

MARRIAGE - AMERICAN STYLE

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NO OTHER PEOPLE HAS SANCTIFIED MARRIAGE LIKE THE JEWISH PEOPLE. IN FACT, THE HEBREW WORD FOR MARRIAGE IS KIDDUSHIN, WHICH MEANS THE PROCESS OF MAKING HOLY. THE MYTH OF THE CREATION OF EVE WAS POSSIBLY WRITTEN TO SUPPORT THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE. THE BOOK OF GENESIS TELLS US THAT EVE WAS REMOVED FROM ADAM'S SIDE, AND THEN THE SCRIPTURE TEACHES, "THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS MOTHER AND HIS FATHER, AND CLING UNTO HIS WIFE, FOR SHE IS BONE OF HIS BONE AND FLESH OF HIS FLESH."

COMMENTING ON THIS STORY, THE ANCIENT RABBIS SAID, THE FIRST HUMAN BEING WAS NOT A MALE. ADAM WAS REALLY BISEXUAL AT FIRST; THEN HE WAS DIVIDED IN TWO, A PART OF HIM BEING MALE AND A PART FEMALE. EVER SINCE THEN, THE RABBIS TAUGHT, MALE AND FEMALE HAVE SEARCHED FOR ONE ANOTHER, AS IF LOOKING TO BE REUNITED WITH AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THEMSELVES.

UNTIL MODERN TIMES, MARRIAGE HAS BEEN VIEWED IN SUCH LOFTY TERMS AMONGST JEWS. THE UNION BETWEEN A HUSBAND AND A WIFE WAS CONSIDERED TO BE MORE BINDING, CLOSER EVEN, THAN THE RELATIONSHIP OF A CHILD TO ITS PARENTS.

RECENTLY I SAW AN OLD MOVIE ON T.V., AND THE MALE LEAD SAID TO THE HEROINE, "I LOVE YOU. I WANT TO MAKE A LIFE WITH YOU." I WANT TO MAKE A LIFE WITH YOU! HOW ODD THAT SOUNDS IN THE MODERN WORLD, WHERE SO MANY COUPLES TALK ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS WITH "NO STRINGS", AND THEY DEMAND THE RIGHT TO WALK OUT AT ANY TIME.

IT IS NOT UNUSUAL FOR A COUPLE ABOUT TO BE MARRIED TO SAY TO ME, "RABBI, BE SURE YOU DON'T SAY THAT STUFF ABOUT 'UNTIL DEATH DO WE PART'." WHAT THESE COUPLES DON'T KNOW IS THAT THIS HAS NEVER BEEN PART OF THE JEWISH CEREMONY, BUT IT IS A COMMENTARY ON OUR TIMES THAT SO MANY COUPLES WANT TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THEY ARE NOT TAKING A VOW TO ESTABLISH A LIFE PARTNERSHIP.

THE BRILLIANT COMIC WOODY ALLEN HAS BECOME A KIND OF SYMBOL OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN MARRIED MANY TIMES BUT WHO CAN'T SEEM TO MAKE MARRIAGE WORK. ONE OF HIS RECENT MOVIES IS "ANNIE HALL." IN THIS MOVIE, WOODY PLAYS A MAN TWICE DIVORCED WHO FALLS IN LOVE, ALMOST, WITH A LOVELY GIRL. THE MOVIE IS THE STORY OF THEIR JOY AND PAIN WITH EACH OTHER IN THEIR ON-AGAIN, OFF-AGAIN RELATIONSHIP. THE RELATIONSHIP FINALLY ENDS LIKE ALL THE OTHER RELATIONSHIPS IN WHICH WOODY PARTICIPATES - IN FAILURE. AT THE END OF THE MOVIE, WOODY MAKES HIS SERIOUS POINT, BUT HE MAKES IT THROUGH A JOKE. THE JOKE GOES THIS WAY: A PATIENT TELLS HIS PSYCHIATRIST THAT HE HAS GREAT DIFFICULTY LIVING WITH HIS BROTHER, BECAUSE HIS BROTHER THINKS HE IS A CHICKEN. "WHY DON'T YOU LEAVE HIM?", ASKS THE PSYCHIATRIST. "I CAN'T," REPLIES THE PATIENT, "I NEED THE EGGS."

