

Producers Circle Audio Transcript: Multiplication and Marriage

Rabbi David Fohrman and learning partners

INTRO

Hi there, Producers, and welcome to this month's installment of your peek behind the scenes. I want to pull back the curtain and share with you what's been close to Rabbi Fohrman's mind and heart. For a while now, Rabbi Fohrman has been developing some incredible material on Eishet Chayil, or Proverbs 31. Rabbi Fohrman's basic theory is that Eishet Chayil is a commentary on the Book of Ruth. Each verse in Eishet Chayil somehow mirrors or responds to a part of the Ruth story — and it all proceeds in a perfect chronology. You really have to see it to believe it. But just to whet your appetite, I'll share with you that the phrase "Eishet Chayil" - a woman of valor - which shows up in the Book of Proverbs — well, it only comes up in one other place in the entire Tanakh - in the Book of Ruth, describing Ruth herself. And recall that the author of Eishet Chayil was Shlomo Hamelech, King Solomon. Who was he to Ruth? None other than her great-great-grandson.

Anyway, Rabbi Fohrman has been developing this material — perhaps you've come across it in the Premium section of our website (just search for "Eishet Chayil" or "woman of valor"), or you heard it in one of Rabbi Fohrman's Shavuot webinars — and it turns out that this material has all kinds of fascinating implications. What you're about to hear is one of those implications. It's a recording of one of Rabbi Fohrman's recent chabura sessions, in which he looks closely at two verses from the middle of Eishet Chayil, two seemingly uninspiring verses — and shows how they actually paint for us a beautiful and complex picture of the meaning of marriage. Even if you've never heard Rabbi Fohrman's Eishet Chayil material before, with this context in mind, you should still be able to follow along just fine. Here is Rabbi Fohrman...

Rabbi Fohrman: It started with a question, actually a riddle that my son posed to me over Shabbos, actually, about nine days ago, a week before last. And then it struck me that he was actually onto something in the riddle. It wasn't just cute. But it was kind

of interesting. So here was his riddle that he posed to me. This is Amichai, my 12 year old son. Amichai poses the following riddle to me: Abba, in Eishet Chayil, what two words have double meanings, and mean both a type of material or cloth and a number?

Learning Partner: I want to get the answer first, I want to be right! I think it's *tzemer*, but... what number is *tzemer*?

Rabbi Fohrman: Yup, *tzemer* is not a number.

Learning Partner: Well, there's linen garments.

Rabbi Fohrman: Good. What's the Hebrew for that? Linen garments are in *pasuk chaf beis*, 22. Yeah.

Learning Partner: *Sheish*!

Rabbi Fohrman: Oh, give that man a prize! Now *sheish*, our linen garments. As well as --

Learning Partner: --*sheish*, number six.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay, good. The second one. The second one is a riddle because it's a homonym. The second one is a homonym. It's tricky because it's true with the letters but not with the vowelization. In other words, it means one thing and if you remove the vowelization, re-vowel the word, it signifies a number. I'll give you a hint -- it's in the verse right before that.

Learning Partner: What -- before, not after?

Rabbi Fohrman: Look at it in English and look at it in Hebrew.

Learning Partner: Oh, *marvadim*! It's *shanim*!

Rabbi Fohrman: There it is, *shanim*. *Shanim*, right. So *shanim* means red wool that's dyed crimson. Right? That's *shanim*. Right? But of course, *shin nun yud mem* also means --?

Learning Partner: *Shnayim*, two.

Rabbi Fohrman: Right. Okay, so this was his riddle. Right. So I thought that was clever. Now, the question is, was that just a clever thing that Amichai happened to pick up? That there just happens to be two words for textiles that happened to mean numbers? Could just be a trivia thing that he just happened to pick up -- or might possibly have been an unintentional riddle, placed there by King Solomon, for a purpose. In other words, that it actually has meaning.

So here's what's interesting about it, it just so happens that these two words which both signified textiles and signify numbers come in back-to-back verses. That's kind of interesting. Right? Makes it seem a little bit less random. It's not just randomly scattered throughout the chapter. They're right next to each other. *Shanim* is the last word in verse 21. Going into 22: *marvadim asata la sheish v'argaman levusha* [Proverbs 31:22]. Okay.

So I started thinking about this. And something else immediately popped out at me, which is another dimension and this mathematical riddle. See if you can find it in verse 21, and 22. And the way you see it is, ask yourself, what is the relationship between the two words that we have found that signified numbers? And that signifies textiles? Right?

Learning Partner: It's almost four -- *resh resh yud* is very close to four, which is the difference between six and two.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay, so the difference between six and two is four. That's true. So one relationship you might say is four separate six and two. Okay, that's true. And interesting.

Learning Partner: You've got the *daled*, and *revi'i* is not quite four, but this looks a bit like four to me.

Rabbi Fohrman: The interesting thing here, right, is that Eishet Chayil is an alphabetical acrostic.

Learning Partner: Ah, *mem*.

Rabbi Fohrman: And now think about *mem*, right? In *gematriya*, what does *mem* stand for? It's a four number, right? It's 40, which might be interesting. Okay, but still, what else? You wouldn't quite say that the relationship between two and six is defined by four. You could, I guess, in addition, but it's more deeply defined by another number.

Now interestingly, even though *sheish* and *shanim* are two types of textiles, they are two very different types of textiles. Notably, they are wool and linen, the kind of thing that would be *shatnez* together. *Shanim* is a type of wool, right? *Sheish* is a type of linen. So they're very different. Right? *Shanim* is something that comes from wool, comes from animals; *sheish* comes from plants. Okay, but getting back to the mathematical properties of this, how else would you characterize the relationship between two and six? Yeah, they're multiples of each other, right? They factor into each other.

So the relationship between them is most deeply defined not by four but by three, because two times three equals six, right? Now, look carefully at the verse which talks about two before you get to six. Can you find the hidden threes?

