offering an original explanation based on the following analysis of the Satmar Rebbe, zt"l (Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum).

In his commentary on "Shir Hashirim" (Song of Songs), the Satmar Rebbe discusses the unique mission of Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon). The Satmar Rebbe brings to bear the verse, "L'gozer yam suf l'gzorim" (Tehilim 136:13), that the Red Sea was split into multiple components (l'gzorim is plural). The medrash states that the sea was split into 12 paths - one for each of the 12 tribes. Another medrash states that the sea split into 600,000 paths -- one for each family. The famous question is "Why the need for all these different paths; why wasn't one division adequate for the entire nation to pass through?"

The Satmar Rebbe quotes the Talmud in Tractate Brachos (58a) which states that if one encounters a gathering of 600,000 Jews, one must recite a blessing of "Baruch Chochom Harozim" -- Blessed Be He, the Wise of Secrets (i.e., who knows what is in the hearts of all these different people). The Talmud continues to offer the following insight into human nature: "sh'eyn d'atam domeh zeh lozeh, v'eyn partzufayhem domim zeh lozeh" -- meaning, that just as no two people have identical faces, they likewise do not have identical personalities. In other words, every individual is comprised of a unique combination of character traits. Therefore, every person has a distinct mission and purpose in this world -- namely, to serve Hashem in a manner consistent with the origin of one's soul -- a mission which no one else can fulfill.

In a similar vein, the Satmar Rebbe cites the Alshich Hakadosh who explains the prayer "v'tein chelkeinu b'toratecha" - give us "our" share in your Torah. It is well known that the entire Oral Torah as well as every original contribution that a future Torah scholar will articulate was already presented to Moshe at Mount Sinai. However, it remained for the individuals of future generations to reveal certain aspects of the Torah based on their particular mission and roles. Through "our" revelation we are actualizing our unique potential and accomplishing our purpose in this universe.

Likewise, the Alshich states that the Song of Songs was said to have been originally presented by Hashem at Mount Sinai or in conjunction with the splitting of the Red Sea. However, it remained for King Solomon to codify it in writing and disseminate it -- since its message was linked to the required mission of his soul, and was a manifestation of his unique essence.

Building further on this theme, the Satmar Rebbe refers to the last Mishnah of Tractate Makos (3:16) which contains the famous statement of Rabbi Chananyah ben Akashyah: "Hashem wanted to make Israel worthy; therefore, he provided them with an abundant Torah and many commandments, as implied in the verse (Isaiah 42:21), 'Hashem chofetz l'maan tzidko, yagdil Torah V'yaadir' -- that Hashem desired to facilitate righteousness, and therefore made the Torah so great and glorious." The Satmar Rebbe cites the Rambam (Maimonides) in his commentary on this Mishnah, who explains it with a fundamental Judaic principle. If a person observes just "one" of the 613 mitzvos (commandments) with optimal purity and wholeness, without any ulterior motives, and with pure love of Hashem, then that mitzvah becomes his basis (his "ticket") to eternal life in "olam habo" (the world-to-come). By offering us 613 commandments it maximizes the opportunity for each person to master the performance of at least one of them with total devotion, and thereby merit eternal existence. This does not imply that one may ignore the other 612 commandments; rather that each individual is likely to form a special affinity to one mitzvah and fulfill it wholeheartedly.

Getting back to the Red Sea, our sages stated (Mechiltah, Shemos, 15:2) that a lowly maid experienced the divine presence during the splitting of the sea on a higher spiritual level than Ezekiel and other prophets during their visions. This suggests that the miraculous occasion of the sea splitting provided an opportunity for divine revelation and constituted a setting for serving Hashem on a lofty level. Therefore, states the Satmar Rebbe, the sea had to split into 600,000 "private" paths so that all individuals would realize their potential spiritual capacities, according to their unique essence, with no interference from any other person.

It strikes me that the above framework could be applied to shedding light on the linkage between marriage and splitting the Red Sea. Each marriage brings together individuals from different families with different characteristics and missions. We are all part of one of the 600,000 core souls that experienced their own path in the sea and then stood by Mount Sinai to accept the Torah. Only Hashem can create "zivugin," couples, through the merger of individuals from two families whose compatibility is necessary in order to successfully promote a common mission. Just as during the splitting of the sea Hashem formed a path for each family -- to enhance its opportunity for expressing its unique attributes in the service of Hashem -- likewise, Hashem as the ultimate "matchmaker," insures a marriage in which the partners can be mutually supportive of their common goals, despite being raised in different families.

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