



58

JEWISH MARRIAGE: A DWELLING FOR THE DIVINE

IN THE SEDRA¹ THIS WEEK WE READ ABOUT THE FIRST INTERMARRIAGE, which caused considerable grief to the parents of the Jewish partner.

Last week's Sedra made clear that Abraham was very concerned that his son Isaac should marry someone from his own people, who were the descendants of Shem (Semites). Shem was the foremost son of Noah, and was specially blessed. The Rabbis describe him as a major spiritual leader. Abraham warned his servant Eliezer, who had to go looking for a wife for Isaac, that he should not choose his wife from the Canaanites.

Even at this early stage of development of the Jewish people, there was a definite concern about who one should or should not marry. Why? Because the goal of the Jewish people is to create a dwelling for the Divine in this physical world. The Temple expresses that ideal on a global scale; each Jewish marriage manifests it in personal terms. When man and woman join in marriage in accordance with Jewish teaching, the Divine Presence dwells with them, in every aspect of their lives². They are thus helping to fulfil the purpose of Creation.

In this week's Sedra we read about the two sons of Isaac, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was a person who spent his time acquiring wisdom from his illustrious ancestor Shem, who was still alive. Esau, by contrast, was a hunter, and a man of violence.

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
www.chabadresearch.net - cru@lubavitchUK.com

It was Esau who married “out”. The Torah tells us that when he was forty years old he married two women, both from the Hittite tribe. The Hittites were one of the Canaanite nations.

Esau’s non-Semitic wives caused “bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebecca”³. Later, Esau realised that his parents did not want him to have wives from the Canaanites. So he married his cousin, the daughter of Ishmael. However, he still retained his two Hittite consorts as well⁴. A grandson of one of them was Amalek, the famous enemy of the Jewish people through the ages.

Later in the Torah the theme of intermarriage is seen several times. The fact that many Jews were consorting with Midianite women, who were leading them to idolatry, caused Moses to break down in tears (Num.25:6). Centuries later, in the time of Ezra, when many Jews had returned from exile in Babylon (Iraq) to the Land of Israel, intermarriage was again a serious problem. It was taking place particularly among the wealthy. A moving talk by Ezra to a large assembly of Jews in Jerusalem was successful in halting this trend⁵.

A contrasting story is that of Moses himself. While living far away from his people, long before the Exodus, he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite. Unlike the wives of Esau, Zipporah dedicated herself to the values and ideals of the Jewish people. This is seen particularly clearly in an incident when she circumcised her son⁶.

Later, a famous proselyte to Judaism was Ruth the Moabite. The Book of Ruth describes how she came to the Land of Israel. She had been married to a Jewish man, who had died. Ruth was filled with longing to join the Jewish people. She said to Naomi, the Jewish mother of her dead husband: “Where you go I will go, where you lie down, I will lie down, your people is my people, your G-d is my G-d...”⁷. She became a Jewess and married Boaz, a relative of Naomi.

Their descendant was King David, and *his* descendant will be the Messiah, who will rebuild the Temple and thus complete the task of Jewish marriage, making the world a dwelling for the Divine.

1. Gen.23:19-28:9. 2. See the discourse *Bati LeGani* by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn, ch.5. 3. Gen.26:35. See also 27:46. 4. See Gen.28:8-9 and Rashi’s final comment. 5. See Book of Ezra, chs.9-10. 6. Exodus 4:25. 7. Ruth 1:16.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



SEDRA TOLEDOT

RESPONSIBILITY

'Hey Aaron, are you enjoying the game?' Aaron heard Jack's familiar voice from behind him, as he stood watching his team mates kick around the ball under the instruction of their coach. 'Just the person I want to talk to', Aaron thought to himself as he turned to face Jack.

Apparently Jack, who had been the team captain for two seasons, had suddenly decided to quit, and Coach had now asked Aaron to take his place.

'Jack, why are you quitting being our captain?'

A look of sadness crossed Jack's face as he answered, 'Well, Aaron, I guess being captain isn't always fun.'

'What do you mean?' asked Aaron.

'Like last game we played; even though we had won the four previous games, when we lost that one everyone blamed me for losing - because I am the captain. You know, it felt bad enough losing, I didn't need everyone in the school to blame me as well.'

'So *that's* the reason? Because of *that* you are quitting?' Aaron asked in amazement. 'You know,' he added, 'Coach asked me to be the captain instead.'

'I know, I suggested you to him,' replied Jack.

Aaron smiled. He suddenly had an idea about what he could say to Jack to get him to change his mind about leaving.

'Jack, I know someone who said something just like you...'
Jack looked at him curiously, 'Who?' he asked.

'Esau, Jacob's brother'.

Jack frowned. What could his friend mean? 'O, come on...' he said.

'One day Esau came rushing into the house to find Jacob cooking a lentil soup. He had been hunting all morning so he was starving. "Give me that soup!" he demanded from Jacob. "Only if you sell me your Rights as a Firstborn", replied Jacob.

"Ach, who cares about the Firstborn Rights anyways!" said Esau in disgust; "all they are is a bunch of responsibilities that make life so much more difficult". "If that is the case", said Jacob, "you won't mind giving them up in order to have this soup".

"Absolutely!" replied Esau, and he hungrily gulped down the soup.' 'So he sold his Firstborn Rights for some soup?' Jack asked.

'Yes,' replied Aaron, 'and only because he didn't like the idea of the responsibility. Imagine - selling one's Rights as a Firstborn just because one doesn't want the responsibility!'

Both boys looked in the direction of the players. Coach was standing still, looking towards them. Jack smiled at him and waved.

'Thank you Aaron; you're a good friend,' he said, and then he added, '... I guess sometimes we forget the value of having responsibilities. But you're right: 'This - ' he said pointing at his tee-shirt, which had a big white CAPTAIN printed on the front, ' - is not worth selling. Especially since no-one is even offering me a bowl of soup!'

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***