



Parshat Beshalach -7 February 2025 Shabbat times start 4:42 finishes 5:55

Rabbi Yossi Jacobson

"To match couples together is as difficult as the splitting of the sea," states the Talmud.

What is the meaning behind these words? True, the process of finding and maintaining a life partner may be challenging and difficult, nothing short of a miracle. But why, of all miracles described in the Bible, does the **Talmud** choose specifically the miracle of the splitting of the sea to capture the process of marriage?

A Map of the Subconscious

What is the difference between the land and the sea? Both are vibrant and action-filled environments populated by a myriad of creatures and a great variety of minerals and vegetation. Yet the universe of dry land is exposed and out in the open for all to see and appreciate, while the world of the sea is hidden beneath a blanket of water.

In Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah and Chassidic spirituality), these two physical planes reflect the conscious and unconscious dimensions of the human psyche. Both parts of the self are extremely vibrant and dynamic. The difference between them is that while our conscious self is displayed and exhibited for ourselves and others to feel and experience, our subconscious self remains hidden, not only from other people but even from ourselves. Most of us know very little of what is going on in the sub-cellars of our psyche.

If you were given a glimpse into your own "sea" and discovered the universe of personality hidden beneath your conscious brain, what do you think you would find? Shame, fear, guilt, pain, insecurity, an urge to destroy, to survive, to dominate, a cry for love? Would you discover Freud's Libido, Jung's collective unconscious, Adler's search for power and control, Frankl's quest for meaning?

In Kabbalah, at the core of the human condition is a yearning for oneness. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), founder of the Chabad school of Kabbalah and one of the greatest soul-experts in the history of Judaism, has written more on the subject than any other Jewish sage. In 1796, a hundred years before Freud, he published a book, the Tanya, in which he presented his "map of the subconscious," based on the Talmudic and Kabbalistic tradition. Rabbi Schnuer Zalman offers a fascinating parable for the inner life of the soul: quoting the biblical verse, "The soul of man is a divine flame" (**Proverbs 20:27**), he explains that just as the flame is always swaying, dancing, licking the air, seeking to tear free of the wick and rise heavenward, so too the soul in man is always aspiring to leave its shell and experience oneness with the divine.

The Secret of Intimacy

This quest for a relationship with the divine is manifested in our search for relationships with our twin flame here below.

Where Freud diagnosed the libido as a craving for union with a parent, and Jung saw it as a longing for the opposite gender etched in our collective unconscious, the Kabbalah understood it as a quest for union with G-d. Our desire for intimacy is one of the profoundest expressions of our existential craving for Truth, for Oneness, for G-d.

As the Book of Genesis states, "G-d created Man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them." Clearly, it was in the union and oneness of the genders that the first Adam, the first human being, reflected the image of G-d.

This view of relationships and intimacy is expressed in the very Hebrew names for man and woman given by Adam in Genesis. The Hebrew words for man and woman – Ish and Ishah – both contain the Hebrew word for fire, Eish. They also each contain one more letter—a yud and a hei respectively—which when combined makes up G-d's name. The significance of this is profound. Man without woman, and woman without man, lack the fullness of G-d's name. When they unite, the two-half images of the divine within them also unite. The fire and passion drawing them to each other is their yearning to recreate the full name of G-d between them.

At a Jewish wedding ceremony, this blessing is recited: Blessed are You, G-d, King of the Universe, Who created the human being in His image... Why is this blessing said at a wedding ceremony? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to say such a blessing when a child is born? The answer is that it is through the uniting of man and woman that the image of G-d is most closely reflected.

The ramifications of this idea are important. It means that marriage is not a suspension of one's natural individual self for the sake of uniting with a stranger. Rather, through marriage man and woman return to their true natural state, a single being reflecting G-d,

The name of the Parshah, "Beshalach," means "When he sent" and it is found in **Exodus 13:17**. Soon after allowing the children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d.

In the desert the people suffer thirst and hunger, and repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff. He causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day, but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar, as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua.

SPLIT YOUR SEA

each in his and her own unique way. Marriage allows wife and husband to discover their full and complete self, a self made up of masculine and feminine energy.

Know Thyself

We may travel through life unaware of this dimension of self, seeking oneness with the divine. Throughout our years on this planet we may behave as though this element of self does not exist. Though its symptoms reverberate through our consciousness – most often in the feelings of emptiness and lack of contentment when our spiritual self is un-satiated – we are prone to dismiss it or deny it. After all, at least in the short term, it is far easier to accept that we are nothing more than intelligent beasts craving self-gratification than spiritual souls craving for G-d.

When we view the surface self, selfishness is easier than selflessness; isolation more natural than relationship; solitariness more innate than love and commitment. Only when we "split our sea," when we discover the depth of our souls, the subtle vibrations of our subconscious, do we discover that oneness satisfies our deepest core; that love is the most natural expression of our most profound selves.

"To match couples together is as difficult as the splitting of the sea," the Talmud states. The challenge in creating and maintaining a meaningful and powerful relationship is the need to split our own seas each day, to learn how in the depth of our spirits we yearn to love and share our lives with another human being and with our creator.

In teaching its children to ask and keep asking, Judaism honored what Maimonides called the "active intellect" and saw it as the gift of G-d. No faith has honored human intelligence more.

