

The Schmooze Stories with a Yiddish Twist

THE CASE OF THE MISSING “DIMENT RING”*

*The Yiddish words for “diamond ring” are “diment ring.”

by
Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe



Syosset, New York

Today one can buy a .90 carat “Bashert” Yiddish Soul Mate Diamond 14K Mens Ring for the sale price of \$2,847. (Check out Sun Jewelry.)

De Beers advertising over the last century has established a “tradition” that a woman should receive a diamond ring as an engagement symbol. De Beers have extended the diamond engagement ring “tradition” by brain-washing us to believe that a diamond eternity ring should also be a tradition on the first wedding anniversary, or the birth of the first child.

A newspaper headline read: RETIRED FIREFIGHTER PULLS BRIDAL JEWELRY FROM THE SAND AT LONG ISLAND, POSTS TO FACEBOOK, AND FINDS THE OWNER THE SAME DAY.

Retired firefighter (“fayer -lesher”) and metal-detector enthusiast, Mike Cogan, made the “find of a lifetime” when he scooped up two platinum-and-diamond rings at Robert Moses State Park. The first was a three-stone engagement ring with a 1.3-carat round center diamond; the other was a wedding band adorned with small round diamonds. The engagement ring alone was worth more than \$13,000. Cogan turned to Facebook, posted a photograph (“fotografye”) of the wedding band. Later that same day, Erin McNulty Carrozzo contacted Cogan, identified the rings, and had them returned. Cogan said he knew how empty (“pust”) the owner had to feel. “I don’t want alone to feel like that, so I started my search.”

Cogan would be called “a gute neshome”--a good soul; a gentle person.

On a personal note, my late husband, Howard, presented me with a beautiful marquise diamond engagement ring in 1957. The marquise is like a pear but pointed on both ends. I'm quite sure that his mother paid for the ring since my husband-to-be was a first year high school teacher who was earning \$5,000 a year. I remember proudly wearing it to N.Y.U. where I was a student at the time.

Recently I came across a touching story titled, “Ringed-in by a mistake. It was published on Jewish World Review on Sept. 4, 2003, and was told anonymously to Chaim Walder. As I approach my Nov. 27th anniversary, I'd like to share it with you.

Our wedding took place twenty years ago.

Two weeks before our nupitals, my chosson (groom) took me to his grandmother's--a visit that, he explained, was a family tradition.

As we sat on her porch, she handed me a beautifully wrapped box containing a huge diamond ring. I didn't have to be a diamond expert to realize it must have cost a small fortune.

Everyone gasped. Bubby (Grandma) Chava simply said: “This is my gift to you.”

I soon learned that Bubby Chava gives each new kallah (bride) in the family a very expensive piece of jewelry so that he will always be remembered.

Actually, Bubby Chava was so sweet and such a darling, that it would be impossible for anybody to forget her.

My father thought that it unspeakable to go outside wearing such a ring when so many children in the country are starving. I, too, felt awkward about wearing the ring.

But a custom is a custom, and who was I to dispute its significance, especially when the ring cost \$5,000.

Yes, that is what it cost. How do I know? You'll soon find out.

It sounds petty to say this, but the ring was a bit big on me. Every woman knows how nerve-wracking it is when a ring is too wide and there's space between the ring and her finger. It drives you batty, like a mouth sore, and you walk around all day feeling your finger to see if the ring's still there.

And that's precisely what I did - throughout the entire wedding.

I spent the entire night worrying about the ring and making sure that it hadn't fallen off. But because I also had a wedding band, I had two rings to toy with for the same price--actually not for the same price.

The wedding passed. The sheva brochos celebratory week was fantastic. Both families came for the entire Shabbes (Sabbath), and the meals were accompanied by joyous zemiros songs. The droshos (speeches) were great.

We live in the coastal town of Netanya. And after the main Sabbath day meal, my new husband and I took a leisurely stroll on the boardwalk.

Shortly after the havdoloh ceremony, my new mother-in-law asked: "Where's the ring?"

I looked at my finger and, to my horror, the ring was gone. I turned pale.

