

THE LANGUAGE OF



אני לדודי ודודי לי

THE BRIDEGROOM

SH'MA! CHAZAK! BIBLE STUDIES

ב'יה

B'ezrat HaShem

The Language of the Bridegroom

A Bible Study

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Richard Spurlock

Sh'ma! Chazak! Bible Studies

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Introduction

The Language of the Bible

The Bible was not written in English.

For any student of the Bible, that statement poses no difficulty. History shows us that the manuscripts that comprise the Bible were written in Ancient Hebrew, Imperial Aramaic, Classical Greek, and Koine Greek. We know well the marvelous history of the English Bible and its influence not only on various sects of Christianity, but the entire world. So, let's try again...

The Bible was not written in Hebrew and Greek.

Hopefully, nearly everyone will balk at that statement; so the truth of it requires some explanation.

Language and culture are inseparable. Culture defines language, and language defines culture. They go together. Always. To remove the culture and history from language is a study in the ridiculous. In the span of only a few generations, the meanings of some words can become completely opposite. So when we speak of "language" we can never be completely sterile. What something means depends on who said it, and when it was said.

To further complicate the issue, a large part of communication is non-verbal. We know that voice inflection, facial movements, and posture can often convey more meaning than the words themselves. Our electronic forms of communication are often so deficient that we resort to keyboard symbols or emoticons to soften our otherwise harsh sounding words.

So, how can we ever truly understand what God means when He says something in Scripture? Don't despair, God invented communication. ***God speaks in the language of men.*** He wants to be understood. He reveals Himself to us in ways that can be understood, because He wants to

have a relationship with us. So, is there a universal language through which we can understand Scripture? For instance, can we depend upon the so-called universal concepts of love, hate, happiness, sadness, good, and evil?

No. The “universal” language does not exist. You might have thought so, until the mention of “good” and “evil.” Most modern travelers can attest to the fact that what some countries call “good,” others call “bad.” This is the origin of moral relativism. One would think that the concept of love for children might be universal, but even that is mythical. Golda Meir was Israel’s fourth Prime Minister. Consider what she said in 1957 at the National Press Club in Washington, DC:

“Peace will come when the Arabs will love their children more than they hate us.”

No, there is no universal love for children. While it is true that most languages and cultures have elements of truth – there is no universal language on which we can depend in our quest for truth.

Can we depend upon the original texts of Scripture to convey the truth? We may at first jump at such a clear path to truth. I believe that ***God inspired every word of the original manuscripts of Scripture***, and that conviction is the reason for Bible study. And yet, are we all experts in the original languages? The concept of *sola scriptura* [only Scripture] demands an authoritative and unbiased source for the meaning of Greek and Hebrew words. Is there such a thing? No, there is not.

Few Bible students know that one of the foremost Hebrew lexicons used by theologians today was written by a man who was also a theological architect of Nazi anti-Semitism. Gerhard Kittel was a virulent anti-Semite, and yet many depend on his lexicon for the meaning of Hebrew

words in the Bible. Gerhard Kittle's father was Rudolf Kittle the editor of a principle Hebrew text used in most Bible translations today: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Gerhard Kittle died in 1948 before he was brought to trial for war crimes against the Jewish people, specifically Polish Jews.

With such men providing our study tools, what hope do we have to determine the meaning of Scripture? Remember, ***God speaks in the language of men***. More specifically, God speaks in the language of ***Jewish people***...

The Bible was “written in Jewish.”

The Bible says this, just not as bluntly. It is not merely the Hebrew (or Greek) words – it is the culture in which the words are presented. ***There is no other culture for God's people other than the Jewish culture***. To argue differently (as the Christian church has for 1,700 years) is to claim that Christianity is a “New Testament” religion – turning most of Scripture on its head.

You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

John 4:22

And nations shall come to your [Israel's] light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Isaiah 60:3

If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.

Romans 11:16-18

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Romans 3:1-2

He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel.

Psalms 147:19

As a young Bible student, I was taught, “context is king.” I was taught that the context of a Scripture passage was important for understanding what God means. I was taught that what a passage means was **by context**. However, I was not taught the importance of **by example**. The difference is that **by context** is simply seeking information from Scripture. **By example** means that what is read is lived out. In other words, the relationship **with** God (i.e. *by example*) is more important than the information **about** God (i.e. *by context*). We relate to God by what we **do**, not what we think we know **about** Him. Likewise we learn what God does, not by discovering “who He is” – but instead we discover “who He is” by seeing what He does. The difference between the two methods is dramatic.

Many study Scripture from a cultural and historical context. That approach attempts to discover what the readers of a passage at the time would have understood. That is **by context**. Once again, we are at the mercy of the men and women who **think** they know what long-gone people **thought**, without anything beyond an academic knowledge of their language and culture. On the other hand, **by example** lives out **repeated patterns**. Like well-worn paths the repeated patterns make the connections between various Scripture passages and our own life experiences. The patterns may come from words, phrases, language, and traditions. The patterns are established by literal Scripture and mature as they are lived out in the lives of God’s people. This approach to interpreting Scripture is more about our **relationship with God** than **academic discovery**.

In the realm of theory, we are free to play with ontology and postulate about the nature of something, or some One (God). This approach does not lead to a relationship, nor does it nurture one. We can see in life a different way. We teach our children first by example –

demonstrating what mere words cannot convey. God uses the real world to reveal what is otherwise other-worldly: Himself. We know that He is the Creator because He created the world around us. We know that He is our Father because He teaches, nurtures, and disciplines us. ***We know that He is the Bridegroom because He treats us as His bride.***

The Language of the Bridegroom

If you tell a bride in Saudi Arabia that God is like a bridegroom, you will not get the same response as you do in Japan. Remember, God does not merely want to reveal something **about** Himself – He wants to **relate to us**. So it is not merely a job for translators to find a picture that conveys a similar idea. The language of the Bridegroom is too important to be left for cultural adaptation. After all, we are talking about the most intimate of relationships.

The language of the Bridegroom must be understood **by example**, in its own unique culture. It is the language of the **Jewish** Bridegroom and bride. **That** is the language of the Bible.

Rules for Study

Our study is going to be information. Information is important – but it is not the goal. A living relationship with the Bridegroom is the goal. Live it, don't just read it. Here are some rules to help with that goal:

Parables are not facts expressed in prose. Parables and similitudes are to make a point, using real life examples, so that the hearers can act in a similar way. If early Christianity had known this about Jewish parables, a lot of things would be different today. Parables are about doing, not about information. The “parable” of our study is the likeness of God to a Bridegroom – and His people to a bride. God expresses this similitude because it is the most intimate of relationships known to **Jews**. But to fully grasp the similitude, you need to **live it, have lived it, or see it being lived by others**. Watching how marriage works in Congo or Brazil may be nice,

but that is not the point. At this point you may be asking if you need to move to Brooklyn or Jerusalem to fully appreciate the parable. The later would be preferable 😊 (see what I just did there?).

