

Teachings of the Maharal

Why do we rejoice at a wedding? (2)

Netiv Gemilut Chasadim 4:161 - Rabbi Abahu said that making the wedding couple rejoice is like sacrificing a thanksgiving offering, as it is written, "Those who bring a thanksgiving offering to the house of Hashem" [Yirmiyahu 17:26]. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak that it is as though one rebuilds a ruin from among Jerusalem's ruin, as it is written, "for I will return the return of the land as it was at first, said Hashem." This verse explains great things about the coupling of the bride and groom. Their union connects with a perfection on high, a divine event like no natural event. The pairing of the couple is not a natural but a divine event, as testified by His name KAH found in man [ISH with a YUD] and woman [ISHA with a HEI] that teaches a G-dly connection in Sh'lemut. In nature, male and female are inherently different, and their union is a divine happening, and KAH Hashem is in both of them. Thus, rejoicing is fitting for the perfection of the union which initiates happiness, just as, Heaven forbid, loss initiates mourning. When there is rejoicing there is broadening and expansion in all four sides, and the fifth which is the midpoint. To not rejoice transgresses the five sounds that expand in all directions as well as the midpoint, the internal direction. To nullify happiness, which informs the perfection of Creation, is to nullify the praise of Hashem. This teaches us that He created man with Sh'lemut.

How does the wedding relate to the thanksgiving offering? The offering is

brought when Hashem does a miracle for a person to save him from death or some misfortune. This teaches that Hashem is One in His world, is Omnipotent and does His will - that is why He did the miracle. Both leavened and unleavened bread is brought with a Korban Toda, opposites to show He is One - nothing but He exists, even including opposites. The angel Micha'el is appointed on water and Gavri'el on fire, but Hashem rules over opposites, and as a sign of this we offer to Him opposites attesting to His Unity. To cause the wedding couple to rejoice, opposites, male and female, being united by Hashem, is like the thanksgiving offering.

How is it like building a Jerusalem ruin? When the man and woman unite, it is as if they build a house as it says in the fifth wedding blessing, "and He fixed from it an eternal building" - the couple is the building, a G-dly building. Now you understand that rejoicing at the wedding is an exalted mitzva.

Rav Yehuda bar Ilai would take a myrtle branch and dance before the bride and say, "A fine and pious bride." Rav Shmuel bar Yitzchak would dance with three myrtle branches. He would throw each one up and catch it. Three things are mentioned here - Dancing in front of bride and groom is complete happiness which has a great reward. The fact that it may look foolish is a advantage, for overcoming his ordinary conduct to do the mitzva in the face of looking foolish, which shows self-sacrifice in the performance of the mitzva. Rav Acha had her ride on his shoulders, and the rabbis questioned his propriety, saying, "should

we all carry on like this?" Rav Acha retorted, "If it is proper in your estimation, then do it; if not, do not."

Column prepared by Dr. Moshe Kuhr