I LOVE YOU MORE THAN YOU LOVE ME

It’s that time of year when we’re reminded of our marriage. The prophets point out that G-d wed us at Sinai. Throughout the Torah, we find that G-d admonishes us for our betrayals, and promises that there are good times yet ahead.

You can usually tell when two people are in love, but the best way to recognize a married couple is by their arguments. These are arguments that you won’t see anywhere else, for the simple reason that they don’t make any sense anywhere but within the context of marriage.

We find one such argument in this week’s Torah reading. (Actually, the argument takes two different forms, explained in different ways by our sages; but underneath, I believe, it’s the same argument).

The disagreement concerns G-d’s instructions to Moses to wage war on the Midianites. “Avenge the vengeance of the children of Israel upon the Midianites,” G-d says to the Jewish leader. But when Moses conveys these instructions to the people, he tells them that they’re going to war “to take G-d’s vengeance on Midian.” Who is the offended party, G-d or Israel?

The Midrash Tanchuma explains: the Midianites caused the people of Israel to sin and worship the idol Pe’or, causing G-d to punish His people with a plague. So G-d tells Israel: “It is you who have an account to settle with them, for they caused Me to harm you.” To which Moses responds: “Master of the Universe! If we had been uncircumcised, or idol-worshippers, or had denied the commandments, the Midianites would not have hated us. They only persecute us on account of the Torah and the precepts which You have given us. Consequently the vengeance is Yours...”

Rashi has a different take on the contradiction, and this theme is taken up by the Chassidic masters: G-d sees the war on Midian as avenging Israel, for G-d’s foremost concern is for His people; the people of Israel see the war as avenging G-d, for they are concerned only with the honor of G-d.

Typical marital argument logic. Husband: “How could you do that to me? When you act that way, it makes me angry at you, and then I hurt you. I’ll never forgive you for making me hurt the woman I love!” Wife: “If you wouldn’t have married me, we wouldn’t be so special to each other, and it wouldn’t hurt you so much when I act that way. So it’s all your fault.”

Or the flip-side of that argument, equally (il)logical: “I love you more than you love me!” “No! I love you more than you love me!”

We’ve been arguing that way for more than 3,300 years now.

Rabbi Yanky Tauber

YOUR BROTHERS GO INTO BATTLE AND YOU WILL SIT HERE?

Before Israel crossed the Jordan into Canaan, several tribes approached Moses for permission to remain in trans-Jordan. They were shepherds and that land had excellent pasture. Moses retorted sharply to them, “Your brothers go into battle and you will sit here?” (Numbers 32:6). Here a familiar integral theme of Torah recurs.

Anyone living in comfort and security finds it difficult to realize the situation of those in want and peril. We may read of famines in India and sympathetically nod. Living in comfort and security, it is difficult to realize the situation of those in want and peril but undismayed we will turn to the next item in the newspapers and with little appreciable loss of appetite will sit at the dinner table. Only a person of responsibility to mankind, one with rare compassion will be moved enough to share his good with the deprived, even more, to share the troubles of the unfortunate.

With Israel especially, one Jew’s peril is every Jew’s concern. No Jew anywhere in the world can hide behind a golden curtain, depending on wealth or status to insulate him from the problems plaguing other Jews. We may have great flocks and have found rich pasture, but while our brothers are in peril we cannot enjoy peace obliviously.

Rabbi Zalman Posner

S H A B B A T S H A L O M!

25 Tammuz, 5769 - July 17, 2008

Light candles Fri., July 17 at 0:00PM Shabbat ends July 18 at 0:00PM
Torah Portion: Matos-Masei (Numbers 30:2 - 36:13) Ethics of our Fathers: Chapter 1
Blessing of the new month Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av: Wednesday, July 22

If you know someone who would like to receive the Fax of Life call or fax us at Tel. 000-0000 Fax 000-0000 E-mail: info@shluchim.org
"THE SLUMBER OF THE RIGHTEOUS"

The brain is a most useful tool. But opinions vary as to how and when to best use it.

Some would say: “I use my intellect for the physical-material challenges of life; these are the kinds of things for which reason and logic will serve as dependable guides. But when it comes to my inner, spiritual life, these cannot be rationalized or weighed with the scales of logic. These are areas in which I surrender to my subconscious, intuitive self.”

Others take an opposite approach. “On the contrary,” they say, “the spiritual side of life is where the mind’s guidance is most necessary. Regarding my material endeavors, if they don’t work out exactly as they should, it’s not the end of the world. But in my spiritual life, I want to get it right. There, I submit my every action, thought and feeling to the most precise measuring tool I’ve got -- my intellect.”

Who’s right and who’s wrong? According to a fascinating Midrash about Jacob’s sleeping habits, both are wrong.

In the 28th chapter of Genesis, we read how Jacob, while journeying from the Holy Land to Charan, spends a night on Mount Moriah (the “Temple Mount”): “He encountered the place; he slept there, for the sun had set ... and he lay down in that place.”

What is the meaning of the seemingly superfluous line, “and he lay down in that place”? (The Torah already told us “he slept there.”) What message is hidden in these words?

Says the Midrash: “In that place he lay down, but for all of the fourteen years that he was hidden in the house of Eber he did not lie down... In that place he lay down, but for all of the twenty years that he was in Laban’s house, he did not lie down.”

“That night”, the night that Jacob spent at the holiest place on earth, was framed by the most intensely spiritual and the most intensely material periods of his life.

For fourteen years prior to that night, Jacob devoted his every moment to the pursuit of the divine wisdom. For twenty years following that night, Jacob worked in the employ of Laban with devotion so absolute that “sleep escaped my eyes.” But during the one night that interposed between and joined these two periods, Jacob “lay down.”

A person lying down positions his head and the rest of his body on the same plane. By doing so, he surrenders the most important advantage that a human has over all other animals -- the fact that, in the human being, the head is positioned above the body. Because man’s upright stature reflects a deeper truth: that in the human being, the mind rules the heart, the head is master of the physical self.

This, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is the deeper significance of the Midrash’s statement that Jacob did not “lie down.” Jacob informs us that “mind rules the heart” applies to all areas of life, from the most spiritual endeavor to the most material occupation.

All areas of life, that is, except when you’re on Mount Moriah. Because there is also a higher truth that transcends physicality and spirituality, surpassing intellect and instinct.

G-d is neither spiritual nor physical. He created both realms, equally present in both. He provided us avenues of connection to His higher truth in both venues: prayer is a spiritual venue of connection to G-d, while giving charity is a physical pathway. And He provided us with a guide -- our rational mind -- with which to navigate both areas of life.

But we also need to be connected to the higher divine truth that transcends spirit and matter. Indeed, it is only because of this connection that we can inhabit two such diverse worlds and even incorporate them both into our lives.

That’s why Jacob had to spend a night at the place of G-d’s deepest self-revelation to man and man’s ultimate commitment in his service of G-d: the place where the elemental divine truth is manifest. Only an encounter with Mount Moriah can bridge our “Eber years” and our “Laban years”.

But on Mount Moriah there are no rules or tools. You cannot grasp or apprehend, you cannot rationalize or experience. You can only surrender to it. You can only lie down.

Our Mount Moriah moments are extremely rare. For Jacob, a single night was enough for 34 years. What’s important is not how often they come or how long they last, but that their influence should pervade everything we do.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

8 Kislev, 5766 – December 9, 2005

Torah Portion: Vayeitzei (Genesis 28:10 - 32:3)