

Chever Torah

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Delving into Torah: Seeding a Heart of Practice, Rabbi Miriam Margles, IJS

LECHA DODI

לְכֵה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאֵת כַּלָּה
פְּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה

L'chah dodi likrat kalah, p'nei Shabbat n'kab'lah

Beloved, Come to meet the bride; beloved come to greet Shabbat.

Verse 1

שָׁמֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדַבּוֹר אֶחָד
הַשְּׂמִיעָנוּ אֵל הַמְּיֻחָד
ה' אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד
לְשֵׁם וּלְתַפְאֵרֶת וּלְתִהְיֶה

“Keep” and “remember”: a single command the Only God caused us to hear; the Eternal is One, God’s Name is One; glory and praise are God’s.

Verse 9

At this final verse the custom has developed for the congregation to rise and turn toward the entrance to the sanctuary, as if to greet the Presence of Shabbat. Some choose to bow slightly at the final line as the bride enters the space.

בְּאֵי בְּשָׁלוֹם עֲטֹרַת בַּעֲלָהּ
גַּם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְצִהֲלָהּ
תּוֹךְ אֲמוּנֵי עַם סִגְלָהּ
בּוֹאֵי כַלָּה בּוֹאֵי כַלָּה

Enter in peace, O crown of your husband; enter in gladness, enter in joy.
Come to the people that keeps its faith. Enter, O bride! Enter, O bride!

Netivot Shalom by Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky (1911-2000)

Our devotional service on Shabbat begins with the practice of “turn from evil” and then “do good” (Ps. 34:15), until we attain the highest degrees possible.

This is the sense of “Keep and Remember were expressed in one speech”.

“Keep (*shamor*)” represents the negative commandments and refers to “turn from evil”, to be liberated from all negative matters to which we are enslaved during the week.

“Remember (*zakhor*)” are the positive commandments and refers to “do good”, to receive the light and holiness of Shabbat.

EXODUS 4:6-8

לֵכוֹ אָמַר לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם
וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֹתָם וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזִרְוֹעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים:

Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am GOD.

I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians
and **I will deliver you** from their bondage.

I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements.

וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וַיִּדְעוּתָם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם:

And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God.

And you shall know that I, the ETERNAL, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians.

וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁוַאתִי אֶת־יְדֵי לְתַת אֲתָה לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק
וְלְיַעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֲתָה לְכֶם מוֹרְשָׁה אֲנִי יְהוָה:

I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
and I will give it to you for a possession, I GOD.”

NETIVOT SHALOM by Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky (1911-2000)

The midrash suggests that the Israelites were so fully enveloped in the life, mores and ways of Egypt that they were “like a fetus in the womb of an animal”, enclosed and surrounded, unable to move from its place alone. In this way were the Israelites given over to the power of the *Sitra Achra*. In response, Scripture says “*I will take you out from the burdens of the Egyptians*”....

But, even someone who is not so bound up like the baby in the animal’s womb, in the hands of the *Sitra Achra*, may still be a servant of the *Sitra Achra*, fulfilling its demands. In response, Scripture says “*I will deliver you from their servitude*”. (Note: *Sitra Achra* is a term from the Zohar meaning “the other side [of holiness]”, often used as a synonym for our evil inclination.)

The Israelites were servants of the husk of Egypt, fulfilling its demands, and the Torah warns against this (Lev. 18:3): “*You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwell*”. A further element of the Egyptian exile was that they were enslaved to Egypt...not only were they bound as servants, they were enslaved to them....They were not even able to think their own thoughts, unable even to groan from their suffering. In response, Scripture says “*I will redeem you with an outstretched arm*”.

The first two stages of redemption were partial, for they remained enslaved to Egypt. Only here, where the actual term for redemption (*ga’alti*) appears, were they redeemed from servitude to the husk of Egypt, as this truly required an “outstretched arm”.

All of the above was merely preparation for the stage of “I will take you to be My people”, to become God’s chosen people, the fulfillment of redemption. The Israelites now moved from Egypt’s domain to that of the Omnipresent....

This is the sense of “I will take”, which signifies engagement for marriage (as “taking/*lekichah* is a formal term for *kiddushin*).

