

“Father of the Bride”

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“So, who is performing your daughter’s wedding ceremony?” several of you have thus inquired, and I’ve never hesitated to assure everyone who asked –

Well, of course, I am! I was the officiant at her naming. With teary eyes, I was there for the Bat Mitzvah. And I was there before the ark to ask God’s blessings upon her on confirmation day. Last July 9th, dodging between one of history’s earliest, and (as it turned out) busiest hurricane season, Jennifer and Aaron even managed to stand with me in our sanctuary for their prenuptial blessing.

Weather! A January blizzard in New York and three hurricanes in New Orleans have plagued our celebratory plans, but the wedding goes on a week from tomorrow, provided there are no further disasters (and I don’t say that lightly – I am completely serious!).

The really greatest part of this wedding (one that we have now planned twice in two different regions of the nation) will be the bride and groom! Both well-educated and devoted doctors, their eyes are wide open to what it takes to build a strong and committed marriage of two loving souls. We are grateful that both Aaron and Jennifer are devoted not only to one another, but also to their parents and extended families, and, not incidentally, to their Judaism and its rich and beautiful traditions.

They are two bright and busy people who seem to know when to be protective and tender and, when necessary, to be direct with each other! They have patterned a wonderful aura of romanticism in their larger relationships, without losing touch with their individual selves. I say that as I remember how actor Sam Keen, in a wonderful interview, once told Bill Moyers, “Marriage is designed...so you can fall out of love into reality.”

Now, Moyers wanted to know what he meant by that. Mr. Keen elaborated:

...because you got to face the fact you’re married to a failure and so is your wife...I mean, we all fail each other in these important ways, and we have to go on in spite of the way we fail. And that’s why I think that real love has to do so much with finally letting loose of all that and just saying – you know, unconditional love doesn’t come at the beginning of a marriage, it comes at the end.

Years ago, columnist Michael Grant of *The San Diego Union Tribune* wrote this about his own marriage. See if it doesn’t strike you as being true about your own:

We continue to adjust to each other, an adjustment

that started 19 years ago, and will never stop, because we each continue to grow and change.

We will always be different. I think of anniversaries as a time for roses and dinner; she prefers Mexican food and a movie. For Halloween, she thinks apples are a good treat. I say, since when did Halloween have anything to do with nutrition?

Don't mistake it for a solid marriage. There is no such thing. Marriage is more like an airplane than a rock. You have to commit the thing to flight, and then it creaks and groans, and keeping airborne depends entirely on attitude. Working at it, though, we can fly forever. Only she and I know how hard it has been, or how worthwhile.

Of course, Judaism is a tradition that is 100% pro-marriage! The Book of Proverbs puts it so well: "Whosoever findeth a wife, findeth a great good, and, obtainith favor of the Lord."

The very book of the Torah we read this Shabbat prescribes the natural turn of events: a man leaves the home of his parents, selects a wife, and they become one flesh. And yet, just like Spencer Tracy and Steve Martin, both of whom elegantly and poignantly played the *Father of the Bride* in those wonderful movies, I, too, have my share of difficulty realizing that "my little girl" is getting married. And, believe me, it goes much deeper than the bills!

The reality is that hundreds view her as their children's doctor and wait hours just to hear what she has to say about their children's welfare. But, that doesn't affect my emotions or control my reactions. She's still my baby girl and a kid to me – a Carrolton Baseball school kid! And, I didn't want her to play baseball anyway, because it was too dangerous!

But, of course, she's not a child to most rational minds. She is grown up and a mature, levelheaded, eminently prepared young woman – and six years older than I was when I married her mother!

So, beyond an incredible number of details to oversee and plans to formulate; and beyond helping Andrea make more arrangements than a NASA moon flight; and beyond negotiating issues of etiquette in not one, but two wedding cities – what more can I do but give these two – Aaron and Jennifer – my most heartfelt blessing?

But, I might go so far as to delicately suggest that they never, ever plan a big event around Sabbath Noah! It has seemed to tempt fate! Then, perhaps, I'll also share with them, and tonight with each one of you, our former Rabbi's "10 Commandments for Marriage." Here is what Dr. Louis Binstock advised back in the 1920s:

1. Deflate romance in your marriage.

2. Expect imperfection in your spouse.
3. Respect differences.
4. Develop common interests.
5. Establish a partnership.
6. Be generous to one another.
7. Be trustful of one another.
8. Respect personal privacy.
9. Be truthful always, and finally...
10. Keep growing.

By the way, nine out of ten times when I ask soon-to-be wed couples what they would like to think their marriage will be like in five years, I receive a reply of this sort: “Communicative – a marriage in which both of us will communicate.”

And yet, I understand that there’s a professor over at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia who, not long ago, conducted a study to ascertain just how much conversation is actually exchanged between a hundred married couples who regarded themselves as being “reasonably happy after fifteen or more years of married life.”

Well, the median amount of time spent in conversational exchange by these happily married couples was some 28 minutes per week, and those, keep in mind, are the happy marriages.

You’ve heard about the 75-year-old man who went to his doctor one day for a physical examination. The doctor examined him and couldn’t find a thing wrong. “You have the body of a man 25 years younger. Now, what’s your secret?” the doctor inquired.

And the man replied, “Well, when my wife and I were married 50 years ago, we made an agreement. We decided that we would just never quarrel. So, when we have a difference of opinion and it causes friction, and we can see that a fight is coming on, she just stays in the house, and I go out for a long walk. I guess good health is due to the fact that for 50 years, I’ve pretty much lived an outdoor life.”

Perhaps it is difficult and foolhardy to make too many generalizations about marriage. If counselors have learned anything over the years, it is that there are an infinite number of marital lifestyles, and what one couple finds delightfully satisfying, another may very well deem worse than death itself.

No matter what, I have to mention this to Aaron and Jennifer. A successful and a living marriage is one that is rebuilt each and every day by a caring and committed husband and wife.

In June of 1972, I searched for something to say at the end of a sermon that I was invited to preach at Cincinnati’s Rockdale Temple on the Sabbath before our wedding.

I couldn't find exactly what I wanted, until I happened upon this little verse written many centuries ago by a Jewish bridegroom in 14th century Rome.

These tender words, and the heartfelt emotions expressed by Immanuel ben Solomon continue to inspire me, and I hope and pray, remain every bit as relevant for Aaron, as he prepares to marry our Jennifer.

Whenever troublous hours I find
That rob me of my peace of mind,
To thee I haste, my little bride,
And all forget, when by thy side.
Let others load their castled towers,
Their magic grots, their gladsome bowers;
For me that place hath chiefest charms,
That brings me, dearest, to thine arms.

Amen