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Dancing in Unity

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*and *siyum* of tractate *Taanis*

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1.

SET YOUR EYES UPON FAMILY

The mishnah (at the end of tractate *Taanis*) says:¹

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: No days were as joyous for the Jewish people as the fifteenth of Av and as Yom Kippur. On these days, the daughters of Jerusalem (other versions say, “the daughters of Israel”) would go out in borrowed, white clothes... and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? “Young man! Please lift your eyes and take note of what you choose. Do not set your eyes upon beauty; set your eyes upon family {lineage}.” {As it says}:² “Grace is falsehood and beauty is vain; a woman who fears Hashem, she shall be praised”; and it says:³ “Give her from the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates....”

We need to clarify:

- a) The verses quoted in the mishnah only prove that the young women declared, “Do not set your eyes upon beauty,” because “grace is **falsehood** and beauty is **vain**.” The quoted verses don’t prove that they said, “set your eyes upon **family**.” On the contrary, these verses explicitly state that a woman’s virtue is demonstrated by her fear of Hashem and her deeds — **not** (only) her family: “A woman who **fears Hashem**, she shall be praised... let **her works** praise her in the gates.”
- b) How can we say that **all the** “daughters of Jerusalem” would say, “set your eyes upon **family**?” Surely, some were not of distinguished lineage.

This difficulty is further magnified: The beraisa⁴ (which elaborates on this mishnah {in the Talmud}) says:⁵ “What would the beautiful women among them say? Set your eyes upon beauty.... What would those of distinguished lineage among them say? Set your eyes upon family.... What would the homely ones among them say? Choose your wife for the sake of Heaven....”

¹ *Taanis* 26b.

² *Mishlei* 31:30.

³ *Mishlei* 31:31.

⁴ {A teaching of the mishnaic Sages that was not included in Mishnah.}

⁵ *Taanis* 31a.

This shows that only the women with distinguished lineage would say, “set your eyes upon family.” Why, then, does the mishnah generalize, saying that “**the daughters of Jerusalem...** would say... set your eyes upon family?”

2.

THREE KINDS OF “DAUGHTERS”

Commentators⁶ explain: The mishnah also alludes to these three statements from the three groups of “daughters of Jerusalem” that are discussed in the beraisa:

The clause, “lift your eyes and **see** what you choose for yourself” was said by the “beautiful women” so that their beauty would be noticed (as the beraisa continues, “a wife is {appreciated} primarily for her beauty”). The women of “distinguished lineage” said, “Do not set your eyes upon beauty; set your eyes upon family.” The “homely women,” who (did not have [grace, which is an expression of] distinguished lineage or beauty, but) had only good deeds, said, “Grace is falsehood and beauty is vain; a woman who **fears Hashem**, she shall be praised’; and it says: ‘Give... and let **her works** praise her in the gates...’” (This reflects what the beraisa says — that they said, “Choose your wife for the **sake of Heaven.**”)

Consequently, this also clarifies the first difficulty (that was mentioned above in Section 1): The verses quoted by the mishnah are not intended to prove what the women said, but as a **separate** statement (that alludes to what the “homely women” would say.)

However, this explanation is not smooth (according to a simple understanding of the mishnah’s phraseology) because:

⁶ *Eliyahu Rabbah* on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 580, sub-par. 10.

- a) The **non-exclusive** wording of the mishnah — “The daughters of Jerusalem... what would they say...” — implies that all the subsequent declarations were said by **all** the daughters of Jerusalem.
- b) Why does the mishnah choose to quote details, and specifically **these** details, from the statements of each class of woman, and not the wording and details used in the beraisa? On the contrary, seemingly, it would behoove the mishnah, which is “a concise text that includes many concepts,”⁷ to express the core theme of each statement: “The beautiful ones would say, “set your eyes upon beauty;” the ones with distinguished lineage would say, “set your eyes upon family,” and the “homely ones” would say, “choose your wife for the sake of Heaven.” The beraisa would then elaborate (based on the mishnah) the **details** of each statement: “Young man! Please lift up your eyes... do not set your eyes upon beauty... Grace is falsehood... her works praise her in the gates...” [In this manner, the mishnah would also (with little need for elaboration) clearly express that these are three distinct statements made by the three classes of daughters of Jerusalem.]

