

THE GREATEST SIN - THE GREATEST VIRTUE

A SERMON DELIVERED KOL NIDRE, 1966 - 5727 - TEMPLE BETH AM, MIAMI, FLORIDA

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IN MODERN TIMES, KOL NIDRE HAS BECOME THE MOST SOLEMN MOMENT WHICH AMERICAN JEWS SHARE. THIS IS, THEN, THE TIME FOR US TO BE THE MOST SERIOUS AND TO SPEAK OF THE GREATEST SIN OF ALL. WHAT IS THE GREATEST SIN?

IN THE BIBLE WE ARE TOLD NOT TO BEAR A GRUDGE AGAINST OUR ENEMIES AND NOT TO TAKE VENGEANCE AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE WRONGED US. NONETHELESS, THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE CLEARLY STATES, "REMEMBER THE WRONG THE PEOPLE OF AMALEK DID TO YOU, AND NEVER FORGET IT".* SOMETHING THAT THE PEOPLE OF AMALEK DID TO THE HEBREWS WAS CONSIDERED BY OUR FATHERS TO BE THE MOST OPPRESSIVE OF SINS. WHAT DID THEY DO? WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF THEIR WRONG THAT IT COULD HARDLY BE FORGIVEN?

THE BIBLE TELLS US THAT WHEN THE HEBREWS LEFT EGYPT, THEY LEFT HURRIEDLY AND SUDDENLY. THEY WERE SLAVES AND THE CHILDREN OF SLAVES, WITHOUT ANY REAL MATERIAL POSSESSIONS, WITHOUT FOOD, AND WITHOUT ANY MEANS OF DEFENSE. THEY APPEALED TO THE PEOPLES WHO DWELLED IN THE LANDS THROUGH WHICH THEY HAD TO TRAVEL TO LET THEM ESCAPE, TO GIVE THEM FREE PASSAGE. WITH RARE EXCEPTIONS, THE RESIDENT POPULATION COOPERATED. THEY WERE CAPABLE OF SYMPATHY FOR A GROUP OF HEROIC SLAVES RUNNING FOR THEIR LIVES. NOT SO THE PEOPLE OF AMALEK. THE AMALEKITES NOT ONLY REFUSED SAFE PASSAGE TO THIS DEFENSELESS PEOPLE, BUT THEY ATTACKED THE HEBREWS, KILLING AND RAPING INDISCRIMINATELY. THERE IS NO BETRAYAL SO GREAT AS THE BETRAYAL OF THOSE WHO ARE COMPLETELY DEPENDENT UPON YOUR STRENGTH AND MAGNANIMITY. IT IS ONE THING TO BE DEFEATED BY AN ARMY WHICH IS A DECLARED ENEMY, BUT IT IS ANOTHER THING TO BE ATTACKED BY THOSE TO WHOM YOU COME IN DESPERATION FOR HELP. THE PROPHETS LATER TAUGHT THAT THE HEBREWS SHOULD CALL THE EGYPTIANS "BROTHER", BECAUSE THE EGYPTIANS, AT THE VERY LEAST, WERE A DECLARED ENEMY WHICH LATER HELD OUT THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP. THE AMALEKITES, HOWEVER, WERE ANOTHER THING. THE MEMORY OF THEIR SIN WOULD NOT GROW DIM.

THIS THEME OF THE NECESSITY OF CARING FOR THE PERSON OR GROUP WHO IS AT YOUR MERCY IS WOVEN THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE. "THOU SHALT NOT CURSE THE DEAF", READS THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS; "NOT PUT A STUMBLING BLOCK IN THE PATH OF THE BLIND." "IF THE DONKEY OF YOUR ENEMY IS LADEN WITH GOODS AND SINKS TO THE GROUND OVER-COME WITH FATIGUE, YOU MUST HELP THE DONKEY." "IF THE OX OF YOUR ENEMY LOSES ITS WAY AND IS LOST, YOU MUST RETURN IT TO YOUR ENEMY." TO HARM THE DEFENSELESS

* A PARAPHRASE

PERSON, THE BLIND OR THE DEAF, TO PERMIT A DUMB ANIMAL TO SUFFER WHEN YOU ALONE CAN HELP HIM, THESE THINGS WERE UNTHINKABLE TO OUR FATHERS.

