

LOVE FROM INSIDE OUT

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

This week's Rabbi's Notebook will be presented in two parts. Part Two will continue next week for Parshas Kedoshim.

This week's Parsha is the Torah portion read on Yom Kippur. The first part of the Parsha read Yom Kippur morning, details the special Avodah (service) performed by the Kohain Gadol on Yom Kippur. The latter part of the Parsha read Mincha time on Yom Kippur, lists the Torah's 15 prohibited intimate relationships. Why did the Torah present these two topics in the same Parsha, and why do we read them on Yom Kippur?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch poses a question that at first glance should raise a few eyebrows. Rav Hirsch asked, "Why did the Torah prohibit incest"? In fact, Rav Hirsch went so far as to say that (aside from genetic concerns) incestuous marriages appear more logical than non-incestuous marriages.

Consider the theoretical marriage between a brother and a sister. Marriages always demand adjustments and compromises. Different experiences, different spousal and parenting role models, different expectations for what a marriage and family should be. Something as seemingly simple as the food "my Mother used to make," can become a point of contention and difficulty. Certainly the differences in how to raise children are potential land mines in the tranquil pasture of a marriage. Lasting and healthy marriages demand confrontation, negotiation and compromise in all these important and not so important issues.

We just celebrated Pesach. How many of us have had to rewrite our family Seder? I am sure that in a few cases one spouse or the other forgave their own Seder experience in favor of the way their in-laws conducted their Seder; however, I assume that most of us cut and paste from the traditions of both families of origin and create our own "new and improved" version of relating the Hagadah. How much wistful negotiation did that take?

Marriage is an ongoing process of negotiation and resolution. The better a couples ability to give and forgive, the stronger their relationship will be. The less developed their ability to problem-solve and compromise the more contentious and resentful the marriage will be.

Imagine the relative ease of the incestuous marriage. Shared memories of cherished family holidays and occasions; similar exposure to spousal relationships and child rearing; high probability for identical expectations in love and war; no need to negotiate where to go for the Yomim Tovim; and best of all, no problems with the in-laws.

Humor and facetiousness aside, Rav Hirsch suggests the most sensible reason for encouraging incestuous marriages. Brothers and sisters begin life loving each other for who they each are. The process of courtship would be founded upon knowledge and honesty. Bad habits, bad hair days, mood swings, closeted skeletons, and other such secrets would all be a matter of record rather than eventual revelation or discovery. Any brother and sister who would wish to marry each other after knowing all that they know about each other would truly love each other in the most open and complete way possible. What better foundation could there be for a loving lasting marriage? Why not allow it? Why not encourage it?

Rav Hirsch explains that the exact logic suggesting why incestuous marriages should be allowed is the reason why G-d forbade incest. As we have noted many times before, separation is natural to creation. Day from night, heaven from earth, land from sea, species from species, fish from fowl from animal from human, man from woman, nation from nation, and good from evil. However, within each species of flora, fish or mammal there are few obvious distinctions that further distinguish and separate individual creations within a species from each other - except among humans. Within the human species distinguishing features and characteristics are sufficient to differentiate one individual human from the next. This is so much so that among humans identical twins are a novelty because of their exception.

Natural differences are G-d's way of identifying divinely gifted qualities and responsibilities. If humans in contrast to other species are the only creatures to have such overt differences in appearance and character within their own species then G-d is telling us something about our obligations as humans.

The most logical place to begin exploring G-d's intentions for us as a unique species of distinguishable individuals is to assume a consistency of intention in regards to all such differences. Therefore, whatever G-d's reasons are for making us look and be different from each other is related to our quality of free will. Free will sets us apart from all other creatures and individual differences within the human species set us apart from each other; therefore, our individual distinguishing differences must relate to our free will.

On the most basic level, the differences between us should generate respect for each other and our individual places within G-d's overall design. Likewise, it teaches us where we personally fit in to His design and presents us with the choice of doing or not doing what G-d wishes for and from each of us. However, based upon Rav Hirsch's explanation why the Torah forbids incest, I would like to suggest a more profound connection between free will and the individual differences within the human species.

On the one hand, G-d created differences between species to mark irreconcilable demarcations; on the other hand, G-d did not set any such demarcations within the other species.

On the one hand, the human is already distinguished from all other species by virtue of free will; on

the other hand, we are further distinguished by virtue of the individual traits that exist within the human species but do not exist as overtly within other species.

On the one hand, we must remain apart and different from all other species and from each other; on the other hand, we must bridge the individual differences that distinguish us from each other and become more like the other species - a single, integrated organism.

On the one hand, we must recognize and respects individuality; on the other hand, we must build on the similarities that unite us.

According to Rav Hirsch, love is the drive that can unite our individuality and the bond that keeps us together and family is the working example of how love should both remove differences between individuals while at the same time respecting and encouraging individual differences.

Let us take a look at the unit of family as it relates to the human species. Individuals cannot grow to independence without the support of family. Parents clearly provide the main ingredients of life and support; however, siblings and the extended family of stepparents, half-siblings, grandparents, uncles, and aunts, provide the training ground for appropriate exchanges of concern and respect. Family is life's first classroom for teaching individual maturation and responsibility.

G-d wishes to unite the entire world in mutual respect, concern and responsibility. If not for the fear of sounding very sixty-seventyish, I would say that G-d wishes to unite the entire world in love. If family is the basic unit of love then love is the bond that can unite family with family.

The bond that already exists within the family unit is the perfect microcosm of G-d's intended world. Separate individuals bound to each other experientially, emotionally, and responsibly but not sexually. Separate individuals sharing time, space, respect, and concern while maintaining between themselves natural, appropriate boundaries and demarcations.

However, to bind family unit to family unit and increase the exchange of concern, responsibility and love, G-d encouraged families to unite with other families. This bonding, this extending of G-d's will, this creation of a new family unit that binds family to family, includes the magical ingredient of physical intimacy.

(Take note that incest is only forbidden by the Torah within the basic family unit. Once individual members of the family unit, such as brothers and sisters, have evolved into their own distinguishable family units, their offspring may marry each other and form their own family units. (1st cousins are permitted to marry each other.)

A comment regarding intermarriage.

Although G-d intended for individual humans to form families and for families to marry each other, G-d clearly forbade the intermarriage between Jew and non-Jew. Although G-d's commandments do not require explanation, it is clear from the Torah that G-d wishes the Jew to remain apart from all

other nations. The position of the Jews as the Chosen People is to model G-d's intentions for all of humanity. The complexity of our national structure: individual, family, tribe, Kohain, Layvie, and Yisroel, suggests that we must model for the rest of the world the integration of our families and other divine designations into a viable loving whole, "As one individual with one heart." As such we must remain apart and distinguished so that the world can view us as a microcosm of all humanity and learn by example.

To be continued...

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