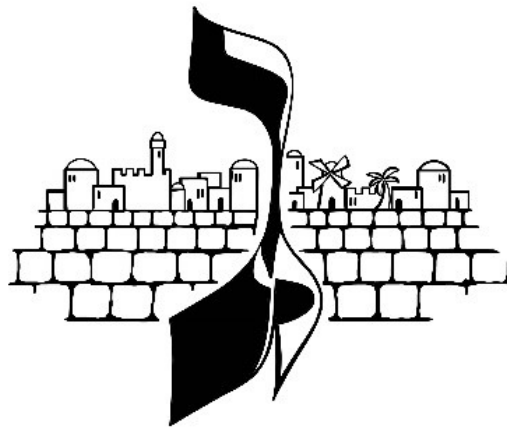


# ברכת רבקה Birkat Rivka

Highlights of the  
Jewish Wedding &  
Sheva Berachot



In Honor of the Wedding of  
Rivka Bracha & Mordechai Hillel Djavaheri  
Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, 5777  
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Cover Art: Rachel Gross  
Orders: mordechai.djavaheri@gmail.com

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PO Box 1037  
Manhasset, NY 11030

יהי רצון שתשרה שכינה במעשי ידינו

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# Introduction

## Purpose

"אמר ר' יוחנן וקשין לזווגן כקריעת ים סוף" (סוטה ב.).

Orchestrating a wedding can be as complex as splitting the sea, both for the families as well as the rabbi. People have questions: "Can we do this? How about that? What's this thing I saw them doing at last night's wedding?" Certainly, it pays to be familiar with the issues, to know what to ask, how to ask, and where to look. The purpose of this pamphlet is to act as a guide in researching those questions. From the erudite yeshiva bachur, to the "kvelling" mother, to the beginner salivating for the juicy and sweet taste of Torah and Mitzvot, there is ample substance to study, in depth in the Beit Midrash, at the dining room table, and while waiting idly at a Chuppah. Coupled with the Halachot are short modular and adaptable Derashot bearing meaningful messages regarding the Jewish marriage.

Though each sentence can host many dozens of pages of elucidations and citations in a footnote, the choice was made to condense to the location in Shulchan Aruch, rulings of relevant contemporary authorities, a sprinkling of Persian and Moroccan traditions, as well as several interesting historical and modern-day discussions. By no means is the content comprehensive in breadth or depth; it's rather merely a taste of a delectable and practical slice of the cake from our wedding with Hashem that we call Torah for readers to deepen and broaden their knowledge in an enjoyable way.

## Acknowledgements

Let this small booklet serve as a token of gratitude to all who have invested in us thus far, including our friends, family, Rebbeim, Morot, and parents, each fulfilling a different part of Hashem's mission to prepare us for our future. In particular, we owe an unending debt of appreciation to my dear Chavruta and his wife, Rav Ike and Shira Sultan, without whom we would never have crossed paths. Be'ezrat Hashem, the Torah learning from this pamphlet should serve as a merit for all of them, especially my grandfather Daniel ben Hillel, after whom we named our son Daniel Ovadia, just short of two months before "Baba" passed away.

Many invested their time in editing and reviewing this work, and their efforts are appreciated. They include R' Simon Basalely, R' Jonathan Cohen, R' Ike Sultan, Micah Hyman, and Yoni Rabinovitch.

Finally, as a side project to being in yeshiva, completing college, planning a wedding, and preparing for marriage, this work is yet incomplete and most probably host to a variety of errors. Kindly send errors, along with any observations, insights, uncertainties, and clarifications to [mordechai.djavaheeri@gmail.com](mailto:mordechai.djavaheeri@gmail.com).

יום חתונתו, ראש חודש תמוז, תשע"ז

מרדכי הלל ג'וואהרי

# Derashot

*Divrei Torah to share,  
especially when asked to speak  
at a Sheva Berachot  
and completely  
unprepared.*

## Getting the Better End of the Deal

### The Start of Every Jewish Marriage

When Avraham Avinu was searching for a final resting place for his cherished and beloved partner in life, Sarah Immenu, he met with a shrewd businessman by the name of Ephron. The property in question was Me'arat HaMachpelah, located in Chevron, a swampy area of little use in agrarian society. Thus, the price should have been affordable, but Ephron tagged it for a whole of four hundred silver Shekalim, a fortune at the time! The crooked Ephron tried to rip off Avraham, who didn't try to bargain. Instead, Avraham made sure to pay in full.<sup>1</sup>

It is quite peculiar that, of the three methods of performing Kiddushin, the one that every Jewish marriage begins with is money, Kiddushei Kessef.<sup>2</sup> What's even more

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<sup>1</sup> Bereshit Chapter 18

<sup>2</sup> Rambam (Hilchot Ishut 1:2, 3:21)



peculiar is that the Gemara<sup>3</sup> derives the very institution of Kiddushei Kessef from conversation with Ephron in the purchase of Me'arat HaMachpelah. Isn't it strange that every Jewish marriage begins with a concept learned from such a sad tale of business, at the hands of such a scoundrel like Ephron?

