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Special Edition with YUConnects®

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Part II • 5773

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lives on in all of us.*

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please visit www.yutorah.org/togo/youconnects

מכתב ברכה

יום ג' לפ' והלכת בדרכיו, י"ז אלול.

רז"ל הורגו (סוטה יד.) שמה הוא - אף אתה, ומה הוא שימש כשדכן לחתן את אדם וחוה, אף אנו נלוינו בזה - לשמור על גלם האלקים שהוטבע בנו, וכהמשך לשון הפסוק - וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ד' נקרא עליך וגו'.

ובמ' שבת (לא.) נזכר שבשעה שמכניסים אדם לדין (בעולם האמת) שואלים אותו שש שאלות, והשאלה השלישית - עסקת צפריה ורביה - ביאר מהרש"א בחדושי אגדות שמה דר"ל - האם עסקת לסדר שידוכים.

ואין בן דוד בא על שיכלו כל נשמות שבגוף (יבמות סב.), וכל המשךך זוג הר"ז ממחר ביאת המשיח. וברכה מיוחדת לחברת ה"מלרפ"ס" על שעוסקים במלוא חשובה זו, ובמיוחד - על שכבר הגיעו למאה שידוכים. וכה יעשה ד' וכה יוסף, להמשיך לשלוח ברכה במעשי ידיהם ולהוסיף עוד כהנה וכהנה עד שכזכה בקרוב לקבל פני משיח לרקנו.

ברוך ברכה,

Letter of Blessing (Translated from Hebrew)

The third day of the week of Parshas Ki Savo, 17 Elul.

Our Rabbis, of blessed memory, instruct us (*Sotah* 14a) that a person must act like G-d. Just like He arranged the marriage of Adam and Eve so too are we commanded to make shidduchim in order to preserve the image of G-d that we were created with, and thus we will fulfill the verse: "and the nations of the land will see that you carry the name of G-d."

The Talmud in *Masechta Shabbos* (31a) mentions that when a person is brought to judgment (in the world to come), he is asked six questions; the third question, whether you were involved in procreation, is explained by the Maharsha in his *Chiddushei Aggados* as referring to whether you were involved in making shidduchim.

Mashiach will not come until all of the souls are brought into this world (*Yevamos* 62a), and thus anyone who makes a shidduch expedites the coming of Mashiach. YUConnects should receive a special blessing for their involvement in this special mitzvah, and in particular on the occasion of reaching 100 shidduchim. "And so should Hashem do and so may He increase," to continue to send blessing in your work and to increase that blessing in every way until we will merit shortly to greet Mashiach Tzidkeinu.

With much blessing,

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

"YUConnects is a program that successfully helps single men and women meet. It thoughtfully combines personal insight, computer networking and appropriate social events. We encourage men and women who are dating to register in the YUConnects database and to participate in YUConnects events. May all of those involved in the chessed of facilitating shidduchim be blessed with success in their efforts on behalf of Klal Yisrael."

Rabbi Hershel Schachter & Rabbi Mordechai Willig, Roshei Yeshiva, RIETS

Foreword

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

The David Mitzner Dean, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

YUConnects is YU's Center for the Jewish Future's social and relationship-building program, convening the Torah, educational and research-based resources of Yeshiva University. The program initiates conversations with community leaders, mental health professionals, high school, post-high school and college educators and the greater community, focused on partnering to build healthy relationship-building fundamentals. Additionally, YUConnects offers many comfortable social and networking events for unmarried men and women, plus a growing database of singles with the help of trained and caring connectors.

The *bracha* of *Yotzer ha'Adam*, creator of humankind, recited underneath the *chuppah* when an individual gets married, rather than at the time when they are born, highlights the additional level of *shleimut*, completion, achieved in our creation when an individual succeeds in finding their life partner. Nowhere but here, at Yeshiva University, are there *roshei yeshiva*, academics, *sganei mashgichim*, researchers, *rabbeim*, scholars, relationship-building experts, dedicated connectors and event planners all working tirelessly toward the same goal of *yotzer ha'adam*—supporting healthy relationship-building in our community. The unique composition of our Yeshiva and University puts us in a wonderful position to deal educationally with the systemic challenges in relationship development, increase meeting and networking opportunities for singles, and help our children navigate the possible twists along the road.

The outpouring of emails received after the release of Part I demonstrates the collective interest, relevance, and need for YUConnects to continue its important work. For this reason, I am confident that this second edition, which focuses on more relationship building topics will be similarly appreciated. We plan to address additional topics suggested by our readers in future publications and educational resources.

