



Q&A – Office Chanukah Parties

Question:

First of all, I would like to thank Doeihu for creating a platform to learn the very important *halachos* in such a clear and practical way. The *halachos* are presented with so much clarity and explanation in a tasteful way, with practical examples and citations to the sources. I truly appreciate all that you do!

I have a question about a situation that is relevant to me and that I have heard is very common for others as well. In my office, the owners are from Yidden, as are most of the employees. Every year, the company makes a large Chanukah party for all of the male and female employees

together, with no *mechitzah*. Is this appropriate? Is it permitted for me to attend?

Thank you in advance for your response to my questions.

Answer:

Thank you for your kind words. This type of warm, positive feedback gives us encouragement to continue with our work.

The shu"t *Be'er Chaim Mordechai* (3:49; to get a glimpse of the greatness of the author, see the approbations of Rav Shach and the Minchas Yitzchok to the sefer's second printing) discusses a nursing home where the elderly men and women were divided into separate sleeping quarters, but during the day they were all together during meals (see the actual response for the full details of the situation). A number of upstanding Yidden noted that this might be inappropriate and asked if this should be stopped.

The author answered that such a situation is not only distasteful but also forbidden according to *halachah*!

He quotes the well-known Mishnah in *Maseches Sukkah* that says that when *Chazal* say that the joy of the *Simchas Bais Hashoeivah* in the *Bais Hamikdash* was leading to levity between men and women (even though they were physically distant to some degree), they made a "*tikkun gadol*, an important rectification, and built balconies so that the men and women should be completely separate.

The Gemara's proof of this requirement comes from a pasuk in Zecharia in which he describes the necessity of gender separation during a funeral in the times of Moshiach, when there will be no Yetzer Hara and in a time of mourning. How much more so is this needed during a time of festivity and joy and when the Yetzer Hara is in full force.

Shu"t Be'er Chaim Mordechai therefore states (in summarization), "This Gemara is speaking about an event that occurred once a year, during a period when the state of *ruchnius* and *kedushah* was much greater than it is today. This gathering took place in the *Bais Hamikdash*, a place that invoked and demanded fear and proper decorum, and it occurred during the holy days of Yom Tov when Yidden came to be *oleh regel* and to bask in *kedushah*. It is, therefore, obvious that in our times when, due to our many sins... (he does not complete his sentence, but we can all understand his intent), in a situation that occurs three times a day (breakfast, lunch and supper), during a time when people are eating and drinking, which *Chazal* say is a time when the *yeitzer hara* is strong, the gravity of the situation is self-understood."

He goes on to explain that the prohibitions and halachic problems apply even to elderly men and women. He concludes: "Therefore, it is clear that this is forbidden. I could continue at length with more proofs from *Shas* and *Poskim*, but one should know that there is an important rule that it is unnecessary to expound excessively on things that are open and clear *halachos!*"

It is self-understood that these words, written close to 100 years ago and about elderly people in a nursing home, certainly apply to parties attended by young people in our generation.

It is, therefore, clear according to *halachah* that ideally, it is necessary to put up *mechitzos* by such gatherings. The men and women must be completely separated (see the previous Question and Answer for more details). If there is no *mechitzah* at all and no separation between the men and women, or even if there is somewhat of a separation but one knows that he will not be able to guard his eyes and thoughts, one may not participate in such a party, as quoted previously from the *Sefer Chassidim* (*siman* 293 and 1020). [If one works in a business which is owned by irreligious Jews and by not attending, they could become very offended, one should consult a competent *posek*.] (*On this topic, see Shu"t Lev*

Avrohom 135; *Shu"t Vayevarech Dovid EH* 121; *Levushah Shel Torah* ch. 78)

We will continue the answer tomorrow.