Life is not divided into common and sacred. There is a place for division; but a goal of Jewish life is to bring holiness into the world – and it does. There is no “preacher” at a Jewish wedding. If there is a Rabbi present, it is to keep the bridegroom and bride pointed in the right direction in all of their excitement, not to authenticate the wedding. A Jewish bridegroom does not have clergy “marry” him. All the holiness necessary for a Jewish marriage is found simply in the two that are to become one: the bridegroom and his bride. The “sanctity” of church sanction is not only redundant; it confounds the significance of marriage. It is not a church or synagogue that makes marriage holy – it is husband and wife, in mutual commitment before God that makes it holy.

Our study presents an ideal, but it is not exclusive. If you did not have (or yet have) the experiences of the Jewish marriage, you can still learn from real life examples. That is the beauty of parables: everyone gets a taste. Some get a feast with their personal story. They had a Jewish wedding. Some get a few bites here and there. They are not married, or they are they were married under the auspices and sanction of some particular religion (the later may need to cleanse their palate occasionally to enjoy the taste of Jewish parables). For some, marriage brings out only bad memories. For those, you can rest assured that God is not like those memories; and perhaps in the grittiness of your experiences you can still find reasons to bless God, who is a good and perfect Bridegroom.

No finger pointing. This is about our relationship with the Bridegroom – not an opportunity to drop guilt-laden hints for our spouses (or spouses to be). If you think that there is something

lacking in your marriage – then look in the mirror. We are responsible for what **we** can change, not what we can't. If a spouse can be improved it is only because we improve **ourselves**.

It isn't mysteriously deep. It is long-term intimacy. Although there are poignant moments, the Jewish marriage is not full of deep secrets and mysteries. It is about life-long commitment and enduring intimacy – like the relationship God wants to have with us.

Don't automatically dismiss what is unfamiliar. What we are unfamiliar with we sometimes think is just a little too odd. You cannot rely on your life experiences to hear the language of the Bridegroom, unless you share the His cultural experience. Simply remember this, not all Jewishness is moral and right, but all anti-Jewishness is immoral and wrong. Like fish, eat the meat, spit out the bones – but first make sure that it is really “bones” you are spitting out. Sometimes people reject things they see as “Jewish” because it is foreign to them – only to later discover that not only did it accurately convey something biblical, but also it was foundational for a proper understanding of Scripture. This study is not an endorsement of all Jewish traditions (or any traditions for that matter), but make sure that any resistance you have does not have origins in “anti-Jewishness” – because there is a lot of that going around these days (and since the days of Ishmael and Esav).

Now, let's dig in.

Lesson One: *Kiddushin*

Tradition Speaks

Like all customs, over the centuries, Jewish weddings have changed, although perhaps less than we might expect. There is no doubt that a Jew from the First Century CE would have no difficulty identifying with a Jewish wedding today.

Even when we consider the changes, we know that the Jewish culture and traditions speak in a unique language. Although not all Jewish traditions are expedient to understanding Scripture, most are – even those that seem to have evolved after the completion of Scripture. That is because a highly protected culture transmits important truths across scores of generations in ways that simple history cannot. History is informational (remember, “in context” is not the same as “by example”) – whereas cultural traditions transmit a common **experience**. In these first lessons we will focus upon the traditions of the Jewish wedding in order to begin to understand the common experience.

Marriage in Two Parts

There are essentially two parts to the Jewish wedding, both in ancient times and today, although over the years these have been often compressed into a single ceremony.

- *kiddushin* (also called *erusin*)
- *nisu'in*

The two parts of the Jewish marriage ceremony originate in the Torah. Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, or “RaMBaM”) wrote:

“Before the Torah was given, when a man would meet a woman in the marketplace and he and she decided to marry, he would bring her home, conduct relations in private and thus make her his wife. Once the Torah was given, the Jews were commanded that when a man desires to marry a woman, he must acquire her as a wife in the presence of witnesses. After this, does she become his

wife. ‘When a man takes a wife and has relations with her.’ (Deuteronomy 22:13)¹

In other words, the formal process involving a written *ketubah* etc. is not seen until the giving of the Torah. The Scriptural phrase, “take a wife” is often seen in three stages as exemplified in Genesis 24:67, where Isaac takes Rebekah into his mother’s tent (physical transfer), he took Rebekah (marriage rite), and she became his wife (consummation)². Although not formally represented, we see this same formula several times prior to the giving of the Torah.

Kiddushin = Sanctification

The word *kiddushin* comes from the same Hebrew root as *kadosh* [holy]. It means that the bride is reserved only (i.e. sanctified or set apart) for the bridegroom. In English we refer to this as the betrothal or engagement, however this is not an accurate translation. *Kiddushin* [sanctification] or *erusin* [betrothal] as it is also known, includes elements not normally considered a part of engagement in western cultures.

Kiddushin is considered to be legal marriage, although intimate relations are not consummated and the bride remains in her father’s house. In ancient times, *kiddushin* was separated from the *nisu’in* ceremony by a long period of time, often a year or more. During that time, if the arrangement was to be terminated a legal divorce was required. Although legally married, if the bride and the bridegroom were together, they could not be alone, and there was no physical contact. If either bride or bridegroom were unfaithful during the time of *kiddushin*, they are guilty of adultery and the Torah death penalty applied.

¹ *Mishneh Torah*, Sefer Nashim, Ishut, Halacha 1

² Abraham Bloch *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*. KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1980. p.24

Ketubah

In ancient times, *Kiddushin* formally began when the man gave the *ketubah* [literally, “written document”] to the bride in the presence of two witnesses. The *ketubah* describes the rights and responsibilities of the bridegroom to the bride. The *ketubah* was considered a form of protection for the bride, ensuring for her provision in the case of the husband’s death or their divorce. The *ketubah* is a one-way contract whereby the bridegroom takes upon himself the obligation that he will provide to his wife three major things: clothing, food and conjugal relations. Additionally, it provides monetarily in the case of a divorce.

For the *ketubah* to be binding (and hence the beginning of *kiddushin*), it must have two witnesses, and the bride must agree. If the bride is too young (as in the case of some arranged marriages), the bride’s father must agree, and once she is of age, she can disagree if she chooses (thus annulling the agreement). The *ketubah* is given to the bride for safekeeping.

The *ketubah* ceremony normally took place in the home of the bride in ancient times. The bridegroom and witnesses would come to her and her parents to formally begin the phase of *kiddushin*. In addition to giving the *ketubah* to the bride, the bridegroom would often give some object of value (such as a ring or jewelry) to the bride.¹

An entire tractate of the Talmud is devoted to the topics surrounding *kiddushin* (Tractate *Kiddushin*). As well, there is a tractate devoted to the topics surrounded the *ketubah* (Tractate *Ketubot*).

