

The Royal Wedding

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

There is a blessing the Talmud gives for when one sees royalty (Brachot 58a). The text itself goes further and says one should even go out of one's way to see royalty, because in being impressed by the way they are held in awe by mortals, one should realize how much more the King of kings should be revered.

This might have been true once upon a time when kings and queens were absolute rulers with the power to make or break, reward and punish every one of their subjects. Jewish post-Biblical law gave kings the right to put anyone to death if they felt that would preserve or protect the realm. Thank goodness that no longer applies in civilized countries; but unfortunately in the barbaric ones which account for most of the world's current population it does. So if a blessing were to be relevant now on this issue it should be to thank God we live under these defanged royal ciphers rather than under bloodthirsty murderers who think nothing of shooting, torturing and raping their own citizens.

Yet I have a problem with all this royalty fuss. I have met the queen several times. She is indeed a gracious lady, but massively underwhelming. She has an unenviable task: to be gracious and calm all the time, to treat the hundreds of thousands of people she meets as if they are important and matter, when in reality it can only be a formality. I have seen her at work (for it is her profession) at Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh and Buckingham Palace in London, at tea parties where thousands wait patiently in line for her to pass and smile and nod and pick out someone here and there to enquire of or comment to, and smile again and move on. It is one of the amazing gifts of the royal family that they can make someone feel for a second or two that he or she is the only one who matters in the world and whatever it is that they do is so significant and interesting. And I have met her at receptions at which once again she approaches, smiles, asks a question or two and moves on. On several occasions when I had a chance to engage her, the mask remained fixed, the polite "how interesting" betrayed cold professionalism, and the only subjects she responded to with animation was when I mentioned that I had just seen her at Ascot where her horse had won, or enquired of her corgis. Otherwise, even praise for her son elicited a blank stare as if I had been guilty of disrespect. Helen Mirren gave an incredibly accurate portrayal of Her Majesty in *The Queen*.

It is hardly surprising, having to go through the public rituals she does and maintain the exterior she must, that she is emotionally restrained, constantly aware of position and obligation rather than emotion, and has brought forth emotionally stunted offspring. But she does nevertheless represent the earthly symbols of rule, even if she is powerless. It is a beautiful and impressive charade and one that attracts millions of tourists, worldwide interest and fascination. But the fact is that nowadays the royal family is no more than a branch of show business. It feeds the insatiable

appetite of those who live dull and boring lives for gossip and "personality".

There was a brief interlude in history when the royal family behaved and believed as if it ought to set an example, morally and religiously. But that is no longer the case. The excessive and irrational personality cult of Princess Diana was for someone of intellectual limitation (albeit more than compensated for by a humanity and concern) and sexual indiscretion. She was a "star".

I was able to observe Prince Charles when he spent a day with us at Carmel College in 1974, to celebrate our 35th anniversary. He was incredibly impressive in the way he had clearly learnt his role, to seem interested in everything and everyone and be excessively polite and friendly. He was an impeccable professional. But at the same time his entourage was busy picking up signals from him of which attractive females to proposition and invite onto his royal train. It seemed as though he had a royal procurer, unofficial of course. In this he was no different from almost all other royals and aristocrats who comprise the fabled Eurotrash jet set. What about him, or indeed his siblings, commands respect? The fact that one day he would inherit the title "Defender of the Faith"? Or his oft expressed wish to be the "Defender of Faiths"?

I am not arguing for the abolition. It is harmless enough and gives a sense of history and national identity, which is disappearing at a rapid rate as the United Kingdom descends to its own bland version of a multicultural, multiethnic society, preserving prejudice as it bends over backwards to indulge. It is not as if other models of national figureheads are any more satisfying or exemplary.

My lack of interest in a mediocre couple of human beings getting married, has repercussions on my attitude to our daily prayers in which we call for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. Do I really want to empower a human, however special, with powers of life and death, or even of mundane legislation? So I translate it in my mind into nostalgia for a misty autonomous past and an expression of hope for future perfection.

As for this royal family, I see no evidence of power or moral splendor, just the banality of personality worship and human credulity. Why should I make a blessing when I see no particular reason to? Mazaltov nevertheless, and LeChayim.