

CHECK MATE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba which is Chevron in the land of Canaan, and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry over her. (Bereishis 23:2)

We don't hear much about the relationship of Avraham and Sarah in this parshah, and what we do hear could be misconstrued as being negative. What man does not know how beautiful his wife is? He was married to her for decades and until they are traveling into enemy territory (Egypt), he finally realizes this? What man uses his wife's abduction as a way to become wealthy? What man has to be told to listen to his wife (well, I guess most of us do)? What wife openly states that her husband is over the hill? And when a pregnant Hagar haughtily lorded herself over her mistress Sarah, it was Avraham who got an earful from his wife.

The Midrashim fill in the gaps and explain how the relationship of Avraham and Sarah was one that was not only made in Heaven, but also lived out as if it took place in Heaven. If Avraham didn't realize how physically beautiful his wife was, explain the rabbis, it is only because her physical beauty paled next to her great spiritual beauty, on which Avraham was completely focused. There is no question that the father and mother of the Jewish people were a perfect match, perfect zivugim.

What about everyone else?

Well, with respect to the Forefathers and the rest of the great people from Tanach, especially during the era of prophecy, we can assume that they too found their zivugim. Or can we? According to the Arizal, even Aharon HaKohen's beloved Elisheva was not his true soul-mate, and if HE didn't marry his zivug, then what about the rest of us, especially in this day when the divorce rate is so high and climbing, even in the Orthodox community?

The truth is, without prophets it is hard to know. However, there are rules concerning the marriage of souls, and though I don't know how absolute those rules are today, or how many other factors play a role in finding one's soul-mate, nevertheless they are interesting to learn about. They come from the Arizal, via Rabbi Chaim Vital and sefer Sha'ar HaGilgulim. The Arizal taught:

There are several reasons for the reincarnation of souls. It can be because a person sinned against the Torah and must return to rectify it. It can be to perform a mitzvah he previously had not completed. A third reason is for the sake of another individual, to guide and rectify him . . . (Sha'ar

HaGilgulim, Ch. 8)

That is, even though the deceased person does not need to return in another incarnation to rectify himself, he can still return in order to help another person achieve his or her rectification. And, says Rabbi Vital, there is another reason to reincarnate as well:

... Such as in order to marry his soul-mate, having not merited to do so the first time. (Ibid.)

Thus we see that it is possible to NOT marry one's soul-mate, and therefore divorce is not necessarily the result of two soul-mates who cannot get along with each other, but rather the result of people who really didn't belong together in the first place. It continues:

Sometimes he may have already married his soul-mate, but he sinned and must return to rectify the sin; he will come back alone, as Sabba of Mishpatim has written (Zohar 105b) on the posuk, "If he came by himself" (Shemos 21:3). (Ibid.)

This posuk from Parashas Mishpatim is actually talking about a Jewish servant. Coming by himself means that he was single when he was sold into slavery to pay for his crime. However, on a deeper level, says the Arizal, it is actually a reference to a reincarnating soul coming back into this world without his zivug.

... Sometimes he has merits, and even though she does not need to reincarnate, she reincarnates with him b'sod, "and his wife will go out with him." (ibid.)

On the level of discussion concerning a Jewish servant, this means that his wife, with whom he entered his six-year period of service, also leaves with her husband at the end of the six years. On the level of discussion about gilgulim, this posuk means that his wife's soul will also return to earth, even though she does not need to reincarnate for her own sake. She returns just to keep him company.

SHABBOS DAY:

If he was married then his wife will go out with him. (Shemos 21:3)

The saga continues:

Sometimes, a person will not merit his soul-mate the first time, and a wife is arranged for him according to his deeds. (Ibid.)

In other words, all hope is not lost for the one who does not marry his zivug. On the contrary, if he lives a good Torah lifestyle, Heaven can still arrange for him to meet the wife of his dreams. It may not be THE wife of his dreams, but it can still be a good match, and they can achieve shalom bayis — a peaceful home.

In a sense, this may require more "effort" on Heaven's part, since a soul-mate automatically matches his wife or her husband. Nevertheless, though they may not be soul-mates, they may be close to it:

From the souls of all the women of the world, there are none as close to him as this woman even though she is not his actual soul-mate. When he sins and reincarnates, he will do so with this wife, even though she is not his actual soul-mate. (Ibid.)

The saga now continues. Not only did he have to return and as a result marry a woman who is not really his zivug, but he has to reincarnate again and re-marry the same woman in the next lifetime! Why not just give the poor man and woman their real soul-mates? The answer to this is discussed in a later chapter:

We discussed earlier whether or not women reincarnate like men. Regarding this topic in the first chapter of Sotah (2a) in reference to the posuk, "G-d settles the solitary into a family, He releases those bound in fetters" (Tehillim 68:7); Chazal speak of a first and second soul-mate. Hence, when it says, "Difficult is pairing people like the splitting of the Red Sea," it refers to the second soul-mate. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

The obvious reading of the passage does not indicate that it is talking about gilgulim, but that is to be expected from the Talmud. Rather, it seems to be talking about a first and second marriage in a single lifetime. The first marriage resulting in one's pre-destined soul-mate and if, G-d forbid, there is a divorce, a second marriage to another woman that is not his soul-mate.

But, says Rabbi Chaim Vital:

The understanding of a first and second soul-mate cannot be according to the simple definition, since in many instances we see that the second marriage is better than the first . . . (Ibid.)

This seems to indicate that the marriage the second time around is really the right one, not the first one. Then what?

Rather, we learn the explanation from Sabba of Mishpatim of the Zohar on the posuk, "If he was married then his wife will go out with him" (Shemos 21:3). That is, when a person is new and in the world for the first time, then his soul-mate is born with him, and when it comes time to marry, they (Heaven) arrange the moment, making it simple for them to meet. (Ibid.)

As the Talmud says, before a man is born it is declared in Heaven who he will marry. However, says the Arizal, this is when he comes into the world the first time, and it is during this lifetime only that Heaven arranges events to make the finding and marrying of one's soul-mate as simple as possible.

However, if a man sins and needs to reincarnate as a result, then the posuk "his wife will go out with him" applies to him, as it says in Sabba of Mishpatim, that is, she will reincarnate as well for his good. Nevertheless, when the time comes to get married, they will not assist them and he will only succeed after great effort. Since he was forced to reincarnate as a result of his sin there will be those [in Heaven] who will accuse him and want to prevent her from being available to him, and they will cause fighting. (Ibid.)

Hence, a new spin on the Talmud's statement. Yes, he can marry his zivug even in the next lifetime, but no, Heaven will not roll out the red carpet and escort her to him. He will have to make a greater effort, perhaps even a much greater effort to find her than the first time.

This is what it means when it says, "Difficult is pairing people like the splitting of the Red Sea"; it is a reference to the second zivug. Hence, in actuality she is his real soul-mate who he has already married in his previous gilgul and now, in this new gilgul, it is their second zivug. In other words, she herself is the FIRST wife, but it is the SECOND time she is marrying him. This is why it does not say the "second soul-mate" (zivug sheinis), but rather the "second- time pairing"(zivug sheini). The former would refer to a different wife and not the same woman. (Ibid.)

In other words, the Talmud does not refer to her as a second soul- mate, but rather to a second pairing of the man and woman, leaving room for the interpretation that she is the same woman as the first marriage in the previous lifetime.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

A woman of valor, who can find? (Mishlei 31:10)

How about a man of valor? In any case, the conclusion of this section is that:

It can happen that a man can marry a woman quickly and without any difficulty or argument. Yet, another man may fight the entire time with his future wife until marriage, after which time there is finally peace, proving that she is indeed his soul-mate, but that it was the second zivug. Had there been no peace after the marriage, we could then assume that she is not his zivug. (Ibid.)

However, before you size up your marriage or potential spouse to see whether or not you have in fact found your zivug, you have to take into account one very important detail: once a couple is married, it is b'shert.

But how can that be, you are asking yourselves. Isn't b'shert a term reserved for one's soul-mate?

Not necessarily. It really just means that something was meant to be and intended by Heaven, because ALL marriages are made in Heaven. For, as we have discussed a number of times before, there is no such thing as coincidence and thus, even the marriage of two people who are not soul-mates was arranged by Heaven.

