

Monogamy – Reflecting Hashem's Relationship with His People

Haftorat Matot

Yirmeyahu 1:1-2:3

This week's Haftorah compares Israel's relationship with Hashem to that of a bride and a groom. This metaphor clearly alludes to the exclusive, monogamous marriage as the highest ideal in the Torah. Working on deepening our marriage strengthens our relationship with Hashem. So during these three weeks it is important to strengthen our family bonds.

Comfort after Affliction

This week's *haftorah* is the first of a series of the three "haftorot of affliction," read during the Three Weeks of mourning for Yerushalayim, between the fasts of 17 Tamuz and 9 Av. Rabbi Avraham ben David of Lunel writes, "From *Parashat Bereshit* through the 17th of Tamuz, the *haftarah* is chosen to correspond to the *parashah* topic by topic; but from there on, the choice of *haftarah* is determined entirely by the time of year and the corresponding historical events" (*Sefer HaManhig, Hilchot Ta'anit, Din 16*).

In spite of Exile – Hashem Never Casts Us Away

The first vision in the book of *Yirmeyahu*, the vision of the almond tree branch teaches us that just as an almond tree is very quick to blossom, so too, G-d quickly carries out His plan to punish the Jews for their sins. The second vision of a boiling pot, whose foam was directed northward, was an allusion to the afflictions the Jewish people would suffer, at the hands of Babylon from the north of Israel. The kingdoms of the north would lay siege on Yerushalayim and Judea, because of Israel's idol-worship and abandonment of G-d. The *haftorah* ends with a reassuring prophecy. In spite of the punishments, G-d will never ever cast the Jewish people completely away.

The Love and Beauty of Your Youth

No matter how much we may stray from His ways, Hashem will always remember our original love and dedication. "...I remember the loving-kindness of your youth, your love as a bride, when you followed Me in the desert, in a land not sown... Israel is holy to Hashem, the first-fruits of His increase; all that devour him shall be held guilty, evil shall come upon them, says Hashem" (*Yirmeyahu 2:2-3*). Rashi explains that the word *kelulotayich* refers to entering into the *chupah* (marriage canopy) with Hashem, through the great *emunah* that Israel had during the Exodus. A bride is called a *kalah* from the same word, which also means completion or perfection such as in (*Eicha 2:15*) "perfection of beauty." Likewise, a bride during her wedding is glowing with perfection of beauty (*Metzudat Zion* *ibid.*).

As A Bride Following Her Groom to the Wilderness

According to *Metzudat David*, Hashem remembers his love for Israel when she was a bride, at the time of the *chupah* at Mount Sinai, when we received the Torah. That pivotal moment is compared to the wedding of G-d to His people (*Radak* *Ibid*). Malbim illustrates the verse as a metaphor in which Hashem is compared to a stranger who came from afar. A wealthy man's daughter brought him into

her father's house, and was kind to him. Her soul cleaved to his and she married him. Finally, she left her father's house to go with him to the wilderness, because of her great belief and trust in him. Each of the parts of this metaphor alludes to Israel's merits. 1. "The loving kindness of your youth" – refers to our *Avot* (forefathers), who taught the whole world about G-d, when He was still unknown among the nations, who worshipped stones and sticks. 2. "Your love as a bride" – The marriage, corresponds to the Exodus and *Matan Torah* (Receiving the Torah), when Israel entered a covenant with Hashem. 3. "When you followed Me in the desert" refers to Israel's strong *emunah* to follow Hashem into the wilderness with great desire to cleave to Hashem.

