

by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

CHAYEI SARA

Wedlock or Padlock?

We learn a great deal about Jewish marriage from Avraham's wish to see his beloved son married.

He sends Eliezer back to the family's homeland in order to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak, showing the importance of choosing a partner from one's own people.

Eliezer chooses Rivka for her gentleness and kindness, indicating that it is not just good looks but good character that one should look for in a wife or husband.

Rivka is asked whether she wants to marry Eliezer's master's son; marriage is too important to be foisted on anyone without their consent.

Why is it the man who takes the initiative to find the woman?

The sages say (Kiddushin 20a) that because Adam's rib was taken in order to create Chava, a man goes in due course "to find the lost treasure: the treasure does not go looking for him." Hence the choice of Rivka is the discovery of the soul-mate destined for Yitzchak from the time of Creation.

The first steps in making the marriage of Yitzchak and Rivka are rational; next comes the emotional thrill of seeing the dream come true.

As Eliezer and Rivka approach home, Yitzchak is out in the field - meditating, according to the text; praying, in the view of the sages - and Rivka sees him and the rest is history.

But the Torah text is careful not to say that they fall in love and then marry. Instead, it tells us that Yitzchak marries her and (thereafter) he loves her.

Their life together has its moments of tension, but they love each other to the end. In that respect it is truly a marriage made in heaven.

Euripides remarked, "Marry and, with luck, it may go well. But when a marriage fails, then those who marry live in hell."

Marriage can be wedlock, a couple happy in a world of their own - or a padlock, where they feel they are chained and imprisoned, and only want out.

Much depends on whether the couple decide to make marriage a lifetime career, with a commitment to remain in the marriage and work it out if problems arise.

He Had It All

Assessing Avraham in old age, the Torah says, "HaShem had blessed him with all" (B'reishit 24:1). What was the nature of his blessing?

The sages offer many theories. The most obvious is that Avraham had material possessions - flocks, herds, and whatever else was highly esteemed in those days. But the Yalkut's interpretation is, AVRAHAM HAYA M'VAREICH ET HAKOL - "Avraham blessed all (other people)." His blessing was that he brought blessing to others. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH