



HIGH HOLIDAYS

Simchat Torah

Whom Should You Marry?

October 13, 2017

WHOM SHOULD YOU MARRY?

THE ULTIMATE BRIDE

ABSTRACT

When G-d tells you that He will give you anything you request, what will you ask for?

Will you ask for health, wealth, long life, wonderful children, a beautiful family?

Or will you ask for something far greater – will you ask for the King’s daughter’s hand in marriage – which will bring you everything else?

Simchat Torah is the most festive and joyous day of the year, compared to a wedding. But why is that? What is the connection between Simchat Torah and a wedding, and why do we refer to those called up to conclude and begin the Torah on this day as *Chatan*, “Groom” – *Chatan Torah*, *Chatan Bereishis*?

Also, what is the scriptural source for celebrating when the Torah is completed?

The answer lies in a wise dream of King Solomon and a magnificent Midrash that explains its inner meaning.

And it will transform how you look at yourself and at Torah.

1. Simchat Torah: Culminating and Celebrating the Torah

Today, Simchat Torah, is the happiest day of the year.

On this day we conclude reading the entire Torah, dancing and celebrating the eternal gift, legacy and heritage given to us by the Creator of the world. As we read in today’s reading: *The Torah that Moses commanded us is a legacy for the congregation of Jacob*¹.

Often, the happiest days of our lives are our wedding days, or the days when our children are born, or the wedding days of our children.

The joy and ceremony of Simchat Torah is analogous to a wedding celebration. We celebrate the receiving of the second tablets, given to Moses on Yom Kippur, which is called the “wedding day”² between G-d and

¹ Deuteronomy 33:4.

² Song of Songs 3:11.

the Jewish people³.

Indeed, the individuals called up to the Torah for today's reading of the conclusion and beginning of the Torah are called, respectively, *Chatan Torah*, "Groom of Torah," and *Chatan Bereishit*, "Groom of Bereishit."

Three Torah scrolls are taken out of the ark today. In the first Torah we read *v'Zot Habrachah*, the conclusion of the entire Torah⁴. In the second Torah we read the opening of Genesis, starting the Torah anew⁵. Then Maftir is read in the third Torah⁶.

Prior to reading the final verses of the Torah, we call up for this last *aliyah* the *Chatan Torah*, the "Groom of Torah." And prior to starting the Torah again we call up for the first *aliyah* the *Chatan Bereishit*, the "Groom of Bereishit."

But why indeed is the Torah and its conclusion compared to a wedding in general, and a groom in particular?

Also, what is the scriptural source that the conclusion of the Torah warrants a joyous and festive celebration?

2. The Marriage at Sinai

The most obvious reason why the joy of Simchat Torah is compared to a wedding celebration is because Sinai was the "marriage" between the Jewish people and G-d, as mentioned above. In the words of the Mishne: "the day of his wedding – that is Mattan Torah."

When the Jewish people received the Torah at Sinai they actually entered into an intimate marriage with the divine. From then on their entire beings – including their physical bodies and material lives – became fused and united with G-dliness.

The Torah, and especially the Tablets, served as the marriage contract between G-d (the groom) and Israel (the bride), with each legally bound to each other in a complete commitment, with obligations and expectations. The Torah's mitzvot are instruments that allow us to refine and spiritualize the material universe.

Indeed, many of the customs at a Jewish wedding correspond to the marriage between G-d and Israel at Sinai. The candles held by the escorting couples are reminiscent of the flickering light and fire which occurred at the time of the giving of the Torah – under the "chupah" (canopy) of Mount Sinai⁷.

³ Mishne Taanit 26b and Rashi.

⁴ Deuteronomy 33-34.

⁵ Genesis 1-2:3.

⁶ Numbers 29:35-30:1.

⁷ Sefer Mat'amim, Chasan v'Kallah 89.

Marriage brings with it joy and celebration. We therefore dance and rejoice on Simchat Torah with the Torah, celebrating our marriage with the divine.

This “marital” relationship between G-d and Israel is absolutely unique and unprecedented, unlike any other.

Even the greatest lovers and connoisseurs of music, art or literature, are not legally married and do not dance with their musical notes, artistic masterpieces or classic books.

The relationship between the Jewish people and G-d, however, is a true marriage, bringing with it all the exuberance and simcha of Simchat Torah.

3. Who is the Groom and Who the Bride?

But this raises an obvious question. According to the above G-d is the “groom” and Israel is the “bride” in the marriage at Sinai.

Why then do we identify the ones called up to the conclusion and beginning of Torah on Simchat Torah as *Chatan* – the groom, *Chatan Torah* and *Chatan Bereishis*?

Explains the Alter Rebbe⁸ that in relation to G-d the Jewish people are like the bride, but compared to the Torah they are the “groom” and the Torah is the “bride.”⁹

In other words, there are two ways to define the “marriage” at Sinai: 1) The marriage is between G-d and Israel, with G-d being the “groom” and Israel the “bride.” 2) The marriage is between G-d’s Torah (which is “one with G-d¹⁰”) and Israel, with Israel being the “groom” and Torah being the “bride.”

As we will soon read in the beautiful and poetic introduction to Chatan Bereishit:

With the permission of Him who transcends all blessing and song, awesomely exalted above all praise and hymn, wise, and mighty in power and strength. Ruler of the world. Master of all creation: and with the permission of the Torah, the glorious daughter of the King kept within, first of all His possessions, treasured for two thousand years [before Creation], pure and perfect, reviving the soul and restoring it, given to Yeshurun¹¹ as a heritage to fulfill and observe it...

8 See Likkutei Torah Brocho Torah Tzivah (93d-96d). Shir HaShirim 39c-40b. See also there Teitzei 37a-b.

9 In Likkutei Torah (ibid) he explains that, when you break it down further, in Torah itself we find that at times the Torah is called the “groom” and at other times it is referred to as the “bride.” This corresponds to two levels in the Torah: 1) One that is mashpia, which transmits (like the groom) to Israel (the bride), 2) the second that is mekabel, which receives (like the bride) from Israel (the groom).

10 Tanya chapters 4. 23. See Zohar I 24a. II 60a. Tikkunei Zohar 6. Likkutei Torah Netzavim 46a.

11 I.e. Israel.

The Torah is clearly called the “the glorious daughter of the King,” the bride, who was “given to” Israel (Yeshurun), the groom, (*chatan*) “as a heritage to fulfill and observe it.”

Hence, the name *Chatan Torah* and *Chatan Bereishis*.

4. The Midrash

A lovely Midrash¹² expounds upon the idea of the Torah being the King’s daughter, and then continues to explain the source for celebrating when we complete the Torah:

Rabbi Simon in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Chalafta: A nobleman grew up in the king’s palace. The king told him: “Ask whatever you like and I will give it to you.” The nobleman said: “If I ask for gold and silver, he will surely give it to me. If I ask for precious stones and pearls, he will surely give it to me.” He said, “I ask please for the king’s daughter’s hand, and all is included.”

The Midrash explains applies the analogy to Torah with an episode that occurred with King Solomon.

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and G-d said, “Ask what I shall give you.” And Solomon said... “give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this Your great people?”

And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And G-d said to him, “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked for yourself long life; neither have you asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked the life of your enemies; but have asked for yourself understanding to discern judgment. Behold, I have done according to your word; behold, I have given you a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like you before you, nor after you shall any arise like you. And I have also given you that which you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there shall not be any among the kings like you all your days. And if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David did walk, then I will lengthen your days.”

And Solomon awoke, and behold (it was) a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants¹³.

Like the king in the Midrash’s analogy, G-d tells King Solomon to ask whatever he would like and G-d would give it him. Like in the analogy, Solomon does not ask for gold, or silver, or precious stones, but for wisdom and understanding by which to discern right from wrong, to judge and lead the people fairly.

¹² Song of Songs Rabbah 1:9.

¹³ I Kings 3:5-15.

G-d is very pleased with this request. G-d gives Solomon the wisdom and understanding to discern and judge found in Torah, and *includes in it that which you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there shall not be any among the kings like you all your days. And if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David did walk, then I will lengthen your days.*

The Torah is the daughter of the King, G-d Al-mighty. Whoever marries the King's daughter, and treats her like the royalty she is, walks in her path, has everything else included in it: wealth, health, riches, long life, etc.

5. The Blessed Groom

This is why the one called up on Simchat Torah to conclude the Torah and the one called to begin it again is called *Chatan*, groom. And by extension, we are called *chatan* today, as we celebrate with our bride, G-d's daughter, the Torah. For, quite literally, by receiving the Torah we are asking for and receiving the King's daughter's hand in marriage – and, with this most precious of all the King's treasures, everything else is included.

And, like at a wedding celebration, this is why we celebrate and dance and feast, as per the conclusion of the Midrash:

And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants. Said Rabbi Elazar: From here we learn that one makes a celebratory feast when one concludes the Torah. Said Rabbi Yudin: To teach us, that whoever studies Torah in public merits that the Holy Spirit should rest upon him, for so did Solomon: he studied and the Holy Spirit rested on him and he composed three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

When King Solomon awoke from his dream and realized that he had received the deepest wisdom of the Torah, the King's daughter in marriage, he immediately went to Jerusalem, to the ark where the Tablets and Torah are kept, and made a celebratory feast, inviting all to the eternal bond of nuptials between the bride, the King's daughter, the Torah, and the groom Israel.

6. Conclusion: Time to Dance

Today we are all grooms. Today we too are asked by G-d for anything we want – wealth, riches, health, long life – and we will be granted it. But we don't ask for those things.

We desire something much more precious. We are in love. We ask for the King's daughter's hand in marriage. And we know that with this most beautiful treasure on earth we will receive all the blessings that come with it, from children who follow in its righteous paths to beautiful families to wealth to health to long life and

everything in between.

This is why, today, on Simchat Torah, like King Solomon we stand before the Holy Ark, take out its holy Torahs, dance like we have never danced before, because this is our wedding day!

Torah is not just a book. It's not just a moral code and the history of our people. The Torah is "our life and our sustenance" (*chayeni v'orech yomeinu*). Like a fish in water, we are inseparable from Torah. We are married to Torah. It is our soulmate and our living guide to life.

As we dance and then read from the Torah, let us all remember that we have been gifted the most prized treasure in the world.

Let us cherish this princess the way Her father meant for her to be treasured and cherished, and then certainly her Father, our Father, the King of the universe and Master of the world, will fulfill the guarantee: *If you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David did walk, then I will lengthen your days.*

May our marriage be blessed with bearing many offspring and fruit. Until we merit to the final redemption, which will elevate our marriage to another level.

Chag Sameach and Good Yom Tov!

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