

Jewish Customs

Exploring Common and Uncommon Minhagim



Zvi Ron

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*Exploring Common
and Uncommon Minhagim*

Maggid Books

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רבי נתן אומר
אין לך אהבה כאהבה של תורה.
ואין לך חכמה כחכמה של דרך ארץ.
ואין לך יופי כיופי של ירושלים.
(אבות דרבי נתן פרק כח)

*Rabbi Natan would say:
There is no love like the love of Torah.
There is no wisdom like the wisdom of the "way of the world."
There is no beauty like the beauty of Jerusalem.
(Avot D'Rabi Natan, Chapter 28)*

*In memory of
Avinoam Mordechai Gottlieb z"l*

*To our parents and teachers,
for all we have learned from them*

Tilla & Ben Crowne



*Thanks to Rav Ron for the wonderful way
he has influenced his talmidim.*

May the rest of the world now benefit as well.

A Talmid's Parents



Donated in honor of

Avi Watson and his unit

for defending Israel.

*May we be zokheh for Avi, his unit and the IDF
to always be victorious.*

Am Yisroel Chai!

Merav and Aharon Watson

Dedicated in Honor of the Author

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Preface

For many generations, the study of Jewish customs consisted primarily of simply recording the various customs, only occasionally giving a reason for the custom. A classic example of this is the very popular *Sefer Taamei HaMinhagim UMekorei HaDinim* by Avraham Sperling, which has been through many editions and expansions since it was first published in 1890. Other similar popular works from previous generations are *Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun* by Avraham Hershovitz (1892), and *Otzar Dinim UMinhagim* by J. D. Eisenstein (1917). A modern version of this type of book is Shmuel Gelbard's *Otzar Taamei HaMinhagim* (1996). It is only in recent years that there has been a growing interest in how customs developed over time, and what influences shaped their development. Rather than taking the custom as a given, researchers now focus on exploring the origin of the custom, the way in which it has been transmitted and popularized, and how it has changed over time, in an attempt to understand how the customs we are familiar with today came to be.

My initial exposure to this approach was the first volume of Daniel Sperber's *Minhagei Yisrael* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1989). For the first time, customs were presented as being subject to change and

development, often from external influences. While this approach may have been found previously in academic literature, for the average practicing Jew, this was a paradigm shift. The fact that this book was disseminated by a respected, traditional publishing house served to popularize this approach among a segment of Jewish society that had not previously encountered this methodology. The book proved popular, becoming an eight-volume series. Other works appeared espousing the same approach, for example, Eric Zimmer's *Olam KeMinhago Noheg* (Zalman Shazar, 1996).

In this book I offer my own research and investigation into a number of popular customs. They were chosen simply because I was curious about or had been asked about these topics, but I could not find a satisfactory treatment of them in the existing literature. I have not sought any particular agenda or hypothesis, although after researching many customs, certain conclusions have emerged. These will be discussed at the end of the book.

There are many new discoveries here, obscure sources and references brought to light, as well as revelations that I found to be remarkable. Sit back and enjoy the fruit of my labor and research, and discover new insights about customs both familiar and arcane.

There are many people to thank for this volume. Foremost among them, my grandfather Rabbi Eliezer Lipa Cohen and my parents, Dr. Shlomo and Ruth Ron, for instilling in me a love and respect for Jewish customs. I grew up in a decidedly non-American home, singing *zemirot* with tunes from the old country that none of my friends were familiar with and which I still proudly use today in my own family, and this is where it all began. With thanks and appreciation to my patient and supportive wife, Sharon, and to my children, Kinamon (and her husband, Nadav), Netanel (and his wife, Karina), Adina, and Shoshana, who are always very encouraging of my research and interests. They all inspire me daily. Our first grandchild, baby Naveh, brings with him a new kind of inspiration. Special thanks also to my students, friends, and neighbors who asked me about various customs; their questions led to the writing of many of the chapters in this book. I'd like to especially thank my students and friends who contributed to support the publication of this book, in particular Dahlia Gottlieb,

whose husband Avinoam, of blessed memory, was a source of many insightful discussions about the topics covered in this book. Thank you to Matthew Miller, publisher of Koren Jerusalem, Aryeh Grossman, as well as to the editorial and design team Caryn Meltz, Tomi Mager, Tani Bayer, Debbie Ismailoff, and Esther Shafier, as well as Marc Sherman for the indexes. Lastly, thank you to my dear brother-in-law, Reuven Ziegler, for his constant encouragement and support.

Earlier versions of these chapters appeared in the following publications. My thanks to them all for their permission to reprint revised and updated versions here.

Chapter 1: “The Origin and Development of the Custom for the Bride to Circle the Groom Three or Seven Times,” *Zutot* 17 (2019).

Chapter 2: “L’Haim,” *Hakirah* 30 (Winter 2021).

Chapter 3: “Covering Mirrors in the Shiva Home,” *Hakirah* 13 (Spring 2012).

Chapter 4: “Walking Out for Yizkor,” *Zutot* 14 (2017).

Chapter 5: “A Shabbat Candle for Every Family Member,” *Hakirah* 30 (Summer 2021).

Chapter 6: “Braided Challa,” *Modern Judaism* 42:1 (February 2022).

Chapter 7: “Akhilat Etrog BeRosh HaShana,” *Sinai* 142 (Nisan 5768).

Chapter 8: “HaMinhag BeAkhilat Shum BeRosh HaShana,” *Sinai* 146 (2014).

Chapter 9: “A Possible Origin of the Eleventh Day of the Eighth Month as the Date of Rachel’s Death,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 24:4 (June 2015).

Chapter 10: “The Story of Judith and the Custom of Eating Dairy Foods on Hanukkah,” *Torah U’Maddah Journal* 18 (2020–2021).

Chapter 11: “Hanukkah Gelt,” *Hakirah* 29 (Winter 2021).

Chapter 12: “The Ashkenazi Custom Not to Slaughter Geese in Tevet and Shevat,” *Hakirah* 17 (Summer 2014).