Some recently received comments include:

“These words of wisdom are a perfect blend of Yeshiva and University with halachic sensitivity and worldly enlightenment ... you have created an honest and helpful guide that should be a ‘must read’ before embarking on the dating scene.” — Parent and grandparent

“Yasher Koach on the excellent publication and your incredible work in helping to build a happier, stronger, Klal Yisrael.” — Pulpit rabbi on the West Coast

“The YUConnects To-Go was a wonderful ensemble and each feature was a gem ... it contained hundreds of unique insights, and provided tips and perspectives to keep in mind for the future. Thank you for enabling all the writers to present and share their pearls of wisdom with students like me.” — Senior at Stern College

Marriage is an important milestone in life, and the more time we take to prepare ourselves for this opportunity, as well as for the intricacies and challenges involved, the richer our marriages will be.

This also underscores our paramount belief that education is the underpinning for success in all aspects of life. Our goal is to expand horizons, broaden attitudes and hearts, and create maximum opportunities within the dating realm while simultaneously reinforcing positive relationship-building blocks. These activities contribute to the utmost happiness in the Jewish home.

Special thanks to our talented authors for sharing their insights and professional expertise with our readership.

The ongoing commitment of our advisory board demonstrates the importance of this holy work. Sharon Blumenthal, Dr. Daniel Berman, Michelle Berman, Michael Feldstein, Dov Greenblatt, Dr. Naomi Greenblatt, Sharon Haberman, Charlie Harary, Dr. Tova Koenigsberg, Cheryl Nagel, Henry Orlinsky and Dr. David Pelcovitz.

A special thank you to the wonderful professionals at Yeshiva University's Center for Jewish Future, Yoni Cohen, Genene Kaye, Levi Mostofsky, Julie Schreier and Suzy Schwartz, for their ongoing guidance and support. To our talented editors, Rabbis Josh Flug and Rob Shur without whom this endeavor would not have moved forward. To our YUConnects team ably headed by the vision, tenacity and selflessness of Dr. Efrat Sobolofsky, and her colleagues Mindy Eisenman, Margie Glatt and Tova Klapper.

To Dr. David Pelcovitz, Rabbi Hershel Schachter and Rabbi Mordechai Willig, who serve as the mental health and religious guides for YUConnects: we are inspired by your leadership and humbly grateful for your assistance in all facets of our program.

We owe a debt of gratitude to President Richard M. Joel for his encouragement and guidance, which continues to motivate and inspire us. None of this would have been possible without his support.

To our financial supporters and sponsors—we thank you for making the YUConnects To-Go publications possible. Your continued support will allow more singles to join our subsidized website, participate in more social, networking and educational events, and to afford more partnership opportunities with communities across the country. Additional research projects, vital to the continual development of best practices, have been proposed and are awaiting funding and sponsorship.

A hearty mazal tov to the recently engaged and married couples who met through one of the program's venues. May your weddings be the beginning of a long-lasting, beautiful life together as you build a bayit neeman b'yisrael. A special hakarat hatov to the volunteering connectors, event facilitators and staff members who enable all of these wonderful blessings.

Consider a generous gift enabling more programs, events, research and matchmaking, all geared toward ultimately establishing more Jewish homes and families.

Finally, words cannot express our debt of gratitude to our Creator for enabling us to partner with Him in this very special mitzvah of bringing eternal joy and companionship into the lives of others, as we truly continue to build the Jewish future.

Thank you,
Rabbi Kenneth Brander

The Concept of *Bashert*

Rabbi Josh Blass¹

Navigating the dating landscape can be an experience fraught with frustration and uncertainty. In addition to the inherent complexities of the dating process, some individuals feel the overarching pressure to find one's *bashert*, one's unique soul mate who is thought to be predetermined by celestial forces. The anxiety-ridden question of whether "this is the one" whom G-d chose for me to marry can prevent the cultivation of a healthy relationship. This article presents some of the classic sources on the idea of *bashert*, and evaluates how some *Rishonim* approach the assertion that each person has a predestined mate. Additionally, it suggests how Chazal's views about *bashert* can be integrated into one's dating experiences in a healthy manner.

The earliest and most extensive sources on the topic of *bashert* can be found in two separate Talmudic passages. The Talmud (*Sotah* 2a) states:

Rav Shmuel the son of Rav Yitzchak states when Reish Lakish began to teach [the subject of] Sotah, he would begin by saying that a man receives a wife in accordance to his merits.

א"ר שמואל בר רב יצחק כי הוה פתח ריש לקיש בסוטה אמר הכי אין מזוגין לו לאדם אשה אלא לפי מעשיו.

Rashi [ad loc] clarifies that a person who is righteous is rewarded for his goodness by having the opportunity to marry an equally pious individual. While this Gemara indicates that G-d plays a significant role in the shidduch process by rewarding a righteous individual with an equally righteous spouse, the match is not made pursuant to a predestined metaphysical connection. Rather, man's actions are the predominant factor underlying the process of how one's mate is chosen.

The Gemara immediately challenges the concept that man's actions determine who he will marry with the famous dictum said by Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav:

Forty days before the creation of a child, a Heavenly voice issues forth and proclaims the daughter of so-and-so will go to so-and-so.

