

BLESSINGS FOR LOVE-MAKING

By Rabbi Moshe ben Asher & Magidah Khulda bat Sarah

In the spirit of the *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* (*The Holy Letter*), which teaches that, “He commanded us . . . saying we must sanctify ourselves at the time of intercourse . . . ,” and in the absence of appropriate blessings, we've developed our own minhag of blessings for before and after love-making.

Our blessing before love-making acknowledges that God gives us the Torah as the path of life—enabling joy and fulfillment—and consecrates us to live in the Divine Image. The blessing itself is based on Psalm 136:7, Zechariah 12:1, Psalm 16:11, and Song of Songs 1:4 and 6:3.

Although we normally make the blessing in Hebrew, it may also be sung in English.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְהוָה,
לְעֵשָׂה אוֹרִים גְּדוֹלִים,
יִצְרַר רוּחַ כָּל אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה.
תוֹדִיעַנִי אֶרְחַח חַיִּים:
שִׁבְעַת שְׂמֵחוֹת אֶת-פְּנֵיךָ.
נִזְכֵּר דְּדִיךָ מִיַּיִן מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
אֶהְיֶה לְךָ,
אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי.

Ba-rukḥ a-ta, a-do-nai,
l'o-sei o-rim g'do-lim,
yo-tzeir ru-akh kol ish v'i-sha.
To-di-ei-ni o-rakh kha-yim:
sho-va s'ma-khot et pa-ne-kha.
Naz-ki-ra do-de-kha mi-ya-yin mei-sha-rim
a-hei-vu-kha,
a-ni l'do-di v'do-di li.

Blessed are you, Adonai,
who made the great lights,
who forms the spirit,
of every woman and man.
You make me know the path of life,
in Your face is fullness of joy.
We will find that loving Your way
is more fragrant than wine,
that it is the right love,
I am my beloved's,
my beloved is mine.

Our blessing after love-making reminds us of the importance of kindness in our relationship.

When we're young we don't affirm the primacy of loving kindness in the people we're considering as prospective mates. We look for many other qualities: we ask ourselves if prospective mates are fun, friendly, even fashionable; if they are from the same class, educational background, or even religion; and, of course, we ask ourselves if we're "in love" with them and if they're "in love" with us.

But none of these criteria address how a relationship with the person we are considering as a lifelong partner will remedy our existential loneliness. And, as far too many people can attest, marriage *per se* doesn't necessarily cure this loneliness. Because we cannot "cure" the experience that the unique part of us created in the image of God is not lovable and loved if, above all, kindness is not the hallmark of our relationships.

The prophet Micah (6:8) tells us, in effect, *how* loving kindness is sustained. He says: "One has told you, human, what is good, what Adonai requires of you: only to do *justice* and love kindness, and to go *humbly* with your God."

We have learned that if kindness is the *sine qua non* of relationships that conquer existential loneliness, justice and humility between the partners are the pillars that sustain such kindness. There is no kindness in a relationship in which either person is, in Martin Buber's words, an "it," an object for the other's gratification, rather than a "thou," another sentient human being—which fundamentally is an issue of *justice*. And there is no kindness in a relationship in which either person is not learning from the other—which fundamentally is an issue of *humility*.

In short, we have learned from the tradition what the Creator requires in our relationship to ensure that the Divine image, which has been implanted uniquely in each of us, is lovable and loved. Nothing is more important than kindness, and nothing makes it more possible than justice and humility.

The blessing also reminds us that our intimacy depends not only on how we act with one another as a couple, but how we act in the world beyond ourselves. We not only believe that between us, justice requires equality and equity in our roles and responsibilities, but that in the world beyond us, justice requires our commitment to *kahal* and *tikkun olam*. We not only believe that between us, kindness requires forgiveness when we hurt or offend one another, but that in the world beyond us, kindness requires *tzadakah*, that we show compassion by treating others righteously. We not only believe that between us, modesty (or humility) requires that we are teachers and learners together, but that in the world beyond us, modesty requires that we become teachers and learners by initiating and accepting challenges.

הַגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מֵהַטּוֹב
וּמֵהָ יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ
כִּי אִם-עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת הַסֵּד
וְהִצַּנֵּעַ לְכַת עִם-אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

Hi-gid l'kha a-dam ma-tov
u-ma Adonai do-reish mim'kha
ki im-a-sot mish-pat v'a-ha-vat khe-sed
v'hatz-nei-a le-khet im-eh-lo-he-kha.

One has told you, human, what is good,
what Adonai requires of you.
Only to do justice and love kindness,
and to go modestly with your God.

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