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- Chapter 13: “Mishloach Manot on Purim and Rosh Hashanah,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (January 2018).
- Chapter 14: “The *Bedikat Ḥametz* Kit: Wax Candle, Wooden Spoon and Feather,” *Hakirah* 26 (Spring 2019).
- Chapter 15: “Our Salty Tears: The History and Significance of an Interpretation of Dipping in Salt Water at the Seder,” *Hakirah* 24 (Spring 2018).
- Chapter 16: “Our Own Joy Is Lessened and Incomplete – The History of an Interpretation of Sixteen Drops of Wine at the Seder,” *Hakirah* 19 (Summer 2015).
- Chapter 17: “The Origin of the Custom of Chai Rotl,” *Hakirah* 21 (Summer 2016).
- Chapter 18: “The Development of the Expanded Tachanun for Monday and Thursday,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 12 (January 2018).
- Chapter 19: “Pointing to the Torah and Other *Hagbaha* Customs,” *Hakirah* 15 (Summer 2013).
- Chapter 20: “Reciting *Al Tira* After *Aleinu*,” *Hakirah* 10 (Summer 2010).
- Chapter 21: “*Tehillat Hashem* and Other Verses Before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*,” *Hakirah* 28 (Spring 2020).
- Chapter 22: “*Minhag Hosafat HaRaḥaman LeShabbat*,” *HaMaayan* 203 (2012).
- Chapter 23: “‘*Shalom Aleichem*’ to Three People During *Kiddush Levanah*,” *Hakirah* 7 (Winter 2009).
- Chapter 25: “*Makor Minhag HaKahal Lomar Et Shemot Aseret Bnei Haman BeKol Ram*” *HaMaayan* 216 (2015).
- Chapter 26: “Reading *Shir haShirim*, *Ruth*, *Eicha* and *Kohelet*,” *Hakirah* 23 (Fall 2017).
- Chapter 27: “*LaOmer / BaOmer*, *Shitat Rav Saadia Gaon*” *Sinai* 149 (2016).
- “Stripes, Hats, and Fashion,” *Modern Judaism* 40, no. 3 (October 2020).

Part 1

Life Cycle

Chapter 1

Why the Bride Circles the Groom

In modern times it has become a ubiquitous Ashkenazic custom for a bride to circle the groom under the *huppa*. The custom began as circling three times, with various reasons given for this particular practice and this specific number. With kabbalistic influence, the custom shifted from three circuits to seven, the common custom today. The reasons given also changed over time, reflecting changing attitudes towards the symbolism of the wedding ceremony. We will be building on Dr. Aaron Ahrend's comprehensive study of the custom in his article "Bride Going Around the Bridegroom – Study of a Marriage Custom" (1991).¹

¹ Aaron Ahrend, "Bride Going Around the Bridegroom – Study of a Marriage Custom," *Sidra* 7 (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 5–11 [Hebrew].

EARLIEST MENTION OF THE CUSTOM

There are many references to this popular Ashkenazic custom² for the bride to circle the groom under the *huppa*. The earliest known source to mention this custom is the Torah commentary of Rabbi Dossa the Greek (ר' דוסא היווני), written in 1430. Rabbi Dossa is a little known Romaniote scholar, originally from Vidin, Bulgaria, who spent time in yeshivot in Austria and northern Italy.³ In his comments to Leviticus 17:11 and 14, where sometimes the word spelled הוּא is pronounced as the masculine *hu* and sometimes as the feminine *hi*, he brings the Masoretic mnemonic to remember which is which: “How long will you turn away, wayward daughter? For the Lord will create something new in the world: A woman circles a man (נִקְבָה תְּסוּבֵב גִבּוֹר) (Jer. 31:21). This reminds the reader that the feminine surrounds the masculine, meaning that the first and last instances of הוּא are feminine, and the two in the middle are masculine.⁴ Rabbi Dossa then adds that at a *huppa* in Austria he saw the bride circle the groom three times. When he asked why this was done, he was told that it was based on that same verse, Jeremiah 31:21. Rabbi Dossa writes that this is a nice custom (מְנַהֵג יָפֵה).⁵

The meaning of the word *tesovev* in the context of the verse does not actually mean “circling around,” but rather refers to courting,⁶ and metaphorically refers to the idea that in the future the people will seek

- 2 Yitzhak Zvi Levovitch, *Shulhan HaEzer*, vol. 2 (Dej, 1932), 32b, *siman* 7, note 8; Shlomo Zalman Braun's edition of *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* with his commentary *She'arim Metzuyanim BeHalakha*, vol. 4 (New York: Feldheim, 1951), 59, note 10; Moshe Weinstock, *Siddur HaGeonim VahaMekubalim VahaHasidim*, vol. 20 (Jerusalem, 1980), 134; *Otzar HaPoskim – Even HaEzer*, vol. 16 (Jerusalem, 1985), 174, *siman* 17; Mordechai Eliyahu stated that Sephardim do not have this custom in his edition of *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* (Jerusalem, 2009), 575, note 7.
- 3 See Shlomo Spitzer, “Yediot al Rabbi Dossa haYevani miChiburo al haTorah,” in *Sefer Zikaron LeRav Yitzhak Nissim*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Yad HaRav Nissim, 1984), 177–80.
- 4 This mnemonic is brought by Hizkuni in his commentary to Leviticus 17:11.
- 5 First published by Shlomo Spitzer, “Yediot al Rabbi Dossa HaYevani,” 181. It appears in the manuscript of Dossa's commentary on page 138r (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Mich. 261; Neubauer no. 203; Hebrew University MS 16339). It is included in Shmuel Eliezer Stern, ed., *Meorot HaRishonim*, part 1 (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 2001), 322, *siman* 81.
- 6 See Rashi, David Kimchi, and Malbim here. See also Menachem Buleh, *Daat Mikra: Yirmeyahu* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1983), 391.

out God.⁷ However, as “encircling” is the common meaning of the word in Hebrew, it was given as a source for the custom. In this earliest source, no explicit reason is given for why it was done three times. It should be noted that the custom was not widespread at the time, even among Ashkenazic communities, as it does not appear in the works of the Maharil and other books of customs from that era.⁸ It seems to have begun in eastern Austria and spread from there.⁹

While Rabbi Dossa records no explanation beyond the verse itself, later authorities added additional symbolic meaning. For example, since the verse refers to a future time of messianic redemption, it was considered a particularly auspicious symbol at a wedding,¹⁰ or that it represents the role of the groom as the giver and the bride as the receiver.¹¹

In recent times, concerns have arisen that this custom is suggestive of the bride being in some way subordinate to her husband,¹² and as a result contemporary interpretations have emerged that may be more acceptable in light of current attitudes, for example, that wherever the groom looks he will see only his bride, or that in circling her groom the bride reciprocates the affection he showed earlier at the *bedekin*,

7 See Kimchi. There are many explanations for this verse, none of which understand that there is an act of actual circling in the verse. For example, Malbim explains that the Land of Israel will seek out its people and Metzudat David explains that it refers to the Israelites acting with strength to overcome the Chaldeans.