Parsha Summary

Everywhere in the world, parents play peek-a-boo with their children. It is a major discovery of life, a cornerstone in human development: To realize that something is there even when you cannot see it, that the world is not defined by your subjective perception, that there is something that absolutely is—whether you know of it or not.

All our life, all of the world, is G-d playing with us that same game. He provides a glimpse of His presence with miracle after miracle while hiding behind the patterns of nature. Eventually, we look behind nature—and find that He was there all along.

Joke

Moishe Kaplan went to his doctor, who told him that he had a bad illness and only a year to live. Saddened by the news, Moishe decided to go to his Rabbi, Rabbi Feldman to talk. After Moishe explained his situation, he asked the Rabbi if there was anything he could do.

"What you should do is go out marry the meanest woman you can find," said Rabbi Feldman, "then move into an apartment above a chicken slaughterhouse and start raising money for our shul."

Moishe asked, "Will this help me live longer?"

"No," said the Rabbi, "but it will make what time you do have seem like forever."

Story time

Many years ago, when the Jews of Spain were suffering from the Inquisition, a famous doctor by the name of Avitar Ibn Karashkash lived in Madrid. To escape the wrath of the Inquisition, he left his beautiful and his prestigious job as a skilled surgeon, and exiled himself to a small town. There, he hoped he would be left to live out his life in peace.

Avitar had a young son, Avraham. Avraham was delighted with his new life in the small town where Avitar was able to devote many hours of attention to Avraham and personally supervise his Torah studies. In addition, Avitar carefully instructed Avraham about the special garden he had planted, discussing with Avraham each plant growing there.

One day Avitar called his son into the garden and said, "Today is Tu B'Shevat, the New Year for Trees. On this day it is decided in the Heavenly Courts which trees will bear fruit and which trees will dry up. What is within our power is to plant trees, to care for them and to hope that they will grow and bear fruit. However, this is not dependent on us."

Avraham would never forget that special Tu B'Shevat when his father permitted him, for the first time, to plant saplings. And he would never forget his father's serious words. "Avraham, promise me that you will always try to be a good Jew, to grow upright and faithful to our people."

Twelve saplings Avraham planted that day, according to the years of his life. Then, Avitar took Avraham to a part of the garden where no one else was permitted; Avitar was experimenting with certain plants there. "Avraham," Avitar said quietly to his son, "Remember what I am telling you. If ever you need to leave here and I am not with you, come here first. Take out this sapling and you will find something underneath that will have a tremendous influence on you in the future."

A few months later, in the middle of the night, the hoof-beats of a horse were heard near the Karashkash house. There was a sharp knock on the door.

"What do you want?" asked Avitar.

"Are you Avitar Ibn Karashkash, the man to whom G-d has given the strength to heal the sick?" asked the stranger. That is my name," answered Avitar. "But I am no longer permitted to work in my profession."

"I am Duke Franciso Alba. My dear wife, the Duchess, is very sick and needs an operation urgently. You must come and operate on her or else she'll die. You cannot let her die," begged the Duke in a plaintive voice.

"Certainly you have access to great doctors in Madrid, Toledo, Barcelona," said Avitar. "Why me? You surely know that I am forbidden to practice my profession. Doing so could only endanger my life."

"I have been everywhere and have approached everyone. No one will perform the dangerous operation. I beg of you, help me," the Duke cried. "I will make sure no one harms you. I will bring a ship to take you and your family to safety if necessary. My wife is suffering. Please, help."

The Duke broke out in uncontrollable tears. "I will do what you ask of me," said Avitar. "But one thing you must promise. If anything happens to me, you must take my son to safety." The Duke agreed readily.

Avitar hadn't lost his skill as an expert surgeon. The operation went well and the Duchess's life was saved. But when he returned home, he found the officers of the Inquisition awaiting him.

Avraham broke out in a bitter cry as his father was taken away. Soon, though, the Duke's men arrived; they had heard what happened to the faithful doctor and would take Avraham to a safe haven. They promised him that the Duke would do everything in his power to save Avitar.

Avraham didn't want to go with the Duke's men, but he had no choice. He asked them to wait a moment until he got his things together. Avraham quickly made his way to the special part of the garden. He carefully dug up the sapling and uncovered a box. Opening the waterproof box he found a pair of tefilin and a note. "These tefilin will give you strength and encourage you in Judaism so that you not, G-d forbid, fall into despair and dejection. In addition, carefully take the sapling you have uprooted, and plant it in new earth. Guard it and care for it painstakingly, and it will be the source of great livelihood for you. For this sapling is from a far-off land. It provides food for the special silkworms that produce the valuable silk material purchased from abroad. Remain a good Jew, my dear son, and the good L-rd will bless you and help you like the blessing of your father who loves you - Avitar Ibn Karashkash." Avraham wiped away his tears and went to join the Duke's men. He wondered if he would ever see his father alive again.

Months later, while Avraham was living on the island of Majorca, he turned thirteen. Precisely at the moment when he first put on his tefilin he saw a small boat coming closer to the port. As it got closer he couldn't believe what he saw. His father was getting out of the boat! After an emotional meeting, Avraham found out that the Duke had finally been able to save Avitar from the Inquisition. Avitar explained that he had not come earlier because he had been sick. He did not, however, explain that his "sickness" was due to the terrible torture he had suffered at the hands of the inquisitors.

In due time, Avitar and Avraham gathered around themselves a group of Jews and set up a Jewish settlement on the island. And each year, on Tu B'Shevat, they planted saplings according to Avraham's years.