THE JOKE ITSELF IS A TRAGIC COMMENTARY ON OUR TIMES, JUST AS WOODY IS A TRAGIC SYMBOL OF OUR TIMES. SO MANY OF US WANT TO BE LOVED AND TO GIVE LOVE, BUT WE DON'T KNOW HOW. SO MANY OF US WANT THE FRUIT OF AN ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIP, BUT WE ARE AFRAID OF IT AND WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO KEEP IT GOING. IN A WAY, WE ARE ALL VICTIMS OF OUR TIME, AND ON THIS ROSH HASHANAH IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE THINK OF WAYS TO BUCK THE TREND OF OUR TIME.

WHILE I WILL BE REFERRING TO CRISES IN MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS, I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I CONSIDER THE PROBLEM TO GO FAR BEYOND THE MARRIAGE SITUATION. THE PROBLEM THAT WOODY ALLEN TALKS ABOUT IN HIS MOVIE, "ANNIE HALL", IS NOT THAT PEOPLE CAN'T STAY MARRIED. THAT IS MERELY A SYMPTOM OF A DEEPER PROBLEM. THE DEEPER PROBLEM IS THAT PEOPLE CAN'T MAINTAIN A CONTINUING RELATIONSHIP OF ANY KIND IN WHICH COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPROMISE ARE REQUIRED.

I AM QUITE AWARE THAT MORE THAN A FEW OF YOU ARE DIVORCED, AND I WOULD LIKE YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT I AM NOT SPEAKING ON THIS SUBJECT TO MAKE YOU FEEL GUILTY OR UNCOMFORTABLE. I HAVE SEEN MARRIAGES IN WHICH ONE OR BOTH PARTIES WERE SO MISERABLE THAT IT WAS BEST FOR THE MARRIAGE TO BE TERMINATED. IT IS NOT A SIN TO BE DIVORCED IN JUDAISM. MANY OF YOU WHO ARE DIVORCED WILL STILL AGREE WITH ME WHEN I SAY THAT THE DIVORCE STATISTICS SHOW THAT THERE IS SOMETHING TERRIBLY WRONG WITH OUR SOCIETY. IN DADE COUNTY THERE ARE NOW AS MANY APPLICATIONS FOR DIVORCE AS THERE ARE APPLICATIONS FOR MARRIAGE. A PARTICULAR DIVORCE MAY WELL BE JUSTIFIED; IT MAY BE DESIRABLE; BUT WHEN SO MANY COUPLES ARE SPLITTING UP; YOU KNOW THAT, FOR TOO MANY PEOPLE, MARRIAGE IS NO LONGER A SERIOUS RESPONSIBILITY. IT IS THIS WIDESPREAD DILUTION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARRIAGE WHICH SO DISTURBS ME, FOR IT STRIKES AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF SOCIETY, AND IT IS POTENTIALLY DESTRUCTIVE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.

WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR THE STAMPEDE TOWARDS THE DIVORCE COURTS? WE CAN ONLY INTRODUCE THE ANSWERS IN THE FEW MINUTES AVAILABLE TO US TODAY. ONE OF THE OBVIOUS REASONS IS THE OPEN SEX SCENE. WHEREVER YOU GO, SEX IS THRUST AT YOU, MUCH AS ANY OTHER COMMODITY IN OUR PLEASURE SEEKING SOCIETY. EROTIC APPEALS ARE SO PREVALENT, WHETHER ON T.V., OR IN NIGHT CLUBS, OR IN ORDINARY DRESS FASHIONS, OR IN ONE'S PLACE OF BUSINESS, THAT IT BECOMES RATHER DIFFICULT TO THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE. IF YOU GIVE A CHILD FREEDOM IN A CANDY SHOP, HE WILL EAT CANDY UNTIL HE MAKES HIMSELF SICK. OBVIOUSLY, IT IS NOT WISE TO GIVE A CHILD SUCH FREEDOM. IF YOU GIVE AN ADULT FREEDOM IN A SEX SHOP, HE WILL INDULGE HIMSELF TO THE POINT WHERE HE BECOMES INCAPABLE OF PROFOUND LOVE, OR, FOR THAT MATTER, INCAPABLE OF RESPECTING HIMSELF. EVERY SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE OPEN SEX SCENE TEACHES US THAT OPEN-ENDED SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE ULTIMATELY DESTRUCTIVE OF WHAT IS MOST NOBLE ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS. ON THE OTHER HAND, HISTORY DEMONSTRATES ABUNDANTLY THAT THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP IN WHICH BOTH PARTIES CONTRIBUTE WHATEVER THEY CAN, STRIVING TO RESPECT AND TO HELP ONE ANOTHER, BUILDS CHARACTER AND LENDS STRENGTH TO SOCIETY. IT IS EASY TO SEE THAT THE SOCIETY WHICH SWINGS IS NOT A ROOTED SOCIETY. A SWINGING SOCIETY IS NOT ONE WHICH BUILDS CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS. IT IS NOT ONE WHICH PROVIDES FOR THE WEAK AND THE POOR. A SWINGING SOCIETY IS NOT A CARING SOCIETY, SIMPLY BECAUSE IT HAS NO CONCERN FOR THE PAST OR FOR THE FUTURE. A MARRIED PERSON WHO BECOMES A SWINGER WORKS A VIOLENCE ON HIS OR HER FAMILY. A SWINGER AS MUCH AS YELLS OUT TO ALL WHO WILL HEAR, "CUT YOUR ROOTS, MAN. FORGET COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY. EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY, BECAUSE TOMORROW JUST DOESN'T MEAN A DARN."

I KNOW OF ONE WOMAN WHO WITHOUT BENEFIT OF DIVORCE LEFT HER HUSBAND TO LIVE WITH A MUCH YOUNGER MAN. HER TEENAGE DAUGHTER IMMEDIATELY WENT TO LIVE WITH A MUCH OLDER MAN. LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER. OUR CHILDREN LEARN FROM WHAT WE DO, NOT FROM WHAT WE TELL THEM TO DO.

THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT THE STAMPEDE TOWARDS THE DIVORCE COURTS IS TIED TO THE OPEN SEX SCENE. THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS COIN IS THAT SINGLE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE ABLE TO LIVE TOGETHER WITHOUT GETTING MARRIED FEEL NO COMPULSION TO GET MARRIED, SO THEY AREN'T HAVING CHILDREN EITHER. THIS LIFESTYLE IS MOST PREVALENT AMONGST AMERICA'S MIDDLE CLASS, AND THE JEWS ARE PART OF THAT CLASS. IT MAY NOT HURT THE AMERICAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY MUCH IF THEIR NUMBERS ARE REDUCED IN THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS FROM 240 MILLION TO 200 MILLION, BUT THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY WILL BE DECIMATED IF THE FIGURES PROJECTED FOR THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS ACTUALLY COME TO PASS

FOR US. IT HAS BEEN PROJECTED BY RELIABLE SOURCES THAT IN FIFTY YEARS, AT THE PRESENT BIRTH RATE AMONGST JEWS, WE WILL HAVE DECREASED FROM FIVE MILLION TO TWO AND A HALF MILLION, AND IN A FEW MORE DECADES, WE WILL BE HALF OF THAT. HITLER TRIED TO STERILIZE THE JEWS. OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE COMPLETING THE JOB THAT HE STARTED. PRESENT TRENDS IN JEWISH MARRIAGE AND IN THE PRODUCTION OF CHILDREN ADD UP TO ANOTHER HOLOCAUST. IT IS TIME TO SHREI, "GEVALT!" IT IS TIME TO SCREAM OUT, "MADNESS!"

