

Why Get Married?

A Lesson in Seven Blessings

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The question that everyone, whether contemplating marriage or already married, should be asking themselves is: Why get married? Of course love is paramount; and surely every couple has their list of myriad reasons, rational and irrational, why they should get married. But when you get down to it, a couple could just as well live together to satisfy all these reasons. And if the couple sees marriage as an expression of commitment, surely a civil marriage through the auspices of the state will fulfill this need.

So the question really is: What is the purpose of joining in union before God? I believe that the answer can be found within the seven blessings pronounced over the couple immediately upon their being wed under the huppa. Indeed, given that the seven blessings are the only formal words said to the bride and groom just before leaving the huppa to enter the world as a couple, this is the most appropriate place to look for the answer to the purpose of their union.

Noting that the blessings number seven, we are immediately reminded of the creation of the world which took place in seven days. Indeed, this relation is underscored by the fact that the seven wedding blessings are said for seven days. With this key in mind, let us unlock the meaning bound within seven blessings.

1 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, Sovereign of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

The first blessing is a technical one, made over the partaking of the wine which is to serve as the vehicle for the blessings. Nevertheless, it too may have symbolic implications as we will see at the end.

2 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהִכֵּל בְּרָא לְכַבוֹדוֹ.

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, sovereign of the universe, Who created everything for His Glory.

The first blessing over the couple is actually a blessing over God in acknowledgement that He created everything toward His glory. By stating that everything was created for God's glory, we are articulating the idea that everything in creation has a purpose – i.e., His glory. At the very outset of the wedding blessings we are given the indication that the union of the couple is intimately connected with creation – and more importantly – with purposive creation.

3 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, יוֹצֵר הָאָדָם.

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, Sovereign of the universe, Who creates man.

The next blessing is said over God creating man who stands at the pinnacle of God's creation. As such, this blessing builds on the previous one that taught that God “created everything for His glory”. It should be noted however that the “glory of God” is not indicative of an egocentric endeavor of the Creator, but just the opposite. The act of

creation was one of selflessness, of giving to another altruistically, and thus, the purpose of creation was to cause another the enjoyment of a perfect world. Indeed, the story of creation begins with God creating the world and placing man in the Garden of Eden, heaven on earth. This third blessing builds on the previous one by acknowledging God for the purposive creation *with man at its center*.

4 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ דְמוּת תְּבַנְיָתוֹ וְהִתְקִין לוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ בְּנֵן עַדִּי עַד. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי יוֹצֵר הָאָדָם.

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, Sovereign of the universe, Who creates man in Your image, fashioning perpetuated life. Blessed are You, LORD, creator of man.

This fourth blessing is identical to the third one, acknowledging God for creating man. However this blessing comes with the introduction that man is not just the most sophisticated of all the animals but rather he was created in the very image of God Himself. This “image of God” does not refer to any physical likeness, but rather refers to a spiritual and moral likeness. Man was created in the likeness of God in the sense that he has the ability to act morally. As such, this blessing builds on our understanding of man’s unique position, his role and his responsibility within creation. Indeed it is this likeness which provides man the opportunity to attain a piece of eternity, or in the words of the blessing: “*perpetuated life*”.

5 שׁוֹשׁ תְּשִׂישׁ וְתִגַּל הָעֵקֶרֶה, בְּקִבוּץ בְּנֵיהָ לְתוֹכָהּ בְּשִׂמְחָה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי מְשַׂמַּח צִיּוֹן בְּבָנֶיהָ.

May the barren one exult and be glad as her children are joyfully gathered to her. Blessed are You, LORD, Who gladden Zion with her Children.

Having blessed God over the purposive creation with man as a moral being at its pinnacle, the blessing turns to the ultimate fulfillment of man’s purpose – the eschatological ingathering of Israel to Zion. Before this stage, God is referred to as barren, for like a woman who has not brought forth the fruit of her womb, so is God bereft of fulfillment until man accomplishes his purpose in creation. Israel, as the perfected people in their return to Zion, is the completion of creation – the return of a perfected Adam and Eve to the Garden of Eden.

6 שִׂמַּח תְּשַׂמַּח רְעִים הָאֲהוּבִים, כְּשִׂמְחַךְ יִצְרִיךָ בְּגוֹ עֵדוֹן מִקְדָּם. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי מְשַׂמַּח הַחַתָּן וְכַלָּה.

Grant perfect joy to these loving companions, as You did Your creations in the Garden of Eden. Blessed are You, LORD, Who grants the joy of groom and bride.

With this profound introduction to the very purpose of creation and man’s role in it, the blessings are ready to turn to the newlyweds. This sixth blessing asks God to grant joy to the bride and groom in the same way that He granted joy to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. What is being said here is that the joy of the bride and groom is the joy of Adam and Eve – the joy of a newlywed couple with the world laid at their feet, ready to perfect themselves and their world and enjoy the fruits of their efforts.

7 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא שְׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה, חֲתָן וְכַלָּה גִילָה, רִנָּה, דִּיצָה, וְחֻדוּדָה, אֶהְבָּה וְאַחֲנָה וְשָׁלוֹם וְרַעוּת. מִהֲרָה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׁמַע בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְחֻצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, קוֹל שְׂשׂוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כַּלָּה, קוֹל מִצְהָלוֹת חֲתָנִים מִחֻפְתָּם וּנְעָרִים מִמְשִׁתָּה נְגִינָתָם. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי מְשַׂמַּח הַחֲתָן עִם הַכַּלָּה.

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, Sovereign of the universe, Who created joy and gladness, groom and bride, mirth, song, delight and rejoicing, love and harmony and peace and companionship. LORD our God, may there ever be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem voices of joy and gladness, voices of groom and bride, the jubilant voices of those joined in marriage under the bridal canopy, the voices of young people feasting and singing. Blessed are You, LORD, Who causes the groom to rejoice with his bride.

The last blessing is identical to the one that preceded it, differing only in its introduction. Both bless God who causes the joy of the bride and groom; however, whereas the previous blessing likened the couple to the primordial couple in the Garden of Eden, this last blessing points them forward to the ultimate redemption and rectification of creation when the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem will be filled with the sounds of mirth. The couple is now blessed as a unit to rejoice in the fulfillment of creation, the fulfillment of the very purpose of creation, the reign of God's glory, the glory of "love and harmony and peace and companionship."

The blessings conclude with newlyweds sharing in the cup of wine, blessed at the outset of the seven blessings.¹ Interestingly, the Talmud suggests that the original sin was committed with wine.² The newlywed couple, having been blessed as Adam and Eve, now tastes from the wine, symbolically starting where the original couple left off – this time, however, with the agenda to fix the original sin, to fix the world and bring about that goal of perfection for which they were created, in "love and harmony and peace and companionship."

That is why people are to get married before God.

¹ While the blessing on the wine is said under the huppa as the first of the seven, it is in fact said as the seventh blessing upon all the wedding meals during the seven days of celebration.

² Sanhedrin 70a, Zohar Noach 73a, Bereishis Rabbah 19:5.