

This is a story about a chasunah.

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In the U.S., when we hear the word *chasunah*, we envision a grandiose event that, admit it or not, reflects what has been called "goyish opulence." We have gowns that cost more than a week's pay and a gourmet chosan's tisch. We reluctantly accept a *takana* that says the kabbolas panim should not have more than the "caterers standard hot dishes" -- and we call that "scaling back." The guests at a chasunah come late, leave early, and schmooze on the way home about the food -- both the quantity and the quality. Halfway through the chasunah it is often left to the bochurim and immediate family to be *mesameach* the chosan and kallah -- everyone else is gone.

When Chazal said that without the Bais Hamikdash the only source of true simcha is a chasunah, I have my doubts that they were describing this type of chasunah.

But this is a story about one very special chasunah.

On Mount Zion in Jerusalem there is a place called Kever Dovid. It is a multi-story stone building, with arches and courtyards and passageways, that was built on the site where Dovid HaMelech is buried. Inside the small shul one can actually daven right next to the kever of Dovid HaMelech.

Slightly down the hill, still on the same property, is Shulchan Dovid. Shulchan Dovid is a hall that can be rented for simchas. It consists of a small building, with the majority of the space outside in a stone floored garden with a view of the Old City. It is truly a beautiful place.

Shulchan Dovid is where the story of this chasunah takes place. I arrived for the chasunah at the designated time, which meant I was early. The staff was setting the tables; one garden for men and one for women. As other guests arrived, we drifted to the tables to prepare for kabbalos panim.

And that is when I began to glimpse what Chazal meant.

When the chosan entered the kabbolas panim area, everyone – and I mean everyone – sang and danced with him. When we sat down after dancing a while, everyone continued to give mazel tov's and brachos to the chosan while the singing continued. The men did not stop singing for anything – not to look in a sefer, not to take or make an important cell phone call, not to shmooze with one another. It was the chosan's moment. The melodies were not my melodies, and many were unfamiliar. But there was no awkwardness. The melodies may not have been mine, but the mitzvah was.

Up the hill in Kever Dovid there are several stone courtyards, one of which had been designated as our chuppah area. But it was nearing shkiah, and there was a concern about whether everybody could make it up the hill in time. So we moved over and up a few steps and started the chuppah right there on the stone floored patio. No prefab chuppah canopies – a real tallis with a real person holding each corner. As we moved to the chuppah, we sang together the traditional soft moving melody of the chosan and kallah – no need for Carlebach yet. Marriage is serious.

The kallah came to the chuppah and circled the choson. The ceremony continued, with one light moment when the choson reached into his pocket for the ring and thought he forgot it. It was in the other pocket.

In between each brocha the crowd softly hummed in unison the same melody, fading out as needed, but providing an audio background for the ceremony. Not one person used their cell phone or stood aloof. Nobody spoke. There were no spectators, only participants. There were musicians from the band present and prepared to play, but they never did -- somehow it seemed superfluous.

When the Melitzer Rebbe said the last of the sheva brochos, it was clear a tzaddik was present. He has probably said that brocha 100 times, but it seemed he was carefully and specially giving a new brocha to this new couple. We had hana'ah just from hearing his brocha.

And smash! The glass is broken and cries of mazel tov. Now we can break out the Carlebach, as the men escorted the couple to the yichud room – all the way up the hill where the chuppah was originally to be. Did I mention it was uphill? I went all the way up. And up. A walker I am not, with bad feet, legs, back, and . . . well, you get the idea. Funny though, I never noticed the walk. The chosan and kallah seemed to be floating, and they pulled everyone effortlessly up the hill. And then through the archways and candle lit passageways and pass the courtyards to the yichud room.

What would a chasunah be without the mandatory picture taking session. Only this session was 4 stories up the stone stairs to the roof of the Kever Dovid building. There, as the sun set in the background, the photographer took pictures of the chosan and kallah with the night lights of the Old City behind them. The photographer, who had equipment that seemed to miraculously produce light as needed, took pictures and told the kallah she could look at these pictures in 50 years and remember how beautiful her chasunah was.

Meanwhile the dancing had begun in earnest. We had a crowd of about two-thirds chassidim, who must have been determined to show us litvaks how it was done! The band played, the singer sang, occasional shouts of mazel tov rang out, and everyone danced. No literary license here, I mean everyone. From the age of 3 to 103, nobody sat down and watched. This was a *mitzvah ba b'yado* – a mitzvah a person can only do themselves. It cannot be delegated. Some danced in the older – er, outer – circle, some in the middle, but the atmosphere was charged. When the chosan came in, the energy was off the scale. Commonwealth Edison could bottle and store it.

But it was all for , about, and around the chosan. Whether in the circle or being hoisted on a chair above the crowd, the crowd was there for one united purpose – to be mesameach this man who today was getting married.

There was a meal, and I seem to recall it being tasty, and there were ample bottles of soda pop and water on the tables. But the food was there for the mitzvah of making a seudah – not one person commented on the food or discussed whether it was better or worse than the chasunah the week before.

The first round of dancing ended with a break for eating, but break is a relative thing. Two Bresslaver chassidim apparently were expert musicians, one on the guitar and one on the banjo. That's right, banjo. So while we ate they strummed and picked in a manner that would be the envy of every studio musician – but performing classic Jewish songs. Ask me back in Chicago if I would want to hear high speed pickin' and strummin' to classical chasunah songs, and I would probably think you were pulling my leg. Here it somehow seemed appropriate – it fit right in with the theme of Doing L'Shaim Shamaim. And I liked it. Apparently after a few songs the crowd did too, as they got up and started dancing again to this unofficial dinner music. Dinner was dinner, but there was a chosan to entertain.

Another round of dancing, and a few people had to leave at around 11:00. But almost all the guests stayed for the bentching and sheva brochos, which saw the kallah come in to the men's section. Since Chassidim do not have the custom of bringing the kallah in during dancing for *keitzad m'rakdim*, it seemed only fitting that the group briefly dance for the kallah before starting the sheva brochos.

It all worked. The chosen and kallah looked to be happier and more b'simcha than can be described.

Finally bentching, and a leibidick crowd – some of us also a bit weary – left for home.

Leaving for home for many meant driving, but for some it simply meant walking to the street and waiting for a bus. I did that, but so did families with children, babies, and strollers. I asked one weary father what bus he and his mishpacha were waiting for, and he said simply "whichever one comes first." I am not quite sure if he was joking or not.

The #1 bus came, which goes to the central bus station. Perfect for me. The families and I climbed aboard, I messed up paying and forgot you are supposed to take the little transfer ticket, but I got it right after a couple tries. The bus took off, and we hung on for dear life – which seems to be a standard part of the Egged bus experience.

Soon I will be back in Chicago, and hopefully attending more simchos of family and friends. But it will be difficult to forget the chasunah on the hill in Jerusalem. And I cannot help but think, that on that night, from the top of the hill, Dovid HaMelech was looking down. And smiling.

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