

Yerushalayim Yearnings:

Looking for the Kallah; Hoping for the Chosson

Dear Wonderful LINK Community,

It is Erev Shabbos Chazon. The saddest Shabbos of the year. Ramo teaches that we don't even wear Shabbos clothing. We follow the Gra who says: *But it's Shabbos and we know that kavod Shabbos beats the mourning.* But it's that sad.

Last week, Batyah and I hosted a Heritage House Friday night seudah in the Rova. The Heritage House is an open place for searching young Jews. They provide (free of charge) a bed, food and gentle access to Torah through sweet madrichim and madrichot and softly direct these chevra to consider a life of deeper connection. Rabbi Meir Schuster, Zt"l, the *dor's* great mekarev, started the revolution; now under the stewardship of a very special yid, Rabbi Matan Weisberg – a good friend, known to many of you, it continues to touch searching Jews.

It is always an eclectic group. Last week Jews from South Africa, Great Neck, Queens, Brooklyn, France, New Jersey ... spanning the gamut of religious commitment came together. Many were intent on staying in Israel, though they had no clue how. Others had a plan. Some studied in yeshiva (one was actually making a siyum on maseches Ta'anis), while others could not read Hebrew. Their common denominator: they are Jewish, journeying in Israel and single. Batyah and I were the Shabbos Abbah and Emah. We enjoy each other's company immensely, discuss *sinas chinam* and strategies of transcendence; hopefully a deeper connection to *yiddishkeit* has been forged.

When we got to Eishes Chayil, I shared with the (predominantly male) crowd something I learned from Rabbi Avraham Willig many years ago: **Everyone in the room should daven for your kallah (or chosson).** After their initial confusion, I shared that since you are in your 20's or 30's, we may assume she (he) is in the world - have her (him) in mind while we sing. Daven for her health and welfare and she should reveal herself soon. It struck a chord somewhere. The story is not over – but a spark was lit.

A few nights later, we have the privilege of a midnight post Kotel surprise visit from Reb Aaron (& Sarah) Markson of YPLA fame; Reb Aaron shared how happy he is with his wonderful kallah. Beyond his dreams. Only from Hashem. A wonderful couple who appreciate each other after transcending their own struggles. How sweet it is!

Fast forward a few days later, and we are visiting Tally Hill – a great Jewish heroine who lives in Gevaot a small yishuv in the Gush Etzion area. Tally is doing great. She is a vibrant productive and hard-working member of society; she produces professional ceramics, is a religious role model, with a great attitude and a deep understanding of her life's mission. She has a great sense of humor. I know that because she laughs at my jokes. (Either that or she has a keen sense of *rachmonus*).

One of Tally's madrichot is Achinoam, a patient, caring, sensitive and kind young lady in her early twenties. Achinoam and Tally are a wonderful team. As a dynamic duo, they go shopping, cook, clean and shmooze together. We speak a little. Mazel Tov! Achinoam is a kallah - IyH to be married in five weeks.

There is a pensiveness in her voice. She barely speak to her chosson; seeing him is almost out of the question – he is in Gaza. Enough said. He will be given 10 days to get married. As I leave, she asks me to daven for Matan Reuven ben Yehudis Malka. Maybe you can as well.

Last night, I finish a shiur and schmooze with many South African yidden. Other than football, we mostly share a common language; A holy yid offers to drive me home. For him, the round-trip is a two+ hour offer. He is happy to do it. We schmooze in the car. He came to Eretz Yisrael many years ago, single with the greatest hopes; he is now divorced, with health, financial, and children challenges and an ex-spouse who left yiddishkeit in mid marriage and drags him through the courts. He is calm, giving and understanding of his challenges. He wonders whether he will ever get married again.

Tonight we will say *lecha dodi likras kallah*. The chosson is Hashem. Who is the kallah? Either Shabbos, the Shechina, or Klal Yisroel. In the latter version, we ask Hashem to reveal Himself – to us; we are His Kallah.

Tomorrow night we will mourn Yerushalayim. Many wonder how we can mourn a bereft (*baddad*) city - that is in fact pulsating with life. Ironically, tens of thousands of people will come to the Kosel and will mourn Eicha style, the city that was so full of people that became like a widow. Indeed nonstop Torah, so much building, so many miracles, such vibrancy. Look at what Hashem given us.

Indeed mourning is a real challenge; of the thousands of people at the Kotel last night, I heard a lot of sincere wailing noise, saw a lot of gesticulations, but would be lying if I saw even *one* tear.

So why do we mourn?

We mourn for the kallahs wondering whether their chosson will make it to their chuppah.

We mourn for the kallahs whose chassanim are buried in Har Herzl. Or a Gazan tunnel

We mourn for the chosson whose kallah walked away.

We mourn for Klal Yisroel who is endlessly prosecuted among the powerful dovrei sheker of the world – who constantly plot our demise.

We mourn for the faithful within Klal Yisroel that seem perpetually on the precipice of massive machlokes

We must mourn for the young men and women who are too depressed to get out of bed

We must mourn for the Jews going through the motions – for the real distance we feel from Hashem in our own lives.

In Rambam's language (Teshuva, 9:20) , we wait for serenity and for the removal of the stone hearts to feel the Divine intimacy

ומפני זה נתאוו כל ישראל נביאייהם וחכמיהם לימות המשיח כדי שינוחו ממלכיות שאינן
מניחות להן לעסוק בתורה ובמצות כהוגן וימצאו להם מרגוע וירבו בחכמה כדי שיזכו
לחיי העולם הבא לפי שבאותן הימים תרבה הדעה והחכמה והאמת שנאמר כי
מלאה הארץ דעה את ה' ... והסירחתי את לב האבן מבשרכם מפני שאותו המלך
שיעמוד מזרע דוד בעל חכמה יהיה יתר משלמה ונביא גדול הוא קרוב למשה רבינו ולפיכך
ילמד כל העם ויורה אותם דרך ה'; ויבואו כל הגוים לשומעו שנאמר והיה באחרית הימים
נכון יהיה כל כולו לה העולם אבל

We must mourn because we are the kallah waiting to hear from the Chosson -
waiting for You Hashem to swoop us up, *kimsos chosson al kallah*.

With longing and yearning

A Gutten Shabbos

The Branders

