**Harei Aht Mekudeshes Li**

**The Story of a Wedding**

This reminiscence of our wedding ceremony -- at a distance now of more than sixty four years -- was occasioned by a conversation with Cousin Annie revolving around her father's father, Rabbi Simon J. Finkelstein.

Our wedding took place early Sunday Afternoon, January 2, 1944 in one of the smaller public spaces on the second floor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Broadway and 122nd St. New York. The bride and groom were married on their 21st Birthdays. The United States was then in the middle of WWII. The wedding ceremony was quite minimal and no-frill in consonance with the prevailing mores of the hour. The bride wore an "every day" brown dress that later she wore on many occasions. The groom, was in a new dark blue suit. No pictures were taken of the event. In retrospect, I wonder why; there were plenty of cameras and film around those days.

But allow me to back up a bit. In the Summer of 1943, I was a graduate student in Mathematics at Harvard, and also teaching Army students in a course known as ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program). Hadassah had completed a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. I had proposed marriage to her some months before. Sometime during that Summer, she had an offer of a job in Pittsburgh in her capacity as a student of psychology. She agonized for a few days: marriage or Pittsburgh ? The two seemed incompatible. After several days, she crossed the Rubicon: marriage. Lucky for me.

Sometime during that Summer or Fall, we visited her Grandfather in Brownsville, Brooklyn so that he could "look me over" and give us his OK and his blessing. In those days , Brownsville was essentially a Jewish community. Brooklyn was essentially *terra incognita* to us, but we had heard of a fabulous delicatessen in Brownsville known as the *Kishke King,* and it was either on the occasion of the visit or on an another occasion that we paid our respects to the *King*. In addition to the usual signs of what was available, I recall "Send a Salami to your Boy in the Army." The multilayered pastrami sandwiches with a half sour pickle or a green tomato were fabulous.

We made our way to the home of Simon Finkelstein. I recall it being fairly full with his congregants, some of whom, I suppose, were asking for opinions on personal matters. I recall Simon J. as a short man with a full white beard and a twinkle in his eye. Once introduced, I had an advantage: he spoke to me in Yiddish, which I could understand perfectly. I answered in English: intelligently I hoped. Apart from short phrases, I had never conversed in Yiddish.

"Vazay heisst du ?" (What's your Yiddish name ?)

" Pesach. Paysie"

" Ah, a gutter nommen."

In those days, Hadassah knew no Yiddish. Her grandfather patted her on the head and said something like

"A shayner maydl. A shayner kallah."

The "interview" went well and we were pleased as were Hadassah's father and all her uncles who had previously conducted their own interviews.

We had set the following January 2 as our wedding day -- our joint birthday --and this seemed to be agreeable to all parties. Why multiply important dates? Selecting January 2 would keep things simple. As January approached, I had to do several things. The first was to buy a new suit. I went to Jordan Marsh on Washington Street in Boston, and bought a plain blue serge suit which I subsequently wore but rarely. Secondly I had to get a Wasserman Test, which was then required by law.

Thirdly, we had to select a wedding ring. In those days there was a jeweler's shop on the west side of Broadway between 113th and 114th Streets. We selected a plain gold band. It cost $10.00. Finally, we needed a wedding license. Since this was before January 2, I was under age, and I had to go with my mother (my father having died two years previously ) to City Hall in Manhattan. Another detail.

Of course Hadassah and other people were doing their things. I don't recall a printed wedding invitation.Telephone calls ? Hadassah's Uncle Maurice and his wife Naomi arrange for a wedding feast in their apartment at 68 East 86th Street. Hadassah' s Uncle Hink and his wife Tess, bought us a compartment on the NYNH&H RR for our trip back to Boston.

Vay'hi hayom. The day finally arrived. I don’t recall the weather. There were about fifty wedding guests. A few on my side. Many more on Hadassah's side. Her relatives plus her father's colleagues and their wives. The ketubah (marriage contract) was signed by Professors Alexander Marx and Professor Saul Lieberman. A portable chuppah was opened up. I don’t recall the men who were honored to hold up its four corner rods. Officiating was Hadassah's grandfather, Simon Finkelstein. When it came time for the ring ceremony, he indicated that I put the ring on Hadassah's right index finger, a temporary location. He then looked closely at me and said in Yiddish

" Chosson : zog nach mir." (Bridegroom: repeat after me.)

Hadassah's Grandfather then spoke slowly and clearly and I repeated his words:

" Harei."

" Harei."

" Aht "

" Aht "

" Mekudeshes li "

" Mekudeshes li "

" B'taba'as zoo "

" B'taba'as zoo "

" K'das "

" K'das "

" Moshe v' Yisroel "

" Moshe v'Yisroel."

(Behold! Thou art consecrated unto me with this ring according to the Laws of Moses and Israel.)

Hovering nearby were other rabbis some of whom wanted "to get into the act." I recall that Professor Mordecai Kaplan, famed for his Reconstructionist version of Judaism, was among those who said a few words at the chuppah.

But the ring ceremony, really, is the only section of the wedding that I remember with any sharpness. I assume there were the cups of wine , the reading of the ketubah and of the Seven Blessings; in other words, all the portions of the ritual that were deemed both necessary and sufficient. And, of course, the breaking of the glass. Then, the loud mazel tovs.

After the ceremony, the invitees reassembled slowly in Maurice and Naomi's dining room . Now what do I remember about the Wedding Meal? Long tables were arranged in a circle. I recall a huge challah which Simon J. cut and distributed pieces for a motzi. Then the meal was served. No klezmer orchestra was present. No dancing. No funny teasing addressed to the bride and groom.

But how can one eat without a recitation of sacred words ? During the meal, the older men who were brought up in that tradition extemporized (in Yiddish, of course.) Simon J. led off with the Midrashic story of how God created the World with the letter beth (from B'rashit bara.. ) This, somehow, got related to the generic conjoining of man and woman. Simon J.'s presentation was not short. After all, in his congregation, he was used to give long, long sermons especially on Yom Kippur Afternoon. He is reported to have justified this practice by saying : " They may listen to me or not . They may understand me or not. But while they are sitting quietly, they are not out in the world making trouble."

My Uncle Charlie, who in his youth had yeshiva training, also put in a few words of Torah. Everything eaten, everything said, finally, finally, Birkat ha Mazon (grace), then after more Mazel Tov's, good bye's and good luck's, Hink saw us to Grand Central Station and to our compartment. Arrived in Boston, we took a taxi to our apartment at 306 Harvard Street between Harvard and Central Squares in Cambridge.

Up early, because on the following day (Monday) I had to give my students an hour exam.

And that's how it was.