

PUTTING THE "SNAP CRACKLE AND POP" INTO ONE'S MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #603 - Burying a Rasha Next to a Tzadik. Good Shabbos!

The Homiletic Lesson of Not Plowing With an Ox and Donkey

This week's parsha contains the prohibition of plowing with an ox and donkey together [Devorim 22:10]. The Torah lists three examples of prohibitions related to mixed species in close juxtaposition. We cannot sow our field with mixed seed (kila-ay zera), we cannot plow our field with an ox and donkey together (a form of kila-ay beheimah), and we cannot wear garments made of wool and linen combinations (kila-ay begadim -- shatnez).

In the final analysis, all laws regarding forbidden species fall into the category of Divine Decrees (Gezeiras haKasuv) that have no apparent reason. Nonetheless, there is a fascinating comment from the Daas Zekeinim m'baalei haTosfos regarding the prohibition against harnessing together an ox and donkey that does shed some insight -- at least homiletically -- into this prohibition.

The Daas Zekeinim offers a logical explanation why the Torah forbade this particular combination of animals. The ox, the Daas Zekeinim says, chews its cud, while the donkey does not. In other words, two animals would be working next to each other, one kosher and one non kosher, one that chews its cud and one that does not chew its cud. The donkey would see the ox chewing and imagine that it must be eating. The donkey would become upset: "I'm working and not eating, while my 'yoke-mate' is working and eating at the same time!"

The Daas Zekeinim's message is that we need to make sure that we are compassionate even towards our animals. We do not want to put the donkey in a situation where he will feel jealousy towards the ox. The eminently obvious (kal v'chomer) conclusion from this lesson relates to human relationships. If we are even commanded to worry about the jealousy we might inspire in a donkey, which most likely has very little pain or anguish from such a situation, certainly we need to be worried about human beings, who are very sensitive to jealousy. Our friends and neighbors are very

sensitive to "what the other guy has". We certainly should not do things that incur the envy and jealousy of other human beings.

Getting Credit For "Selfish" Actions

Later in the parsha, the Torah mentions the prohibition against a Moabite or Ammonite (male) ever marrying into the Jewish nation [Devarim 23:4]. This is a harsher restriction than that levied against the Egyptians, whom we are allowed to accept as marriage partners after 3 generations. Despite the fact that, historically, we would assume that the Egyptians treated us worse than the Moabites, the Moabites are more restricted than the Egyptians "because they did not greet you with bread and water on your journey when you came out of Egypt and because they hired against you Bilaam son of Beor... to curse you."

In past years, we have cited the Ramban's opinion that the reason for the harsher treatment against Amon and Moab was due to the fact that they were "cousins" who should have repaid the favors to the Jewish people that our ancestor Avraham did for their own ancestor, Lot. Their lack of gratitude (hakaros haTov) and particularly their repaying good with bad -- by hiring Bilaam to curse the Jews triggered the Torah's insistence that they never be allowed into "the Congregation of Hashem."

This year, we would like to focus on the continuation of the pasuk [verse], which states, "And the L-rd did not hearken to Bilaam and He inverted Bilaam's curses to blessings for the L-rd your G-d loves you."

The Dubno Maggid asks a simple question here: This is history. Parshas Balak describes the whole narrative. Balak hired Bilaam to curse Klal Yisrael. Bilaam tried to curse them several times, but every time he tried, the words came out a blessing. This is not germane to Parshas Ki Seitzei and the prohibition of marrying Moabites and Ammonites! It may make sense for the pasukim to explain the wickedness of the Moabites by mentioning that they hired Bilaam to curse us. But the fact that "G-d did not wish to listen to Bilaam" is not germane to the issue at hand. We know that already!

The Dubno Maggid explains: Perhaps the Moabites will argue that they did us a favor. In hindsight, they paid for beautiful blessings that were bestowed upon the Jewish people. Even though that might not have been their initial intent, nonetheless, from the historical perspective they can claim that they indirectly benefited us. To counteract this line of reasoning, the Almighty answers them: "No. You are not going to get away with such an argument. Do not try to say that you did Klal Yisrael a favor. The only reason why it resulted in blessing is because I chose not to listen to Bilaam. You tried to do a wicked sin, but I interceded to prevent it from taking place."