Love after Marriage

Malbim demonstrates how the love between the bride and groom gradually increases; reaching a higher level only after the beginning state of marriage, when an even more trusting relationship develops. My personal experience, of having been married for more than thirty years, is that as we mature emotionally and spiritually, we increase our capacity for true love and unity. As a young bride, my own self-expression was the center of importance for me. Yet, as the years pass, I desire much more to unite with my husband in the highest way. Unfortunately, today's world is full of distractions, and we, women, have so many "important" things to accomplish, that our relationship with our husband sometimes is pushed aside. Perhaps this is also a reflection of our relationship with Hashem, which easily goes down the wayside, if we do not exert a conscious effort. The first step to fulfillment in marriage is to place the relationship as the highest priority in our life. Realizing that the relationship between husband and wife is a reflection of the relationship between Hashem and His people, makes it easier to appreciate the fact that there is nothing more important than working on our marriage. The second step is to get used to praying for the success of our husbands daily, in as much detail as we can, including *shalom bayit* (peace in the home). I have seen incredible changes happen, as a result of a wife's prayer for her husband. We all know the power of prayer. However, the prayer for *shalom bayit* is especially powerful, because it is like praying for what Hashem prays for already. The final step is to seek spiritual guidance together. Developing a relationship with a Rabbi as a couple, helps direct married couples to develop an evermore trusting relationship.

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The comparison between the relationship of Israel and G-d with that of a bride and a groom is a reoccurring theme in the Torah. This teaches us to value the exclusive monogamous relationship between husband and wife. Just as the Jews had one G-d (*Ha-shem echad*), G-d chose only one people (*am echad*). In the Garden of Eden, after creating the first woman, (note, Hashem created just one woman from and for man) Hashem describes the nature of the marital institution as the deepest union between a man with his pre-destined wife: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother, and cleaves to his wife: and they become one flesh (*basar echad*)" (*Bereishit* 2:24). The matrimony between Adam and Chava fashioned by no other than G-d, in the Garden of Eden, is a model for the ideal marriage. Noach, too, who, preserved human life after the flood, had only one wife. The "woman of valor" glorified in the Book of *Mishlei* is not "women of valor," and rare was the rabbi, of the thousands of sages of the Talmud, who in polygamous times, had more than one wife. It is true that the bible includes several cases of polygamy. However, most of these cases were not only with the first wife's consent, but even through her initiative. The rabbinic system of law, the *halacha*,

allows polygamy for Sephardim, however, “In a place where it is not the custom to marry more than one wife, a man is not permitted to marry an additional wife besides his wife, without her permission...” (*Shulchan Aruch, Eben Ha’ezer Hilchot Ketubot 76:8*). From all this there can be no doubt that Judaism strongly upholds an exclusive, monogamous marriage as the highest ideal.

Frustrations with Marriage and the Diminished Light of the Moon

Unfortunately, many women are rightfully frustrated with the institution of marriage. Innumerable women are single, unhappily married, or divorced. Gila Manolson, author of “The Magic Touch,” commented on my article: “Unfortunately, part of the reason why women are willing to be a *pilegesh*, is probably the statistical lack of eligible, quality Jewish men who want to get married.” I am personally, very keenly aware, to the depths of my prayers, of the difficulties many women encounter both in marriage and with the process of Jewish divorce. However, as frustrating as these situations may be, they still do not undermine the holiness of the Jewish marriage. The fact that Israel made a Golden Calf does not counteract the holiness of *Matan Torah* and our eternal covenant with Hashem. Hashem did recognize that there is something intrinsically unfair in the very fabric of creation, through the diminished light of the moon, which alludes to the woman. This is why Hashem asked for atonement for making the moon small (*Chulin 60b*). The suffering of *agunot*, abused and divorced women, whose ex-husbands dishonor the *ketubah* are manifestations of the diminished light of the moon, for which Hashem requested atonement. However, we need to strengthen our *emunah* that the end of days is near when “The light of the moon will indeed become like the light of the sun” (*Yesha’yahu 30:26*).

Strengthen Emunah and Do not Tolerate Polygamy and Exile!

The difficulties experienced during our pre-redemptive era, are all part of the contractions and birth-pangs of Mashiach. Just as a woman prepares herself for child-birth, so do we need to come prepared into the marriage, and do everything in our power, through self-development and discernment to avoid entering an abusive relationship. Nothing like steadfast *emunah*, prayer, and guidance by our true Rabbis and Rebbetzins can help support us through the suffering with a difficult relationships. The main thing is not to give up and settle for less. In spite of all the suffering during the darkness of exile, we need to work on strengthening our *emunah* every day, to believe that in spite of the punishments, G-d will never ever cast the Jewish people completely away. Hashem will indeed redeem us soon, and renew His marriage to Israel, His one and only people.