ארבעים יום קודם יצירת הולד בת קול יוצאת ואומרת בת פלוני לפלוני.

Clearly, Rav Yehudah's heavenly focused approach to *bashert* is wholly different than the position espoused by Reish Lakish. The Talmud reconciles these two divergent views through the statement that one's *zivug rishon*, first mate, is determined in the Heavenly realm, while one's *zivug sheini*, second mate, is determined by one's own deeds and personal initiative.

¹ Rabbi Josh Blass (YC '95, RIETS '98) serves as a Mashgiach Ruchani in Yeshiva University. He has had extensive experience in counseling men and women about issues revolving relationships and marriage. Rabbi Blass also serves as the Rabbi of Kehillas Bais Yehudah in Wesley Hills, NY.

While the exchange in *Sotah* establishes the concept of *bashert*, the idea of a predestined soul mate finds a more radical application in *Moed Kattan* 18b. Generally, marriage is prohibited on *Chol Hamoed*, the intermediary days of a festival, so that one can wholly focus on the joy of the holiday and not on one's own personal happiness. However, the Gemara states in the name of Shmuel that:

<p><i>It is permissible to betroth a woman on Chol Hamoed lest another [man] interject himself [and betroth her first].</i></p>	<p>מותר לארס אשה בחולו של מועד שמא יקדמנו אחר.</p>
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This statement seems to be at odds with the principle of *bashert* elucidated in *Sotah*. How is it possible for another individual to step in and short-circuit the Heavenly voice that predetermined the relationship between a specific male and specific female? How can a man possess this ability? The Gemara answers that it is the prayers of this individual that may possess the power to dissolve the intended union. If this man truly desires to betroth a woman for whom he is not predestined, his prayers may be potent enough to dissolve the intended match, thus threatening the intended union. Therefore, in order to ensure the actuality of the *bashert* relationship, Shmuel sanctions betrothal during *Chol HaMoed*.

Although this passage clearly affirms Chazal's belief that each individual has a predestined match, some *Rishonim* further radicalize the application of *bashert*. The *Ba'alei Tosfos*, most notably Reb Yechiel Mei'Paris as well as the Ritva, add that if a preordained match is broken by the prayers of a third party, any new union created with a member of the original *bashert* relationship by definition will not be a joyous one since it is not truly the intended relationship.

Rashi (D'H Oh Ihu) understands the Gemara in a more extreme fashion by explaining that the *bashert* union is so strong that even *tefillah* is ineffective to dissolve the match. Based on the continuation of the Gemara, Rashi explains that Shmuel encourages betrothal during *Chol HaMoed* not to ensure that no man prays to marry a specific woman, but to ensure that no man prays for a woman's life to be shortened before she can become betrothed to her originally intended mate. According to Rashi, *tefillah* might be effective in this woman meeting a more immediate death, but it has absolutely no ability to change one's *bashert*.

Only slightly less radical is the position of the *Nimukei Yosef* (10b in the pages of the Rif) who avers that even though *tefillah* might have a short-term effect on changing one's *bashert*, ultimately the Heavenly voice must come to fruition and the original *bashert* match will somehow find themselves together. What all three of these positions share in common is that *bashert* is not simply a theoretical concept, but a serious notion with both practical and halachic ramifications.

The Meiri establishes an intermediate position that upholds the concept of *bashert*, but seeks to limit its range of application, essentially eliminating any practical expression to the idea of *bashert*. While most *Rishonim* believe that the *zivug rishon* and *zivug shaini* discussed in the Gemara in *Sotah* literally refers to a first marriage and a second marriage, the Meiri (*Sotah* 2a) explains these concepts in a totally different vein. He understands that a *zivug rishon* is speaking of a marriage that occurs at a very young age, before one truly has his own meaningful actions and *zechuyos* (merits). For such a person, the only means of determining his mate would be

through the Heavenly channel of a *bas kol*. However, one who marries at an older age, the *zivug sheini* of the Gemara, is a more fully formed individual with a track record of actions upon which a match can be determined.²

While the Meiri acknowledges the theoretical concept of *bashert*, but limits its application, the Rambam completely eliminates the notion of a predetermined marriage. In general, the limitation of our classic understanding of *hashgacha pratis* (Divine intervention on an individual level), and the ability of miracles to change the natural course of the world, is a theme that manifests itself throughout the Rambam's writings.³ As such, the Rambam's reluctance to embrace the concept of *bashert* is consistent with his overall worldview. The Rambam writes in a *teshuva* (436) that it is only the *kochos hateva*, the natural forces such as the wind and the rain, that are under the domain of G-d's control in this world. One's choice of a spouse, and other such worldly decisions, lie fully in the purview and control of man. The Rambam marshals support from the halacha that a betrothed man is exempt from serving in the army because a third party might step in during his absence and claim his intended's hand in marriage. The Rambam argues that if marriages are predetermined, and thus outside the control of man, why would the Torah be concerned about the engaged man going off to war? Furthermore, the Rambam explains the famous Talmudic dictum that "*hakol bi'yidei shamayim chutz miyiras shamayim*"—everything is in G-d's hands besides fear of Heaven—to mean that "fear of Heaven" reflects all human choices. Therefore, all human choice and endeavors are firmly in man's control.⁴

What emerges from the above sources is that with the exception of the Rambam, who outright rejects the notion of *bashert*, and the Meiri and Chasam Sofer,⁵ who modify its application, that the majority of the Rishonim, embrace the notion of a singular, predetermined partner. This of course raises the question of in what way, if any, should this concept of *bashert* play a role in the process of forging a healthy and vibrant relationship with one's potential spouse? The reality is that both research and experience have borne out that loving and dedicated relationships are developed over the course of many years. It is by no means a reflection of an unhappy marriage for one or both spouses to sincerely believe that they could have married one of many people and been able to have built a loving and fulfilling marriage. As complicated as relationships may be, finding one's lifetime companion often boils down to finding a person who you enjoy being around, who you are attracted to, who shares key values with you and who has a similar life

² The Chasam Sofer, *Teshuvos Chasam Sofer* 7:34, also explains the Gemara in a way that limits the scope of predeterminism in the dating process, albeit in a way that is quite different than the Meiri. The Chasam Sofer, based on an idea of the Arizal, clarifies that the *zivug rishon* of the Gemara refers to a state in utero in which G-d, recognizing that man is only complete when connected to another soul of the opposite sex, unifies two souls. Since that man's completion comes via the spiritual unification with another, creation would be incomplete without the existence of a soul mate during its creation process. However, once man is born and his life is directed by his own choices, then his spouse, his *zivug sheini*, is determined by his own actions.

³ See, e.g., *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:25.

⁴ Parenthetically, the Rambam, in his rejection of the concept of *bashert*, does not explain the Talmudic statements that clearly believe that relationships are predestined.

⁵ See note 1.

vision to your own, and then dedicate yourself to a lifetime of working on yourself and on the relationship. This is a formula that potentially could exist with a number of people.

How then are we to synthesize the practical dating experience in which the notion of *bashert* plays essentially no role, together with Chazal's view, which clearly assumes that each person has a specific individual for whom they are intended? How is one to navigate between real life experience that often rejects the concept of *bashert*, and our full acceptance of Chazal who affirm it?

Perhaps one can suggest that there is a world of difference between the mindset of someone embarking on the dating stage of life and the attitude of one who successfully has been able to cultivate a loving marriage. While the individual who is dating should recognize that preoccupation with the notion of *bashert* can become a debilitating and counter-productive mindset, one who is fortunate enough to have built a strong marriage over the course of many years might allow themselves a different sort of reflection. Namely, that after a lifetime of developing a loving and affectionate bond together, of laughing together, of building a functioning home together, of having and raising children together and generally sharing all of the victories and vicissitudes, all of the intense peaks and valleys that constitute one's personal tapestry, that it is hard to imagine one's life with anyone else. In a sense, that is a vision of *bashert* that is less a potential cause for anxiety during dating and more of a rewarding end goal to aspire to over the course of a lifetime.

Respect in Marriage: A Two-way Street

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg¹

The Torah's approach to respect in marriage is sometimes misunderstood. Some men draw erroneous conclusions about respect in marriage based on certain statements of Chazal. Many are familiar with the statement of the Gemara (*Pesachim* 108a) that a woman who is eating at the Seder table with her husband is exempt from reclining. The Rashbam there explains that the exemption is due to the fact that a woman wouldn't feel comfortable reclining in the presence of her husband since she is in awe of him. In addition, the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30b) states that a married woman is exempt from honoring her parents because she is responsible to be available to serve her husband.

The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Ishus* (15:19):

The Chachamim commanded that a woman should honor her husband excessively. She should revere him. She should act by the word of his mouth. He should be in her eyes like a minister or a king. She should follow the desires of his heart and distance whatever he dislikes.

וכן צוו חכמים על האשה שתהיה מכבדת את בעלה ביותר מדאי ויהיה לו עליה מורא ותעשה כל מעשיה על פיו ויהיה בעיניה כמו שר או מלך מהלכת בתאות לבו ומרחקת כל שישנא.

The impression one gets from these statements of the Gemara and the Rambam is that Chazal felt that in an ideal Jewish home, all decisions should be dictated by the whims and desires of the husband. He should be the master in control of everything, much like a feudal lord, and his wife is obligated to respect and to serve him.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the Rambam writes in the previous halacha (15:18)

The Chachamim commanded that a man should honor his wife even more than himself.

וכן צוו חכמים שיהיה אדם מכבד את אשתו יתר מגופו.

Clearly, the need for respect in marriage is not a one-sided gesture. It has to be a mutual exchange. This is what is implied by the Gemara (*Yevamos* 62b), which says:

One who loves his wife as he loves himself and honors her more than himself... about him the verse says, "And you will know that your tent is in peace."

