
ADAM AND EVE AND THE KIDS

A Sermon Delivered by Rabbi Haskel Lookstein

At Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun

There is something terribly out of order in the order of creation!

In chapter 2 of Genesis, the Torah describes creation with man as its focus. Verses 8 through 15 describe the Garden of Eden, its contents and its surroundings. This is the scene of man's beginnings. In verse 15 the Torah tells us that God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and protect it.

Suddenly, in verse 16, the Bible says "And the Lord, God commanded Adam as follows: from all the trees of the garden you shall eat, but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will die." This is the first law given to mankind. Our sages saw it not alone as a prohibition on a particular fruit but rather as the basis for an entire moral law to which all of mankind is ultimately obligated.

Following the promulgation of that law, God says in verse 18: "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." God then brings all of the animals to Adam. Adam names each of the animals (naming means, essentially, understanding them and their functions) but "He never found a fitting helper for Adam" among those animals. As a consequence, God finally anesthetizes Adam (verse 21), does reconstructive surgery on his rib and Eve is created.

There is a fundamental problem with this order of events. Our revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, brought it to our attention. He points out that the moral law was given only to Adam (verse 16). At the time of its promulgation Eve had not yet been created (verse 21). Eve is, of course, obligated to adhere to the principles of the moral law but her obligation is indirect. She receives it through Adam. Logically, Eve should have been created first. After her creation both Adam and Eve should have been commanded together.

What are the forces that keep a marriage together?

What is the reason for this strange order? The Rav maintains that in this particular order of events lies the essence of the Jewish ideal of marriage and the family. Marriage and the family are the bedrock of Jewish existence, the eternal structure which keeps the person whole and the *People* alive. This is the meaning of the expression in the marriage blessings *binyan adai ad* - an eternal structure rooted in the present and leading to the future.

What is it that unites a couple in marriage? What are the forces that keep a marriage together? There are several. A suggestion of some of them is offered by Maimonides in his commentary on The Ethics of the Fathers when he speaks of different types of friends. Marriage is a lifelong friendship and consequently the Maimonidian description of the things that bind friends together is pertinent also for marriage.

1. Utilitarian friendship.

Sometimes friends stay together because their friendship is useful. Maimonides calls this: *chaver l'to'elet*. The two help each other. They support each other. They fulfill each other's needs. Ecclesiastes speaks about such friendship when he writes "Two are better than one; the reward for their joint efforts is greater. For if they fall, one can pick up his friend while if one falls alone there is no other to raise him. And if two lie together they will be warm, while one lying alone will never be warm. And if one attacks them there will be two to stand against the attacker..." (4:9-12). This theme explains friendship but it also forms a basis for a good marriage. When one member of the couple falls or is depressed there is one's closest friend to render support. When there is success and achieve-

ment the support from one's spouse renders the experience even sweeter. My father, of blessed memory, used to say that that is the symbolism in the sharing of the cups of wine at the conclusion of the seven blessings recited at the end of the wedding feast. When the cup of life is shared, whatever problems arise are divided in half but the joys are doubled.

The utilitarian aspects of a marriage also apply in the area of positive critique. No one is perfect and everyone needs constructive criticism. One of the most useful aspects of married life is the corrective value of criticism from someone who loves you. It is a way of staying on course and avoiding difficult and sometimes tragic pitfalls. A single person often misses this kind of supportive critique. "Two are better than one".

2. Confidential friendship.

A second type of friend is one with whom one can feel sufficiently secure to be able to confide one's innermost feelings. Maimonides calls this: *chaver l'vidui*. People need such friendships. A good marriage serves this need as well. A husband and wife should not be afraid to communicate their private thoughts. They should be able to reveal fears, anxieties, love, desire, and all other feelings without fear of being embarrassed or shamed, because genuine love allows for such freedom of expression and, indeed, this kind of free exchange often deepens love.

Our forefather, Abraham, was able to reveal to Sarah his feelings of admiration and affection for her at the same time as he disclosed his

fear that the Egyptians would kill him in order to take her. Sarah, on another occasion, obviously understood Abraham's great personal need when she suggested his taking Hager as a concubine in order to have a child. On the other hand, Abraham understood Sarah's feelings when, reluctantly, he accepted her fears and anxieties and banished Hager and Ishmael from the house. A husband and wife can and should be confidants without fear of rejection, mockery, or reprisal.

3. Friends as colleagues in the service of ideals.

But the most effective force for uniting two people is a common commitment to an ideal which they share. Maimonides calls this *chaver l'de'a*. Colleagues and comrades, professional associates, and members of groups that share an ideal have such a friendship. It binds them together with great strength.

The fundamental purpose of marriage is to share religious, moral goals and to work together to pass on a tradition to children.

