GENESIS 1:21 Creation, reproduction and re-creation of life

INTRODUCTION: The topic “Sexuality and Judaism” is delicate and complex. It is usually reserved for private discussions. Before marrying, every Jewish observant person, male or female, studies an intense course on Jewish sexual education (Taharat haMishpaha), to understand and internalize the strong connection between sexuality and *qedusha. “Qedusha”, the word the Tora and the Rabbis use systematically when referring to sexual behavior, is achieved by* our constant effort to get closer to God, and reaches its highest level when we “imitate” God as life-giving creatures. Those private conversations are the natural framework for the teaching and discussion of these issues.

What leads me to write the present reflections, outside of that traditional framework, is that at present time, many of us are being influenced about this delicate subject, voluntarily or mostly subliminally, by what is seen and heard in the media and even in the street. Moreover, many issues related to sexuality have nowadays become a matter of politics. Some times, they are part of a larger discussion between opposing philosophical visions: one that affirms the existence of God and sees Man as a creature endowed with the power to make moral decisions, vs. another vision that sees human beings as evolved members of the animal kingdom, where attention to one’s primary instincts becomes more important or more noble than one’s duty to mastering these instincts and drives.

Since the subject is so broad, I will dedicate to this a few days or perhaps weeks.

I would like to invite the readers to contribute with their questions and comments (write your emails to: rabbibitton@yahoo.com)

Let us start today, literally, from the beginning.

The first time the Tora refers to sexuality is in relation to animals, and exclusively in reference to reproduction. After the creation of the first animals, on the Fifth Day of Creation, the Tora says: (Genesis 1:22):

"And God blessed them [the animals] saying: 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the water in the seas, and the birds, increase on the earth'. '"

From this brief text, what it says, how it says it and what it does not say, we learn the first elements of the Tora's view on sexuality.

REPRODUCTION vs. MORTALITY:

Unlike any other physiological function, such as breathing or blood circulation, the Tora highlights the reproductive function when it refers to the first creation of living creatures. Although the Tora has not yet mentioned "death", the blessing of reproduction seems to hint that living beings, as individuals, will be subject to mortality. This blessing expresses, however, that as a species, living creatures will continue to survive. Reproduction reminds us in one aspect, i.e., perpetuation, of some previous creative acts. (a) When HaShem creates the transition between day and night, according to Seforno, the Creator established the rotation of the earth on its axis, that is, the mechanism that "perpetuates" this transition. (b) On the Second Day of Creation, HaShem divides the waters. According to Rabbi Moshe Hefets, it was at that time that HaShem established the mechanism of evaporation> precipitation (= rain), which guarantees the "perpetual" production of freshwater. Likewise, in this verse, animal sexual reproduction is presented as the mechanism that the

Creator is establishing for the “perpetuation” of living beings.

WHAT TYPE OF BLESSING?

This blessing that HaShem grants to animals, therefore, should not be understood as a regular formal blessings. Usually, a blessing expresses a desire: “May HaShem bless you” means more or less: “I wish that HaShem will heal you, or facilitate your success, etc.”

Sometimes, when the blessing comes directly from haShem, the blessing comprises a command. It is as if HaShem is saying to us, “This is what I command you to do, for YOUR OWN GOOD”(that is how HaShem’s order is expressed as a blessing).” In our text, when God blesses the animals, HaShem is not wishing them to reproduce, nor is He ordering them to reproduce. HaShem is establishing the blessing of sexual reproduction as part of animal’s biology. It is a blessing mainly in the sense that it defeats mortality.

The blessing to animals, though expressed in the imperative, is completely different from the blessing that HaShem bestows on Adam and Hava (Eve), when referring to sexual reproduction (as we shall see in greater depth BH tomorrow.) In our text, HaShem does not address or orders animals to reproduce. This is clearly seen in the use of the Hebrew word “lemor” which means “saying” (as opposed to “saying to them”, which is used when HaShem blesses Adam and Eve). Why doesn’t HaShem order animals to reproduce? Because an order, a mitsva, can only be given to a being who can obey or disobey, accept or reject it. Animals have no control over their sexuality or sexual behavior. Humans do.

To be continued