HaRav Yisroel Chesir, a HANC rebbe who had great influence on me over the years, explains that from this very transaction we see exactly the right attitude each party must have when entering a marriage. Ephron thought Avraham Avinu was such a sucker for willing to pay a fortune for a useless and muddy excuse for a property. In his eyes, it was worthless, and *he* was getting the better end of the deal. At the same time, Avraham Avinu made sure to pay full price for Me'arat HaMachpelah, because every inch of Eretz Yisrael is priceless! What are four-hundred silver shekalim in comparison to a piece of the holiest land on Earth?! As such, they both not only went into the deal each thinking he got the better end of it, but they also continued that way. By extension, every Jewish marriage must operate under the same nature, that each party believes it truly has received the better end of the deal.

## “Buying” a Wife

Consequently, one might fall under the impression that the Torah objectifies women – after all, they're “purchased” with money, just like property. It's essentially a business transaction! HaRav Eli Pielet, a former rebbe in Yeshivat Sha'alvim, points out that it highlights the

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<sup>3</sup> Kiddushin 2a

tremendous and integral underpinnings in marriage: this is the first time we find a purchase of land in Eretz Yisrael in Tanach, and on it we base the very fabric of our holiest interpersonal relationship. The Torah tells us that we should feel the same way about our marriage as we do for Eretz Yisrael – priceless.

By the same token, HaRav Hershel Schachter, Posek of OU Kosher and Rosh Yeshiva of YU, quotes from Rav Shamshon Refael Hirsch<sup>4</sup>, that indeed, the enlightened Jews are right that the Jews “buy their wives” like land, but keep in mind that she remains his as his most valued possession in the world. This purchase was the final step in a lifelong journey and partnership in the joint service of Hashem for Avraham Avinu and Sarah Immenu. With that in mind, every Jewish marriage picks up where that of our perpetually venerated father and mother left off.

## Invei HaGefen beInvei HaGefen

### Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

תנו רבנן, לעולם ימכור אדם כל מה שיש לו וישא בת  
תלמיד חכם וישיא בתו לתלמיד חכם. משל לענבי הגפן  
בענבי הגפן דבר נאה ומתקבל. (פסחים מט.)

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<sup>4</sup> From his commentary to Bereishit 23:19. There, he also notes how peculiar it is that the only two narratives of monetary transactions recorded in Tanach are Avraham Avinu’s purchase of Me’arat HaMachpelah, and Yirmiyahu HaNavi’s purchase of a field in the context of a prophecy regarding the Babylonian conquest of Eretz Yisrael and destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. The two events effectively bookend our nation’s residence in our land.

The Chachamim compare a good match to intertwining grape vines and implore of one to make every effort possible to seek out a fine family and suitor committed to perpetuating Torah-true values. Grape vines cannot stand on their own, but rather need a base, a trellis, something to lean on, wrap around, and grow. Likewise, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach exclaims, Chazal praise such a couple for building their home on the bedrock of our ancestors.<sup>5</sup>

## Grape Vines Over Other Fruits

Though there are plenty of other succulent fruits of Eretz Yisrael to compare to, grapes were chosen specifically, because they are the only fruit whose juice is more valuable than they are. Usually, the fruit, the parent, is more significant than its juice, its offspring, but wine is unique in that it is ultimately principal to the grape.<sup>6</sup> Correspondingly, HaRav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach elaborates, we bless the couple that their offspring should

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<sup>5</sup> Shalmei Simcha page 71. Similarly, the Chachamim compare cheering a Chattan veKallah to *rebuilding* the ruins of Yerushalayim, as opposed to new construction (Berachot 6b). The latter requires hiring an architect and drawing up new plans, while the former demands filling the shoes and designs of the previous structure. We therefore inform the new couple **צאי לך בעקבי הצאן**: they should build their Bayit Ne'eman with the guidelines of our holy tradition of our ancestors and not **ברצון איש ואיש**, according to the unrefined whims of common man. (Ma'or Yisrael Derushim page 308, Derashot Lesmachot by Rav Aharon Zakkai, prolific head of Ohr Yom Tov institutions, page 153, Rav Asher Weiss in Darkei Hora'ah vol. 9 page 240)

<sup>6</sup> Even the Beracha on wine (HaGefen) is more specific and, thereby, significant than the Beracha on grapes (Ha'Etz), while all other fruit juice Berachot are more general (Shehakol) and less significant.

not only be as exemplary as the parents, but also reach even greater heights than the parents did!

