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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot

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The Wedding Ceremony II: Kiddushin

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MESADER KIDDUSHIN, AND WHO CAN FULFILL IT? HOW IS KIDDUSHIN CONDUCTED IN PRACTICE? CAN THE KALLA GIVE THE CHATAN A RING?

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Mesader Kiddushin

We concluded our previous piece with *chatan* and *kalla* standing together under the *chuppa*, ready for *kiddushin* (halachic betrothal). Though nowadays conducted publicly at the *chuppa*, *kiddushin* is fundamentally a personal undertaking for the couple. Two witnesses suffice to ensure the validity of the halachic bond it establishes between them.

A second, more communally oriented, stage of the ceremony is *nissuin* (marriage). We mark *nissuin* with the recitation of *birkat chatanim* (*sheva berachot*) in the presence of a *minyan*, which underscores the communal significance of the couple creating a new household.

The Talmud discusses the two witnesses required for *kiddushin*,¹ and the minyan required for *birkat chatanim*.² The Talmud also emphasizes the importance of halachic expertise in the field of *kiddushin* and *gittin*:

¹ *Kiddushin* 65b

Rav Yitzchak son of Shemuel son of Marta said in the name of Rav: One who is *mekadesh* with [only] one witness, we are not concerned that his *kiddushin* [may be valid], and even if both of them [*chatan* and *kalla*] agree.

² *Ketubot* 7b, 8b

A baraita taught: Whence is *birkat chatanim* with [a quorum of] ten? For it is said, "And he [Boaz] took ten men from the elders of the city and said: sit here" [*Rut* 4:2]. Rabbi Abbahu said: From here: "In assemblies bless God the Lord from the source of Yisrael" [*Tehillim* 68:27]...What is "from the source"? On matters of the source [i.e., uterus—childbearing]....For Rabbi Yitzchak said Rabbi Yochanan said: We recite *birkat chatanim* with ten, and *chatanim* count toward the number.

Kiddushin 6a

For Rav Yehuda said Shemuel [said]: Whoever does not know the [halachic] nature of *gittin* and *kiddushin* should not have dealings with them.

Rashi, whose view *Shulchan Aruch* adopts,³ explains that an error in these *halachot* could have drastic and irrevocable consequences. Therefore, an expert is required to adjudicate halachic questions that arise, such as matters of personal status.

Rashi ad loc.

Should not have dealings with them - to be a *dayyan* [rabbinical court judge] in a matter, lest he permit a sexual prohibition, and this is an irreparable distortion.

This is the closest the Talmud gets, however, to mention of a Rav officiating at a wedding. This omission implies that the role of *mesader kiddushin*, officiating Rav, developed only later.

Responsa Keneset Yechezkel EH 71

...In the days of the Talmud, there were no *mesaderei* [rabbinic officiants for] a *get* or *kiddushin*; rather, one would divorce before two witnesses, and similarly be *mekadesh* before witnesses.

If the role of *mesader kiddushin* is a post-Talmudic development, then how did it evolve, and to what purpose?

Rabbinic presence at *kiddushin* seems to have developed over time as one of a range of responses to concerns about the possible pitfalls of private *kiddushin*, with just the couple and two witnesses present. A number of problematic situations could result from *kiddushin* conducted in private: Without communal involvement or oversight, a man could perform *kiddushin* before two witnesses with relative ease, and then never proceed to *nissuin*, leaving the woman unable to marry. A couple could make an impulsive decision when both parties were young, but halachically of age. Or a man could falsely claim to have performed *kiddushin*, in an act of revenge or in pursuit of financial gain.

As early as the twelfth century, rabbinic mandates emerged in Egypt requiring all marriages and divorces to be conducted under the auspices of local Rabbanim.

Responsa of Rambam 348

...In the year 4947 from Creation [1197 CE] the Rabbanim of Egypt enacted and took out a *sefer Torah* in public and established a *cherem* [ban] on men of the neighboring villages ...that a man should not marry a woman nor should

³ *Shulchan Aruch* EH 49:3

Whoever is not expert in the [halachic] nature of *gittin* and *kiddushin* should not have dealings with them to issue rulings regarding them, for he could easily err and permit a sexual prohibition and cause *mamzerim* [offspring of prohibited relationships] to increase in Yisrael.

any man divorce his wife in these villages except through those Rabbanim that are in the villages of Egypt...And we agreed and put in *cherem* anyone who would give permission to a man [to marry or divorce] who does not know the nature of *gittin* and *kiddushin*...

In thirteenth-century Catalonia, Rashba mentions a widespread agreement to insist on the presence of a minyan for *kiddushin* and the presence of family as well as the local *chazan* (prayer leader).⁴

Responsa of Rashba 4:314

Also, in many places there is agreement to perform *kiddushin* only in the presence of ten and that her father and mother, or some of her relatives, and the *chazan* be among the assembly.

In the fourteenth century, Rivash reports on a decree in Ashkenaz requiring rabbinic approbation for any commitment to marry.⁵

Responsa Rivash 268

...This is text of the writing of Rav Yochanan, may God protect him...'No man in the land is permitted to make a match for his son or daughter secretly, without permission of the Rabbanim of the city...'

About two centuries later, Rema reports that it is customary for a local Rav to officiate at and take a fee for a *chuppa*:

Rema YD 245:22

If a visiting sage comes to a city, he should not deprive the Rav who lives there of his fee by conducting *chuppot* and *kiddushin* and taking the fee that comes from them, since this is the reward of the rabbi who lives there. But it is permissible to conduct the *chuppa* and hand over the fee to the established Rav.

