

Shabbat “Ve’Avraham Zaken”

Minhag: Since the times of the Geonim, Sepharadic communities have celebrated the Shabbat following the wedding, known as the “*Shabbat Chattan*” (what Ashkenazim refer to as “*Shabbos Sheva Brachos*,” not the “*Aufruf*”), with a special ritual involving the reading of “Ve’Avraham Zaken” (Bereshit 24:1-7), in which Avraham Avinu directs Eliezer to find an appropriate wife for Yitzchak Avinu from Avraham’s family and not from Kena’an.^[1] For this reason, the “Shabbat Chattan” is also known as “Shabbat Ve’Avraham Zaken” (or “Ve’Abraham Zaken” for Syrians).

Procedure: An additional Sefer Torah is taken out for Keriat HaTorah, the Chattan carries it to the Bimah, and he is given an Aliyah. Generally, the Chattan receives one of seven weekly Aliyot first, and then he reads “Ve’Avraham Zaken” from the other Sefer Torah before reciting the concluding Beracha^[2] or, more commonly, from a printed Chumash, after the concluding Beracha.^[3] Some have the custom for him to only get an Aliyah from the additional Sefer Torah and not read the weekly Parasha at all.^[4] In all cases, the Aramaic translation is read by someone else in between Pesukim. Some read each Hebrew Pasuk twice,^[5] while others do not repeat.^[6] For most communities, this is the only remaining vestige of the custom of translating the Torah reading dating back to Talmudic times. Ultimately, all variations of the custom have what to rely upon, and one should uphold his tradition, not modify it^[7] This custom is completely non-existent in Ashkenazi communities,^[8] and it is not ubiquitous to Sepharadi communities either.

Meaning: The choice to read these Pesukim on the Shabbat Chattan may stem from its positive reflection on marriage, which contributes to Simchat Chattan veKallah and compensates when that week’s Parasha does not contain such uplifting motifs.^[9] Moreover, the value of finding a suitable partner with whom to serve Hashem is highlighted, to discourage people from getting married for the wrong reasons (wealth and honor), as such a marriage will not last. A woman of good and preferably similar stock will produce children who are loyal and dedicated to the service of Hashem.^[10] In Tunis, the Chattan would conclude by picking up the Sefer Torah, making a public donation, and circling around the Bimah. The whole experience would make a profound impact on the Chattan and his family, as if he took a public oath to raise his children in accordance with our Torah heritage.^[11]

Haftarah: Finally, a few Pesukim from the Haftarah of “Sos Asis” (Yeshayahu 61:10-63:9, read for Parashat Nitzavim), which contains Chattan and Kallah imagery, would be appended to the regular Haftarah reading,^[12] but, today, nobody observes this custom.^[13]

1. Abuderhem (Birkat Erusin veNissuin) in the name of Rav Saadia Gaon, Aruch (“Chattan”), Ritva (Yoma 70a s.v. Chad). The Poskim spanning generations tackle a number of Halachic issues that arise with this custom, such as the venues in which it is appropriate to take out an extra Sefer Torah, reciting a Beracha on non-weekly Parsha aliyot, reading a Parasha by heart or from a Chumash, rolling a Sefer Torah while the congregation is waiting, and if this custom is observed in circumstances in which either side has been previously married. See Beit Yosef (Orach Chaim 144:2), Keneset HaGedolah (Hagahot HaTur Orach Chaim 282:11), Ginat Veradim (vol. 1 Siman 49), Meshiv Davar (vol. 1 Siman 16), Sdei Chemed (Chattan veKallah 14-17, 28), Minchat Yitzchak (vol. 2 Siman 109), HaNissuin KeHilchetam 15:94-101.
2. In Tunis, Libya, and No Amon (Thebes). (Ateret Avot vol. 3 28:38)
3. This is commonly reported as the custom in Eretz Yisrael/Yerushalayim, Morocco, Izmir, Syria, and Egypt by Eretz Chaim (Setton, 144:3), Kaf HaChaim (144:10). Yalkut Yosef (Orach Chaim 144:1, Sova Semachot vol. 1 20:5), Halacha Berurah (144:2), Ma’amar Mordechai (Eliyahu, vol. 4 Shabbat 28), Beit Chattanim (vol. 2 page 469), Magen Avot (Orach Chaim pages 251, 517, and 683, Even HaEzer page 66), Ateret Avot (vol. 3 28:38), A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs page 46
4. See Shu”t Ish Matzliach (vol. 3 Orach Chaim-Yoreh Deah 9) and Aseh Lecha Rav (vol. 9 Siman 10) who discuss the basis for reciting a Beracha.
5. Mekor Chaim HaShalem 238:2, Ateret Avot (vol. 3 28:38)
6. Yalkut Yosef (Sova Semachot vol. 1 20:5), Beit Chattanim (vol. 2 page 469)
7. Sdei Chemed (Chattan veKallah 17). Yaskil Avdi (vol. 7 Hashmatot Siman 6, page 291)
8. Aruch HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 144:5)
9. Tashbetz (2:39)
10. Rabbeinu Bechaye (Bereshit 24:3)
11. Rav Meir Mazuz (Ohr Torah 5748 Siman 257)
12. Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 144:2), Rama (Orach Chaim 428:8)
13. Eretz Chaim (144:3), HaChuppah veHaNissuin (vol. 1 page 196), Otzrot HaHalacha HaTefilah veHilchoteha (vol. 5 Siman 12), Beit Chattanim (vol. 2 page 469).