By: Rabbi Chaim Avraham Zakutinsky
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Chapter 1
The Engagement

The marriage proposal is the first step in the hallachic marriage process. The Gemara refers to the marriage proposal as shidduchin.¹ There is a custom to have a formal party to announce the engagement to the community. This party is referred to as the vort. Originally, it was customary to sign tenaim at the vort and this is still prevalent in some Jewish circles today, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Section 1:
The Engagement Ring And Other Gifts

1) It is an ancient custom for the chosson to give the kallah an engagement present. The Gemara refers to this gift as a sivlon. The Rashbam writes that, traditionally, this gift was jewelry.² Today, following the general custom, the chosson usually gives his kallah an engagement ring. Harav Aryeh Kaplan zt”l explains that since the wedding ring may not have a stone (refer to Chapter 18 Section 1.

¹ על משמתיית עלית “שידוכים” - התברר שבחי פ”א שהיתabytes שלושה, ממון, חמתו (ת”ר א’ סי’: ימימה מונחת
שידוכים האביר - רשב”ם, שמתשהל מצא מונחת ביג’ ביכל. בכוכב (ת”ר א’ סי’: ימימה מונחת
אשת בח יאשד’. הבדר מדרים ורש איתה冈מה שניה את ש’, בתברר בסך החוור או שניים, whatsoever: יאשדך, יאשדך, יאשדך, יאשדך
עיבוד ויקו, שבבל ההיתabytes שלושה, חום שרומר בנות (שבחי פ”א: מיל ויתרה העדות) מלבש, יאשדך
והנהות לכלל השמידא bancים. ינני ב נמיה ניקויים ביב’. קנפה הבוגר שליאש יצד פורק ג’ הלכה ח’
והשלמות עיקר החיה איס ר’ סיך. ד”ת השוע המחבר חול שניים הוא הרוד הלנה. עניין הוא בשתיו
ס ח”ק א’ בתווח איס ונ”ק א’装甲 שוכנת. לרוש בוגר כותל שאם לא שיכר התחלת מקין
אכתוב המכתב. אופליל ימות הכרח, שום, שאויך מכין על דבר, זה יוהי שיש בו מוטה פורחות, והלנה
בככ. תכשיטים בויר הפרות והם בשられない פ”א ח’.²

² رسول ביא בונה כנ.putString לע’ סבלנות.
Halacha 6), the engagement ring has a stone which cleanly delineates it as an engagement ring and not the wedding ring.3

2) Since giving the engagement ring is a prelude to marriage, there is concern that if it is given in the presence of witnesses, the couple may be considered married and to break that sort of engagement would then require a Jewish divorce. Therefore, Harav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin zt”l rules that the engagement ring should not be given in the presence of witnesses.4 Harav Hershel Schachter shlit”a, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon, in a letter addressed to the author, writes that while normative halacha would allow one to give the ring in the presence of others, he has heard that many righteous and meticulous Jews have the custom that the mother of the chosson gives the kallah the ring, and not for the chosson to give it to her directly.5 Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum shlit”a, in a letter addressed to the author, explains that while it may be legitimate to give the ring in front of witnesses, nevertheless, one should try to adhere to the words of Harav Henkin zt”l and refrain from doing so.6 If the chosson gave the ring before witnesses, and the engagement is later broken, a rabbi should be consulted.7

3) Even if the engagement ring is going to be given in private, there is concern that if witnesses are present, it will be considered a wedding ring and require a Jewish divorce. Therefore, Harav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin zt”l rules that the engagement ring should not be given in the presence of witnesses.4 Harav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin zt”l states that the engagement ring should be considered married and to break that sort of engagement would then require a Jewish divorce. Therefore, Harav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin zt”l rules that the engagement ring should not be given in the presence of witnesses.4 Harav Hershel Schachter shlit”a, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon, in a letter addressed to the author, writes that while normative halacha would allow one to give the ring in the presence of others, he has heard that many righteous and meticulous Jews have the custom that the mother of the chosson gives the kallah the ring, and not for the chosson to give it to her directly.5 Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum shlit”a, in a letter addressed to the author, explains that while it may be legitimate to give the ring in front of witnesses, nevertheless, one should try to adhere to the words of Harav Henkin zt”l and refrain from doing so.6 If the chosson gave the ring before witnesses, and the engagement is later broken, a rabbi should be consulted.7

