

Elul and Yarchei Kallah

Source Sheet by Sofia Freudenstein, sofiafreudenstein@gmail.com

Introduction: Elul

Ecclesiastes 5:8

(8) Thus the greatest advantage in all the land is his: he controls a field that is cultivated. *i.e., the high official profits from the labor of others; but meaning of verse uncertain.*

קהלת ה':ח'
(ח) וַיִּתְּרוֹן אֶרֶץ בְּכָל (הִיא) [הוּא] מְלֶךְ לְשָׂדֶה
נֶעֱבֵד:

Likkutei Torah, Re'eh 10, R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi

...It is known that Elul is a time when the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are revealed.

Why are [the days of Elul] ordinary weekdays and not festivals?

The *Shabbatot* and the festivals [are distinguished] because they are days when [a dimension of] Godliness [transcending the natural order] is revealed; Godliness radiates. In particular, the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy reflects a very elevated level of Godliness, for this is the level revealed on Yom Kippur. Now, obviously, there is a great difference between Elul and Yom Kippur.

This concept can be illustrated by way of analogy: Before a king enters a city, its inhabitants go out to greet him and receive him in the field. At that time, anyone who so desires may go out and greet him. He receives them all pleasantly and shows a smiling countenance to all. As he proceeds to his city, they follow him. Afterwards, when he reaches his royal palace, one may only enter [his throne room] with permission — and this is granted only to the nation's elite, to a select few.

[To explain the] analogy: In the month of Elul, we go out to receive the light of God's countenance in the field, so to speak, as it is written: "God will cause countenance to shine upon you." This refers to the emanation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy in a manner that allows them to be received "face to face." (*trans. Sichos in English Collection of TheRebbe.org*)

לקוטי תורה, ראה י'

...והנה נודע שבאלול הוא זמן התגלות י"ג מדות הרחמים, ולהבין זה כי למה הם ימות החול ואינם יו"ט כמו שבתות ויום טוב שבהם התגלות אלהות בחי' הארת אלהותו ית' ובפרט בעת זמן י"ג מדות שהם הארת העליונות מאד והם מתגלים ביוהכ"פ ובודאי יש הפרש גדול בין יוה"כ ובין אלול. אך הנה יובן ע"פ משל למלך שקודם בואו לעיר יוצאין אנשי העיר לקראתו ומקבלין פניו בשדה ואז רשאיין כל מי שרוצה לצאת להקביל פניו הוא מקבל את כולם בסבר פנים יפות ומראה פנים שוחקות לכולם. (ב) ובלכתו העירה הרי הם הולכים אחריו. ואח"כ בבואו להיכל מלכותו אין נכנסים כ"א ברשות ואף גם זאת המובחרים שבעם ויחידי סגולה. וכך הענין עד"מ בחודש אלול יוצאין להקביל אור פניו ית' בשדה, כי הנה כתיב יאר ה' פניו אליך שהוא ענין הארת י"ג מדות שיהי' פנים בפנים

Part 1: What Were the Yarchei Kallah Like?

Berakhot 6a:5

Summarizing the effects of the demons, **Rava said:**

The crowding at the *kalla*, the gatherings for Torah study during Elul and Adar, **is from** the demons;

those knees that are fatigued even though one did not exert himself **is from** the demons;

those clothes of the Sages that wear out, despite the fact that they do not engage in physical labor, **is from friction** with the demons;

those feet that are in pain is from the demons.

ברכות ו' א:ה'

אמר רבא: האי דיוחקא דהוי
בכלה — מנייהו הוי. הני
ברכי דשלהי — מנייהו. הני
מאני דרבנן דבלו — מחופאי
דידהו. הני כרעי דמנקפן —
מנייהו.