In these halachic developments, we see an emerging role for a local religious figure or Rav to be present at *kiddushin*, with a minimum of a minyan of attendees. One aspect of the role would be a sort of licensing, ensuring that the *kiddushin* would be

⁴ A questioner refers to this as a *takana*, rabbinic enactment:

Responsa of Rashba 1:550

You asked: There is a *takana* in this city, with *cherem* and a fine, not to betroth [*le-kadesh*] any Jewish woman except with ten [men present] and the prayer leader.

⁵ See Avraham Chayyim Freiman, *Seder Kiddushin ve-Nissuin*, pp. 45-46, that this may be what Rav Yechezkel Katzenelbogen had in mind when he referred to a decree dating back to Rabbeinu Tam:

Responsa Keneset Yechezkel EH 71

Indeed, to officiate at *kiddushin* I do not see [agree with] these stringencies. All this I wrote to expose the offense of those who entertained the idea of annulling the *kiddushin* [retroactively, if performed without authorization], but no man would entertain the idea of officiating at *kiddushin* without permission and appointment of the head of the community or province's *beit din*...And Rabbanim have already risen up against this matter, and dressed in the raiment of vengeance to wave and to draw a sword from its scabbard, they have surely set a *cherem* and will enforce it, and all the great authorities of the land have received tradition from the Rabbanim of France, who received [it] from Rabbeinu Tam, who made a decree and said not to officiate at *kiddushin* except if one is chosen as Rav of a community or province...

known to the local community and its rabbinate. In much of Europe, this role was cemented in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when Jewish communities lost legal autonomy and laws in the Austrian, French, and Russian empires mandated the presence of recognized clergy for legal licensing of weddings.⁶

A second, ritual aspect would be reciting *birkat eirusin*, which, as [we have learned](#), would protect the honor of less learned *chatanim*. Rashba's student, Ritva, reports that the prayer leader would recite it:

Ritva Ketubot 7b

...The widespread custom in all lands is that the *shaliach tzibbur* recites it, and that is correct.

Rema adds that reciting *birkat eirusin* was an accepted rabbinic role, so much so that he himself recited it even at a wedding held when he was in mourning:

Darkei Moshe, YD 391

I already had a situation that when I was in mourning for my mother of blessed memory, and I recited *birkat eirusin* under the *chuppa* as is the way of the city's Rav to recite *birkat eirusin*.

A third, natural evolution of the role would be to provide halachic oversight of the *kiddushin*.

Along these lines, in the early eighteenth century, Rav Yaakov Reischer suggests that, beyond permission from local halachic authorities, a Rav officiating at a wedding should *le-chatchila* (from the outset) himself be a recognized expert in matters of *gittin* and *kiddushin*:

Responsa Shevut Ya'akov 3:121

The intent was that *le-chatchila* one should not officiate at *kiddushin* and *gittin* if he is not an acknowledged expert who knows the [halachic] nature of *gittin* and *kiddushin*, and this is also included in being a *dayyan* for *gittin* and *kiddushin*. And for this reason, the Talmud used the phrase "he should not have dealings." The term "dealings" implies any dealing with matters of *kiddushin* and *gittin* whether to be *dayyan* or *mesader*...and certainly it isn't for naught that in these generations it became customary that one not be *mesader kiddushin* without the permission of the Rav, for there is concern for many stumbling blocks.

Others rely on Taz, in the seventeenth century, who considered it sufficient for the *mesader kiddushin* to be less learned.

Taz EH 49:3

...For in giving *kiddushin* there are not a lot of details in this officiating, and variations for which halachic ruling would be relevant are not common there

⁶ See Freiman, pp. 312-323.

...and thus is the custom among us that we honor with *siddur kiddushin* even someone who is not a great scholar.

It is now a firmly entrenched custom to have a Rav, known as a *mesader kiddushin*, facilitate local rabbinic recognition of a marriage and supervise all halachic phases of the wedding: ensuring that the couple is halachically fit to marry, designating and checking the fitness of the witnesses, and overseeing the *ketuba* and all halachic aspects of the ceremony, especially the act of *kiddushin*. It is also customary in most communities for the *mesader kiddushin* to recite *birkat eirusin*. Often, the *mesader kiddushin* also acts as a sort of master of ceremonies at a *chuppa*, and shares words of Torah and blessing as well as explanation and insight into the ceremony.

In Israel, where there is no civil marriage, the licensing and halachic functions are closely intertwined. The *mesader kiddushin* must be a Rav approved by the Israeli Rabbinate as being sufficiently familiar with the *halachot* of marriage to perform a legal wedding, which usually requires passing a written exam or being recognized as an expert in these *halachot*.⁷

In practice, though, sometimes another family member or guest is honored with reciting *birkat eirusin*. Outside of Israel, there is often more flexibility for who can officiate at a wedding, but it is still important out of respect for custom and for the licensure of a wedding, for a *mesader kiddushin* to be approved by local halachic and legal authorities. These requirements translate, in Israel and other locales, into only men serving as *mesaderei kiddushin* at traditional orthodox weddings.