¹ b.*Kiddushin* 1a

The Torah, Kiddushin, and Ketubah

We have seen that the *ketubah* begins the formal marriage with the presentation of the *ketubah* in the presence of two witnesses. The bridegroom gives the *ketubah* to the bride to be held in her possession for all her life. As soon as she agrees, the two are husband and wife in the state of *kiddushin*. The Talmud likens giving of the Torah at Sinai as the giving of a *ketubah*¹.

Comment on the following passages and how they might relate to the traditions of *ketubah* or *kiddushin*.

Genesis 24:45-61:

Genesis 24:62-67:

Genesis 31:43-50:

Ruth 4:1-13:

¹ b.*Ketubot* 17a

Exodus 19:1-11:

Matthew 1:18-25:

Betrothed of God

Perhaps we can already begin to see patterns played out in the relationship between God and His people, His betrothed. Read the following passages and comment on the *kiddushin* of God and His betrothed.

Jeremiah 31:31-34:

Hosea 2:7-23:

Act It Out

How will you act out what you learned in this lesson about your relationship to **the** Bridegroom?

Lesson Two: *Nisu'in* – Part One

Nisu'in – Lifting Up

As we saw in the previous lesson, a Jewish wedding has two parts: *kiddushin* (also called *erusin*) and *nisu'in*. *Nisu'in* comes from verb root that means to “elevate.” In ancient times, these two parts were often separated by a lengthy period of time. For the past several hundred years, the two parts have been done on the same day, the wedding day. Remember, the wedding couple is legally married after the *ketubah* is witnessed and accepted by the bride, and thus *kiddushin* begins. Full marriage rights and responsibilities are realized in the second part, *nisu'in*.

Because of severe persecution, Jews in the middle ages began to do away with the time interval between *kiddushin* and *nisu'in*. Eventually, both *kiddushin* and *nisu'in* were accomplished on the same day, the wedding day.

Tena'im

Because *kiddushin* and *nisu'im* became part of a single ceremony, Jews began to incorporate an ancient practice of creating a *tena'im* document that stated the intentions and conditions for a future marriage. The *tena'im* did not replace the *ketubah*, it simply provided an instrument of intention similar to a modern “memorandum of understanding” between two legal parties. In more modern times, the *tena'im* signing begins the official engagement period, where the bride and the bridegroom’s families began planning for the wedding day itself.

Joy Required

An important thing to remember about the Jewish wedding is that joy must be present. Since ancient times, it has been understood that to not be joyful, or to cause anxiety for a bride and her bridegroom on the day of their *nisu'in* [wedding day] was a great sin.

In biblical times and after, wedding parties would last days, with the entire community contributing toward the experience.

Read the following passages and comment on the significance of joy for the bride and bridegroom:

Psalms 19:5:

Isaiah 61:10:

Isaiah 62:5:

Jeremiah 33:11:

Matthew 9:15:

Mark 2:19:

The first miracle that Yeshua performed was to turn water into wine at a wedding celebration. Read **John 2:1-11** and comment on the significance of this sign and what the outcome was:

Because of the requirement of *simcha* [joy], Jewish weddings are delayed at least thirty days following the death of an immediate family member. Likewise, they are not planned for days of mourning such as: Yom Kippur, the three weeks between 17 Tamuz and 9 Av (mourning for the sin of the golden calf, and the sin of the ten spies), the counting of the Omer.

Additionally, weddings are not planned for the Sabbath, or any other holy day such as Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, etc.

Wine and Weddings

It is not by accident that it was at a wedding that Messiah first revealed Himself. It is not by accident that He did it by performing a miracle that turned water into wine. It was not just wine, but apparently fine wine.

Read and comment on what the master of the wedding feast said in **John 2:9-10**:

In light of Messiah's miracle of turning water to wine, comment on the following passages:

Isaiah 25:6:

Song of Songs 7:9:

Jeremiah 31:10-14:

Zechariah 10:6-12:

How do you think biblical weddings, and the joy surrounding them relates to the Final Redemption when God sets all things right?

Ritual Steps of Nisu'im

Those in western cultures can immediately identify that they are participating in a wedding ceremony when a clergyman stands up in front of a group and says phrases such as “dearly beloved, we are gathered here today” or “does anyone here have any reason why this man and this woman should not be joined in holy matrimony.” Such phrases are so common in western culture that we immediately relate to them.

As people of the Bible we should even more so relate to the steps of *nisu'im* in a Jewish wedding. After all, these are far more ancient than our western traditions, and they incorporate

the very language and imagery of Scripture. Most importantly, the Sages (with the support of Scripture) point out that *kiddushin* and *nisu'im* are a reenactment of the marriage of God to His bride, Israel.

The most common steps in *nisu'im* ceremonies since ancient times include:

- *Mikveh* – immersion for the bride
- *Tzom* – bride and bridegroom fast from sunrise until after the *chupah*
- *Badeken* – the veiling of the bride
- *Chupah* – bride and bridegroom under the marriage canopy
- *Ketubah* – the *ketubah* is read and witnesses identified
- *Sheva B'rachot* – the Seven Blessings
- *Im Eshkachech* – “If I forget you Jerusalem” and the breaking of the glass
- *Yichud* – seclusion for bride and bridegroom

In the next lesson, we will examine each of these steps in light of their Scriptural significance.

Act It Out

How will you act out what you learned in this lesson about your relationship to **the** Bridegroom?

Lesson Three: *Nisu'in* – Part Two

Nisu'in Steps

In the previous lesson we briefly looked at the main steps in the Jewish wedding ceremony known as *nisu'in*. In this lesson we will look at each step in greater detail.

- *Mikveh* – immersion for the bride
- *Tzom* – bride and bridegroom fast from sunrise until after the *chupah*
- *Badeken* – the veiling of the bride
- *Chupah* – bride and bridegroom under the marriage canopy
- *Ketubah* – the *ketubah* is read and witnesses identified
- *Sheva B'rachot* – the Seven Blessings
- *Im Eshkachech* – “If I forget you Jerusalem” and the breaking of the glass
- *Yichud* – seclusion for bride and bridegroom

Mikveh

The bride goes to the *mikveh* [immersion] prior to the ceremony. She has not seen her bridegroom for at least the previous seven days, and she is making herself ready for the wedding with the same type of ritual bath that preceded entrance to the Tabernacle and Temple in ancient times.

Read and comment how this relates to **Exodus 19:10-14** and **Ephesians 5:25-27**:

Tzom

Because the wedding day is treated like a personal Yom Kippur, the bride and bridegroom fast from sunrise until they are secluded together in the *yichud*. Traditionally, on this day both bride and bridegroom have all previous sins forgiven on this day, starting their life together with “a clean slate.” They will both be wearing white under the *chupah*, and the bride will wear no jewelry.

