

D'var Torah: Parashat Tazria

by Benjamin Gee - Wednesday, April 03, 2019

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This week the Chief Rabbi explains that ‘kindness begins at home’...

When Jewish people are born we are already looking forward to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and the wedding.

The actual mitzvah to perform a brit, is given in the parasha of Tazria. And once we have performed this mitzvah and we have given a name to the baby, we say a prayer, “k’sheim shenichnas la’brit”, in the same way that this child has entered into the covenant with Hashem, “ken yikanes l’torah l’chupa ul’ma’asim tovim”, so too, may he come to Torah - which is Bar Mitzvah, Chupah – stand under the chupah as a married man, and engage in ‘ma’asim tovim’ – acts of kindness. And for girls, we have a similar prayer.

I think we can all understand this. We live for simchas. God forbid, on sad occasions we greet people by saying ‘please God, we should meet on simchas’, how much more so on happy occasions! Once we are blessed with a child, we look forward to the next stage and the stage after that, to always celebrate important milestones in their lives.

But I have a question. Isn’t the order wrong? Torah, which is Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Chuppah – wedding, and only afterwards ‘ma’asim tovim’. Surely the ‘ma’asim tovim’, the good deeds should come right at the beginning, because we want this child to grow up, immersed in a world of loving kindness, from the word ‘go’.

Of course that is the case. But this particular order adds another dimension to ‘ma’asim tovim’, to acts of kindness. It tells us that it is when one is married that one is provided with the thrilling experience of a partner to perform acts of loving kindness alongside. Within one’s home, one can generate so much hospitality and so much chessed (acts of kindness) to the world.

Then there is a further lesson. ‘Ma’asim tovim’ relates specifically to those who have stood beneath a chuppah because once married, they need to dedicate themselves to kind deeds towards their spouse and members of their family. Hence two of the Ten Commandments which relate to infidelity; not to covet the spouse of another person, and not to commit adultery. On the tablets, the ‘issur’, the prohibition of adultery comes alongside idolatry, indicating that when one is unfaithful towards one’s spouse, it’s analogous to being unfaithful to the Almighty.

Therefore, at the very earliest moments of a child’s life, we bless them: may God bless and protect you to enable you to lead a life full of Torah and mitzvot, to stand one day under a chupah and always to be an outstanding individual full of ‘ma’asim tovim’ (kind deeds) for all. But let’s start at home – with that loyalty and kindness to the members of one’s family – to be faithful and loyal to those who are part of your mishpacha.

Shabbat Shalom.

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