

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

May a bridal shower be scheduled during the three weeks?

The issues:

A) *Bain hametzarim*, the 'Three Weeks'

B) Weddings and their preparations during this period

C) Gift giving during this period

A) *Bain hametzarim*, the three weeks

The three week period from the Seventeenth of *Tamuz* to the Ninth of *Av* is observed as a period of mourning for the destruction of both of the temples in *Yerushalayim*. It is commonly referred to as *bain hametzarim*, between the straits (the two fast days commemorating the Romans' breaching the walls, and *Tisha b'Av*, when the *Bais Hamikdash* was actually destroyed) after the verse in *Eicha* saying that the Jews' pursuers caught up with them between these straits, with nowhere to escape to. Historically, the Seventeenth of *Tamuz* commemorates the day the Jewish people worshiped the golden calf. *Tisha b'Av* was the day the spies returned from their tour of *Eretz Yisroel*, brought back their evil reports, and 'that night ordained for future trouble', the Jews wept, thus denying faith in the promise about the Land. More unfortunate events took place on these days in subsequent times, right up to our own times.

While *Tisha b'Av* is observed with full mourning practices, there is a gradual build up. On *Tisha b'Av*, apart from fasting and sitting on the ground, other mourning practices include refraining from wearing leather shoes and from washing any part of the body. Torah study, which causes joy, is limited to sad passages. On *Erev Tisha b'Av*, when eating the last meal before the fast, one may not eat more than one cooked food, or eat meat or drink wine, and one eats alone. During the week of *Tisha b'Av* it is forbidden to wash clothing, to wear freshly washed clothing and to take a haircut. From *Rosh Chodesh Av* and on (nine days) joy is minimized. Weddings are not held and fancy building and tree-planting is forbidden. The Talmud refers to a custom (though apparently this was not forbidden outright) to refrain from weaving. Court cases with gentiles should not be scheduled during this ominous period. These are the restrictions mentioned by the Talmud.

Throughout the generations Jewish communities adopted more restrictions, or extended these restrictions backwards, some of them to the Seventeenth of *Tamuz*. These have the status of *minhagim* that are binding on members of those communities. The most universal restrictions include refraining from celebrating weddings, taking haircuts and laundering. They are restricted for varying parts of this period, based on communal practices. In addition, other practices have become accepted. The practices that concern us here are to refrain from social gatherings and from reciting *shehecheyanu*, the *brocha* on new acquisitions. In addition, a regular *avail* may not engage in frivolous activity.

This shows a carefree attitude to the judgment visited upon him. Certain specific institutions apply, including the restrictions on weddings and other festive gatherings, and greeting him. Sending a gift is considered a form of greeting. The *avail* may also not purchase new items of clothing that require *shehecheyanu*. [See Taanis 29b-30a, Yerushalmi Psachim 4:1, Poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. OC 551, commentaries.]

B) Weddings and wedding preparations

A bridal shower is the term used for a party with the specific purpose of bringing gifts for the engaged couple. This is a way for the friends of the couple to provide them with their basic home necessities, and some more luxurious items. The gifts are not usually expendable items like food, or items that have no relevance to the upcoming wedding or marriage. The 'party' need not be a lavishly catered event, since the purpose is not the celebration. Refreshments are served, but are usually kept tastefully on the side. However, it is a social gathering, albeit purposeful rather than frivolous.

Our question, therefore, is on various fronts. Is this considered similar to a wedding, which is forbidden, at least according to the prevailing *Ashkenazic* custom? Is it like an engagement party, which is permitted, with certain limitations? Is it a social event, which might be forbidden due to its festive nature? In addition, the gift-giving itself raises some questions, that will be discussed in the next section.

Getting married is a *mitzvah*, that also leads to various other *mitzvos*. For one with no children, it leads directly to the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* to procreate. The restriction on marriage is mentioned by the Talmud. However, there are two stages in marriage: erusin and nisuin. Erusin is the first stage, known as betrothal. The two are halachically husband and wife, but do not live together until nisuin, the second stage. The Talmud forbids nisuin after Rosh Chodesh Av, but permits erusin. The Yerushalmi goes further, allowing erusin on Tisha B'av itself. The reasoning is that one might be afraid to let the chance to marry this girl slip away. She might marry someone else.