Read and comment how this relates to **Revelation 19:7-8**:

Badeken

The bridegroom personally veils the bride. This harkens back when Rebekah veiled her face before meeting Isaac. As well, the veiling is related to the *chupah* and the *yichud*, where this is where the bridegroom “covers” his bride, signifying that her beauty is reserved solely for him.

Read and comment how this relates to **Exodus 19:17-19**:

Chupah

Like the veiling, there is significance to the covering of the bride and bridegroom. The *chupah* is where the bride and bridegroom meet to finalize their nuptials. The *chupah* is considered the bridegroom’s domain. The bridegroom is led to the *chupah* first. The bridegroom is led to the *chupah* by his father (and sometimes by his father-in-law). This procession is a very holy time for the bridegroom. From the moment he begins to walk to the *chupah* until his bride

completes her seven circuits around him, God looks down upon him with great love.

Read and comment how this relates to **Nehemiah 9:11-13** and **Isaiah 4:5**:

Unlike a western wedding, the focus of a Jewish wedding is not on the bride, but on the bridegroom. This is why the bride's procession to the *chupah* does not end when she approaches her bridegroom under the *chupah*. When they meet under the *chupah*, she then makes seven circuits around him. These seven circuits around her husband are infused with great symbolism for the bridegroom. Since his *bar mitzvah*, he has wrapped *tefillin* each weekday morning for prayers. Each time he has wrapped his arm with the leather strap of *tefillin*, he has recited a prayer from Hosea chapter 2, where God vows His faithfulness to His bride, His people.

Read and comment on the significance of God's declaration in **Hosea 2:19:20**:

Read and comment on the prophecy of the Messianic Age in **Jeremiah 31:22**:

Ketubah

As part of *nisu'in*, the *ketubah* is read and the witnesses are identified. Remember, the *ketubah* is the bride's guarantee from her husband. The *ketubah* is completely her possession.

Read and comment on who the two witnesses were to the *ketubah* at Mount Sinai.

Exodus 19:24-20:2:

Sheva B'rachot

The *Sheva B'rachot* [Seven Blessings] are such an important part of the Jewish wedding that for a proper wedding to occur it is said that all that is required is the presence of a *chupah* and the *Sheva B'rachot* to be said. These seven blessings uniquely compare the bride and bridegroom to the first bride and bridegroom (Chavah and Adam), but more importantly to God and His people. We will devote a later lesson to the *Sheva B'rachot*.

Im Eshkachech

Simcha [joy] is a necessary part of the Jewish wedding. However, because of the prophetic nature of the Jewish wedding, there is a moment for pause and reflection at the height of joy. Because the Messianic Age is revealed as a time of rejoicing for bride and bridegroom, this particular wedding must be understood to ***not yet be that time. That time cannot come, and the Messianic Age cannot begin, until Messiah restores Jerusalem and the Davidic monarchy.*** This prophetic event has always been seen as when the Holy Temple is rebuilt, and Messiah reigns in Jerusalem as King.

So in the midst of the joy of the wedding, we pause to remember the destruction of the Jerusalem and the Holy Temple as the Psalms prophesied would happen. Psalms 137:5 begins with “*im eshkachech*” [if I forget you].

Read **Psalms 137:4-6**, and then read **Jeremiah 16:9** and comment on why even on this day of great joy, we must remember to temper our joy with sorrow.

Now you know why this intermission is climaxed by the sharp sound of glass breaking under the bridegroom’s foot.

Now read and comment on **Jeremiah 33:7-14** and how we look forward to a day when we will know only the joy such as at a wedding.

The moment the glass is broken, the wedding guests are released from their sorrow for Jerusalem, which will be taken away in the Messianic Age. They all respond “*Mazel Tov!*” Judaism does not believe in “luck” (good or bad), but only in the providence of our faithful God; thus this phrase is not a phrase to wish “good luck” but rather to congratulate them on their marriage.

Yichud

Until the moment when the bride and bridegroom are secluded together in the *yichud* room, they have been forbidden to be alone together. Ever. For their entire lives they have not been secluded with any person of the opposite sex other than briefly with immediate family until this moment as husband and wife. In the *yichud*, with the door locked and guarded, they will break their individual fasts together. The bride will bless her husband, “*May you merit to have a long life, and may you unite with me in love from now until eternity. May I merit to dwell with you forever.*” She will then don her jewelry, and after just a few moments alone (for propriety), they will emerge from seclusion and be introduced to the wedding guests as a married couple.

The word *yichud* comes from the root *echad*, and refers not only seclusion, but unity.

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared **as a bride adorned for her husband**. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “**Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**”*

Revelation 21:1-4

Act It Out

How will you act out what you learned in this lesson about your relationship to **the** Bridegroom?

Lesson Four: *Eshet Chayil* – Part One

The Accomplished Woman

One way to learn about a bridegroom is to listen to how he describes his bride. We can learn how the Bridegroom speaks by listening to what He says about *Eshet Chayil*: the accomplished woman.

Proverbs 31:10-31 praises *Eshet Chayil*. Who is this most remarkable woman? These last twenty-two verses of King Solomon's *mishlei* [proverbs] are set in an acrostic. Each verse begins with a Hebrew letter, starting with *alef* and ending with *tav*. The Sages considered these twenty-verses as practical, representative, and metaphorical. They are practical, because they describe the ideal Jewish woman. They are representative because various righteous women are easily identified. They are metaphorical because the attributes of *Eshet Chayil* are seen in Israel, the Torah, and the Sabbath.

Twenty-Two Letters

Like Psalms 119 and Psalms 145, Proverbs 31:10-31 is outlined by the *alef-bet*. These twenty-two letters grouped together embody perfection. These words of praise for the virtuous woman are closely related to the praises of the Torah. Rabbi Yitzchak bar Nechemiah (*Yalkut Shimoni*) said, “Just as God gave the Torah with twenty-two letters of the Alef-Bet, so He praises righteous women with the twenty-two letters.” Rav Acha said, “Whoever marries a righteous woman is as if he had observed the entire Torah from beginning to end, and that is why *Eshet Chayil* is written according to the [twenty-two letters in the Hebrew] Alef-Bet.”¹

Alef: Eshet Chayil (verse 10)

An accomplished woman...

¹ *Mishlei Volume 2*. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2007. p.648

There are various translations for the word *chayil* [חַיִל]. When paired with “*eshet*” [woman] it is rendered “accomplished”, “valiant”, “virtuous,” “valiant,” “excellent,” or “renowned.” So which is it? Why the difficulty in finding the meaning for the title of a woman so highly lauded?