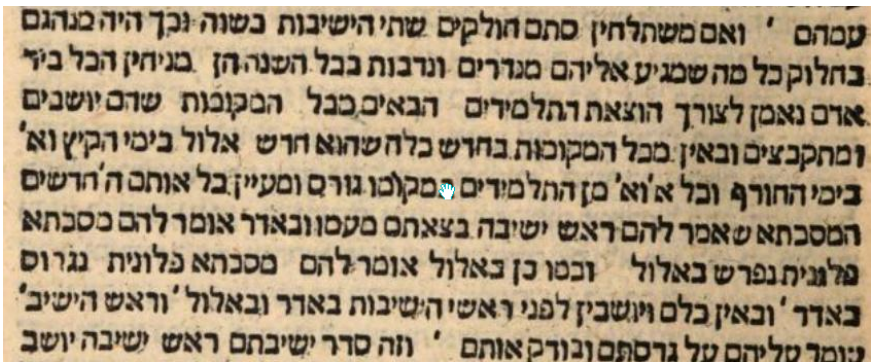
Berakhot 6b:12

ברכות ו' ב:י"ב

Similarly, **Abaye said: The reward for attending the *kalla* is for the crowding.** Due to the large crowd, study was difficult, so the primary reward was given for their effort to hear and understand some part of the lecture. אָמַר אַבְיִי: אַגְרָא דְכָלָּה — דְּיוֹחָקָא.

Iggeret Natan HaBavli, Sefer Yokhasin of Rabbi Avraham Zacut, trans. Shlomi Helfgot

And if [the donations] are sent without a specific address, the two yeshivot [Sura and Pumbedita] split them equally. And this was their custom in dividing [the donations] - all that came to them was placed in the hands



of a trustworthy person for the disbursal of the needs of the students who came from all over the world. **These students would gather and come from their hometowns in the month of the Kallah, which is the month of Elul in the summer, and one [month - Adar] in the winter, and every one of the students had been learning and memorizing the masekhta which the Rosh HaYeshiva had told them to learn as they left in Adar for the five months which followed.** He would say to them: "Such and such a masekhta we will explain in Elul." Similarly, in Elul, he would say to them: "Such and such a masekhta we will learn in Adar." And all would come and sit before the heads of the yeshivot in Adar and Elul. And the Rosh haYeshiva would ensure that they knew their masekhta properly, and he would test them...And when the Rosh HaYeshiva wished to test them in their knowledge, he would call them together for four weeks - all of the month of Adar - and **he would sit, and the first row would recite before him and the rest of the rows would listen quietly.** When they would reach a place in the text that required more explanation, they would speak [and debate the meaning of the text] between themselves, with the Rosh HaYeshiva listening and understanding their words. **And afterwards he would read, and they knew that he had understood that they encountered difficulties in the places they had discussed. He would explain that masekhta and include in his words the true explanation of the difficulties they had raised in the texts. Sometimes he would ask them the meaning of a text, and they would defer to one another and give each other the honor of responding.** No one would speak until they received permission from the Rosh HaYeshiva, and even then, after speaking their words, they would ask what the Rosh HaYeshiva thought. **After hearing various explanations - each according to the responder's wisdom - the Rosh HaYeshiva would expand on the words and**

explanations given and explain every halakhah and halakhah until everything was clear to everyone present. Once this was accomplished, the first row would stand up and explain to the rest of the crowd the true explanation, and the assemblage would reason and attempt to understand the explanation according to its exact meaning. And this is what they would do every single day of the month, until the fourth week. At this point they would call in the Sanhedrin [leadership and teachers of the Yeshiva] and all of the students, and the Rosh HaYeshiva would investigate, question, and test [the students] until he would discern those who were quicker than the others in their grasp and those who did not know the material so well. **To those he was very harsh, he deducted from their set allowance, and rebuked and admonished them - but he also showed them the places in which they had been careless with their learning, and he would warn them that if such happened one more time - that is, not paying enough care to the learning - that his allowance would be cancelled. Therefore, they would ensure to memorize and understand well so that they would not stumble before him in a matter of halakhah, and none of the rows would leave until he would announce the masekhta which they would engage in studying [for the next term], everyone in their own home, and to the rest of the attendees he did not need to announce - rather each would read whichever masekhta he desired.**

- What sticks out to you about the nature of this learning experience?

