

Lecha Dodi and Romantic Shabbat Relationships

Rabbi Shelomo Alkabetz was a Safed Kabbalist of the early 16th century. When he wrote Lecha Dodi, he arranged the initial letters of the first eight stanzas acrostically to form his name, Shlomo ha-Levi. The song Lecha Dodi begins “Come my friend, to meet the bride; let us welcome the presence of the Sabbath. The song responds to the practice of Safed kabbalists who used to go on Friday afternoons into the fields to meet the “Queen Sabbath” in meditation and song. In this practice, the Sabbath is compared to the Shekhinah, the feminine presence of God, and the relationship between Shabbat and the Jewish people is compared to the relationship between a bride and a groom.

לְכֵה דוּדֵי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָהּ. פְּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָהּ:

Come my beloved to welcome the bride, the Shabbat presence, let us receive

שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדַבּוּר אֶחָד, הַשְּׁמִיעֵנוּ אֵל הַמְּיֻחָד. יְיָ אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד. לְשֵׁם וּלְתַפְאֵרֶת וּלְתִהְלָהּ:
“Safeguard” and “remember” said in a single utterance, the one and only God made us hear. The Lord is One, His Name is One, for renown, for splendor and for praise.

לְקִרְאֵת שַׁבַּת לָכוּ וְנִלְכָהּ. כִּי הִיא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה. מֵרֵאשׁ מְקֻדָּם נְסוּכָהּ. סוּף מַעֲשֵׂה בְּמַחְשָׁבָה
תִּחְלָהּ:

To greet shabbat, come let us go, for it is a source of blessing. From the beginning from antiquity she was honored. Last in deed but first in thought.

מְקֻדָּשׁ מְלֶךְ עִיר מְלוּכָהּ. קוּמִי צְאִי מִתּוֹךְ הַהִפְכָהּ. רַב לָךְ שַׁבַּת בְּעֵמֶק הַבְּכָא. וְהוּא יַחְמוֹל
עֲלֶיךָ חֲמֻלָה:

O sanctuary of the king of the royal city, arise and go forth from the upheaval, too long have you dwelled in the vale of tears, for He will shower compassion upon you.

הַתְּנַעֲרִי מֵעֶפֶר קוּמִי. לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי תִפְאֵרֶתךָ עַמִּי: עַל יַד בֶּן יִשְׁי בֵּית הַלְחָמִי. קִרְבָּה אֶל נַפְשִׁי
גְּאֻלָּהּ:

Shake off the dust, arise, don your splendid clothes My people, through the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, draw near to my soul to redeem it.

הַתְּעוֹרְרִי הַתְּעוֹרְרִי. כִּי בָא אֹרֶךְ קוּמִי אֹרִי. עוֹרִי עוֹרִי שִׁיר דְּבָרֶיךָ. כְּבוֹד יְיָ עָלֶיךָ נִגְלָה: לְכֵה
Awaken, awaken, for your light has come, rise and be bright, awake awake utter a song, the glory of the Lord is upon you revealed

לֹא תִבּוֹשִׁי וְלֹא תִכְלָמִי. מַה תִּשְׁתַּחֲוִי וּמַה תִּתְהַמֵּי. בְּדָךְ יִחְסוּ עַנְיֵי עַמִּי, וְנִבְנְתָה עִיר עַל תְּלָהּ:
Feel not ashamed or mortified. Why are you downcast? Why are you disconsolate? My people’s afflicted will find shelter in you and the city will be built on its hilltop.

וְהָיוּ לְמַשְׁסָה שְׂאִסְיָךְ. וְרַחֲקוּ כָל מְבַלְעֶיךָ. יִשִּׁישׁ עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ. כְּמִשׁוֹשׁ חֲתָן עַל כְּלָהּ:
May your oppressor be downtrodden, and my those who devoured you be cast off. Your God will rejoice over you like a groom’s rejoining over a bride.

יָמִין וְשָׂמַאל תִּפְרוֹצִי. וְאֶת־יְיָ תִעְרִיצִי. עַל יַד אִישׁ בֶּן פְּרֵצִי. וְנִשְׂמַחָה וְנִגְלִיָּה:

You will burst forth to the right and to the left, and you will extol the power of the Lord, through the man, the progeny of Peretz. and we will be glad and joyous.

בּוֹאִי בְּשָׁלוֹם עֲטֹרַת בַּעֲלָהּ. גַּם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְצִהְלָהּ. תֵּוֹדֵי אֲמוּנָי עִם סִגְלָהּ. בּוֹאִי כְלָהּ, בּוֹאִי כְלָהּ:

Enter in peace, the husband's crown, even in gladness and good cheer, amid the faithful of a chosen people. Enter O Bride! Enter O Bride!

Your *Lecha Dodi* Navigator

1. Why is Shabbat compared to a bride?
2. What qualities does a bride have that Alkabetz seeks to attribute to Shabbat?
3. What does this relationship teach us about how the Jewish people and God relate to one another? How do you respond to this imagery?

A WORD

Lecha Dodi helps us anticipate the arrival Shabbat each week as we would anticipate the arrival of an honored guest. Just as we await a good friend or companion, so too can we eagerly await the coming of the Sabbath, a partner and companion of the Jewish people for all time.

On Shabbat this anticipation is heightened as we celebrate the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Sometimes the relationship is difficult between us. We experience moments of anger, frustration, or even doubt God's presence in our lives. But as Lecha Dodi suggests, at the root of our relationship with God is the love and understanding of a partner or a friend. May we all find comfort, love, and stability in knowing that God and Shabbat are present in each of our lives.

Shabbat Shalom!!