

Empowering Wives, Renewing our Vows

Category: Holidays, Shavuot

Why is Shavuot compared to a wedding?

Royal Weddings

Good Yom Tov!

Since Shavuot is symbolically represented as the “marriage” of G-d and the Jewish Nation, I’d like to talk today about a more conventional marriage: the royal weddings in the British Royal Family.

When the most recent one took place, it was naturally the most talked-about wedding in the world. Everyone wanted to know how much the dress cost, who was invited—and, more importantly, who wasn’t invited. The whole world obsessed over the fact that the father of the bride was not in attendance, and how much the entire wedding’s total cost actually was. (Security-wise alone, probably a good few million right there.)

But what went far less reported was the fact that the bride, in her previous non-royal lifetime, had been a women’s-rights activist.

Women’s Rights

In 2015, before she became (and now un-became) Princess Meghan, she had actually spoken at the UN Women’s “20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing” event.

At that event, she said the following: “When I was just 11 years old, I unknowingly and somehow accidentally became a female advocate.”

She went on share how, over two decades earlier, she was watching a TV program while at elementary school when a dish-washing liquid commercial came onto the screen. What sparked her attention was its tagline: “Women all over

America are fighting greasy pots and pans.”

“Two boys from my class said, ‘Yeah, that’s where women belong, in the kitchen,’” she said. “I remember feeling shocked and angry and also just feeling so hurt—it just wasn’t right and something needed to be done.”

So her father suggested that she write letters to VIPs about the issue—and in fact, she ended up writing letters to Hillary Clinton (who at the time was First Lady of the United States), as well as to the editor of a children’s magazine and even to the manufacturer of the liquid dish soap.

Within a few weeks, to her surprise, she got responses from all of them—and in fact, one month after that, the dish soap company changed its commercial from “women all over America” to “people all over America.” And it was then that she understood how much influence even an 11-year-old girl could have!

Our Wedding With G-d

By Hashgachah Pratis (Divine Providence), that royal wedding took place the evening of

Shavuos—the very holiday which we are now celebrating, and which celebrates the greatest “wedding” of all time, the “wedding” of G-d and the Jewish Nation. Those nuptials still stand firm after well over 3,300 years; nuptials in which the bride was the Jewish Nation and the groom, no less than the Creator of the Universe Himself.

And for that reason, the Rebbe would note the traditional sources stating that all the customs of a traditional Jewish wedding symbolize the Giving of the Torah one way or another.

Indeed, the entire concept of the Chuppah, the canopy stretched above the bride and groom’s heads, is based on the verse (Shmos 19:17) referring to the Jewish Nation, stating, that they stood “at the bottom of the mountain,” on which Rashi comments, “Its Midrashic meaning is that the mountain was [miraculously] uprooted from its place and imposed over them like a barrel”—and to commemorate that, we set out a Chuppah (Shaarei Nisuin, pg. 131).

Furthermore, the custom is that once under the Chuppah, the groom stands in the

center while the bride circles him seven times—which is based on the concept of G-d being the “Groom” on Mt. Sinai, with the Jewish Nation being the “bride” standing all around Mt. Sinai.

Now, the religious marriage contract used at Jewish weddings is called the Kesubah. It is a document that protects women’s rights. In it, the groom is legally obligated to support his wife. And so, in the analogy at hand, the Torah is Jewish Nation’s Kesubah, by which G-d is obligated to feed and support the Jewish Nation.

And there are many further examples of the analogy.

What’s more, not only is a Jewish wedding a symbol of the Stand at Mt. Sinai, but even the preparations in the run-up to a Jewish wedding remind us of the preparations undertaken by the Jewish Nation before getting the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

As is known, as a preparation for the wedding, the bride will count seven “pure days” and then immerse in a mikvah. So the Rebbe says that the Zohar quotes a teaching that the “bride” at the Giving of the Torah, the Jewish Nation, also needed seven “pure days” by which to purify “herself” from all the idol worship of Egypt. And thus we find in the Torah that immediately after leaving Egypt, the Jewish Nation prepared itself for its upcoming “wedding” over the course of seven weeks—which is the concept of Sefiras HaOmer, the Counting of the Omer (Hisvaduyos 5742, Vol. III, pg. 1534).