Midrash Tanchuma, Noach 3:9-10

(9) The Holy One, blessed be He, made a covenant with the Israelites that neither they nor their descendants, unto the last generation, would forget the Oral Law...

(10) Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, established two yeshivot (at Sura and Pumbeditha) for the Israelites where they studied the Torah day and night, and where they assembled from all parts of the world twice each year, in the months of Adar and Elul. They came together to “battle” the problems encountered in the Torah until they had resolved them and reached a definitive decision concerning them. They would adduce arguments from the Torah, the Mishnah, and the Talmud so that the Israelites might not sin against the law, as it is said: *Great peace have they that love Thy law; and there is no sinning for them* (Ps. 119:165). Scripture informs us: *The Lord will give strength unto His people, the Lord will bless His people with peace* (Ps. 29:11). Hence, these two yeshivot experienced neither captivity, persecution, nor pillage.

מדרש תנחומא, נח ג':ט-י"י

(ט) ואף הקדוש ברוך הוא כרת ברית עם ישראל, שלא תשכח תורה שבועל פה מפיהם ומפי זרעם עד סוף כל הדורות...
 (י) ולפיכך קבע הקדוש ברוך הוא שתי ישיבות לישראל, שיהיו הוגין בתורה יומם ולילה ומתקבצין שתי פעמים בשנה באדר ובאלול מכל המקומות ונושאים ונותנים במלחמתה של תורה עד שמעמידין דבר על בריו והלכה לאמתה ומביאים ראיה מן המקרא ומן המשנה ומן התלמוד, כדי שלא יכשלו ישראל בדברי תורה, שנאמר: שלום רב לאוהבי תורתך ואין למו מכשול (תהלים קיט, קסה). ה' עז לעמו יתן ה' יברך את עמו בשלום (תהלים כט, יא).
 ואותן שתי ישיבות, לא ראו שבי ולא שמד ולא שלל.

- What sticks out to you about the nature of this learning experience?

Berakhot 8b:2

Rav Beivai bar Abaye thought to finish all the Torah portions of the entire year, which he had been unable to complete at their appointed time, **on the eve of Yom Kippur** when he would have time to do so.

ברכות ח' ב:ב'

רב ביבי בר אבאי סבר לאשלומינהו
לפרשיותא דכלא שתא במעלי יומא
דכפורי.

Sefer HeArukh, Letter Kaf 116

...Rav Bibi, son of Abaye, decided to finish all of the Parashiyot of the Kallah on the day before Yom Kippur. That is - the eight Parashiyot that are read on the four Shabbatot of Elul and the four Shabbatot of Adar, and because Rav Bibi, son of Abaye, was so busy during the month of the Kallah in the Masekhta of the Kallah, he did not find the free time to finish each Parshiyah in its proper time. Therefore, he decided to finish these eight Parashiyot on the eve of Yom Kippur. (trans. Shlomi Helfgot)

ספר הערוך, אות הכ"ף קט"ז

כל [צירדע. ברויט. פארטאג] (ברכות ח)
רב בובי בר אבאי סבר לאשלומינהו
לכולהו פרשייתא דכלא במעלי יומא
דכיפורי. פי' הן ח' פרשיות שקורין בד'
שבתות שבאלול ובד' שבתות שבאדר
ומפני שהיה רב ביבי מרוד בחדש הכלה
במסכתא דכלא ולא מצא פנאי להשלים
כל פרשה בשבתה סבר לאשלומינהו להני
ח' פרשיות בערב יום הכפורים

Part 2: The Cyclical Nature of the Yarchei Kallah**Bava Batra 157b:9**

Rav Nahman said: This matter was raised before us, and the Sages sent a response from there, from Eretz Yisrael: **The first lender acquires** the property, since his lien came first. **Rav Huna says:** The lenders **divide** the property between them. **And so teaches Rabba bar Avuh:** The lenders **divide** the property between them. **Ravina said: The first time Rav Ashi taught this matter he said to us: The first lender acquires** the property. **The last time Rav Ashi taught this matter he said to us:** The lenders **divide** the property between them. **And the halakha** is that **they divide** the property between them.

