

Acquiring a wife

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The mitzvah of marriage may be found in our Parasha: כִּי יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה, 'If a man takes a woman.'^[1] When thinking of engagement and marriage we will often imagine love and romance. It is therefore surprising to discover that the first Mishnah in Masechet Kidushin teaches that *taking* means *acquiring*. There are a few questions which arise from this:

1. The first chapter, which takes up almost half of the Masechet, is the main part of the Talmud to discuss acquisition of objects. It hardly seems the place for this in the tractate of engagement.
2. Since this is the chapter of acquisitions, it is strange that it begins with the acquiring of a wife, something that we do not really have ownership over, and then builds up to other things that we have more ownership over. Surely, if this misplaced chapter wants to teach about acquisitions, it should have begun with objects, then on to land, animals and slaves, until it finally reached the acquisition of a wife.
3. Obviously, the most fundamental question, why ever does the Torah command acquiring a wife? Romance aside; this does not seem like a compliment towards the bride.

To answer these questions I wish to suggest an approach to the Gemara which I was taught in my yeshiva in Ma'alot. When Rebbe compiled the Mishnah, he did not write an introduction. He did, however, carefully choose which Mishnah to open the tractate with. The first Mishnah in the various tractates of the Talmud may often not be the one we would have expected the Masechet to start with, as is the case in Masechet Kidushin. Within this order Rebbe has hidden an introduction to the Masechet.

In the case of Masechet Kidushin, clearly the first chapter is not mislocated nor is the order of the chapter reversed, but rather Rebbe is teaching us what an acquisition is in the eyes of the Torah. When forming an acquisition we are creating a connection, a bond with the acquired. Only when giving of ourselves can we fully appreciate it. When losing a sentimental object we feel bad, and a new one will not necessarily make us feel better. In the eyes of the Torah the greatest way to form a bond is through acquisition. And the greatest bond that a man can form is with his wife. Thus marriage is about giving of yourself, and through this, forming the ultimate bond of love. It is therefore suitable that the chapter of acquisitions is in Masechet Kidushin, for otherwise this message would have been lost. We would never have appreciated the acquisitions in our lives, and we could have easily mistaken 'acquiring a bride' as being disrespectful to Jewish women.

^[1] Devarim 24:1

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