Alternatively, regular fruit juices spoil after some time; wine is the only fruit juice that improves with fermentation. As such, Hashem should bless the new couple with a happier and more wholesome marriage as time goes on.<sup>7</sup>

## We Met at the Well

### Should We Go to Starbucks?

While on the run from Paroh, Moshe Rabbenu escaped to Midyan, where he encountered his wife, Tzipporah, at the local well, the Be'er. The Midrash cited by Rashi (Shemot 2:15) explains that Moshe learned to seek a wife at a well from Yitzchak Avinu and Ya'akov Avinu, whose wives were also encountered at a well.

It's somewhat unusual that the Chachamim felt it worthwhile to give us dating advice. Are they simply suggesting one patronize the closest Starbucks to his potential mate's home on his first date or is there perhaps something more substantial than courtship ritual instruction here?

HaRav Asher Weiss – a colossal Talmid Chacham, expert in Jewish medical ethics, and Halachic authority of world renown – notes how there are three distinct types of locations from which one can draw water: a Ma'ayan (spring), a Be'er (well), and a Bor (pit or cistern). A

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<sup>7</sup> Shalmei Simcha *ibid.* For a series of similar and additional ideas related to this axiom, see *Derashot Lesmachot* page 155.

Ma'ayan is a product of nature, as is its water supply. Diametrically opposite the features of a Ma'ayan are those of a Bor, which is both dug by man and supplied water by man. The Bor only contains as much water as one pours into it. In between these two extremes lies the Be'er, which is a natural water source uncovered by man.

When the Torah tells us that Moshe Rabbenu was at a well, the Chachamim aren't just pointing out that he got some good dating tips from his great-grandfather; rather, they are highlighting the fact that it was at a Be'er.

With marriage and, similarly, with anything significant, one can neither sit back and expect the spring to be dug and stream of water to perfectly flow for him automatically like a Ma'ayan, nor can he expect to be able to accomplish everything with his own efforts alone as with a Bor. It takes a careful balance between our efforts and making room in our lives for Hashem's graceful blessings to fill it with a healthy, happy, and everlasting marriage. It's well worth it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Along the same lines, Shlomo HaMelech instructs us “שְׁתֵּה-מִיָּם מִבּוֹרְךָ וְנָזְלִים מִתּוֹךְ בְּאֶרֶךְ. יִפּוּצוּ מֵעֵינֶיךָ חֻצָּה בְּרַחֲבוֹת פְּלִגֵּי-מַיִם:” – “Drink water from your own cistern, Running water from your own well. Your springs will gush forth in streams in the public squares.” (Mishlei 5:16-17). Often, this Pasuk is used as a Beracha to others to merit to print their overflowing Torah thoughts. Rav Asher Weiss explains that the same idea appears in the Pesukim as follows: At first, engaging in Torah learning entails an investment of much toil with an equivalent return (Bor). After some time, the effort is met with a stream of aid from HaKadosh Baruch Hu (Be'er), and, eventually, the flow will be perfect and independent of one's efforts (Ma'ayan). (Rav Shay Schachter, Darkei Hora'ah vol. 9 page 244) The Ben Ish Chai (Mishlei Chaim ad loc.) writes similarly. See also Shalmei Simcha page 159 for another approach.

# Halachot

## An Overview of the Jewish Wedding Ceremony

### Basics of Kiddushin and Nissuin

Every Jewish marriage begins with two Halachic steps, **Kiddushin**, also known as **Erusin**, the man's act of initiating marriage by designating his new partner in life, and **Nissuin**, the act of bringing her physically or symbolically into the husband's domain.

Although there are three ways to accomplish Kiddushin, the custom is to give an object of monetary value, specifically a plain ring, as the means of betrothing the bride. Without Kiddushin, the colloquially “engaged” couple is simply committed to eventually marry, but with no Halachic implications to their status. If they were to break up, the former fiancé would not require a Get, while a couple that parts ways after Kiddushin absolutely does.