The first usage of the word is found in Genesis 34:29, where it is translated, “wealth.” Similarly, Ibn Ezra saw the usage in Deuteronomy 8:17 and Jeremiah 15:13 as referring to money. Thus he comments that *Eshet Chayil* refers to a wife who is industrious. The Vilna Gaon describes her as a woman who protects her husband, because *chayil* refers to “strength” or a “warrior” (Exodus 14 refers to Pharaoh’s host as *chayil*).¹ In *Tanna DeVeI Eliyahu Rabbah*, the Sages note that *Eshet Chayil* is ***the woman who does the will of her husband.***

In practical terms, the righteous wife influences and helps her husband obey his inner will, which seeks to obey HaShem (Romans 7:21).

Comment on the language of the Bridegroom from **Exodus 24:7**:

Bet: Batach bah lev (verse 11)

Her husband’s heart trusts in her...

Such a wife elicits absolute confidence from her husband. Knowing that she is *Eshet Chayil*, he is confident that his home is completely safe. He knows that he will not lack any gain while he is away, and does not need to rush back because he fears for his home.

¹ *Ibid*

Rabbi Moshe Alshich commented that the husband of *Eshet Chayil* has complete trust in his wife, because she determines what is permitted and what is forbidden in the household.¹

Numerous commentators speak of this quality especially evident in Sarah. Abraham had absolute confidence in Sarah (see why in **1Peter 3:1-5** – it points back to *alef*).

Comment on the language of the Bridegroom from **Matthew 16:19**:

Gimel: G'maltu tov (verse 12)

She bestows goodness upon him...

The verse says, “all the days of her life.” This wife’s devotion is constant and abiding, in times of wealth, poverty, old age, and youth.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Proverbs 12:4:

Proverbs 19:14:

¹ *Ibid* p.651

Dalet: Darshar tzemer ufish'tim (verse 13)

She seeks wool and flax...

Clothing is often used as a metaphor to describe how “good deeds” are clothing for the soul – but these two clothing materials bear special significance.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Deuteronomy 22:11; Revelation 19:7-8:

Deuteronomy 15:37-41 (note: traditionally, *tzitzit* [tassels] are made with cords made from flax plus one cord made from dyed wool):

Hey: Haitah ko'oniyot socher (verse 14)

She is like a merchant's ships...

Rabbi Moshe Alshich said the merchandise of *Eshet Chayil* is her good deeds, and the ships are her soul. It is as if her soul travels to the heavenly court every night to carry her merits, thereby laying up treasure not only for this life, but also for the World to Come.¹

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Proverbs 15:6:

¹ *Ibid* p.655

Matthew 6:19:

Vav: Vatakom b'od lailah (verse 15)

She arises while it is still night...

Eshet Chayil is zealous and diligent. This verse seems to describe more than just the outstanding industry of this wife. Metaphorically, it also speaks of the person who can rouse their soul even in spiritual darkness – though the reward for good deeds is not yet evident, her maidens (i.e. her good deeds) are fed with the words of the Torah.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Matthew 26:36-45:

Proverbs 20:13:

Deuteronomy 8:1-3:

Zayin: Zam'mah sadeh vaticachehu (verse 16)

She envisions a field and buys it...

The Sages noted the peculiar grammar and spelling in this verse. Differing conclusions were drawn for the reason that the word נָטְעָה [ns'a = she planted] lacks the final *hey* denoting feminine gender. One Rishon, Rabbi Menachem ben Solomon ha-Meiri, explains that נָטְעָה [ns'a

= she planted] is written in the masculine gender, but read in the feminine gender, which implies it is her husband that does the planting, but it she is the force behind the work.¹ Or perhaps it is the reverse?

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Jeremiah 31:1-6:

Isaiah 65:17-25:

John 4:33-38:

Chet: Chagrah v'oz motneiha (verse 17)

With strength she girds her loins...

The Meiri notes that *Eshet Chayil* is not naturally strong, but that she strengthens herself by motivation and discipline². Ironically, she then does not take credit for her achievements, but considers that her strength comes from HaShem.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Psalms 29:11:

¹ *Ibid*, p.656

² *Ibid*, p.657

Isaiah 12:2:

Luke 6:40:

Hebrews 12:11:

Tet: Ta’amah ki tov sachrah (verse 18)

She discerns that her enterprise is good...

Eshet Chayil knows that her good deeds have eternal outcome. Her spiritual “enterprise” pays eternal dividends. Once again, a peculiar spelling got the attention of the Sages. בַּלַּיִל [b’laila = at night] is missing the letter *hey*. Rashi notes that there is one other place in the TaNaKh where “night” is spelled incorrectly in the same way: Exodus 12:42. This spelling in Proverbs 31:18 is meant to remind us of the night on which the Egyptian firstborn were killed is described as “the night of watching.” Because Israel obeyed HaShem’s instructions for the lamb’s blood on the doorpost, the **night of terror** for the Egyptians was a **night of deliverance** for Israel. The lamp of good deeds is not extinguished by death [night], but continues to burn.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Psalms 119:55:

Proverbs 6:23:

Matthew 5:14-16:

Yod: Yadeha shilchah vakishor (verse 19)

She stretches out her hands to the distaff...

The distaff and spindle are parts of a spinning wheel, used to make clothing. *Eshet Chayil* is very industrious outside of the home, but does not forget her duties in the home. She does not neglect the preparation necessary for good deeds [i.e. clothing]. The Sages noted that the verbs used in verse 19 are almost the same ones used in verse 20. *Eshet Chayil's* labor in the home is directly related to her acts of charity outside the home.

Read **Titus 2:3-5** and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Kaf: Kapah parsah le'ani (verse 20)

She spreads out her palm to the poor man...

The actions in both of the halves of this verse at first appear to be the same. The Sages, however, noted that not only are her actions different, they are dependent upon what kind of poor person is receiving her charity. To the first, who is humiliated by his need, she secretly gives. To the second, who is completely destitute, she reaches out publicly, and gives a double portion.

Read **James 1:27-2:8** and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Lamed: Lo tira l'vetah mishaleg (verse 21)

She fears no snow for her household...

The righteous woman does not fear trouble or tribulation, knowing that she has clothed her household in the clothing of good deeds. *Yalkut Shimoni* identified that her household being clothed in scarlet [שָׁנִים] as a reference to blood of circumcision. On the other hand, *Midrash Tanchuma* renders the word not as “scarlet” but as “two” since the spelling is identical in the vowel-less original text. *Midrash Tanchuma* relates this word to Torah commandments with double verbs (i.e. Deuteronomy 15:8, 10).

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Deuteronomy 15:8:

Deuteronomy 15:10:

We will continue with *Eshet Chayil* in the next lesson.

Act It Out

How will you act out what you learned in this lesson about your relationship to **the** Bridegroom?

