



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

A Match Made in Heaven

In his final days as leader of the nation Moshe continued disseminating the Divine law and guiding his people. It may come as a surprise that it is at this stage that Moshe communicated the laws of divorce.

“If a man marries a woman...and he wrote her a bill of divorce and presented it into her hand...and she shall leave his house and go and marry another man.” (*Devarim* 24:1-2).

The Rebbe’s Analysis

In a fascinating *sicha* (*public teaching*), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson zt”l (1902-1994) interestingly focuses on the unique relationship of ‘marriage’ the Almighty shares with the nation of Israel. He uncovers the deeper meaning surrounding the idea of divorce.

Contradictory Terms

The Rebbe is intrigued by the term the Torah employs for the bill of divorce: *Sefer Kritut*. The two words actually have conflicting meanings. *Kritut*, literally ‘cutting off’ or ‘separation’ implies that

this document must sever all legal bonds between husband and wife. The document must be unconditional in terms, leaving no ties between the man and his former wife.

In contradistinction, the first term *sefer* symbolizes unity. The word *sefer* is associated with a *sefer Torah* - a scroll which stands for wholeness and peace. Indeed, a *get* actually must conform with certain rules that are required when writing a *sefer Torah*. For example, it must be written upon ruled lines and its length be greater than its width. (*Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Even Haezer*, ch.25). Another unique example of unity uniquely embedded within the divorce document is that the divorce scroll must be written on a single sheet. This is in contrast to a Torah scroll which consists of many sheets sewn together. In sum, the Rebbe quotes the Rambam who proposes that a Torah scroll is a supreme symbol of unity: “The whole Torah was given to make peace in the world,” (*Hilchos Chanukah*)

Is it not surprising to find a dual symbolism inherent in the divorce document; on the one hand ‘separation’ (*kritut*), on the other (*sefer*), a symbol of unity and wholeness?

Marriage Between Israel and God

The Rebbe proceeds to examine the notion of marriage and the possibility of divorce

in the spiritual realm between God and Israel.

Our Sages assert that a bond of marriage was forged between the Almighty and Bnei Yisrael at Sinai. We are reminded of this when reciting a *bracha* and we use the same word that is used concerning a wedding - *kiddushin*, namely, “*asher kideshanu bemitzvotav ve’tzivanu...*”.

A striking example of a ritual in which we affirm a Jew’s betrothal to God is when donning Tefillin. We wrap the strap around the finger, which symbolizes *erusin*, the betrothal with the Almighty - we declare: *V’erastich li l’olam*, ‘You are betrothed to me forever.’

Indeed, the axiom is established that the nation of Israel and God are *wed to one another*.

A passage in the Talmud raises the question if divorce is actually a feasible prospect between the Divine One and His people (*Sanhedrin 105a*). A group of ten elders, leaders of Israel, sat before Ezekiel the prophet and exclaimed: “If God answers us favorably, fine. However, if he does not, but rather leaves us in the hands of our enemy, Nebuchadnezzar, then he has no right to punish us for our sins, for a husband who divorces his wife no longer has a claim of loyalty upon her (see *Rashi*

to *Yechezkel 20:1*.)” In other words, these sages raised the possibility that a divorce between God and Israel may have actually already occurred.

The Holy One Blessed be He answered through prophecy with these words, “Where is the divorce document?...” (*Isaiah 50:1*) In other words, the fact that you have no ‘bill of divorce’, no ‘*get*’ was ever delivered to you proves that the relationship was never severed. Rather, our separation is only temporary due to the force of your sin and rebellion.

Merely An Appearance of Divorce

The Rebbe cites a further proof that a divorce from Hashem is untenable: A decisive *halacha* proves that God’s exile of the nation of Israel in no way brought about the actuality of divorce. The Mishnah in Tractate *Gittin* tells us, “The bearer of a divorce from another country must declare, “In my presence it was written and in my presence it was signed.” In other words the individual delivering the *get* states he is not the husband, he is only his messenger.

We can apply this law to the situation of Israel in exile. Namely, any of the foreign powers that have defeated Israel and ruled over her in exile serve only as God’s messengers; they have no real power over Israel. Indeed; they therefore have no means to effectuate a divorce. Israel

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remains, and will always remain God's people. The bill of divorce never left God's hands and therefore we emphatically affirm that there is no divorce.

Why A Get is called a 'Sefer'

The Rebbe declared that a deep and enduring love between Israel and God was established at Sinai - a love that can never be extinguished. The love of the Jew for God is reciprocal. Thus exile is not divorce. It may be a hiding of love - however, the love between God and *Klal Yisrael* is constant and alive.

The Rebbe makes the claim that the exile actually revealed an even stronger bond between God and his nation. There is a love that exists that is essential to their bond, even when they have ostensibly 'parted ways.' Neither side gives up on the relationship even when it is strained and might even appear that a divorce has transpired.

Although at a time of exile the relationship between God and Israel may have appeared as a divorce outwardly, inwardly, that bond is never broken. On a spiritual plane this is the metaphysical meaning as to why the bill of divorce is given the name *sefer* and is written on a single sheet - because the apparent divorce never took place.

The Rebbe went further and suggested that when Talmudic tractates were organized by the Sages they intentionally

placed Gittin (the tractate that deals with divorce) prior to the chapter of Kiddushin (the tractate that deals with marriage). This symbolizes that our spiritual exile, which often is experienced as divorce, will be followed by the expression of the essential love that will be revealed and manifest to all mankind.

Lessons for Living

What are we meant to glean from these lofty ideas that will help guide our own interpersonal relationships?

The bond between people is also powerful and profound. The Chassidic masters taught that there exists between all people an intrinsic connection because we are all a sliver of a single soul. When two people bond in the holy act of matrimony there exists a deep cohesiveness. Says the Torah, a man will cling to his wife "and they will become one flesh" (Bereshit 2:24).

In the heavenly realm we know that God never severed his bond with Israel. In a similar way we aspire to emulate, even duplicate, that unity here below.

The Teaching of Tractate Gittin

The opening of Tractate Gittin offers a particular perspective on the entire issue of divorce. Noteworthy is the fact that the Talmud does not begin with the standard law, rather it opens with a side issue; it does not concern divorce itself but the rule of sending a divorce document by a messenger from overseas. It is an unusual case. The Rebbe suggested that the fact that Rabbi Yehudah the Prince opens the tractate with a case of divorce

רפואה שלמה
טובה אסתר בת לאה מרים
צילה בת מרים

from a foreign country alludes to the idea that the entire concept of divorce has its origins in a “foreign place”. There is unnaturalness to divorce. Although at times it is necessary, the most organic or natural state is unity and cohesiveness.

The final passage of Tractate Gittin concludes: “Whenever anyone divorces his first wife even the Temple Altar sheds tears on their account.” (*Talmud Gittin 90b*)

This Precise Location in the Torah

The Rebbe now asked: “In what way does this topic have relevance to the time of year it is read?” He suggested a compelling answer: *Ki Teitze* is always read in the Weeks of Consolation. The apparent forsaking of Israel is not real. Eternal love abounds.

From a chassidic perspective, Moshe teaches this law at this time, one of his concluding messages to his beloved flock, as it conveys the unity and oneness that binds together the nation and the Almighty. This is a message that the people of Israel need to carry with them long after Moshe will leave this world.

There is a profound lesson to be learned from this conceptualization of the notion of a *sefer krittut*: Cohesiveness exists even in the face of fragmentation. The more we seek to actualize a close kinship with our fellow Jew and endeavor to attain true oneness with Hashem, the closer we move toward heralding a time of wholeness and the Redemption.

May that moment come soon. ■

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