The question is raised, if one has no children and his marriage is such a great *mitzvah*, why would it be restricted? Some say that in the case of a *mitzvah*, none of the restrictions based on extra joy apply. Thus, building, planting, purchasing and the like would be permitted for this person. The main reason given for the minhag to restrict the marriage is *lo misamna milsa*, it is not a propitious time. Since one wishes to marry at a propitious time, so that the marriage will have better chances at success, one avoids it at times like these. Thus, it is not really a ban, but a restriction based on benefiting the parties. Thus, only the actual wedding is restricted. Preparations are permitted.

Another reason this *mitzvah* would be restricted is because of the intense joy involved in the celebration. The act of marrying alone would not have been forbidden. However, in the general process, a *seuda* is required. This is a festive meal, replete with many joyful elements. The *seuda* is also a *mitzvah*. Nonetheless, this joy is inappropriate at a time of mourning. One mourning a parent may not attend a wedding for the entire twelve month period. However, he or she may wed themselves, after the first thirty days. One does not delay this *mitzvah*. During *shloshim*, the first thirty days, the mourning is more intense. There is some debate in the Talmud about the comparison between the mourning of this period, and that of an individual mourner. Two differences emerge. There is a difference between public mourning and private mourning, and the destruction

took place long ago. It is an old *availus*. The latter reason would be invoked to allow leniencies. The former is debated. Some interpret it as a reason to enforce certain restrictions, but not on marriage *per se*. The restrictions might apply to building and planting. Others maintain that this is also cause for leniency. Private mourning is more intense.

Attending a wedding is also a mitzvah. The *shushbinin*, the wedding party accompanying the couple, are exempt from their obligations to perform other *mitzvos* while they are preoccupied with this *mitzvah*. Nonetheless, only an *avail* whose absence would mar the joy of the bride and groom has a dispensation permitting him to attend. Other *availim* must forgo this *mitzvah*. The joy is inappropriate for an *avail*.

The *minhag* to refrain from weddings during the Three Weeks is based mainly on *lo misamna milsa*. The additional issue of joy that accompanies the *seuda*, which applies to first time marriages as well as those with children, could be viewed in two ways. The period of *Bain Hametzarim* could be considered as intense as *shloshim*, even for the bride and groom, even if they have never married. Or perhaps it is like the twelve month period, during the bride and groom would be permitted to wed. However, everyone else would be considered like mourners. No guests could attend the wedding, thus making it practically unfeasible. Interestingly, a *sheva brochos seuda* is permitted during this period. While various poskim debate whether musical entertainment would be permitted as well, there are no restrictions on attendees. *Availim* in general may not attend such gatherings, unless they have the aforementioned dispensation.

In practical terms, nowadays we perform *erusin* and *nisuin* together. Therefore, there is no practical application of a permissible marriage ceremony without a *seuda*. In addition, due to *lo misamana milsa*, we do not permit first marriages at all during this period. Nonetheless, engagement usually seals a marriage agreement. This is permitted during *Bain Hametzarim*. The poskim maintain that one should not provide a *seuda* for this. Although a *seuda* for a *bris milah* celebration is permitted, an engagement *seuda* would involve more intense joy. However, one may serve snacks and refreshments. Evidently, since it does not qualify as a *seuda*, it is not included in the restriction.

The inclusion of friends at a *seuda* causes the intensity of joy. It is a combination of the joy of the couple and that of the participants that forms the basis for the *minhag*. Our question would be whether to rely on this to permit post-engagement parties involving snacks and refreshments. While they are not necessary for the engagement, there is no *seuda*. If the purpose of the gathering is to help with the couple's preparations for their great *mitzvah* of marriage, it should be permitted. [See Taanis 29a-b Moed Katan 23a Yevamos 41a-43b, Poskim. Tur BY Sh Ar OC 551:2 7, YD 392, EH 14, commentaries.]