Learning Partner: *Lameds* are three, *shins* and *sins* are three, and *gimels* are three.

Rabbi Fohrman: Good, there's a word which is composed of nothing but threes.

Learning Partner: Well, there's a *mem* at the beginning.

Rabbi Fohrman: There's a *mem* at the beginning, but the *mem* is a prefix. Right? *Lo tira liveita mishaleg ki chol beita lavush shanim* [Proverbs 31:21]. Her house does not fear snow, because her house is all bundled up in coats and fine linen. But *sheleg* just happened to be composed of --

Learning Partner: Three hundred.

Rabbi Fohrman: Right. *Shin* has the *gematriya* of 300, *lamed* has the *gematriya* of 30, *gimel* has the *gematriya* of three. Those are all the three numbers in the alphabet and they compose *sheleg*. Right? So it's almost as if you take the threes, right? And you put them together with the twos, right? In verse 21, and you get the six in verse 22. Are you with me so far?

Learning Partner: Yes.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay. Now the question is all right, so much for the math. That's all very nice. Maybe that's coincidental. Maybe it's not. But to judge whether it's coincidental or not, what relationship would the math have to the actual meaning of the verses? That is, what in the world do these verses mean? Right? So to me, this is what really proves interesting about this. Let's go back to our theory of Eishet Chayil.

So if you remember, right, the basic theory I had on Eishet Chayil was that Eishet Chayil is a commentary on the book of Ruth. Now, it just so happens that in the commentary on the book of Ruth, the climax of the commentary occurs in these two verses, right? These are the verses in which, basically Boaz commits to marrying Ruth. Right. Also interestingly, from a numerical or from an alpha-numeric standpoint, it also happens to be the straight up middle of Eishet Chayil, right? Because the middle of the middle of the alphabet is *lamed* and *mem*, right? Those are the two and it's an alphabetical acrostic.

So you have the *lamed* verse and the *mem* verse, right? And the *lamed* verse and the *mem* verse correspond to what really is the climax of the book of Ruth, which is the

moment where Boaz commits himself to marry Ruth. In the poetic words of Eishet Chayil, that's *lo tirah l'veita mishaleg ki chol beita lavush shanim* [Proverbs 31:21], that her house does not fear snow because everyone in the house is wearing these warm red clothes. Right? And now let's think back -- before we get there, let's just translate and understand these words. The lamed verse is her house does not fear snow because everybody in it is clothed in these warm coats. Right? I've dyed wool, and then my *marvadim aseta*, she's making blankets, *sheish v'argaman levusha*, and she's wearing fine linen and purple. Right? She's wearing fine linen and purple. Okay, so what does that correspond to?

What does that mean? Let's just read this and refresh our memories. And then see how it corresponds to the book of Ruth. *Vayehi bachatzi halaila*, and it happened in the middle of the night. *Vayeherad haish vayilafet*, the man trembled. Right. *Vahineh isha shochevet marglotav* [Ruth 3:8]. There's a woman sleeping at his feet. And he says, *mi at*, who are you? *Vatamar anochi rut amatecha* [Ruth 3:9], I am Ruth, your maidservant. Right. I think we talked about this, right? This is the moment. In a way, this is the moment where all of these deceptions in Jewish history come around and get redeemed in a way. Right? We talked about goats and coats? But to refresh your memory about goats and coats: Boaz and Ruth, go all the way back to three goats-and-coats narratives, right?

The three key goats-and-coats narratives are the three great deceptions in early Jewish history in Genesis. The first great goats-and-coats deception is the great grandpappy of all deceptions. It's chapter 27 of the book of Genesis, and that's the first time that a man trembles. You have these words here that had happened in the middle of the night when he can't see, there's a man that trembles, *vayeherad haish vayilafet*, there's this woman at his feet. But of course in Genesis chapter 27, is the first time we hear the man trembling, when he can't see. Who trembles when he can't see and is about to be deceived or is deceived? When he realizes -- Right, that of course there's going to be Isaac.

When Isaac trembles when he realizes he's deceived, he actually asked the same question that Boaz asked. *Vayomer mi at* [Ruth 3:8], right. Who are you? That's the

question Isaac said -- *mi ata b'ni* [Gen. 21:18], who are you, my son? Now? Jacob answers with a lie. Jacob began his answer with the word *anochi*, I am, but the rest of it was a lie. *Anochi eisav b'chorecha* [Gen. 21:19], I am Eisav, your firstborn. But here Ruth begins her answer. The same word *anochi*, I am. But when she says afterwards is not a lie. She could have lied if she wanted to deceive him and seduce them. As Naomi seems to be suggesting that she does. The man is tipsy, the man has been drinking, and is vulnerable to seduction. All she has to do is lie and say it doesn't matter who I am. Go back to sleep and she can have her way with him.

But instead she chooses to tell the truth, as risky as it is, and says *anochi rut amatecha* [Ruth 3:9], I am Ruth your maidservant. So she tells the truth, right? There's no lie about her identity despite the fact that she's a Moabite, he might not want her. But she tells the truth. Not only does she tell the truth, but the word *amatecha* has a homonym which means -- it doesn't just mean I am Ruth, your maidservant. But what else does *aleph mem tav* mean?

Learning Partner: Yitzchak! Truth?

Rabbi Fohrman: Truth, as if to say, I am Ruth your truth teller. Right? So I am Ruth. Now this story that we are hearing, the echoes of which is the story of Genesis 27. The first time a man trembles and is deceived, that's a story which I like to call the first goats and coats story, right? Because in that story, Jacob and Rebecca, working together, slaughter a goat, right and he dresses up in the coats of Eisav. And wearing those coats carrying the goat, he goes to his father and says I am Eisav, your firstborn. So that's the first story of goats and coats.

