



At Matan Torah the Torah Was Betrothed to Yisrael: Through Diligent Torah Study the Marriage Is Consummated and the Torah Becomes a Loyal Wife Revealing Her Secrets to Her Husband

In honor of the auspiciously approaching Chag HaShavuos—**Zman Matan Toraseinu**—it is fitting that we examine the daily practice of reciting two Berachos prior to studying Torah, as per the institution of Chazal. The first berachah is: **ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה—Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His mitzvos and commanded us to engage in the study of Torah.** We accompany this berachah with a special tefilah lauding the pleasing nature of Torah-study: **והערב נא ה' אלקינו את דברי תורתך בפנינו ובפיות עמך בית ישראל, ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי צאצאינו וצאצאי עמך בית ישראל, כולנו יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמה, ברוך אתה ה' המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל.** **Please, Hashem, our G-d, sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouths and in the mouths of Your people Yisrael. So that we, our descendants and the descendants of Your people, the house of Yisrael, all know Your name and study Your Torah for its own sake. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who teaches Torah to His people, Yisrael.**

The "michaber" and the Rama (O.C. 47, 6) write that the words **"והערב נא"** must be recited with the addition of the initial letter "vav," rather than **"הערב נא"**. Their sources are Rashi (Berachos 11b) and Tosafos (ibid. 46a), who assert that **"והערב נא"** is not a separate berachah; rather, it is a continuation of the first berachah. Thus, we have a single, long berachah that opens with "baruch" and concludes with "baruch."

The second berachah recited in association with Torah-study is: **ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתך ברוך אתה ה' נתן התורה—Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who chose us from all the nations**

and gave us His Torah. Blessed are You, Hashem, Giver of the Torah. Regarding this berachah, the Gemara teaches (ibid. 11b): **"אמר רב המנונא, זו היא מעולה שבברכות"**—**Rav Hamnuna said: This is the choicest of the Berachos.** Rashi comments: **This is the best of the Berachos of the Torah, since it includes an expression of gratitude to the Omnipresent and praise of the Torah and of Yisrael.** We will endeavor to explain why Chazal instituted the recitation of two Berachos in association with the mitzvah of Torah-study rather than just one berachah, as is the usual practice.

Additionally, we will explore why Chazal deemed it necessary to include in the formula of this choice berachah the statement: **Who chose us from all the nations and gave us His Torah.** After all, the commentaries are puzzled by this statement seeing as the Torah explicitly states (Devarim 33, 2): **"ה' מסיני בא וזרח משעיר למו הופיע מהר פארן ואתה מרבבות קודש מימינו אש דת למו"—Hashem came from Sinai and He shone forth to them from Seir; He appeared from Har Paran, and He came with some of the myriads of the holy; from His right hand, He presented a fire of law to them.** Rashi explains: **He presented it to the children of Eisav (who dwelled in Seir), so that they would have the opportunity to accept the Torah; but they did not want it. He also went to Har Paran and presented it there to the children of Yishmael, so that they would have the opportunity to accept it; but they did not want it.** The source for Rashi's comment is the Midrash (Eichah Rabbasi 3, 1). The Midrash concludes by saying that Hashem ultimately went back to Yisrael, and they accepted it, as it is written (Shemos 24, 7): **They said, "Everything that Hashem has said, 'na'aseh v'nishma' (we will do and we will hear)!"**

Thus, we see quite clearly that initially HKB”H intended to give the Torah to the descendants of Eisav and the descendants of Yishmael. Only after they declined His offer did HKB”H give the Torah to Yisrael. That being the case, how can we boldly claim in the berachah: **Who chose us from all the nations and gave us His Torah?**

The Torah Is Not Merely Our Heritage but It Is Our Betrothed

We will begin to shed some light on the subject with a precious introduction that is the foundation of Matan Torah. The Gemara (Pesachim 49b) expounds on the following passuk (Devarim 33, 4): **”תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב, אל תקרי מורשה—אלא מאורסה”**—**“The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov.”** Now, do not read the word in this passuk as **“morashah”**—meaning an inheritance—but rather as **“meorasah”**—meaning a betrothed. In Chiddushei Aggados, the Maharsha explains why the Gemara chose not to interpret the word **“מורשה”** in its plain sense as an **“inheritance.”** He cites the following Mishnah (Avos 2, 12): **”והתקן עצמך ללמוד תורה שאינה ירושה לך”**—**prepare yourself to study Torah, since it does not come to you as an inheritance.** The Mishnah states explicitly that the acquisition of the Torah is not inherited automatically, it requires effort and must be earned. This is consistent with the teaching in the Gemara (Megillah 6b): **”אם יאמר לך אדם יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן, לא יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן”**—**if someone tells you, “I labored in my Torah-study but did not succeed,” do not believe him. “I have not labored, yet I have succeeded,” do not believe him. “I have labored, and I have succeeded,” you may believe him.**

