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Discover the Joy
of Shabbos

Shabbat and Shir HaShirim

By HaRav Eli Mansour (shiur E3)

Do you know how to love? Do you love intensely, deeply, with all your heart? Are you as passionate as an infatuated young lover? If the answer is yes, then Shabbat is for you. And if the answer is not quite, then you need to start using Shabbat properly.

The Minhag to recite Shir HaShirim

Nearly 500 years ago, the AriZ"L instituted the practice of reciting Shir HaShirim upon the onset of Shabbat. That practice can still be found in many communities, some of whom even recite this Megilla in a communal chant when they begin קבלת שבת. What is the connection between this Megilla and שבת?

Holy meets Holy of Holies

A simple answer would be that שבת is called קודש – holy, and Shir HaShirim is called קודש קדשים – holy of holies by R' Akiva in the Midrash. That would explain the 'fit' between the two.

The switch between בה בו בם

To capture the theme of a Jewish Day we look at the Amidah, the designated Tefilah of that day. In the case of Shabbat, we have three עמידות. Each of the עמידות has an opening statement, a proof text which supports the opening statement,

and a conclusion, ending with the Bracha, מקדש השבת. The conclusion is consistent across the three עמידות with one subtle but significant distinction. At night we say וינחמו בה ישראל – the People rest in *her*; in the morning we say וינחמו בו ישראל – the People rest in *him* and in the afternoon, we say וינחמו בם ישראל – the People rest in *them*. What is implied by the switch between the feminine, to the masculine, to the plural in what is otherwise an identical Bracha?

The source of our sustenance

One way of analyzing these words is by checking their Gematria¹. The three references are בה which has the numerical value of 7, בו is 8 and בם is 48. Together they are 57 which is the numerical equivalent of זן, which means sustenance. We refer to Shabbat as the מקור הברכה, the source

of the blessing and sustenance of the whole week. That source of both physical and spiritual sustenance is alluded to by these references adding up to זן, or sustenance.

*Shabbat is the
place where that
longing and love
is given
expression as
bride and
groom embrace
one another in
the sanctity of
Shabbat.*

¹ ספר שיירי כנסת הגדולה



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The Bride, the Groom, and the Union

Another, less esoteric explanation draws from the fact that Shabbat is referred to as a bride, as we say בואי כלה – welcome, bride – when we invoke the Shabbat. The implication is an intimate union on Shabbat between the People and their Creator. We can think of Shabbat as a wedding ceremony. A wedding requires a bride (alluded to by the feminine כה on Friday night), a groom (as implied by the masculine בו in the morning) and the union between them (the בם at the apex of the sanctity of Shabbat towards the end of Shabbat).

The Longing of the Bride and the Groom

Recognizing Shabbat as a wedding gives meaning to the meals as wedding feasts and gives Shir HaShirim its proper place as the first of the wedding songs. This song proclaims and describes the profound love and longing between the People and Hashem. Shabbat is the place where that longing and love is given expression as bride and groom embrace one another in the sanctity of Shabbat. Our observance of Shabbat is not merely a statement of our obedience to the commandment to cease from creative work on Shabbat; it is a declaration of our understanding of the intimate relationship between Hashem and His People.

גאולה and שיר השירים

Another numeric explanation puts שיר השירים into the picture. אברהם אבינו was told that the sojourn down to Egypt would be 400 years. We know that Hashem back-dated the clock to the birth of Yitzchok and the standard explanation is that the actual time spent in Egypt was 210 years

(alluded to in the word רד"ו or 'come down' to me, as Yosef messaged to his father Yaakov). But the Seder Hadoros says that the math will show that they were in Egypt for 117 years. And that is precisely the number of פסוקים in Shir HaShirim. The recitation of that Megilla with the onset of Shabbat is meant to recall the incomplete redemption from Egypt (since, after all, there was exile after that redemption) and awaken the yearning for the intimate relationship of the future redemption. That redemption will be eternal and will not be marred by a subsequent exile.

Shabbat and the song of redemption

Shabbat is often associated with our redemption. We find Chazal telling us that our observance of but one more Shabbat would usher in the ultimate redemption. More than just a count of another Mitzvah, this dictum links Shabbat with Geula. When we left Egypt, points out the חיד"א, we sang a song at the Sea, the אז ישיר. And now, at the onset of Shabbat, when we are looking towards the future redemption, we sing the Song of Songs, the Shir HaShirim.

Arousing the yearning for redemption

And so, adds the חיד"א, we should be careful to recite each Pasuk of the Shir HaShirim; they are each signed and numbered with the 117. And, having recited the Shir HaShirim, we are poised as perhaps at no other time, to beseech Hashem to hasten the coming Geula.

סדר ליל פסח and שיר השירים

The connection between Shir HaShirim and the Geula may well explain the custom of many to



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recite Shir HaShirim at the conclusion of the Seder on the night of Pesach. Having celebrated the magnificent redemption from Egypt we turn

our attention to the future Geula which will outshine even the great Exodus from Egypt.

Takeaway: Pause before Shabbat begins to acknowledge the intimate relationship with Hashem contained in Shabbat and the connection between Shabbat and the coming perfect Geula – the Song of Songs.