Since, according to many views, *birkat eirusin* is fundamentally a *beracha* obligatory on the *chatan*, some maintain that the *chatan* has precedence in selecting the *mesader kiddushin* when there is conflict between the *chatan* and *kalla*, or their families, on the matter:

Responsa Be-tzel Ha-chochma 2:72

...It seems simple that in the view of Rambam and Shulchan Aruch if another recites the *beracha* then he recites the *beracha* in place of the *chatan* and as his agent. And even for those who say that another recites the *beracha* in order not to embarrass one [a *chatan*] who does not know [the *beracha*], still, the *beracha* perforce belongs to the *chatan*.... If so, even for those [who maintain it's for this reason], perforce this other person is only reciting the *beracha* as the agent of the *chatan* ...Even if *birkat eirusin* is a *beracha* of praise, it is

⁷ See here and here:

https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/policy/nohal_ishut1/he/Book%20nisuiin.pdf

https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/policy/nohal_ishut/he/%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA%20%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%93%D7%94%20%D7%AA%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%96%20%D7%A2%D7%98.pdf

The Israeli Chief Rabbinate, Marriage Registration Regulations, Updated Edition, 5779, p. 41

65a A Rav who meets one of the following criteria is permitted to be *mesader kiddushin*:

(1) He has received a permit from the Committee for Officiants at *Chuppa* and *Kiddushin* of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate....(2) He has received a one-time permit from the Rabbinic Marriage Registrar, at the request of the couple. The Registrar is permitted, in unusual cases, to grant a one-time permit as *mesader kiddushin* only for files opened in his jurisdiction, after he is convinced that the requested Rabbi is fitting in character and lifestyle to be *mesader kiddushin* and is expert in the laws relevant to conducting *chuppa* and *kiddushin*.

incumbent upon the one performing *kiddushin* to say it...When the *chatan* wants a certain Rav to be his *mesader kiddushin* and the *kalla* and her parents wish for a different Rav, the halacha is on the side of the *chatan*...

A conception of *birkat eirusin* as the *chatan's beracha* may also preclude a woman from reciting it. (See more [here](#).)

In a statement about female rabbis, a Rabbinic Panel for the Orthodox Union ruled that a woman cannot act as clergy by officiating at a wedding. It is not entirely clear to which aspects of the role of *mesader kiddushin* this statement refers, especially since the OU permits women to teach Torah at such occasions:⁸

OU Responses of Rabbinic Panel on Professional Roles of Women in the Synagogue, 2017

For the reasons stated above we believe that a woman should not be appointed to serve in a clergy position. This restriction applies both to the designation of a title for women that connotes the status of a clergy member, as well as to the appointment of women to perform clergy functions on a regular ongoing basis - even when not accompanied by a rabbinic type title. The spectrum of functions appropriately considered as the role of clergy can be identified by duties generally expected from, and often reserved for, a synagogue rabbi. These common functions include, but are not limited to: the ongoing practice of ruling on a full-range of halakhic matters, officiating at religiously significant life-cycle events, (e.g. brit milah, baby naming, bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah, weddings and funerals). Note: Women speaking at these events is common practice in our community and is not a "clergy function."

This statement would still seem to leave room for a woman sharing words of Torah at a *chuppa* or serving as MC, including halachic explanations of the ceremony, depending on the *tzeniut* standards of the community. (Still, as we'll see in our next piece, Rav Herschel Shachter, one of the signatories of this statement, came out strongly against women reading the *ketuba* at a wedding, for *tzeniut* reasons that would likely also apply here.) Rav Yehuda Henkin explicitly rules that the MC role is open to women:

Responsa Benei Banim 3:27

But in a community where in any case women give speeches and reports in public in matters pertaining to the community etc...A woman is permitted to announce who is the Rav *mesader kiddushin* and who are the witnesses and those reciting the *berachot* of *sheva berachot* and other announcements. Only, it is fitting to tell them [the Rav and witnesses] of this in advance, so that they not be alarmed.

Apprising public participants in a wedding ceremony in advance of women's speaking under the *chuppa* is important for ensuring their comfort with the *chuppa* in which they will be participating.

⁸ Available here: <https://www.ou.org/assets/Responses-of-Rabbinic-Panel.pdf>

It is also now typical for a couple to meet with a *mesader kiddushin* in advance of the wedding to discuss their plans. A valued female spiritual mentor could take part in similar discussions, perhaps joining in conversations with the *mesader kiddushin*, and thus contributing to the halachic preparations for the wedding.

Kiddushin

The first stage of the ceremony under the *chuppa* is *kiddushin*, betrothal. *Birkat eirusin* is recited just prior to *kiddushin*, usually by the *mesader kiddushin*. The *beracha* is recited over a cup of wine, from which the *chatan* and *kalla* take a taste. (See more [here](#).) In some communities, a *beracha* over fragrant spices is made at this juncture as well.

Two witnesses must hear and observe the *kiddushin* for it to take effect. The witnesses need to be Jewish men⁹ who observe *mitzvot* and are not related to the couple or to each other.¹⁰ As we learned in our piece on the concept of *kiddushin* ([here](#)), *kiddushin* is enacted by the transfer of any item worth at least a *peruta* (the smallest halachic unit of currency, worth even less than a US quarter or an Israeli shekel),¹¹ from the possession of the *chatan* to the *kalla*.

Rema, Shulchan Aruch EH 42:4

The witnesses need to see the actual giving into her hand or her domain...

The *mesader kiddushin* will confirm that the object in question belongs to the *chatan*,¹²

⁹ We plan to discuss Halacha's recognition of male witnesses in an upcoming piece. According to some views, the witnesses should be explicitly designated by the *chatan* to the exclusion of other attendees, who may not be valid witnesses.