Based on this premise, the Maharsha explains that at the great revelation of Matan Torah, HKB”H gave Yisrael the Torah merely as an **“ארוסה”**—**a betrothed**—but not as a full-fledged wife—a **“נשואה”**. For, only afterwards, through diligent, laborious study is the marriage consummated, and the Torah becomes one’s wife. This is the message conveyed by the elucidation: **Do not read the word in this passuk as “morashah”**—meaning an inheritance—but rather as **“m’orasah”**—meaning a betrothed.

Let us elaborate. During the times of the Mishnah and the Talmud, the marriage process consisted of two stages. During the first stage, the “Chasan” betrothed the “kallah” in the

accepted manner but did not take her under the chuppah, which is the final, unique stage of acquisition known as “nisuin.” During the betrothal stage, the “kallah” becomes an **“arusah”**; from the Torah’s perspective, she is considered his wife for all practical purposes; however, she is still prohibited to her husband until he performs the formal acquisition under the chuppah.

Therefore, she remains in her father’s house during the entire betrothal stage—the “eirusin.” After the formal acquisition under the “chuppah”—the stage of “nisuin”—the “Chasan” secludes himself with the “kallah” and takes her to his home. She is now no longer an **“arusah”** but a **“nesuah”**; she is his wife. Here is how the Rambam describes the process (Hilchos Ishus 10, 1): **According to Rabbinic law, an “arusah” is forbidden to engage in sexual relations¹ with her husband as long as she is living in her father’s home . . . until he brings her into his home, enters into seclusion with her, and thus singles her out (as his wife). This act of seclusion is referred to as entry into the chuppah, and it is universally referred to as “nisuin.”**

This clarifies very nicely the Maharsha’s explanation above. At Matan Torah, HKB”H bequeathed the Torah to every Jew, in every generation until the end of time, as a betrothed “arusah.” The goal, however, is not to leave her in that state. Instead, it is incumbent upon each and every Jew to complete the process of “nisuin” by making the Torah his bride. This end is accomplished by secluding oneself with the Torah and completely dedicating oneself to her through laborious study; he must bring the Torah into his home, into the depths of his heart and delight in her.

The Gra’s Explanation

Concerning this matter, it behooves us to introduce the sacred words of the Gra of Vilna, zy”a, in his commentary on the Tikunei HaZohar (Tikun 21). He concurs with the Maharsha, explaining that the status of the Torah given to Yisrael at Har Sinai was that of an **“arusah”**—in keeping with the Gemara’s elucidation: **Do not read the word in this passuk as “morashah” but rather as “meorasah.”** The Torah does not achieve the status of a **“nesuah”** until one studies her with devotion.

He substantiates this viewpoint based on a teaching in the Gemara (A.Z. 19a): **”אמר רבא בתחילה נקראת על שמו של הקב”ה ולבסוף נקראת על שמו, שנאמר בתורת ה’ חפצו ובתורתו יהגה ויליה”.** **Rava said: Initially, the Torah is referred to as belonging to HKB”H. Ultimately, she is referred to as belonging to**

that person, as it states (Tehillim 1, 2): **“But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in his Torah, he meditates day and night.”** The explanation of the Gra is as follows: Initially, when a Jew’s relationship to the Torah is that of an “arusah,” she is still considered **“Hashem’s Torah”**; it is as if she is still in her father’s house. Yet, after a Jew merits bringing her into his house through laborious, diligent study, she becomes a “nesuah”—his wife. Then, she is called his, as indicated by the passuk: **“In his Torah he meditates day and night.”**

We can find an allusion to this phenomenon in parshas Ki Seitzei (Devarim 21, 11): **“וראית בשביה אשת יפת תואר וחשקת בה—ולקחת לך לאשה והבאתה אל תוך ביתך—and you will see among its captives a woman who is beautiful of form, you will desire her and you will take her to yourself for a wife. You shall bring her into your house.** The Ma’or V’Shemesh writes that the **“woman who is beautiful of form”** is an allusion to the holy Torah. This is consistent with the passuk (Mishlei 31, 10): **“אשת חיל מי ימצא—who can find a woman of valor?** Rashi explains that the **“woman of valor”** referred to is none other than the Torah.

