

# CHASSIDISHE WEDDING:

What Every Mother Should Know

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For a parent there is no joy comparable to marrying off a child. A tremendous investment of time, effort and money goes into preparing for the wedding day, which is the culmination of years and years of toil in bringing up our children. Given the false world we live in, where the *gashmius* is front and center, sometimes the tremendous spiritual power of the day can be overlooked. If we want to harness the *ruchniusdike* energy of the wedding day, to establish the young couple on the right path for life, this can be done only with preparation. It does not just happen by itself.

When I was a young *kallah* the world was very different. Then, if they were lucky, the *chassan* and *kallah* could go directly from the *chuppah* to get a dollar from the Rebbe. Then the *kedushah* was palpable and everything else was secondary. Today we need to invest more effort in order to reveal the tremendous *kedushah* of the wedding day. Preparing for the wedding is similar to preparing for Shabbos. The *ruchniusdike* beauty of Shabbos is reflected in the *gashmius*—in the way we prepare our homes, the special food and clothing. Sometimes we can get carried away with the *gashmius*—such as when we sit down at a physically beautiful Shabbos table but the conversation around the table does not reflect the *kedushah* of Shabbos. The same is true of the wedding day. As much as we want every detail to be perfect *b'gashmius*, we must ensure that this does not overshadow the *ikkar*—to establish the young couple on a foundation of holiness and purity.

## WHY A PUBLIC SIMCHAH?

When a *chassan* and *kallah* get married, the *simchah* is not only for them and their family. It is shared by the entire community and all of Klal Yisroel. For example, for the whole week of *sheva brachos*, *Tachanun* is not recited in shul if a *chassan* is present. And it is a *mitzvah* to participate in the *simchah* of a wedding and to dance and rejoice with the *chassan* and *kallah*. But why? Why can't the *chassan* and *kallah* celebrate in private? Why the big public display?

In a *maamar* of the Mittlerer Rebbe, *L'havin inyan hilulah d'Rashbi*, he explains that the great joy of a wedding is the reunion of two halves of one *neshamah*. It is compared to two close friends who were separated for a long time and are now reunited. The Mittlerer Rebbe explains that the joy of reunion depends on how close the friends were, how long they were separated and the reason for their separation. If one of them was in peril, such as in captivity or seriously ill, the celebration at their reunion will naturally be greater.

The *chassan* and *kallah* are not just close friends but one *neshamah* that comes into the world in two separate bodies. They are separated for a long time—for the first 20-plus years of their lives. Furthermore, they are sent down, into *olam hazeh*, a world filled with *kelipah* and *sitra achara*, and there is a real risk that they may not be reunited in purity. For all these reasons, the joy at a Yiddishe wedding is especially great. And since all *neshamos* are one, as explained in Perek 32 of *Tanya*, the joy of one *neshamah* is shared by all of us.

When the two halves of this *neshamah* are reunited, they are not just coming together the way they were before. The *chassan* and *kallah* together are creating something new. Together they are building a new Jewish family. We've all done the science experiment when you form a volcano by mixing baking soda and vinegar. When two substances come together to form a new compound, energy is released. At a wedding, the union of the two halves of this *neshamah* releases an *ohr makkif* that affects all of *sefer hishtalshelus*. Every detail of a Jewish wedding reflects this *kedushah* being released.

## STANDING UNDER THE CHUPPAH

What is the significance of standing under the *chuppah*? The Mittlerer Rebbe explains that the *chuppah* is *bechinas makkif*—a type of *kedushah* that is above the world and cannot be drawn down through our efforts. At the wedding, this level of divine revelation is poured down on the *chassan* and *kallah*, and this is the energy they will use to build their lives together. As they stand under the *chuppah* they need to connect their thoughts to Hashem in order to draw down this tremendous energy in a revealed way.

When we stand under the *chuppah* it is like standing at *mattan Torah*. The *chassan* and *kallah* must have a feeling of *bittul*, desire and *mesirus nefesh* to do Hashem's will. But to have this sensitivity requires preparation, and that preparation is, simply, learning.

## WHAT IS THE PREPARATION?

We want each of our sons and daughters to feel the *kedushah* of the wedding. But the wedding day often goes by in a blur—for the bride there is hair, makeup, pictures, pictures, pictures and pictures. Where in the day does she have an opportunity to focus her thoughts on what really matters?

