Jewish Tribune – Ki Seitzei

**The Blessing of Marriage**

Our sedrah speaks of the sad topic of divorce. But it is not until the very last mishna and the very last daf of maseches Gittin, that we find out what the grounds for divorce actually are. And for those who get to the end of the masechta, it is strange to say the least.

Beis Shamai say that divorce should only occur over a matter of immorality. Beis Hillel says that divorce is permitted “even if she burns his soup.” Is this the same Beis Hillel who, in the first perek of Pirkei Avos, exhort us to be אוהב שלום ורודף שלום – to love and pursue peace and to be אוהב את הבריות – to love our fellow human beings?

And the third opinion - Rabbi Akiva – is also very hard to understand. Rabbi Akiva, whose devotion and gratitude to his own wife is as legendary as his famous maxim

ואהבת לרעך כמוך, says one can divorce his wife “even if he finds a nicer woman.”

Really?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in his sefer Emes L’Yakov gives an amazing interpretation. The Mishna is not defining how to get divorced. Sadly, that is easy. It is defining an attitude that defines love. The Mishna is teaching us how to understand love and marriage.

If a husband has soup that his wife lovingly cooked for him and only tastes burnt soup and is repulsed, he is missing the love that the Torah requires.

Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl once sent a cheque as a wedding gift to a talmid who had recently married. The cheque was for $500. Noting the very large sum large, the חתן thought that there may have been a mistake. Maybe it should have been $5 or $50. He went back to his illustrious Rebbe to clarify. Rav Moshe told him there was no mistake. The חתן was a grandson of Rav Moshe’s own Rebbe, Rav Pesach Pruskin. Rav Moshe who had learned under Rav Pruskin in Slutzk and explained to the חתן that the debt he had to his former Rebbe was immeasurable and if he could have afforded to, he would have given much more.

A key ingredient to a happy and successful marriage is הכרת הטוב. As Rabbi Leff notes, although this is often translated as being grateful, it is much more. It is literally recognising and finding the good. Why focus on the extra spoons of salt that were mistakenly put in. What about the effort to go shopping, buy the ingredients and the time spent sweating over a hot stove to cook and serve the soup?

If a husband thinks there is someone out there more lovely than his own wife, there is a problem.

At a sheva brochos we shower the new couple with many beautiful blessings. In one, we say: **שַֹמֵּחַ תְּשַֹמַּח רֵעִים הָאֲהוּבִים, כְּשַֹמֵּחֲךָ יְצִירְךָ בְּגַן עֵדֶן מִקֶּדֶם**. We bench the couple that they rejoice like they did in Gan Eden. Why refer back to Gan Eden?

The answer is that in Gan Eden there was only Odom and Chava. No one else. Neither party thought that perhaps there was someone out there better or more suitable. Each one felt they had married their perfect partner, their soul-mate.

Our mishna is giving us an indicator of a marriage that needs attention and is setting a benchmark of what a marriage can and should be.

Our parsha recognises that divorce is a fact of life and very sadly sometimes necessary. But the Torah also teaches us what a relationship can be – one of the most beautiful blessings in the world.

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