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**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש

**Friday 9 July 2010 - 27 Tammuz 5770**  
**Sedra Mattot-Mas'ey**


**BETROTHAL AND MARRIAGE**

**T**HE RELATIONSHIP OF THE INDIVIDUAL WITH G-D IS OFTEN described in terms of that of a husband and wife. This may help us understand the beginning of our double Sedra<sup>1</sup>. The plain text concerns some of the rules regarding making vows.

The Sedra tells us that if a woman makes a certain kind of vow - one which may in some way affect her relationship with her husband, such as never to wear perfume - her husband has the right to annul it. Today a woman would be unlikely to make a vow of this kind and if she did, her husband may not dream of interfering. However, the spiritual teaching in this law is still relevant to us, as we shall see.

Further points in the law: if a young unmarried girl makes a vow, her father has the power to annul it. When she gets engaged (more precisely: betrothed), her father and fiancé have a joint right to annul her vows. An interesting anomaly is that according to the Sages, the husband can only annul vows his wife made while married to him. The fiancé, together with his bride's father, can annul the vows she made much earlier in her life<sup>2</sup>.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe asks: why does the fiancé, who is only betrothed to his bride, have a greater power to annul her vows than does her full husband? The simple answer is because the fiancé is



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annulling her vows *together* with her father. Alone, he has no power to annul her vows at all. Together with her father, he can even annul the vows she made in the past. By contrast the married man has full power to annul certain of his wife's vows, without help from anyone, but this is restricted to the vows she made after getting married.

Let us translate this into terms of the relationship of the individual with G-d. The ability to annul vows symbolises our power to redeem the Divine sparks which are concealed in existence. Further, our bond with G-d has two levels: to be 'betrothed' means that there is concern and love, longing and even dedication - but not as yet the sense of fulfilment. By contrast in marriage there is a sense of total fulfilment. In terms of one's relationship with G-d, the person feels truly complete. Yet, says the Rebbe, this itself can sometimes present a problem. The person may feel so confident in their relationship with G-d that he or she could seriously err. The Talmud tells of Bar Kochba whose tragic downfall stemmed from his confidently saying to G-d: 'do not help me and do not hinder'<sup>3</sup>. Better, says the Rebbe, that one continues to feel 'betrothed' rather than 'married'. This actually grants greater spiritual power: because one does not feel that one has any power, but all depends on G-d, the 'father'.

The annulment of vows signifies releasing the Divine sparks from their exile in the material world, the process of Tikkun, the 'repair' of the world which is the task of each individual. The vows described as 'earlier' are those which relate to deeper levels of exile. Only the person who feels totally dependent on G-d is able to reach this deeper level and redeem it<sup>4</sup>.

Perhaps this idea can also at least in part be applied to human marriage. When one is engaged there is a freshness and a mutual respect, and also the knowledge that this is not yet complete, it is part of a process moving forward. Fulfilled marriage too requires a touch of this inspiration and humility, the sense that every day one is embarking on a journey. This grants the true spiritual power to create together a Divine dwelling in the world.

1. Numbers 30:2-36:13. 2. See Nedarim 67a-b, and Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 234:5,35. 3. Jerusalem Talmud Taanit 4:5. 4. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.2, pp.612-4.

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SEDRA MATTOT-MAS'EY

**KEEPING YOUR WORD**

It was heading to the end of the school year, and Michael and Leah were both really busy with their respective exams.

Leah was working on a project for the history class. She wanted to find pictures and drawings from the early 1800s of the first railway trains, and to show the differences between the different types of trains, and the gradual development of railway technology.

It was a fun project, apart from the fact there were so many other things to study for and to do. Leah searched on the Internet and found a lot of information and also some pictures of early trains. But she realized she would still have to get some books from the library. She had found some titles of the right kind of book. The problem was, when could she go to the library to borrow them. Every day was full.

Leah asked Michael to help her by going to the Library and finding as many as he could of the books on her list. He could borrow them on his library card, then Leah would scan some of the pictures, and they would become part of her project. The problem was that Michael was also very busy.

"Leah, I have a lot of studying to do myself and I really don't have the time to help", he said. "Well, you still seem to have time to play football on Sunday and every day after school" Leah retorted. "Well that's my leisure time, and I don't think I could take away from that", Michael said firmly.

The next day at the supper table Leah broached the subject again. "You know, Michael, I really need this help, and I will pay you five pounds if you do it for me" she said.

"Well, now you are talking" Michael said. "I don't mind doing it for a bit of cash. By when do you need the books?" "Next week, Tuesday, at the latest" Leah said, happy that her bargain had been accepted. "Here is the

list of books I need. If you can get at least three of them would be good.”

The following week on Monday afternoon Michael happily came running up the stairs to Leah’s room. He knocked loudly on the door. “Come in” responded Leah “why are you banging so loudly?” “Well, I have all your books except one,” Michael said, opening his packed satchel. “I had to go to two different libraries.” He put the pile of books on the table.

“Oh thank you, my dear brother, you are so kind” Leah said, with exaggerated eloquence. “And now for the cash?” Michael responded.

“The what?” asked Leah. “The five pounds you promised” answered Michael.

“Oh come on, I wasn’t serious about that. I was just joking, couldn’t you tell?”

“What?!” Michael said, his mouth dropping in shock. “You made me spend all that time for nothing!? You promised me five pounds!”

The brother and sister were now really shouting at each other. Then their father came home and heard their argument. He made them both sit down with him in the living room. He asked each one to give their account of what happened. Leah said she was obviously joking, and Michael said she was obviously serious. Their father sat silently for few moments.

Leah suddenly began crying. “I’m sorry,” she said between her tears. “I shouldn’t have done it. I know it’s wrong. The truth is I thought I would have five pounds to give you, but then I lost it somewhere.”

“What does the Sedra of the week say about this problem?” asked their father.

“I know,” said Leah. “It says ‘whatever comes out of your mouth you should do’, right at the beginning of the Sedra. I said I would pay you five pounds so I have to do that. Please forgive me pretending it was a joke. I owe you five pounds, Michael, and I thank you very much for your help.”

“Apology accepted,” said Michael. They looked at their father. Somehow, he too seemed to have tears in his eyes...

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