Shulchan Aruch EH 42:4

If he performed *kiddushin* before witnesses, even if he did not say: you are witnesses, she is *mekudeshet* (betrothed). Rema: And even if he designated witnesses, others who saw the act can testify. And the witnesses need to see the actual giving into her hand or into her domain, but if they did not see the actual giving into her hand, even if they heard him say: Be *mekudeshet* to me with such-and-such an object, and afterwards she has it, this is not [valid] *kiddushin* unless they see the actual giving.

Shulchan Aruch EH 42:2

One who performs *kiddushin* without witnesses, or even with one witness, this is not [valid] *kiddushin*.

Shulchan Aruch CM 35:14

A woman is invalid [as a witness].

¹⁰ Shulchan Aruch EH 42:5

One who performs *kiddushin* with those who are disqualified on a Torah level from giving testimony, this is not [valid] *kiddushin*.

Shulchan Aruch EH 42:2

Similarly, if he performed *kiddushin* before two [witnesses], and one of them was a relative, it is as if he performed *kiddushin* before one witness.

¹¹ Mishna Kiddushin 1:1

The woman undergoes *kinyan* in three ways...She undergoes *kinyan* through money, through contract, or through relations. With money: Beit Shammai say with a *dinar* or with the equivalent value of a *dinar*, and Beit Hillel say with a *peruta* or the equivalent value of a *peruta*.

¹² Technically, *kiddushin* can be valid with a borrowed or rented object.

Shulchan Aruch EH 28:19

One who borrows an object from his fellow and informs him that he wishes to perform *kiddushin* with it, [the woman is] *mekudeshet*. And if not [he does not inform him], there is doubt as to whether she

that the witnesses can attest to its value, and that the *kalla* is not particular about how it is made.

Rema EH 31:2

In any case we have the custom under the *chuppa* to ask the witnesses if the ring is worth a *peruta* (coin), in order that the *kalla* know that she is only *mekudeshet* with something worth [at least] a *peruta*.

Before performing *kiddushin*, the *chatan* formally states to the *kalla* that she is becoming betrothed to him in accordance with the laws of Moshe and Yisrael through the object he transfers to her possession. He typically repeats these words after the *mesader kiddushin*.

The Ring

In some communities, such as the Syrian community,¹³ a coin is used to effect *kiddushin*, harkening back to the mishna's description of *kiddushei kesef* (*kiddushin* with money). The Zohar mentions the use of a ring for *kiddushin*, which is seen as representing the couple's connection.¹⁴ A ring has long been a prevalent mode of *kiddushin*, already noted in Geonic times.¹⁵

A simple, gold ring gives the *kalla* no false impressions about its value, so we can be confident that the *kiddushin* will not be challenged as having taken place under false pretenses:

Mordechai Kiddushin 487-488

The people had the practice of performing *kiddushin* with a gold ring without a precious stone set in it, since most people are not expert in assessing value...

A ring also has the advantage of serving as a sign of marriage following the wedding:

Sefer Ha-chinuch Ki Tetzei 552

Among the roots of this mitzva is that the Torah commands us [that a man should] perform an action with a woman that demonstrates the matter of their relationship before he has relations with her...And we can even say that it is in order that she keep this in mind forever...And thus their dwelling and living will always be in harmony, and the dwelling will fulfil the will of God who wishes it. And since the foundation of the mitzva is as I mentioned, [Am] Yisrael have

is *mekudeshet*. Rema: The same halacha applies to one who rents a utensil or object from his fellow and performs *kiddushin* with it.

¹³ https://www.dailyhalacha.com/media/Syrian_Sephardic_Wedding_Guide.pdf

¹⁴ *Tikkunei Zohar* 5, 19a

This final *mem* [used unconventionally at the beginning of the biblical phrase "*le-marbeh ha-misra*" (Yeshayahu 9:6)] is made into a ring, and with it is said to the *kalla*, 'be *mekudeshet* to me with this ring,' *mem* [in the shape of a final *mem* letter], about which it is said the embodiment of the connection is attached to the ring...and when it spreads out to give light, it makes colors to give light.

¹⁵ *Teshuvot Ha-geonim* – Harkavi 65

They are accustomed in our place that one is *mekadesh* a woman with a ring...

been accustomed to perform *kiddushin* with a ring to be on her hand always as a reminder, even though halachically it is possible to perform *kiddushin* with a mere amount of a *peruta*.

The *chatan* traditionally places the ring on the *kalla*'s index finger:

Sefer Ha-Roke'ach, Laws of Betrothal and Marriage, 351

He places the ring on her second finger that is adjacent to the thumb and says: Be *mekudeshet* to me with this ring according to the law of Moshe and Yisrael.

However, even if he simply gave her the ring without placing it on any finger, the *kiddushin* take effect.

Aruch Ha-shulchan EH 27:4

Even if he placed it in her lap or in her domain, she is *mekudeshet*...and they are accustomed to place the ring on the finger adjacent to the thumb, but the fundamental law is that this is not something to be particular with.

When a *kalla* is in *nidda*, physical contact with her *chatan* is restricted. This raises questions about how she should receive her ring. Maharil suggests that the ring be dropped onto her finger:

Maharil (Minhagim) Nissuin

He would press the ring onto her finger that is adjacent to the thumb. But if she is not *tehora* [ritually pure] he does not touch her, but rather lets it [the ring] fall on its own onto her finger.