בבא בתרא קנ"ז ב:ט'

אמר רב נחמן: הא מילתא איבעיא לן,
ושלחו מתם: ראשון קנה. רב הונא אמר:
יחלוקו. וכן תני רבה בר אבונה: יחלוקו.
אמר רבינא: מהדורא קמא דרב אשי,
אמר לן: ראשון קנה. מהדורא בתרא דרב
אשי, אמר לן: יחלוקו. והלכתא: יחלוקו.

Rashbam on Bava Batra 157b:9:2

..."The last time" - When he [Rav Ashi] reviewed his learning a second time. As documented in the responsa of Rav Hai and in the commentary of Rabbeinu Hananel, Rav Ashi lived 60 years, and in every year he would review his learning in the two months of the Kallah Nissan and Tishrei. When he came to 30 years, he completed all his learning, and then that's what he did in the 30 years after. The "first time" is in reference to the first 30 years, and the "last time" is in reference to the last 30 years. (trans. Sofia Freudenstein)

- What sticks out to you about the nature of this learning experience?

רשב"ם על בבא בתרא קנ"ז ב:ט':ב'

מהדורא בתרא - כשחזר לימודו פעם
שניה נמצא בתשובת רב האי ובפר"ח
רב אשי חיה ששים שנה ובכל שנה
מחזר לימודו בשני חדשי הכלה ניסן
ותשרי ולכשהגיעו שלשים שנה סיים
כל לימודו וכן עשה בשלשים שנים
אחרונים ומהדורא קמא היינו שלשים
שנים ראשונים ומהדורא בתרא הן
שלשים שנים אחרונים:

Hakham José Faur, *The Horizontal Community*, pg. 294-295

The Babylonian Talmud was conceived in the compactness of mind and spirit of the *Kalla*. According to Geonic tradition, Rab Ashe served head of the *Yeshiba* for close to sixty years. Under his ministry one hundred and twenty *Kalla* conventions were organized. Each *Kalla* focused on a single tractate. There meetings were divided into two thirty-year cycles, known as *mahdora*. There was "a primary" or original "*mahdora*" of the Talmud and "a final" or conclusive "*mahdora*." In this fashion, every tractate was studied once in the primary cycle, and then further revised thirty years in the final cycle....

The Babylonian Talmud was produced at these *Kalla* meetings. The study, final approval and revision of the text were conducted in the general assembly, with the participation of all the sages of Israel and their disciples....Its [the Talmud's] authority rests on a single fact: it represents *national* consensus.

Rabi Joseph B. Soloveitchik On Repentance by Pinchas H. Peli

What is the meaning of the word "Teshuvah"? What is the exact etymological significance of the term? In the Bible, the word bears a specific connotation, "at the return of the year", that is at the termination of the year's cycle. The word also appears in the following context (I Samuel 7:15-17): "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Beth-El and Gilgal and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all those places. And his return (u-teshuvato) was to Ramah, for there was his home and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar unto the Lord." Here, too, the word Teshuvah bears the connotation of completing a circle; after Samuel would make a circuit throughout Israel he would return to Ramah, for there was his home.

Part 3: The Democratization of the Yarchei Kallah

Bava Metzria 86a:3

§ The Gemara relates another story discussing the greatness of the Sages. **Rav Kahana said: Rav Hama, son of the daughter of Hasa, told me that Rabba bar Nahmani died due to the fear of a decree of religious persecution.** The Gemara explains: His enemies **accused him [akhalu beih kurtza]** of disloyalty **in the king's palace**, as they said: **There is one man from among the Jews who exempts twelve thousand Jewish men from the king's head tax** two months a year, **one month in the summer and one month in the winter.** Since many people would study in Rabba's study hall during the months of Adar and Elul, he was being blamed for preventing those people from working during those months.