Effectively, the couple is married already from the moment of Kiddushin and on, but they may not live together until Nissuin. For many generations, these two steps would happen up to a year apart, to give the couple time to prepare themselves financially for the new stage of

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and Sarah is omitted, as they were not yet committed to the observance of monotheism when they got married for us to emulate their behavior. See Kedushat Levi (Parashat Toledot).

their lives, but, nowadays, we do them back to back at the wedding. Nevertheless, we still entertain some form of noticeable division between the two by reading the Ketubah under the Chuppah and sometimes hearing inspiring words of Torah and gratitude to Hashem.

Nissuin is accomplished by entering the Chuppah, which, in the simplest sense, means bringing the bride into the groom's domain, his home, together with the understanding that this is the means of completing their marriage. At the same time, there exist a few competing definitions and flavors of Chuppah, such as covering the bride with her veil (known as Badeken), standing under the Chuppah canopy, spreading out a Tallit over the couple's heads, and being secluded together in a room designated for them. Ashkenazim and Sepharadim have differing customs regarding which routes to take, but, at the end of the day, there's equal reason to celebrate. Preceding the Nissuin and during the seven days of feasting that follow, we recite Sheva Berachot to bless the new couple with a holy and happy marriage.

## At the Wedding

First, the rabbi recites the two Berachot of Bore Peri HaGefen and Erusin, both bride and groom take a drink, then the groom declares the canonical proposal in Hebrew and puts the ring on the bride's finger. The Ketubah is read, and the rabbi may even share a Torah thought. Then, Sheva Berachot are recited, the glass is shattered, and the couple is danced out of the room.

## The Rabbi – Mesader Kiddushin

אמר רב יהודה: כל שאינו יודע בטיב גיטין וקידושין לא  
יהא לו עסק עמהן (קידושין ו.)

As the Halachot of making and breaking a marriage are an intricate field of expertise, every Jewish wedding is orchestrated by an erudite rabbi, a **Mesader Kiddushin**, who is well versed in these laws. If care is not taken in seeking out a qualified Mesader Kiddushin, the marriage could very well be null and void due to the mistakes he will make, which can have many ramifications in the immediate future with respect to living together and down the line in more upsetting circumstances.

The same way one goes to a specialist over a general practitioner for anything more than a standard checkup, it is imperative to appoint someone who knows *these* Halachot (outlined in Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 26-65, in addition to how to write a valid Ketubah and who may marry whom) superbly well, and not just any shul or yeshiva rabbi, whose general or even specific training may not be adequate license for him to run the show. The shelves of the Beit Midrash are brimming with discussions in Halacha attempting to determine the marital status of couples whose marriages were not orchestrated by the right people; it is better to be definitely and happily married than to be a complicated chapter in a great rabbi's book.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Nehar Mitzrayim (Hilchot Kiddushin 1-10), Yalkut Yosef (Sova Semachot 5:1), Shulchan HaLevi (vol. 1 Perek 27:6) and Minchat Asher (vol. 2 Siman 78:2). Some additional considerations when selecting a Mesader Kiddushin include precedence for the rabbi of the community, which family is paying for the wedding, the interests of the Chatten, the Kallah, and even that of the audience. See Teshuvot veHanhagot (vol. 2 Siman 637), Belkvei HaTzon page 271, and Shalmei Simcha chapter 24.



## Family Customs – Minhagim

Jewish communities uphold many holy customs of all sorts of fascinating shades and flavors. Regardless of where we hail from, we're all putting on the same show but on a different stage, with a different cast, wardrobe, and music. Although it's imperative to preserve one's family traditions, compromising on customs is not a cardinal sin or worth causing strife over at such a joyous event. The family should submit to the decisions of the Mesader Kiddushin on all matters of Halacha so as not to spoil the jubilant occasion.<sup>18</sup> It's advisable to discuss these matters prior to the wedding so as not to make a scene.

## Celebrations Prior to the Wedding

### The Henna

Many Sephardic communities herald the forthcoming Simchah by celebrating with a "Henna Party," in which henna, dye produced from a ground up henna plant (*Lawsonia inermis*) mixed in a liquid, is smeared on the Kallah and sometimes the Chattan, as well. With skill, the henna can be applied in complex and remarkable designs.

Though various reasons and symbolisms are offered in explanation for this practice, it seems that the primary reason, at least for Moroccans who do it a week prior to

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<sup>18</sup> Rav Ezra Basri (Dinei Ishut vol. I page 169)