8 *Pardes Eliezer*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: Machon Damesek Eliezer, 2014), 128.

9 Aaron Ahrend, “Bride Going Around the Bridegroom – Study of a Marriage Custom,” *Sidra* 7 (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 9.

10 A. Lewysohn, *Mekorei Minhagim* (Berlin, 1847), 104, *siman* 74; repeated in Y. Lipetz, *Sefer Mataamim* (Warsaw, 1899), 35, *siman* 79; Yitzhak Zeller, *Yalkut Yitzhak*, vol. 4 (Warsaw, 1900), 97, *mitzva* 552, *siman* 35, and J. D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Dinim UMinhagim* (New York, 1917), 127.

11 See Dov Ber Schneerson (the Mittlerer Rebbe), *Torat Chayyim – Bereshit* (Brooklyn: Otzar Chasidim, 2002), 423, *Vayeshev*, *siman* 16. This idea is quoted in Avraham David Lavut, *Shaar HaKollel* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2005), 83, 35:5.

12 Anita Diamant, *The Jewish Wedding Now* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 110; Nancy Wiener, *Beyond Breaking the Glass* (New York: CCAR, 2001), 37 (“Early Reform practice dispensed with this ritual altogether, viewing it as superstitious, non-egalitarian and inessential”); Irit Koren, “The Bride’s Voice: Religious Women Challenge the Wedding Ritual,” *Nashim* 10 (2005), 31 (“The circling of the groom strikes many as indicating that he is at the center, while the bride is at the margins”).

reminiscent also of the verse in Jeremiah.¹³ Other opinions propose that “the woman delineates the sacred space of the union,”¹⁴ or that she is demonstrating the creation of a new relationship unit.¹⁵

EARLIEST EXPLANATIONS OF THREE CIRCLES

Tashbetz, referred to as *Tashbetz Katan* so as to avoid confusion with the compendium of responsa bearing the same name, is a collection of the customs of Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg (c. 1215–93) recorded by one of his students, generally recognized as Samson ben Zadok. Although a version of the book, or parts of it, was apparently already known to the students of Rabbi Meir, it was first published only in 1556.¹⁶ There are many different versions of the book found in earlier manuscripts, and the last group of *simanim* is later material added to the original work.¹⁷

In this latter part of the book, among wedding-related practices that have numerical significance, the custom to hand the bride over to the groom (למסור כלה לחתן) three times is mentioned. This is explained as corresponding to the three times the Torah uses the expression “When a man marries a woman” (כי יקח איש אשה), in Deuteronomy 22:13, 24:1, and 24:5.¹⁸

While this *siman* does appear in the first published edition of *Tashbetz* from 1556,¹⁹ it does not appear in earlier manuscripts of *Tashbetz*, and is not even included in some editions published in modern times.²⁰ This interest in numeric symbolism is in line with that found in other practices of the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* in general and Rabbi Meir

13 Yisrael Samet, “The Meaning of *Huppa* Customs – Part 2,” *Tzohar* 10 (2001), 166 [Hebrew].

14 This is cited as the explanation given “in some feminist circles,” Wiener, *Beyond Breaking the Glass*, 37.

15 Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage* (New York: Jonathan David, 1980), 214.

16 Shlomo Angel, ed., *Sefer Tashbetz* (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 2010), 10–11.

17 *Ibid.*, 12.

18 *Ibid.*, 267, *siman* 467.

19 *Sefer Tashbetz* (Cremona, 1556), 45a.

20 For example, this *siman* is not found in the version of *Tashbetz* published by Mekhon Torah shebi-khetav (Jerusalem 2005), see 353.

in particular,²¹ although we do not find this custom mentioned in any of the writings of Rabbi Meir that we have today. An entire section of *remazim* related to the wedding ceremony, however, is found in a fourteenth-century manuscript, comprising a collection of many diverse works. Although it immediately follows a section on the laws of blessings attributed to Rabbi Meir,²² this particular section is not attributed to any individual. The manuscript is not dated, but it does contain a section dealing with matters pertaining to the calendar and covers the years 1323–1446, so it is reasonable to infer that it is from the early fourteenth century.²³

The practice of circling the groom three times was included in *Mateh Moshe* (1591) by Rabbi Moshe ben Avraham of Przemyśl, where he uses the same terminology as the *Tashbetz*, and attributes the practice to Rabbi Meir.²⁴ These earliest sources specify three times rather than seven,²⁵ and are considered to be the source of the custom quoted in popular classic works which provide explanations for customs, all of which describe circling three times.²⁶ However, it is important to note that this source does not use the term circling at all, but rather “handing over,” and actually refers to a completely different custom, that of having the bride “handed over” to the groom at three distinct times, the first earlier in the day (a practice known as *huppah Main*), the second with the *kiddushin* and blessings, and the third at the *bet yihud* where the couple would spend time alone.²⁷ Later books on customs appropriated the

21 See D. Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael*, vol. 7 (Jerusalem, 2003), 412.

22 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Hébreu 391, fol. 108r. See also Shmuel Eliezer Stern, *Seder Erusin VeNisuin LeRabbotenu HaRishonim* (Bnei Brak, 1990), 127.

23 Munk, Derenbourg, Franck, and Zotenberg, *Catalogues des Manuscrits Hébreux et Samaritains de la Bibliothèque Impériale/Manuscrits Orientaux* (Paris, 1866), 52.

24 Moshe ben Avraham of Przemyśl, *Mateh Moshe* (Frankfurt, 1719), 111a, part 3, chapter 1, *siman* 4.

25 Aaron Ahrend, “Bride Going Around the Bridegroom – Study of a Marriage Custom,” *Sidra* 7 (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 5, note 1.