When our children who have gone through traditional *chinuch* get married, they sincerely want to do things the right way. But it's up to the parents to set things up beforehand so that the *ruchniusdike* matters are the priority. During the engagement, the *kallah* has a lot on her mind. She needs to shop for—everything!—and find and furnish an apartment. She is most likely working, taking *kallah* classes and worrying about her future. Therefore, it is not practical to leave all the *ruchniusdike* preparations for the engagement period. Ideally, as soon as our sons and daughters reach marriageable age they should begin to learn these topics. There are many *sefarim* in both Hebrew and English that explain in detail every aspect of the wedding day and marriage in general.

## MINHAGIM OF THE WEDDING DAY

There are many *minhagim* for the *chassan* and *kallah* to observe on the wedding day. One of the *minhagim* that the Rebbe stressed is *tzedakah*.

When I got married the Rebbe had just spoken about the importance of having a *tzedakah pushka* on the head tables, with family members and friends encouraged to give *tzedakah* in *zchus* of the *chassan* and *kallah*. Everyone had *pushka* centerpieces at their wedding with the coins hanging this way or that way. Today how many people remember to put a *pushka* on the table at all? And most people don't have change in their pockets. The Rebbe instituted this *minhag*. Let's honor it. Set up the table with a *pushka* and a plate of change, and remind guests to give *tzedakah* in honor of the *chassan* and *kallah*. The *chassan* and *kallah* themselves should be reminded to put coins in the *pushka* throughout the day of the wedding.

This is just one example. There are many other details to be observed on the wedding day which have an impact on the future of this couple.

## FOUR THEMES OF THE WEDDING DAY

As we learn about the wedding day and the significance of the wedding *minhagim*, four themes emerge:

**Rosh Hashanah:** The wedding day is a personal Rosh Hashanah for the *chassan* and *kallah*. Just as Rosh Hashanah draws down *chayus* for the whole year, the *chassan* and *kallah* draw down *brachos* for their whole lifetime. The way we spend the

day on Rosh Hashanah affects our whole year, and the same (and more so) for the *chassan* and *kallah* on their wedding day.

Rosh Hashanah was also the first wedding day in history—the wedding of Adam and Chava. Many details of the wedding day reflect what happened at their wedding. For example, we have a band playing music at a wedding because Hashem arranged music for Adam and Chava.

**Yom Kippur:** The wedding is a personal Yom Kippur for the *chassan* and *kallah*, which is why they fast and the *chassan* wears a *kittel* under the chuppah. All their sins are forgiven on this day. The reason for this is that on Yom Kippur an *ohr makkif*, an all-encompassing light, is drawn down. This *ohr makkif* is also represented by the *chuppah*. When the *kallah* and the *unterfirer* stand under the canopy and surround the *chassan*, they are drawing down the *ohr makkif*. But it doesn't happen by itself. There needs to be *teshuvah*. The *chassan* and *kallah* say *vidui* at *minchah* on their wedding day, but saying

the words is not enough. They also need to focus on what this day means for them.

**Mattan Torah:** The giving of the Torah was like the wedding between Hashem and Knesses Yisroel. When we stand under the *chuppah* we recreate the moment of *mattan Torah*.

**Yemos HaMoshiach:** The marriage between the Yidden and Hashem was not finalized at *mattan Torah* because we went into *galus* afterwards. It will only be finalized in the future, when Moshiach comes. In the future Hashem will dance a *machol*, a circle dance, with the *tzadikim*, which is one of the reasons we dance in a circle at the wedding.

Each of the *sheva brachos* that we say under the

When we stand  
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it is like standing  
at mattan Torah.  
The chassan and  
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a feeling of bittul,  
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nefesh to do  
Hashem's will.



*chuppah* has a special meaning for the *chassan* and *kallah* that impacts their entire life.

When we study all the details of the wedding day and understand the details beforehand, it gives a different meaning to what we do. Don't wait until the last minute. If they haven't done so beforehand, then during the engagement, both the *chassan* and *kallah* should sit down with *sefarim* and learn these concepts. Let them underline the things that inspire them. We can't expect a *chassan* and *kallah* to have the right feelings on the wedding day if they don't study these ideas beforehand.