4) Rav Hershel Schachter shlit”a, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon, in a letter addressed to the author, writes that while normative halacha would allow one to give the ring in the presence of others, he has heard that many righteous and meticulous Jews have the custom that the mother of the chosson gives the kallah the ring, and not for the chosson to give it to her directly.5 Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum shlit”a, in a letter addressed to the author, explains that while it may be legitimate to give the ring in front of witnesses, nevertheless, one should try to adhere to the words of Harav Henkin zt”l and refrain from doing so.6 If the chosson gave the ring before witnesses, and the engagement is later broken, a rabbi should be consulted.7

5) Rav Hershel Schachter shlit”a, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon, in a letter addressed to the author, writes that while normative halacha would allow one to give the ring in the presence of others, he has heard that many righteous and meticulous Jews have the custom that the mother of the chosson gives the kallah the ring, and not for the chosson to give it to her directly.5 Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum shlit”a, in a letter addressed to the author, explains that while it may be legitimate to give the ring in front of witnesses, nevertheless, one should try to adhere to the words of Harav Henkin zt”l and refrain from doing so.6 If the chosson gave the ring before witnesses, and the engagement is later broken, a rabbi should be consulted.7
3) The poskim discuss whether the chosson should recite a bracha when purchasing the engagement ring and which bracha the kallah should recite, if any, when she receives the ring from the chosson.

Harav Moshe Feinstein zt"l writes that when the chosson purchases the ring he should recite the bracha of shehechiyanu. When the kallah receives the ring from the chosson, she should recite hatov v'hameitiv. Harav Moshe explains that the bracha of hatov v'hameitiv is usually reserved for happiness that is shared by more than one person (for example a bottle of wine which will be enjoyed by numerous people). In this case the joy is in fact shared by two people: the kallah receiving joy from the new ring and the chosson feeling joy when the kallah accepts his gift.

However, the Mishnah Berurah disagrees and writes that one can only recite the bracha hatov v'hameitiv when multiple people receive physical pleasure (e.g., multiple people drinking wine). The joy that one feels when someone accepts his gift is not a physical gain for the giver and does not allow for the recital of hatov v'hameitiv. Therefore, he continues, a shehechiyanu should be recited. It seems that according to the Mishnah Berurah the kallah should recite the blessing of shehechiyanu, and not hatov v'hameitiv. Indeed, Harav Yosef Shalom...
Elyashiv zt”l rules that the kallah should recite shehechiyanu, and not hatov v’hameitiv. [Harav Elyashiv adds that the chosson should not recite any blessing.]11

Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l questions whether the prevalent custom is to recite any bracha upon purchasing and receiving jewelry. He adds that the gifts exchanged between a chosson and a kallah might be exempt from a shehechiyanu because they may not be considered gifts at all, but rather are considered as payments of financial obligations that the families accepted upon themselves when they entered into an engagement agreement. Therefore, to avoid these brachos uncertainties, the kallah should eat a new fruit or wear new clothing and recite a shehechiyanu on the fruit or clothing, with specific intent to also express her gratitude to Hashem for her new jewelry.12 Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum shlit”a, in a letter addressed to the author, also writes that he believes that the prevalent custom is to refrain from reciting any bracha.13

4) The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l writes that the custom among many Jews is for the kallah to purchase a set of Talmud Bavli for the chosson, and for the chosson to purchase seforim that have halachos relevant to a Jewish home for the kallah.14

5) There is a custom for the kallah to buy a watch for the chosson.15 Many explain that the watch is meant to remind the chosson of the importance of time, how finite life is, and that there comes a time when all people are judged by Hashem for their actions.
6) In addition, many have the custom for the kallah to purchase a tallis for the chosson to wear after the wedding. Some also purchase a kittel for the chosson. 17

Section 2: Shabbos After The Engagement

There is a very old custom for the chosson to receive an aliya to the Torah the first Shabbos after the engagement.18 Others, such as Belz Chassidim, do not have this custom.19

Section 3: Parental Objections

1) It is important for the couple to have the blessings of both sets of parents. Nevertheless, the Rama rules that if the parents do not agree to the marriage, the couple is not obligated to obey them. 20 To marry and have children is a commandment of the Torah, and when a person finds a suitable mate, he has the opportunity to fulfill this obligation in the best possible way. He can never be sure that the opportunity will arise again if he were to cancel the engagement. Therefore, when the parents object to a marriage, it is tantamount to their demanding that a commandment be violated. The Gemara (Yevamos 6a) explains that if a parent instructs a child to do something against the Torah, the child is forbidden to obey. Therefore, there is no obligation to obey the parent in this situation.21
2) There is no difference between whether the objections come from the chosson’s parents or the kallah’s parents. Neither the chosson nor the kallah need to adhere to their parents’ objections.22