26 Avraham Sperling, *Sefer Taamei HaMinhagim UMekorei HaDinim* (Jerusalem: Shai Lamora, 1999), 408; A. Hershovitz, *Sefer Minhagei Yeshurun* (Vilna, 1899), 100, *siman* 176; J. D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Dinim UMinhagim* (New York, 1917), 127.

27 Yaakov Yisrael Setel, ed., *Sefer Gematriot* (Jerusalem, 2005), 308–10, especially note 68; Binyamin Shlomo Hamburger, “Shenei Huppot BeYom HaNisuin,” *Or Yisrael* 21

explanation found in *Tashbetz* for this threefold handing over to explain the custom of circling the groom,²⁸ although this is not what *Tashbetz* was referring to.²⁹ It is for this reason that despite the manuscript most likely predating Rabbi Dossa, it cannot be considered the earliest mention of the custom of circling the groom.

Over time, many other reasons have been offered to explain why the bride made specifically three circuits. For example, the three circles represent the three words in the original source (נקבה תסוכב גבר) in Jeremiah 31:21.³⁰ Another suggestion is that they represent the three times the word ארשתוך is found in Hosea 2:21–22, “And I will betroth (וארשתוך) you forever, I will betroth (וארשתוך) you with righteousness and justice, and with goodness and mercy. And I will betroth (וארשתוך) you with faithfulness; then you shall be devoted to the Lord.”³¹ Since this verse is connected to the wearing of *tefillin*, the circles may also represent the three times the *tefillin* are wound around the finger.³² They are also said to represent the three ways a man can perform *kiddushin*, or the three obligations a husband has to his wife.³³ Other commenta-

(Tishrei 5761/2001), 219.

- 28 Lipetz, *Sefer Mataamim*, 35, *siman* 80; A. Hershovitz, *Sefer Minhagei Yeshurun* (Vilna, 1899) 100, *siman* 176; J. D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Dinim UMinhagim* (New York, 1917) 127; Shmuel Gelbard, *Otzar Taamei Haminhagim* (Petach Tikva: Mifal Rashi, 1996), 443.
- 29 Aryeh Kaplan, *Made in Heaven* (New York: Moznaim, 1983), 160: “This developed into the bride walking around the groom three times.” See also Aaron Ahrend, “Bride Going Around the Bridegroom – Study of a Marriage Custom,” *Sidra 7* (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 7, note 12.
- 30 Chanoch Zundel ben Yosef, *Mitzhalot Hatanim* (Johannesberg, Germany), 11. Although there is no publication date printed, it seems to be around 1854; see the introduction, 5. Chanoch Zundel died in 1859. See also Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich, ed., *Iggeret HaTiyul* (Jerusalem: HaTehiya, 1957), 217. This is found in a section of additional material not seen in earlier editions of Hayim ben Betzalel’s (1530–88) work. See Aaron Ahrend, “Bride Going Around the Bridegroom – Study of a Marriage Custom,” *Sidra 7* (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 9, note 26.
- 31 A. Lewysohn, *Mekorei Minhagim* (Berlin, 1847), 104, *siman* 74; repeated in J. D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Dinim UMinhagim* (New York, 1917), 127.
- 32 A. Lewysohn, *Mekorei Minhagim* (Berlin, 1847), 104, *siman* 74, repeated in Shlomo Zvi Schick, *Siddur Rashban* (Vienna, 1894), 15b, *siman* 87.
- 33 Lewysohn, *Mekorei Minhagim*, 104, *siman* 74, repeated in Schick, *Siddur Rashban*, 15b, *siman* 87 and A. Hershovitz, *Sefer Minhagei Yeshurun* (Vilna, 1899) 100, *siman* 176.

tors say the circles symbolize the three camps that surrounded the Ark of the Covenant in the wilderness, or the layers of darkness, cloud, and fog that surrounded the Divine Presence.³⁴ It has even been suggested that it gives an opportunity for the groom and two witnesses (three people in total) to catch a glimpse of the bride and make sure she is the right woman.³⁵ All these reasons are found in books dating from the mid- to late 1800s and early 1900s that give explanations for customs, often without attribution.³⁶

PROTECTION

In Berakhot 54b we find, “R. Yehuda said: Three persons require guarding: a sick person, a groom, and a bride.” Rashi explains that in the case of a bride and groom, protection is needed from evil spirits (מזיקין) because they are jealous of them.³⁷ There are many wedding customs that are based on providing protection for the groom from negative spiritual forces and entities,³⁸ and the opinion of the folklorists is that the custom of encircling him is one of them. This approach understands that

34 Lipetz, *Sefer Mataamim*, 36, *siman* 92, 93, repeated in Yitzhak Zvi Levovitch, *Shulhan HaEzer*, vol. 2 (Dej, 1932), 32a, *siman* 7, note 8.

35 Schick, *Siddur Rashban*, 15b, *siman* 87. This approach is ridiculed in S. M. Lehrman, *Jewish Customs and Folklore* (London: Shapiro, Valentine and Co., 1949), 147, where he prefers the explanation found in *Tashbetz* or the one based on ראושתין.

36 See the notes above where I endeavored to show the earliest source for each explanation.

37 J. Lauterbach, “The Ceremony of Breaking Glass at Weddings,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2 (1925), 351–80, here 355: “It is the belief that the evil spirits or demons are jealous of human happiness and therefore seek to spoil it or to harm the happy individual.”

38 See *Pardes Eliezer*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, New York: Machon Damesek Eliezer, 2014), 134, note 7, where he brings the idea that the bride’s face is covered with a veil in order to protect her from evil forces, and that Psalm 121 is recited under the *huppa* as protection for the bride and groom; Menachem Savitz, *Yismah Lev* (Lakewood, 2004), 191, *siman* 274 and Yitzhak Shechter, *Yashiv Yitzhak* (Netanya, 2004), *siman* 61, 351–53, regarding not leaving the groom alone due to fear of *mazikin*; Hershovitz, *Sefer Minhagei Yeshurun*, 95, *siman* 171, regarding making sure there are no knots on the clothing of the bride and groom as a protection from witchcraft; Lauterbach, “The Ceremony of Breaking Glass at Weddings,” 355–61 regarding a variety of wedding customs. See also Aaron Ahrend, “Bride Going Around the Bridegroom – Study of a Marriage Custom,” *Sidra* 7 (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 7, note 17 and Joshua

the custom “was probably originally intended to keep off the demons who were waiting to pounce upon them” by constructing a protective barrier,³⁹ “a version of the magic circle.”⁴⁰ Both the numbers three and seven are considered “favored mystical number(s),” and both would be appropriate for the purpose of providing supernatural protection.⁴¹ This is also the conclusion reached by Aaron Ahrend of Bar-Ilan University, in his comprehensive study of this custom.⁴² The groom was considered to be in more danger, based on the ancient concern that the demonic forces “would seek to kill the bridegroom or otherwise hurt him and prevent him from joining his bride, in order that they might keep the bride for themselves,”⁴³ an idea previously found in the Apocryphal work *The Book of Tobit*, understood to have been written by a Jewish author sometime during the third or early second centuries BCE.⁴⁴

At first glance, it would seem that this explanation is not given in any of the early sources, even though other protective practices were explicitly described as such.⁴⁵ However, upon closer inspection we see that the element of protection was present from the earliest reference

Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Athenium, 1984), 172–74.

