



Discover the Joy of Shabbos

Explore the deeper meaning of the Zemiros, Tefillos and Hanhagos of Shabbos.



Shabbos and Shir HaShirim

By HaRav Eli Mansour (Shiur E3)

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Do you know how to love? Do you love intensely, deeply, with all your heart? Are you as passionate as an infatuated young lover? If the answer is yes, then Shabbos is for you. And if the answer is not quite, then you need to start using Shabbos properly.

The Minhag to recite Shir HaShirim

Nearly 500 years ago, the AriZ"l instituted the practice of reciting Shir HaShirim upon the onset of Shabbos. That practice can still be found in many communities, some of whom even recite this Megilla in a communal chant when they begin Kabbolas Shabbos. What is the connection between this Megilla and Shabbos?

Holy meets Holy of Holies

A simple answer would be that Shabbos is called קודש – holy, and Shir HaShirim is called קודש קדשים – holy of holies by R' Akiva in the Midrash. That would explain the 'fit' between the two.

However, an analysis of the theme of Shabbos could yield a more penetrating insight into the connection between them.

The switch between כה כו כח

To capture the theme of a Jewish Day we look at the Amidah, the designated Tefilah of that day. In the case of Shabbos, we have three עמידות. Each of the עמידות have an opening statement, a proof text which supports

the opening statement, and a conclusion, ending with the Brocha, מקדש השבת. The conclusion is consistent across the three עמידות with one subtle but significant distinction. At night we say וינוחו בה ישראל – the People rest in *her*; in the morning we say וינוחו בו ישראל – the People rest in *him* and in the afternoon we say וינוחו במ ישראל – the People rest in *them*. What is implied by the switch between the feminine, to the masculine, to the plural in what is otherwise an identical Brocha?

The source of our sustenance

One way of analyzing these words is by checking their Gematria¹. The three references are בה which has the numerical value of 7, בו is 8 and במ is 48. Together they are 57 which is the numerical equivalent of זן, which means sustenance. We refer to Shabbos as the מקור הברכה, the source of the blessing and sustenance of the whole week. That source of both physical and spiritual sustenance is alluded to by these references adding up to זן, or sustenance.

The Bride, the Groom, and the Union

Another, less esoteric explanation draws from the fact that Shabbos is referred to as a bride, as we say בואי כלה – welcome, bride – when we invoke the Shabbos. The implication is an intimate union on Shabbos between the People and their Creator. We can think of Shabbos as a wedding ceremony. A wedding requires a bride (alluded to by

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¹ ספר שיירי כנסת הגדולה



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the feminine בַּהּ on Friday night), a groom (as implied by the masculine בּוֹ in the morning) and the union between them (the בָּם at the apex of the sanctity of Shabbos towards the end of Shabbos).

The Longing of the Bride and the Groom

Recognizing Shabbos as a wedding gives meaning to the meals as wedding feasts and gives Shir HaShirim its proper place as the first of the wedding songs. This song proclaims and describes the profound love and longing between the People and Hashem. Shabbos is the place where that longing and love is given expression as bride and groom embrace one another in the sanctity of Shabbos. Our observance of Shabbos is not merely a statement of our obedience to the commandment to cease from creative work on Shabbos; it is a declaration of our understanding of the intimate relationship between Hashem and His People.

Shir HaShirim and redemption

Another numeric explanation puts Shir HaShirim into the picture. The Torah tells us that the sojourn down to Egypt would be 400 years. We know that Hashem back-dated the clock to the birth of Yitzchok and the standard explanation is that the actual time spent in Egypt was 210 years (alluded to in the word וָרַדִּי אֵלַי 'come down' to me, as Yosef messaged to his father Yaakov). But the Seder Hadoros says that the math will show that they were in Egypt for 117 years. And that is precisely the number of פְּסוּקִים in Shir HaShirim. The recitation of that Megilla with the onset of Shabbos is meant to recall the incomplete redemption from Egypt (since, after all, there was exile after that redemption) and awaken the yearning for the intimate relationship of the future redemption. That redemption will be eternal and will not be marred by a subsequent exile.

Shabbos and the song of redemption

Shabbos is often associated with our redemption. We find Chazal telling us that our observance of but one more Shabbos would usher in the ultimate redemption. More than just a count of another Mitzvah, this dictum links Shabbos with Geula. When we left Egypt, points out the חִידָ"א, we sang a song at the Sea, the אִזְ יִשְׂרָאֵל. And now, at the onset of Shabbos, when we are looking towards the future redemption, we sing the Song of Songs, the Shir HaShirim.

Arousing the yearning for redemption

And so, adds the חִידָ"א, we should be careful to recite each Pasuk of the Shir HaShirim; they are each signed and numbered with the 117. And, having recited the Shir HaShirim, we are poised as perhaps at no other time, to beseech Hashem to hasten the coming Geula.

Shir HaShirim and the Pesach Seder

The connection between Shir HaShirim and the Geula may well explain the custom of many to recite Shir HaShirim at the conclusion of the Seder on the night of Pesach. Having celebrated the magnificent redemption from Egypt we turn our attention to the future Geula which will outshine even the great Exodus from Egypt.

Takeaway: Pause before Shabbos begins to acknowledge the intimate relationship with Hashem contained in Shabbos and the connection between Shabbos and the coming perfect Geula – the Song of Songs.