

FamilySECTION



Feel the NACHAS

Rav Menachem Zupnik shlita

As simchos over the last few months have been really topsy-turvy, Chayeinu explores if there are any lessons we can take with us for the future.

It is indeed encouraging that *rabbanim chashuvim* and *askanim* are once again bringing up the issue of the incredible burden that elaborate *chasunos* place on our communities. The importance of such an initiative needs no explanation. Our leaders have been speaking about the “*chasunah* issue” for years and, of course, this writer would encourage everyone to join the present campaign.

Similar efforts have been made in the past, and although they’ve made some inroads, they unfortunately did not change the basic nature of our weddings and how we celebrate them. Perhaps now, due to the circumstances currently forced upon us, we are ready to seriously re-evaluate our approach and make a dramatic and desperately-needed change.

Much has been said about the high cost and waste of our weddings and much of what is said is

true. Practically speaking, it is difficult to suggest to someone that he “curtail” his *simchah* when he can afford to do more. The approach of “limiting” a *simchah* ultimately does not sell. But, more importantly, the real solution will not be found in restrictions and regulations if these limits do not come along with a new understanding of what a *simchah* is really meant to be. What needs to change is our mindset regarding these key moments in our personal and communal lives. If we can succeed in changing our mindset, we stand to attain immense gain, and ultimately, also a more meaningful celebration and *kiddush Shem Shamayim*. Allow me to explain.

Rav Nechemia Friedlander *shlita*, son of the venerated *mashgiach* of Ponevezh, Rav Chaim Friedlander *zt”l* (author of the famous *sefarim* “*Sifsei Chaim*”), who himself serves as *mashgiach* in Ponevezh (Ashdod), told me the following story about his father. Rav Chaim was in the U.S. undergoing treatment at Sloan-Kettering and was unfortunately too ill to attend the *chasunah* of **his own** youngest daughter. Groups of former *talmidim* came to visit him in the hospital on the evening of the *chasunah* to cheer him up and help him feel a part of the *simchah*. They were relieved to find him in a very joyous mood! Noticing their wonder, he shared a simple but profoundly true explanation of his joy.

The real *simchah* that we experience when our children marry, he explained, is the joy we feel at the privilege we were given to help create another *mikdash me’at* — an additional place for Hashem to rest His *Shechinah* in Klal Yisrael. “Regardless of whether I am present at the wedding or not,” said Rav Chaim, “the fact that I *baruch Hashem* successfully raised a daughter who is about to establish a home of *kedushah* — is a *simchah* to rejoice in.”

This perspective is not unique to great *tzaddikim*, of course. Indeed, all *shomrei Torah u’mitzvos* know what *Yiddishe nachas* is, and understand that it is not about the smorgasbord or the music or the number of guests. Interestingly, this familiar word — *nachas* — doesn’t have any parallel in other languages, because *nachas* from children is a uniquely

Jewish sentiment, nearly impossible to share or explain to outsiders. Only Jewish parents know and feel what it means to take part in creating another golden link in the chain of Klal Yisrael.

Humans find many ways to pursue pleasure. Some enjoy drinking beer and riding motorcycles, others have more sophisticated tastes and choose classical music and dry wine. But true connoisseurs of the good life will choose *Yiddische nachas* every time.

That is why it is tragic when this elevated and profound form of joy gets smothered by the trappings of the contemporary “Jewish wedding.” Alcohol, loud music, pictures, videos, excessive food, expensive clothing, fanfare, and conspicuous display of wealth — even when presented as “high-end” — are actually gross, unsophisticated forms of pleasure. Music and feasting were meant to **enhance** our *simchos*, not to displace them, and certainly not to **define** them. Rav Chaim was as full of joy in his hospital room as he would have been standing at his daughter’s side, because he was not “missing” the essence of the *simchah* at all!

An expert chef chooses spices and sauces that will enhance the flavor of the meat being prepared; a simple cook drowns the meat in sauce until that flavor is unrecognizable. Similarly, our *chasunos* are all spices and sauce. We have forgotten what we are supposed to be eating and are left afterwards primarily with the indigestion.

Are feasting, special clothing, music, dancing, and celebrating with friends foreign to a Jewish *simchah*? Of course not. But let us make sure that they remain the backdrop, not the spotlight, of this special occasion.

In fact, with this in mind, I have long urged my *baalei batim* to reconsider “inviting” the wedding photographer to “capture” the precious moment when the parents *bentch* their child before he or she is escorted to the *chuppah*. These *tefillos* are intense and the *brachos* heartfelt, a precious expression of the true bond between child and parent at this pivotal moment in their lives. Parents who followed this advice have thanked me for the deep, sincere emotion that this moment of privacy afforded them, with no photographer present. I have never heard anyone express regret that these untaken photos were missing from the hundreds snapped that night.

Perfectly synchronized, prefabricated weddings deprive us of our connection to true feeling, sincere connection, and genuine *simchah*. Will the circumstances engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic help us rediscover the essence of what a *chasunah* is and teach us to start “truly rejoicing” rather than merely “slow down the spending”?

I think so. Hashem has given us a golden opportunity to feel, appreciate, and share *nachas* once again. We have every reason to try it, and I have every reason to believe that we will end up liking it!

טעמו וראו כי טוב ה' אשרי הגבר יחסה בו. ©

A Step in the Right Direction

Rav Chaim Meyer Roth shlita

We would all like to take a step in the right direction and make our *simchos* more meaningful and real. As in all areas, here, too, we can look to Chazal for guidance.

Dovid HaMelech says in *Tehillim* (126:2), “*Az yimalei sechok pinu*,” “Then (at the time of the *Geulah*), our mouths will be filled with laughter.” The Gemara (*Berachos* 31a) teaches us that it is forbidden to fill our mouths with laughter in this world. Happiness is the result of perfection, and complete perfection can be attained only after *Mashiach* arrives. Until then, we live in a world of imperfection, and complete happiness is out of our reach. How, then, can we feel true *simchah* at this time? If we focus on the *ruchniyus* aspect of our *simchos*, we can tap into that future world of perfection and be granted a taste of the *simchah* of *lasid lavo*.

But in order for our *simchah* to be infused with the true joy of *lasid lavo*, there is one condition we must fulfill. Our *simchah* must be tempered by the recognition that “*az yimalei*”; that utter perfection can be only in *yemos haMashiach*, not now. When we intentionally do not seek absolute perfection in the physical aspect of our *simchah*, we are declaring our understanding that “*az yimalei*” and our *simchah* now can be drawn only from spiritual perfection.

This concept is actually alluded to in *halachah*. One of the practices enacted as a *zecher lchurban* is the requirement to leave out one dish when preparing a meal with guests (*Orach Chaim* 560:2). The fact that the meal is not complete reminds us that, while in *galus*, our *simchah* can never be complete.

Halachically speaking, it is debatable how this *halachah* applies on a practical level nowadays. But the concept is there. Limiting the emphasis on perfection in the physical aspects of one’s *simchah* can be an effective first step in making one’s *simchah* more meaningful. Whatever plans you have for your next *simchah*, try dropping one item from the list, no matter how small. Tell the Ribono Shel Olam, “I am minimizing my physical *simchah* because I realize that *Your simchah* is not complete.” The absence of that one detail will help you access an entirely new sphere of *simchah* and will grace your table with a taste of the future joy — “*az yimalei sechok pinu*!” ©