

Weekly Teaching

April 5, 2018

I recently returned from visiting my daughter and her fiancé. My wife and I were helping them move from one Massachusetts apartment to another, in a town closer to the big job in which she will stay.

The couple's hope of maintaining one car was dashed, as they commute in different directions. But, the real purpose of our week-long visit was, as my wife described it: wedding "venue" hopping.

This was a new experience for me. Prior, I had really only thought of "venue" in the legal sense of where a court case takes place. I associated "venue" with strategy, provincial and the like. Now though, the word takes on a whole new significance.

A wedding venue is the first major choice that cascades, domino-like, into multiple other choices along the wedding continuum. It is not trivial, and finances (as I've learned) are only one small factor.

The most important criteria of choosing a wedding venue is how the couple feels in said venue; is it "them"?

There are many venues that possess beautiful interiors, gorgeous exteriors, are friendly or luxurious, elegant or charming. My daughter and her fiancé have some concerns such as being in central New England, so their guests could return to home or work the same day as their Sunday wedding, if desired or needed. But mainly, it needed to be a picturesque nature scene, water or woodland, with big windows, and a lovely interior in case of inclement weather.

The research, the menus, the costs...it reminded me of house hunting. And it was equally as exhausting.

Like Steve Martin's character in "Father of the Bride" (1991), I try not to get caught up in the whole wedding industry web.

Keeping to the main pivotal criterion of how the couple feels at the various venues and vistas, what resonates with and reflects them, I contemplated one of the most powerful love ideas that I've learned, in many iterations. It is this: loving another person, perceiving of them as your "home."

"You are my home." This means a person with whom one can be completely themselves; safe, warm, comfortable, beloved.

The Hebrew word "house—home" is *bayit* in Hebrew; *beit* for "house of" as in *Beit Seifer* (House of the Book/School), or *Beit Keneset* (House of Assembly/Synagogue).

Bayit or *Beit* begins with the second Hebrew letter of the alphabet: *Bet* (ב).

The Hebrew letter looks like an enclosure itself, and when used as a prefix, as in *B'Shalom* (In Peace), it connotes the meaning of "in" or "within."

It is good and fitting that an engaged couple searches out their wedding venue based on how they feel when they visit each place. It takes time, because the venue should not be a mask that is a temporary reflection of the couple's taste.

Though the wedding by its nature is a one-day event, the real venue will be the *huppah* (wedding canopy) that is within the geographical space.

Within the *huppah*, like nesting dolls, the couple—my daughter and future son-in-law—will face each other and stand next to each other. The rabbis understand the *huppah* as symbolizing the new “home” that is being created by the marriage.

The Talmud describes the *huppah* as the house which is open on four sides and notes that it is its own prayerful statement that the home of the bride and groom should be “wide open” like the Tent of Abraham and Sarah, who, according to Jewish tradition, had entrances on all four sides of their tent so as to welcome all travelers, and that no matter from which direction they came they shouldn’t be burdened searching for an entrance door. The *huppah* is the hope that the new home of the bride and groom will be filled with love and kindness.

By tradition, the *huppah* is preferably outside under God’s skies so that the bride and groom are especially aware that they are surrounded by God’s eternal presence.

It was an exhausting week looking at wedding venues, yet I feel privileged to have been included in the process of helping the bride and groom choose the elements of their blessed *bayit*.

Shabbat Shalom,
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