

## [Women and Work; Mixed Seating at Weddings; Expensive Weddings---Rabbi Marc Angel Replies to Questions from the Jewish Press](#)

Submitted by mdangel1 on Sun, 05/12/2019 - 00:00



Should a woman accept a job that will require her to be away from her family for significant periods of time?

I would like to re-phrase the question: Should a man or woman accept a job that will require being away from family for significant periods of time? Men, as well as women, have responsibilities to be present for their families.

For many centuries, it was assumed that men are responsible for earning a living and therefore must be away from home as much as needed for their work. It was assumed that women are responsible for the home, and therefore must not be away from home and children for significant periods of time.

But in modern times, perceptions and realities have changed. Until recent decades, few women had the opportunity to attend university, to attain high level employment, to assume leadership roles in political or communal life. Today, women have vastly greater opportunities and possibilities. Women, as well as men, want to fulfill their professional and personal goals.

That being said, professional responsibilities must not be allowed to undermine the stability of the family. We want—and need—men and women to recognize their primary responsibility to raise healthy, happy, Torah-true children. Each family has different dynamics, different needs, and different ways of addressing their challenges. It is not easy to balance family and professional responsibilities—and yet, this must be done.

Each woman and man must evaluate what is best for self and family. Sometimes a woman or man must sacrifice professional opportunities for the sake of family responsibilities. Sometimes a woman or man may accept a job requiring significant commitment if that is deemed best for the family. Each person must weigh contending factors, come to a harmonious understanding with husband or wife, and be sure that the interests of children and family are paramount.

In an ideal Torah society, should a yeshiva dinner have separate or mixed seating?

In an ideal Torah society, each yeshiva should decide for itself whether to have separate or mixed

seating. In an ideal Torah society, there would be respect for differing legitimate opinions and there would be no unhealthy judgmental aspersions cast on others.

In an ideal Torah society, men and women would be able to interact in a respectful, modest fashion. They would be able to sit together as dignified human beings, without this leading to improper thoughts or behavior.

Rabbi Aaron Rakefet has pointed out that many gedolei Torah—including Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky and Rav Yosef B. Soloveitchik—attended weddings where men and women sat together at the dinner receptions. Rabbi Rakefet testified: “For their own children (I was at the weddings), there was mixed seating. There was no question about it. Each one’s kavod was with his rebbitzen.” <http://haemtza.blogspot.com/2006/02/mixed-seating-at-weddings.html>

A photo of the annual dinner of the Agudath Israel in 1945 shows mixed seating, in the presence of a large group of learned rabbis.  
[https://winners-master.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/sale\\_099/261.jpg](https://winners-master.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/sale_099/261.jpg)

It seems that the tendency to insist on separate seating at yeshiva dinners, weddings and other public events dates back to the 1960s or 1970s.

When deciding on seating arrangements, organizers need to consider the feelings of the guests who are being invited to attend. Some men and women are in favor of sitting separately from their spouses at yeshiva dinners or wedding receptions. Others find separate seating to be unnecessary and offensive. They prefer to sit with their spouses on these festive occasions.

Let each yeshiva determine how to seat its guests. Whether they choose to have separate or mixed seating, may they succeed in bringing as many people as possible to the wellsprings of Torah and mitzvot.

Is there anything inherently wrong with a person spending vast sums of money on a wedding or bar mitzvah if he's rich and can easily afford it?

People should spend what they can properly afford. But the hallmark of every wedding or bar/bat mitzvah celebration should be modesty. When rich (or those who wish to appear rich) spend excessive amounts in order to impress guests with their opulence, this is not only bad taste...it's also bad religious values. One can have a very high quality (and very expensive) celebration without being ostentatious. The greatest elegance is that which doesn't try too hard to be elegant.

Rabbi Haim David Halevy, late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, discussed the issue of expensive weddings in volume one of Asei Lekha Rav (no. 24) and found no reason to forbid such events as long as the hosts could afford them and in view of the practice for guests to give gifts of the approximate value of the meal that the hosts provide. He added: “These events provide ongoing income for hundreds of families—from the producers and distributors of agricultural products to the caterers and waiters. What need is there to cut off this economic branch that grows and develops day by day?...May celebrations increase in Israel.”

A problem arises when people feel the need to spend far more than they can afford, in order to maintain appearances. They go into debt or they ask others for financial assistance. This is not appropriate. Let all live and celebrate within their means...in a happy, modest, non-ostentatious way. May celebrations increase in Israel.

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