

FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

“And he said to Ephron in the ears of the regular people, ‘If you would only listen to me, I have given money for the field, take from me so that I may bury my dead’....(Breishis 23:13)

Let us take a look at the inner workings of the Torah. This verse, which refers to Avraham buying a field to bury his beloved wife Sara, is actually an address for learning a law about a seemingly different subject.

The first Mishnah in Kiddushin deals with three procedures that cement a marriage. One way that we are familiar with is through “Kesef”-money or anything of equal value. This is on display at every chasunah when the groom gives the bride a ring in front of witnesses. This makes the boy and girl into an officially married couple. The Gemora begins to analyze the information presented in the Mishnah to discover the source for such a notion asking, “Where in the Written Torah do find this idea of money achieving marriage?”

Now things start to get a little tricky! The Talmud now references a verse from Devarim that says as follows, “When a man will take a woman...”.(Devarim 24:5) This verse is speaking explicitly about the subject of marriage. The word “take” which is the verb that accomplishes marriage now becomes the operative term. How does a man take a woman? The Gemora zeros in a verse regarding Avraham’s purchase of the field to bury Sara. “The money for the field, take from me...” This logical hyperlink is called a Gazera Shoveh- which equates and shares the properties of one situation to a seeming unrelated case using the entire Torah a self-referential dictionary. Since Avraham was asking Ephron to take the money to purchase the field then logically that is what catalyzes the marriage.

I used this example many times at seminars to explain the dynamics of the Oral Torah and clarify its relationship with the Written Torah. Most always, there were both men and women in the lecture room and I could already feel at this point the room heating up with a growing objection. Realizing that it would be only a matter of time before someone walked out in disgust from the lady’s section or a pocket book might be aimed at my head, it became almost an emergency that something be said, and the explanation had better be a good one. I understand very well the potential contention. It’s not to be dismissed. I might have the very same problem. Is a woman to be purchased like a field? Is he to take her with money? Is that coarse analogy valid and is it acceptable to the Torah? Let’s take a closer look.

I once presented to a Rebbe a challenging personal question and received a most surprising answer. My wife and I were newly married and there was a generous offer from someone to buy us some big ticket item like a car or living room furniture, I can’t recall. Our concern was that this gift, although free in monetary terms, might have the heavy tax of personal obligations associated. We weren’t sure we were game for the potential entanglements. After a brief cost-benefit analysis the Rabbi told us that it was important for these people to be involved with what we are doing, raising a Jewish family and such. We would have to manage the risk diplomatically. I was a little surprised. I thought I was being noble and pure somehow by refusing to accept the gift. I countered back, “But Rebbe, Sone’ matanos yichiya!- King Solomon said in Mishlei, “One who hates gifts will live!” To which the Rebbe answered, “Take it and hate it!” I realized then that sometimes taking is a forming of giving!

Let’s get back to our field situation. The comparison is not what it seems superficially. Sure, Avraham is acquiring a field with money. What causes the field to be his? Which verb is it that makes it happen? “Take!” Avraham is not taking the field. The word “take” is in the context of giving! It’s a form of giving! “Take the money!” How is marriage made? Not by taking! The man gives! That’s how he takes! The woman receives, she takes (the gift) and that’s how she gives.

Maybe it is no mistake that we learn from the final tribute that Avraham exerted on behalf of his beloved wife Sara - **the foundation of marriage!** (*Rabbi Label Lamm, torah.org*)