That is immediately followed by a second story of goats and coats. The second story of goats and coats is in the story of the sale of Joseph, the perpetrator of the last goats and coats story, which is Jacob, the one who who pulls the deception pulls the wool literally over Isaac's eyes. And by the way, that expression to pull the wool over one's eyes probably comes from Genesis 27, from the story of Yitzchak's deception. So Jacob pulls the wool over Isaac's eyes, but here the wool is pulled over his eyes. And another goat story where brothers slaughter a goat, take the blood, put it on a coat,

take it to their father and say we found this goat, do you recognize where it comes from? And remember, of course, that the word "do you recognize," of course, is that language, which goes back to Genesis 27, with Isaac, right? *V'lo hitkiro* [Gen. 27:19], and he did not recognize them. Isaac didn't recognize them. And now Jacob doesn't recognize the truce about Joseph. And he recognizes the coat falsely and comes to the false conclusion that Joseph is dead. And that's the story of goats-and-coats two.

Turns out that goats-and-coats two is followed immediately in the next generation with goats-and-coats three, once coats and coats three in the next generation? Well, goats-and-coats two is chapter 37; goats-and-coats three is chapter 38 and that involves the protagonist of goats-and-coats two, the deceiver of goats-and-coats two, becomes the deceived in goats-and-coats three. That's the way it always happens. The deceiver becomes the deceived. Jacob was the deceiver in goats-and-coats one becomes the deceived in goats-and-coats two. Judah was the deceiver in goats-and-coats two, and becomes the deceived in goats-and-coats three.

Goats-and-coats three is when he sees Tamar, but Tamar has dressed up like a harlot to seduce him by the side of the road. And he doesn't know who she is. He can't tell her true identity. Right. And what happens is, is he we hear about their bargaining session over what he will pay for her services. She says, I'll take a goat, right? And he says, I don't have a goat. Right? I have to find some sort of replacement for a goat and from a literary standpoint you could say, well, why doesn't Judah have a goat? What did Judah do with a goat in the last story?

Learning Partner: He *shechted* it.

Rabbi Fohrman: That's right. He doesn't have a goat because it's dead. He killed the goat, right? So I'm goatless, right? So he says, I don't have a goat, but I have a coat. Right? Can you take my coat as collateral for the goat, right? And he gives her the coat as collateral for the goat. And then at the end of the story, he gets his coat back from her when he recognizes the truth about her. And there's that word recognition again, right? He recognizes the coat, and he's able to somehow, you know, redeem the issue and he didn't kill her. And so he comes back.

Now, what's interesting is that there was a child that was born as a result of goats-and-coats three, and that child was Peretz. That's the child that Tamar is pregnant with from Judah. Peretz is of course, the first in the line of Kings that culminates in King David ten generations later, parents is the tenth generation progenitor of King David. The book of Ruth is about the story of the continuation of the line of parents as evidence from the fact that the end of the book of Ruth, you have the you have the lineage of Peretz -- *v'eleh toldot Peretz* [Ruth 4:18], these are the generations of Peretz, right, culminating in King David.

Anyway. So we talked about goats-and-coats one, goats-and-coats two, goats-and-coats three, the story of the continuing line of Peretz in Ruth can be seen as goats and coats four, right? In a facetious kind of way. Why? Because look at the scene we have now in front of us: its echoes of goats-and-coats one. There's a man that is trembling, there's a man that asks who are you, Ruth answers truthfully, and then says *uparastak nafecha alumotecha, ki goel ata* [Ruth 3:9]. Spread your coat over your maidservant because you're a redeemer.

Now this is the euphemism that the verse uses for marriage. *Uparastak nafecha alumotecha*. Spread your coat over your maidservant, because you are a redeemer, right? Could you marry me, please? This is a proposal of marriage. But of course, notice the mention of coats. Right? *Uparastak nafecha alumotecha*, spread your coat over your maidservant. Now ask yourself, okay, that's a coat. But what about the goat? Where's the missing goat in the story?

Learning Partner: Oh, Boaz?

Rabbi Fohrman: That's Boaz. Boaz's name was, right, *bo-ez*, him as a goat was literally what Boaz means, right? Since *ez* means goat. So who does the coat belong to? It belongs to a guy by the name of goat. Right? So it's Goat's coat. So in story number four, the guy called goat spreads his coat. Right on, on, on Ruth and in a rejection of seduction. Right? They marry each other. All right, so this is *uparastak nafecha*

alumotecha ki goel ata. Okay, so let's stop right here for a moment. We'll come back to these verses. And let's go back to Eishet Chayil's commentary on these verses.

Actually, let's look at one more verse. Boaz answered: *vayomer brucha at l'hashem biti* [Ruth 3:10], Boaz says blessed are you to God, just as goats-and-coats one was all about a blessing. Here there's another blessing: she gets blessed by him as if she's his daughter, *brucha at l'hashem biti*, blessed are you to God, my daughter, *hetavta chasdecha acharon min harishon* [Ruth 3:10], your second *chesed* of choosing to marry me is even greater than your first of taking care of your your your mother in law. *Livilti lechet achara habachorim im dal v'im ashir* [Ruth 3:10], you've chosen a husband for the reason of loyalty to your dead husband. Not because of their socioeconomic power. *V'ata biti al tireh*, do not fear, *kol asher tomri e'eseh lach*, everything you say I will do, *ki yodeah kol sha'ar ami ki eishet chayil at* [Ruth 3:11], because everyone in the gates knows that you are a woman of valor. This is where the term "woman of valor" comes from. It's these words now that Shlomo, that Solomon is picking up on in Eishet Chayil.

Boaz's words, listen to it again -- and now, my daughter, do not fear, *kol asher tomri e'eseh lach*, everything you told me I will do, because everyone in the gates knows that *eishet chayil ata* [Ruth 3:11]. Let's go to the *lamed* verse in Eishet Chayil and you'll hear this, right? *V'ata biti al tiri*, and now, my daughter, do not fear. What was *lamed*? *Lo tirah l'beita mishaleg*, right, she shall not fear, *lo tira l'beita*, her house shall not fear -- right? Now, notice that *beita* is a play off of which words back in Ruth? *V'ata biti al tiri*. Which word sounds like *beita*?