39 Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Athenium, 1984), 121.

40 Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Athenium, 1984), 174. “People all around the world from every era of history have believed that circles have magical powers,” Wiener, *Beyond Breaking the Glass* 36. See also *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 7, 1154, on *hakafot* in general as an “attempt to dissuade *shedim* from intruding upon the object of attention.”

41 See the numerous examples in Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 119–21; see also 174. For rabbinic sources on the power of circles and circling seven times in particular, see Meir Benayahu, *Sefer Zikaron LeRav Yitzhak Nissim*, vol. 6: *Maamadot UMoshavot* (Jerusalem: Yad HaRav Nissim, 1985), 120–25.

42 Aaron Ahrend, “Bride Going Around the Bridegroom – Study of a Marriage Custom,” *Sidra* 7 (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 7.

43 Jacob Lauterbach, “The Ceremony of Breaking Glass at Weddings,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2 (1925), 355.

44 *Tobit*, chapter 6, has the hero concerned that he could not marry Sarah because a demon killed seven men that she had been previously betrothed to. Lawrence M. Wills, ed., *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 62, 75–76.

45 See Ahrend, “Bride Going Around the Bridegroom,” 8.

to the custom. Yevamot 62b cites Jeremiah 31:21, the verse brought as the earliest source for the bride circling the groom, as a proof text for the idea that an unmarried man “does not have a wall” (בלא חומה). This teaching is well known and appears in the *Tur* in the very beginning of the laws regarding marriage in *Even HaEzer*, and from there was included in a more abbreviated version by Rabbi Moshe Isserles in *Shulḥan Arukh*, *Even HaEzer* 1:1.

Various explanations were given as to why having a wife is like having a wall,⁴⁶ in particular that she protects her husband from sin.⁴⁷ This idea can be found in the *Wisdom of Ben Sira* (36:30): “A vineyard with no wall will be overrun; a man with no wife wanders and strays.”⁴⁸ Many connected the teaching of Yevamot 62b to the bride circling the groom. Rabbi Yosef Shapira (1778–1854) explained that a wife protects her husband from doing stupid things which lead to sin, and to highlight this protection, she circles the groom.⁴⁹

Others viewed this as a supernatural protection for the wedding day.⁵⁰ The explanation for the custom reported in the name of Rabbi Shalom Rokeach, the first Belzer Rebbe (1781–1855), is that the bride circles the groom to create a protective barrier, a wall, to protect him from negative spiritual forces (חיצוניים), based on Yevamot 62b.⁵¹ Rabbi Shmuel Meir

46 Note that Song of Songs 8:9–10 also compares a woman to a wall.

47 For example, Maharsha understands that a wife protects her husband from the evil inclination and sin. This is in accordance with the statement of Rabbi Ḥiyya in Yevamot 63a–b that a husband should be thankful for his wife since she saves him from sin, which Rashi explains as sexual thoughts. Similarly, in contemporary times, Yisrael Samet, “The Meaning of *Huppa* Customs – Part 2,” *Tzohar* 10 (2001), 166 [Hebrew], explains that a wife provides a safe home protected from the dangers of the outside world.

48 Gail Labovitz, *Marriage and Metaphor* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 139, note 20.

49 *Hiddushei Mahari Shapira - Yevamot* (Jerusalem, 1991), 3. Found at the end of the volume of comments on Pesahim and Avoda Zara.

50 See note 39 to Yevamot 62b in the ArtScroll Mesorah Schottenstein edition of the Talmud (Brooklyn, NY, 1999).

51 Baruch Mordechai Cooperstein, *Ezer MiKodesh* (Jerusalem, 1993), 139–40, chapter 6, *siman* 46, note 79.

HaKohen Hollander (1888–1964)⁵² explains that just as it is customary for members of the *hevra kaddisha* to circle around the deceased to chase away negative spiritual forces (לגרש את המקטרגים), so too the bride circles the groom to do the same. He explains that as in the story of Jericho, where seven circuits were needed to break down the wall, so too seven circles are needed to banish the negative forces.⁵³ He then relates the story of Rabbi Barukh of Medzhybizh, who once dealt with a young man who lost his virility and came to him for help. Rabbi Barukh investigated and discovered that this young man's wife did not circle him at his *huppa*. He ordered the young man to divorce his wife and remarry her, this time with circling. Rabbi Barukh is reported to have said that his grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov, said that the seven circles are needed to chase away a kind of negative wife (זיווג מצד הסיטרא אחרא) associated with the demonic Lilith.⁵⁴ A similar story is told of Rabbi Aharon Rokeach, the fourth Belzer Rebbe (1880–1957), where a young couple could not have children, and it was attributed to the fact that because they got married on a snowy day, the *huppa* was rushed and the bride did not circle the groom. In this case they were instructed to do the circling now.⁵⁵

We can now understand that the aspect of protection was indeed implied in the earliest mention of this custom, when Rabbi Dossa was told that Jeremiah 31:21 was the source of the custom.

52 For biographical information, see Meir Wunder, *Encyclopedia LeHakmei Galitzia*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1982), 96–99.