Therefore, it is reasonable to understand the mishnah’s statement, “what would they say...” (**all the** daughters of Jerusalem that went out {into the vineyards}) applies to the **entire** continuation of the passage. The beraisa **adds** to the mishnah and specifies that, besides the {general} declaration made by all the daughters of Jerusalem, each class individually added another aphorism matching their unique qualities.

⁷ Rambam, preface to his *Commentary on Mishnah*, s.v., “acharei chein.”

3.

FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN

We also must further clarify the beraisa itself:

- a) How can we justify the statement (of the “beautiful ones”), “set your eyes upon beauty?” The Torah teaches that “grace is falsehood and beauty is **vain!**” Furthermore, the “beautiful ones” themselves said (as the mishnah teaches), “Do **not** set your eyes upon beauty... grace is falsehood and beauty is vain”! (This question is based on the explanation above that all of the daughters of Jerusalem made this declaration.)
- b) Why is the advice to “choose your wife for the sake of Heaven” a reason to marry “**homely**” women, specifically?

Commentators⁸ explain that the “homely” women were also virtuous. By saying, “choose your wife for the sake of Heaven,” the women intended to advise potential suitors not to focus on “beauty” or “family,” but only on the fear of Heaven and on kind deeds (“for the sake of Heaven”).

This explanation, though, calls for clarification: Simply understood, the statement of the ones with “distinguished lineage” — “set your eyes upon family” — refers to the **spiritual** advantage of “distinguished lineage.” As *Tosafos Yom Tov* explains,⁹ “Presumably, those with distinguished lineage are G-d-fearing.” In light of this, someone who chose from among those with “distinguished lineage” also did so “for the sake of **Heaven.**” In that case, what is superior about the advice of the “homely” women” to choose “for the sake of Heaven”?

⁸ See *Eliyahu Rabbah* on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 580, sub-par. 10.

⁹ *Tosafos Yom Tov* on *Taanis* 4:8.

4.

THE DANCE OF THE FUTURE

Following the aforementioned beraisa, the Gemara concludes the tractate with a quote of a teaching (by Ulla Biraah in the name of Rabbi Elazar):¹⁰

In the Future Era, Hashem will arrange a circle {dance} for the righteous, and He will be sitting among them in the Garden of Eden. Each and every one {of the righteous} will point {to Hashem} with his finger, as the verse says,¹¹ “He will say on that day: *Behold, this is our L-rd, for whom we waited, that He shall save us. This is Hashem for whom we waited; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.*”

The connection between this teaching and the mishnah is self-understood: After the mishnah relates that “the daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance, וחולות (as Rashi explains, “as in the verse, ‘dance in the **dances**,’ לחול במחולות”)¹² in the vineyards...,” the Gemara quotes the teaching that “in the Future Era, Hashem will arrange a **circle** {dance} for the righteous...”

It is reasonable to say that the connection between this teaching and the mishnah and beraisa is not limited to one specific detail, i.e., all three discuss a dance. Rather, they share many of the details, pertaining to the dance-theme, described in the teaching's continuation: “He {Hashem} will sit among them... every one {of the righteous} will point {to Him} with his finger as the verse says, “He will say...”

We must further say: The Gemara quotes this teaching immediately following the beraisa (which follows the **declaration** of the daughters of Jerusalem) and does not cite this in a separate paragraph, as a commentary on the words of the mishnah, “They would go out and dance...” (or the like). Therefore, this {close arrangement} implies that the teaching, “In the Future Era, Hashem will arrange...” is a continuation of, and connected with, the theme

¹⁰ {*Taanis* 31a.}

¹¹ *Yeshayahu* 25:9. {Hashem will be revealed, so that every righteous individual will be able to say: *This is our L-rd*, as though they were pointing at Him with a finger. See end of sec. 9, where the Rebbe explains this idea according to Chassidus.}

¹² *Shoftim* 21:21.

of the **beraisa** (regarding the three kinds of statements made by the daughters of Jerusalem).