Learning Partner: *Biti*.

Rabbi Fohrman: *Biti*. Right? *V'ata biti al tiri kol asher tomri e'eseh lach*. Notice that in this speech he refers to *biti* twice -- once in the previous verse and once here. In the previous verse, *brucha at l'hashem biti*, blessed are you to God, my daughter. And now, my daughter, do not fear. And Shlomo's gonna pick up with that with a double reference to *beita*. He's gonna transpose *biti* to *beita*, right? Take a look at it. In Eishet Chayil, we look at the *lamed* and *mem* verses. Look at the *lamed* verse -- see the

double *beita*? *Lo tira l'beita mishaleg, ki kol beita lavush shanim*. Right? Her house should not be fearful of snow, because everyone in her house is clothed in warm coats. Right? Made of *shanim*, made of red dyed wool.

Okay. So what do you think this means? *Lo tira l'beita mishaleg*, her household shall not fear *sheleg*. So now let's talk about *sheleg*, this word with the threes, right? What does *sheleg* signify to you? Think about *sheleg* -- symbolically, what does *sheleg* remind you of in the Torah? Have you ever, can you think of any reference to snow in the Five Books of Moses? It's an unusual word. Not a lot of snow in the Middle East.

Learning Partner: I was thinking the sand, the sea, the stars...

Rabbi Fohrman: Nope, no snow there.

Learning Partner: What about the mountains?

Rabbi Fohrman: That would be a good guess, you're getting warm -- sort of a pun -- because the only reference to snow in the Five Books of Moses takes place at the top of a mountain. The snow isn't on the mountain, but God speaks to someone about snow -- or actually, no. God doesn't speak about snow. God makes a miracle, right, turning something that looks like snow.

Learning Partner: *Metzuach l'sheleg* [Exodus 4:6], with the hand.

Rabbi Fohrman: That's right, it's the only time you have snow. The only time you have snow is --

Learning Partner: *Tza'aras*.

Rabbi Fohrman: That's right. The only time we have snow is in the story of the burning bush. Interestingly, in a story of fire you have snow.

Learning Partner: And with Miriam.

Rabbi Fohrman: There actually, I don't think snow is mentioned. She becomes -- does it?

Learning Partner: It does! Same word.

Rabbi Fohrman: Oh, it says *metzaras l'sheleg*.

Learning Partner: Exactly the same word.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay, so the only time you have snow, twice in the Torah, is a reference to leprosy, *tza'aras*. Moshe's hand is miraculously turned white as snow -- hence the phrase "snow white." *Tza'aras l'sheleg*. And later Miriam will become leperous like snow, right? So now my question to you is, what then do you think snow signifies if it signified leprosy? Why is the leprosy called white as snow? What is snow, what then does snow become a metaphor for in the Torah?

Learning Partner: Death.

Rabbi Fohrman: The answer would be death. Right? When, if you look at your hand and all of a sudden it's white as snow, your hand looks like death. Right? People, when they're dead, look white. Now, the opposite of looking dead is what?

Learning Partner: Alive.

Rabbi Fohrman: Right? And what color do we associate with life rather than death? If we associate white --

Learning Partner: Red!

Rabbi Fohrman: That's right, red or scarlet. That's *shanim*. Right? So *shanim* is the contradistinction to the white, right? It's the pulsating, right? If you actually think back to goats and coats, it's interesting because one of the guys in goats and coats had a name "Red," right?

Learning Partner: Eisav!

Rabbi Fohrman: That was Eisav.

Learning Partner: Eisav was a ruddy man.

Rabbi Fohrman: That's right. And there was someone more pale, more right, who's pretending to be red. So at the beginning of goats and coats, we have whites and reds. And now at the conclusion of goats and coats, we have whites and reds again,

at least in Shlomo's retelling of it. *Lo tirah l'beita mishaleg*, her household does not need to fear snow, *ki kol beita lavish shanim*. Now notice, you know it's interesting that we're playing off the whites and the reds, because, right, because why choose -- if all you want to say is that her house is filled with people with warm coats, they didn't have to be red coats. But he's choosing red coats, right? The red coats of *shanim*.

Okay, so let's understand this now. If sheleg is a metaphor for death, or for -- not actually for death, because *tza'aras* is not death. The ironic thing about *tza'aras* is you're not dead when you have it, right? Because you're alive. But you're like you're dead. So it's actually walking death. Having *tza'aras* is a little bit like being a zombie, you're a walking death. Right? You're walking death.

Learning Partner: And what's the link with Moshe, with the burning bush?

Rabbi Fohrman: Why is it that he looks at his hand and it's specifically, what's the symbolism of seeing that his hand is snow-white at the burning bush? Is that your question?

Learning Partner: Yeah.

Rabbi Fohrman: That's a great point -- let's leave that for now because it's a bit far afield. I do have a video on that, which you can look up at Aleph Beta. It's a great video. So let's leave it for now. So, here you have -- so let's just talk about death for a moment, right? And I think by the way, at the burning bush, it also signified death. I think that God basically, in a nutshell, in ten seconds -- my theory there is that God was giving empathy for a traumatic death experience that all of Israel had been exposed to in Egypt, notably the stillborn children. But why I think that is a whole long shmooze, and let's not get into that now. But just to keep things simple, leprosy is this idea of walking death. Right? So her household does not need to fear walking death. Why? *Ki kol beita lavush shanim*. So, to bring that in to Ruth, why would her household fear walking death?

Learning Partner: No *yibum*.

Rabbi Fohrman: No *yibum*, exactly. Now, why would no *yibum* be walking death? Why is that the perfect metaphor for no *yibum*?

Learning Partner: Because there's no future.