For a standard wedding, seven days are enough—but for the marriage of the Jewish Nation and G-d, seven days were hardly enough! And so they counted seven times seven—which are the 49 days of Sefiras HaOmer—and only then did they immerse in the mikvah. As Maimonides writes (Isurei Biah 13:3), “Their immersion took place in the desert, before the Giving of the Torah, as the verse states, ‘And you shall sanctify yourselves today and tomorrow, and wash their clothes.’”

But then something happened that happens at every wedding.

As a general rule, right after they get engaged, grooms are interested in getting married as soon as possible—because for every day the wedding is postponed, it ends up costing him more. Every time the bride gets involved in the planning,

another idea occurs to her: Maybe we should do this? How about we add that? It never ends. Despite that, the bride says that she needs more time to prepare for the wedding—she needs to find the right dress, and so on. And, of course, who *always* wins here? The bride, of course! Because the wedding is “her” day...

And so, too, is the case with the marriage of the Jewish Nation and G-d—the very same disagreement. G-d said to Moshe (Shmos 19:11), “And you shall sanctify yourselves today and tomorrow, and wash their clothes; and they shall be prepared for the third day,” which was the Giving of the Torah.

But Moshe Rabbeinu decided to postpone the wedding by one day—he notified the Jewish Nation that they needed to prepare themselves for three days, and only on the fourth day would the wedding take place. And on that, the Talmud (Tractate Shabbos 87a) tells us that this was one of the three things “that Moshe did of his own reasoning, and G-d agreed with him”—so again, we see that the “groom” bowed to the opinion of the “bride,” and in fact, the “wedding” took place only when the “bride” was ready.

And so, at the Stand at Mt. Sinai, the “groom” arrived under the chuppah before the “bride,” as the verse (Shmos 19:17) states, “And Moshe brought out the people towards the L-rd,” on which Rashi comments: “This means to tell us that the Shechinah went out towards them like a groom stepping forth towards the bride.” And so it is the custom to this very day.

The Process of Emancipation

Now, at the start of their “marriage” to G-d, the Jewish Nation had a yearlong “honeymoon” at the foot of Mt. Sinai. After that, they entered the Land of Israel, where the “husband” was involved in every detail of everything the “wife” did. The Jewish Nation needed G-d’s guidance for every step, because in those days, the “wife” was not independent at all—and every time the “husband” was *not* involved in an open way, the situation deteriorated. But as the years went on, the “wife” became more and more independent, with the “husband” more and more relying on her to make the right decisions.

And thus, for the last 2,000 years, the Jewish Nation has not had any Prophets—because the Jewish Nation is mature and responsible enough to do G-d’s Will, even when not hearing G-d’s Voice through prophecy.

And so, the closer we get to the days of Moshiach, the “wife”—the Jewish Nation—increasingly becomes the one in the marriage who decides the agenda and the future of the marriage.

As is known, what we see here in our physical universe is a reflection of the spiritual universe. And thus, just as in the physical universe we are seeing more and more women gain more and more power and independence, with more and more women setting agendas on the world stage, that’s also exactly what’s happening in the spiritual universe—in the relationship between the Jewish Nation and G-d.

And thus, the decision on when Moshiach will come depends on our actions and our work. G-d can encourage us, awaken us and demand from us—but ultimately, it depends on us.

And just like there is a concept of “renewing vows,” a ceremony in which decades after the wedding, the husband and wife rededicate themselves to each other—and which many couples see as an excuse for a party, complete with new dresses, gifts from the husband, and so on—so too can we say that this is another perspective on why the Jewish Nation has the holiday of Shavuot every year. It’s because we’re getting together on our wedding anniversary, reading the “Kesubah,” the Ten Commandments, and again rededicating ourselves to be faithful to one another.

And so, my friends, I want to wish all of us one thing: “Happy anniversary!”

Good Yom Tov!