
WELCOMING THE SHABBOS QUEEN

לכה דודי

Composed by Rabbi Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz

This introduction is a bit longer than most, since I did not want to break up the flow of the tefillah/poem/song with lengthy explanations and Instant Insights.

The refrain—**לכה דודי לקראת כלה, פני שבת נקבלה**—As previously noted, if you want to create a relationship, you cannot sit back and wait for it to happen. If it is something you really care about, you will get up, go out, and initiate that relationship! To do that, we need to “let go” of our six-day-week baggage, as well as some of our preconceived ideas about what does or does not “make sense” in our lives. This is all indicated in the very first word of this tefillah: **לכה**. Similar to the very first word of Kabbalas Shabbos (לכו) in Lechu Neranenuh, in the context of this tefillah, **לכה** is translated as “Come—let us...” But literally, the word means to “go forth.” (Accordingly, the great Kabbalists of Tzefas would “go forth” to the fields and mountains to greet the Shabbos Queen!) This is teaching us that in order to connect to the power of Shabbos and create a relationship with our Shabbos Queen, we must make the first move. We must start by moving away from the troubles, angst, and struggles of the past week—all that “number 6” stuff! Let it go, **לכה**—move on, and greet the bride, the Shabbos Queen.

The question is: who (or Who) is going out to greet and welcome whom (or Whom)? The author of this poem/song, one of the great Kabbalists of Tzefas, wove many layers of meanings into the seemingly simple words of the key phrase “**לכה דודי לקראת כלה**—Come, my beloved, to greet the bride; **פני שבת נקבלה**—let us welcome the Shabbos presence.” There are three basic ways to interpret this:

- **On a simple level** (which is what we will be using below in our explanation of this entire tefillah), the term “dodi,” beloved, refers to Bnei Yisrael. It is a call to us to take the first step forward in creating a relationship with Shabbos. **לכה דודי לקראת כלה**—Come, Bnei Yisrael, and greet your bride, **פני שבת נקבלה**—welcome the Shabbos Queen. This is parallel to “Shabbos Bereishis,” the Shabbos of Creation (which is the topic of the Shabbos Maariv Shemoneh Esrei). The Midrash tells us that Shabbos “complained” that within the days of the week, she had no partner, since she was day number 7 and therefore “the odd one out.” (Day 1 had Day 2, Day 3 had Day 4, and Day 5 had Day 6! But Day 7, Shabbos, was all alone.) Therefore, Hashem told Shabbos that Bnei Yisrael would be its partner, and He led us to greet our new “bride.”
- **Taking it deeper**, “dodi,” Beloved, refers to Hashem (and thus would be capitalized). We are inviting Hashem to join us and/or help us in “going forth” and greeting our bride, the Shabbos Queen. **לכה דודי**—Come, Hashem, and join us; **לקראת כלה פני שבת נקבלה**—help us, Bnei Yisrael, in greeting our bride, the Shabbos Queen. This alludes to the Shabbos of Matan Torah (the topic of Shabbos Shacharis Shemoneh Esrei) when we created our unique relationship with Hashem by accepting His Torah—and we heard Hashem tell us to keep the Shabbos.
- **The Kabbalists take it even deeper**—to a level that all we can do is repeat the words of what they say, since the true meaning is beyond this siddur

(and beyond me!). They tell us that the term “dodi” refers to Hashem—His very essence, which is way up in the upper “worlds” and “spheres.” The “kallah,” bride, refers to the Shechinah—the Presence of Hashem, which is what our limited abilities can perceive down on earth during the six-day week. We are taught that on Shabbos, the Shechinah rises up to the Heavens and “reunites” with the essence of Hashem. We parallel that and unite with the Shabbos Queen. This accounts for our neshamah yeseirah, which is available to us during Shabbos and offers us great opportunities for kedushah and enlightenment, should we decide to connect to it. According to this, the phrase means: *לֵךְ דּוּדִי לְקַרְאֵת כְּלָה*—Go, Hashem, and greet Your “bride” (the Shechinah); *כָּנִי שִׁבֵּת נִקְבְּלָה*—while we greet (our bride) the Shabbos Queen. This is an allusion to the Era of Mashiach (referred to many times as “yom shekulo Shabbos,” an eternal Shabbos, which is the topic of Shabbos Minchah Shemoneh Esrei). At that time, we are told, *בְּיוֹם אֶחָד יִהְיֶה יְהוָה אֶחָד וְשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד*—On that day, Hashem will be One and His name will be One. What does that mean?

Sometimes it appears to us that what Hashem does throughout the 6,000 years of history makes no sense. However, once Mashiach comes, everything will make sense. We will then realize that (שְׁמוֹ) Hashem’s name, i.e., what we see Him doing on earth (“Shechinah”), and Hashem’s essence is all one unified whole. Shabbos offers the same opportunity. Every Shabbos, as we welcome our Shabbos bride, the presence of Shabbos (“pnei Shabbos”) gives us the shalom and kedushah to look back at the six-day week and see that the Shechinah, how we perceive Hashem on this earth, and Hashem’s essence, is really *אֶחָד*—one unified whole.