IF BETRAYAL IS THE GREATEST SIN, THEN THE GREATEST VIRTUE IS HESED, WHICH IS THE OPPOSITE OF BETRAYAL. HESED IS A HEBREW WORD WHICH IS NOT QUITE TRANSLATABLE INTO ENGLISH. IN THE KING JAMES TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE, HESED IS INDICATED BY THE TERM "LOVING-KINDNESS". IN THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION OF MODERN PROTESTANTS, HESED IS TRANSLATED AS "COVENANT LOVE". HESED IS THAT VIRTUE WHICH TWO PARTIES TO AN AGREEMENT OWE EACH OTHER. THE AGREEMENT CAN BE FORMALLY ARRANGED, OR IT CAN BE AN UNSOUGHT RELATIONSHIP WHICH CIRCUMSTANCES FORCE UPON YOU. FOR EXAMPLE, OUR TRADITION TEACHES THAT GOD AND ANCIENT ISRAEL FORMALLY ENTERED INTO A COVENANT. AS PART OF HIS HESED TO THAT AGREEMENT, A HEBREW WAS BOUND CLOSELY NOT ONLY TO GOD BUT TO HIS FELLOW HEBREWS WHO WERE PARTY TO THE AGREEMENT. THUS, IF A HEBREW WAS FORCED TO SELL HIMSELF INTO SLAVERY TO PAY HIS DEBTS, ANOTHER HEBREW HAD TO RESTORE THE SLAVE TO FREEDOM. THIS ACT OF RESTORATION OR REDEMPTION WAS AN ACT OF HESED OR COVENANT LOVE. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STRONGER MEMBER IN A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WAS GREATER THAN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WEAKER PARTY. THUS, EVEN THOUGH THE HEBREWS VIOLATED THEIR HESED WITH RESPECT TO GOD AND DISOBEYED SOME OF THE LAWS, IT WAS ANTICIPATED THAT GOD WOULD FORGIVE ISRAEL AS AN ACT OF HESED ON HIS PART; FOR MAN COULD BE EXPECTED TO BE IMPERFECT, AND IT WAS GOD'S ROLE TO FORGIVE.

SUCH IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN, THAT CHILDREN ARE EXPECTED TO DO ONLY AS WELL AS THEY CAN, BUT PARENTS HAVE A GREATER OBLIGATION. WHAT IS TOLERABLE FOR A CHILD TO DO MAY NOT BE TOLERABLE FOR A PARENT, FOR THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD DEPENDS ON THE NOBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY OF THE STRONGER PARTY. A PARENT HAS TO BE NOT ONLY CONSISTENT IN HIS OWN PERFORMANCE, HE HAS ALSO TO BE FORGIVING OF THE CHILD'S WEAKNESS AND LACK OF CONSISTENCY. SOMETIMES HESED DICTATES FIRMNESS OR JUSTICE. SOMETIMES HESED DICTATES SOFTNESS OR MERCY.

ON OCCASION, WE ARE THROWN INTO A SITUATION WHERE WE DID NOT SEEK RESPONSIBILITY, BUT IT BECOMES OURS ANYHOW. THE TALMUD TELLS US THAT IF YOU SEE A MAN DROWNING, AND YOU CAN'T SWIM, YOU HAVE ONLY THE OBLIGATION TO SOUND THE ALARM; BUT IF YOU CAN SWIM, YOU HAVE THE FURTHER OBLIGATION TO SAVE THE MAN. FAILURE TO ACT IN SUCH A SITUATION, EVEN WHEN A RISK WAS INVOLVED, WAS CONSIDERED A VIOLATION OF HESED, AN ABDICATION OF ONE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO A FELLOW HUMAN BEING.

