



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

PESACH > Seventh Day

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Pesach

**Marriage, Money and the
Splitting of the Sea**



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is impossible. They say marriage is the number-one cause of divorce.

Making money is so hard. They say the price isn't worth it. But do we have a choice.

Marriage and money are as difficult as the splitting of the sea. Literally.

These things are, so to speak, even “difficult” for God.

What?!

And why?

The awesome wonder and miracle of the splitting of the sea teaches us something beautiful and profound about our marriages and our livelihood.

This sermon is augmented with a witty story about the Rogatchover Gaon and Reb Chaim Brisker, which conveys the depth of a unique phenomenon: the *Peulah Nimshechet*, “Perpetual Motion.”

MARRIAGE, MONEY, AND THE SPLITTING OF THE SEA

1. Singular Humor (Joke 1)

A little old lady sits next to an old man on a bench in Miami. The woman asks, "Are you a stranger here?"

The man replies, "Sort of. I used to live here years ago."

"So, where have you been?" asks the old lady.

The old man replies, "I was in prison."

"Really?" says the old lady. "For what?"

"For murdering my wife."

"Oh..." says the old lady. "So you're single..."

2. The Perfect Guy (Joke 2)

Hannah goes to see a *shadchan*, a matchmaker, hoping that he has someone on his books that would meet her needs. She says to the *shadchan*, "I'm looking for a husband. Can you please help me find someone suitable?"

"I'm sure I can help," replies the matchmaker. "May I ask what your requirements are?"

"Well," says Hannah, "he needs to be handsome in a masculine kind of way, well-versed in current events, and he needs to have a good sense of humor. He must be polite and courteous and have knowledge of most subjects. He needs to sing and dance well, and he must always accompany me during my leisure hours. And I want him to tell me interesting stories when I need some conversation, but to be quiet when I need to rest."

The *shadchan* smiles and says, "I understand exactly what you need. You need a television set."

3. Marriage Is Insane

Aaah, the institution of marriage – what a wonderful thing.

As someone once said when asked why he didn't want to get married: "Marriage, as we well know, is an institution, and I don't want to be institutionalized."

If marriage is not easy, getting married is even harder. The dating, the heart-break, the doubts. Is he Mr. Right or not? Is she Mrs. Wrong or the best thing that ever happened to me? Is he the one? Is she really the girl of my dreams?

When his students asked Socrates whether they should get married, he purportedly replied: Absolutely. If you have a good marriage you'll learn about love, if you have a bad marriage you'll become philosophers."

The proliferation of online dating sites, matchmakers, horoscopes and relationship counseling testifies to the difficulty and complexity of the nuptial reality.

And it's not as if the difficulties cease once you do get married. I believe that the divorce rate in the United States is somewhere like fifty percent. That means that every other wedding one goes to will sadly end up in a divorce.

That is downright depressing.

If marriage is so difficult, perhaps this means that human beings are not meant to get married? Perhaps marriage is just unnatural and that's why it's difficult?

Anyway, why are we discussing this on *Shvi Shel Pesach*, on the seventh day of Passover?

4. Splitting of the Sea

On this day, 3,327 years ago, occurred one of the most fascinating events in the history of the world, and one of the most transformative events in the history of the Jewish people.

One week after leaving Egypt (on the 15th of Nissan, which marks the beginning of Passover) the newly-minted Jewish nation came to an impasse – they were trapped between the Red Sea in front of them and the fast approaching Egyptian army behind them. What to do?

This is when that otherworldly event occurred: the sea miraculously split! The Jewish nation walked right on through. When the Egyptians, in hot pursuit, followed the Jews into the open waters, the sea closed back up and drowned them.

This is what we just read in the Torah – the portion that relates and celebrates this very occurrence, known as *kriyat yam suf*.¹

The miracle of the parting of the sea is seen as the culmination of the Exodus, when the Egyptian enemy was finally vanquished, and the Jewish people could feel completely free. Up until the splitting of the sea, their past slavery was still chasing them from behind. After the splitting of the sea, the Jewish nation could finally move forward without the demons of the past following them.

This, in itself, is a profound lesson for all of us today:

Sometimes you can leave behind a negative experience from your past, but that negative experience doesn't leave you; it remains lurking in your rear-view mirror, just one step away. True freedom is destroying that negativity once and for all so that you may be free of your past burdens, ensuring that they will not haunt you for the rest of your life.

¹ Exodus 13:17-15:26.

5. A Most Difficult Feat

Kriyat yam suf, the splitting of the sea, was a miraculous feat. But we are also taught that it was the most difficult of all the Exodus miracles – in the words of the Talmud:² *kosho ke'kriyas yam suf*, as difficult as the parting of the sea.⁵

What can that possibly mean?

