

# **HAMODIA**

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## **Separate But Not Always**

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In many Orthodox circles it has become the status quo that separate facilities are provided at events attended by both men and women. Many Chasanas, Sheva Brochos, Bar Mitzvahs and Melava Malkas not only have separate seating but a Machtetza separating the sexes. In addition, many simcha halls in Brooklyn now feature separate entrances for men and women. Chinese auctions held by many Mosdos advertise separate viewing times for men and women. Every effort is made to prevent mingling and fraternization by men and women at these public gatherings.

Now picture the following. It is a Motzoi Shabbos in January, and the location is the heart of Boro Park. Hundreds of “right-wing” Jews are crammed together in a relatively small area. There are men, women and children both at the entrance and inside. Many of the men are still dressed in the Shabbos finery and sport Shtreimals and white socks. Virtually all of the married women have their hair covered, and many apparently hold that only a sheitel is not sufficient, because they are either wearing a hat on top of their sheitels or forgo the sheitel entirely and wear a black head covering with a hat over it. In short, gathered here is what the media would refer to as an “Ultra-Orthodox” crowd.

If you look more closely, you see that the men and women are moving to and fro along narrow aisles. These aisles are so narrow that it is virtually impossible to avoid contact with others. However, those attending do not seem to be concerned at all. Here there apparently is not a problem with the intermingling of men and women and boys and girls. A number of people are busy chatting and socializing. The vast majority of these Jews would never attend a Simcha at which there were such goings-on, yet here they seem completely unconcerned.

You say, “It cannot be! Right-wing Brooklyn Jewry would never participate in an event that involves the intermingling of men and women and boys and girls in a place where not only is there no Machtetza and separate entrances, but, it is almost impossible to avoid physical contact with others. Never, never!”

Yet this is precisely what I witnessed when my wife and I attended a “spectacular” warehouse furniture sale recently. The sale was advertised in the Hamodia and other Orthodox Jewish newspapers. People came to find bargains, and I am sure that there were

many bargains to be had. The question is, “At what price?” Why is it that people who would think twice about attending a Simcha that had mixed seating and would never make such a Simcha themselves were perfectly comfortable at this sale? What is the Halachic basis for attending such an event? Why is it that our community does not think twice about such things? I would love to know the answer.