

What's In a Relationship?

In Deuteronomy 22:13-22, *Parashat Ki Teitze* addresses the subject of the virginity of a wife whose husband no longer wants her. It's easy to read the text, observe that it's misogynistic and no longer relevant to contemporary society, and move on. The concept of proof of virginity is archaic at best, at least in Western societies. Likewise, the concept that the virginity of a woman is a commodity owned by her father or her future husband, valued at a price, is viewed as obsolete. Yet the passage raises other issues that are still relevant today. The first issue is that of parental DNA. In the past, the maternal lineage was the only one that could be visually ascertained; paternal lineage depended on many factors, such as the ones discussed in this parashah, which pertain mainly to validating a claim of sexual fidelity. Today, of course, we are able to ascertain lineage on both sides in other ways. Yet the need to know continues, for many good and bad reasons.

Fidelity in a relationship has always been considered important, as it is today. And, the conditions under which a husband may file for divorce are quite different. And yes, sometimes individuals change, and the relationship cannot continue as it has been. Most important, however, is why couples choose marriage. As "The Torah – A Women's Commentary" observes, a woman was always better off with a husband because of the potential for financial security and status in the community. The need to produce offspring also was tied to potential future security, as well as political or economic alliances. Affection was typically not the foundation for the relationship as it is today.

The key theme of this passage is the husband's dissatisfaction with his wife, and a desire to divorce her without financial loss. These elements are very much alive and well today. We have only to look at the news headlines to see who is divorcing whom, and who had a prenuptial agreement and who didn't...Some things never change.