- **And a gematria:** There are 26 letters in this refrain, which is the numerical value of the name of Hashem *יְהוָה*.

The structure of the 9 stanzas: allusions to those three Shabbosim

The first two stanzas refer to Shabbos. The first speaks of the Shabbos of Matan Torah when we heard Hashem tell us the Asreres Hadibros, which includes Shabbos. The second refers to Shabbos Bereishis, explaining that Shabbos was the primary goal of Creation. (Yes, it does seem out of order, since obviously Shabbos Bereishis happened before the Torah was given! The lesson here is the following: Many people like the idea of “resting” at the end of the week, and even have in mind the concept that Hashem created the world in six days and “rested” on the seventh. But at Matan Torah, Hashem set down very clear Shabbos rules—positive and negative commandments. By mentioning the Shabbos of Matan Torah first, we are stressing that it is only a Shabbos as defined by our Torah that is the goal of Creation. You cannot make up your own Shabbos!)

The next six stanzas speak about the difficulties of our galus and our hopes for Mashiach. This parallels the 6,000 years of history and our personal six-day school/workweek.

The last stanza ends this tefillah with Shabbos. It is referring to us actually going out to greet our Shabbos bride, alluding to the Era of Mashiach, which is a “yom shekulo Shabbos.” It is our longing for Mashiach that gives us the vision to stay strong during our galus. Similarly, it is the beauty and vision of Shabbos that gives us the ability to stay spiritually strong during the trials of the six-day week.

לְכָה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאָת כָּלָה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה:

לְכָה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאָת כָּלָה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

לְשִׁמּוֹר וְזִכּוֹר בְּדַבּוּר אֶחָד, הַשְׁמִיעֵנוּ אֵל הַמִּיחָה, יְהוָה אֶחָד וְשִׁמּוֹ אֶחָד, לְשֵׁם וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת וּלְתִהְיֻתָּהּ: —*(When Hashem spoke to all of us at Har Sinai), the word “שמור,” observe (referring to the negative commandments of Shabbos), and the word “זכור,” remember (referring to the positive commandments on Shabbos), were both said simultaneously as one word; and the one and only God (miraculously) gave us the ability to hear both as one word! (This teaches us that anything less than both together is simply not our Shabbos Queen!)* יהוה אחד ושמור — Hashem, Who is one and Who (*once Mashiach comes*) will be known to all the nations as the only one God; לְשֵׁם וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת וּלְתִהְיֻתָּהּ — (*gave us the Shabbos in order for us*) to stand out as unique (לְשֵׁם), and to be glorified (לְתִפְאֶרֶת) and praised (לְתִהְיֻתָּהּ) (*because Hashem chose us out of all the nations of the world*).

לְכָה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאָת כָּלָה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

לְקִרְאָת שַׁבַּת לָכֵן וְנִלְכָּה, כִּי הִיא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה, מִרְאשׁ מְקֻדָּם נְסוּכָה, סוֹף מַעֲשֵׂה בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה תַּחֲלָה: —*Come let us go forth to greet the Shabbos; כי היא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה — for it is the source of blessing (for the entire week); מִרְאשׁ — from the very beginning, even before Creation itself, Shabbos was crowned with royalty; סוֹף מַעֲשֵׂה בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה תַּחֲלָה — (because even though) she was created last, she was the primary goal of Creation (that mankind will reach the shalom, peace and harmony, of the Shabbos Queen).*

לְכָה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאָת כָּלָה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

מְקוֹדֵשׁ מְלֶךְ עִיר מְלוּכָה, קוּמִי צְאִי מִתּוֹךְ הַהִפְכָּה, רַב לָךְ שַׁבַּת בְּעֵמֶק הַבְּכָא, וְהוּא יַחֲמוֹל עָלֶיךָ חֲמֻלָּה: —*Beis Hamikdash of the King, Yerushalayim the royal city, קוּמִי צְאִי מִתּוֹךְ הַהִפְכָּה — get up and get out from your ruins! שַׁבַּת רַב לָךְ שַׁבַּת — You have stayed too long in the depths (of galus, which is the cause of) so many tears! וְהוּא יַחֲמוֹל עָלֶיךָ חֲמֻלָּה — Hashem will have mercy on you (and rebuild you) with compassion.*

לְכָה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאָת כָּלָה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

הַתְנַעֲרִי מֵעָפָר קוֹמִי, לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרֶתְךָ; עָמִי, עַל יַד בֶּן יִשִּׁי בֵּית הַלְחָמִי, קָרְבָה אֵל נַפְשִׁי גְאֻלָּהּ: —Yerushalayim, shake yourself off from the dust (*of galus and destruction*) and stand up! —Put on the “clothes” that you take so much pride in, My people (*Bnei Yisrael who are returning*)! —Please Hashem, through (*Mashiach, who comes from the descendants of David*) Ben Yishai of Beis Lechem; —redeem me out of our galus, so that my soul can get near to You.