5.

A DISPUTE BETWEEN RASHI AND TOSAFOS

At the conclusion of the tractate,¹³ we find something perplexing in the commentaries of Tosafos and Rashi:

On the words, “point with his finger,” Rashi explains: “He will say, ‘This is our L-rd, for whom we waited, that He will deliver us. This is Hashem for whom we waited; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’” Tosafos similarly explains: “Each of them will point to the Holy One with his finger, as the verse says, ‘Behold, this is our L-rd, for whom we waited... we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’”

This is most perplexing: What are Rashi and Tosafos adding that the Gemara does not already **explicitly** mention?!

We can posit that Rashi and Tosafos disagree about the explanation of the phrase {of the Gemara}, “**as the verse says**, ‘He will say on that day: *Behold....*’”:

Rashi explains that the Gemara does not intend only to derive from the verse that “each and every one {of the righteous} will point {to the Holy One} with his finger,” but also that while doing so, they will also **say** the words (of the verse), “Behold, this is our L-rd....” Therefore, Rashi adds to the Gemara’s words: “(...point with his finger) **and he will say** (‘This is our L-rd...’).” Meaning, during the dance, two things will happen: (a) The righteous will point with their fingers; and (b) **they will say**, “This is....”

¹³ {*Taanis* 31a.}

Tosafos disagrees. He says, “Each of them will point to the Holy One with his finger, as the verse says, ‘Behold, this is our L-rd...’” Tosafos **omits** the beginning of the verse, “He will say on that day.” By doing so, Tosafos intends to clarify that:

(a) the Gemara quotes the verse solely to prove (“as the verse says”) that “each of them will point (to the Holy One) with his finger...”; and

(b) the beginning of the verse, “He will say on that day,” (discussing what will be said then) is not relevant here.

However, we must clarify: What is the rationale behind each opinion (in Rashi and Tosafos’ dispute) whether the statement of the righteous applies to this Gemara?

6.

THE INHERENT ATTRIBUTE OF THE JEWISH WOMAN

The explanation of all the above:

It is understood and obvious that “the daughters of Jerusalem...” went out on Yom Kippur and on the 15th of Av was something holy. Consequently, we also understand that they did not intend to point out their physical attributes (beauty, wealth,¹⁴ and so on) in of themselves. Rather, they intended to highlight their attributes that the **Torah** teaches are worthy reasons for pursuing a match and a marriage.

[For example: When the “beautiful” women said, “set your eyes upon beauty,” they meant the true (**spiritual**) advantage of beauty, since physical beauty is derived from spiritual beauty. As known,¹⁵ to have physically beautiful children depends on the parents’ sanctity and purity during intimacy. (Then,

¹⁴ As mentioned in the version of *Ein Yaakov* of this text.

¹⁵ See tractate *Kallah*, ch. 1; *Nedarim*, 20a.

children receive spiritually beautiful character traits (and “soul garments”);¹⁶ therefore, they are physically beautiful, as well.)]

More specifically, the virtues of the daughters of Jerusalem can be divided into two categories : (a) The **particular** attribute that was unique to **each** daughter of Jerusalem; and (b) the common attribute possessed by all of them. This attribute was **transmitted** to their children and grandchildren, and to all successive generations.

