

kol chovevei TORAH

PARSHA PONDERINGS

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The Parallel Nature of Divine and Human Love

By Rabbi Avi Weiss

Shavuot is a celebration of that moment when we, the Jewish people, were wed to God. Note the parallel between that moment and the wedding of bride and groom.

At Sinai, God and the people of Israel stood at the base of the mountain, "*be-tahtit ha-har*." (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on the word *be-tahtit*, the Midrash concludes that we, the Jewish people, were literally standing beneath the mountain - much like bride and groom stand under the *huppah*, the bridal canopy during the wedding ceremony.

At Sinai, God pronounces the words "*ve-atem tihyu li...goy kadosh*, and you will be to Me a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6) This formula is very similar to what the groom says to the bride when he places a ring on her finger - "*harei at mekudeshet li*, behold you are betrothed to me."

At Sinai, God and the people of Israel signed a contract in the form of the ten declarations, *aseret ha-dibrot*. Bride and groom do the same - they enter into the marital agreement through the signing of a *ketubah* - a marital contract.

There are other traditions and rituals that point to a parallel between Sinai and a wedding ceremony. The Jews encircled Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:12) just as the bride circles the groom. There was lightning at Sinai. (Exodus 19:16) This is mirrored in the wedding ceremony as some have a tradition to carry lit candles to the *huppah*. In the end, the tablets were broken at Sinai. (Exodus 32:19) Similarly, a glass is shattered at the end of the

nuptials. The Jewish people ate and drank at Sinai. (Exodus 24:11) In the same way, we also partake of a festive meal at a wedding celebration.

Thus, the Torah states, that "Moshe (Moses) brought the people forth from the camp toward God." (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on this sentence, the Midrash compares this moment to a groom and bride coming toward each other

There are emotional considerations that point to a connection between divine and human love. For example, feeling the presence of God means, no matter how lonely one is, God is near. Love, in the human realm, is also a response to loneliness. Moreover, when we connect to God, we connect to eternity, as God, of course, lives forever. Eternity is also a central component of marriage as we attempt to transcend our own lives by having children. Finally, loving God and loving a fellow human being can both give one a sense of deep fulfillment and meaning in life.

I believe that only through the experience of blissful marital love can one understand love of God. While each partner in the relationship maintains her or his own individuality, love is the uniting of two souls. This gives one a sense of the absolute oneness of God. Human love is also an emotion that is infinite in its scope, giving one a sense of the infinity of God. No wonder the Torah calls cleaving to one's spouse *ve-davak* (Genesis 2:24), just as cleaving to God is called *deveikut*.

In one word: love of God and love of spouse and family interface. On this Shavuot, may each one show us the way to the other.