Thus, we can interpret the passuk as follows: **“And you will see among its captives a woman who is beautiful of form”**—as long as a person has not wed the Torah and made her his wife, it is as if she is a captive—akin to an “arusah” waiting a prolonged period of time for her “Chasan” to make her his wife and bring her into his home. Therefore, HKB”H requests: **“You will desire her and you will take her to yourself for a wife”**—do not allow her to remain an “arusah”; take her as a wife; **“bring her into your house”**—to study her and occupy your thoughts day and night.

Further support for the explanations of the Maharsha and the Gra can be found in the words of Chazal in the Midrash related to the passuk (Shemos 25, 8): **“ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בם—they shall make Me a Sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them:**

It is analogous to a king who had only one daughter. One of the other kings came and married her. He wanted to go to his land and to take his wife with him. The king said to him, “My daughter that I gave you, is my only child. I cannot bear being apart from her. I also cannot tell you not to take her; for she is your wife. So, please do me this one favor. Wherever you go, provide a small dwelling, so that I can dwell near you;

I cannot be apart my daughter.” This is what HKB”H said to Yisrael: “I gave you the Torah. I cannot part from her; I also cannot tell you not to take her. Instead, wherever you go, make Me a single house in which I will dwell”—as it states, “And they shall make Me a sanctuary.”

According to the Maharsha and the Gra, we can comprehend the point of the Midrash. HKB”H is the father, who has only one daughter—the holy Torah. At Matan Torah, He gave Yisrael his daughter to betroth as an **“arusah.”** Initially, she remained in her father’s house, in the sense of: **“But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem.”** Nevertheless, the ultimate goal was for Yisrael to complete the transaction—the “nisuin” with the Torah. She was meant to be a **“nesuah”**; they were obliged to take her into their homes and study her diligently and laboriously, in the sense of: **“And in his Torah, he meditates day and night.”**

Therefore, when a Jew wishes to bring the Torah into his home as a **“nesuah,”** HKB”H says to Yisrael: **I gave you the Torah** at Har Sinai as an “arusah.” On the one hand, **I cannot part from her**; on the other hand, **I cannot tell you not to take her.** I gave you the Torah with the status of “eirusin,” so that she would become your wife, with the status of “nisuin.” So, **wherever you go, make Me a single house in which I will dwell—as it states, “And they shall make Me a sanctuary.”**

The Marriage of the Torah Is Through the 48 Forms of Acquisition

At this point, it is worth inquiring: We have learned in the Mishnah (Kiddushin 2a): **“האשה נקנית בשלש דרכים... נקנית בכסף—בשטר ובביאה—a woman is acquired in three ways . . . she is acquired with money, with a document and with sexual relations.** At Matan Torah, when Yisrael betrothed the Torah as an “arusah,” which type of acquisition was performed? Apropos this question, we find a wonderful chiddush in the Reishis Chochmah (Sha’ar HaKedushah 4). He relies on the following Mishnah (Avos 6, 6): **“גדולה תורה יותר מן הכהונה ומן המלכות, והתורה נקנית שהמלכות נקנית בשלשים מעלות, והכהונה בעשרים וארבע, והתורה נקנית בארבעים ושמונה דברים.” Torah is greater than the priesthood and the kingship. For the kingship is acquired along with thirty advantages, and the priesthood is acquired with twenty-four (gifts), but the Torah is acquired by means of forty-eight qualities.**

Based on this Mishnah, the Reishis Chochmah explains that just like a man acquires a woman in one of three ways;

so, too, Yisrael acquire the Torah in holy matrimony through the forty-eight methods listed in the Mishnah. Here are his illuminating words: **The Torah is referred to as the daughter of the King. The law requires that a wife be acquired in one of three ways; this acquisition constitutes “kiddushin” (holy matrimony). The same applies to the Torah, which is referred to as the daughter of the King. Her “kiddushin” that he gives her, for her to achieve the status of a “nesuah,” so that she will reveal her secrets to him, is by means of the forty-eight methods mentioned.**

It is fitting to add what the Beir HaGra on Mishlei writes regarding the passuk (31, 10): **“אשת חיל מי ימצא”**—**who can find a woman of valor?** As mentioned above, Rashi explains that the **“woman of valor”** referred to is none other than the Torah. The Gra explains: **The woman referred to is the Torah; she is called an “אשת חיל” (a “woman of valor”), because she is acquired by means of the 48 methods listed in Maseches Avos.** He is pointing out that the gematria of the word חיל is 48. So, based on the explanation of the Reishis Chochmah, the Gra is teaching us that the Torah is called an **“אשת חיל”**, because she was acquired by Yisrael in holy matrimony via the 48 methods by which the Torah is acquired.