האוהב את אשתו כגופו והמכבדה יותר מגופו ... עליו הכתוב אומר וידעת כי שלום אהלך.

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Apparently, a man is just as obligated to honor and respect his wife as she is required to do so with him. What's more, from the Gemara it would appear that marital peace and harmony is dependent not on a wife's respect for her husband, but on a husband's respect for his wife.

How can respect be a mutual feeling? How can a woman respect her husband if she knows that he is also required to respect her? The answer is that honor and respect cannot be demanded; they can only be earned. As the Mishna says in *Pirkei Avos* (4:1), "Who is honored? One who honors others." Conversely, the Gemara (*Eruvin* 13b) comments, "One who searches for honor, honor will elude him."

When a person demands respect from others, he or she may get them to do their bidding, but real respect will be absent. They might listen to the commands of that person out of fear, but admiration will be missing from the relationship. People tend to respect those who act in a refined manner, those who show sensitivity to others, those who think less of themselves and more of other people. The less self-centered a person is, the more honor and respect he'll earn because his behavior will lead people to admire him. The same is true of a spouse. The more selfless and respectful a spouse is toward the other, the more likely it is for the other to reciprocate those very same values.

It is no coincidence that the Rambam writes that a woman should view her husband like a king, because if a man wants his wife to respect him, his behavior should model that of an ideal Jewish king. The Navi (*Melachim I*, 12:3-16) describes how after Shlomo Hamelech died, the people asked his son Rechavam to ease some of the financial burden that Shlomo had placed on them. When Rechavam sought counsel from the elders who had advised his father Shlomo, they told him to listen to the people. "If today you become a servant to this people and serve them," they said, "if you respond favorably to them and speak kind words to them, then they will be your servants forever."

But Rechavam decided to ignore the elders and instead he followed the advice of his young friends who told him to respond harshly to the people and refuse to lighten their tax burden. The result was that most of the kingdom abandoned Rechavam. He did not gain their respect by talking tough. After all, he hadn't sacrificed for them yet as a king. He hadn't given them anything yet. Making demands without giving of oneself rarely brings a person respect. Sometimes it can even spark rebellion. Rechavam failed to understand that the role of a proper Jewish king is to sacrifice for his subjects, to lead them in battle, to provide for their needs. Until he had demonstrated his willingness to give to the people selflessly, he couldn't expect to earn their respect.

The same is true in marriage. It's important for men to realize that while a wife might be obligated to honor and respect her husband, it has to start with the husband. He has to act toward his wife in a way that endears him to her, in a way that demonstrates how much he values and cherishes her. If he is selfless in his behavior toward her, then she will naturally respond with love and kindness, with honor and respect.

How can spouses show respect to each other? I believe there are three things that every spouse can do. The first is to compliment and show appreciation to one another for the efforts that each one invests on behalf of the other and the family.

The Chazon Ish once wrote to an engaged young man, “Pay attention every moment to the fact that a wife has pleasure from being attractive in her husband’s eyes... If she hangs a picture on the wall or places a plant on the table, she does all this for him and he is obligated to see and to recognize good on every such occasion.” (Rabbi Jeff Forsythe, a noted private counselor, quotes this letter in his writings.)

The Chazon Ish understood that a woman wants to feel appreciated by her husband. She wants to feel that he values her contribution to the home and family. It’s not enough for the husband to simply feel gratitude in his heart. He has to express those feelings verbally to his wife. Similarly, a wife should express appreciation to her husband for everything he does for the home and family. She should never take his efforts for granted.

A person should be very careful not to speak negatively to their spouse, not to offend or insult. As the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59a) says in the name of Rav:

<i>A man should always be wary not to wrong his wife verbally, for since she cries easily (when she is offended), the punishment for the one who wronged her comes quickly as well.</i>	לעולם יהא אדם זהיר באונאת אשתו שמתוך שדמעתה מצויה אונאתה קרובה.
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Even subtle criticism or lack of praise can be interpreted by a wife as a sign of disapproval. Whether the food is delicious or not, often stretching the truth just a bit can go a long way toward strengthening the bond between husband and wife.

Sometimes people become impatient with their spouse, especially after a long day at work. They may feel stressed or exhausted. They may lapse and speak to their spouse with disrespect if they feel their needs are not being met. Rav Yitzchak Blazer, one of the famous *talmidim* of Rav Yisrael Salanter, used to say that a person should treat his wife with the same respect and patience that he would treat a stranger (*Kochvei Or*, Biographical Sketch, p. 16). No matter how tired a person feels, he always tries to act politely with a stranger. A spouse deserves no less.