Rabbi Fohrman: There's no future. So the idea is that even though you're alive -- yes, very good, you're alive. But what good is that gonna do if there's no future for you? If there's no future for your line, if you're all going to be destroyed now, if this whole long lineage of parents is going to meet its end in this generation? So what good is it that you're alive? Great, you're alive, you're walking death. Right? So, the tension of Ruth is perfectly encapsulated in the metaphor of *sheleg*, the metaphor of walking death, and the metaphor of *tza'arat*.

Interestingly, you have a precedent for this idea of walking death being the metaphor for *yibum*. We talked about it back, I think we talked about this -- maybe we didn't, so I'll just bring it up here really fast. But in the very first proto-*yibum* story we seem to have in the Torah, is the story of Judah and Tamar. The story of Judah and Tamar is the first time we have the verb for *yibum*, *v'yabem ota*, Judah tells Oman to marry Tamar in an act of *yibum*, to perform *yibum* with her to carry on the legacy of his brother. What was the name of the dead brother? The name of the dead brother whose name is being carried on there is Eir, *ayin resh*. Right? All that happens to Eir is that he marries Tamar and dies. We don't know anything more about Eir, but Eir is a strange thing, because it means something besides a name. What does *ayin resh* mean?

Learning Partner: Awake.

Rabbi Fohrman: Awake, which is a pretty strange name for a dead guy, right?

Learning Partner: Is it?

Rabbi Fohrman: Yeah, "eir" is living. Anyways, so here you have poor Eir, who's kind of living dead, and that's the fear of snow, right? Which is that it's all gonna be over, and that there's gonna be this unnatural mix of living and death where you're alive, but really you're dead, and nothing is continuing, and there's unfinished business. This is the problem of *yibum*. So *lo tirah l'beita mishaleg*, so what the song is saying is that when Boaz said *v'ata biti al tiri*, and now, my daughter, do not fear, the meaning of that was that he was assuring her that she would not be condemned, that they would both not be condemned to a life of *sheleg*, of living death. In essence he was saying *lo tirah*

l'beita mishaleg, your household, i.e. your family, right, the family which you don't even have yet, children, will not have to fear *sheleg*, this living death.

Why? Now, how do people save themselves from the snow? If it's snowing outside, what do you do to keep warm? The answer is, you put on some coats. And what better coat than fine wool? So, *Ki kol beita lavish shanim*. She doesn't have to worry about snow, because her household is robed in these fine coats. Now, that also refers to what happened in the verse that Solomon is commenting on, right? Because, remember, what was Ruth's marriage proposal? What metaphor did she use for marriage?

Learning Partner: *Uparasta k'nafecha*.

Rabbi Fohrman: Spread your coat over me, right? So, what Solomon is saying, is that of course she doesn't have to fear snow, because her whole household is wearing these coats. Which coats? The coats of the *yibum* marriage. Right? The coats that bring life back into death, into living death. So what color are they? They're red. They infuse red -- if you could imagine, you look at your hand and your hand is white at snow. What color do you want back in your hand to show it's alive? Redness. The red shows that life is back. *Ki kol beita lavush shanim*, her house is robed in these coats of red.

Learning Partner: *Kapeha* is mentioned twice, the spreading forth and hands in these two *pasukim* before that.

Rabbi Fohrman: Where are you going with that?

Learning Partner: It's spreading the hands, it's bringing them up in the conversation.

Rabbi Fohrman: Which hands are you referring back to?

Learning Partner: So, back in Ruth. I'm sorry, I'm in *mishlei*... hands are mentioned twice *kapeha* is mentioned twice.

Rabbi Fohrman: Right, so which hands are you bringing up?

Learning Partner: The hands in her marriage proposal.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yes, that's true, she spreads out her hands. That's part of it. And in a way, maybe that goes all the way back to the original hand that was white as snow. Miriam -- well, Moshe's hand, which was white as snow. So here she has hands that are white as snow, but as she spreads them out, life comes back to them when he essentially takes her outstretched hand and puts the coat over her and says I'll marry you. Right? Okay. So that's the verse which is our *lamed* verse.

Learning Partner: Why connect it to Moshe?

Rabbi Fohrman: Because of *sheleg*. Okay, so let's continue now with the next verse. *Marvadim asata la, sheish v'argamam levusha*. So now verse 22, right? Blankets, she makes, *sheis v'argamam levusha*. Now she's wearing something else. In the *lamed* verse she was wearing *shanim*, she and her household were wearing these coats made of wool. Now she's wearing something linen, and the linen comes with purple. It's not red anymore; it's purple. Now, purple is a very close cousin to red, right, to scarlet. It's almost exactly the same color as scarlet, but it's a shade darker in the blues, right? And then we get purple.

Now, let's talk about the meaning of verse 22. So now she's wearing blankets, and *sheish v'argamam levusha*, she's wearing something else, fine linen, and purple. What's the significance of this? What do we associate purple with?

Learning Partner: The Temple?

Rabbi Fohrman: It is associated with the Temple. Think in the Book of Esther.

Learning Partner: *Techelis? Argaman?*

Rabbi Fohrman: So *argaman*, purple, right, is typically associated with royalty, a royal color. Right? So, all of a sudden the red turns to purple. Think about the end of the Book of Ruth. The significance of carrying on the line of Peretz ultimately is royalty, right? David, there's going to be a royal line that comes out of Ruth.

Learning Partner: I had to wear purple robes when I became a lord.

Rabbi Fohrman: Wow, did you? Interesting. So wearing purple is a sign of royalty, okay? So now let's go to *sheish v'argaman levusha*. Now let's go back to the Book of

Ruth, the homonym for sheish. It means linen, but in numbers it means six, right? It turns out that Amichai's riddle probably was intended by Solomon. It seems pretty clear that Solomon intended *sheish* as a homonym that means both linen and six. Why? Because if you go back to the Book of Ruth, turns out there was a moment that Ruth was wearing six. When was Ruth wearing six?

