

53. Much Overdone

Some decades ago, when we invited our acquaintances to attend the Barmitzvah of our sons, we mailed a simple card announcing the date and place of the occasion as well as a Kiddush after Mussaf. Our relatives and a few special friends were invited by telephone to come to a festive Seudoh held in our house. None of our sons ever complained. The day of their Barmitzvah was the highlight of their young lives when each changed from boyhood into becoming an עול מלכות שמים איש ישראל charged with the acceptance of

Now when we are invited to attend a Barmitzvah, things are quite different to say the least. It starts with a very oversized envelope — actually two envelopes, one with a lining stuffed into the other. The address is written by a professional calligrapher. When we open the envelope, no, two envelopes — we are treated to a picture of Tefillin styled like the initial of the boy's name. A lengthy invitation, very artistic and very expensive, announces the grand occasion and festivities in honor of the young hero נ"י.

What is modestly termed a Kiddush is really a

sumptuous smorgasbord: hot cholent, knishes, kishke and varnishkes. And this is only the foretaste of a banquet which will take place in a large hall complete with floral extravagance, a professional band and an extraordinary display of luxury. It looks every bit like a wedding including the little Chosson Habarmitzvah carried on the shoulders with exotic dancing and sundry acrobatics.

Now we forgot the lavish gifts. The Barmitzvah boy's display resembles a Seforim store, or rather a library. It is beneath your dignity to just give the boy a simple Sefer as a present. All is in big style, full of elegance, ostentation and the flaunting of the wealth of parents, relatives and friends.

When we are invited to a wedding all this is vastly magnified, doubled and tripled. Those colored, jumbo-sized envelope(s) with artistic embellishments, are certainly not sold for nothing. And let us not forget the three hundred dollar artistic Kesuvo which comes in a special case resembling a Megillas Esther, plus the Parisian style human hair sheitel and the overpriced wedding gown. Here we have a display of extravagance hard to beat.

The wedding feast itself, held in a ballroom, looks every bit like the annual dinner of a major organization, complete with a famous orchestra, clowns, fireworks and robust music. Everything from the pre-Chupah extravaganza to the overladen Viennese table at the end breathes affluence, exorbitant wealth, earned or borrowed. Here is a display of conspicuous waste at its worst going down the drain. How many hundreds of hungry brothers and sisters could have benefitted from the surplus which is discarded after the gorging is over? And all this in addition to an exhibition of minks, gold, pearls and all the other glitter.

Now we ask ourselves, isn't it about time that someone gets up and shouts loud and clear, "Stop!! Stop all this nonsense!"

A wedding is supposed to be for bride and groom like a Yom Kippur. The Simcha is supposed to be holy and serene. The need for all of us to a return to sanity is long overdue. Things have gotten totally out of hand in the mad rush to

outdo each other or at least to imitate one's friends because of "what people will say".

In *מסכת שקלים פרק ה' הלכה ד'* we learn that Rabbi Chomo, looking at the beautiful *כתי כנסיות* in Lud exclaimed, "See how much money did my forebears sink into the ground when they built these magnificent edifices." Whereupon Rabbi Hoshayo responded, "כמה נפשות שקצו אבותכם כאן, How many lives have your forefathers put into the ground? Were not any Talmidei Chachomim living at that time whom they could have helped to toil in the Torah with all the money they wasted on these expensive buildings?"

The new direction must start with the really wealthy who are also known for their excessive generosity. Nobody would accuse such a person of being miserly if he would send out a note to all his friends that "We are making a simple wedding for our children. We have decided to divert the money we save to the following sacred causes... You are invited to a reception held after the Chupah..."

Let us start to go back to a more simple style when we celebrate the happiest periods in our lives. Why not ask all the young friends of Chosson and Kalloh to sing and dance immediately after the chupah for two hours or more and partake of the goodies which are served to them? After they have left the photographer can do his job and allow the family and the closest friends to sit down at a meal with Divrei Torah and Sheva Brochos. Those relatives and friends not invited to the main wedding Seudoh are invited during the entire week for one of the Sheva Brochos. Why should we slavishly follow like a herd of sheep the ridiculous performance of the contemporary so-called "Jewish Simches" which are nothing but *איבוד ממון ישראל*?

This article was not written for those who go through life without thinking and just follow the crowd. If anyone should feel hurt by all the things described before, please understand that you personally were not meant. We only addressed ourselves to the wise and the humble. But deep down in our hearts we all should feel that a breath of fresh air is sorely needed.