The Rav teaches us that the greatest unity of which a husband and wife are capable exists when they are committed to the same ideal and goal, like that highest friendship in the commentary of Maimonides.

What does Judaism posit as that common goal? It is nothing less than the transmission of our religious heritage, the passing of the *mesorah*

- the Jewish tradition - from our parents through us and on to our children. When a husband and wife have that common goal as the driving force of their marriage, they have a powerful force for unity, a unity that can transcend many problems, overcome many disappointments and eclipse any annoyances. Above and beyond everything, the couple shares a goal to pass on the *mesorah* from the past to the present and on to the future.

This, explains the Rav, accounts for the strange order of creation as described in chapter 2 of *Bereishit*. First God gives the moral law to Adam. Then Adam realizes his existential loneliness. He has no one with whom to share the moral commitment and no one with whom to pass it on to the future. Then, and only then, does God create Eve, introduce her to Adam and join them, in effect, in a marriage - a marriage of two human beings who share a moral commitment. It is this sharing of a commitment that underlies all marriages, and, particularly, Jewish marriages.

The quality of marriage.

There are two corollaries that we might draw from this insight of Rabbi Soloveitchik.

a) The first corollary touches on the quality of a marriage. What is the purpose of marriage? Why do people marry in the first place? The answer in the beginning is, of course, the physical attraction and emotional involvement of two people for and with each other. They want to join their lives together. They want to make a nice home, fill it with lovely furnishings and enjoy experiencing life together.

If a husband and wife concentrate on this commitment in common, there is a good chance the passing years will only deepen and enrich their marriage, give ever increasing meaning to their love and partnership in life, and provide ultimate levels of satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment.

However, if that is all the marriage is, then, as the couple passes from youth to middle age, there is a serious risk of one or both of them getting tired, bored, disinterested, distracted, or - worse - attracted elsewhere. In our day, we are painfully aware of how often this happens, how often people feel that somehow they are not being served well by their marriages and their spouses and they seek satisfaction, happiness and personal fulfillment elsewhere.

Perhaps it is more important than ever to stress the fact that the fundamental purpose of a marriage, as understood by Judaism, is not simply to provide satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment, although those achievements are certainly important. The fundamental purpose, however, is to share religious, moral goals and to work together to pass on a tradition to children. If a husband and wife concentrate on this commitment in common there is a good chance the passing years will only deepen and enrich their marriage, give ever increasing meaning to their love and partnership in life, and provide ultimate levels of satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment.

Do you want to test this out? Ask anyone who experiences the joy of a child or a grandchild carrying on the tradition of a parent or a grandparent and he or she will tell you that this joy transcends everything else.

One corollary, therefore, of the Rav's analysis of the order of creation has to do with giving quality to a marriage by the sharing of religious ideals and goals.

How to transmit a heritage.

b) The second corollary has to do with how one transmits a *mesorah* to children. It is done with consistent, dependable day in-and-day-out effort. This does not mean pressure; but it does mean consistent effort and example.

It means being more concerned with how a child behaves than with how a child looks. The right home furnishings are nice; the right home atmosphere is more important. Stylish clothes are nice; values of kindness and consideration are more important. Good food is desirable; kosher food is essential. Sunday outings to interesting and exciting places are great; *Shabbat* in *shul* and around a *Shabbat* table at home are indispensable. Developing athletic skills is a plus; sending a child for the summer to a camp in America or a program in Israel that teaches and experiences *Shabbat*, *kashrut* and *tefillah* is essential.

Some of my best friends are taking religious risks with their children that are frightening - and don't think the children fail to get the message. They do. They should never be taught that developing a cannonball serve is worth giving up serving God for a few weeks. They are never going to be Pete Sampras or Jennifer

Capriotti anyway. They will rise to their own level of ability in the long run. So let them be in a living atmosphere of *Torah* and *mitzvot* in the summertime and on vacations. Parents must remember that their overriding goal is to transmit a *mesorah* to the future.

We would never place our child in physical jeopardy, saying: "It's okay, my kid will handle it." We should not put our child in spiritual jeopardy either and expect him or her to come through unscathed.

To be fair, even if we do the most consistent, committed job possible, we run the risk of failure - in whole or in part - as we endeavor to live in a wide-open, pluralistic world. All the more reason, therefore, for us to be assiduous and purposeful in rearing our children and remain constantly conscious of our priorities in our role as parents.

So, there is really nothing out of order in the order of creation. First God gives Adam the moral law. Then there is a realization that the moral law needs to be shared and transmitted. Therefore, Eve is created and the marriage is consummated. The message is clear: the most exalted purpose of marriage is to transmit a tradition from the past to the future. This view has a lot to say about how to select a spouse and maintain a happy and fruitful marriage from youth to old age. It also has profound implications for priorities in our rearing of the children with whom, we pray, God will bless us.