A TOUCHING EXAMPLE OF THE LOYALTY OF A SERVANT TO HIS MASTER IS DESCRIBED TO US IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS. WHEN ABRAHAM KNOWS THAT HE IS DYING, HE URGES HIS SERVANT ELIMELECH TO PLEDGE HIMSELF TO THE PERFORMANCE OF ABRAHAM'S FINAL WISH CONCERNING HIS SON ISAAC. AFTER ABRAHAM'S DEATH, THE SERVANT WAS ACTUALLY FREE TO DO AS HE PLEASSED, BUT HE DID NOT HESITATE IN PERFORMING HIS PERILOUS MISSION. FOR ELIMELECH, THE DEATH OF HIS MASTER MADE THE OBLIGATION OF FULFILLING THE PLEDGE ALL THE MORE COMPULSORY. IT WAS NOT CONCEIVABLE TO ELIMELECH THAT HE NOT KEEP FAITH WITH THE DEAD, FOR THE DEAD ARE COMPLETELY DEPENDENT ON THE HESED OF THE LIVING.

HESED MIGHT BE TRANSLATED, IN PART, AS "NOBLESSE OBLIGE". IT IS THAT WHICH WE DO OUT OF A SENSE OF HONOR AND HUMAN DECENCY EVEN THOUGH NO ONE CAN FORCE US TO DO IT. THE DOLLAR WE GIVE TO CHARITY OR TO THE TEMPLE WHICH WE TRULY CAN'T AFFORD - THAT'S HESED. THE LOYALTY THAT A HUSBAND SHOWS TO A WIFE WHO IS TOTALLY INCAPACITATED BY ILLNESS FOR MANY YEARS, THAT'S HESED. THE EXTRA TIME AND PATIENCE THAT A MOTHER GIVES TO A CHILD THAT HAS SPECIAL PROBLEMS, THAT'S HESED. WHEN A SOLDIER WOULD BE JUSTIFIED IN RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE, BUT, INSTEAD, REMAINS BEHIND TO HELP HIS WOUNDED COMRADE, THAT'S HESED. HELPING THOSE WHO HAVE NO ONE ELSE TO HELP THEM, AND WHO ARE DEPENDENT UPON US, BY REASON OF CHANCE OR PRIOR ARRANGEMENT, - THAT'S HESED. THE TALMUD TEACHES THAT THE WORLD CANNOT STAND WITHOUT THIS VIRTUE. IT IS THAT LITTLE SOMETHING THAT MAKES THE SCALES OF SURVIVAL A LITTLE WEIGHTIER THAN THE SCALES OF DESTRUCTION.

- WE ARE ALL IN VIOLATION -

ON YOM KIPPUR WE ALL CONFESS OUR SINS TOGETHER. THERE ARE NO RIGHTEOUS AMONGST US TONIGHT. WE ALL SHARE IN EACH OTHERS INADEQUACIES. WE HAVE ALL BEEN GUILTY OF THE SIN OF BETRAYAL; WE ARE ALL GUILTY OF VIOLATIONS OF HESED. RECENTLY, WE READ IN THE NEWSPAPERS ABOUT A MOTHER WITH MANY CHILDREN WHO ABANDONED HER NEWEST BABY IN A SUPERMARKET. WE COULD SAY THAT THIS WAS A CASE OF DEPRAVED BETRAYAL OF RESPONSIBILITY. WE CAN, NONETHELESS, HAVE SOME SYMPATHY FOR THE MOTHER, BECAUSE SHE, HERSELF, WAS AN ABANDONED WIFE WHO WORKED ALL DAY TO FEED HER KIDS, AND SHE SIMPLY DIDN'T KNOW HOW SHE COULD TAKE CARE OF STILL ANOTHER CHILD. THE WHEEL OF BETRAYAL GOES ROUND AND ROUND, AND AT SOME POINT WHERE THE WHEEL STOPS, YOU AND I ARE FOUND WANTING.

