

HOLY MATRIMONY

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

There are two main steps needed for a marriage to be binding under Jewish law. Our Sages refer to these two essential ingredients as Kiddushin (betrothal) and Nisuin (marriage). The Kiddushin part of the marriage ceremony typically occurs nowadays when the groom says "Behold, you are betrothed to me with this ring, according to the tradition of Moshe and Israel," and then places the ring on the finger of the bride. This part of the ceremony is akin to an "acquisition" of sorts. In fact, the language the Torah uses to describe this is "When a man will take a woman . . . (Devarim 24:5)." Yet, our Sages did not term this procedure as taking, "Kicha," or an acquisition, "Keni'ah." The term they used was "Kiddushin," "Sanctification." The root of the word Kiddushin is Kodesh, which means holy. Why did our Sages pick this word to describe betrothal?

Rabbi Matis Blum in Torah La'Daas quotes the Yalkut HaGershoni to answer the question. Kiddushin is only one of the 613 mitzvos. What distinguishes the performance of this mitzvah is that it is the **only** one which we say we are doing "according to the tradition of Moshe and Israel."

The reason for this unique utterance stems from the uniqueness of marriage. When a person gets an item, he can do with it as he sees fit. He can treat it any way he wants, and if he so desires, he can dispose of it. However, if a person were to receive an item from a dignitary, he would treat the item with great care. It would be a prized possession, handled with the greatest caution and concern.

The tradition of Moshe and Israel is the Torah. The Jewish people alone received the Torah from G-d as a gift. Because of the special value of this gift, we guard it and treat it with the greatest respect and honor. A bride as well is a gift from G-d. Because the gift is so precious, a groom must act with this gift accordingly. A groom must show the highest levels of care and concern. Reverence and respect are in order. An extraordinary gift must be given extraordinary care.

If the Sages has termed the betrothal using an expression of acquisition, people might have the mistaken impression that what was occurring was similar to any simple purchase. The groom was getting an item, and the owner of the item could do with it as he saw fit. To assure that people would understand how special the bond of marriage is, they used the term Kiddushin, invoking an expression of holiness. Just as a holy item carries with it a special status, worthy of great care and veneration, so too is a bride special. A bride is so special, and the Sages were so concerned with the respect of a bride, that a groom must declare that he is marrying his wife according to the tradition of Moshe and Israel. He is committing himself to treat his wife with same respect that he must show

to the Torah. He is affirming that he realizes that his wife is truly a gift from G-d. This union, our Sages are telling us, must truly be holy. The choice of the word Kiddushin tells us this.

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