Now, let us luxuriate in the wonders of the Torah. With the insight of the Reishis Chochmah, we can better appreciate the remarks of the Maharsha and the Beir HaGra, who assert that at Matan Torah, the Torah was betrothed to Yisrael with the status of an **“arusah.”** The Sifsei Tzaddik (Shavuos 10) explains in the name of his esteemed elder, the author of the Chiddushei HaRim, zy”a, that HKB”H gave us the forty-nine days of Sefiras HaOmer in preparation for receiving the Torah. On each day, we are supposed to correct one of the qualities from the forty-eight qualities by which the Torah is acquired. The last day, the forty-ninth day, is for reviewing all of those qualities and reinforcing them.

Now, based on the contention of the Reishis Chochmah that Yisrael sanctified the Torah by means of the forty-eight methods by which the Torah is acquired, it turns out that the **“kiddushin”** were completed on the forty-ninth day of the Sefirah. In that merit, HKB”H gave them the Torah on Chag HaShavuos as an **“arusah.”** Since then, it has been our sacred duty to complete the process of **“nisuin”** by means of diligent, laborious Torah-study.

A Wonderful Story Involving Maseches Chagigah Disguised as a Woman

We will now introduce the amazing words of the Menorat HaMaor, authored by Rabbi Yitzchak Abuhav (213). He presents a wonderful story in the name of the Midrash Tanchuma (unavailable to us) involving the Torah, which is like a wife to those who study her:

There was an incident involving a particular chassid, who would seclude himself in one place and would learn Maseches Chagigah there. He would dissect it and review it several times until he had learned it well and he knew it well. He was not familiar with any other Maseches of the Talmud. He was absorbed in it his entire life. When he passed from the world, he was alone in his house and no one knew of his demise.

The image of a woman came and stood before him. She raised her voice in tears and eulogy, and her sobbing and wailing increased until a large crowd gathered. She said to them, “Eulogize this chassid, bury him and honor his casket, and you will merit life in Olam HaBa. For, he honored me throughout his life; I was never forsaken nor forgotten.” Immediately, all of the women gathered and sat with her; they made him a grand, extensive eulogy. The men occupied themselves with his shrouds and all the necessities of his burial; they buried him with great honor. Meanwhile, that woman cried and wailed. They said to her, “What is your name?” She told them, “Chagigah is my name.”

Once that chassid was buried, that woman vanished from sight. Immediately, they realized that she was Maseches Chagigah, who appeared to them in the form of a woman. She came when he passed away to eulogize him, to cry for him and to bury him with honor; because he studied her constantly and diligently. We can learn a “kal va’chomer” from this incident. If this is what transpired on behalf of this chassid who learned only one Maseches, what awaits one who learns much Torah, teaches it to others and has many disciples is all the more so.

The Test to Know if One Has Succeeded in Making the Torah His Wife

In honor of Chag HaShavuos, “zman matan toraseinu,” I had a wonderful idea. I would like to explain how one knows if he

has successfully ascended through his rigorous study of Torah to make the Torah his wife. Let us refer to the Mishnah (Avos 6, 1): "רבי מאיר אומר כל העוסק בתורה לשמה זוכה לדברים הרבה... ומגליו: **Whoever engages in Torah study l'shma (for its own sake) merits many things . . . the secrets of the Torah are revealed to him; he becomes like a steadily strengthening fountain and like an unceasing river.**

The Degel Machaneh Ephraim (Yisro) explains the meaning of the Mishnah. If one studies Torah l'shma, the Torah itself reveals its secrets to him. It is like a wife who reveals all of her secrets and intimate thoughts to her husband. Thus, we have a legitimate test to determine whether or not a person has merited making the Torah his wife. If he engrosses himself in Torah-study like Moshe, then the Torah itself reveals its secrets to him: **In the sense that a woman only reveals her inner thoughts to her husband.** Regarding this situation, Rabbi Meir says: **"Whoever engages in Torah study l'shma (for its own sake) merits many things . . . the secrets of the Torah are revealed to him."**

It gives me great pleasure and delight to combine the incredible idea of the Degel Machaneh Ephraim with the sacred remarks of the Derech Pikudecha (Mitzvah 1, 25-27). He explains how it is possible to fulfill the mitzvah of "pru u'rvu" at all times, even if a person cannot actually fulfill the mitzvah. He does so by toiling to generate novel interpretations and insights related to the Torah. It is as if he fathered and brought spiritual children (offspring) into the world.