CONSIDER THIS PROUD NATION OF AMERICA. IN 1939 AND 1940 WHEN HITLER BEGAN HIS CAMPAIGN OF EXTERMINATION AGAINST THE JEWS, TENS OF THOUSANDS OF JEWS APPLIED FOR ENTRANCE INTO AMERICA. THE DOORS WERE SHUT TO ALL BUT A TRICKLE. AMERICA WAS THE AMALEK OF THE 20th CENTURY, BUT AMERICA WAS NOT ALONE. SO MANY OTHER COUNTRIES DID THE SAME. HITLER COULD NOT HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN HIS FIENDISH PLAN IF THE CRIES OF THE JEWS HAD NOT FALLEN ON DEAF EARS. WHERE WAS THE HESED, THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF THE CIVILIZED WORLD IN 1940?

THE SITUATION IS NOT TOO DISSIMILAR IN AMERICA TODAY. WE PROUD WHITES RIDE BY DECREPIT NEGRO SHACKS EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK, AND WE CANNOT HEAR THE SOUL'S ANGUISH THAT WELLS UP FROM THESE TEEMING SLUMS. THE CRIES ARE THERE, BUT WE CANNOT HEAR THEM AS WE DRIVE BY, BECAUSE THE WINDOWS OF OUR AIR-CONDITIONED CARS ARE CLOSED! OUR MAGNIFICENT GADGETS HAVE INSULATED US FROM THE REALITY OF LIFE ABOUT US. WHY WE CAN'T EVEN HEAR THE BOMBS DROPPING IN VIET NAM! WE CAN'T EVEN FEEL THE FIRE OF THE MAPALM WHICH IS CONSUMING ENTIRE VILLAGES. OUR RADIOS BLARE FORTH SWEET AND SOOTHING MUSIC, BLOTTING OUT ALL ELSE. OUR TV SETS SPREAD BEFORE US CAPTIVATING FAIRY TALES, SO WE ARE DISTRACTED FROM THE REAL EVENTS HAPPENING AROUND US. OUR VERY WEALTH MAKES THE PERFORMANCE OF OUR MORAL OBLIGATIONS ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT.

- "YOU ALWAYS HURT THE ONE YOU LOVE" -

THE GREATEST TRAGEDY OF OUR SOCIETY, HOWEVER, IS NOT TO BE MEASURED IN TERMS OF OUR INDIFFERENCE TO THE GREAT CAUSES THAT COULD DEMAND OUR ATTENTION. OUR GREATEST SINS OF BETRAYAL TODAY ARE BEING COMMITTED IN OUR OWN HOMES. IT IS AN UNFORTUNATE TRUISM THAT "YOU ALWAYS HURT THE ONE YOU LOVE". SUCH HURTING IS EVER POSSIBLE, BECAUSE THE MEMBERS OF OUR FAMILY ARE SO COMPLETELY DEPENDENT UPON US. A HUSBAND AND WIFE INVEST SO MUCH IN EACH OTHER. THEY INVEST THEIR YOUTH, THE BLOOM OF THEIR EARLY LOVE. THEY INVEST THEIR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE IN EACH OTHER. THEY INVEST THEIR SEED IN EACH OTHER. AS THE YEARS GO BY, THE INVESTMENT BECOMES GREATER. HUSBAND AND WIFE LABOR IN EACH OTHER'S BEHALF, HE AT THE OFFICE, SHE AT HOME WITH THE CHILDREN. THE MORE A MAN AND WOMAN GIVE TO EACH OTHER, THE MORE DEPENDENT UPON EACH OTHER THEY BECOME; BUT, CONVERSELY, THE BUSIER THE MAN AND WOMAN BECOME, IN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES, THE LESS TIME THEY HAVE TO DEVOTE TO EACH OTHER. IN THIS KIND OF SITUATION, IT IS INEVITABLE THAT THERE BE OCCASIONAL MOMENTS WHEN ONE PARTNER DOES NOT DO ALL THAT THE OTHER WOULD LIKE HIM TO DO. WITHIN THE DAY-TO-DAY FUNCTIONING OF A MARRIAGE, THERE ARE BOUND TO BE DISAPPOINTMENTS AND INADEQUACIES. NO HUMAN BEING IS EVER QUITE ABLE TO FULFILL ALL THAT HIS PARTNER EXPECTS FROM HIM AND NEEDS FROM HIM. THE FAILURE TO BE AND DO EVERYTHING THAT YOUR PARTNER WANTS IS NOT A FAILURE OF HESED, HOWEVER. HESED BEGINS TO DRAIN OUT OF A MARRIAGE AT THE POINT WHERE ONE PARTNER FAILS TO UNDERSTAND THE INVESTMENT THE OTHER HAS MADE IN HIM AND BEGINS TO TREAT IT LIGHTLY. HESED IS WITHDRAWN FROM A MARRIAGE WHEN ONE PARTNER FAILS TO UNDERSTAND HOW DEPENDENT THE OTHER IS UPON HIS EFFORT AND CONSIDERATION.