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE OTHER CAUSES OF DIVORCE IN OUR TIME? STRANGELY ENOUGH, I FIND THAT ILLNESS IS FREQUENTLY THE CAUSE OF DIVORCE. A CHILD WILL BECOME CHRONICALLY ILL, AND INSTEAD OF DRAWING TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN EACH OTHER FOR THIS CONTINUING PROBLEM, HUSBAND AND WIFE WILL BEGIN TO PULL ON EACH OTHER, AS THEIR NERVES FRAY. SOMETIMES, IT IS THE ILLNESS OF A SPOUSE'S PARENT THAT TEARS A COUPLE APART. SOMETIMES IT IS THE ILLNESS OF ONE OF THE PARTNERS. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN EASIER TO RUN AWAY FROM A PROBLEM THAN TO STAY AND WORK IT OUT. I AM NOT SUGGESTING THAT THE ONE WHO RUNS AWAY IS ALWAYS THE CULPRIT. I AM SAYING THAT WHEN A COUPLE FINDS THAT AN ILLNESS BECOMES A SOURCE OF AGITATION, THEY SHOULD GET PROFESSIONAL HELP TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY ARE DOING TO EACH OTHER; FOR IF A MARRIAGE MEANS ANYTHING AT ALL, IT MEANS HAVING SOMEONE WITH WHOM TO SHARE A CRISIS LIKE SICKNESS. I KNOW OF A SITUATION IN WHICH THE WIFE BECAME CHRONICALLY ILL. SHE WAS SURPRISED TO SEE THAT HER NORMALLY VERY BUSY AND UNATTENTIVE HUSBAND SUDDENLY BEGAN TO PAY HER MORE AND MORE ATTENTION. "WHY ARE YOU PAYING ME MORE ATTENTION," SHE ASKED, "NOW THAT I AM LESS ABLE TO HELP YOU?" "YOU NEED ME MORE," HE ANSWERED; "I'M JUST GOING TO HAVE TO LOVE YOU MORE." MARRIAGE OUGHT TO BE A SITUATION IN WHICH EACH PARTNER GIVES MORE, AS THE NEED ARISES.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE OTHER CAUSES FOR DIVORCE? IT SHOULD BE NO SURPRISE TO YOU THAT MONEY COMPLICATES THE SUCCESS OF A MARRIAGE. FEW OF US KNOW HOW TO USE THE ABUNDANCE WHICH OUR SOCIETY PROVIDES FOR US. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IF A FAMILY IS POOR, IT IS FORCED TO MAKE SACRIFICES AND TO SHARE PROBLEMS. AS THE FAMILY BECOMES WELL TO DO, THERE IS LESS OF THIS COMPULSION TO WORK TOGETHER.

THERE IS SOMETHING GOOD ABOUT BEING ABLE TO AFFORD MORE SPACE FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL IN A FAMILY, BUT THERE IS A POINT WHERE THE VARIOUS MEMBERS OF AN AFFLUENT FAMILY BECOME SO CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR OWN PRIVACY, THEIR OWN RIGHTS, AND THEIR OWN SPACE, THAT THEY FORGET THERE IS SUCH A THING AS SHARED SPACE. SOME MEMBERS OF A FAMILY CAN'T EVEN WATCH A T.V. SHOW TOGETHER, BECAUSE EACH PERSON IS WATCHING HIS OWN SHOW FROM HIS OWN SET IN HIS OWN ROOM. INDIVIDUALITY IS WONDERFUL, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LACK OF CONTACT? DOESN'T THAT EVENTUALLY BECOME A PROBLEM OF ITS OWN. YOU MIGHT WELL ASK YOURSELVES ON THIS ROSH HASHANAH, WHAT KIND OF THINGS DO YOU DO TOGETHER AS A FAMILY? ARE THEY IMPORTANT THINGS? HOW MUCH TIME DO WE SPEND TOGETHER AS A FAMILY? WHEN WE DO GET TOGETHER, WHAT GOES ON? IS THERE A SHARING OF LOVE? IS THERE A DISCUSSION OF COMMON PURPOSE AND PLANS? DO WE DISCUSS OUR ROLE AS JEWS? DO WE TALK ABOUT OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO EACH OTHER AND TO THE BROADER COMMUNITY?