53 It has also been suggested that seven circles can both destroy a wall, as in Jericho, or build a wall, as in the *huppa*. See *Pardes Eliezer*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: Machon Damesek Eliezer, 2014), 145. See Meir Benayahu, *Sefer Zikaron LeRav Yitzhak Nissim*, vol. 6: *Maamadot UMoshavot* (Jerusalem: Yad HaRav Nissim, 1985), 121–25 for kabbalistic sources that explain how the same force that destroyed the wall of Jericho can also be used to build and protect. There is also a tradition that Jericho was surrounded by seven walls; see Yaakov Yisrael Stell, “Homot Yeriho: Minyanan, Tivan VeInyanan,” *Kovetz Hitzvei Gibborim* 10 (Nisan 5777/2017), 542–85.

54 Shmuel Shaymer, *Sihot Talmidei Hakhamim* (Tel Aviv, 1950), 151, *siman* 86. A much abbreviated version is found in Asher Anshel Katz, *Otzar Minhagei Nisuin* (Williamsburg, 1999), 118–19. Special thanks to Avi Levine who gave me this book as a gift. An expanded version of the story can be found in *Pardes Eliezer*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: Machon Damesek Eliezer, 2014), 136–37.

55 Baruch Mordechai Cooperstein, *Ezer MiKodesh* (Jerusalem, 1993), 140, chapter 6, *siman* 46, note 79.

THE SHIFT FROM THREE TO SEVEN CIRCLES

A popular source given for the custom that the bride circles the groom under the *huppa* is Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried's *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh*, where he writes that the bride circles the groom three times. This is found in Rabbi Ganzfried's additions to the 1859 edition of *Siddur Derekh HaḤayim*,⁵⁶ and was repeated in the first edition of his *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh*, published in 1864, and appeared in later editions as well.⁵⁷ Some versions of the *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh* have the number of times as seven instead of three.⁵⁸ This version began to appear in editions published in Rabbi Ganzfried's lifetime,⁵⁹ and in most subsequent editions.⁶⁰ Some contemporary editions preserve the original version of three circles.⁶¹

It would seem that the text was emended in order to conform with the popular custom that the bride circles the groom seven times. Rabbi Ganzfried himself, in the introduction to the Lemberg 1884 edition, writes that he made a few corrections and changes in this edition, and this may be one such change.⁶² Whether it mentions three circles

56 Yaakov ben Yaakov Moshe Lorberbaum of Lissa, *Siddur Derekh HaḤayim* (Vienna, 1859), 114b, *siman* 5.

57 In the first edition it appears in 143:5. In subsequent editions, such as the Warsaw 1874 edition, it is found in 147:5.

58 This was noted by Menachem Mendel Pakshar, *Invei HaGefen* (Jerusalem, 1985), 93, note 143, where he attributes it to textual variants. As we will see, the number of circles was intentionally changed over time.

59 For example, the Lemberg 1884 edition, which has an introduction by Rabbi Ganzfried. Rabbi Ganzfried lived from 1804 until 1886.

60 For example, the Lublin 1905 edition; the Vilna 1915 edition; the Hebrew Publishing Company 1927 edition; the Jerusalem 1944 edition; the Basel 1945 edition; Shlomo Zalman Braun's edition with his commentary *She'arim Metzuyananim BeHalakha*, vol. 4 (New York: Feldheim, 1951), 58; Eshkol 1954 edition; the Shabtai Frankel edition (Bnei Brak, 1987), Eliakim Shelneger, *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh im Divrei Mishna Berura*, vol. 2 (Be'er Yaakov, 1990), 807; and the Shai Lamora edition (Jerusalem, 1999). Seven is also the version in Hyman Goldin's English translation of *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Code of Jewish Law*, vol. 4 (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1963), 11.

61 *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973). This version states on the cover page that it is 'fixed' (מתוקנת). The editions published in Tel Aviv by Sinai Publishing also preserve the three circles. See, for example, the 1967 and 1978 editions.

62 *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh* (Lemberg, 1884), author's introduction.

or seven, no explanation is given in the *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh* for the practice.

The custom also appears in Rabbi Yaakov Emden's *Siddur Beit Yaakov*, in the description of the wedding ceremony.⁶³ In language very similar to that found in the *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh*, Rabbi Emden writes that it is customary for the bride to circle the groom three times. Although he lived a century before the *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh* was published, this is not in fact an earlier source for the custom. *Siddur Beit Yaakov* was not actually written by Rabbi Yaakov Emden, and was published in 1881, after the *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh*. The information found in *Siddur Beit Yaakov* is a combination of commentaries from Rabbi Emden and much later material.⁶⁴ This custom was included in it from Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried's additions to the 1859 edition of *Siddur Derekh HaḤayim* and later incorporated into his *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh*. This has led to a certain amount of confusion. For example, the Vilna 1902 edition of *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh* states in the main body of the text that the custom is to circle seven times, but in a note it states that Rabbi Yaakov Emden says it is three times. However, this is not found in the actual writings of Rabbi Yaakov Emden, and the note is actually quoting the version of the custom found in *Siddur Derekh HaḤayim* and earlier editions of *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh* itself, which was in turn the basis for the passage in *Siddur Beit Yaakov*, and so attributed to Emden.

We have seen that the original custom was for the bride to circle three times, but over the years it changed to seven times, a process that can be seen in the various editions of *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh*. Although today the prevalent custom is for the bride to circle the groom seven times,⁶⁵ the custom of three times persisted until the very recent past. For example, Rabbi Yitzhak Zvi Levovitch reported that in Hungary in the 1930s the custom was to circle three times.⁶⁶

63 *Siddur Beit Yaakov* (Lemberg, 1903), 124.

64 See Moshe Zvi Aryeh Bik's introduction to his 1962 facsimile edition of Emden's *Amudei Shamayim*, 1.

65 *Pardes Eliezer*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: Machon Damesek Eliezer, 2014), 142.