Learning Partner: Barley grains?

Rabbi Fohrman: The barley grains, right? Okay, so here's what happens. He gives her -- this happens twice, it's a bit earlier also. He says to her right before he sends her back to Naomi, give me your kerchief, *asher alayich*, that's on you. And, *v'achzi ba*, and hold it, *vatochez bah*, she holds her kerchief, *vayamad sheish seorim*, and he puts six barley seeds, *vayashes aleha*, and places it upon her, *vayavo ha'ir*, and she comes back to the city. And then she says, she comes to Naomi, Naomi says, how are you, my daughter? Tell me what happened.

And she says, *sheisha seorim haeileh nata li*, he gave me these six barley seeds, *ki amar*, because he said, *al tavo reikam al chamotecha*, don't come empty-handed to your mother in law. And we talked about this before. We talked about the strangeness of six barley seeds, being empty-handed, but we said it was metaphoric, right? The idea that you shouldn't come home empty-handed to your mother in law --

Learning Partner: Like Peretz.

Rabbi Fohrman: Right, it's the six generations. I understand the stakes here, right? The six generations will have a continuation, right? The six seeds will have more, they will continue, and so you won't come empty-handed, in that I understand what's at stake here, I understand that the line has to continue, and so what he's doing in essence is, if we put the two verses together, is she asked for marriage by asking him to take his coat and place it upon her. He does so, essentially, but then takes her kerchief and places it upon her, putting seeds in the kerchief, saying there will be a continuation of the line. Right? And that's the significance of the *sheish*.

Okay. Given this, let's come back to the riddle of the numbers. Let's go back to verse 21 and 22 in Proverbs. What emerges now is that verse 22 is the verse that transforms --

we look for the relationship between verses 21 and 22. Verse 21 is the fact of marriage, and 22 is the consequence of the marriage. Let's understand what that means. The fact of marriage takes place when he assures her, *lo tira l'beita mishaleg ki kol beita lavush shanim*. You don't have anything to worry about, right? I'm going to spread my coat over you, you'll be warm, right? And the significance of that ultimately is royalty, right? The *sheish b'argam levusha*, you'll be wearing six, you'll be wearing purple, there will be children that will come from this, the children will be royalty.

So what struck me as interesting is this: it's clear that Solomon means for *sheish* to be taken as a homonym that means not only linen, but also six. That's clear, because that's his play off of the Book of Ruth, when he clearly takes six barley seeds and gives it to her. That's what King Solomon is playing off of in verse 22, when he says *sheish v'argamam levusha*, the word that means both linen and six. If he's playing number games, then we can assume that the six, right -- and it might not just be the six he wants us to look at, but also the *shanim*, the two, right, in verse 21. *Ki kol beita lavush shanim*. And perhaps also, the *sheleg* in verse 21 as well.

So here's the thought that came to me, and I'm still in the middle of figuring this out. But I think something interesting is going on with this. Let's think about the two numbers in verse 21, and the relationship to 22. The two numbers in verse 21 are threes and twos. Right? We multiply them and you get six. Okay. What was the three? The three was snow. What was the two? The two was the coat. Who's the snow, and who's the coat? Let's start with the snow. Who's the snow in verse 21? Who would have been snow, were it not for this act of marriage?

Learning Partner: Nachlon and Kilyon.

Rabbi Fohrman: Nachlon and Kilyon, right, Ruth's side of the picture would have been snow, would have ended in this cold, lifeless death. Now, who's the coat? *Lavush shanim*. Whose coat is it?

Learning Partner: It's Boaz's.

Rabbi Fohrman: It's Boaz's coat, right? So you have snow plus coat, right? What happens when you have snow plus coat? So, what Solomon says is that the question

isn't what happens when you have snow plus coat. That is, the story of the marriage of Boaz to Ruth is the story of snow and goat and coat coming together. There's a girl who would be out in the snow, Ruth, right? Except that now she's wearing coats. So you can envision that as snow and coats coming together. Now let's talk about mathematics for a moment. And this leads, I think, possibly to a very deep insight into the nature of marriage. And this is the point I kind of want to leave you with. Let's talk about math. When things come together in math, what do we call that? When numbers come together in math, what do we call that?

Learning Partner: Integration, addition?

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay, addition. What else could we call it?

Learning Partner: Equilibrium?

Rabbi Fohrman: So, one way of things coming together is addition, right? But there's another way that things come together in math.

Learning Partner: Integration?

Rabbi Fohrman: I don't know what you mean by integration. Integration is just addition, when I say two plus three equals five, I integrate them and it's five.

Learning Partner: Equilibrium?

Rabbi Fohrman: Well, the other thing I'm looking for is multiplication.

Learning Partner: Oh, yeah! Okay.

Rabbi Fohrman: Right? Multiplication and addition are two ways, if you think about it, that numbers come together. So, let's say I'm trying to explain to somebody learning basic math for the first time, what the difference between multiplication and addition is. So -- and let's say there's a first-grader or second-grader who just doesn't understand it. I can't figure it out, I don't get it. What's the difference between multiplication and addition? You keep telling me that when I have a two and a three, I put them together, but sometimes you say it equals five, and sometimes it equals six. You say there are two different ways that numbers come together. I don't get it! Either they

come together or they don't. They either equal five or equal six. What's the difference between these things? How would you explain it?

Learning Partner: Multiplying is when the sum of its parts are greater than the individual components.

Rabbi Fohrman: Good. There's something special about multiplication, when the sum of its parts is greater than the numbers themselves.

Learning Partner: *Peru u'rivu*, multiply!

Rabbi Fohrman: That's interesting, right? Imagine, even the word for marriage is the word for multiply. It's literally, it's construed in terms of math, right? As if there's something about marriage that by definition is greater than the sum of its parts, or has the potential to be greater than the sum of its part, to become more than two. Right? If it were just addition, then in marriage, one plus one would equal two and nothing more. But the amazing thing about marriage is that one plus one can equal more than two, right? There's a greater than the sum of its parts quality, there's a potential of *peru u'ruvu*, of multiplication.