Lesson Five: *Eshet Chayil* – Part Two

The Accomplished Woman

In the previous lesson, we began looking at how Proverbs 31:10-31 outline *Eshet Chayil*, the “accomplished woman.” The twenty-two attributes are identified by the twenty-two letters of the *alef-bet*, the Hebrew alphabet. At the literal level they speak of the ideal Jewish woman. On another level, they speak of the people of God (His “bride”). We have looked at the deeper level from *alef* to *lamed*. We now continue with the letter *mem*.

Mem: Marvadim astah lah (verse 22)

She made for herself luxurious bedspreads...

מַרְבָּדִים [marvadim = expensive coverings, luxurious bedspreads, tapestry] seems to relate more to expense. The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michal) comments that this should be “expensive jewelry” and that HaShem has blessed her handiwork.¹ In reference to her attire (linen and purple), again we see the mixture of cloth, linen and wool. Such a mixture is only permitted for High Priestly garments, and the *tzitzit* of every Israelite man.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Revelation 3:18:

Proverbs 8:15-21:

¹ *Ibid*, p.661

Revelation 19:8; 19:14:

Nun: Noda bash'arim ba'lah (verse 23)

Her husband is distinctive in the councils...

This righteous woman is recognized and praised because she is the wife of **her** husband who is known as great and wise.

Read **1Peter 2:9** and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Samech: Sadin astah vatimkor (verse 24)

She makes a cloak and sells [it]...

Eshet Chayil not only is industrious enough to provide for her own needs and the needs of her household, she is able to add to the family's wealth through her work. The Hebrew does not say that she "sells" the belt, but rather "gives" it. Enterprise and charity are motivated by the same quality.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

2Timothy 3:10:

James 1:27:

Ayin: Oz v'hadar l'vushah (verse 25)

Strength and majesty are her raiment...

Once again clothing plays an important role in describing this righteous woman. At the literal level, we can easily see how righteous women, though modestly dressed, seem to be adorned with far more. Metaphorically, raiment alludes to her good deeds. In this case, it refers to her **lifetime** of good deeds. The Hebrew literally says, “she laughs” when speaking of the time to come (the last days, the Day of Judgment). It is with confidence and joy that she awaits her reward in the World to Come – because she is clothed with strength and majesty, i.e. her obedience to the King of kings.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Job 29:14:

Isaiah 61:10:

Revelation 19:6-8:

Pey: Piha patchah v'chochma (verse 26)

She opens her mouth with wisdom...

This wise woman teaches others. The Sages asked a question about the phrase “the Torah of kindness” from this verse. Is there even such a thing as the Torah without it being “the Torah of kindness”?

Rabbi Eleazar further stated, "What is the purport of what was written, 'She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and the Torah of lovingkindness is on her tongue?' Is there then a Torah of lovingkindness and a Torah which is not of lovingkindness? But the fact is that Torah [which is studied] for its own sake is a 'Torah of lovingkindness', whereas Torah [which is studied] for an ulterior motive is a Torah which is not of lovingkindness."

b.Sukkah 49b

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Titus 2:1-5:

Philippians 1:15:

Tzadi: Tzofi'ah halichot betah (verse 27)

She anticipates the ways of her household...

Her diligence is evident on the literal level. Delving deeper, we can see that she is not satisfied with her studies until she is confident that she has discovered how a Scripture passage should be lived out. The Vilna Gaon refers m.*Pirkei Avot* 3:21 to explain this concept. He read the saying, "*if there is no flour, there is no Torah*" to mean that if a she does not work hard (i.e. to grind) in her study of Torah, she will never know how to live out what she reads.¹

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Psalms 111:2:

¹ *Ibid*, p.666

Psalms 119:45:

Psalms 119:155:

2Timothy 2:15:

Kof: Kamu vaneha vay'ash'ruha (verse 28)

Her children have risen and praised her...

No doubt every mother and wife who has had this blessing sung to them on Erev Shabbat, can attest to the joy that comes from raising children who honor her, and a husband that praises her. On another level, this also speaks of her good deeds (i.e. her children) that attest to her righteousness, and the praise that HaShem (i.e. her husband) heaps His righteous ones.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

1Peter 2:12:

Revelation 14:13; 20:12:

Ephesians 5:25-27:

Resh: Rabot banot asu chayil (verse 29)

Many women have amassed achievement...

This verse points us back to verse 10. This woman is the most valuable of all. There is no comparison to her.

Read the following passages and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Song of Songs 6:9:

Exodus 19:3-6:

Shin: Sheker hachen v'hevel hayofi (verse 30)

Grace is false, and beauty vain...

Whether one is beautiful or not is not by our choice. What we look like is HaShem's work. Praise for *Eshet Chayil* comes not from what HaShem has done, for that is praising Him. Rather, praise for this woman should be focused on what ***she has done***. It is her fear of HaShem that earns her praise. The Vilna Gaon compares this to studying the Torah. He said that there are three levels of Scripture study:

1. Those who learn from Scripture to get honor and wealth.
2. Those who learn from Scripture to gain favor from God.
3. Those who learn from Scripture because it reveals the will of God.

In the first case, they seek grace in the eyes of others. In the second case, they seek to beautify themselves in God's eyes. In these first two cases, the results do not last. They cannot even be

compared to the third level, which is for the sake of the greatness of God alone.¹

Read **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14** and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Tav: T'nu lah mip'ri yadeiha (verse 31)

Giver her the fruits of her handiwork...

There is reward in this life, and there is reward in the World to Come. This verse speaks of both, in the literal level as well as a deeper level. Our deeds bring consequences (good and bad) in this life and they follow us to the Day of Judgment. We know that God is both just and full of lovingkindness. His justice demands punishment for evil and reward for good. His lovingkindness provides for forgiveness through the work of Messiah.

Read **Psalms 19:7-11** and comment on the language of the Bridegroom:

Act It Out

How will you act out what you learned in this lesson about your relationship to **the** Bridegroom?

¹ *Ibid*, p.669

Lesson Six: Song of Songs

The Torah Is A Love Story

When some people first read *Song of Songs* they are often struck with the beauty of the poetry, the deep romance... and the inappropriateness of finding it in a holy book! Such a reaction misunderstands all of Scripture. The intimacy of the Garden of Eden, where we walked and talked with the Infinite One is the beginning of a very satisfying **love story**. The language of the Bridegroom beckons us to see the Torah and balance of Scripture as the poetry of the Bridegroom wooing His bride. *Song of Songs*, speaking in the intimate language of lovers puts the focus on **the relationship** between God and His people. This is why Rabbi Akiva called *Song of Songs* the “Holy of Holies.”

King Solomon, who built the Holy Temple for his father King David, wrote *Song of Songs*. The Temple, the Torah, and the language of the Bridegroom are inextricably linked. The Temple is the protocol whereby God’s people, the bride, can meet with their Bridegroom. The Torah is our *ketubah*, our written promise of His fidelity. Solomon understood this relationship.

