

Text for “I Will Betroth You to Me Forever: Ketubot I’Shavuot”

Rabbi Enid C. Lader
Tikkun@Home 2020/5780

#1 - Here is a text from the Zohar, the Jewish Mystical commentary on Torah, that offers a description of preparation for this marriage – in this case, between the Shekhinah and The Eternal:

Rabbi Shimeon used to sit and learn Torah at night, [the time] when the bride joined with her spouse. It is taught: The members of the bride's entourage are obligated to stay with her throughout the night before her wedding with her spouse to rejoice with her in those perfections (*tikkunim*) by which she is made perfect.

#1 Continued

[They should] learn Torah, Prophets and Writings, homilies on the verses and the secrets of wisdom, for these are her perfections and adornments. She enters with her bridesmaids and stands above those who study, for she is readied by them and rejoices in them all the night. On the morrow, she enters the canopy with them and they are her entourage. When she enters the canopy, the Holy One, blessed be He, asks about them, blesses them, crowns them with the bride's adornments. Blessed is their destiny. (Zohar I:8a)

#2 - The most widely used text of a *ketubah le-Shavuot* is that of the prolific Safed mystic and poet Israel Najara (c.1550-c.1625). Many of his piyyutim are found in the liturgy of Sephardic, or Oriental, Jews.

Let's take a look at a partial translation of his hymn, included in the Sephardic prayer book for Shavuot [from *The Shavuot Anthology* published by the Jewish Publication Society. The *ketubah* is translated by Solomon Feffer]:

“Friday, the sixth of Sivan, the day appointed by the Lord for the revelation of the Torah to His beloved people... The Invisible One came forth from Sinai, shone from Seir and appeared from Mount Paran unto all the kings of the earth, in the year 2448 since the creation of the world, the era by which we are accustomed to reckon in this land whose foundations were upheld by God, as it is written, ‘For He hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods’ (Psalms 24.2).

The Bridegroom [God], Ruler of rulers, Prince of princes, Distinguished among the select, Whose mouth is pleasing and all of Whom is delightful, said unto the pious, lovely and virtuous maiden [the people of Israel] who won His favor above all women, who is beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun, awesome as bannered hosts: Many days wilt thou be Mine and I will be thy Redeemer.

Behold, I have sent thee golden precepts through the lawgiver Jekuthiel [Moses]. Be thou My mate according to the law of Moses and Israel, and I will honor, support, and maintain thee and be thy shelter and refuge in everlasting mercy. And I will set aside for thee, in lieu of thy virginal faithfulness, the life-giving Torah by which thou and thy children will live in health and tranquility.

This bride [Israel] consented and became His spouse. Thus, an eternal covenant, binding them forever, was established between them. The Bridegroom then agreed to add to the above all future expositions of Scripture, including Sifra, Sifre, Aggadah, and Tosefta. He established the primacy of the 248 positive commandments that are incumbent upon all... and added to them the 365 negative commandments. The dowry that this bride brought from the house of her father consists of an understanding heart that understands, ears that hearken, and eyes that see.

Thus, the sum total of the contract and the dowry, with the addition of the positive and negative commandments, amounts to the following: 'Revere God and observe His commandments; this applies to all mankind' (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The Bridegroom, desiring to confer privileges upon His people Israel and to transmit these valuable assets to them, took upon Himself the responsibility of this marriage contract, to be paid from the best portions of His property...

All these conditions are valid and established forever and ever. The Bridegroom has given His oath to carry them out in favor of His people and to enable those that love Him to inherit substance. Thus, the Lord has given His oath. The Bridegroom has followed the legal formality of symbolic delivery of this document, which is bigger than the earth and broader than the seas. Everything, then, is firm, clear, and established...

I invoke heaven and earth as reliable witnesses.

May the Bridegroom rejoice with the bride whom He has taken as His lot and may the bride rejoice with the Husband of her youth while uttering words of praise.”