

I. HUMAN AWARENESS

The Rooster Crowed

...Only last week

The scapegoat cliff devoured yet another sacrifice:

He was a silken scholar, consecrated,
Even from the womb.

Vise grip of the Creator

Sends its menacing fangs, menacing
claws

Over sky and sea.

Sharp cliffs, honed, await their prey.

Sea, desert, blue of sky.

Moab's mountains are veiled by a mist

Rising from a steel sea.

A promising sun peeks,

Stealing leisurely through the peeks.

So there is order, after all.

Suddenly, the blue of steel gleams,

Fierce dazzling,

“The mountains dance like rams.”

A bear hug envelops earth and sky.

“And a mist rises” from the sea – heated
vapor,

Infernal seething cauldron,

Whipping up froth, raising fire in
leaping whirlpools,

Straight from hell.

In such a place – the satyrs might
dance...

Suffocating anguish:

A land vomits out its soul over its
inhabitants.

“And no man was there, to work the
earth.”

A rooster call is heard, somewhere,
yonder,

Nearing,

And soothing!

“For the earth forever stands.”

Civilization...

The man washes his hands, the blessing
is said:

Blessed...are You...Who have given
insight

To the rooster,

To distinguish between the day and the
night.”

Blessed...are You...Who have given
man reason.

So be it!

II. AWARENESS

“Who has given insight to the rooster, to distinguish...” The other winged creatures are roused by the dawn as well. Birds chirp, dogs bark. This action is nothing more than response activated by environmental stimulus. The natural universe merges with the stream of creation. “It comes and it goes,” after the pattern of the angels, doing the bidding of the Creator of the universe.

Such action contains no awareness. It follows in the direction of the general flow, together with the blowing wind, the greening trees, the fragrance of flowers. The buzzing of the bee heralds fertilization, just as the growl of the beast testifies to a particular need, to a specific situation that requires its own specific response.

The call of the rooster is an exception to this rule. It does not answer to any of the rooster’s many needs. It is its own expression. It is intended to publicly announce to the universe that creation has undergone a renewal; there has been a change in the flow.

The rooster has no consciousness of his own deeds – such consciousness is lacking in all creatures; it is reserved for man alone. The uniqueness of human beings lies in this consciousness of their own existence. Man’s destiny as the crowning glory of creation is to proclaim the presence of the Creator, if only by the simple fact of being aware of the Creator’s existence. The cock’s crow is meant to remind man of his own consciousness of the presence of the Lord, blessed be His name.

For this reason, the rooster blessing was designated as the first of the dawn blessings – blessings intended to awaken this consciousness. Our existential needs are not their own goal, these blessings remind us, but rather only the means for reaching awareness of our own existence for the sake of the Lord.

So too with the blessing “that He has not made me a woman,” whose role is to bear the burden of natural existence, through involvement, through creativity, through merging with the natural stream that flows through her environment, and through her own self as well, more so than man.

Woman is meant to create belonging, to create the bond between heaven and earth, to contribute – by her capacity for belonging – to the unity of creation. Her position does not free her to delve inward toward consciousness and awareness, which require freeing oneself from all other involvements, from merging, relating, and flowing with creation. Woman has no need of reminders, through consciousness and awareness, of her role, because the

existential needs with which she is merged are, in themselves, capable of awakening her to her role.

The man's blessing is intended to make available to him an action that he can initiate on his own, that can awaken within him an initiative of awareness, of his own obligation to his Creator, because there is absolutely no natural "awakener" found in his environment, except of the sort designed to fulfill natural existential needs. This intention and initiative finds its expression in prayer, which is more obligatory upon man than upon woman, mainly for this reason.

Freedom, as mentioned, is the main source of the difference between man and woman. Woman's primary tendency toward belonging is what makes her responsible for the unity of the creation.

Freedom is what enables man to free himself from the environment of existential needs, and to concentrate on pondering the essence of his own human quality: His own human quality, and another's. Such consciousness is free of the selfish interests that derive from his self-preservation mechanism, and enables him to express the value and the quality of the other, through the value-oriented qualities of his own self.

From here, the way is open to identifying with another, to experiencing empathy, which enables the bonding of objective, qualitative love, as the Ramban defines it, for the Ramban finds it difficult to equate love for another with the expression of the emotion of love.

"Love [your fellow] as yourself" is excessive, in the words of the Ramban. It is an overstatement that is remote from reality. For the simple reason that emotional love, just like emotional hate, which creates dependency, distorts the image. It contains no objective assessment of the other.

For this reason, the Ramban seeks a love that is accessible to rational judgment. He reaches this possibility through a process of elimination: Eliminate every trace of envy.

Such a love is accessible to conscious criticism and judgment. When you are capable of wishing for your friend everything that you wish for yourself, and when there is no envy to reduce by even one iota the good that you wish for your comrade, then you may be secure in the knowledge that it is indeed love that prevails between the two of you.

Sensitivity to the other through identifying, is therefore only and solely possible when you are capable of seeing the other through your own Godly quality, through the source of qualities that is your Godly self, by eliminating the involvement of ego, which activates the mechanical systems of the machinery of survival. Envy derives from ego. Freeing the unique, qualitative, Godly self from ego's quantitative preoccupations, automatically frees it

from envy. Hence the precise wording of the verse: “You shall love your comrade as yourself – I am God.” The Godly presence alone is what makes possible that love and bonding that unites the “I” with the “you”.

One’s own freedom, therefore, is the key to awareness and to consciousness of the Godly quality that expresses the original uniqueness of every human being. Uniqueness, in paradoxical fashion, is the differentness that brings to unity. Man arrives at unity through a roundabout direction in this way, whereas woman deals with unity through the direct approach, by actually intensifying the dynamics of belonging.

Omer

The count of the Omer is meant for what it is: Counting. No other action takes place, other than counting per se. We cannot avoid the conclusion that we are meant to view the count as the act of taking initiative, of awakening in man the awareness, the recognition of his own destiny as bearer of the Godly presence. The counting of the Omer is not merely a counting of days until the appointed time for receiving the Torah.

Intrinsic to the counting of the Omer is the preparation to receive the Torah, and this is nothing less than the preparation of man: By counting, he awakens the consciousness and awareness of his own Godly existence.

For this reason, woman is exempt from this mitsva, not only because it is a positive time-bound commandment, and women are exempt from those. Women are exempt even according to the Ramban, who determines that the Omer is not a positive, time-bound commandment: This is not one of those acts of mitsva that includes time among the conditions by which it is fulfilled. Rather, time itself is the very essence of the mitsva.

Nevertheless woman shall be exempt from this mitsva, for the reason that woman has no need of reminders to awaken her recognition, her awareness of her own existence. For such awareness flows toward her from every corner and every angle of her existential environment. Awareness of the other, for example, comes to her through devoted care of the other, love through *hesed*, as defined in Michtav Me’Eliahu – love as the result of the investment of *hesed*. Of such investment Rav Dessler writes: “There is no greater unity than this.”