This complements the words of the Degel Machaneh Ephraim very nicely. He taught us that by laboring in the study of Torah, one merits connecting with the Torah in a manner analogous to the bond and contract of "nisuin." As such, she becomes his loyal wife and reveals her intimate, innermost secrets to him. As a result of this incredible relationship, Torah-related chiddushim are generated. Thus, this person has fulfilled the mitzvah of "pru u'rvu" by producing spiritual offspring.

Two Berachos Related to Torah Study: One for the Eirusin and One for the Nisuin

Following this sublime path, we will now explain why Chazal instituted two distinct Berachos in association with Torah-study. The berachah: "אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו",

the choicest of the Berachos, expresses our gratitude to the Omnipresent for giving us the gift of the Torah on Har Sinai, as a betrothed, with the status of an "arusah." As Rashi explains, this is the best of the Berachos, **since it includes an expression of gratitude to the Omnipresent and praise of the Torah and of Yisrael.** In other words, we are thanking the Almighty for giving us the Torah as a gift, as a form of "eirusin," even before we have toiled in the study of Torah.

Thus, we have reconciled that which the commentaries find puzzling with regards to this berachah. After all, HKB"H visited the descendants of Eisav and Yishmael and offered them the Torah; however, it is clear that he intended merely to give them the precepts of the Torah, so that they could abide by all of its mitzvos. He was simply offering it to them like the seven Noahide mitzvos, which the goyim are obliged to abide by. He was allowing them to study the laws of the Torah, so that they would know how to observe them but not to derive pleasure from them or to engross themselves in them like with an "arusah" and a "nesuah."

Accordingly, we can comprehend the pronouncement in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 59a): "עובד כוכבים שעוסק בתורה חייב מיתה"—**an idolater who engages in Torah-study is liable to death.** According to one opinion in the Gemara, the reason is because it says: **"The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the 'morashah' of the congregation of Yaakov."** As we learned above, they expound: **"Do not read the word in this passuk a 'morashah' but as 'meorasah'**—not as an "inheritance" but as a "betrothed." This implies that the Torah is sanctified and reserved for us exclusively; so, an outsider who studies her rigorously resembles someone who has relations with a married woman; hence, he deserves the death penalty.

For this reason, they specifically said: **"An idolater who engages in Torah-study"**—this pronouncement applies to a goy to studies Torah employing the methodology of "pilpul"—scholarly debate—to achieve an in-depth comprehension of the issues. As the Turei Zahav (O.C. 47, 1) explains the established formula of the berachah specifies: **"לעסוק בדברי תורה"—to engage in the study of Torah**—we are obliged to study Torah employing "pilpul" and diligence, akin to a person engaged in commerce. Consequently, a non-Jew who **"engages"** in Torah-study is liable to death, because he has no right to derive pleasure from the study of Torah, which is designated exclusively for Yisrael. On the other hand, he is certainly allowed to learn what is permissible and what is prohibited.

In truth, the first berachah: **אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה** expresses the fact that we were commanded to engage in the study of Torah diligently and laboriously. By doing so, we are able to consummate the marriage and complete the process of “nisuin.” As a married woman, the Torah will reveal her innermost secrets to us.

We can now comprehend why our blessed sages instituted two Berachos related to Torah-study. The first berachah acknowledges the fact that HKB”H bequeathed the Torah to us on Har Sinai to be ours exclusively with the status of an “arusah.” The second berachah acknowledges the fact that HKB”H gave us the Torah, so that we would complete the process of “nisuin”; the Torah is meant to be like a wife, who reveals her innermost secrets to us.

Thus, with regards to receiving the Torah as an “arusah,” we recite the berachah: **אשר קדשנו במצוותיו**—indicating that HKB”H gave us the Torah as an “arusah”; **וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה**—so that we would be obligated to complete the “nisuin” to the Torah

by engaging in rigorous Torah-study. This explains beautifully why, as an addendum to this berachah, we beseech Hashem: **“והערב נא ה' אלקינו את דברי תורתך בפנינו ובפיות עמך בית ישראל.”** We are requesting that the Torah herself, that we study rigorously with our mouths, out loud, will reveal her secrets to us.

As explained, however, to merit this revelation, we must study Torah l’shma—with pure, sincere intentions, without ulterior motives—as per the statement of Rabbi Meir: **“Whoever engages in Torah-study l’shma merits many things . . . the secrets of the Torah are revealed to him.”** Therefore, we beseech Hashem: **ונחיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי צאצאינו כולנו יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמה**—that we, our descendants and the descendants of Your people, the house of Yisrael, all know Your name and study Your Torah l’shma. By studying the Torah purely for her sake—l’shma—we will complete the process of “nisuin,” and the Torah will reveal her innermost, intimate secrets to us!



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

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