C) Giving gifts

Giving a gift during the Three Weeks raises two issues. Giving gifts to mourners is akin to offering a greeting. In addition, on acquiring a new vessel, one recites the *brocha shehecheyanu*. This *brocha* shows joy and thanksgiving to Hashem for bringing us to this wonderful moment in time. Two issues arise with regard to this. Does a mourner recite *shehecheyanu*? Even if a mourner is obliged to recite it, in this sad period can one give thanks for living to see this moment? It is a time of *puranus*, punishment for the type of sins that precipitated the destruction. One should not show disregard for the *puranus*.

The poskim forbid giving gifts on Tisha B'av. The reason is the same as the restric-

tion on greeting on that day. Accordingly, during the rest of this period, when greeting is not restricted, gift giving should also be permitted. Another source says one should not purchase second-hand items, if they bring joy to the purchaser. In addition, the *brocha shehecheyanu* will be required. However, if one receives a gift, he should recite *hatov vehamaitiv*, the other *brocha* recited on new purchases, immediately. This second source might refer to one who receives the gift from a gentile, or a Jew who did not realize it was forbidden. Furthermore, it does not refer to the *brocha shehecheyanu* on the gift.

Three customs are mentioned regarding *shehecheyanu*. Some do not recite *shehecheyanu* at all for the entire period. Some recite it only on *Shabbos*. Some recite it regardless of the time of year. A slight variation is those who recite it before *Rosh Chodesh Av*, at least on *Shabbos*, and possibly all the time. After *Rosh Chodesh*, these people do not even recite it on *Shabbos*.

In explaining the *minhagim*, some say that those reciting it on *Shabbos* believe that the restriction is connected to *availus*. They follow an opinion that an *avail* may not recite *shehecheyanu* except on *Shabbos*. Accordingly, some later authorities discount this *minhag* totally, since a mourner may recite *shehecheyanu* if he does experience joy. If one hears bad tidings, that his father passed away, together with the good news that he inherited his money, he recites two *brochos*, one on the bad news, and *hatov vehamaitiv* on the good news. *Hatov vehamaitiv* is recited when others share the good fortune. This implies that were there no brothers sharing the inheritance, he would recite *shehecheyanu*. However, this is not conclusive proof. It is possible that were there no brothers, he would recite nothing. Nonetheless, the consensus is that an *avail* recites *shehecheyanu* on cyclical *mitzvos* and on new fruits, but is precluded from reciting it publicly.

A second explanation is that the stringent view is based on the inappropriateness of a *brocha* commemorating a time of *puranus*. Thus even on *Shabbos* one refrains. However, many say that one should not forgo the chance for this *brocha*, at least on *Shabbos*.

A further possibility is that a mourner cannot control feelings of joy. If the joy is due to events not of his making, such as *Yomtov*, he recites it. He would not make new purchases, if this brings on joy that requires the *brocha*. Giving him a gift could invoke joy. If the gift is given to a couple, the *brocha* would be *hatov vehamaitiv*. There is enough precedent to permit this *brocha*, even at an ominous time. [See Brochos 59b, Poskim. Sefer Chasidim 840. Tur Sh Ar OC 551:17 554:20 671, commentaries. Noda biyehuda OC II:141 Avnei Nezer OC 428. Availus Bahalacha 16:31:71. Hamoadim Bahalacha 343]

In conclusion, the shower may be held and gifts may be brought.

On the Parsha ... But if [the maiden] shall become wed, become wed, to a man ... [30:7] This refers to *erusin*. [Rashi] The repetition refers to her becoming betrothed to a second husband after her first husband dies. [Nedarim 70a-b] Why is the term 'to become' used for betrothal? It refers to belonging. Perhaps, from the perspective of the husband, he feels the urgency to 'catch' her before anyone else does so. The Torah reveals that Hashem has plans for her, and eventually she will be wed to the one man that He chooses for her.

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