First of all, how could anything be “difficult” for an omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite and all-powerful Creator? Even if we use the word “difficult” just a figure of speech, what exactly entails difficulty for God?

Secondly, the creation of the world seems to be a much broader, greater and revolutionary achievement than the splitting of the sea.

Sure, the miracle of the splitting of the sea *manipulated nature* (after all, seas are naturally meant to flow, not stand still like a wall), but the miracle of the creation of the world was *the creation of nature* itself.⁴ Wouldn't that present a greater “difficulty”? Yet we do not find that creation is called “difficult?”

6. Marriage and the Splitting of the Sea

The Talmud uses the wonder of *kriyat yam suf*, the splitting of the sea, as a simile for things difficult:

*Marriage is as difficult as splitting of the sea.*⁵

Okay, we don't need the Talmud to tell us that marriage is difficult.

Indeed, research shows that the single greatest cause of divorce is marriage.

² Cited shortly.

³ See Likkutei Sichot vol. 5, p. 361 (also printed in Haggadah Shel Pesach Im Likkutei Taamim u'Minhagim p. 311); Shaar Ha'amuna ch. 32.

⁴ See Tanya, Shaar Hayichud v'Haamunah ch. 2.

⁵ Sotah 2a; Sanhedrin 22a.

All humorous quips aside, marriage is no easy task. As we know from our own experience and from the experience of marrying off our own kids, marriage is no walk in the park. As a matter of fact, it is probably one of the most difficult and complicated tasks in known existence. As difficult as the splitting of the sea.⁶

But this only reiterates and intensifies our question: How could something be “difficult” for God?

And: If marriage is difficult – and we agree that it is – how can it be as difficult as the splitting of the sea? I mean people get married all the time and they do live happily ever after. I don’t see seas splitting all the time...

Indeed, marriage and splitting of the sea seem to be polar opposites: the former is about union while the latter is about division. Why are the complexities of marriage compared to the difficulty of the splitting of the sea?

7. Making a Living Is Difficult

Elsewhere the Talmud makes another cryptic statement:

*The provisions of man are as difficult as the splitting of the sea.*⁷

What is so difficult about the provisions of man? Every human being works to make a living. Is this really as difficult as the splitting of the sea? Sure, it’s a pain in the neck to make ends meet, but is it really as difficult as changing the very nature of nature?

That reminds me of the anecdote about a man who was asked what he does for a living.

“I work for my brother.”

⁶ Note: the Talmud there asserts that this difficulty refers to a second marriage. Here is not the place to elaborate.

⁷ Pesachim 118a.

“And what does your brother do?”

“He’s looking for a job.”

Certainly finding a job, and working once a job is found, is often difficult, at times depressingly so. But could it really be as difficult as splitting the sea?

And, once again: Perhaps provisions are difficult for us mortals to procure, but how is providing sustenance to humanity “difficult” for God?

8. The Kabbalah of Difficulties

This brings us to another question: What does a Godly “difficulty” entail exactly?⁸

Well it seems that creating nature isn’t “difficult” for God – changing nature is.

There are, generally, two tracks to existence: 1) what the Kabbalists call, *Seder Hishtalshlut*, the natural order to things, the natural chain of creation – the structure of existence; and 2) *Lemalah M’seder Hishtalshlut*, the reality beyond this order which transcends the rules of physics and nature, existing beyond the chain of creation – beyond structure.

Everything we know in this world is part of the orderly, empirical process of *Seder Hishtalshlut*, with rules, definitions and parameters. The law of gravity states that any two bodies in the universe attract each other with a force that is directly proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. In simple English this means that Earth’s gravitational pull causes objects to fall. The first law of thermodynamics states that the total energy of an isolated system is constant; energy can be transformed from one form to another, but cannot be created or destroyed.

⁸This section is based on the Chassidic discourse titled Hachodesh 5654 (Sefer Hamamarim 5654, p. 133), by Rabbi Sholom Ber Schnerson, the fifth Chabad Rebbe, known as the Rebbe Rashab.

Every aspect of our lives on Earth is governed by the laws of nature.

For the Creator to create the world from nothing to something is not “difficult.” Creating the *Seder Hishtalshlut*, was a great wonder, but it wasn’t difficult. That’s why creation is not used as the example for something difficult, for it wasn’t.

Neither is *Lemalah M’seder Hishtalshlut*, the reality beyond this order, difficult. After all, that is God’s “natural state.”

