

Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

The teachings of the Alter Rebbe in Torah Ohr and Likkutei Torah

Making opposites compatible

ד"ה אשה כי תזריע

פרשת תזריע

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The Parsha opens with the Posuk **אשה כי תזריע וילדה זכר**, "When a woman will give seed and give birth to a male child". Why does the Torah need to mention the woman "giving seed". It would have been sufficient to say "When a woman gives birth to a male"?

From these words, the sages of the Talmud (Niddah 31a) teach that at the time of conception, if the woman gives seed first, she will conceive and ultimately give birth to a male child. If the man gives seed first, she will give birth to a female child.

In the Chassidische Parsha, the Alter Rebbe presents the understanding of "the Philosophers"; that when the woman gives seed first, the male seed comes afterwards and rests upon it. There is a principle that when two things become mixed, the upper one will be dominant.

So when the male seed comes "on top", its masculinity will be dominant in the creative process, resulting in the conception of a male. The opposite would be true when the man gives seed first, when the 'upper', dominant seed would be that of the female.

The Alter Rebbe questions this understanding. According to these Philosophers, the birth of the male child is actually coming from the man's seed. However, the teaching of the sages implies that the male child comes from a quality within the woman's seed itself.

The Philosophers were bothered by the question that the female seed, giving a feminine energy, should produce a female child. Likewise, a male seed, giving a masculine energy, should result in a male child. In their explanation they sought to reconcile the teaching of the sages with this logical premise.

The Alter Rebbe presents a Kabbalistic explanation that reconciles the two, whilst keeping to the literal explanation of the Gemara that it is the woman's seed that causes the conception of a male child and converse for the man's seed.

The soul-root of a male comes from the Sefirah of Chessed (loving kindness) as alluded to in the verse **זכר חסדו** "remember His kindness". The word Zachar (remember) also means male, suggesting that Masculine energy comes from of Chessed.

In contrast, the feminine Sefirah Malchus is associated with the attribute of Gevurah (discipline) - like a king (Malchus) who rules through authority and justice (Gevurah).

Chessed is like water and Gevurah is like fire. The opposites of water and fire cannot coexist, let alone fuse together and unite. The property of fire would consume the water and the quality of water would extinguish the fire!

Yet, the creation of a child results from the fusion of the contributions of both mother and father. But how is the fusion of these two opposites energies possible?

Kabbalah explains that in our world-order, the Sefiros are not pure homogenous and mutually-exclusive energies. Chessed is not pure unadulterated Chessed and Gevurah is not pure unadulterated Gevurah. Rather, the Sefiros experience what is known as Hiskallelus; inclusivity or integration.

Each Sefira has within it elements of all 7 Sefiros. So within Chessed, there is an element of Gevurah as well as the other Sefiros. And in Gevurah, there is an element of Chessed (as well as the other Sefiros).

This idea is best illustrated by example. When a parent disciplines their child, the act of discipline appears to be one of Gevurah. However, the discipline is in fact an expression of Chessed, motivated by the love of the parent towards their child. Discipline comes from the Gevurah within Chessed or how Chessed manifests itself in a mode of Gevurah.

An example of Chessed within Gevurah would be spoiling a child and overindulging their desires. Giving a child treats appears to be an act of Chessed, but it is actually to their detriment, an act of Gevurah.

It is specifically because each Sefira has within in it the elements of the others, that allows them to unite. Through the Gevurah within Chessed, Chessed can unite with what is essentially Gevurah. And through the Chessed in Gevurah, Gevurah can unite with Chessed.

The time of conception is about the union of husband and wife, where they become one flesh. The result of the union is the child that they create, which embodies this oneness.

When the male gives seed, he gives to her from the Gevurah within his Chessed - the feminine energy within his masculinity. The female seed comes from the Chessed, the masculine energy within her Gevurah. This is how the two can unite.

So it is true that the feminine energy that creates a female child, but it comes from the male seed. And the masculine energy creates a male child, but it comes from the woman's contribution.

This idea is relevant when we face the challenge of dealing with relationships and interactions with people who seem very different to us. We may be complete opposites in our opinions, outlooks, beliefs, values and interests. This challenge can come up in our marriages, at work or in our communities.

The answer to achieving a harmonious and constructive relationship in every situation, is to find a point of commonality within us, that we share with them; Not to focus on the greater differences, but to focus on the small points of agreement. If we strive to focus on our similarity to them and they do the same, these points of commonality will allow us not just to tolerate the other or coexist, but to connect in a deep and, meaningful and constructive way.