In a *sichah* of Yud Daled Kislev, 5714, the Rebbe's wedding anniversary, the Rebbe spoke about the importance of following *minhagim*. It seems that

there are more *minhagim* nowadays to keep than when I was younger. The reason for this may be that certain *minhagim* were not discovered until later. For example, there are letters from the Rebbe's father, Reb Levi Yitzchak, instructing his son how to conduct himself on his wedding day. There was a *hora'ah* from the Rebbe's father to learn *Perek 25* in *Tanya* on the day of the wedding. Now this is not something we can expect of every *chassan* on his wedding day. But if he learns it beforehand, he just needs to review it the day of the wedding. It talks about *teshuvah*, *kabalas ohl*, *mesiras nefesh*—important foundations for life.

In that *sichah* the Rebbe talks about the text of the wedding invitation. Now that may seem to be a minor detail. Nowadays we don't even need

to send out invitations. Just send out emails and be done with it. But we use the same text that the Friediker Rebbe used for the wedding of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin. It is known that the invitation has four paragraphs and the first letter of each paragraph spells out the word *ahavah*, love. But the Rebbe said that the Friediker Rebbe didn't want this to be made conspicuous. One should not design the invitation with these letters in large type.

This is an example of a *minhag* which seems minor but has great spiritual significance. Regarding *minhagim* the Rebbe quotes, "Open for Me an opening the size of the eye of a needle, and I will open for you an opening the size of a hall." We give Hashem a little and He repays us with a lot; keeping the wedding *minhagim* with all their details opens up a tremendous channel for *brachos* to last for the couple's entire life.

## TEHILLIM ON THE WEDDING DAY

One of the *minhagim* of the wedding day is for the *kallah* to say the entire *Tehillim*. The reason for this is that the Friediker Rebbe mentioned specific *kapitlach* of *Tehillim* for his daughter, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, to say on her wedding day, but since we don't know which ones they were, we say all of them.

Now, depending on how fast she reads, saying the whole *Tehillim* can take two or even three hours or more. Is it practical to expect this from the *kallah* on her wedding day? The answer is yes, if it is a priority. If the *kallah* and her parents realize that this is one of those most important things that need to be done on the wedding day, they will figure out how to fit it in between the pictures and the hair and makeup.

In most homes the wedding day is very hectic. There may still be small children in the home, or relatives arriving from all over. With all the goings-on in the house the *kallah* may have a difficult time focusing on her *ruchniusdike* preparations. That's why it may be a good idea to have the *shomeres* take the *kallah* to a private place where she can *daven* and say *Tehillim*. If, despite all preparations, the *kallah* will not manage to complete the whole *Tehillim*, some

decide to arrange to divide the *Tehillim* before the *chuppah* among family and friends.

## VISITING THE OHEL

Another special *minhag* is visiting the Ohel. This is not just a Chabad *minhag*; it's a *minhag* Yisroel to visit *kivrei tzadikim*. But the visit to the Ohel should not be rushed. The *chassan* and *kallah* should take their time, to think about what they want to say in their *pahn* and write it out slowly and carefully. For this reason some choose to go to the Ohel a bit earlier (consult a *mashpia* beforehand).

They should speak to parents and *mashpia* beforehand to get *hadrachah* for how to write the *pahn* and what to include in the letter.

There is so much holiness on the wedding day and you want to get in as much as possible. This will not happen by itself. Parents should set up a schedule for the week of the wedding and the wedding day itself so that important things are taken care of.

*N'shei Chabad Newsletter* once published an "I Was Touched" [column now renamed "Of Kindness and Courage"] about a *kallah* from Crown Heights who, on her wedding day, traveled to pediatric wards in hospitals to bless the children there, and to give them the thrill of seeing a *kallah* close-up. Then she went to a school where many older singles learned, and blessed them to find their *shidduchim*. She fit all this into her wedding day because, as she put it, "I didn't want to waste a minute of my special day."

## TAKING CONTROL OF WEDDING PICTURES

Someone I know was once in *yechidus* and told the Rebbe he was trying to save money on *chasunah* expenses. The Rebbe told him they could do without a photographer.

Now I'm not saying everyone should go that far, but photography is a prime example of where we make the *tafel* into the *ikkar*. We are so focused on getting good pictures that we forget about the actual event. Never should we allow the

photographers to intrude or assert control over the wedding itself.