Or Zarua, however, rules that the *chatan* may place the ring directly on her finger. The couple are not yet married at this stage of the ceremony, and relations remain off limits. Therefore, extra concerns with a married couple passing objects to each other or inadvertently touching during *nidda* do not yet apply:¹⁶

Or Zarua I 341

Nevertheless, where they have already prepared what is needed for the [wedding] feast, and she became *nidda*. He brings her in [to the *chuppa*] *le-chat'chila* and is *mekadesh* her and she receives the ring from his hand, for since she is not yet *mekudeshet* and they are not permitted to have relations, there is no concern if he touches her hand. And it seems to me that so ruled my teacher Rabbeinu Simcha and acted accordingly himself.

Rav Shmuel Vosner rules in accordance with the lenient view, but specifies that the couple should take care not to touch:

¹⁶ Shulchan Aruch YD 195:2

He may not touch even her little finger, and he may not pass anything from his hand to her hand, or receive it from her hand, lest he touch her flesh.

Shiurei Shevet Ha-Levi 195 2:3

In a *chuppa* where the *kalla* is *nidda* we rule that he can place the ring on her finger, just that he not touch her.

Accepting Kiddushin

Kiddushin take effect only with the *kalla*'s consent. (Learn more [here](#).) The *kalla*'s holding out her hand following the *chatan*'s statement that he is *mekadesh* can be understood as a way of expressing her consent to the *kiddushin*.¹⁷

Responsa Rivash 170

...When it is said to the woman in the language of *kiddushin* at the time of giving [the ring], and she reaches out her hand and takes the ring, then she becomes *mekudeshet* through her silence. For her receiving the ring or the money of *kiddushin* is acquiescence, since she already heard that he is giving it to her for the purpose of *kiddushin*.

Is there room for a *kalla* to indicate verbally that she accepts *kiddushin*? While simple verbal expressions of consent aren't customary, they also do not affect the validity of the *kiddushin*.¹⁸ Meiri explains that once *kiddushin* are performed, a *kalla*'s statement of acceptance has no effect on them:

Beit Ha-bechira, Kiddushin 5b

...For since we don't require her statement, her speech does not add or detract at all...

However, ruling in this way does not typically translate into encouraging the *kalla* to respond to *kiddushin*. For example, Rav Binyamin Adler writes:¹⁹

¹⁷ The *kalla*'s silence can itself be taken to indicate acquiescence, in accordance with the halachic principle "silence is akin to acquiescence" (see *Yevamot* 88a).

¹⁸ The Talmud brings an unusual case where a man gives a woman money as collateral and then says he wishes to betroth her with it. In this case, her silence is actually taken as lack of consent so that *kiddushin* would be invalid, but her verbal assent indicates that she consents and *kiddushin* are valid. Ordinarily, though, no statement is necessary.

Kiddushin 12b-13a

As it is taught [in a *baraita*]: He said to her, "accept this *sela* [a coin] as a deposit," and then he said to her, "be *mekudeshet* to me with it" – [if he said it] at the time of giving the money, she is *mekudeshet*, [if he said it] after giving the money, if she wanted, she is *mekudeshet*, if she didn't want, she isn't *mekudeshet*. What is "she wanted" and what is "she didn't want"? If you say, "she wanted" is that she said "yes," [and] "she didn't want" is that she said "no" – It would follow that, in the first case in the *baraita*, if she said "no" it is still *kiddushin*. Why? – she said "no"! But rather, "she wanted" is that she said "yes" [and] "she didn't want" is that she was silent. We learn from this that silence [in response to his statement of *kiddushin* made] after the giving of money has no significance.

¹⁹ See also here:

Responsa Bema'eh Ha-bazak 5:112

A woman who very much wants to respond to her *chatan* after *kiddushin*, "Behold I receive this ring and am *mekudeshet* to you with it in accordance with the laws of Moshe and Yisrael" can do thus. Note 1:...The Rav *mesader kiddushin* needs to explain to the *kalla* that she should not think that this statement is an act of *kiddushin*, but just an expression of consent to the husband's *kiddushin*...

Ha-Rav Binyamin Adler, *Ha-nissuin Ke-hilchetam* I, 7:39, pp. 223-24

[The woman who is] becoming *mekudeshet* receives the ring in silence, and does not need to respond at all after the statement of the one who is *mekadesh*. But if she responded after him “*hen*” [“yes” in Aramaic] or said “*harei ani mekudeshet lecha*” “behold I am *mekudeshet* to you,” she has not lost anything. But if she answers, “*harei ata mekudash li*” “you are *mekudash* to me,” as is practiced in Reform congregations, there is uncertainty whether she has thus nullified the *kiddushin*, and therefore she is only doubtfully *mekudeshet*...

The Alter Rebbe connects the *kalla*’s silent acceptance of *kiddushin* with the vagaries of exile. The *kalla* represents the *sefira* of *malchut*, which rises as we approach redemption:²⁰

Rav Shlomo Zalman of Liady, *Torah Or, Va-yigash*, 45

That which is said [in *sheva berachot*] “speedily may there be heard...the voice of the *kalla*.” For now, in exile, it is said “I have remained mute” (*Tehillim* 39:3), which is the aspect of silence, “like a mute who does not open his mouth” (*Tehillim* 38:14). Therefore, the *chatan* is the one who says, “behold you are *mekudeshet* to me” and the *kalla* is silent. But in the future, when she will be elevated higher and higher, then she will also pour forth abundance and it will be called the voice of the *kalla*.

According to this vision, a redemptive future will include a *kalla* finding her voice.

How might a *kalla* find her voice?

The concluding beracha of the sheva berachot, drawing on a verse from Yirmiyahu, speaks of “the voice of the chatan and the voice of the kalla.”