PEOPLE SOMETIMES CRITICIZE ME BECAUSE IN MY MARRIAGE CEREMONY I WARN THE COUPLE THAT THERE WILL BE ROUGH MOMENTS IN THE FUTURE. I EVEN SUGGEST IN THE CEREMONY THAT THERE MIGHT BE TIMES WHEN THE BRIDE AND GROOM WILL WONDER WHY THEY GOT MARRIED AND WHETHER THE MARRIAGE OUGHT TO BE CONTINUED. SUCH THOUGHTS COME INTO THE MINDS OF MOST MARRIED PEOPLE IN TIME OF STRIFE OR STRAIN. THEY ARE NATURAL WITHIN A SITUATION WHERE TWO PEOPLE ARE SO DEPENDENT UPON ONE ANOTHER AND MAKE SUCH GREAT DEMANDS UPON ONE ANOTHER. HESED, THE LOVING-KINDNESS, COMES IN WHEN THE ANGER AND DISAPPOINTMENT IS SET ASIDE AND THE PARTNERS REALIZE THAT THEY ARE ONLY HUMAN, FRAGILE AND IMPERFECT. THE HESED COMES IN WHEN THE PARTNERS SIT DOWN TO TALK ABOUT THEIR DIFFERENCES, WHEN THEY CONSCIOUSLY ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER, AND WHEN THEY FORGIVE EACH OTHER.

NO MARRIAGE IS WITHOUT ITS CONFLICTS. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MARRIAGES IS THAT, IN SOME, THE PARTNERS CAN TALK TO EACH OTHER, AND, IN OTHERS, THE PARTNERS LACK THIS STRENGTH AND FORBEARANCE. AH, SWEET BLISS, WHEN TWO MARRIED PEOPLE ARE MATURE ENOUGH TO ADMIT TO EACH OTHER WHERE THEY ARE RESPECTIVELY WRONG!

THERE ARE MANY WAYS OF WITHDRAWING HESED FROM A MARRIAGE. THE MAN MAY TREAT HIS WIFE AS IF SHE WERE A CHILD AND NOT A PARTNER. THE WOMAN MAY INSIST ON BEING THE AUTHORITY IN THE HOUSE INSTEAD OF ENCOURAGING HER HUSBAND TO BE THE LEADER. THE MAN MAY USE HIS HOME AS A MERE WAYSTATION IN BETWEEN WORK AND PLAY. THE WOMAN MAY USE HER BODY, CONSCIOUSLY OR NOT, AS A LEVER TO GAIN WHATEVER SHE WISHES. EITHER PARTNER MAY USE HIS PARENTS AGAINST HIS SPOUSE. THE LIST OF PROBLEMS IS ENDLESS, BECAUSE HUMAN BEINGS ARE COMPLEX, AND BECAUSE IN TIME OF STRESS, THE BEST OF US REGRESS TO THE BEHAVIOR PATTERNS OF OUR CHILDHOOD.