66 Yitzhak Zvi Levovitch, *Shulḥan HaEzer*, vol. 2 (Dej, 1932), 32b, *siman* 7, note 8.

We find a few explanations from the late 1800s and early 1900s for why circling was done seven times. These reasons are not found in earlier sources, and appear to be creations of the various authors to explain the current custom.⁶⁷ Rabbi Yaakov Kahane, in his book of responsa, *She'erit Yaakov*, published in 1895, suggests that the word for bride, כלה, appears seven times in the Song of Songs (although it actually appears six times),⁶⁸ or that it signifies that the marriage is holy, the seven circles representing God's abode above seven heavens.⁶⁹ Other explanations rely on *Gematria*, such as that brought in *Yalkut Yashar*, which states that the last letters of נקבה תסובב add up to seven.⁷⁰ Following the idea that circling three times relates to the number of times the word ארשתך is found in Hosea 2:21–22, it was suggested that seven represents the number of items through which the betrothal is accomplished in those same verses.⁷¹ It has also been proposed that the circles represent the seven days of the week, or the seven times the word *kol* is mentioned in Psalm 29,⁷² or that the bride in some fashion represents Shabbat.⁷³ Kabbalistic explanations were also given, based on the seven lower *sefirot*.⁷⁴

Later, other explanations were offered in line with changing tastes and perspectives. Rabbi Yona Metzger, in his book *BeMaagalei HaHayim*,

67 Aharon Mendel Cohen (1866–1927) in his book *Kelilat Hatanim* (Cairo, 1910), 11a, first gives two explanations, with sources, regarding circling three times (*siman* 4), and then provides two explanations for circling seven times with no references (*siman* 5), one of which he explicitly states is his own idea. He explains that it is either symbolic of the seven *huppot* God made for Adam, an explanation later brought in Moshe Weinstock, *Siddur HaGeonim VehaMekubalim VehaHasidim*, vol. 20 (Jerusalem, 1980), 134, or of seven good things that a wife brings. Note that some sources indicate that God made ten *huppot* for Adam; see *Pardes Eliezer*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: Machon Damesek Eliezer, 2014), 144, note 13.

68 See the discussion of this discrepancy in *Pardes Eliezer*, 143, note 12.

69 Yaakov Zev Kahane, *She'elot UTeshuvot She'erit Yaakov* (Vilna, 1895), 75a, *Even HaEzer* 18.

70 Yeshaya Rokach, *Yalkut Yashar* (Bilgoraj, Poland, 1937), 111. See there for another explanation, based on the spelling of the word סוכה.

71 Menachem Hacohen, *Sefer Hayei Adam – Kelulot* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1986), 63.

72 Menachem Mendel Pakshar, *Invei HaGefen* (Jerusalem, 1985), 93, note 143.

73 Moshe Wolfson, *Emunat Itkha*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 2004), 281.

74 See, for example, Avraham Twersky, *Magen Avraham*, vol. 2 (Lublin, 1887), 110 (Korah).

a book on the Jewish life cycle intended for a modern audience, explains that the bride circles the groom seven times in order to break down the barriers between them, as with the walls of Jericho.⁷⁵ Rabbi Yaakov Rakovsky, for many years the *rav* of the Hadassah Medical Organization, said in the name of his father, Rabbi Avraham Barukh Abba Rakovsky (1885–1959) that the seven circles represent the idea that every day of the week, at all times and in all directions, the husband will always see only his wife, and not be tempted by others.⁷⁶

Some sources indicate that they were unsure why the custom was indeed seven times if the explanation taken from the *Tashbetz* applies only to three times. For example, Rabbi Yisrael Chaim Friedman of Rakov (1852–1922) gives a complicated kabbalistic explanation for seven times, and concludes by saying that this is all speculation.⁷⁷

KABBALISTIC REASONS FOR SEVEN CIRCLES

When and why did this custom shift? It seems to have been influenced by various other customs that involved some kind of circling, which for kabbalistic reasons were associated with the number seven rather than three. As these customs became more widespread, circling in general became associated with the number seven.

The first example of this is the *hakafot* on Simḥat Torah. The Mishna (Sukka 4:5) reports that in the Temple, the altar was circled seven times on Hoshana Rabba. This was replicated in the synagogue to remember what was done in Temple times.⁷⁸ Rav Saadia Gaon and Rav

75 Yona Metzger and Nachum Langental, *BeMaagalei HaḤayim – BeḤaye HaAdam* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 1988), 81. It has also been suggested that the seven circles represent in some fashion the creation of the world, showing that a new relationship is being created, Nancy Wiener, *Beyond Breaking the Glass* (New York: CCAR, 2001), 37.

76 Yaakov Rakovsky, *Arukhat Bat Ami*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1993), 384. He brings the same idea in volume 2, 192, but does not state that he heard it from his father there.

77 Yisrael Chaim Friedman, *Likkutei Maharit*, vol. 3 (New York, 1965), 131b, כל זה כתבתי רק בדרך סמך ובדרך אפשר. This is the reason for the seven times referred to in Yitzhak Zvi Levovitch, *Shulḥan HaEzer*, vol. 2 (Dej, 1932), 32a, *siman* 7, note 8. He notes that it is a kabbalistic explanation (על פי סוד) and does not quote it. By contrast, he quotes in full three reasons for three times.

78 *Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim, remez* 703.

Hai Gaon both report a custom to circle the *bima* three times on each of the intermediate days of the festivals, and seven on Hoshana Rabba.⁷⁹ Although this would universally shift to once a day during Ḥol HaMoed,⁸⁰ we can see from here that three times was also considered a significant number for circling. This practice of circling the *bima* seven times was carried over into Simḥat Torah by Rabbi Isaac Luria (the Ari) and his students, as reported by Rabbi Hayim Vital.⁸¹ Thus, the practice of the bride circling the groom predated that of *hakafot* on Simḥat Torah. However, at that time the custom was to circle the groom only three times.

Some communities did only three *hakafot* on Simḥat Torah, as reported by Rabbi Eliya Shapira (1660–1712) in his work *Eliya Rabba*, and by Rabbi Joseph ben Meir Teomim (1727–92) in his work *Peri Megadim*.⁸² This version of the custom was still reported in various Ashkenazic communities into the late 1800s and early 1900s.⁸³

The practice of seven *hakafot* on Simḥat Torah was popularized outside of kabbalistic circles in Israel when it was included in the books *Nagid UMetzaveh*, published in 1712, and *Ḥemdat Yamim*, published in 1731.⁸⁴ These books were reprinted multiple times in the 1700s, and *Ḥemdat Yamim* was particularly influential.⁸⁵

Another kabbalistic custom involving seven circles is that of circling the deceased. This parallels the bride circling the groom in that it was done in order “to chase away the forces of impurity.”⁸⁶ The custom was first mentioned by Rabbi Abraham Saba (1440–1508), who associated it with protection from demonic forces coming from “the side of Lilith,” generated from the seed spilled by the deceased throughout his

79 See Avraham Yaari, *Toldot Ḥag Simḥat Torah* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1998), 259.

80 *Ibid.*, 291.

