

THE REASON THE TORAH PROHIBITS MARRYING TWO SISTERS

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Parshios Acharei Mos & Kedoshim

The Reason The Torah Prohibits Marrying Two Sisters

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 678, Tochacha: Is Ignorance Bliss? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Achrei Mos contains the list of forbidden sexual relationships. Vayikra 18:18 contains the Biblical prohibition for a person to marry his wife's sister. In expressing this prohibition, the Torah uses the word "litzror" [to make a co-wife].

The Ramba"n comments: This verb expresses the reason for this prohibition. Most of the forbidden relations (e.g. -- mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, etc.) were simply forbidden without stating a reason. However, the Torah does state a reason by a sister-in-law, namely that it is inappropriate to make two sisters into co-wives of the same husband. These two women should ideally love one another. Placing them into a situation of rivalry will inevitably cause those who should have been best of friends to have a hostile relationship with one another.

The Ramba"n continues: The Torah does not state this regarding a daughter or mother of one's wife, because they remain forbidden even after his wife's death (unlike the situation with the sisters, where a sister is permitted to marry her brother-in-law if her sister -- his first wife - dies). The Ramba"n distinguishes between the "ervah" of two sisters and that of other relations. Here the Torah did not forbid the marriage because of "ervah" but because of the social harm it would bring to the sibling relationship, which at any rate is subject to rivalry. To avoid aggravating that natural sibling rivalry to intolerable levels, the Torah forbade a man to simultaneously be married to two sisters. The proof that this prohibition is different than all the others (and that it is not because of "ervah" or "she'er basar" [close relationship] but for some other reason) is the very fact that the prohibition expires upon the death of one of the sisters.

We learn two novel ideas from this Ramba"n.

First, we see from the fact that the Torah includes this prohibition in the chapter of forbidden relationships (arayos) that the Torah treats the matter of causing sisters to hate one another with the

same severity as it treats the cardinal sin of arayos.

Second, we see how important it is in the eyes of the Torah for children to get along with one another. The Torah bans two sisters from marrying the same person for the simple reason that the Torah does not want siblings to fight with each other. Whether we are ourselves siblings or whether we are parents who have children who are siblings, we all know that this is indeed a very big challenge.

Restating The Tenth Prohibition

In the beginning of Parshas Kedoshim, the Rambam quotes a Medrash in Vayikra Rabbah. The Medrash states that this parsha contains a rephrasing of each of the Asserres Hadibros [Ten Sayings, commonly known as the Ten Commandments].

For instance "I am the L-rd Your G-d" [19:3] rephrases the first "commandment". Likewise "Molten gods you shall not make for yourselves" [19:4] rephrases the second "commandment". This Medrash links the tenth "commandment" (Thou shall not covet) with the pasuk "Love your neighbor as yourself." [19:18]

Rav Simcha Zissel comments that offhand we would have said the reason for the prohibition against coveting in the Asserres Hadibros is to address the human characteristic of greed or lust. However, we see from this Medrash that the prohibition against coveting is not a sin of avarice or passion but a sin of lack of Ahavas Yisrael [love for one's fellow Jew].

It is not so much that one needs his friend's house or car or wife - rather, the sinner does not want his friend to have that house or car or wife. There is a Yiddish word "fargin" - which means to come to peace with the idea that someone else has something better than I have. This inability to "fargin" one's neighbor is not necessarily a result of simple jealousy; it is a lack of Ahavas Yissroel. The cure is to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

A person who really loves someone and wants the best for him or her, does not mind if that person has something better than himself. The Talmud says that a person will be jealous of anyone except his son or his disciple [Sanhedrin 105b]. When such a love exists as between father and son or teacher and disciple, the parent/teacher wants the son/disciple to have it better than he had it. There is no room for jealousy when such love exists. If we would have more "love another like oneself" in the world, we would have less "coveting" in the world.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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