SCRATCH THE SKIN OF ANY ADULT, AND YOU WILL FIND A CHILD, AND IN THE BEST OF MARRIAGES, THERE IS PLENTY OF SCRATCHING.

IN SPITE OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP, THOSE MOST EXPERIENCED IN THE FIELD OF MARITAL PROBLEMS ASSURE US THAT THERE ARE INTELLIGENT AND EFFICIENT WAYS OF SOLVING MOST PROBLEMS. MARRIAGE COUNSELORS, WHETHER WE INCLUDE IN THIS CATEGORY SOCIAL WORKERS, PSYCHOLOGISTS, OR PSYCHIATRISTS, TELL US THAT MOST DIVORCES NEED NEVER HAVE TAKEN PLACE, IF THOSE INVOLVED HAD ONLY TAKEN THE TIME TO GAIN SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE DYNAMICS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP.

FOR EXAMPLE, ONE ACUTE MARRIAGE PROBLEM WORKED OUT WHEN THE WIFE DISCOVERED IN THE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE THAT IN HER DESPERATE FEAR THAT SHE WAS NOT RAISING HER CHILDREN PROPERLY, SHE WAS DEVOTING ALL OF HER TIME TO THEM AND NEGLECTING HER HUSBAND. ANOTHER MARRIAGE PROBLEM WAS SOLVED WHEN THE HUSBAND DISCOVERED THAT HE WAS REACTING TO HIS WIFE THE SAME WAY HE USED TO REACT TO HIS MOTHER, WHOM HE COULD NOT TOLERATE. STILL ANOTHER MARRIAGE WAS SAVED WHEN THE WIFE WAS ABLE TO ADMIT THAT HER DESPERATION WAS BASED ON HER LACK OF COURAGE TO STAND UP TO HER HUSBAND AND VOICE HER OWN OPINIONS. THE HUSBAND WAS FAR MORE READY TO ACCEPT HER OPINIONS THAN SHE HAD IMAGINED. FREQUENTLY, THE CAUSE OF A MARITAL PROBLEM IS EXACTLY THE REVERSE OF WHAT ONE OR BOTH PARTNERS THINK IT TO BE. THAT IS WHY THE BEST OF MARRIAGES CAN BENEFIT FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING, IF THE APPROACH IS MADE IN GOOD FAITH.

- DIVORCE SOMETIMES FOR THE BETTER -

DEAR FRIENDS, I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I AM NOT AGAINST DIVORCE AS AN INSTITUTION. JUDAISM HAS ALWAYS SANCTIONED THE POSSIBILITY OF DIVORCE. SOMETIMES A MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP IS A SICK ONE AND IS INCURABLY DESTRUCTIVE. I AM FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT THE PARTNERS ARE WELL RELIEVED OF SUCH AN ASSOCIATION. MOST OF THE TIME, HOWEVER, THE SICKNESS INVOLVED IN A MARRIAGE IS CURABLE. IF A HUSBAND OR WIFE INDIVIDUALLY OR TOGETHER CAUGHT SCARLET FEVER, NEITHER WOULD HESITATE IN SUBMITTING TO A PHYSICIAN, BUT IF THE DISEASE IS "SEPARATION FEVER", HOW FRIGHTENED PEOPLE GET WHEN PROFESSIONAL HELP IS RECOMMENDED! DIVORCE IS TRAGIC ONLY WHERE THE PARTIES INVOLVED HAVE NOT DONE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO FIND THE CAUSE OF AND TO TREAT THE SEPARATION FEVER.