But, following this is yet the stage of “I will bring you into the land”, which signifies the consummation of marriage and being brought to a new home, as Scripture says, “I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me” (Ex. 19:4).

Each of these stages of redemption from Egypt represent the stages of the future redemption, as well as those of each individual.

Shabbat brings redemption to the world.... Shabbat itself contains all of these stages of redemption. When we first enter Shabbat, we shake off all that in which we were mired during the week, liberated from all of the forces of the *Sitra Achra* that swirl around us, in the sense of “I will take you out, I will deliver you, I will redeem you”.

Then we arrive at the stage of “I will take you to be My people”, which represents the purpose of Shabbat, for us to cleave to God.

At the Third Meal, the time of deepest desire, we sense the unity of the blessed Holy One and Israel, and we attain the state of “I will bring you to the land”, the ultimate experience of intimacy and wedded bond.

RABBI JONATHAN SLATER

The metaphor of marriage that R. Shalom Noach finds in the last two stages of redemption are grounded in “taking” and “bringing”.

We find both terms in this verse,

כִּי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ ...

A man takes a woman to wife and cohabits with her... (Deuteronomy 22:13)

They appear in the narrative of the union of Isaac and Rebecca,

וַיִּבְרָאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ וַיִּנָּחֵם יִצְחָק אֶת־רֵי אִמּוֹ:

Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife.

Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death. (Genesis 24:67)

In the Jacob story, his marriage to Leah and Rachel was consummated,

וַיְהִי בְעֶרְבַּי וַיִּקַּח אֶת־לֵאָה בָתּוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֶתָּהּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ:

When evening came, he (Laban) took his daughter Leah and brought her to him (Jacob); and he (Jacob) cohabited with her. (Genesis 29:23)

but in that verse it was Laban who “took” *vayikach* Leah to Jacob.

Jacob did not employ the act of engagement. It's absence plays out later when he flees Laban and is accused of “stealing” Laban's daughters. Yet, even then Laban complains,

Then Laban spoke up and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks; all that you see is mine. Yet what can I do now about my daughters or the children they have borne?”(Genesis 31:43)

He would have asserted his continued power over them except that Jacob had now “taken” them, and so made him his family.

These terms then become technical terms employed in halakah as the elements of *kiddushin* (engagement) and *nissuin* (marriage).

The emphasis on the imagery of marriage deepens the quality of experience of Shabbat. Not only is there resonance with Israel as the marriage partner of Shabbat (Gen.R. 11:8), but R. Shalom Noach adds that the goal of Shabbat is “cleaving” to God. There is no experience that expresses love more powerfully than that.

RABBI MIRIAM MARGLES

R. Shalom Noach reaches God's "outstretched arm" into this mire to liberate us from the tyranny of our conditioned, distorted and harmful thoughts. What a beautiful image of support and uplift. In order to be liberated, we need something outside of this swirl of thoughts to break through and reach that part of us that can recognize that which is essentially real and true! Awareness is radical liberation. This process is concretely embodied in the aspects of Shabbat that teach us restraint - the practices of *lo taaseh* (all the things we refrain from doing on Shabbat) that interrupt the mindlessness of not thinking our own thoughts or feeling our own feelings.

The partner to this releasing and turning away, is the fourth phrase of redemption - "I will take you to be My people." The whole purpose of Shabbat, and the core practice of redemption, is *devekut* - intimate connection with the One. Here we actively turn toward and nurture experiences of delight and pleasure, all the goodness of Shabbat that we can savor.

We open into experiences of connection to the true selves and true unity that emerge when the mire is cleared away. As we shift from Egypt's domain to God's, we ask with warm curiosity - where do I already belong? To whom do I already belong? We might get a glimpse of the one thought, the one feeling that remains when all the conditioned thoughts of others fall away - "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." This is the domain of *kedusha*, holiness and *kiddushin*, betrothal to the Beloved. Love and *kedusha* live in the domain where nothing is treated as utilitarian, but is of endless and essential worth and wholeness. Our primary practice is to keep reminding ourselves of the truth of our home here, in the lap of Love, until we know it with every cell of our beings, saturating our awareness.