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COUNTERPOINT: IS THERE A BETTER WAY?



By Mishpacha Readers | SEPTEMBER 4, 2019

The project “Our Weddings, Our Wallets” (Issue 773) continues to draw reader feedback. Below is a sampling



From the Bottom Up — Shmuli Margulies, Chairman of Mesila

In a recent article in Mishpacha, Reb Shia Markowitz, a personal friend and a friend of Mesila, was interviewed regarding the wedding guidelines that were proposed and subsequently shelved.

I believe the reason the guidelines didn't make it then and wouldn't accomplish the purpose now is because people don't want to be told what to do, even via the indirect tool of across-the-board takanos, or, as defined more softly — “guidelines.” Even if the name is more elegant, the principle is the same: It is trying to achieve change from the top down, while we believe that the change must come from the bottom up.

The only true solution is to give people in our communities the deep-seated motivation to live with financial stability, without loans and without charity — for their own sake. When they realize what they stand to gain — the serenity and quality of life — they will choose to keep the bar lower of their own accord.

When people are motivated to take charge of their quality of life, they are able to take effective steps to lower wedding spending. And more often than not, when people “compromise” on perceived standards, they gain in the quality of the wedding. The spotlight is taken off of the external trimmings and swings to the essence of the event.

This kind of change must come from within, not — or, at least, not only — from externally imposed limitations. Because there will always be the drive to “keep up with the Joneses.” And there will always be the struggle between, “A wedding is once in a lifetime; splash out as much as you can!” and “It's just one night; what for?” But when those temptations are countered by the powerful attraction of living a life of true values, people will more easily resist societal pressures and allow the voice of reason to prevail.

The answer is not to limit, but to empower. To open people's eyes to what they are sacrificing on the altar of “societal norms” and give them the inner stamina to choose lasting serenity over short-lived, perceived benefit. To provide our children with the strength of character to resist negative social influences and reach for genuine quality of life — because only if the young couple also wants this does it stand a chance of happening.

Mesila is working toward this goal by educating children in schools and young adults in yeshivos and seminaries, and by reaching the community through coaching, workshops, and lectures. Our mission is to motivate people to live a financially secure life — not because anyone is telling them they must, but because that is what they genuinely want, and because this is truly for their long-term benefit.