FREQUENTLY, ONE OF THE PARTIES INVOLVED IN A MARRIAGE CONFLICT IS FEARFUL OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING. HE IS AFRAID THAT THE COUNSELOR WILL TELL HIM SOMETHING HE DOESN'T WANT TO HEAR. HE IS AFRAID THAT SOMEBODY, IN A POSITION OF AUTHORITY, IS GOING TO TELL HIM WHAT TO DO. OF COURSE, PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS NEVER MAKE A DECISION FOR THE COUPLE, AND THEY NEVER ATTEMPT TO FIX BLAME. THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL IS TO GET THE PARTIES INVOLVED TO UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES OBJECTIVELY. IN THE END, DECISIONS HAVE TO BE MADE BY THE COUPLE THEMSELVES, AND ONE OR BOTH OF THEM MAY STILL CHOOSE DIVORCE;

BUT A DIVORCE SOUGHT IN ANGER OR IN DESPERATION, WITHOUT THE RESORT IN GOOD FAITH TO PROFESSIONAL AND OBJECTIVE ASSISTANCE, IS A SIN AGAINST ALL THE PARTIES INVOLVED.

ACTUALLY, A PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR ONLY DOES ONE THING. HE TRIES TO GET THE INDIVIDUALS CONCERNED TO KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THE HUMAN PERSONALITY. THE QUESTION CONSIDERED IS "WHY DO HUMAN BEINGS DO WHAT THEY DO"? IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE ANGRY PERSON WHO LASHES OUT IS REALLY SAYING, "HELP ME, I CAN'T HANDLE THIS"? IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE PERSON WHO TAKES REFUGE IN A SILENCE WHICH SEEMS SO CRUEL IS SAYING, "HELP ME, I DON'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO STATE MY POSITION"? THE PROFESSIONAL TRIES TO EDUCATE THE PEOPLE WHO COME TO HIM TO UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES. ISN'T THE SEEKING OF THIS KIND OF EDUCATION ABOUT ONE'S SELF AND ABOUT ONE'S SPOUSE A FACET OF HESED? DON'T WE OWE TO OURSELVES THE OBLIGATION OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING, AND DON'T WE OWE TO OUR MATES THE OBLIGATION OF TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THEM?

LET ME CONCLUDE THIS EVENING WITH A STORY FROM OUR RICH HASIDIC LORE. A HASIDIC RABBI SAID THAT HE LEARNED THE MEANING OF LOVE FROM A SIMPLE, UN-CULTURED MAN. THE RABBI ONCE ATTENDED AN INN AND OVERHEARD ONE OF THE PEASANTS SAYING TO HIS PARTNER, "TELL ME, DO YOU LOVE ME OR DON'T YOU?" HIS PARTNER REPLIED, "I LOVE YOU VERY MUCH". WHEREUPON THE PEASANT CONTINUED AGITATEDLY, "YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME, AND, YET, - YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HURTS ME. IF YOU REALLY LOVED ME --, YOU WOULD KNOW WHAT HURTS ME". FOLLOWING THIS INCIDENT, THE RABBI ALWAYS TAUGHT, "TO LOVE SOMEONE IS TO SENSE ANOTHER'S NEED AND TO BEAR HIS GRIEF".

THIS IS THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF HESED - TO LEARN ANOTHER'S NEED AND TO HELP BEAR HIS GRIEF. IF TWO PEOPLE CAN COME SO TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER, THEIR MARRIAGE WILL LIKELY STAND - IN SPITE OF ITS PROBLEMS. THE WHOLESAL INCREASE IN THE DIVORCE RATE IS MERELY A SYMPTOM OF THE ILLS OF OUR TIME. IF MANKIND, INDIVIDUALLY AND TOGETHER, PROVES ITSELF CAPABLE OF LOVING-KINDNESS, THE WORLD WILL STAND. OTHERWISE WE WILL BE DIVORCED FROM ONE ANOTHER. WE WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY SEPARATED FROM ONE ANOTHER. AND WE WILL BE LOST OUT HERE IN THE STARS - LOST - AND ALONE!