Literal, Homiletic

There is confusion in some students of the Bible as to how to read some passages, whether literal or allegorical. There is reason for concern, for to confuse the two can sometimes bring dramatically different behavior on the reader’s part. The Sages of Israel taught that Scripture often speaks in similes and parables, and yet the literal and the allegorical meaning are not always equally true. When it is true that only the deeper meaning is intended in the use of poetic language, then the truly **simple** meaning is **not** the literal words of poetry, but rather the thought the words convey. As an illustration:

*But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.*

*Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief
That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.*

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2

We read these lines and understand that they use poetic language to describe Juliet as being more beautiful than the moon on a moonlit night. Because poetic language is being used, we do not ascribe equal weight to the literal words themselves. No, Romeo is not describing light coming from the window, or the rising sun. He is describing Juliet on a moonlit night. No, the moon is not envious, it is not sick or pale with grief. Romeo is simply praising Juliet's beauty, or more truthfully, his response to how he sees her.

The Poetry of Song of Songs

Song of Songs is not an account of Solomon and some unnamed woman. It is written in poetry and tells the story of God (the King), and Israel (the maiden). The simple meaning of *Song of Songs* describes God and His people, in poetic language. That does not mean we cannot learn about a human relationship between bride and bridegroom from it. Better still, we should be able to better understand our relationship with the Bridegroom, when we live His language out in our personal lives and in our relationships.

The Sages remark that because of the allegorical language of *Song of Songs*, we should understand that ***the thoughts being conveyed are otherwise indescribable***. After all, we are reading about the intimate relationship between the Infinite God and His very finite beloved.

Solomon foresaw through Ruach HaKodesh [the Holy Spirit], that Israel is destined to suffer a series of exiles and will lament, nostalgically recalling her former status as God's chosen beloved. She will say, "I will return to my first husband for it was better with me then than now" (Hosea 2:9). The children of

Israel will recall His beneficence and “the trespass which they trespassed” (Leviticus 26:4). And they will recall the goodness which He promised for the End of Days.

The prophets frequently likened the relationship between God and Israel of that of a living husband angered by a straying wife who betrayed Him. Solomon composed Shir haShirim [Song of Songs] in the form of the same allegory. It is a passionate dialog between the Husband (God) who still loves His exiled wife (Israel), and a “veritable widow of a living husband” (2Samuel 20:3) who longs for her husband and seeks to endear herself to him once more as she recalls her youthful love for him and admits her guilt.

God too is “afflicted by her afflictions” (Isaiah 63:9), and He recalls the kindness of her youth, her beauty, and her skillful deeds for which He loved her so. He proclaimed that He has “not afflicted her capriciously” (Lamentations 3:33), nor is she cast away permanently. For she is still His wife, and He her husband, and He will yet return to her.

Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki’s [RASHI] introduction to *Song of Songs*¹

RASHI’s Paraphrase

To have a better understanding of how the language of the Bridegroom is not merely a conveyance of information, but a shared experience, we will be looking at several passages in *Song of Songs*, and then compare Scripture with RASHI’s paraphrase of *Song of Songs*. RASHI, usually the ultimate Scriptural literalist, thought that *Song of Songs*’ simplest meaning was that of the Jewish wedding and marriage shared by those living a Torah life. Thus, the shared life experiences, conveyed in the language of the Bridegroom, bring deep meaning to the poetry of *Song of Songs*.

Read the following passages and then read RASHI’s paraphrase of the same passage. Don’t cheat, read the Scripture passage **before** reading RASHI’s paraphrase! The space left after the

¹ *Shir haShirim*. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications Ltd, 1976-1996. p.67

Scripture reference is for your comments.

Song of Songs 1:1-6:

RASHI:

The song that excels all songs dedicated to God, the King to Whom peace belongs.

Israel to HaShem:

Communicate Your innermost wisdom to me again in loving closeness, for Your friendship is dearer than all earthly delights. Like the scent of goodly oils is the spreading fame of Your great deeds; Your very name is Flowing Oil, therefore have nations loved You.

Upon perceiving a mere hint that You wished to draw me, we rushed with perfect faith after You into the wilderness. The King brought me into His cloud-pillared chamber; whatever travail we shall always be glad and rejoice in Your Torah. We recall Your love more than earthly delights, unrestrainedly do they love You.

Israel to the nations:

Though I am black with sin, I am comely with virtue, O nations who are destined to ascend to Jerusalem; though sullied as the tents of Kedar, I will be immaculate as the draperies of Shlomo. Do not view me with contempt despite my swarthy skin, for it is but the sun which has glared upon me. The alien children of my mother were incensed with me and made me a keeper of the vineyards of idols, but the vineyard of my own true God I did not keep.¹

Song of Songs 2:10-14:

¹ *Ibid*, p.69-81

RASHI:

Israel:

My Beloved called out and said to me: "Arise My love, My fair one, and go forth. For the winter of bondage has passed, the deluge of suffering is over and gone. The righteous blossoms are seen in the land, the time of your song has arrived, and the voice of your guide is heard in the land. The fig tree has formed its first small figs, ready to ascend to the Temple. The vines are in blossom, their fragrance declaring they are ready for libation. Arise My love, My fair one and go forth! O My dove, trapped at the sea as if in the clefts of the rock, the concealment of the terrace. Show Me your prayerful gaze, let Me hear your supplicating voice, for your voice is sweet and your countenance comely."¹

Song of Songs 4:6-12:

RASHI:

HaShem:

Until My sunny benevolence was withdrawn from Shiloh and the protective shadows were dispersed by your sin. I will go to Mount Moriah and the hill of frankincense where you will be completely fair My beloved, and no blemish will be in you. With Me you will be exiled from the Temple, O bride, with Me from the Temple until you return; then to contemplate the fruits of your faith from its earliest beginnings from your first arrival at the summit of Snir and the mountain of Hermon, the lands of mighty Sichon and Og, as impregnable dens of lions, and mountains of leopards. You captured My heart, My sister, O bride, you captured My heart with but one of your virtues, with but one of the precepts that adorn you like beads of a necklace resplendent. How fair was your love in so many settings, My sister, O bride, so superior is your love to wine and your spreading fame to all perfumes. The sweetness of Torah drops from your lips, like honey and milk it lies under your tongue; your very garments are scented with precepts like the scent of Lebanon. As chaste as a garden locked, My sister, O bride; a spring locked up, a fountain sealed.²

¹ *Ibid*, p.107-113

² *Ibid*, p.133-141

Song of Songs 4:16b-5:6:

RASHI:

Israel:

Let but my Beloved come to His garden and enjoy His precious people.