In addition, one should make every effort to avoid arguing with their spouse. Even if a person does have an argument with his spouse, he should never be afraid to apologize and move on. Dr. Meir Wikler, a noted psychotherapist, is fond of saying that when he lectures on the topic of marital harmony, he often asks the audience, “What are the three most important words in marriage?” And he quickly adds, “The first word is ‘I,’ but the third word is not ‘you.’” After the audience looks at him quizzically for a few moments, he tells them the answer. “The three most important words in marriage are ‘I was wrong.’”

That simple statement says it all—that the person realizes that marriage is not about winning. It’s about sharing. It’s about building a life together. Sometimes people are afraid to apologize because they think it makes them look meek to their spouse. In fact, the opposite is true. A person is more likely to admire a spouse who is willing to apologize. Why? Because when a

person is able to admit his or her faults, it demonstrates that they're not afraid to be selfless. They respect the opinion of their spouse. They see their spouse as an equal, not as an adversary.

This is one way that spouses can show honor and respect to one another, by showering each other with only positive words. But there is another way as well, and that is by helping with the household responsibilities, whether it is paying the bills, cleaning/maintaining the home or driving carpool, because by doing so, they demonstrate that they are equal partners in these responsibilities.

What's more, when it comes to running the household, a man should take care of his wife's needs even before his own. This is evident from the actions of Avraham Avinu. The *posuk* says at the beginning of *Parshas Lech Lecha* (12:8) "וַיִּטְּ אֹהֶל־הוּא—And he pitched his tent." But the word "tent" is written with a *hey*, not a *vav*. If the word were to be read as it is written, it would mean "her tent," not "his tent." Why would the Torah change the spelling of the word? The *Midrash Rabba* there explains that it teaches us that Avraham set up his wife's tent before his own. Pitching the tents was clearly Avraham Avinu's job; it wasn't expected that Sarah should help him with such strenuous labor. And yet, even while discharging his own responsibilities, Avraham Avinu was able to show his respect for Sarah by taking care of her needs before his own.

This is the second way that spouses can honor each other, by sharing the responsibilities of the household. But there is a third avenue as well, and that is by simply spending quality time with one another—talking, discussing, sharing the events of the day. A woman enjoys being a part of her husband's life. When a man involves his wife in his life decisions, when he shares his successes with her, and maybe even some of his challenges, she feels like a partner, like an equal.

After his first wife passed away, Rabbi Akiva Eiger wrote a letter (*Michtivei Rabbi Akiva Eiger*, no. 149) in which he bemoans his terrible loss. "With whom will I share my worries?" he writes. "Who will care for me? Who will give me their attention? ... Few know the extent of her righteousness and modesty. Many times we had discussions about *yiras Shamayim* until midnight."

The tone of the letter is quite remarkable. After all, Rabbi Akiva Eiger was quite a busy man. As a leader of the Jewish community, a renowned *talmid chacham* and posek, he was sought after by numerous people. And yet, not only did he make time to speak with his wife when he came home at night, apparently he cherished those discussions. Rabbi Akiva Eiger should serve as a model for the importance of spending quality time with one's wife.

These are just a few ways that spouses can show respect for each other and earn trust and love in return. The important thing to keep in mind is that respect in a relationship is counterintuitive. Sometimes people think that the more assertive they are, the more they will be respected. But the reality is that when a person thinks less of him or herself, they become even more endeared to their spouse, and ultimately the more cherished and admired they will be.

Marriage: Confidence Bred by Commitment

Chani Juravel, CSW¹

Often, in working with couples or with a married client, a crisis of confidence will be expressed on one of two dimensions. One is the question of whether the marriage is truly “*bashert*” (Divinely ordained). That question leaves a partner plagued by doubt and lots of thoughts of the “would have, should have, could have” nature. Second is the theme of mistrust: disappointment and resentment over the partner’s disappointing performance in some way. Perhaps professionally he/she isn’t earning up to par, or parenting effectively ... or just not impressive overall.

Every case is different and frustrations of these sorts are no doubt real and deserve validation. Work with the couple can take many directions. We can help a client understand the cause of attraction to the partner and how it was originally meant (consciously or otherwise) to be healing and hopeful. We can focus on communication styles and each partner’s ways of displaying and needing love and how, if the couple “speaks different languages,” it may leave them feeling disconnected. We may also need to help a client mourn what a marriage *isn’t*, and that can be important work, even if the marriage will be saved.

Additionally, if the marriage is healthy on the whole and the work will be about getting it on track, it can be helpful to restore belief in the marriage and reestablish trust on the two counts mentioned above. First, a sense of confidence in the partner as right and most fitting, as well as trusting and respecting each other within the framework of the relationship.

A successful marriage is built upon having that trust. In fact, the essence of a *bayit ne’eman* (trusting home) is the root of *emuna*, of faith and trust inherent in the union. Helping make that trust a reality is such a valuable process.

