



A Honeymoon with G-d

The newlywed soldier and our moment with G-d.

The Newlywed Soldier

A number of years ago, during a war in Gaza, there was a story that made world news, about a particular Israeli soldier named Aharon Karov. He was a paratrooper officer who trained the soldiers under his command over the course of several months of preparation for the assault on Gaza.

A few days before the scheduled invasion day, Officer Karov found himself about to get married.

He was given official permission to leave for the Shabbos before his wedding — but right after he was called up to the Torah in the synagogue, he was reactivated and called back to his base because his unit was about to enter Gaza. By Tuesday, because the ground campaign hadn't actually started, the army let him go home again. He was to get married two days later — on Thursday.

The wedding went on as scheduled. But on Friday, before he had a chance to eat breakfast with his new bride, he was called back to his base again. His family didn't know whether they'd celebrate the Shabbos Sheva Brachos with the groom or not.

Two weeks later, Aharon Karov entered a booby-trapped house in Gaza and was critically wounded. Doctors said he only had a few hours to live. The story spread like wildfire around the world — about the

wounded newlywed soldier who hadn't even been able to celebrate his Sheva Brachos with his bride.

Millions of people prayed for him, and the prayers of the masses stood him in good stead. Today, the man is a walking miracle.

In the wake of this fortunately happy story, several members of Israel's Knesset tried to pass a law exempting grooms from military duty during their first year of marriage. And guess what their proposal was based on? It comes right from this week's Torah portion.

The First Year

In the Parshah of Ki Teitzei, which we read this week, the Torah states explicitly: "When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out in the army... He shall remain free for his home for one year and delight his wife, whom he has taken" (Ki Teitzei 23:5).

There is a concept in Halachah, called Shanah Rishonah, the First Year. This means that a groom, during his first year of marriage, is required to spend all his time with his wife. That's why the Torah exempts him from serving in the military, and for the same reason, he is not to travel outside the city, not even for business or work, since he needs to stay home. In general, during the Shanah Rishonah, he should also try not to get too busy — because Shanah Rishonah is dedicated completely towards building up his married life.

The Torah teaches us that in order to build a relationship between a couple, a week or even a month is hardly enough to make it solid and permanent. You need a full year.

In general, we see something interesting — the same periods that we have in mourning, we have with marriage too. As the Rambam writes (Laws of Mourning 1:1): "Moshe Rabbeinu established the seven days of mourning and the seven days of feasting for the Jewish Nation."

Just like there is Shiva when one is mourning for the passing of a close relative, so too, is there seven days of celebration with the groom after his wedding. Just like there is Shloshim, the 30 days of lesser mourning after the passing of a close relative, so too, there are special laws for the young couple during their first 30 days of marriage. And just as there is one year of mourning for the passing of a close relative, so too is there the law of Shanah Rishonah, which requires the groom to “delight” his wife for the course of a full year.

In the Chabad community, young couples who go out on shlichus, to spend their lives doing outreach work, generally head out after the Shanah Rishonah, not right after the wedding.

Now, going back to this proposed new law in Israel, just like there are always going to be people who don't like a particular new law, here too — there are those in Israel who are opposed to this new proposal either. They argue that this law sounds very nice — but the realities are a little more complicated.

They ask, “Why is only a young groom exempted from military duty? What about the father of three kids whose wife is about to have another baby? Is he needed less at home?!” They also point to the only child who helps his aging and ill mother who is in a difficult health situation — is he not needed at home?! And there are endless examples of such situations — why are they not freed from military duty? Why does the Torah love the groom, or the bride, more than the sick mother or the unborn baby?

To answer this, let's step back and take a look at the 613 Mitzvos of the Torah.

Mitzvos You Must Do Yourself

In general, the 613 Mitzvos are divided into two categories: the mitzvos between man and G-d, and the mitzvos between man and

man. (In plain English, these might be called the ritual mitzvos and the ethical mitzvos.)

With the mitzvos between man and G-d, most such mitzvos involve the physical human body — the person must physically perform these mitzvos. For example, men must put tefillin themselves — they can't have someone else put them on for them. Everyone must hear the sound of the Shofar — you can't have someone else hear the Shofar being blown for you. And so on and so forth with all the mitzvos.

With mitzvos between man and man, however, most of these mitzvos can be done by a representative or agent. You don't necessarily have to perform them yourself — you just have to make sure that the mitzvah gets done.

For example, you don't have to personally bury the deceased yourself. However, you do have to make sure that your town has a Chevra Kadisha, a Jewish burial society that will do it for you. You don't have to personally visit the sick (although it's a wonderful thing to do) every Friday at the hospital — but if you know that somebody is sick and in the hospital, you need to make sure that somebody visits him or her. You don't have to do it yourself.

Even such mitzvos like Bris Milah, circumcision, in which you officially are obligated to circumcise your own son, you still don't have to do it yourself — and most of us wouldn't even try. If your hands shake, you simply give the surgical knife to the mohel, and appoint him to be your representative to do the mitzvah for you.

And even the mitzvah of educating your children, which we mention every day in the Shema prayer and which obligates Jewish fathers to teach their sons Torah — if you don't have time or patience to sit and teach your boy, you hire a tutor who does the mitzvah for you.

Perhaps we can say that this is the reason the Torah exempts the

young groom and not the others. A person whose mother is very sick, G-d forbid, has the obligation to honor his mother. But that's not a mitzvah he must personally and physically perform himself — he can hire someone to tend to his parents, or even his expectant wife, to help them.

But there is one mitzvah which is impossible to be done by someone else for you — the mitzvah of delighting your wife. This is something that only you can do. Perhaps that is why it is precisely this mitzvah for which the Torah exempts the young groom from military duty — because this mitzvah cannot be done by anyone else.

Our Moment With G-d

The Midrash tells us that “What G-d does, He tells the Jewish Nation to do” — and even in the marriage of the Jewish Nation and G-d we find the concept of Shanah Rishonah.

The marriage of G-d and the Jewish Nation was the Giving of the Torah, at which the “bride,” the Jewish Nation, and the “groom,” G-d, stayed together for 12 months.

The Jewish Nation arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai “in the third month from the departure of the Sons of Israel from Egypt... on this day, they arrived at the Sinai Desert” (Shmos 19:1). They stayed there until “the second year, in the second month” — which Rashi explains means “that they were at Choreiv [another name for Mr. Sinai] for 12 months minus ten days.”

In Halachah, there is a discussion over what to do with a husband who did not spend the full year with his wife during Shanah Rishonah. Some opinions hold that he needs to make it up. I would like to suggest that all the wives check their calendars and see which days in the first year of marriage, their husbands were out of town alone or otherwise not home for various excuses — and to demand payback of

their debt now.

But seriously, if you were paying attention, you may have heard it said that in the Shanah Rishonah of G-d and the Jews, the first 12 months were lacking ten days.

Perhaps we can say that these ten days are the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, the Ten Days of Repentance from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, during which G-d makes up for the ten lost days. It is during these days that G-d comes to every Jew and stays with him, as the Prophet tells us, “Seek G-d when He is to be found; call upon Him when He is close” — referring, as the Talmud (Tractate Rosh Hashanah 18a) tells us, to the “Ten Days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.”

Let us pray that as the New Year comes upon us, we draw closer than ever to our loving, noble and faithful “husband in heaven,” and may our marriage with him bring on the ultimate honeymoon, the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days, amen!