3) According to some poskim, if the potential spouse is immoral or unethical, the kallah or chosson must adhere to their parents’ objections. The poskim explain that although the child is not obligated to honor his or her parents’ wishes when it comes to choosing a suitable mate, he or she still is not allowed to embarrass them publicly. Marrying someone who will bring shame to his or her parents and family is not allowed.23 Other poskim disagree and state that even in this scenario there is no obligation to obey the parents.24 In such a situation, a rabbi should be consulted.
Section 4: Aveilus

1) During the thirty days of mourning after a sibling, child, or spouse’s death and during the year of mourning for a parent, the mourner may not receive gifts. In the case of engagement, however, Harav Moshe Feinstein zt’l rules that one may give an engagement ring to a kallah in mourning. Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum shlit”a, in a letter addressed to the author, explains that the ring and other presents can actually be considered as payments of financial obligations that the families accepted upon themselves when they entered into an engagement agreement, instead of being perceived as gifts, and therefore may be given in this situation.

4) If one wishes to marry someone who he or she is not hallachically allowed to marry, for example a kohen marrying a divorcée, all should actively attempt to prevent the marriage. If a question arises as to who is allowed to marry whom, a competent rabbi should be consulted.
2) It is permitted to get engaged during the first week of mourning, or shiva, to prevent the potential fiancée from becoming engaged to someone else.\textsuperscript{29} However, the engagement should not be accompanied by a feast. Some allow the mourner to partake of refreshments and pastries.\textsuperscript{30}

Section 5:
Engagement During Chol Hamoed

1) While it is prohibited to marry during Chol Hamoed (which will be discussed in Chapter 5), engagements are permitted.\textsuperscript{31}

2) It is permitted to write tenaim\textsuperscript{32} and celebrate the engagement with a festive meal accompanied by singing and dancing during Chol Hamoed.\textsuperscript{33} Some authorities prohibit serving a complete meal and only permit refreshments.\textsuperscript{34}

Section 6:
Engagement During The “Three Weeks” And During Sefira

1) The “Three Weeks” and The “Nine Days”- The “Three Weeks” between the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av have historically been days of misfortune and calamity for the Jewish people. During this time, both the First and Second Temples were destroyed, amongst other terrible tragedies. Therefore, various aspects of mourning are observed in order to minimize joy and celebration. The laws of mourning become more stringent during the “Nine Days”, which are the days from Rosh Chodesh Av through Tisha B’Av.
2) The Shulchan Aruch and Mishnah Berurah write that it is permitted for a couple to get engaged during the “Three Weeks”.  

3) During the “Three Weeks” one may arrange an engagement and accompany it with a feast. During the “Nine Days” however, one may not have a feast, but refreshments and pastries may be served. Dancing is not permitted during the “Three Weeks” and during the “Nine Days”. Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l maintains that one should minimize any singing, whether it be recorded, tape, live, or a capella at an engagement party during the “Three Weeks”.  

4) Although one does not wear Shabbos clothing during the “Nine Days”, Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l explains that if the chosson and kallah come in common clothing it would be considered disrespectful to the engagement process. Therefore, he permits the chosson and kallah to wear Shabbos clothes to the engagement party.  

5) Harav Moshe Feinstein zt”l writes that it is preferable for the chosson not to purchase the engagement ring (or any other gift) during the “Nine Days”. He would be permitted, however, to purchase it if delaying the purchase would result in financial loss. Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l disagrees with Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l and rules that it is permitted to purchase the ring during the “Nine Days”,

35 Although one does not wear Shabbos clothing during the “Nine Days”, Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l explains that if the chosson and kallah come in common clothing it would be considered disrespectful to the engagement process. Therefore, he permits the chosson and kallah to wear Shabbos clothes to the engagement party.  

36 Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l disagrees with Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l and rules that it is permitted to purchase the ring during the “Nine Days”,  

37 Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l disagrees with Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l and rules that it is permitted to purchase the ring during the “Nine Days”,
regardless of whether there will be financial loss. He explains that the ring can be considered a payment of financial obligations that the families accepted upon themselves when they entered into an engagement agreement. And, he adds, it would be permitted to fulfill a financial obligation during the “Nine Days”.42

6) 

Sefira- The Gemara states that Rabbi Akiva’s twenty four thousand students died during the period of Sefira, which is the time between Pesach and Shavuos. Since Talmudic times, the period of Sefira is treated as a time of mourning.43

7) The Mishnah Berurah writes that one is permitted to get engaged during the days of Sefira. However, the custom is to refrain from dancing.44