Appreciating the Master Plan

Under the *chupa* (bridal canopy), every couple starts out their married life hearing seven beautiful blessings, reiterated at each of their *sheva brachot* celebrations. One of those blessings bears question. We wish the couple the *simcha* of the very first of couples, Adam and Chava, the *rayim ahuvim* (beloved friends) who began their lives in Gan Eden. Let’s think about that. Here you are, starting your married life, with all of your options of marriage models open. You could

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be blessed to be like Avraham and Sarah, who so respected each other's goals and being. You could fashion yourself after Yaakov and Rachel, with a love so natural and personalities so in sync. But we prefer to wish the starry-eyed couple that they be blessed to emulate Adam and Chava, a couple who ignored G-d's command and caused our exile from the Garden of Eden; were left homeless and bearing eternal hardships; and had one son who killed another. Are we hearing the *bracha*?

We most definitely can. For in spite of all of the disappointment and turmoil they experienced, Adam and Chava were unique in experiencing a blessing that is paramount in marriage. They were blessed in the fact that they could not compare or contrast their spouse to another. It is that clarity—that *this person* is the human being most appropriate and *bashert* to me—that allows a couple serenity of the highest form; trusting in the fact that they are right and best for each other is the foundation most critical to creating a healthy, focused marriage. For it is that *ne'emanut* (faithfulness) that is at the core of a *bayit ne'eman*.

The morning after she was engaged, a young kalla's father invited her to talk. He asked her how she felt. She responded with all of the expected superlatives. Her father smiled warmly. "I just need to tell you," he said, "that you may not always feel this way. It may be tomorrow, a month from now, 20 years from now at a neighborhood barbeque... You'll wonder if he was the right one for you or if you could have chosen otherwise." The young woman was shocked and offended. Was her father implying that she made the wrong choice? Not at all. "I'm just educating you: it's a process. Often, we find that Hashem gives clarity, then withdraws, and allows for us to come to it by our own work and initiative. There are so many examples: He has an angel teaching a baby Torah in utero, then taps him and causes the learning to be forgotten, and the child has to recreate that learning on his own. He gave the Torah at Sinai, withdrew, we faltered and then had to yearn for a second set of luchot. Once we did, in spite of the second tablets being inferior to the first, they are the ones still with us today. In the same vein, He now gave you the clarity you had to choose your mate and enter this marriage. It is up to you to retain that clarity once the magic is withdrawn. Only then will it be yours in a way that is lasting. The work you put into maintaining that clarity—remembering that your choice is most fitting and right for you, even when it's not as obvious as it is now—will be the key to your marriage's success and your happiness in it."

We are taught (Chavakuk 2:4) that "*Tzaddik b'emunato yichyeh*"—and typically define that to mean that a righteous person lives by the dictates of his belief. It goes much deeper than that, says Rav Rephael Menachem Schlanger in his *Ohel Rachel*. It is only by having *emuna*, true belief that there is a Power governing our lives and that the lives we are living are the ones lovingly and expertly fashioned by Him for us, that one can truly *live*. Without that belief, we are constantly plagued by doubt and insecurity. Without a base of belief in a Power beyond our own, we are limited to our own limited perceptions and abilities. And that would not allow for real living.

Under normal circumstances, within the context of a marriage with potential (for there are marriages that need to be dissolved, and that is a topic beyond the scope of this article), that belief has to extend to our life's partner being part of our life's prescription. Without that basis, it is hard to really breathe and live comfortably in the marriage. With lack of confidence in the marriage being *bashert*, there is a lot less motivation to put in the effort to see it work and thrive.

The root of the word *emuna* and its meaning can be gleaned from two sources in Tanach. In Yeshaya (22:23), we find reference to a peg affixed in a *makom ne'eman*, a secure place. In Bamidbar (11:12) we learn of an “*omain*,” caring for and nursing an infant. The two obviously different meanings offer a composite in understanding the type of belief that allows for ideal living: that it needs to be secure and permanent, and that possessing that belief allows for a sense of being cared for and nurtured.

Our goal in accessing the life-giving force of a *bayit ne'eman* hinges on believing that it is a partnership designed by Hashem and one that is part of a plan meant, out of His constant love and concern for our best, to help each spouse grow most effectively toward his or her greatest potential.

Defining Our Commitment

There are two relationships in life that fall under the category of “*brit*” (a covenant). One is our relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, concretized at Sinai when we received the commandments. The second is marriage. No other relationship is similar in its expectations or the level of commitment it demands. Friendships and partnerships of other sorts are not covenants. Let’s understand the difference.

In the Navi Yirmiyahu (3:20) Hashem bemoans the fact that we have betrayed Him. He characterizes us a woman who “*bagda meirei’ah*”—rebelled against her acquaintance/friend. The *Ohel Rachel* questions why we don’t find it said that she rebelled against her *husband*? Wouldn’t that be a more accurate analogy of our relationship with Hashem and describe His frustration with us more realistically? Chazal (*Shmot Raba* 32:5) explain: the fact that she strays in her loyalty is proof that she never saw her relationship as a marriage. Her attitude proves that this was nothing more than a casual connection. Were it a marriage, it would go without saying that loyalty and acknowledgment of the other would be unconditional and consistent:

When a man takes a wife and is with her many days, even if he becomes impoverished—his wife wouldn’t rebel against/abandon him. Rather, she would say: “When he was wealthy he fed me and clothed me. Now that he cannot, I can’t abandon him! But if it isn’t a relationship of marriage, she acknowledges him when he gives her, but doesn’t recognize him when he doesn’t. Therefore it says, ‘a woman rebelled against her acquaintance.’”