81 *Ibid.*, 266.

82 *Eliya Rabba*, siman 669; *Peri Megadim*, *Eshel Avraham*, siman 669. Yaari, *Toldot Ḥag Simḥat Torah*, 291.

83 Yaari, *Toldot Ḥag Simḥat Torah*, 292.

84 *Ibid.*, 269.

85 *Ibid.*, 268.

86 Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah: In Liturgy, Halakha and Customs* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 305.

life.⁸⁷ It was understood that there are seven groups of forces of impurity that must be banished.⁸⁸ The custom is mentioned by other kabbalists from the time of the Spanish expulsion,⁸⁹ and was popularized in extensive discussions by the Italian kabbalist Rabbi Aaron Brechia (d. 1639) in his most famous work, *Maavar Yabok*, which deals with sickness, death, and burial.⁹⁰

The custom of circling the deceased had a very strong impact on the custom of circling the groom, as they both were understood to give protection from forces related to Lilith. In addition, the parallel between the seven days of mourning a death and the seven days of joy for a wedding is well known.⁹¹

Jeremiah 31:21, the proof text for circling and for the wife as a wall, is cited in the sixth *tikkun* of *Tikkunei Zohar* 23a, in connection with the seven days of Sukkot, when we circle the *bima* seven times while holding the lulav and etrog. Although written earlier, *Tikkunei Zohar* was first published in 1557, the first Zoharic volume to be printed.⁹² Many more and newer editions were published in the 1700s.⁹³

Due to these multiple associations of circling with the number seven, all circling became associated with seven. Rabbi David ibn Zimra (Radvaz, c. 1479–1573) suggests that the word *hakafa* itself can imply the number seven, writing that another term for a week or a cycle of seven years is *hekef*. He explains that this is why the deceased are circled specifically seven times for protection.⁹⁴ It is not surprising that the circles

87 Meir Benayahu, *Sefer Zikaron LeRav Yitzhak Nissim*, vol. 6: *Maamadot UMoshavot* (Jerusalem: Yad HaRav Nissim, 1985), 107.

88 See Benayahu, *Sefer Zikaron*, 114.

89 *Ibid.*, 106.

90 *Ibid.*, 127–28.

91 See *ibid.*, 124. The parallel between mourning and wedding practices is the subject of Shmuel Glick, *Or Noga Aleihem* (Efrat: Keter, 1997). See 188–205 there regarding the parallel between circling the groom and circling the deceased.

92 Boaz Huss, *The Zohar: Reception and Impact* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), 99.

93 *Ibid.*, 228.

94 David ibn Zimra, *Magen David* (Amsterdam, 1713), 46a, beginning of letter *kuf*. This book was virtually unknown before being published in 1713, Benayahu, *Sefer Zikaron*, 127. The kabbalistic practice to circle the Shabbat table also shifted to seven

made by the bride would shift from three to seven over time, especially considering that seven was already a significant number for weddings, with the seven blessings and seven days of celebration. It would thus appear that “the prevalent custom of the bride walking around the groom seven times is kabbalistic in origin.”⁹⁵

This is why the custom to circle seven times was first reported in hasidic circles in the 1700s.⁹⁶ As it became more popular, the custom was changed in the *Kitzur Shulḥan Arukh* in the late 1800s. Although there were fewer reasons for seven circles as opposed to three,⁹⁷ and some of those reasons were not very convincing, once the frame of reference for circling was seven, based on Hoshana Rabba, Simḥat Torah,⁹⁸ circling the deceased, and *Tikkunei Zohar*, this number was carried over to the wedding custom as well.⁹⁹ The custom to circle three times for both Simḥat Torah and under the *huppa* fell into a gradual decline from the 1700s onward, and was replaced with seven in both cases.¹⁰⁰

While it is not common to see the bride circle the groom three times these days, I saw it happen at a wedding between an Ashkenazic groom and a Sephardic bride. The bride was not interested in circling seven times, as it is not a Sephardic custom. The groom, however, was concerned about ignoring a long-standing custom of his heritage, and

times; see the letter in *Alei Zikaron* 31 (Shevat 5777/2017), 81. On this custom and the various numbers associated with it, see Moshe Hallamish, *Hanhagot Kabbalot BeShabbat* (Jerusalem: Orḥot, 2006), 287–88.

95 Aryeh Kaplan, *Made in Heaven* (New York: Moznaim, 1983), 160, note 69.

96 Shmuel Shavmer, *Siḥot Talmidei Ḥakhamim* (Tel Aviv, 1950), 151, *siman* 86.

97 See Eliyahu Shragai, “Takkanot UMinhagim BeYisrael,” in *Shana BeShana* 5748 (1987), 271, who notes that there are many reasons given for circling three times but very few for seven times. He says that they parallel the seven kabbalistic *sefirot*.

98 See Yisrael Samet, “The Meaning of *Huppa* Customs – Part 2,” *Tzohar* 10 (2001), 166 [Hebrew]. See also *Pardes Eliezer*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: Machon Damesek Eliezer, 2014), 148.

99 See Abraham Chill, *The Minhagim* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1979), 282–83, where he concludes, “While no source can be found, one might surmise that it is in keeping with other encirclements in religious life such as *hakafot*.”

100 Note that Yosef Yehuda Charney (*Sefer Masaot* [St. Petersburg, 1884], 300) describes a wedding in Derbent, Dagestan, in the 1860s and notes that the bride went around the groom “a few times” (פעמים אחרות), indicating a possibility that the exact number of times was not always considered particularly important.

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he asked Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, then chief rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem, what to do. Rabbi Nebenzahl advised that, as a compromise, the bride should circle him only three times, as per the original custom, which satisfied both the bride and the groom.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ For other cases of refusal to circle with different rabbinic responses, see Irit Koren, “The Bride’s Voice: Religious Women Challenge the Wedding Ritual,” *Nashim* 10 (2005), 41–42; Masud Meshulam, *Mesos Hatan* (Tel Aviv, 2008), 16, note 31; Meir Eliyahu Machfutz, *Inyanei Huppa* (Kfar Chabad, 2015), 56. I will note here a practice that I employed when the fathers insisted on standing next to the groom while the bride circled him, that for the last three circles the groom was left alone to be circled by the bride.