A mini-commotion erupted and, to my horror, the ring was gone. I turned pale.

A mini-commotion erupted and my husband said: "I'll take a look in our room. Maybe you forgot it there."

I was very tense and began to bite my fingernails. Something in my heart told me that he might not find it. After all, the ring was a bit too large for me and I hadn't fingered it for quite a while.

Then the dreaded moment arrived. My husband returned - empty handed.

"Did you look in the closet?"

"Yes."

“In the drawers?”

“Yes.”

To make a long story short, he had looked everywhere. It had disappeared.

At that point, there wasn't a soul in the entire extended family who didn't know that I had lost a \$5,000 ring, except for Bubby Chava, who had gone home directly after havdoloh (Now you know how I knew its price. When things are lost, you find out how much they are worth very quickly. This is true not only with respect to jewelry, but also with respect to people.)

My mother-in-law, with a number of well-meaning aunts, began turning over our bedroom and, believe it or not, opening every drawer. Yes, every drawer.

The search lasted more than an hour. Each would-be Sherlock Holmes was certain he knew where the ring might be. When I finally dared to hint that it had been a bit big on me, one of the sleuths remonstrated: “Why didn't you say so in the first place?”

“I did!” I replied.

“Then the tension began to mount without hope of its subsiding. After listing all of the people and places we had spent the day visiting we concluded that the ring must have fallen off on the beach.

It's hard to pinpoint the precise moment that the seeds of resentment began to sprout. But when my husband and I finally went downstairs to the car, everyone looked a bit sour. Nobody tried to console me or to say that I wasn't to blame. And I understood them. It really was an expensive ring, and they should be commended for not having shouted: “Dunce, are you a baby who loses things!?” But they didn't have to yell. Their facial expressions said it all.

My husband and I returned home crestfallen. Trying to make light of the situation, my husband said: “Great! Now the ceiling price for my losing things is \$5,000.”

He paid dearly for that job, because I didn't see it as an attempt to dispel the tension. Rather, I perceived it as an attempt to needle me. And so I let out all the anger I felt against myself - on him.

He apologized and apologized, but to no avail. I was very hurt by both the loss of the ring and the accusations hurled against me.

My husband behaved like a tzaddid (saint). He consoled me and explained: "You're not to blame. The person who insisted that you wear the ring even though it was too big is at fault." He basically blamed himself. He was so sympathetic too. By the end of the evening, I concluded that if this had been a nisoyon, a Divine test, he had passed with flying colors.

Okay. He passed, but his family didn't. Every time we visited his family, the incident of the ring hovered in the air. Their sarcastic questions about how I felt about the lo made me squirm. I don't blame them. But apparently when one loses an item worth more than a hundred dollars, he pays a price that far exceeds that of the lost item.

Along with the ring, I lost my new family's love and esteem. I felt disliked and loathsome. After all, how can one hold in high regard a person who thoughtlessly discards a \$5,000 ring?

The beginning of my marriage was very gloomy. I felt that I could never regain my former esteem. The loss of the \$5,000 ring seemed to brand me as irresponsible and unreliable, as well as a pain-in-the-neck.

The situation peaked, when we bought an expensive vase and one of my brothers-in-law told my husband, "You'd better carry it you know." He said that in front of everyone. Well, all I can say is that I exploded and screamed that I wouldn't set foot in his house again.

Then the fighting period, during which my poor husband tried to bring about a reconciliation between them and me, began. He didn't actually include me in these efforts, but I understood that he had argued with his brothers, telling them that if they continued to pick on me, he would sever all ties with the family. Actually, we did sever the ties for about a week-and-a-half. But Bubby Chava intervened and eventually confirmed that she did indeed know the entire story.

Then came the appeasement, which was very unpleasant. My

mother-in-law apologized and claimed that of all her daughter-in-laws, she loved me best. I, in turn, made a number of gooey statements such as: "I always felt that you loved me."