This is the difference between the mishnah and the beraisa:

The mishnah speaks primarily about the common attribute possessed by all the daughters of Jerusalem. (a) **Every** daughter of Jerusalem possessed a special spiritual attribute by dint of which she was included in the category of “a woman who **fears Hashem**, she shall be praised”; and, (b) this attribute was so deeply rooted that it was transmitted to her children to whom she gave birth, and whom she educated. This is hinted to in the second verse that the mishnah quotes: “Give **her** of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”

Meaning, “**she shall be praised**” not only because of her own positive attributes (which were enumerated in great detail earlier: “She treats him with goodness... she **works** willingly... from her earnings...”), but also because of her children — {alluded to by the words} “the fruit of her hands,” and “her works” — “give her...” and “let her works praise her in the gates.”

In contrast, the beraisa addresses the individual (spiritual) attribute of each kind of “daughter of Jerusalem,” as will be explained.

¹⁶ {In the Hebrew original, “*levushei hanefesh.*”} See *Tanya*, end of ch. 2.

7.

EXTERNAL BEAUTY VS THE INHERENT “GOOD FAMILY”

Why are we certain that **every** daughter of Jerusalem had the attribute of, “a woman who fears Hashem, she shall be praised,” and that it was so deeply rooted that it was transmitted to her children, as mentioned above? To address this, the daughters of Jerusalem would say, “Young man! Please **lift** your eyes and see... do not set your eyes upon beauty; set your eyes upon family”:

We should not evaluate a person’s (physical and spiritual) attributes — based on how they appear to the eye — as we usually do [“**do not** set your eyes upon **beauty**” in the **broad** sense of the word {i.e., special attributes}]. Instead, we must, “**lift your eyes and see.**” (This is like the verse, “**lift** your eyes Heavenward” — bringing {to the next step} — “and you will see Who created these creations,”) ¹⁷ i.e., with an elevated and deeper perspective: One needs to look at the root and the source from where the attributes are derived.

This is the intended meaning of the words, “set your eyes upon **family**”:

In the broader sense, “family” refers not only to parents, etc., but to anyone who influences a person’s (spiritual) underlying character. This includes teachers and educators. (In fact, in numerous teachings of our Sages, ¹⁸ teachers and educators are referred to as “parents.”)

In particular, special attention should be paid to the fact (since the term “family” is used to describe the nation as a whole) ¹⁹ that she is from *the* Jewish family — a daughter of Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah, the **matriarchs** — from whom she has **inherited** her Jewish character traits.

And then one will see that (a) even a woman who does not have any discernible spiritual virtues, only lacks these virtues outwardly. Inwardly,

¹⁷ *Yeshayahu* 40:26.

¹⁸ See *Sanhedrin* 19b, 99b. Sifri and Rashi on *Devarim* 6:7.

¹⁹ Commentary of *Metzudas David* on *Amos* 3:1 .

however, since she is a member of the Jewish family, she is considered to be “a woman who fears Hashem, she shall be praised” (even though in the meantime, this virtue may be concealed). (b) Furthermore, the true virtues of the “daughters of Jerusalem” are not defined by “beauty,” by advantages that are seen outwardly [because “grace is **falsehood** and beauty is **vain**”] — but specifically, by how virtues are like “family”: They are inheritable virtues transmitted by from one generation to the next.

8.

THE HOMELY ONES ALSO HAVE FAMILY

After this teaching, the beraisa adds: Once we clarify that “set your eyes upon **family**... a woman who fears Hashem, she shall be praised” means that after we look at and discern the inward excellency of every Jewish daughter (“family”), for which reason, she is a “woman who fears Hashem,” **then**, we can also praise (not only her “fear of Hashem,” but also) her **grace** and **beauty**. Because then, these {seemingly superficial} advantages are also considered real advantages.

Therefore, we find that in the beraisa that afterwards, each group among the daughters of Jerusalem expressed its own particular virtue (that was overt and visible):

The “beautiful ones” — this refers to the daughters of Jerusalem whose (spiritual) virtues and the beauty of their soul’s dispositions were **clearly** seen (for as explained above in Section 6, physical beauty stems from spiritual beauty {and thus, the true meaning of “beautiful ones” are those whose spiritual beauty is evident}). Consequently, they said, “set your eyes upon beauty,” i.e., to those whose advantages are **evident**.