Yirmiyahu 33:11

The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of a *chatan* and the voice of a *kalla*, the voice of those who say: Give thanks to God of Hosts, for God is good for His lovingkindness is forever, who bring a thanksgiving offering to the House of God, for ‘I will restore the captives to the land as at first,’ said God.

At traditional Jewish weddings, the voice of the chatan is heard, but the voice of the kalla typically is not.

Still, even when she is silent, the kalla’s role is not that of a passive “object.” Kiddushin are valid only with her willing and deliberate consent, so that she is a full partner in the betrothal.

Even at the most traditional weddings, the kalla’s voice can be heard figuratively, as when she participates in planning out the details of her chuppa and chooses honorees to represent her.

²⁰ Available here: <https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=16069&st=&pgnum=97>

Or quietly, as she davens under the chuppa for herself and others.

Nevertheless, kallot today have increasingly chosen to make their voices audibly heard at their weddings. Depending on her and her chatan's inclinations, communal and familial norms, and the mesader kiddushin's counsel, a kalla may make a siyyum at the reception, recite she-hechiyyanu upon receiving her ring or later in the ceremony (see below and the next installment of this series), or join the chatan in reciting "Im eshkech" "If I forget, thee, O Yerushalayim" (see our next installment). Or a kalla might choose to offer words of Torah under the chuppa, as Rabbanit Dr. Chana Friedman did at her own wedding.²¹

Rabbanit Dr. Chana Friedman, "Bridal Reflections." Geluya 11.5.20

I sought only one departure from the usual protocol: I wanted to express something of all these thoughts in speech. Under the *chuppa*, immediately after the stage of giving the ring, I took the microphone from the one conducting the ceremony, and shared with those assembled my interpretation of the "*kinyan*" that I had just undergone.

The wedding is one of the most significant and meaningful moments of a couple's life. It is important to think and talk through beforehand how each of them sees themselves within it.

She-hechiyyanu

May a *kalla* recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* upon receiving her ring?

In *she-hechiyyanu*, we bless God "Who has kept us alive, and sustained us, and brought us to this time." In line with its reference to time, it is obligatory to recite *she-hechiyyanu* at the [onset of holidays](#), and over *mitzvot* that come at festive times, or at long intervals.²²

The fundamental halacha is also to recite *she-hechiyyanu* over occurrences that fill a person with joy, such as acquiring significant new clothes or jewelry.

Shulchan Aruch OC 223: 3,4,6

If one built a new home or acquired new articles...one recites *she-hechiyyanu* each time, and not only if they are new for the halacha is the same for old ones if they are new to him...for the *beracha* is only on account of joy of the heart...over an insignificant item, like a robe...one does not recite a *beracha*.

²¹ Available here: <https://gluya.org/bridal-reflections/>

²² Rambam, Laws of Berachot 11:9

Every mitzva that is from time to time, such as *shofar* and *sukka* and *lulav* and reading the *megilla* and Chanuka candles, and similarly every mitzva that is an acquisition for him, such as *tzitzit* and *tefillin* and *mezuzah* and *ma'akeh* [a guardrail on one's roof], and similarly a mitzva that is uncommon and not always available, which is similar to a mitzva that is from time to time, such as a *berit mila* for his son, or *pidyon ha-ben*, one recites over it *she-hechiyyanu* at the time of performing it...

When joy is shared with another, the *beracha* of *ha-tov ve-hameitiv*, “Who is good and bestows good,” is recited instead.²³ Shulchan Aruch rules that this is the appropriate *beracha* to recite over a gift.²⁴ Other authorities, however, including the Mishna Berura, rule that one should recite *she-hechiyyanu* upon receiving a gift.

Mishna Berura 223:21

When articles are given to him as a gift, the recipient needs to recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* and not *ha-tov*, and there are those who take as law the ruling of Shulchan Aruch and recite *ha-tov* and not *she-hechiyyanu*, and in practice it seems that it's better practice in this to recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu*.

In his *Bei'ur Halacha*, he adds that even those authorities who would prefer *ha-tov ve-hameitiv* over a gift acknowledge that *she-hechiyyanu* would not be a *beracha* in vain.²⁵

In practice, *she-hechiyyanu* is often not recited over new acquisitions:

Magen Avraham 223:5

New articles. I haven't seen people being careful about this....

Perhaps a general tendency not to recite *she-hechiyyanu* at every opportunity can help explain why it is not customary for a *kalla* to recite *she-hechiyyanu* over her wedding ring.

Along these lines, Rav Yosef Lieberman rules that a *kalla* should not recite *she-hechiyyanu* over her wedding ring following *kiddushin*. In his understanding, *she-hechiyyanu* isn't commonly recited over jewelry. Furthermore, he notes that we make an effort at a wedding to emphasize that the ring need only be worth a *peruta*, which perhaps detracts from its significance:

Responsa Avnei Derech (Printz) 29

I asked Rav Yosef Lieberman, author of *Responsa Mishnat Yosef*: Should the *kalla* recite *she-hechiyyanu* over the ring, for she certainly is very happy in her heart and why should she not need to thank God for that? And this is what he responded to me:...For the custom is not to recite the *beracha* over items of jewelry, even if they are of gold and expensive, even on a diamond ring, how

²³ *Berachot* 59b

It is taught in a baraita: The brief rule for this matter: On [what is] one's own, one says “*Baruch she-hechiyyanu ve-kiyyemanu*,” on [what is] one's own and one's fellow's, one says “*Baruch ha-tov ve-hameitiv*.”