But the whole affair had tired me out. While peace supposedly prevailed, it was a chilly peace. I felt crushed and sensed that my husband's family would never love me and never appreciate me - and certainly would never entrust me with an item worth more than a few dollars.

The turnabout came four months later. We had gotten married two days after the holiday of Shavuos. At the wedding and during sheva brochos week, my husband wore a frock (Prince Albert). He also was one on yomim tovim (religious festivals).

It was nearly Rosh Hashonoh. My husband took his frock out of the closet, put it on, and asked me if it still fit, or whether he had gained weight. I told him that he looked pretty thin.

Suddenly he thrust his hand into the pocket of his frock - and what do you think he fished out? My ring, of course.

We stared at the ring for a number of moments without saying a word. Then he said: "I'm in a state of shock. Apparently I placed the ring in my frock."

We sat opposite each other for a while - and then I burst into tears, releasing all of my pent-up emotions. My husband called his mother immediately and told her that he had found the ring. Shortly afterwards, everyone came over - his parents and his brothers, who examined the ring, and then Bubby and Zeidy (Grandpa). All were overjoyed that the ring had been found. All heaved sighs of relief and asked me to forgive them for the pain they had caused me.

They all wondered why, in the first place, they hadn't thought to check my husband's pocket.

From then on, I was the family's queen. All realized that they had erred and that I was a responsible person who never loses a thing. Quip like Poor Lady. But what can she do if she was destined to marry a scatter-brain who happens to be our son/brother? And it was so kind of her to have agreed to marry such a fellow were repeated regularly.

Even though my husband was slightly offended by the insults, he was still happy for me. In addition, he now had a happy wife, peace of mind and everlasting shalom bayis, marital harmony. I was in seventh heaven. Suddenly, I was being showered with tons of love and attention. But the story doesn't end here.

From that day on, I bore my husband a slight grudge for having caused me so much anguish during the first few months of our marriage. Funny, but during the early months when everyone thought that it was I who was to blame for the loss of the ring, my husband never used the incident as ammunition against me - and never needled me about it. But once the ring was found and he was considered the irresponsible one, I would use that point as a springboard to needle him whenever I could.

If we had money, I would tell him that I preferred to hold onto it myself, lest he lose it. When a package or a document had to be delivered, I would say: "Let someone else take it, so that it won't get lost in the sandbox." Soon, the phrase "in the sandbox" became an idiom I would use in order to hint that he was unreliable.

Many people take advantage of the foibles of those dearest to them in order to ridicule them. This is a form of hono'as devorim which is forbidden by the Torah. But that is precisely what I did.

My husband suffered in silence and didn't complain. There were times when I saw his pained expression when I spoke that way and I would feel sorry and placate him. But beyond the pained expression, he never complained.

Actually, we were very happy and our life proceeded smoothly. We had seven adorable children who loved their parents. They, too, knew the story about the ring in which all thought that Mommy had lost it on the beach and which, in fact, absentminded Daddy had actually forgotten in his frock. Who told them? You guessed it. Little ol' me!

Fifteen years passed. I still wore the ring to important simchas, life-cycle events, and received many compliments for it. One day, though, in order to surprise my husband, I decided to get rid of the ring by exchanging it for some other pieces of jewelry. I asked my mother-in-law where Bubby Chava bought her jewelry and she replied: "At Yankel Cohen's. He's a fine jeweler."

One afternoon, I went to Mr. Cohen's store and showed him the ring. "My husband's grandmother bought this here," I told him "and I want you to appraise it for me."

"Wow," he shrieked after examining it. "It's gorgeous - worth a lot of money - more than \$6,000. I don't mind exchanging it for whatever you want. But I just want you to know that she didn't buy it here."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked in surprise. Then I told him her name and said that she always buys her jewelry from him.

"True," he replied "She always buys her jewelry here. But I never sold such a ring in my life. Apparently she bought it somewhere else."

I thought a bit and then figured that since the ring might be worth more than \$6,000, I should really check with my husband before exchanging it.