The “ones with distinguished lineage” refers to those whose positive attributes and characteristics were not so clearly seen. Since, however, they descended from distinguished families, with Torah scholars and good character

traits, **generation after generation**, they were certainly raised to conduct themselves according to the values of their family. We can also be sure that they themselves would educate their own children this way. Therefore, they said, “set your eyes upon **family**,” referring to “family” in the narrow sense — their individual family.

The term “homely ones” refers to a group of the daughters of Jerusalem whose spiritual virtues were concealed. The demeanor of their parents also did not express special qualities, and they had no one else to educate them properly. Therefore, they were spiritually “homely,” and consequently, also physically homely.

However, we are speaking here about the daughters of Jerusalem. Their very realization that they were homely aroused within them a spirit of bitterness, humbleness, and *bittul*.²⁰ Notwithstanding that they had no one from whom to learn these positive traits, **they themselves** accepted upon themselves the yoke of Heaven submissively. This feeling of *bittul* and submissiveness to Hashem awakened an exalted feeling that was expressed in their words, “choose your wife for the sake of Heaven.” They desired grooms who were entirely motivated for the sake of Hashem and were not thinking about positive attributes, etc.

Through this, it was later discovered that they also possessed the virtue of “family.” For this reason, even the homely ones (together with all the daughters of Jerusalem) said (as the mishnah says), “set your eyes upon family.” Because the broken heart of a Jewish woman — over the fact that she was included among the homely ones, with no spiritual virtues — sprung from her being a daughter of *the* Jewish family, viz., a daughter of Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah. Therefore, she feels the sentiment expressed by the verse,²¹ “Your forsaking of Hashem, your L-rd, is bitter.”

9.

TRULY ONE EXISTENCE

²⁰ {*Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

²¹ *Yirmiyahu* 2:19.

The above difference between the mishnah and the beraisa (the mishnah addresses the common virtue of the daughters of Jerusalem, while the beraisa addresses the individual virtue of each group) is also expressed in the difference between the subject, and the continued flow, of the mishnah and the beraisa.

The dancing demonstrated the peace and unity between all the daughters of Jerusalem (which also explains their custom of going out “in borrowed, white clothes, in order not to shame someone who did not have her own”).²² This clarifies the rest of the mishnah: “And similarly it says, ‘Go forth, daughters of Zion, and gaze upon Shlomo *HaMelech*...’”²³ — “the King for whom **peace is His**.”²⁴ This itself is the core of the explanation: How **can** there be peace and unity between all the daughters of Jerusalem? By them “go[ing] forth... and gaz[ing] upon Shlomo *HaMelech*.” Since this is linked with “the King, for whom peace is His,” i.e., Hashem, who creates peace among them all.

This unity was expressed in two ways: (a) As a result of their inner core, it became recognised that “the daughters of Jerusalem” were at the outset one existence without individual differences; (b) even from the standpoint of their individual virtues — and the way things are understood by people differs from one person to the next — nevertheless, the daughter of Jerusalem were united and at peace.

This is the difference between the mishnah and the beraisa: The mishnah addresses the collective “daughters of Jerusalem” (the Jewish people) as they are a single unit. In contrast, in the beraisa, which highlights their individual differences, it was felt that this peace and unity is achieved not on account of their individual virtues being **nullified** (i.e., so they were then not noticeable), but, on the contrary: Notwithstanding the conspicuous differences among the various virtues of the daughters of Jerusalem whose differences were **explicitly articulated**, they all danced together in one circle with peace and unity.

²² *Taanis* 26b.

²³ *Shir Hashirim* 3:11.

²⁴ Rashi and *Bartenura* commenting on *Taanis* 4:8 {who interpret “Shlomo *HaMelech*” to refer to Hashem}.

