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It's More Than Just the Music That Is a Problem

Dr. Yitzchok Levine
Department of Mathematical Sciences
Stevens Institute of Technology
Hoboken, NJ 07030
llevine@stevens.edu

Last week's Hamodia Readers' Forum featured two articles under the heading of "Lowering the Volume Revisited." These articles were written in support of an earlier article decrying the fact that "bands play extremely loud music at *chasunas* and other *simchas*." One writer related how his family had been successful in insisting that "non-overpowering music" was played at their children's weddings." However, if we are honest, it is more than the volume of the music that is problematic at weddings and other *simchas*.

I know someone who is a *mashgiach* in the *bais medrash* of a Brooklyn yeshiva and, as a result, attends many *chasunas* once told me, "People have a choice between pictures and a *chasuna*, and they almost invariably choose pictures!" He was referring to the common practice that the *chosson* and *kallah* and their families and relatives are busy taking pictures after the *chupah* while their guests are kept waiting for an hour or more. The reason for this is because the *chosson* and *kallah* are supposedly not "allowed" to see each other for a week before the *chasuna*. The net result is that it is quite late when the *chosson* and *kallah* finally appear for the start of the first dance. By this time, many people who have to get up early the next day are anxiously waiting to be served their meal and leave. If things get out of hand and the *chosson* and *kallah* do not appear until 10:30 or 11 PM, some people will find it necessary to leave without eating. Thus many guests are unable to participate in the *mitzvah* of being *m'sameach* the *chosson* and *kallah*. Those who do stay to the end of the *chasuna* go to sleep at an hour that is so late they may not be able to function properly the next day. **Therefore, every effort should be made to limit the time spent on picture taking to a minimum. Rav Yisroel Salanter is famous for his dictum that, "The other person's *gashmius* is your *ruchnius*." Doesn't keeping hundreds of guests waiting for an extensive amount of time fly in the face of this?**

The "format" of our *chasunas* is also problematic. Almost invariably today, there is no *d'var* Torah at the wedding. Here we have a major religious event that is totally devoid of *divrei* Torah. I recall reading a story about how the Torah greatness of the *Chazon Ish* was "revealed." He once attended a *chasuna* and was sitting at a table set aside for the poor. A famous and learned Rov began to speak and quoted a *mishna*. He explained it in a certain way. The *Chazon Ish* stood up and pointed out that this was not the correct way

to explain this *mishna* and offered an alternative explanation. The Rov was so impressed with the explanation of the *Chazon Ish* that he asked the *Chazon Ish* to come and sit next to him at the head table. Given his great humility, the *Chazon Ish* did not want to do this, so the Rov went and sat next to him. The point here is that there was a *d'var Torah* at this *chasuna*. Why don't all of our *chasunas* feature at least one *d'var Torah*? Rav Dr. Yosef Breuer, ZT"l, wrote an article in the Aug./Sept. 1966 issue of the *Mitteilungen*, the congregational Bulletin of *K'hal Adath Jeshurun*, entitled "The Spiritual Leadership of the Kehilla." In it he expresses his reservations about the "new" custom of Hasidic dancing: "While we are not used to the manner in which frequently also in our circles the joyous participation in weddings manifests itself, such 'deviation,' actually an imitation of other circles, is of no real significance. We *are* concerned with the custom that calls for vigorous 'Mitzve dancing' during the festive meal but does not provide an opportunity for a single *D'var Torah* (either under the Chuppa or during the meal). This practice directly contrasts with the admonition of our Sages which characterizes any meal, particularly a festive one, as a 'meal of the dead' that is not accompanied by Words of Torah."

Last but not least is the lavishness of our present day *simchas*. At a talk given at the 55th National Convention of Agudath Israel entitled "Society's Newest Pressures" and reprinted in **Selected Writings**, Rav Shimon Schwab, ZT"l, said, "The ostentation that one sees, the flaunting of wealth, the big rings, the large stones, the colossal weddings, the tremendous bar mitzvahs – what has happened? Millions of dollars are wasted! Money with which we could feed all the hungry Yidden of *Yerushalyem*, with which we could maintain all the Yeshivos – all of it is wasted. There was once an *inyin* of *t'memus*, of *pashtus*, of simplicity. Where has that gone? Did this also perish in the flames of Auschwitz? One goes to a *chasuna*. Almost all *chasunas* look alike – except for the *chosson* and *kallah*. Each one represents thousands of dollars which could be used to support the young couple for years. Many a *chosson* could sit and learn day and night for the money which we spend on one *chasuna*. What a waste of good Jewish money."

Years ago *sheva brochos* were a simple affair made by a relative or someone else close to the *chosson* and *kallah* in their home. A *minyán* of men and their spouses and perhaps a few more people gathered for these *sheva brochos*. This is often not the case today. A restaurant or hall must be rented to accommodate the large number of guests invited. When it comes to the Shabbos *sheva brochos* three lavish meals are served to 80 or 90 or more people. Some even take a slew of guests away to a hotel for Shabbos! Is this really necessary? I recall when an invitation to participate in Shabbos *sheva brochos* meant inviting people to come to one's home **after** the *seuda* for desert. Each person was asked to have in mind when he or she washed at home that they would be *benching* at the home of the person making the *sheva brochos*. For some reason or other this is not good enough today. As Rav Schwab pointed out, "What a waste of good Jewish money."

There are most certainly many more problems with our *simchas* than just extremely loud music. It behooves us in light of our Torah values to examine these carefully. One of the articles in last week's Readers' Forum outlined the efforts a family made to ensure that the volume of the music at the weddings of their children was within proper bounds.

Shouldn't we make the same efforts regarding other practices that seem to have gotten out of hand to the point where these excesses fly in face of the Torah values that we supposedly hold so dear?