לָכֵה דוֹדִי לְקִרְאָת כֶּלֶה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָהּ:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

הַתְעוֹרְרִי, הַתְעוֹרְרִי, כִּי בָא אוֹרְךָ קוֹמִי אוֹרִי, עוֹרִי עוֹרִי שִׁיר דְּבָרִי, כְּבוֹד יְהוָה עָלֶיךָ: —Yerushalayim, wake up! Wake up (*from your indifference and apathy caused by our galus!*); —for the light of your redemption is coming, arise and shine your light (*on us, your children*); עוֹרִי עוֹרִי —Because the glory of Hashem’s Presence is revealed and resting on you! —awake! Awake and break out in song!

לָכֵה דוֹדִי לְקִרְאָת כֶּלֶה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָהּ:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

לֹא תִבּוֹשִׁי וְלֹא תִפְלֹמִי, מִהַ תִּשְׁתַּחֲוִי וּמִהַ תִּהְיֶה עִיר עַל תִּלְלָהּ: —Yerushalayim, do not be ashamed or feel humiliated (*by the way the nations of the world treat you*); —why are you so downcast and mournful (*from the pain of galus and your desolation*)? —Soon the suffering ones of My people will find shelter in you; and Yerushalayim will be rebuilt to its original glory and strength!

לָכֵה דוֹדִי לְקִרְאָת כֶּלֶה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָהּ:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

וְהָיוּ לְמִשְׁסָּה שׁוֹסֵיךָ, וְרָחֲקוּ כָּל מְבַלְעֶיךָ; וְיָשִׁישׁ עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, כְּמִשׁוֹשׁ חֲתָן עַל כֶּלֶה: —Those who trampled you will be trampled! כל וְרָחֲקוּ כָּל מְבַלְעֶיךָ —And all those who destroyed you will be sent far away! —Hashem, Who takes particular care of you, will rejoice over you (*by resting His Presence there again*); —like a chassan rejoices over his kallah!

לָכֵה דוֹדִי לְקִרְאָת כֶּלֶה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָהּ:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

יָמִין וּשְׂמָאל תִּפְרֹצִי, וְאֶת יְהוָה תַּעֲרִיצִי, עַל יַד אִישׁ בֶּן פְּרָצִי, וְנִשְׁמַחָה וְנִגִּילָה: —You will spread out and conquer (*all the nations that are*) to your right and left; וְאֶת יְהוָה תַּעֲרִיצִי—and you will praise Hashem and proclaim that all your strength and victories are from Him! עַל יַד אִישׁ בֶּן פְּרָצִי—And this will all occur through (*the Geulah brought by Mashiach*) the descendant of Peretz; וְנִשְׁמַחָה וְנִגִּילָה—and then we all will be glad and joyous.

לְכָה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

We now stand and turn to the rear of the shul to greet our bride, the Shabbos Queen, and to welcome our special neshamah yeseirah (extra or enlarged neshamah), which will be with us the entire Shabbos. As we say the words בָּאִי כְלָה, we bow to acknowledge her entrance, and then turn forward to continue the davening.

בָּאִי בְּשָׁלוֹם עֲטֹרַת בְּעֻלָּה, גַּם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבִצְהֵלָה, תּוֹךְ אֲמוּנֵי עַם סֻגְלָה, בָּאִי כְלָה, בָּאִי כְלָה: —Enter in peace you, who is the crown and glory of her husband (*us, Bnei Yisrael*); גַּם וּבִצְהֵלָה, תּוֹךְ אֲמוּנֵי עַם סֻגְלָה, בָּאִי כְלָה, בָּאִי כְלָה:—we greet you with joy and jubilation. (As you come to rest your presence on us,) Hashem's faithful and special treasured nation! Enter, (*Shabbos our*) bride! Enter, (*Shabbos our*) bride!

לְכָה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה, פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה:

Come, my beloved (*Bnei Yisrael*), to greet the bride;
let us welcome the presence of Shabbos.

During the week of shivah, mourners enter the shul at this point and are greeted with the following words of consolation:

הַמָּקוֹם יִנַּחֵם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׂאֵר אֲבֵלֵי צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם.

May Hashem, Who is Omnipresent, comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Yerushalayim.

תהילים צב—מזמור שיר ליום השבת

The focus on this chapter is praising Hashem by looking back at the six-day week and the 6,000 years of galus and seeing that all that Hashem has done is really for the good, even though at the time it may not have looked like that. That is the power of Shabbos and the power of the Era of Mashiach—"yom shekulo Shabbos." If we tap into our neshamah yeseirah, which we receive as we say this chapter of Tehillim, we will be able to achieve the shalom, peace and harmony, that comes from acknowledging מִה גָּדֹל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ ה'—how great are all Your works Hashem, even the ones we do not understand!

See also the Introduction to this siddur for another explanation as to the connection of this chapter to Shabbos.