²⁴ Shulchan Aruch OC 223:5

If they gave him a gift, he recites the *beracha* “*ha-tov ve-hameitiv*,” for it is good for him and for the giver.

²⁵ *Bei'ur Halacha* 223:5

Furthermore, it seems to me more that, even according to the opinion of the authorities that he can recite the *beracha* of *ha-tov ve-hameitiv*, even so, if he recited the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu*, it is not in vain, for the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* applies to his own happiness that he has over some thing [or] good news that concerns him.

much more so that we do not recite a *beracha* over a wedding ring, about which the Rav *mesader kiddushin* asks the witnesses, “Is it worth a *peruta*?”...

Still, there is halachic basis for the *beracha*. In the early nineteenth century, Eshel Avraham rules that it is proper for a *kalla* to recite *she-hechiyyanu* when she first wears significant pieces of jewelry following the wedding:

Eshel Avraham (Buczacz) 223

In any case, it seems that it is correct to oversee that the *kalla* recite a *beracha* at the time of her first wearing significant jewelry that she wears after the wedding, though in any case after the fact there is justification in this [not reciting it]...

Similarly, in the mid-twentieth century, Rav Moshe Feinstein suggests that a *kalla* receiving an engagement ring (**not** a wedding ring for the purpose of *kiddushin*) should recite *ha-tov ve-hameitiv*:

Responsa Iggerot Moshe EH 4:84

In the matter of acquiring a ring that they give to a *kalla* at the time of engagement [*shidduchin*]....and the *beracha* that one should recite over it...Regarding the *kalla* who receives it, there is also reason to recite the *beracha* of *ha-tov u-meitiv*, for it is also good for the giver [the *chatan*]...

The ring used for *kiddushin* would seem to bring no less joy than the engagement ring. Though it is simpler and less financially valuable, its significance is exponentially greater. Indeed, Rav Yaakov Ariel is quoted as saying that it is permissible for a *kalla* to recite *she-hechiyyanu* over receiving her wedding ring, but that doing so in public raises issues of *tzeniut*:

Responsa Avnei Derech (Printz) 29

Since at a wedding the *kalla* recited *she-hechiyyanu* before those assembled, I asked Rav Yaakov Ariel (in writing) regarding this and he explained to me that certainly the *kalla* can recite the *beracha* of *she-hechiyyanu* over clothing and new articles or over gifts, “However, the *beracha* in public is not in the way of the modest daughters of Yisrael, and there is a breach of the fences [of modesty] in this and the sages are not pleased with it.”

This would seem to leave room for a *kalla* to recite *she-hechiyyanu* over receiving her ring in a soft voice or, in a community in which women take on more public roles, to recite it in a public way. A *kalla*’s *she-hechiyyanu* over receiving her ring is one possible expression of her joy in accepting it and the *kiddushin* it represents. (We’ll discuss the possibility of reciting *she-hechiyyanu* at a later point in the wedding in our next piece.)

A Chatan’s Ring

In recent years, it has become increasingly common for halachically observant men to

wear wedding rings. Decades ago, Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled that it is fully permissible for a man to wear a wedding ring, in part as a sign of marriage:

Responsa Iggerot Moshe EH 4:32

...If there is a prohibition on account of idolatrous ordinances for the man to go about with a ring that the *kalla* gave him outside of the time of *kiddushin*. It seems in my humble opinion that there is no reason to prohibit, for there is no ordinance among idolators for a man to go about for some time with a ring that she gave him ...since going about after the wedding [with the ring] is certainly only for adornment and perhaps also as a sign that he is married...

In many circles, *chatan* and *kalla* privately give each other gifts in the *yichud* room, following the wedding ceremony. Some *kallot* take this opportunity to give a ring to the *chatan*. Giving a ring outside of the *chuppa* draws a clear contrast between this act, with only personal significance, and the halachic significance of the ring used for *kiddushin*. It also avoids potential concerns specific to *chuppa* (which we'll discuss shortly).

In general, the *kalla* giving a gift to the *chatan*²⁶ once *kiddushin* have been concluded does not affect the validity of the *kiddushin*.²⁷ But doing so under the *chuppa* does raise other halachic issues:

Responsa Iggerot Moshe EH 3:18

...Certainly, regarding the *kiddushin*, since she has already become *mekudeshet* in accordance with Halacha, they are full-fledged *kiddushin*. That she also gave and also said what she said is silliness and nonsense...But it is prohibited to do this...for it is against the law of the Torah, and according to gentile law she, too, needs to perform *kiddushin*, and thus that they do in accordance with their ordinances which is certainly prohibited, but even if it is not a gentile ordinance also it seems to be prohibited to do so during the *chuppa* even without making a statement, and with a statement even afterwards if it is adjacent to the *chuppa*...for one should be concerned that based on this they

²⁶ The Talmud introduces the possibility that *kiddushin* could take effect by a *kalla* giving something of monetary value to a *chatan*, if he is sufficiently important and elevated in station that his acceptance of her gift could be perceived as having monetary value. However, this is not practiced. Furthermore, it would rule out the *chatan* giving the *kalla* a ring, and thus not resolve a couple's desire for each of them to give a ring to the other.

Kiddushin 7a

Rava asked: [She says] 'Take this *maneh* [the equivalent of 100 silver *zuzim*] and I will be *mekudeshet* to you.' What [is the halacha]? Mar Zutra said in the name of Rav Papa: She is *mekudeshet*...Here we are dealing with an important man, that for the benefit of his receiving a gift from her, she consents and makes a *kinyan* of herself to him.