בבא מציעא פ"ו א:ג'

אמר רב כהנא, אישתעי לי רב חמא בר ברתיה דחסא: רבה בר נחמני אגב שמדא נח נפשיה. אכלו ביה קורצא בי מלכא, אמרו: איכא חד גברא ביהודאי דקא מבטל תריסר אלפי גברי מישראל ירחא בקייטא וירחא בסתא מכרנא דמלכא.

Hakham José Faur, *The Horizontal Community*, pg. 296

The Talmud was not created in a monastery, away from the laity, where better and superior men find shelter from the 'outside world.' The opposite was true. Not only was the Talmud conceived and born at the *Kalla*, but its purpose was to also transmit the *temperament* and *personality* of the *Kalla* society, in all its facets and modalities. Just as the Synagogue is a virtual experience of the Temple, and the liturgy of the sacramental services, so the Talmud is a virtual *Kalla* experience. Through the Babylonian Talmud, students and sages from fragmented Israel have unfettered access to the *Kalla* world and hear the voices of Jews from Tiberias and Caesarea, from Lydia and from Sippore, from Nehar De'a, Fum be-Dita and Sura, and countless other seats of learning. In concert and as one, pupil and teacher, learned and commoner, disciple and sage, brilliant and mediocre, share in their discussions, reflect on their ideas, and renew their bonds with an *integral Jewish society*. That is why the Talmud is much more than a book or a landscape of things lost: it is a virtual *Kalla*, a holistic experience. Upon entering the

Talmud, one and all can sit at the feet of the sages, partake in their discussions, and join the men and women standing firmly at the *berit* Sinai-Moab, set and ready to carry on the *Morasha* of Israel; not in some dingy cloister, but amidst the sound and voices of the *Kalla*.

Berakhot 17a:8

The Sages in Yavne were wont to say:

I who learn Torah **am** God's **creature** and **my counterpart** who engages in other labor **is** God's **creature**.

My work is in the city and his work is in the field.

I rise early for my work and he rises early for his work.

And just as he does not presume to perform my work, so I do not presume to perform his work.

Lest you say: I engage in Torah study **a lot**, while **he** only engages in Torah study **a little**, so I am better than he,

it has already **been taught:**

One who brings a substantial sacrifice **and one who brings a meager** sacrifice have equal merit,

as long as he directs his heart towards Heaven (Rav Hai Gaon, *Arukh*).

ברכות י"ז א:ח'

מְרַגְלָא בְּפֻמֵּיהוּ דְּרַבְנָן דִּיבְנָה:
 "אֲנִי בְרִיָּה, וְחֻבְרִי בְרִיָּה. אֲנִי
 מְלַאכְתִּי בְּעִיר וְהוּא מְלַאכְתּוֹ
 בְּשָׂדֶה. אֲנִי מְשָׁכִים לְמְלַאכְתִּי,
 וְהוּא מְשָׁכִים לְמְלַאכְתּוֹ. כָּשֶׁם
 שֶׁהוּא אֵינוֹ מִתְגַּדֵּר בְּמְלַאכְתִּי,
 כֵּךְ אֲנִי אֵינוֹ מִתְגַּדֵּר בְּמְלַאכְתּוֹ.
 וְשָׁמָּה תֹאמַר: אֲנִי מְרַבֶּה, וְהוּא
 מְמַעֵיט — שְׁנֵינוּ: אֶחָד הַמְרַבֶּה
 וְאֶחָד הַמְּמַעֵיט וּבִלְבָּד שֶׁיִּכּוּן
 לְבוֹ לְשִׁמּוֹת."

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