IT HAS BEEN MY OBSERVATION THAT ALL TOO OFTEN AFFLUENT FAMILIES GRADUALLY TRAVEL FASTER AWAY FROM EACH OTHER AND FURTHER AWAY FROM EACH OTHER, UNTIL THERE ARE ONLY RARE MOMENTS OF MEETING AND SHARING AND GROUP REINFORCEMENT. ISN'T IT TRUE THAT THE MORE MONEY YOU MAKE, THE MORE YOU TEND TO GIVE YOUR SPOUSE AND YOUR CHILDREN

OF YOUR MONEY AND THE LESS YOU TEND TO GIVE OF YOUR TIME AND SELF? IN OUR DAY, OUR SOPHISTICATED MIDDLE CLASS JEWISH CHILDREN INCREASINGLY HAVE TO FACE THE PROBLEM OF TWO CAREER DRIVEN PARENTS, NEITHER OF WHOM HAS TIME TO BE AVAILABLE IN THOSE LITTLE MOMENTS WHEN CHARACTER IS FORMED AND PERSONALITY IS MOLDED. WE MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES HAD BETTER HAVE SOME OBJECTIVITY ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF OUR LIFESTYLE, OR WE WILL BECOME THE VICTIMS OF THAT LIFESTYLE.

ONE OF THE REASONS I THINK THAT THERE IS SO MUCH DIVORCE IS THAT HUSBAND AND WIFE HAVE BECOME MARRIAGE ACCOUNTANTS. YES, EACH OF THEM SITS DOWN WITH PAPER AND PEN AND BEGINS TO ADD UP WHAT THE OTHER HAS OR HASN'T DONE. FREQUENTLY, A COUPLE COMES IN TO ME SPOUTING ANGER, AND THE QUESTION IS SOMETHING LIKE, "RABBI, ISN'T EACH PARTNER IN A MARRIAGE SUPPOSED TO GIVE 50%?" USUALLY, THE COUPLE IS SURPRISED WHEN I SAY THAT THIS 50/50 BUSINESS IS A MYTH. EACH PARTNER IN A MARRIAGE SHOULD GIVE WHAT HE CAN GIVE. THAT MAY MEAN THAT IN SOME DEPARTMENTS ONE PARTNER WILL GIVE 70%. IN ANOTHER AREA, WHERE HE HAS LESS STRENGTH, THAT SAME PARTNER MAY GIVE ONLY 30% OR 40%. A MARRIAGE DOESN'T SUCCEED WHERE EACH PARTY BEGRUDGINGLY COUNTS UP THE SCORE. IT SUCCEEDS WHERE EACH PARTNER GIVES FREELY OF WHAT HE IS ABLE TO GIVE, AND NOT EVERYONE HAS EQUAL THINGS TO GIVE. THE POINT IS THAT EACH PARTNER SHOULD GIVE ALL HE IS ABLE TO GIVE AND SHOULD RECOGNIZE THIS AS A COMMITMENT.