The so-called “difficulty” occurs when the reality beyond this order is revealed within this order itself, when the supernatural is seen in the natural.

Changing nature, which will in effect change the world, is “difficult” for God because it goes against the nature of both things.

Though God certainly has the power to suspend the laws of nature He created, yet with creating these laws, God bound Himself to these laws, and promised that he would not suspend them: “As long as the earth lasts, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night, shall never again cease [to exist].”⁹ Thus, defying these laws is, so to speak, “difficult,” for God.

And this is what happened at the splitting of the sea. Everything maintained its nature – the water was still wet, the waves still roiled – only now the supernatural touched the natural, the nature of water covering the seabed was suspended. And for the Jews it was liberation; for the Egyptians it was extermination.¹⁰

9. The Supernatural in the Natural

And this is why both marriage and livelihood are “difficult” and why we human beings find them to be challenging and at times, stressful.

⁹ Genesis 8:22.

¹⁰ See Isaiah 19:22; Zohar II 36a.

Marriage is unnatural: bringing an independent man and an independent woman to join as one unit is “difficult,” because it requires transcending the laws of nature which separate between two diverse individuals, let alone a man and a woman, each with their own unique personality, temperament and self-interest. It isn’t normal for two independent adults to commit to each other to the exclusion of everyone else.

Thus marriage is the fusion of two opposites: two different individuals, one masculine one feminine, which can appear as opposites – from two different planets. Remember John Gray’s best-selling book, *Men are From Mars, Women and from Venus?*

Actually, according to the Jewish mysticism masculine energy is compared to land and feminine energy to water. Hence, bringing them together in marriage is *as difficult as splitting of the sea*.

The “difficulty” is also in fusing eternal love and marriage with the mundane impermanent realities of the here and now. It’s one thing to find eternity in heaven, in the reality beyond the structure of existence. But to bring that eternity into a home and family built by two mortals is “difficult” – but possible.

The same is true for earning a living. We live in a dog-eat-dog world, where the ruling principle is: survival of the fittest. So though we can create a system of checks and balances, red lights and green lights, to maintain some semblance of order and co-existence, yet, when push comes to shove, people are capable – as we know too well – to hurt each other for personal gain. Greed, corruption, selfishness are very much part of human nature.

Thus, *the provisions of man are as difficult as the splitting of the sea* – earning a fair living is not an easy task. Some even wonder whether it is possible to succeed without cutting corners or worse.

The natural order of *The Selfish Gene* (using Richard Dawkins phrase and book title) seems to go against true interaction and cooperation (unless it served the self-interest of the individuals) – the pillars of commerce and human progress. Not to mention, virtues like nobility, altruism and helping another even if you stand nothing to gain.

We should be like animals, with the strongest prevailing, the weakest dying, and everybody grabbing whatever they can.

This is why the Talmud says that livelihood and marriage are *as difficult as the splitting of the sea* – the same challenges are at work in both instances.

But though both are *as difficult as the spitting of the sea*, just like the sea was indeed split by the Divine power, so too can our marriages and livelihoods succeed when we introduce into them the “third partner” – God. When marriage and work are infused with a divine higher purpose, and are not merely driven by human interests, they are capable of thriving, and enhancing both parties with a transcendent force, greater than the sum of the parts.

10. Perpetual Motion (Story)

There is a unique sophisticated principle of Torah thought called *peulah nimshechet*, “perpetual motion,” or “perpetual action,” or “perpetual impact.” Briefly – without elaborating on this complex and far-reaching concept – a *peulah nimshechet* refers to an ongoing event, wherein something that is begun is constantly renewed, as if it is beginning again and again.¹¹

A simple example of this is modern-day electricity: When you flick on a light switch, the light bulb flickers on and the room is illuminated. You only flicked the switch once but the action of the electricity flowing through the wires into the bulb is perpetual. If for whatever reason the electricity would pause flowing for even a split second, the bulb would cease to burn and the room would go dark.

¹¹ See Likkutei Sichot vol. 5, p. 174ff as an example.

This example illustrates the Jewish idea that certain realities are ongoing and are recreated every moment.¹²

Rabbi Yosef Rosen, known as the Rogatchover Gaon, the Genius of Rogatchov, applied the *peulah nimshechet* concept to marriage. Since spouses are two separate entities, and male and female are opposites, a third continuous energy has to keep them together perpetually. Thus, the “electricity” of marriage doesn’t only flow on the wedding day but is continuously renewed in perpetuity every moment of the marriage!

How is that for romantic? Imagine if we were always able to hold on to the magic and excitement of the first moment of love and marriage.

