**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**LIFECYCLES – HILKHOT ISHUT**

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**Shiur #20: Laws of the Wedding (10)**

**Customs and Laws of the Wedding**

**Introduction**

**In the** [previous *shiur*](http://etzion.org.il/en/laws-wedding-9-customs-and-laws-wedding)**, we discussed the** ancient practice, preserved by some German and Sephardic communities, to use a *tallit* as a *chuppa*. More specifically, the *chatan* covers his wife with his *tallit* during the wedding ceremony. Some (*Tashbetz* 461; see also *Maharil*, *Hilkhot Nisu’in*, p. 466) trace this practice to the Biblical description of the betrothal of Rivka to Yitzchak (*Bereishit* 24:64-65). Others point to the laws of the marital designation (*yi’ud*) of a Jewish maidservant (*ama ivriya*). Numerous *Rishonim* (see, for example *Orchot Chaim*, vol. 2, pp. 64-65) explain that spreading his garment over the *kalla* constitutes the *chuppa*. Yet others (*Rokeach* 353) trace this practice to Ruth, who says to says to Boaz, “I am Ruth, your handmaid, and you shall spread your skirt over your handmaid, for you are a near kinsman” (Ruth 3:9; see Rashi ad loc.). This practice was observed throughout Ashkenaz, and it appears in recent Sephardic halakhic literature as well (see *Ben Ish Chai*, *Shana Aleph*, *Shoftim*; see also *Sefer Ha-Mifkad*, vol. 1, 2b, and *Birkei Yosef*, OC 8:5). The common custom of holding the wedding ceremony under a canopy consisting of four poles and a *tallit* or other cloth is first mentioned by the *Rema* (EH 55) and contemporary Polish *Acharonim* (see *Taz*, EH 62:7; *Mas’at Binyamin* 90; *Bach* EH 62:1).

We also noted a somewhat recent custom of reciting the *Shehechiyanu* blessing over a new *tallit* during the *chuppa* (*Sefer Ha-Mifkad*, vol. 1, 2b). We discussed why the *Shehechayanu* blessing is not said on the wedding itself (see *Maharik* 128; *Shakh* YD 25:5). Interestingly, R. Yaakov Emden (cited in *Pitchei Teshuva*, EH 63:6) rules that the *chatan* should say *Shehechiyanu* during the wedding ceremony. Most *Acharonim*, however, disagree.

This week, we will discuss the reading of the *ketuba* during the wedding ceremony. We will also discuss the *sheva berakhot*.

**Reading the *Ketuba***

 As we discussed previously, there are different customs regarding the proper time to perform the *kinyan* and for the *eidim* to sign the *ketuba*. In some communities, it is customary to read the *ketuba* under the *chuppa*, and before the word “*kenanina*,” the *chatan* performs the *kinyan* and the *eidim* sign the *ketuba* (see Maharam Mintz 109, for example). This custom is common among Sephardim, in *Eretz Yisrael*, and, more specifically, in Jerusalem. The most common custom is to perform the *kinyan* and for the *eidim* to sign the *ketuba* shortly before the *chuppa*.

The Rema (EH 62:9) records that it is customary to read the *ketuba* between the *kiddushin* and *sheva berakhot* in order to create a “break” in between these two parts of the ceremony. Some (see Tosafot, *Pesachim* 102b, s.v. *she-ein*) explain that the *ketuba* is read in order to create a sufficient interruption between the *kiddushin* and the *sheva berakhot* in order to justify saying the *Borei Peri HaGafen* blessing over the second cup of wine, the cup of the *sheva berakhot*.

In some communities, the *mesader kiddushin* reads the *ketuba*, but in other communities, one of the guests is called upon and honored with the reading of the *ketuba*. It is not necessary to read the entire *ketuba*, and some omit the personal status of the *chatan* and *kalla* and the *chatan’s* voluntary financial commitment (*tosefet ketuba*). The latter practice may be especially appropriate if the *chatan* or *kalla* are converts.

There is a tradition dating from the Geonic era for the *chatan* to give the *kalla* the *ketuba* in front of the community (see Halakhot Gedolot 36). In fact, R. Saadia Gaon (*Siddur* *Rav Saadia Gaon*, p. 97) writes that the *chatan* says, “Take this *ketuba* in your hand, through which you enter my domain according to the laws of Moses and Israel.” This formulation may support the view of those who suggest that giving the *ketuba* to the *kalla* serves as an alternate for of *kiddushin*, *kiddushei* *shtar* (*Orchot Chaim*, *Hilkhot Ketubot*). Others claim that there is no reason for the *chatan* to give the *ketuba* to the *kalla*, and it is sufficient for the *mesader* *kiddushin* to ensure that the *kalla* receives the *ketuba* (see *Levushei Mordekhai* 49). It is important that the kalla retains procession of the *ketuba*, as the couple is not permitted to live together without a *ketuba*.

**Introduction to *Birkat Chatanim* – *Sheva Berakhot***

The Talmud (*Ketubot* 7b) teaches that the *sheva berakhot* are recited at the wedding and for the seven days following the wedding:

The Sages taught: One recites the benediction of the grooms in a quorum of ten men all seven days of the wedding celebration.

These blessings are recited over a cup of wine, and only in the presence of ten men (a *minyan*). What is the nature of these *berakhot*?

The Beit Yosef (EH 62) suggests that according to the Rambam (*Hilkhot Ishut* 10:6), the *Birkot Chatanim* function as a *birkat ha-mitzva*, like any blessing recited before performing a *mitzva*. For this reason, the Rambam requires that the blessings must be recited before the *nisu’in*. This view raises many difficulties, such as whether the *nisu’in* is a *mitzva* and how seven blessings of praise can be viewed as a *birkat ha-mitzva*.

Interestingly, the Ran (*Pesachim* 4a, *s.v. u-le’inyan*) explains that “the *berakhot* are blessings of song and praise.” He adds that although *birkot* *ha-shevach* (blessings recited to praise a natural or religious phenomenon) are generally said upon experiencing the given phenomenon, the *birkat chatanim* are said before the *nisu’in*:

These blessings are said before the *nisu’in*… because the *chuppa* is a form of *yichud* (i.e. seclusion of the husband and wife), and the *chuppa* can only be performed if it possible for the couple to engage in sexual relations (*reuyah le-bi’ah*). Since a *kalla* is not permitted to her husband, like a menstruating woman, before the blessings are recited, the blessings must be recited before the *nisu’in*.

In other words, according to the Ran, the blessings offer praise for the union between this *chatan* and *kalla*, and their recitation permits the *chatan* and *kalla* to be secluded. In fact, he cites the Rambam cited above who rules that if one did not say the blessings, the *birkat chatanim* can be recited several days after the wedding, as a proof that the blessings must be *birkot ha-shevach*.

 Next week, we will discuss the details of the *sheva berakhot* recited under the *chuppa*.