The Dubno Maggid continues as follows: We see from here that the only reason why they did not get credit for collateral benefit that emerged from their actions is because their intent was malicious. They would have gotten credit if their intent was not malicious, but perhaps only self-serving. If in the course of an action taken for my own benefit, an indirect benefit emerges for someone else -- I can be credited with having done a mitzvah.

Rav Aharon Kotler writes that if one hires a friend to fix his house, he is credited with doing the worker a Chessed [act of kindness]. Although his primary intent was clearly "selfish" -- to have his house repaired, since he thereby provided a livelihood for his friend as well, he will get reward for that mitzvah. As long as a person's intent is not malevolent, any benefit that derives to someone else is counted as a Chessed.

Putting The "Snap Crackle and Pop" Into One's Marriage Relationship

Later in the Parsha, the Torah says (regarding the draft deferment of the Jewish soldier for the first year after his marriage): "He shall be free to go home and make his wife happy (v'seemach es ishto) for one year." [Devorim 24:5]

Rashi comments on the words "v'seemach es ishto" by citing the Aramaic Targum: "v'yachdee yas itsei". Rashi explains that anyone who translates the pasuk to mean "v'yachdee IM itsei" is making a mistake. The two versions of Aramaic translation quoted by Rashi hinge around the interpretation of the Hebrew word "es". "V'seemach ES ishto" could mean "You should MAKE your wife happy" or it could mean "You should be happy WITH your wife." Rashi says the former translation is correct and the latter translation is erroneous. Rashi supports his position by stating that the meaning of the 'piel' grammatical form of the word v'seemach is to make someone else happy. Had the meaning been "you should rejoice WITH your wife," the expression would have appeared as "v'sAmach es" not "v'sEEmach es".

However, the Targum of Yonasan ben Uziel quotes the very translation that Rashi rejects as erroneous. Yonasan ben Uziel was a Tanna! How can Rashi imply that a Tanna does not know how to properly translate a pasuk in Chumash?

The Shemen HaTov offers a beautiful interpretation to resolve this difficulty.

Certainly, the meaning of the pasuk is -- as Rashi says -- that the husband must try to make his wife happy. But if one's intent in marriage is to make the other partner happy then they will ultimately find happiness together. A marriage only works when each party is trying to make the other one happy. When each person tries to make the other one happy, they will wind up both being happy. On the other hand, if one approaches marriage from the perspective "What is in it for me?" then no one will be happy.

This interpretation of the Shemen HaTov could shed light on the universally expressed blessing when a child is born that the parents merit to bring the child to Torah, to the marriage canopy (Chupah), and to ma'asim tovim (good deeds).

The sequence of this blessing is often questioned. Why do ma'asim tovim appear last in the list? It sounds from this wish like good deeds only begin after one is married. Is that the case?

I once heard the following explanation: When one is single and he goes shopping for breakfast, he walks down the cereal aisle to make his selection. He thinks to himself, "What kind of cereal do I

like? Cheerios. What about Rice Crispies? I can't stand Rice Crispies." He buys himself a box of Cheerios every single week.

Then he gets married and goes shopping for the family. The first week he brings home Cheerios. His wife tells him "I hate Cheerios. I like Rice Crispies." If he can afford it, then fine, he buys two boxes -- one of Cheerios and one of Rice Crispies and everyone is happy. But what if he cannot afford it? He will have to make a choice. He goes to the store and looks at the cereal aisle and asks himself "What should I buy? Should I buy Cheerios or should I buy Rice Crispies?"

The pasuk in this week's parsha cries out to him: V'Seemach es Ishto. "I am going to buy Rice Crispies!" After marriage, even the act of buying cereal -- which until the time one gets married was just a mundane shopping chore -- now becomes a Gemillas Chessed, an act of kindness. The mundane act of shopping is turned into a ma'aseh mitzvah (an action with religious nuance). Therefore we understand: First Torah; then Chuppah; and after that even buying cereal will fall into the category of Ma'asim Tovim.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for the weekly parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series is provided below:

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