8) Some allow men to sing songs at the vort. However, musical instruments should not be used.45

Section 7:
Inviting The Departed

1) The poskim tell us that the souls of the departed come to the wedding of their children and grandchildren.46 If either the chosson or kallah have lost a parent, many have the custom for the engaged child to visit the cemetery before the wedding in order to extend an invitation to the deceased.47 Some write that the Zohar is the source for this custom.48
2) It is unclear whether this custom extends to grandparents or other relatives.49 The Shulchan Haezer writes that the custom is to invite "parents and relatives."50 It would seem that he feels that this custom does extend to the grandparents. However, Harav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l is of the opinion that one need not invite deceased grandparents.51

Section 8:
A Time For Spiritual Growth

1) The time between the engagement and the wedding is one of spiritual growth for both the chosson and the kallah.52 They must remember that all of the restrictions of yichud and physical contact between men and women are in full effect for an engaged couple until after the chuppah.53

2) Many poskim advise couples not to have a very long engagement period in order to prevent the chosson and kallah from becoming lax in these areas of halacha.54

3) The chosson should not sleep in the same house as the kallah during the engagement period.55
4) There was an old custom for the *chosson* to complete a tractate of *Talmud Bavli* during the engagement period in order to make the *siyum* at the wedding. The Ksav Sofer completed all of *Mishnayos Taharos* for his wedding.\(^\text{56}\)

5) Rav Yaakov Kamanetzky zt”l would advise *chassanim* to study the chapter *Shaar Hakedushah*, found in the *Sefer Reishis Chochma*, before their weddings.\(^\text{57}\)

6) The Chazon Ish would urge *chassanim* to study the chapter *Shaar Hakedushah*, found in the *Sefer Reishis Chochma*, before their weddings.\(^\text{58}\)

7) Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum shlit”a, in a letter addressed to the author, writes that it is important for the *chosson* to receive blessings from *tzaddikim* and *rabbanim* before the wedding.\(^\text{59}\)

8) Harav Oelbaum shlit”a, in a letter addressed to the author, advises that the *chosson* should study the text of the *kesubah* before the wedding so that he can understand the financial obligations enumerated in the *kesubah* document.\(^\text{60}\)

9) The Gemara in Pesachim 49a states that, “It is good for a *bas kohen* (daughter of a *kohen*) to marry a *chacham yisrael*, but not an ignoramus.” Therefore, writes the Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l, if a non-*kohen* plans to marry a *bas kohen*, he should attempt to study and become a “*chacham*” before the wedding.\(^\text{61}\)
Lubavitch writes that the definition of a “chacham” is someone who knows at least one Tractate of Talmud. The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l adds that he can be considered a “chacham” by knowing one of the smaller Tractates, such as Meseches Kallah, and he need not memorize it. If one is capable of learning more than one Tractate, he should do so.

10) During the engagement, the chosson and kallah need to study and familiarize themselves with the area of hilchos nidah. It is therefore imperative that the chosson and kallah find qualified rabbanim and teachers to help them understand these halachos properly.
Chapter 2

The Tenaim

The word tenaim literally means “conditions.” This is a formal ceremony where a contract is signed, setting the wedding date and stipulating various prenuptial agreements. Many chassidim, especially those who originated from Hungarian descent, have the custom to sign tenaim at the vort.¹ Most Lithuanian Jews sign them at the wedding, right before the chuppah.²

Section 1:

Tenaim And Roshei Perakim

In addition to the tenaim, there are those who have the custom to write another document called the roshei perakim.³ The roshei perakim specifies in great detail the financial responsibilities of both families. Unlike the tenaim, it does not specify the wedding date and any repercussions if one of the parties reneges. The roshei perakim is written and signed privately between the in-laws, while the tenaim is signed in public.

Section 2:

The Text Of The Tenaim

There are different forms of the tenaim documents. The proper nusach (text) for any chosson and kallah will depend on whether they are

¹ עיין בספר כתר שם טוב סימן כ בכסף בכסף טעתי בכריאל על שדותים וזואים דף ח קד使之 וחא
² עיין בｐפּ שָׁוִי תְאִירָה מְשָׁאָה בֶּן הָעָה דא ס יַא בֶּן בֶּנֶּסָּה בֶּרֶיָּה על תִּנְאָים דף כז
³ עיין בכל זה בֶּלֶחַת שֵׁבֶת סְמִי כו הָבֶן הָעָה דא ס יַא בֶּן בֶּנֶּסָּה בֶּרֶיָּה על תִּנְאָים פָּקָד קז