



SPIRITUAL BIRTH

EVERY DETAIL IN OUR HUMAN WORLD HAS A PARALLEL ON A SPIRITUAL plane. The key relationship among human beings is the joining of man and woman in marriage. With Divine help, marriage leads to the birth of children, boys and girls.

In various sections of the Bible the image of marriage is used to describe the relationship of the Jewish people with G-d. Most famous among these is King Solomon’s ‘Song of Songs’. The beautiful woman in the Song of Songs is the Jewish people, who have a complex relationship with G-d, sometimes far away from Him, sometimes drawing close. The Prophet Isaiah uses similar imagery¹.

Our Sedra² opens with a passage about a woman giving birth to a child: “When a woman gives seed and bears a son”. This passage is usually explained in straightforward literal terms. If it is a boy, the child must be circumcised, and whether a boy or a girl, the mother brings an offering to the Temple, usually two doves. She brings the offering after forty days if the child was a boy, and after eighty days if she had a baby girl. These doves were the most popular offerings brought to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe quotes the great Moroccan Sage Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (1696-1743), who suggests another way of reading this text. As in the Song of Songs or Isaiah, the ‘woman’ represents the Jewish people³. Through the fulfilled relationship of the Jewish

people with G-d, a baby is born.

Rabbi Chaim explains that the birth symbolizes Redemption. The sense of completion when a human couple have a baby reflects the higher spiritual reality of the free and independent Jewish people being able to serve G-d in a fulfilled and wholesome way.

Our history provides a number of examples of redemption. Some 3,300 years ago there was the redemption from Egypt. Later in the Land of Israel we often suffered attack and persecution by our neighbours, and G-d would deliver us. We had a miraculous deliverance from a threat of massacre at the time of Purim. We were redeemed from Babylon and came back to the Land of Israel, and built the second Temple. A few centuries later we were redeemed from Syrian-Greek oppression at the time of Chanuka, and so on.

The problem with each of these moments of Redemption is that it was followed by a further phase of Exile. Our hope and faith is in the ultimate Redemption, which will be permanent and total for the entire world. This will end all strife, for us the Jewish people and also globally. Rabbi Chaim says, this permanent redemption is symbolized by the boy who is born at the beginning of the Sedra. The male is physically stronger and this strength denotes the permanence of the redemption.

How is this redemption achieved? When the woman, the Jewish people, “gives seed”. Seed is planted in the ground, and this planting represents our service of G-d in our practical, physical world. Indeed there are beautiful ideas, feelings and states of consciousness to which we should aspire, but the real basis of everything is the practical reality of keeping the Commandments of the Torah in our physical, daily lives, such as eating kosher food, giving charity, observing Shabbat.

These practical realities create the tangible bond with G-d which leads to birth, and as a result of birth, the beautiful experience of bringing offerings to the Temple and, for all humanity, the fulfilment of the purpose of Creation³.

1. See Isaiah 50:1, 54:5-8, and Hosea 2:21-2. 2. Leviticus chs.12-13. See his commentary ‘Or HaHaim’ at the beginning of the Sedra. 3. Freely adapted from *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1 pp.236-9.

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53

SEDRA TAZRIA

INSTANT WARNING

"We were going to go and visit my cousins in Westcliff for the weekend but now we can't - my little cousin Jonathan has chicken pox."

Dina was telling this to her friend Sara, as they sat comparing their pencil collections at break one day.

"Oh, what a shame. Maybe he's really got Tzara'at - you know, what Miss Miller was saying in the Sedra lesson - those white spots which came on a person's skin".

"She said a person would get them for saying bad things about other people. In Hebrew that's called Lashon HaRa, the Evil Tongue. Maybe that's why your cousin has chicken pox - because he spoke Lashon HaRa."

"How could you say such a nasty thing? Of course he didn't," Dina said, annoyed. "Anyway, he's only one and a half years old - he can't really talk that much as yet. And anyway, nowadays people don't get Tzara'at for talking Lashon HaRa, Miss Miller said."

“Hmmm. Does that mean it’s okay to talk Lashon HaRa nowadays?” Sara demanded.

“Of course not! Just because we don’t get punished straight away with white spots doesn’t mean it’s okay to do something wrong!

“In earlier times we were lucky. As soon as someone did something bad, they were immediately warned that it was wrong. So if someone spoke badly about another person, they got the white spots of Tzara’at as a warning.

“Later on this stopped happening. But talking bad about another person is very wrong and it’s really something to be ashamed of doing.”

“You know, whenever I speak bad about someone I feel very upset afterwards to think that I might have hurt them,” said Sara. “Because the person I tell it to, probably tells someone else, and so on. It must be horrible to have lots of people talking about you, laughing or sneering at the bad things you did.”

“Wow!” said Dina. “That’s kind of like an instant punishment – like having Tzara’at in your mind. That should warn you never to do it again.”

Sara sighed. “I just wish I would feel like that *before* I spoke against the other person! Usually I speak first and only afterwards do I remember...”

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