

PARASHAT SHEMOT

THE SNEH IS NOT CONSUMED

Subjugating the hazards of knowledge

In Judaism, the act of procreation between husband and wife is described as an act of knowing. This is the verb used by the Torah to describe the first marriage, “Adam knew his wife Eve.”¹ But, knowledge can be hazardous, as King Solomon, the wisest of all men said, “Increasing one’s knowledge increases one’s pain.”²

To protect him from the hazards associated with knowledge, Adam was forbidden from eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Likewise, until they are wed in holiness a man and woman are taught to completely overcome their negative desires involving marital relations.

But, when a husband and wife do come together, their union requires that they be able to utilize the Tree of Knowledge—the source of the union between husband and wife—by cultivating and separating its positive aspect (good) from its negative aspect (evil). Once married, a couple cannot come to know one another, nor can they have children, without the same desire that earlier was prohibited. Utilizing the same desire for the purpose of holy procreation is an example of how that which previously was self-serving (אֵלֶּיךָ מְשֻׁלָּב) can become that which is entirely selfless (מִשְׁלָבֶיךָ). The same desire that previously had to be absolutely subjugated now becomes the source of good, revealing the more essential side of the “[Tree of] Knowledge of Good,” the side that leads to the fulfillment of God’s commandment to be fruitful and multiply.³

The future state of the Tree of Knowledge

The verses describing the prohibition to eat from the Tree of Knowledge read,

Havayah Elokim commanded Adam, saying, “From every tree of the garden you shall eat. But, from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, you shall not eat from it.”⁴

In his book, *Mei Hashilo’ach*, the Izhbitzer Rebbe provides a most innovative interpretation to these verses. He writes,

In the future, when the sin of Adam will be rectified, there will be a refinement of the meaning of the verse [prohibiting consumption of the Tree of Knowledge]. It will be read, “...From every tree of the garden you may eat *and* from the Tree of Knowledge of Good”; then, “And evil, you shall not eat from it!” Meaning, that it will be possible to eat only from the good that is in the tree and only the bad will be prohibited.

Furthermore, God will reveal retroactively that even in the past, whatever he [i.e., every Jew] did, he only ate from the good of the tree. The transgression he thought he had performed was only from his point of view and had no more impact than the skin of a garlic.⁵

This is truly a futuristic reading of the verse, demonstrating the future state of marriage, when the female will ascend and influence the male. Such will be the union between the *tzadik* (indeed, “All of Your nation are *tzadikim*”⁶) and the Torah: the *tzadik* will no longer be only influenced by the Torah (i.e., limited and dependent by the Torah’s literal interpretation), rather, he will influence the Torah, by punctuating the text differently and revealing new meanings in it.

Separating evil from good

Indeed, only after they have been married can a husband and wife attain the higher consciousness needed to understand this futuristic reading of the verse. They can then separate the two types of knowledge contained within the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The evil contained within it is self-consciousness which when combined with sexual desires leads to the waste of one’s procreative force.⁷ The cause for such improper behavior is the individual’s self-centeredness that takes the place of energy that should be invested in others. It is easy then to understand why the diverting of energy from relationships to one’s own self leads to actions that are auto-satisfactory.

On the other hand, the good contained within the Tree of Knowledge is described in

the Bible as the “good glue,” i.e., energy of consciousness that is directed at knowing and relating to one’s spouse from of a place of true commitment and devotion.

Even though the energy expended on knowing one’s spouse necessarily leads to self-awareness—because without consciousness there can be no sexual arousal—it is in this context exactly that we come to reveal that we have eaten only from the good, and any transgression we imagine we have performed has no more value in our eyes than the skin of a garlic. Spent in the holy context of marriage, the seeds of the Tree of Knowledge are revealed to be holy, and that which is holy is self-contained⁸ and cannot be influenced by any negative forces.

Sweet fire in the sneh

Once married, husband and wife need to learn how to enter a new state. From a state of subjugating their desires because they are still extraneous and inapplicable to a state in which they are constantly transforming them by revealing the Divine spark inherent in them. This is described as the Divine service of “Know Him in all your ways”; find God even where He would seem to be a stranger.

In doing so, the couple learns the secret revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu when he saw that, “the *sneh* [brush] burns, but the *sneh* is not consumed.”⁹ The *sneh* represents the desire that before marriage was perceived as extraneous (and therefore detested¹⁰). The fire burning within is the holy fire of our longing to serve God and perform His will. The miracle is that even though the fire of our dedication to God burns within, because it is Divine fire it does not consume¹¹ our extraneous desires, instead it elevates them so that they can be used to serve God. The desire itself is transformed into a holy fire that reveals (rather than consumes) the Divine sparks inherent within.

The miracle of God’s sweet fire was revealed specifically to Moshe Rabbeinu, the faithful shepherd who is considered the collective

consciousness/knowledge of the Jewish people. As such, he is entrusted with the task of rectifying and refining the consciousness of each individual Jew, through the Torah given to him at Sinai and through the extension of his soul into the leader of each subsequent generation.

In his first incarnation (as Moshe Rabbeinu, the redeemer from Egypt), at the prophecy of the *sneh*, Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to refrain from having intimate relations with his wife in favor of absolute spiritual communion fully with the Divine Providence. This suggests of course that at the time, there was some contradiction between spiritual elevation and physical intimacy with one’s spouse. But, even then, it was already revealed to him, symbolically, that in the future, when his soul would return for its final incarnation as the soul of the Mashiach, the final redeemer from our present exile, this contradiction would no longer exist. Moshe Rabbeinu, as the Mashiach will not need to separate from his wife.

This is one of the reasons that when marrying, the husband proclaims that it is following the custom of Moshe and Israel. By clinging to the image of Moshe Rabbeinu, the couple are able to secure their connection with the inner Divine aspect of their bond, the Divine Presence that brings them together. Through this inner spark of Divinity that binds them together they are able to elevate their desires (which in and of themselves can be a consuming fire, consuming them and their marriage), transforming them into a radiant fire illuminating the Divine Presence between them.

(based on Yayin Mesame’ach, Volume II, pp. 87-9)

Notes: 1. Genesis 4:1 2. Ecclesiastes 1:18 3. Genesis 1:28 4. Ibid. 2:16-17 5. *Mei Hashilo’ach* on the verse 6. Isaiah 60:21 7. Such waste reveals that the Hebrew word for “seed” (זֶרַע) hints at the words “this is evil” (זֶה רָע). 8. קֵדַשׁ מִיְלָהּ (קֵדַשׁ מִיְלָהּ), *Zohar* III, 94b 9. Exodus 3:2 10. The Hebrew word *sneh* (סֵנֶה) is phonetically similar to the word meaning “hated” (שָׂנֵא). 11. See *Bereishit Rabbah* 2:5.

THE REDEMPTION GROWS NEAR

The path of the one who redeems the Jewish people begins with the act of “he struck down the Egyptian.” The self-sacrifice demonstrated by Moshe Rabbeinu in killing the Egyptian is the root of his ability as the Mashiach (for Moshe is the first redeemer and the final redeemer) to cause the *tzadikim* too to do *teshuvah*.

(based on Malchut Yisra’el, Volume 3, pp. 151, 171)

Dedicated in thanksgiving and gratitude to G-d Almighty for the great miracle He performed for our children and grand-daughters, Yehuda Shmuel, Shayna Rochel, Malka Ella, and Chaya Mushka Tilles, saving them all without harm from a horrific car accident.