Okay, let's think about this a little bit deeper. What is it about multiplication that makes it different from addition? Why is it that multiplication brings numbers together differently than addition? Why is it that when you multiply numbers, you get something that's greater than the sum of its parts? Let's say I'm a persistent second-grader and I say, okay, but why is it that when I multiply numbers they turn into these greater things, and when I add numbers, they don't? How would you try to explain it?

Learning Partner: Multiplication is taking the same thing more than once, as opposed to just taking separate things. It's itself, the same thing being done over and over, instead of two different things being put together.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay, but then let's say I'm the second grader, I challenge you and say, that's just a lot of fancy talk. How do you -- you just told me -- let's act this out. I'll be the second grader who keeps challenging you, and you explain it to me.

Learning Partner: I get to be you?

Rabbi Fohrman: You get to be me! So explain it to me. Let's take an example where the difference in numbers is a little more dramatic. Let's take four times three equals twelve. Right? Or five times three equals 15, right? Okay. So, you keep on telling me that five times three is when I take five and three together and I put them together and it equals 15. You keep on telling me that five plus three is when I put five and three together and they equal eight. So I don't get -- how come when I put them together one way they equal eight, and when I put them together a different way they equal 15. Explain that to me.

Learning Partner: You're not putting them together. You're looking at it differently -- it's not about putting them together, it's about how many times it happens.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay, so you're arguing with me. But wouldn't you agree that there is a sense in which five times three is putting five and three together?

Learning Partner: Yes. So what's the relationship between eight and 15? That wasn't there before.

Rabbi Fohrman: That's too complicated, let's not go there. Right? I just want to understand, it's not -- we would all agree that there is something about multiplication, where I'm putting five and three together. So how is it different from addition, where I put five and three together? Wouldn't we all agree that the simplest way to put five and three together would be addition? Five plus three equals eight, just count it up, count up the five and three, equals eight. It seems more complex to argue that I'm putting five and three together when I get 15, isn't it? How do you explain that that's also putting five and three together?

Let me give you two hints for how to explain it, that struck me as I was thinking about this. One hint -- both hints come from the numerical notation that we've chosen in mathematics to be able to express these things. How do I express five plus two, I need a sign, right? Five plus three -- I need a sign to indicate addition. But the funny thing is, in multiplication, you can do it with a sign or without a sign. I could do five x three to signify five times three, or I could do parentheses five parentheses three equals 15, and

that means the same thing. Even without a sign -- how can we do that? How come multiplication is the operation that we choose to signify without a sign, but not addition? What does that signify?

Learning Partner: It's more natural.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yes. There's actually something which is more natural about multiplication than addition. Or, there's something even more together about the five and the three in multiplication than there is in addition. In other words, the putting together the five and the three is literally putting together, they're so close that there's like nothing even dividing them. It's just five, three. Five three is multiplication. Five plus three, right, there's a certain separateness in addition which doesn't exist in multiplication. It's a deeper unity in multiplication than in addition.

I'll give you another way of thinking about it. The cardinal sign, which we use for multiplication, is X. How did we come to use X to mean multiplication? What do you think the significance of that symbol is, when it means multiplication? So here's the thought. I want you to picture addition. Picture it just mentally, create a mind picture of how addition works. Five plus three. Right? What's the easiest way to illustrate five plus three to, you know, a six-year-old? If you had to illustrate that, what would you do to illustrate it?

Learning Partner: Five grains, and then you add three grains, is eight.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay. And what would be the easiest way to illustrate that -- what pattern would you make with the grains for us, if you were illustrating that? The easiest way to illustrate it.

Learning Partner: A straight line.

Rabbi Fohrman: A straight line. You'd put five grains in a straight line, and you'd put three grains in a straight line, and you put them right next to each other and say, you see that's five? Let's count them, it's five. You see that's three? Let's count them, it's three. Now let's put them together in one straight line and count them all. And I'd count eight of them and say, see, I just put them together. Right? That would be the

easiest way to explain it, right? Do we all agree to that? Okay, let's agree to that. How many dimensions did that operate in?

Learning Partner: It's a line. It's one dimension.

Rabbi Fohrman: One dimension. The difference between multiplication and addition is how many dimensions you put them together in. In addition, I put things together in a single dimension. In multiplication, you know what happens to that line? Take the two lines, then them, so that there's a second dimension, and cross them. That's the X. There's a second dimension, which enters into the picture in multiplication. And the second dimension indicates an even larger unity between the two numbers. Right? In other words, the three is still three along the line. It hasn't been transformed. You see, when I took three and five together, the three was gone; all there was eight, right? There was this new number called eight.

The funny thing about multiplication is that the three is still three, and the five is still five, but together they're actually 15. When I look at that three, that line for three is still there. You know what the magic of multiplication is? Where is the line for the five? The line for the five, is it at the same level as the three anymore? It dropped down in a vertical, so that the line for the three is horizontal, and the line for the five intersects with the line for the three vertically at its upper lefthand base. And now, there's 15. Right? There's three fives and five threes. But there's only 15 in two dimensions. In one dimension, there's still three and five. The three still has its integrity as three in a single dimension, and the five still has its integrity of the five in a single dimension. It's only in two dimensions that there's 15. You with me? Do you understand what I mean by adding dimensions?

Learning Partner: Yes. Yeah, I do. So two plus three, in one dimension it's in a straight line. So you're saying you take three five times, and pile the threes on top of one another, that's what you're saying? You're piling the three five times. Is that what you're saying?

Rabbi Fohrman: Sort of -- it's easier if I illustrate it. Right? Think of it this way -- I'm going to talk you through it, since I can't illustrate it on my phone for you right now. You see my hands, right? Okay. So, let this be five, and let this be three. When I count, I put five

and three together and it becomes eight, right? But, if this is five and this is three, when I multiply, this happens. They come together in a different dimension. They come together in two dimensions, not in a single dimension.