The story is told that the esteemed Reb Chaim Brisker, knowing this innovative teaching, once wished his colleague, the Rogatchover Gaon, a hearty *Mazel Tov*.

Perplexed, the Rogatchover inquired as to why Reb Chaim would wish him a *Mazel Tov* out of the blue.

Reb Chaim replied that since each moment was like a new marriage, each moment called for a new *Mazel Tov*.

The Rogatchover, known for his biting wit, provided this sharp retort to Reb Chaim:

“A new *Mazel Tov* is not required every moment, since the one provided at the wedding also falls under into the principle of *peulah nimshechet*, and is thus continuing in perpetuity.”

We can say that both statements are true. The first mazel tov perpetuates. And yet, we often need to be reminded of its continuously renewed enchantment.

¹² Chassidut, starting with the Baal Shem Tov, and as the Alter Rebbe elaborates in Tanya *ibid*, explains the concept of perpetual creation: Since existence has no true validity on its own, thus the Divine energy of creation which is manifest in every creature (*koach hapoel bnifal*) is renewed every moment. This corroborates well with modern physics, which understands that matter is in essence a continuous pulsating flow of energy.

11. Message and Inspiration for Our Times

Knowing that every moment of our marriages is a perpetual *Mazel Tov* is an inspiring lesson in and of itself.

But there's more. The lessons from the splitting of the sea and the difficulties of marriage and livelihood are many.

We can live life on autopilot. That is "normal," in the sense that many people live that way. Or we can turn our lives into perpetual motion, excitement that is renewed every moment of our lives.

Obviously, at times we may need to go into autopilot, when we are not in the mood etc. But those should be exceptions. The general objective and aspiration ought to be – to discover the passion that is continuously being renewed in our relationships.

Kriyat yam suf teaches us something astonishing: It isn't enough to live, we also have to elevate – life is not about doing the easy thing, but the hard things, and always growing in the process. If you ain't busy living, you're busy dying. The easy thing would be to live in *Seder Hishtalshlut*, in the natural order of things, as the world expects of us.

But we were born – collectively as the Jewish nation and individually as unique people – to do the difficult thing: To bridge the beyond with the present, to infuse the ordinary with the extraordinary, the natural order with supernatural magic, to imbue mundane matter with Divine transcendence, to bring *l'Malah m'Seder Hishtalshlut* into *Seder Hishtalshlut*.

And the two most tangible manifestations of this are marriage and earning a living. Both are as difficult – but as gratifying as the parting of the sea, because they integrate the two contrasting worlds.

When two human beings live together physically in a holy and transcendent way they are bridging the natural and the supernatural.

When a human being works, sweats, toils physically in an honest and holy way, toward a higher means, he sanctifies his work and bridges matter and spirit.

And this type of living requires a *peulah nimsheches*, "perpetual motion."

12. Arranged Marriage (Joke)

A *shadchan* goes to see a poor man and says, "I want to arrange a marriage for your son."

The poor man replies, "I never interfere in my son's life."

The *shadchan* responds, "But the girl is Lord Rothschild's daughter."

"Well, in that case..."

Next, the *shadchan* approaches Lord Rothschild. "I have a husband for your daughter."

"My daughter is too young to marry."

"But this young man is already a vice president of the World Bank."

"Ah, in that case..."

Finally, the *shadchan* goes to see the president of the World Bank. "I have a young man to recommend to you as a vice president."

"I already have more vice presidents than I need."

"But this young man is Lord Rothschild's son-in-law."

"Ah, in that case..."

13. Happily Ever After (Conclusion)

On this day when we celebrate the parting of the sea we are reminded of our mission – to split the seas in our lives.

It is our job to arrange the earth's marriage with heaven, the body's marriage with the soul, matter's marriage with spirit, man's marriage with God.

We are the *shdachanim*, the matchmakers, of the universe. And with every mitzvah we create another *shidduch*, another match.

We are taught that the ultimate redemption can be compared to a giant cosmic wedding, marrying heaven and earth, the natural order (*Seder Hishtalshlut*) and transcendence (*l'Malah m'Seder Hishtalshlut*), when body and soul will be united as one.

Perhaps we could say that, in order to achieve this divine goal, our work today has to proceed according to *peulah nimshechet*, perpetual motion. We have to be committed to perpetual action, driven by unceasing ambition, and we can never stop our momentum forward.

The true miracle of the splitting of the sea wasn't so much that God transcended nature and changed it; the true miracle of the spitting of the sea was that it gave us the power to transcend nature and change it.

And so we shall.

May we all dance at the cosmic wedding immediately!

Chag Sameach and Good Yom Tov!