When I came home, I rummaged through my jewelry box for the ring's receipt. When I found it, I learned that it really hadn't been bought in Mr. Cohen's jewelry store, but at a very exclusive and famous jeweler in town. It had indeed cost \$5,000, and its price had apparently risen over the years. But then an additional detail, which I might have ignored under normal conditions, caught my eye.

I waited until my husband returned home, my heart beating like a sledgehammer all along. When he arrived, I told him that I had wanted to exchange the ring for some other pieces of jewelry, and that I had spoken with Mr. Cohen, who said it was worth \$6,000.

"Great," my husband replied. "We made a thousand dollars."

"Yes, but Mr. Cohen said that Bubby bought the ring somewhere else" I demurred.

"Could be," he said.

"Do you mean to say that Bubby Chava might have bought MY gift somewhere else?"

"What's the problem?" he asked.

"I'll tell you what's bothering me," I said as tears streamed down my

cheeks. “For fifteen years I didn’t realize what a good-hearted and wonderful husband you are - one I don’t deserve. You pulled that one over in the most amazing manner possible. I lost my ring and you quietly took a loan and bought me a new one. No, don’t try to hide it. You did that in the most elegant and polished manner possible. I lost my ring, and you quietly took out a loan and bought me a new one. No don’t try to hide it. You found exactly the same ring for the same price. But you forgot one thing - to hide the purchase date.”

Then I showed him the receipt with the purchase date, the 14th of Elul. “Maybe you’ve forgotten, but I still remember that we were married on the 9th of Sivan. BubbyChava gave me the ring before the wedding, so that this ring was bought four months after I got the original one. The date gave you away,” I protested - and then burst into tears.

It is difficult to describe the thoughts that raced through my mind at that time. Imagine that! A young man takes on a \$5,000 debt so that his family would believe that HE is to blame for the loss of a ring, and not his wife. What a gift! I knew that I was the only woman in the world who had received such a present. I am not referring to the ring, but to the fifteen years during which the blame was shifted from me to him. Until today, I shudder when I recall how I kicked him in what I thought was his Achille’s Heel, but which was really the area in which he excelled.

That evening, he told me what he had gone through in order to secretly pay back that debt to make sure that I would never be the wiser. He then explained that he couldn’t have eliminated the resentment between me and his family, unless they thought that I wasn’t to blame. “They’re good people,” he said. “But good people also have weaknesses. What could I do? That was their weakness.”

It took him years to repay that debt, and I had made things worse for him by my digs. But even those digs reminded him of what he had gained--a happy wife, peace of mind and marital harmony.

I am telling this story because I want to share the lesson I learned with everyone. The lesson is: Never remind a person of his weakness, and surely don’t make it the subject of your digs. But most important: Clear your hearts of all resentment and preconceived notions, because even if you don’t badger a person who erred, your anger at him will find ways to project itself.

Nothing is worth the anguish and pain we suffered over the loss of the ring. Gold and diamonds come and go, and sometimes even get lost in sandboxes. So be it, as long as human beings aren't hurt as a result.

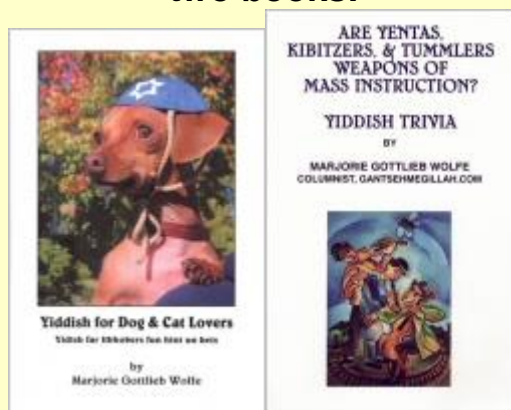
Learn from my husband, too. For fifteen years he agreed to be blamed for a blunder he hadn't committed - so that his wife would be happy. In that way he is like Rabbi Akiva who said: "A person should throw himself into a fiery furnace if only not to see the disgrace of his fellow."

This seems like a story about a diamond ring, but it is really a story about a golden heart.

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Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:



"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and "Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish Trivia." To order a copy, go to her website: MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com

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