

# The Grand Wedding

Category: Bamidbar, Bamidbar

*Why are there so many Israeli weddings, why do we break a glass, and what does it have to do with Shavuot?*

## The Explosion of Weddings

Over the past eight months, an intriguing phenomenon has been unfolding in Israel: the war is encouraging couples to get married.

One might expect a war to cause young couples to postpone their weddings, especially when the groom, and sometimes even the bride, have been drafted into the army. However, the opposite is happening. Couples are organizing small weddings on military bases or in their backyards and tying the knot. Couples who perhaps hadn't planned to marry at all are finding themselves prompted by the war to do so.

There are various psychological explanations for this trend. It could be, for example, the desire for stability amidst the chaos of war; marriage offers a sense of commitment and hope for a better future. Whatever the reason, it is clear that this boosts national morale. The explosion of weddings shows that the Jewish people believe in a brighter future and are making the most important decision of their lives—to establish a permanent home.

## Why Do We Break the Glass?

One of the customs most closely associated with the Jewish wedding ceremony is the breaking of the glass.

The commonly known explanation is that it helps us remember the destruction of the Temple. There is a verse in Psalms (137:6) which says that "I will place Jerusalem above my highest joy." Therefore, during every joyous occasion, especially at weddings—the greatest of celebrations—we break a glass to remember the destruction of the Temple.

However, there's a lesser-known reason as well: it wards off the "evil eye."

According to *Ta'amei HaMinhagim*, "It is customary to break a glass at the wedding to ensure that the evil eye not prevail; because of the large gathering at the wedding, there might be an evil eye, so the glass is broken to let the evil eye focus on the glass instead. This serves as a diversion for the negative forces that always seek destruction and division" (*Ta'amei HaMinhagim*, p. 412). In other words, a perfect wedding is something that could invite the evil eye to sow conflict or division. By breaking something, we demonstrate that even this wedding is not perfect—and the evil eye has no reason to be envious.

## The First Evil Eye

One of the earliest events in Jewish history that touches upon the concept of the "evil eye" is connected to the upcoming holiday of Shavuot.

On the first Shavuot, over 3300 years ago, the Israelites stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and heard the Ten Commandments from G-d. The following day, Moses ascended the mountain and remained there for forty days, at the end of which G-d gave him the two tablets.

These tablets unfortunately didn't have a long lifespan: when Moses descended from the mountain, he saw that the Israelites had made the Golden Calf, and in response, he shattered the tablets.

The next day, Moses ascended Mount Sinai again to pray for G-d's forgiveness for the people, and indeed, G-d forgave them and told Moses to carve two new tablets upon which He would re-inscribe the Ten Commandments. On the first Yom Kippur in Jewish history, G-d gave Moses the second set of tablets.

However, these tablets came with an additional instruction: There was to be no public fanfare, and they were not to be publicly displayed.

When Moses descended with the first tablets, he had not prepared an ark to store them in. All the Jews were able to witness them, causing the interference of the "evil eye," and as a result, they ended up broken. In contrast, Moses said about the second tablets, "I came down from the mountain and placed the tablets in the ark which I had made" (*Devarim* 10:4, see also *Rashi* on *Shemos* 34:3). G-d told Moses to make sure to be modest about it. And, indeed, those tablets have endured to this very day.

# Why Two Rounds?

The Rebbe once pointed out that this story is perplexing. G-d knew that the commotion would lead to the breaking of the tablets. So why did He give the first tablets with such noise and celebration? Why didn't he give them in a more discreet manner from the outset?

The explanation the Rebbe suggested is that receiving the Torah *must* be accompanied by joy. The giving of the first tablets had to be amidst great commotion to inspire excitement and joy among the Jewish people—regardless of the influence of the Evil Eye (Toras Menachem 43:367).

I think this is a profound idea. The giving of the Torah was such a significant event that it had to be done in a dramatic way to imprint itself on the souls of the Jewish people. If the initial event would be quiet and modest, it would fail to inspire us. And well, if this leads to the evil eye, it will need to be corrected later with a second set of tablets. But it cannot diminish the importance of the first tablets being given with major fanfare.

## Why Two Rounds? #2

The Rebbe uses this idea to explain another puzzling aspect of the giving of the Torah:

The Talmud and Midrash say that if the Jewish people had not sinned with the Golden Calf, they would have only received the five books of the Torah and the book of Joshua. The first tablets represented a much shorter version of the Torah, but the second tablets came with many more teachings and interpretations—the Prophets, Writings, and the entire Oral Torah (Nedarim 22b, Shemos Rabbah 46a).

Why was that the case? Chassidic teachings explain that initially, when the Israelites heard G-d's voice during the giving of the Torah, they felt proud and self-important as the chosen people, a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." However, true success in Torah study requires humility and self-nullification, qualities they lacked at the time of the first tablets.

It was only after the sin of the Golden Calf and the breaking of the tablets, when

their hearts were genuinely broken, that they became deserving of the deeper teachings and received the Oral Torah.

If this is all true, it would raise the same question we discussed earlier: if true success in Torah study requires humility, why did G-d allow the Israelites to develop a sense of self-importance, which then necessitated the breaking of the tablets to humble them?

The answer is once again the same. G-d needed to select the Jewish people as His chosen nation, and this selection had to be marked by immense fanfare so that every Jew would understand the privilege and responsibility of being part of the chosen people. If that would result in pride or ego—that would later need to be corrected by the breaking of the tablets.

## **Why We Celebrate Weddings**

We can ask about the custom of breaking the glass at a wedding. If we are concerned about the evil eye to the extent that we break a glass at the end of every Jewish wedding, why do we hold a large wedding with so much celebration? Wouldn't it be better to have a small ceremony in the backyard or the rabbi's office to avoid any concern about the evil eye?

Here, too, the same principle applies: the institution of marriage is the most important institution in the Jewish community. The joy and excitement are essential parts of the experience of building a Jewish home—to share the joy with others and to encourage others to follow suit. If there is a concern about the evil eye, we address it by breaking the glass. This does not diminish the importance of having a grand wedding; it ensures that the celebration is perfect.

## **Our Grand Wedding**

Shavuot is the holiday when G-d wedded the Jewish people. In fact, many wedding customs are based on the events surrounding the giving of the Torah, right up to breaking the glass, which reminds us of the breaking of the tablets.

Shavuot is our “wedding anniversary”: every year, we “renew our vows.” This has recently become popular in America, but we've been doing it each year for three thousand years. When we go to shul to hear the Ten Commandments, it's like

reliving the wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. G-d again chooses us as His people, and we commit to loving Him and following the path of Torah and mitzvos.

Everyone is invited to come to shul to celebrate our wedding day. The groom will be there—so let's make sure that the bride doesn't forget to show up either.