In light of this, we understand why, following the beraisa, the Gemara quotes the teaching: “In the Future Era, Hashem will arrange a circle {dance} for the righteous... and each and every one {of the righteous} will point {to Hashem} with his finger...” This means that every righteous person will “point” to Hashem with **his own** finger, i.e., according to **his** degree of understanding. Nevertheless, even **then**, they will all join in a single dance.

10.

TWO LEVELS OF UNITY, RASHI AND TOSFOS

More specifically, the second manner of peace and unity {that was described above} (that is reflected even within the **details** {i.e., their individual qualities}), contains two components. In this discussion, regarding the peace between the righteous people, these two components are:

- a) True, each individual righteous person is **distinct** in his level of service to Hashem. Nevertheless, **Hashem** “will sit among them,” and from Hashem’s perspective, all the distinctions between the different levels of service are not mutually exclusive. Accordingly, Hashem creates peace among them, so that all the righteous people, together with all their differences, will be unified all together (in one circle).
- b) Each one of them is influenced by, integrated with, the others. Each one **influences** the others with his {manner of divine} service so that there is total oneness and unity between all the various strata of righteous people.

This is Rashi’s novelty: “Each one will point with his finger and **say**, ‘This is our L-rd...’” This means that each righteous person will also “say,” i.e., influence all the **other righteous people** in the circle, with **his** divine service and with his spiritual standing.

In contrast, according to the approach of Tosafos, in the circular dance, the only thing {in common} that will happen is that all the righteous “will point with

his finger.” The statement (“He will say on that day”) will **not** be directed to the other righteous people in the circle, in order to influence them. (Rather, it is only {directed to Hashem} expressing praise, or the like). According to Tosafos, the peace and unity in the **circle** will not be in a manner of **fusing** of the various categories and levels, etc, as will be explained.

11.

ULTIMATE ONENESS

The concept of a circular dance reflects the theme of Hashem’s infinite *light*,²⁵ “which {like a circle} has no end” (as Rabbeinu Bachya explains).²⁶ The teaching: “In the Future Era, the Holy One will arrange a circle {dance} for the righteous...” means that their pleasure and joy will be beyond measure and without limit. In other words, everyone will indeed point with **his finger**, each according to **his** personal level and style of divine service, as mentioned above. However, this will be in a manner that emphasizes the essential point (the kabbalistic concept of *keser*) of his level of Divine service — a point that is beyond measure and without limit.

For this reason, Tosafos understands that complete fusion between all of the various levels did not happen then. — Because fusion is only possible when each level is in an “expansive” state. Such a state leaves room for a second level external to itself. But within the essential point of each level, there is no room for a second level.²⁷ — Consequently, we must conclude that the peace and unity that was expressed through the **circular-dance** was limited to only the first level of unity discussed earlier (in Section 10).

This also aligns with the teaching of our Sages that, in the Future Era,²⁸ “each one will be singed by the canopy of the other.” A “canopy,” חוּפָּה, is cognate with the word חוּפָּה, (with letter פ”א vowelized with a *segol*) {which means to

²⁵ {I.e., revelation.}

²⁶ In his commentary to *Shemos* 25:31.

²⁷ Similar to a *sefirah* in the realm of *Tohu*.

²⁸ *Bava Basra* 75a.

envelop}, symbolizing the idea of “*makif*”²⁹ or the “*keser*”³⁰ of each righteous person and their level of divine service. From the vantage point of “canopy” and “*keser*,” there is no room for fusion {with another level of divine service}; on the contrary, the level of “canopy” of one righteous person “is **singed** by the canopy of the other.”

Rashi maintains that this will only be true at the beginning {stage} of the Future Era. Afterwards, however, the true oneness of Hashem’s Essence will be revealed, and Hashem’s Essence can contain two opposite realities **as one**. In light of **this revelation**, there will be a **fusion** between all the levels of the righteous (even the highest level, “*keser*” in them) with true peace and unity.

— From the talk delivered on Tu B’Av, 5735 (1975)

²⁹ {Lit., “surrounding,” referring to the highest levels of a person’s soul-powers.}

³⁰ {Lit., “crown.”}