When you hire a photographer, you are the boss. You are paying him and he has to please you. Photographers are in business to please their customers. In their eyes that may mean taking thousands of shots so you can choose the most perfect ones. But is that what you want? Think about what you want your wedding to be like. Communicate to the photographer so he knows what his place is at the wedding. You don't have to follow his lead. He is working for you. One friend of mine who has made many weddings always tells the photographer, "I will never be angry at you later for missing a scene or event. But I will be very upset with you if you at all get in the way of the wedding or give any orders to family or guests. Take what you can and don't worry about missing anything."

I have heard from wedding photographers that they need a minimum of two to three hours to take pictures of the *kallah*. Some photographers take hundreds of different poses of just the *kallah* herself. Why? I ask you: Is this necessary? On a day when the *kallah* should be saying *Tehillim* and preparing for the most momentous event of her life, she is posing for hundreds of pictures. And then after the wedding, the newlywed is poring over hundreds of pictures of herself with her head like this and her nose like that, to decide which is the best. Is this what her focus should be? If done correctly, the *kallah* does not need more than 20 minutes to pose for pictures. Limit the pictures taken before the *chuppah*, and after it too. The *kallah* does not need to be present while all the family pictures are taken.

When the *chassan* and *kallah* stand under the *chuppah*, they are joined by three generations of ancestors. In some cases the *chassan* and *kallah* are blessed and all three generations are present in person. Their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents *tzum lange yahren* may all be standing under the *chuppah*. But the photographer is shoving with his equipment to get the best shot, and ends up pushing an *elter-zeide*. Treat the grandparents and great-grandparents with respect! Let the photographer stand further away, or get a *chuppah* big enough to accommodate everyone.

Sometimes after the *chuppah* the *chassan* and *kallah* enter the hall together. And everyone oohs and aahs and thinks it's adorable. But this is not appropriate. The *chassan* does not belong on the women's side of the *mechitzah* surrounded by women. If your son is getting married, appoint someone to stand next to him and guide him over to the men's side as soon as they enter the hall.

## POSING WITH EIDELKEIT

According to Torah, husband and wife do not display affection towards each other in public. According to *Shulchan Aruch*, a woman may not check her husband's hair for lice in public. This refers to any intimate contact, like leaning over him or putting an arm on his shoulder. This is part of the Torah requirement to guard our eyes.

I have spoken to Rabbi Sholom Ber Chaikin on this matter and he says that when taking wedding pictures the *chassan* and *kallah* should not touch each other. They may stand next to each other and their clothing may touch (depending on her status at the time) but they should not take any suggestive poses.

Some *kallahs* ask what is wrong with intimate pictures if they are for the couple themselves and will not be viewed by anyone else. First of all, it is difficult to guarantee that the pictures will never be made public. The photographer claims ownership of the pictures and in some cases even demands that you pay extra for the "privilege" of not having your pictures used in his advertisements.

Another aspect is that it is absolutely forbidden for a couple to touch each other before marriage. For a couple that has never touched before, how comfortable will the *chassan* and *kallah* be to pose for intimate pictures, right after the *chuppah*? They are bound to feel a bit self-conscious, so the pictures will not even be natural. Why compromise your standards for pictures that are awkward and uncomfortable?

I heard a story that went something like this (not verbatim). Once the air conditioner in the Rebbetzin's home broke and a repairman from a different *frum* community came to the house to fix it. He did not realize it was the Rebbe's house.

He asked, “Are you Lubavitch?” The Rebbetzin answered that she was. “Do you admire the Lubavitcher Rebbe?” The Rebbetzin answered that she did. “Then where is the Rebbe’s picture? This is the first Lubavitcher home I’ve been in that doesn’t have a big picture of the Rebbe.” The Rebbetzin answered, “I have the original.”

When a *chassan* and *kallah* get married, they have each other. They have a strong bond between them. They have a whole lifetime ahead of them to strengthen and grow that bond. Why do they need these pictures of a bond, pictures which don’t reflect the true depth of their relationship? When they emerge from the *yichud* room they are united on the deepest level of *neshamah*. Will any picture capture that? Why denigrate the holiness of the moment with an unrefined picture?

The point is not that the unity between *chassan* and *kallah* is something to be ashamed of. On the contrary. It is so holy and sacred that we are careful to guard it and not display it in public. The *keruvim* on top of the *aron* were a male and female embracing. They were kept in the *kodesh kodoshim*. The more sacred something is, the more careful we need to be to keep it private.