A bad joke to punish the couple? To make them appreciate what it means to be married and care for one's spouse by marrying into just the opposite situation?

It may seem like that sometimes, but every marriage, the good ones and the bad ones all come to accomplish the same thing: tikun, which amounts to, in the words of the Vilna Gaon, sh'viras hamiddos — the breaking of (bad) character traits.

Most people in the world have not married to rectify anything except loneliness. The main emphasis

for getting married has been to be together with another person in a legal way that allows for enhanced pleasure in life. True, there is great pleasure in making the other person happy, but often that giving is still motivated by self-interest.

What happens when there is dissension in a relationship? What happens when a couple doesn't see eye-to-eye, and it turns out that they have different approaches to many different situations so that one spouse's solutions are really problems for the other? Then what?

That's when marriage truly begins, from a Torah perspective.

As a person once told me, if shalom bayis (peace in the house) was such a common concept, would there be so many segulot (for example, like setting up one's wife's Shabbos candles erev Shabbos in order to increase shalom bayis in the house) to promote it? Not likely.

Thus, in such a predicament, a spouse has a choice, and though it may not be a difficult one at the beginning of a marriage, it becomes increasingly difficult as the children start coming and the stresses begin to add up. That choice is: Do I force the issue to increase my own happiness, or do I take a more passive approach and work on making my spouse happy?

Guess which one brings about tikun hamiddos — rectification of character traits?

Thus, in a real sense, a less amicable marriage provides even greater opportunity to perfect one's character traits. However, no one advises looking for the wrong spouse on purpose and marrying him or her. On the contrary, one must look for his or her zivug to the best of his or her ability and means. BUT, at the same time know that no matter who one marries, in the end, it is b'sheret, and meant for the sake of achieving personal tikun by caring more about the other person's happiness than one's own.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Her husband's heart relies upon her and he shall lack no fortune. (Mishlei 31:11)

In the case of the Avos, there was more to it than this. Avraham knew that he was to be the father of the future Jewish people, and he knew that whomever he would marry was destined to be the mother of the Jewish people, a partner in producing a nation of G-d. That's why it was so frustrating that Sarah could not have children, and why it was such a joyous occasion when she did.

This is also how the rabbis explain Yaakov's being so direct when he told Lavan to give him his wife so that he could start building his family. "Alright, Yaakov, we all know why you want to get married, but maybe keep it to yourself!" Yaakov's whole intention was to build the 12 tribes. He did not relate to the more personal and private aspects of marriage. He was totally selfless about his marriage, except that he gave himself over not only to his wives, but also to the future of the Jewish people.

True, we are not Avraham Avinu or Sarah Imeinu, or even Yaakov Avinu or Rachel or Leah, and therefore our marriages and the families we create may seem far less important than those of

Biblical times. Nevertheless, we are still meant to learn from their actions and apply them to our lives to the best of our abilities, and that includes imitating at least a little of the single-mindedness they had when it came to building a Bayis Neeman B'Yisroel.

We are not saying that, in some cases, divorce is not inevitable; sometimes the tikun itself comes from such a sad ending to what started off as a happy relationship. In some cases, divorce seems to be b'shert.

Furthermore, we are not saying that one must become a doormat for the other spouse, for that too can result in a disastrous marriage. What we ARE saying is that when two people get married and they are both committed, sincerely committed to a Torah lifestyle and the path of life that the Torah mandates, then that alone is the basis of a good Jewish marriage. That is the foundation of the Bayis Ne'eman b'Yisroel.

With that devotion comes a certain level of selflessness, without which good marriages lack meaning, and bad marriages become hopeless. It is on the foundation of such a commitment to Torah that a couple can then begin to build upward, adding "floor" to their marital house as the years move on. Some of the bricks in that home may be the result of happy and memorable moments, but often the bricks that count the most are the ones that were formed when one or the other spouse put the happiness of the other one before his or her own.

When this occurs, not only does that spouse break a negative trait (the more he or she does this, the more permanent the change becomes), but it makes the house" stronger, and it produces healthier children who will in turn, make good spouses. Furthermore, it becomes a relationship that mirrors that of our ancestors, and it becomes a cornerstone, in its own small way, in the larger bayis that we call Bais Yisroel.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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