

Dear Chavraya,

Last night I had the honor to stand at the *chuppah* with a dear friend and colleague and to assist in officiating at the wedding of his daughter. Pulsating with dancing and singing, it was a very large wedding that brought together a remarkable cross-section of the Jewish people. Every wedding has its struggles along the way of coming to be. It is inevitable, all of the emotions of approaching a major life transition, diverse images and ideals of what the magic day will look like, who will walk with whom, who will sit with whom, family tensions revealed, all the frayed threads finally woven into a great symbolic *chuppah* big enough to shelter and soothe all who are gathered. Beyond the essential union of love between two people, weddings bring together, however imperfectly at times, all of those whose light forms the galaxy of the couple's world.

Looking out from the *chuppah* last night, I saw the diversity that was unique to this wedding. In that hushed moment of anticipation just before the procession began, of all those who craned their necks together to witness the grand entrance the range itself sang of triumph. Underscoring that range were the black hats and *peyos* of Chassidic Jews who had come from both families to celebrate. Most notable was the presence of the Bostoner Rebbe, a cousin of the groom's father, a Chassidic leader of international stature. Had the Rebbe simply been present at a wedding celebrated by two Conservative rabbis, *dayenu*, in a Jewish world so fragmented, it would have been enough. When the time came for the seven marriage blessings, the *Sheva Brochos*, the Rebbe rose and came up to the *chuppah* to sing the seventh, most honored of the blessings. He quietly asked to use the siddur I was holding, the arrangement of the ceremony as used by Conservative rabbis. *Dayenu*, soon the glass had been broken and the joyful echo of *mazel tov* hovered in the air. As I stepped off the *bimah* and away from the *chuppah*, the first person to greet me was the Bostoner Rebbe. He extended his hand and offered words of *mazel tov* and of praise. It was a beautiful moment of *ahavat Yisrael*, love for other Jews, all as part of one people regardless of our differences.

The beauty of the Rebbe's gesture is underscored by the rarity of such openness. His affirmation of other Jews stands in stark contrast to the disparaging of one Jew for another that is all too rife among our people. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Chukkat*, Moses loses his temper with the people and berates them for their frailties. A strange *midrash* reflects on that incident with a story: Rabbi Abahu and Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish were on their way to a particular town. Rabbi Abahu asked Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, "Why are we going to a place of shamers and blasphemers? Resh Lakish, as he is called, took a handful of sand and stuffed it into his colleague's mouth. Stunned, Rabbi Abahu sputtered, "Why did you do that?" And so the answer came, "The Holy One does not want anyone to speak evil about Israel (about other Jews.)"

May there be no sand in the mouths of any of our people, but only words of *mazel tov* as we celebrate wholeness and holiness together. Affirming each other as Jews, so may we affirm the gifts of all people and receive them with love.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor