

Tazria

Love and Children

When her purification period for a son or a daughter is complete, she shall bring to the Kohen, to the Ohel Moed entrance, a yearling sheep for a burnt offering, and a young common dove or a turtledove for a sin offering.

Vayikra 12:6

When it comes to the sin offering that follows birth, every woman, not just the poor ones,¹ must offer a dove. R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk² explains that every new mother desperately needs to bring a dove as a sacrifice, to remind her of the message of the dove. Why is it that a new mother must offer a sin offering, in the first place? The Gemara³ explains that as a woman experiences that pain of birth, she impetuously swears to herself that she will never again be intimate with her husband. Now, the dove is a unique animal, teach our Sages, and had the Torah not been given, we could learn fidelity to our spouses from doves, who mate with one mate only and are faithful to that mate all their lives.⁴ Thus, while normally only the poor bring birds as a sacrifice, writes R. Meir Simcha, the new mother must bring a dove, to remind her of the dove, and thereby reinforce her relationship with her spouse.

The birth of a child is an event that brings incredible unity to a couple. “Therefore, a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they will be one flesh.”⁵ Rashi⁶ explains that the couple becoming one flesh is accomplished when they have a child, who is one body that was created by both parents together. Only in a child do parents create a tangible being out of their unity.

Paradoxically, however, the birth of a child also temporarily separates the parents from one another. A woman is to separate from her husband physically during the days after the birth of a child.⁷ The husband does not even hug his wife in the delivery room, according to rabbinic decree.⁸ And yet, perhaps this is precisely the point. The connection that is made between two

1 Poor people would generally offer doves for their other obligations, due to their poverty.

2 *Meshech Chochmah*, Vayikra 12:6

3 Niddah 31b. See also Bereishis Rabbah 2:7, where the Midrash teaches that since she did something wishy-washy (*rifrija*) she therefore brings a korban that is fluttery *mirufraf* (see Maharzu, ad loc., that this word means “perpetually moving” in Arabic).

4 Eruvin 100b. See also *Baal Haturim* to Vayikra 12:6, s.v. *uben yonah*.

5 Bereishis 2:24

6 On Bereishis 2:24, based upon Sanhedrin 58a. See also *Tiferes Yehonason* (of R. Y. Eyebshutz) to Parshas Emor 21:13, regarding why a Kohen Gadol should not marry a widow or divorcee, where he speaks about this verse and also connects the coming together as parents of one flesh with the nature of their children in a fascinating way.

7 Vayikra 12:2, 5

8 See *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah*, 195

parents when their child is born is a real one. It is a deep one. No physical connection is required to connect the parents when there is a child for them to hold.

The midrash⁹ tells a remarkable story that occurred in the city of Tzidon. A couple was married for ten years, and they were still not blessed with children. The husband wondered if perhaps the time had come for them to split up and seek new spouses, since they both greatly desired to have children. The heartbroken couple came before R. Shimon bar Yochai, requesting his advice. The husband told his wife, “Before you leave to your father’s house, you may take anything at all that you wish from my home. R. Shimon bar Yochai agreed with them that they ought to split up, but he said, “Before you do, make a party. Just as when you married, you did so with food and drink at a party, so, too, should you split up in a similar way.”

At the party, the wife got her husband drunk to the point where he collapsed. Then she told her servants to pick him up and take him home with her. The man woke up in the middle of the night, shocked.

“Where am I?” he demanded to know.

“You are in my father’s house with me,” said the woman. “Don’t you remember telling me that I could take anything that I wanted home with me? The only thing in the world that I want is you.”

The couple went back to R. Shimon bar Yochai, and when he heard this story, he blessed them to have a child, and his blessing came true.

Why did the Rabbi not bless them with a child off the bat? Why did he need to wait for this story to play out? The answer is¹⁰ that the birth of a child is something that is to come from deep love between spouses. Only where there is that deep love should a child really come to this world. The Talmud teaches of the terrible effects on a child’s soul that are brought about by parents who are not dedicated to one another during the conception of that child.¹¹ When these spouses demonstrated the incredible love that bound them, R. Shimon bar Yochai then saw that, indeed, this is precisely where children are to come from. The very party that the Rabbi suggested is what allowed them the eye-opening experience that they had, and the opportunity to express their love. This brought them a child.

When the great Chana was told by her husband, Elkana, “Aren’t I more valuable to you than ten children?”¹² he was not being foolish. Children can be the greatest manifestation of the connection between two people. Elkana wished to reassure his wife that they could have that deep connection even without the children that she desired so deeply, and perhaps thus ease the pain of his wife.

The separation of spouses at their children’s births comes at the same time as the greatest possible connection between them. This potential separation is not meant to be one that rips

9 Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishis 16

10 See *Zayis Raanan* (of the Magen Avraham) to the Yalkut Shimoni, ad loc.

11 See Nedarim 20b, and *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim*, 240

12 Shmuel I, 1:8

them apart, but rather, one that binds them together. Thus, the new mother brings a special offering of a dove. For though she may have considered growing distant from her husband in a moment of pain, she has, in fact, grown even closer to him.

Nothing will ever bring a couple closer than creating a human being out of their great love. And when a child is armed with loving parents who created him or her in an atmosphere of love, he can do anything. For when there is love, even those who are barren can be blessed with offspring.