Learning Partner: Right, I see.

Rabbi Fohrman: So if there's five and three, right, that 15 is here, right? In this space made by the horizontal and the vertical.

Learning Partner: It's an area. The area of a square, a rectangle, is for multiplying. So it's taking it to another dimension, I hear it. I got it.

Rabbi Fohrman: And what's deep about that, Philip, is that in multiplication, multiplication is so much more robust than addition. Here's why: because in a single dimension, when I put five and three together, the five and the three don't even have any dimension. All we have is a line. And not only do I have the depth of the whole thing, but each of the units has depth. Right? Each of the units is now a square unit. There's a square, it's length times width. Right?

Learning Partner: Right, you've got five, you've got your three, and the area -- you've got all three entities.

Rabbi Fohrman: So what's amazing is that in addition, the identities of the things that made it are gone in addition. Once I put five and three together, I lose the sense that there was ever a five or a three -- it's just eight. Whereas with multiplication, I don't lose that; I just, if I want to look at the in a single dimension < I say there's a five here, there's a three here, I see the five, I see the three, I look at it in two dimensions, I see the area, and I see the 15. So there's a sense in which the five still has its integrity, the three still has its integrity, and the 15, which is so much more robust than either the five or the three, and exists in a separate dimension. And each of those spaces has body to them, right, exists in a separate dimension. You with me?

Learning Partner: Yeah -- how did you explain the X? What was that concept

Rabbi Fohrman: So X is like this. If you visualize addition as two things coming together in a line -- now take the two lines and introduce a second dimension into that. All of a sudden it looks like this.

Learning Partner: Got it.

Rabbi Fohrman: Where they're coming together is not this; where they're coming together is this. Right? There's new dimensionality in their union, right? A new dimension is being created in the union. Right? Because they're coming together on a line. Okay. Now, Solomon is using these ideas to talk about the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. Let's take this into Ruth and Boaz. There's sheleg on the one hand, there's a girl who desperately wants to keep the line of her dead husband alive, and that's going to be sheleg and snow. And if you would interview Ruth, and interview Naomi in Beit Lechem, you'd say, you know, how are things going? It's terrible, all there is is snow. It looks like this whole thing is going to die, right? And if you look at Boaz, what's Boaz? Boaz is just this useless coat, right?

But when is a coat useful? A coat is useful when it keeps warm somebody who's freezing. If you put the freezing person together with the coat, then you have *kol beita lavush shanim*, *lo tira l'beita mishaleg ki kol beita lavush shanim*. You have that evaporation of fear, you have comfort, and you have things coming together. And then what do you have? Magically the coat is not a coat, but the coat is *sheish* already, *sheis b'argam levusha*, the coat is loyalty, right? More than the sum of its parts has been created, right? So what you have is, when two comes together with three, right, when the two of *shanim* comes together with the three of sheleg, you get six. Right? And the six is the royalty that emerges from the multiplication. If you think about what marriage is, this is the tidiest explanation of what marriage is. What is marriage? If you had to explain to a couple that's about to be married what in the world they're doing, say in a word if you were introducing a new dimension into your lives. Which -- what does that mean?

Learning Partner: Wow, beautiful.

Rabbi Fohrman: It means that you're still individuals. When you come together, you're not losing any of your individuality. This is not addition of you. If it were addition, you'd

both be lost. Then why would you ever want to get married? Because whoever you are is going to be subsumed in this new thing. All there's going to be is something, and you'll never know that you ever existed -- the only thing that will matter is your union. Who wants that? That's the death of my individuality. Marriage? I'm not interested in that.

That's not what marriage is. Marriage is the addition, the bringing of the new dimension into your life. What marriage is, is something that's larger than the sum of its parts. There's two I's that unite to create a we, in which the identity of the two I's remain distinct. Which is the soul of multiplication. Right? There is an I, I am who I am, you are who you are, none of that is compromised in our marriage. Our union exists in this new dimension called a we. And in that union, what we have when we really come together, is we can be individuals if we want. I can do my own thing and you can still do your own thing. But what we can do together is mind-boggling. Mind-boggling -- we're not a three or a five anymore, we're so much more than three or five could ever dream of. We're 15! And we're not just 15 on a line; we're 15 squares, 15 things with depth. Why? And this is the essence of it, I was thinking of. The cool thing about multiplication is that once I have five, right -- if I'm the five, and then you bring me together with a three, what happens is that each one of the things that make me into a five have dimension when expressed in terms of the three things that make you a three.

Learning Partner: Yeah.

Rabbi Fohrman: Which is, everything about you plays off everything about me, to bring extra dimensionality to all the aspects of my personality. All of the aspects of my personality are just potential, potential for expression within a community. The very first community is marriage. Right? And in the community of marriage, there's the possibility of expression of individual strength into a new dimension, which gives depth to them.

And where I unify with someone, there's allowed each of my strengths, each of the parts of my personality, the things that make a five, whether that's compassion, humor, wit, whatever it is that make me me, they kind of all play off the part that makes you you, to become these multi-dimensional boxes which actually have depth, right?

Meaning all of a sudden there's 15 of them, right? And there's something that's dramatically more than any of us could have imagined, which becomes the sheish, right, of royalty, of the purple.

Learning Partner: Beautiful.

Rabbi Fohrman: So that was my thought.

Learning Partner: Absolutely beautiful.

OUTRO

And that's a wrap. As always, if you have thoughts to share about, well, anything — what you thought about this piece, general feedback or a message to share with Rabbi Fohrman — we'd love to hear from you. Just send an email to producers@alephbeta.org. As always, I want to thank you for being our partners, for supporting the Torah that you love. We couldn't do this without you. This is Beth Lesch signing off, with gratitude, until next month.