

THE BASIS OF MARRIAGE

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Maggid of Dubno was famous for answering all questions with a parable. Even when he was asked why he always answered with parables! Here is the answer he gave. "Truth was walking about town but everyone was scared to look at him. Wherever he went, people screamed and ran away because he was completely naked! Along came his friend named Parable who told Truth that if he wanted to be accepted, he would offer him a suit of clothing. That is what happened. Parable gave Truth a suit so people would be more comfortable in his presence."

The Maggid was once asked why there is a need for the two Jewish Holidays of Simchas Torah and Shavuot as they seem to have the same function. Why don't we condense them into one grand Holiday? He answered with one of his most famous stories. Once there was a King and Queen who were without children for many years. In desperation they visited an old wise man who gave them a potent blessing with one caution attached. If the child would be a girl, no man must see her until her wedding day, lest she die! When the Queen gave birth to a baby girl a secluded island was prepared for the Princess to live on where she would be raised in the finest royal style with all female educators.

When the Princess came of age, the King approached a handsome nobleman and offered his daughters hand in marriage. "Sure" was the response, "let's meet her!" After the King explained that his daughter was not to be seen before the wedding day, the nobleman declined. Time after time the King was confronted with the same frustrating reaction. "Let's see her!" "If not, then how do I know what I'm getting myself into?"

Finally, the last worthy man told the King that he was greatly honored by the offer. If the princess had the attributes of her royal parents then he would be delighted to marry her even without seeing her till the wedding day.

A date was set and the whole world was invited to the celebration. Everyone came to dance and rejoice. A marvelous time was had by all...except the groom! He was overcome with anxiety. He had hidden his inner fears over not having even met his bride. Even after the wedding he remained apprehensive. He anticipated that, although she was beautiful, somehow her ugly side would eventually surface. After months of happy marriage, he came to appreciate more and more profoundly, her wonder, beauty, charm and wisdom. Each day another wondrous facet was revealed.

The Prince then became upset that he had withheld himself from joyful expression at his own wedding. He approached the King and admitted that although _now_ he was delighted beyond measure, at the time of the wedding he had been filled with inner turmoil. A decision was made that a new party would be arranged. All the guests would be invited back but this time only one person, the Prince himself, would dance to express his supernal delight.

The Maggid of Dubno explained that when the Torah was offered to the world there were questions about its contents. However, when the Jewish nation was given its turn to answer, there was a clear consensus that they were committed to do even before understanding all it contained. The goal, though, of _total_ trust was not yet complete. The mind can know what the heart cannot yet accept. After living with Torah and experiencing what King Solomon described as "All its ways are pleasant and all its paths are peace" (Mishlay), _then_ the Jewish nation is ready on Simchas Torah to express intense joy over The Almighty's precious gift.

A great Rabbi asked a group of his students who were preparing for marriage, "On what do you base your marriage?" They unanimously agreed, "On love and understanding!" The Rabbi corrected them saying that although their sentiments are correct, they would not be able to build a marriage on love and understanding because they as yet neither loved nor understood their respective brides. Love is something that grows with understanding and the experience of sharing.

Love and understanding are goals, not basis. The foundation of a marriage is a total and absolute commitment to arrive at the mountain peak of love and understanding. Similarly, the basis of our relationship with the Almighty is in this awesome initial step: to act...to learn...perchance to understand and therefore love. Sinai was a mountain of commitment, aspiring to an ocean of deep love and profound understanding. As the entire Oak tree resides in the acorn, so is the whole of Jewish destiny in the seed of that initial commitment from which we can continuously grow and to which is constantly referred to as a wedding day!

Good Yom Tov and Good Shabbos!

We would like to thank Rabbi Label Lam of Foundations for Jewish Learning for his contribution this week. You can find out more about the upcoming Foundations seminars which will be held on June 10th in South Africa, July 4th in Danbury Conn.-(Hebrew/English) and Rosh HaShana with Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, by calling 1 800 700-9577.

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