LET US THINK BACK TO WOODY ALLEN'S STORY ABOUT THE BROTHER WHO THINKS HE IS A CHICKEN. THE STORY TELLS US THAT THE PSYCHIATRIC PATIENT CAN'T LEAVE HIS CRAZY BROTHER BECAUSE HE NEEDS THE EGGS. THE STORY REVEALS THAT THE PATIENT, THE TELLER OF THE STORY, IS A TAKER. THE STORY DOESN'T TELL US THAT THE CRAZY BROTHER RECEIVES ANY HELP OR LOVE FROM HIM AT ALL.

NOW THINK OF THAT STORY WHICH COMES TO US FROM OUR TRADITION WHICH TELLS US WHY THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM WAS BUILT ON THAT PARTICULAR SPOT. IT SEEMS THAT IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE TEMPLE, SOME 3,000 YEARS AGO, THERE WERE TWO BROTHERS WHO LIVED, AT SOME DISTANCE FROM EACH OTHER, IN TWO DIFFERENT TOWNS AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM. ON THIS CERTAIN NIGHT, WHEN IT WAS COLD AND STORMY, ONE BROTHER THOUGHT OF THE OTHER AND SAID, "I AM BETTER OFF THAN MY BROTHER. HE IS ALONE AND COLD ON THIS STORMY NIGHT. I WILL BRING HIM SOME FIREWOOD AND SOME HOT FOOD. AND SO IT WAS THAT THIS FIRST BROTHER SET OFF INTO THE STORM TO GO TO HIS BROTHER'S HOUSE. MEANWHILE, THE SECOND BROTHER HAD SIMILAR THOUGHTS. HE SAID TO HIMSELF, "MY BROTHER HAS TO TAKE CARE OF HIS FAMILY, AND THAT IS A GREAT DEAL TO DO ON A STORMY NIGHT, SO I WILL TAKE HIM SOME FIREWOOD AND SOME HOT FOOD." AND HE, TOO, SET OFF INTO THE STORM. THE TRADITION TELLS US THAT ON THE SPOT WHERE THESE TWO BROTHERS MET THAT NIGHT, EACH LOOKING FOR THE OTHER, EACH TRYING TO HELP THE OTHER, ON THAT VERY SPOT THE TEMPLE WAS BUILT. THIS STORY GIVES US A PATTERN FOR WHAT A MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP OUGHT TO BE. EACH OF US IS CAUGHT UP IN THE BURDEN OF HIS OWN DUTIES. EACH OF US WANTS TO CRY OUT, "HELP ME", AND INDEED WE ARE ENTITLED TO SUCH HELP; BUT WE OUGHT ALSO TO BE CONCERNED ENOUGH ABOUT OUR PARTNER TO ASK, "HOW CAN I HELP YOU?", AND WE OUGHT TO MAKE THAT OFFER REAL.

IN MY MARRIAGE CEREMONY, I PRONOUNCE THE FINAL BENEDICTION OVER THE COUPLE IN THIS WAY, "MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU AND WATCH OVER YOU, AND MAY YOU USE YOUR INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS TO BLESS AND WATCH OVER EACH OTHER, FOR MARRIAGE IS IN ITS DEEPEST MEANING JUST THAT, A WATCHING OVER." DEAR FRIENDS, THERE ARE SO MANY

CAN WE NOT THINK OF EACH OTHER IN TERMS OF OUR NEEDS? CAN WE NOT CONCENTRATE ON HELPING ONE ANOTHER RATHER THAN OUTMANEUVERING ONE ANOTHER. CAN NOT HUSBAND AND WIFE THINK OF EACH OTHER IN THE COSMIC TERMS OF THE ADAM AND EVE STORY, AS ESSENTIAL PARTS OF ONE ORIGINAL WHOLE, AS BONE OF EACH OTHER'S BONE AND FLESH OF EACH OTHER'S FLESH?

CAN WE NOT, AS JEWS, TAKE THOSE EXTRA STEPS AND DO THOSE EXTRA THINGS WHICH WILL ENABLE US TO RESIST THE DESTRUCTIVE TRENDS OF OUR TIME?

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