²⁷ See also:

Rav Haim Jachter, "Conservative Kiddushin," *Techumin* 18

I heard from my Rav and teacher, Rav Zalman Nechemya Goldberg Shlit"a, that nothing in this [giving a *chatan's* ring] would render *kiddushin* invalid, for with a person performing *kiddushin* we don't say that [correcting an action] "within the flow of speech is like [initial] speech" (*Nedarim* 87a) and if so, what does it matter to us what the woman did [in giving a ring] after the husband was *mekadesh* her with a ring?

Available here: <https://www.zomet.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=262&ArticleID=245A>

will come to say that also a woman can perform *kiddushin* on a man...it is a great prohibition, for through this they cause the law of *kiddushin* to be forgotten by many...

Rav Moshe expresses concerns that presenting a ring to the *chatan* under the *chuppa* might be derived from gentile wedding customs, and thus akin to following idolatrous ordinances. Furthermore, it could lead to misunderstandings about the nature of *kiddushin* or to the halacha being forgotten. Still, he distinguishes between this situation and an **exchange** of rings under the *chuppa*, which he fears could raise questions about the validity of *kiddushin*.²⁸

Although Rav Moshe strongly disapproves of double-ring ceremonies, in pressing situations he permits a *mesader kiddushin* to enable a *kalla* to give her *chatan* a ring under the *chuppa* after *kiddushin* are complete—on condition that the *mesader kiddushin* clearly states that she is giving him the ring only as a gift.

Responsa Iggerot Moshe EH 4:13

...When a Rav at a given wedding is in a situation where they compel him and he is under duress for his livelihood to conduct the *kiddushin* specifically in a way that the *kalla* will also give a ring to the *chatan*, he must inform them and also the witnesses that only the *chatan's* giving to the *kalla* is *kiddushin*, and the *kalla's* giving to the *chatan* is not relevant to the *kiddushin* at all, but rather it is a mere gift, and her statement should be the language of giving for love and affection once he is already her husband.

More recently, a ruling was published in Eretz Hemda Institute's *Bemar'eh Ha-bazak* that leaves room for a *kalla* to give her *chatan* a ring under the *chuppa* after the wedding ceremony has clearly ended, when it is very important to the *kalla*:

Responsa Bemar'eh Ha-bazak 5:112

...One should not permit the woman to give a ring to the *chatan*, even if she says, "behold I am *mekudeshet* to you"...Note 3: If the matter is very important to the *kalla*, it is possible to suggest that she give a ring after the clear conclusion of the *chuppa* ceremony, and that she say to him the verse, "Place me like a seal upon your heart, like a seal upon your arm" [*Shir Ha-shirim* 8:6], or sentences similar to this that have no acquisitional meaning. This suggestion leaves no room for the concerns that *Iggerot Moshe* raised (EH 3:18) 1. A custom of non-Jews is not relevant here. 2 Also there is no concern in this of [causing] error, that people will think that also a woman performs *kiddushin*...3. The concern that a law of the Torah will be forgotten is not applicable.

²⁸ Responsa Iggerot Moshe EH 4:13

...That the *kalla* also gives a ring to the *chatan* under the *chuppa* during *kiddushin* and says something as well, something which many "rabbis" have introduced into the procedure of *kiddushin*, and it is not recognizable who is *mekadesh* whom, the *chatan* the *kalla* or the *kalla* the *chatan*, and perhaps it seems that it's just a trivial matter of exchanging rings as gifts as a mere symbol of attaining the significance of man and wife and not the act of *kinyan* for marriage that the Torah required, for perhaps based on this intent it is as though they did not perform *kiddushin* in accordance with the Torah and she is not *mekudeshet* at all, and this is a great doubt for me, for which I have yet to find a proof.

In Israel, some Rabbanim permit the *kalla* to gift the *chatan* a ring under the *chuppa*, following *sheva berachot* and breaking the glass; others do not.²⁹

Rav Benaya Bruner, Head of Zohar Weddings Initiative, Rings, Zohar Rabbanim answer

There is a possible option that in our experience is acceptable for most couples, that at the end of the ceremony after breaking the glass, the *kalla* gives the ring to the *chatan* as a gift that expresses love. The matter must be done in coordination with the Rav, after the Rav's announcing that the halachic ceremony has ended. At this giving the *kalla* can say a few words, it is common to quote verses that express love such as "I am beloved's and my beloved is mine" and the like. [one can consult the Rav for the language.]... There are Rabbanim who permit giving a ring by the *kalla* at the end of the ceremony in accordance with the above suggestion and there are those who do not allow for it. Their concern is lest the matter be interpreted as a halachic act, which is a slippery slope...

As above, there is more rabbinic support for the *kalla* to privately give the *chatan* a ring after the *chuppa* is over, e.g., in the *yichud* room. Previously, we noted that Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion Rav Baruch Gigi, permits giving a ring to the *chatan* upon his assumption of the obligations in the *ketuba*, which Ashkenazim typically perform prior to *chuppa*. (See more [here](#).) A *kalla* can also give the *chatan* a ring at a time other than the wedding.

In our next piece, we continue to discuss the wedding ceremony, beginning with the reading of the *ketuba*.

Further Reading

- Rav Binyamin Adler, *Ha-nissuin Ke-hilchetam*.
- Rav Aryeh Kaplan, *Made in Heaven*, New York: Moznaim, 1983.

²⁹ Available here: <https://www.mitchatnim.co.il/article/292/>