



## Torah Table Talk

### The Role of Heseid in a Marriage: Loyalty, Love and Faithfulness

Parshat Noah

Genesis 6:9 – 11:32/ Isaiah 54:1 -55:5



*Dedicated by Frances and Buddy Brandt  
in memory of their grandson, Oren Jacob Brandt-Rauf.  
“He was the perfect child.”*

After the great flood, God makes a covenant with Noah. God promises Noah that the earth will never again be flooded. Similarly, the prophet of the exile in the latter part of Isaiah tells the Israel that God has made an eternal promise with Zion and its inhabitants. Like Noah’s covenant, God’s love and His covenant of friendship will be more enduring than the mountains and the hills. While Israel has been like a barren and forsaken, she will now become more numerous than her neighbors. God’s anger will be replaced by everlasting kindness and love. The nations of the earth will now learn that the “Holy One of Israel” who redeems Israel is the one who created the heaven and the earth. Today’s Haftorah is filled with beautiful and intimate imagery used to describe the unique relationship between God and Zion.

#### **Isaiah 54:4**

For you shall forget the reproach of your youth, and remember no more the shame of your widowhood. For he who made you will espouse you, His name is Lord of hosts...

#### **Isaiah 54:6-8**

The Lord has called you back as a wife forlorn and forsaken. “Can one cast off the wife of one’s youth,” said your God. For a little while I forsook you, but in vast love (*rachamim*) I will bring you back. In slight anger, for a moment, I hid my face from you; But with kindness everlasting (*hesed olam*) I will take you back in love – said the Lord your redeemer.

#### **Isaiah 54:10**

For the mountains may move and the hills be shaken but my loyalty (*hesed*) shall never move from you nor my covenant of friendship be shaken.

#### **Michael Fishbane, The JPS Haftorah Commentary, Page 14**

**The wife of one’s youth:** The reference to Israel as “wife of his youth” (*ne’urim*) recalls the terminology in other uses of the marriage motif. The word *hesed* alludes to the covenant response found also in Hosea 2:21 and Jeremiah 2:2. The word conveys the idea of loyalty and commitment. Through *Hesed* one deals faithfully or keeps faith with another; it is also so used of the divine-human and interpersonal relationships (Deuteronomy 5:10, I Samuel 20:8.)

#### **Deuteronomy 5:8 -10**

You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image any likeness of what is in heavens above or on earth below or in the waters below the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am an impassioned God, visiting guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and fourth generation of those who reject Me, but showing kindness (*hesed*) to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep my commandments.

#### **Hosea 2:21- 22**

And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in goodness (*hesed*), and with mercy (*rachamim*). I will betroth you to me in faithfulness (*emunah*) and you shall know the Lord.

## **Jeremiah 2:2**

Go proclaim to Jerusalem: Thus said the Lord: I accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth, Your love (*hesed*) as a bride – how you followed me to the wilderness, in a land not sown.

## **Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 22a**

R. Samuel bar Nahman said: All things can be replaced, except the wife of one's youth, as Scripture says, "A wife of [one's] youth, can she be rejected?" (Isaiah 54:6). R. Judah taught his son R. Isaac: Only in his first wife does a man find utter joy, as Scripture says, "Have joy in the wife of thy youth" (Proverbs. 5:18). R. Isaac asked, "What wife, for example?" R. Judah: "Your mother, for example."

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. The word *hesed* is translated in a variety of different ways in the verses above both from the book of Isaiah and in the other prophetic books. How are the translations different from one another? What does each translation add to our understanding of the word?
2. In what way does the prophet understand the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage? Why is the wife of ones youth emphasized in particular both in the Bible and in rabbinic literature?
3. What can we learn from marriage about our relationship to God? What can we learn from our relationship to God about marriage?
4. In the Ten Commandments God is called an *El Kana*, an impassioned or jealous God. This term is used in contrast to the fact that God also acts with *Hesed*. What is the connection between these two terms? In what ways might jealousy serve a positive role in a marriage?

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