Just as we pay more for kosher food and *tzniusdik* clothes and a pure *chinuch* for our children, invest the time to find a photographer who will respect your standards and will take only proper pictures.

Today everything is out in the open and everyone is posting their wedding pictures on Facebook. Our young people see all these pictures and “everyone is doing it” so it becomes okay. The average *chassan* and *kallah* want to do the right thing. They just need to be educated so they know the right thing to do. Speak to your daughter on this subject. Speak to your son. If you can’t, get someone else who can.

## WEDDING DANCING

The dancing at a wedding is not just a fun way to express our happiness for the new couple. It is a *mitzvah* and has profound spiritual significance. Remember that a wedding is a reunion of two halves of one *neshamah*. The elevation of the *neshamah* is so great that it lifts the body off

the ground. When we feel the *kedushah* of the moment, our dancing is different.

According to *Kabbalah*, the *chassan* and *kallah* represent two opposite forces. The *chassan* is the *mashpia* and the *kallah* is the *mekabel*. The *chassan* represents water which flows downward and the *kallah* represents fire which is drawn upward. How do these two opposite forces unite? *Oseh shalom bimromav*—Hashem makes peace in heaven. All forces in the world unite when they are subjugated to serve Hashem. When we lift up the *chassan* or *kallah* during the dancing, it represents their being uplifted to access the higher level of energy that allows them to become one.

The *kedushah* of the wedding dance is great and we must be vigilant to protect it. Speak with the band and tell them exactly what type of music you want them to play to ensure that your *simchah* will reflect the true spirit of the event. Just as with the photographer, the musician is not your boss. You are paying him and you have a right to decide on the terms. Find a musician who will work with you to create a beautiful, *chassidische* atmosphere at the wedding.

Now to the question of family members dancing together at the wedding. Before there were *mitzva'im*, there were two battles that the Rebbe fought fiercely. One was for women to wear *sheitlach*. The other was to have a kosher *mechitzah* in shuls and at weddings. There was a time in America when mixed seating at *frum* weddings was the norm. By the dancing, even if men and women danced in separate circles they were still able to see each other. *Al pi halachah* it is forbidden for women to dance in front of men. The Rebbe fought that a *mechitzah* at a wedding should be the norm.

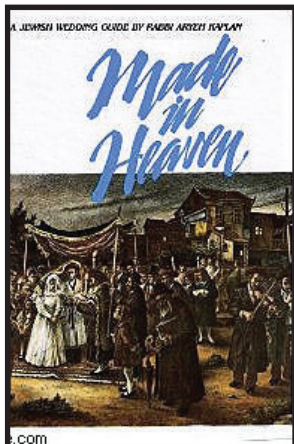
There are exceptions to the rule of women and men dancing together. A woman may dance with her father and grandfather. Brothers and sisters dancing together is not so simple.

There are certain communities that have the *minhag* of *mitzvah tantz*. The *kallah* comes to the men’s side and holds a *gartel*. Her father and other male relatives hold the other end of the *gartel* and dance. In some cases she is wearing a veil, and she might also dance with the *chassan* holding hands.

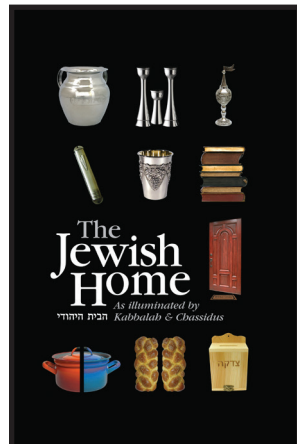
A rav once wrote to the Rebbe and asked why