HaShem:

To Your Tabernacle Dedication, My sister, O bride, I came as if to My garden. I gathered My myrrh with My spice from your princely incense; I accepted your unbidden as well as your bidden offerings to Me; I drank your libations as pure as milk. Eat, My beloved priests! Drink and become God-intoxicated, O friends!

Israel:

I let my devotion slumber, but the God of my heart was awake! A sound! My Beloved knocks!

HaShem:

Open your heart to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My perfection; admit Me and My heart is filled with dew-like memories of Abraham; spurn Me and I bear collections of punishing rains in exile-nights!

Israel:

I have doffed my robe of devotion; how can I don it? I have washed my feet that trod Your path; how can I soil them? In anger at my recalcitrance, my Beloved sent forth His Hand from the portal in wrath, and my intestines churned with longing for Him. I arose to open for my Beloved and my hands dripped myrrh of repentant devotion to Torah and God and my fingers flowing with myrrh to remove the traces of my foolish rebuke from the handles of the lock. I opened for my Beloved; but, alas, my Beloved had turned His back on my plea and gone. My soul departed at His decree! I sought His closeness but could not find it; I beseeched Him but He would not answer.¹

¹ *Ibid*, p.143-151

Song of Songs 6:2-4:

RASHI:

Israel:

My Beloved has descended to His Temple-garden, to His incense-altar, yet still He grazes my brethren remaining in gardens of exile to gather the roseate fragrance of their words of Torah. I alone am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine, He Who grazes His sheep in rose-like pastures.¹

Song of Songs 8:3-5:

RASHI:

Israel:

Despite my laments in Exile, His left hand supports my head and His right hand embraces me in support. I adjure you, O nations destined to ascend to Jerusalem, to what vain purpose do you dare cause hatred or disturb this love while it yet gratifies?

HaShem:

How worthy she is who rises from the desert bearing Torah and His Presence, clinging to her Beloved!

Israel:

Under Sinai suspended above me, there I roused Your love, there was your people born a mother to other nations, there she endured the travail of her birth.²

¹ *Ibid*, p.161-163

² *Ibid*, p.193-195

Song of Songs 8:10-14:

RASHI:

Israel:

My faith is firm as a wall, and my nourishing synagogues and study halls are strong as towers! Then, having said so, I become in His eyes like a bride found perfect. Israel was Shlomo's vineyard in populous Jerusalem. He gave His vineyard to harsh, cruel guardians; each one came to extort his fruit, even a thousand silver pieces.

HaShem:

The vineyard is Mine! Your iniquities are before Me!

Israel:

The thousand silver pieces are Yours, Shlomo, and two hundred more to the Sages who guarded the fruit of Torah from our designs.

HaShem:

O My beloved dwelling in far-flung gardens, your fellows, the angels hearken to your voice of Torah and prayer. Let Me hear it that they may then sanctify Me.

Israel:

Flee, my Beloved, from our common Exile and be like a gazelle or a young hart in Your swiftness to redeem and rest Your Presence among us on the fragrant Mount Moriah, site of Your Temple.¹

¹ *Ibid*, p.201-203

Act It Out

How will you act out what you learned in this lesson about your relationship to **the** Bridegroom?

Lesson Seven: The Seven Blessings

Sheva B'rachot

While the bride and the bridegroom are under the *chupah*, seven [*sheva*] blessings [*b'rachot*] are recited for them by honored guests. These seven blessings are so important, not because of who recites them, but because Who is said to have recited them **first**. Tradition teaches that God Himself recited seven blessings for Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden. As well, the Sages teach that at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, there were seven sounds (count them in Exodus 19 and 20). David, in reflecting on the giving of the Torah at Sinai in Psalms 29, lists seven "sounds." All of these appear to allude to the *Sheva B'rachot*.

It is said that a wedding is incomplete if there is no *chupah* or if the *Sheva B'rachot* are not heard. If physically possible, it should be recited in the presence of a *minyan* [a quorum of ten or more men].

The *Sheva B'rachot* are also recited for the bride and bridegroom every day for seven days following the wedding. These are usually recited as part of Grace After Meals in homes where the bride and bridegroom are invited as guests following the wedding.

Sheva B'rachot: From the Garden to The World To Come

The *Sheva B'rachot* remind us of the first wedding in the Garden of Eden, and end with prophecies of the Final Redemption. The order is important. RASHI's explanation¹ of the order is as follows:

¹ Moshe Bamberger *Sheva Berachot*, Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2006, p.51

1. The assembled guests are blessed, for they emulate God Who was a member of the wedding party of Adam and Eve.
2. God created Adam, the first human being.
3. God separated Eve from Adam, so that they could become two distinct people who would then unite in marriage.
4. How can we rejoice while our mother city, Jerusalem, is barren, with her children in exile? So we plead with God to bring her children back to her.
5. May God allow the young couple – who are about to become lifelong companions – to enjoy success in all their lives together, just as He gladdened Adam in the Garden of Eden.
6. Finally, we thank God for gladdening this particular couple in their shared joy, and we pray that He will return pure joy to the streets of Jerusalem (in the Messianic Age).
7. The *Sheva B'rachot* closes with the blessing over the wine, the symbol of joy combined with devotion to God.

Sheva B'rachot

1. *Blessed are You, HaShem, our God King of the Universe, Who has created everything for His glory.*

Read and comment on **Isaiah 43:6-7**:

2. *Blessed are You, HaShem, our God King of the Universe, Who fashions the man.*

Read and comment on **Genesis 2:7**:

3. *Blessed are You, HaShem, our God King of the Universe, Who fashions the man in His image, in the image of His likeness and prepared for him – from himself – a building for eternity. Blessed are You, HaShem, Who fashions the man.*

Read and comment on **Genesis 2:20-24**:

4. *Bring intense joy and exultation to the barren one through the ingathering of her children amid her gladness. Blessed are You, HaShem, Who gladdens Zion through her children.*

Read and comment on **Isaiah 35:10; 51:3; and 56:7**:

5. *Gladden the beloved companions as You gladdened Your creature in the Garden of Eden to the east. Blessed are You, HaShem, Who gladdens groom and bride.*

Read and comment on **Song of Songs 5:16**:

6. *Blessed are You, HaShem, our God King of the Universe, Who created joy and gladness, groom and bride, mirth, glad song, pleasure, delight, love, brotherhood, peace, and companionship. HaShem, our God, let there soon be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the grooms' jubilation from their canopies and of*

youths from their song-filled feasts. Blessed are you, Who gladdens the groom with the bride.

Read and comment on **Isaiah 62:5**:

Read and comment on **Jeremiah 33:10-11**:

7. *Blessed are You, HaShem, our God King of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.*

Read and comment on **Judges 9:13**:

Act It Out

How will you act out what you learned in this lesson about your relationship to **the** Bridegroom?

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