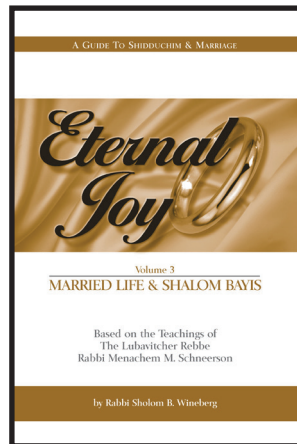
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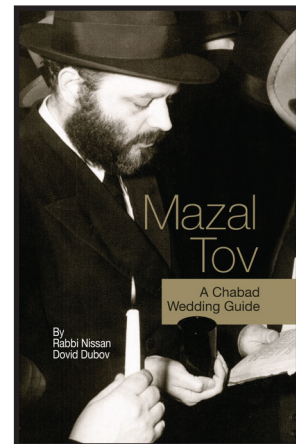
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it is not *minhag* Chabad to have a *mitzvah tantz*. Rebbetzin Chana wrote in her diary that when her son, the Rebbe, got married in Warsaw, she and Reb Levi Yitzchak were unable to attend and hosted a celebration in their home in Yekaterinoslav. There she danced with her father, Rabbi Meir Shlomo Yanovsky. If it was okay for Rebbetzin Chana, why not for us?

The Rebbe's answer has four points. 1) We can try to understand the reasoning behind it and why there are exceptions, but that does not change the fact that dancing together is not our *minhag*. 2) Just by looking around we can see that the concept of *mitzvah tantz* has evolved at many weddings into [something completely inappropriate]; whoever has seen this can actually see why we avoid it today. 3) In the times of the *avos*, they used to build *bamos* (private *mizbeach*) for *karbanos* and this was acceptable. After the Mishkan was built, it became completely *assur* to build a *bamah*. Some things that are completely fine in one generation are inappropriate in a different generation. 4) Ask the *rav* of your community.

A *balabos* once offered a *shliach* to pay for half the wedding if there would be a *mitzvah tantz*. The Rebbe did not allow it.

The *halachah* is if the men can see the women at the wedding, or if there is any form of dancing

that is not *al pi halachah*, we may not recite in the *zimun* to *sheva brachos shehasimchah bime'ono*. The Rebbe explains (*Igros* vol. 9, p. 1) that when a proper *mechitzah* is erected Hashem's name is mentioned and He bestows *simchah* to the world at large—first and foremost to the *chassan* and *kallah*. And this causes them to be “*tzufriden*” (content) throughout their lifetime. When brothers and sisters dance together in one circle—especially in the presence of other onlookers—this represents a breach of the boundaries of *tznius*, or worse. The *simchah* at the dancing bestows happiness from Hashem on the couple for years to come. Why risk your child's future happiness with improper dancing?

WEDDING SHTICK

Before the wedding, the *kallah* should speak to her friends and make sure that any *shtick* they bring to the wedding is tasteful and appropriate. They are there to add *simchah*, not to turn the wedding into a Purim carnival. I was once at a wedding where they danced with masks of all the U.S. presidents. Girls also wrap different things around their waists and the effect is not so *eidel*. Does the dancing serve the needs of the *neshamah* or *guf*? This needs to be considered

and planned out before the wedding.

## MEZINKE TANTZ

When the youngest child in a family gets married, there is a tradition called the *mezinke tantz*, where all the siblings, brothers and sisters, dance around the parents. It has become so entrenched that people assume it must have a grand history behind it, but this is not a *minhag Chabad* or even a *minhag Yisroel*. It actually is part of Yiddishist folklore with Greek mythology thrown in, and was carried over from the non-Jews of the Ukraine.

Marrying off the youngest child is indeed a milestone and we should show our gratitude to Hashem for bringing us to this occasion. However, the way we celebrate must be appropriate and done with *Yiddishe chein*. Not with brothers and sisters dancing together in public. Even if you would be able to find a *rav* who holds that it is okay for siblings to hold hands and dance together, this dance is watched by other men

(the *chassan*, for one) who are forbidden to see women dancing. Show your respect and gratitude to Hashem with *eidele, chassidishe* dancing.

We should be *zocheh* to dance straight into *yemos HaMoshiach* with the wedding of *Knesses Yisroel* and the *Shechinah!* ❏

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Mrs. Sara Morozow lives in Crown Heights where she is raising a large and growing family, *kein yirbu*. In addition, she is a *kallah* teacher, lecturer, and *mashpia* with a loyal following among Jewish women of all ages and stages. This article has been reviewed for accuracy by Harav Sholom Ber Chaikin of Cleveland and by Harav Yosef Y. Braun, *mara d'asra* and member of the *Badatz* of Crown Heights. *N'shei Chabad* Newsletter thanks [mikvah.org](http://mikvah.org) for providing the recording of the talk (at *Kinus Hashluchos 5777*) that this article is based on.



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