אדם שהוא נוטל אשה ועושה עמה ימים הרבה אפילו העני אשתו אינה כופרת בו אלא אומרת בשעה שהיה עשיר האכילני והלבישני ועכשיו שהעני איני כופרת בו ובשעה שהיא זונה אם נתן לה הרי היא מודה לו ואם לא נתן לה אינה מכרת אותו לכך נאמר אכן בגדה אשה מרעה.

What is the difference between the commitment inherent in a *brit* as opposed to that of a mere friendship?

A friendship can be one of many, it can be temporal and it can be conditional, dependent on filling mutually satisfying needs. For instance, I may have a friend who likes the activities that I do, or enjoys similar discussions, or who is devoted to the same causes I participate in. Our friendship can be the means toward shared end goals. If goals are not achieved, dissatisfaction can result in dissolving the friendship.

In the relationship of a *brit*, on the other hand, the relationship itself is the goal.

True, if conditions are met that are satisfying it is no doubt a bonus. But even if that isn't the case, the commitment of a *brit* remains a constant.

It was during the real estate market crash that I was exposed to this scene. It taught me just how scary conditional love can be. My young son and I were waiting in a jewelry store for my watch battery to be replaced. I walked a woman with her little boy. She was known to have been a woman of means, and the jeweler promptly put aside my watch to attend to her; no doubt she held the promise of a far bigger sale. The woman was admiring a fabulous diamond necklace. The jeweler complimented her with "Oh! You always have the finest taste!" To which she replied, "I still have the taste... but he can't bring it in!"

The woman obviously didn't value the *brit* dimension of her relationship.

In *Shirat Chana* (Shmuel I 2:1-10), the song Chana sang after struggling with infertility for about two decades, she reacts to her success. Interestingly, there is no mention of "baby" in her song. Instead, she sings of G-d's greatness, of His involvement in her life. It is not that Chana ignored the obvious blessing of having a baby; she rejoiced most, though, over the proof of G-d's presence and ability that it brought to light and the joy she had in being connected to Him. The greatest joy was in a newfound clarity and depth of her relationship with Hashem. By not emphasizing "baby," Chana proves that, while her relationship with Hashem was enhanced by the success and the *simcha* of her prayers answered and a desired condition met, it was not defined by it.

A *brit* weathers ups and downs. In the low times, the devotion does not falter. And in the good times, highlights are special in that they are special times to share. They aren't seen as proof of the relationship's worth. To appreciate the value of a 24/7 commitment, look up Shmos 24:7. There you will find the words of *na'aseh v'nishma*—acceptance of our *brit*! A covenant is forever.

In the *brit* of marriage, our belief in each other means that success or lack thereof isn't indicative of the marriage being "right." Each partner takes his or her piece of being responsible to expend effort to acquire success on any level. Assuming we do our fair part in the process, we cannot judge each other by the outcome. That is out of our hands. In a *bayit ne'eman*, each partner does his or her parallel job with *ne'emanut*, not shirking responsibility, and each has belief in the other that his or her job will be done, too. Judging the other unfavorably, looking over his shoulder, or comparing his success to another's means that we don't believe that our collective efforts bear us our just and fitting rewards. Deeming a spouse as "unsuccessful" is missing the point. As a unit, we will earn what our *team* is meant to yield, assuming hard work was done responsibly. The outcome, positive or negative, will not determine the viability of our union. It will just become what the union has to live with and through.

It is the respect and trust we give another that helps allow him/her to live up to the image of being respected and trustworthy. If the *emuna* in the other is lacking, the degradation it causes will assure a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Heaven and earth are referred to (by Maharal, *Netivot Olam, Netiv HaEmunah* no. 1) as “having faith one with the other.” The fact that each does its job with the assumption of the other doing its job in tandem (e.g.: the heaven sends forth rain, confident of the earth absorbing it) shows their sense of faithfulness and serenity. That is the goal of a solid union. In our ideal state, we live in a similar state of being to the *shamayim al ha’aretz*, where the heaven is comfortably over the earth. In marriage, each spouse plays a parallel role toward a shared end-goal, much like the heaven and earth. Each focuses on his/her role and tasks with *ne’emanut* and trusts in the other to be doing the same.

So many marriages are plagued by couples being preoccupied with second-guessing the choice of partner, evaluating him or her constantly, and feeling shortchanged in some way. Many are affected by resentment of the other “not living up to his/her end” of the partnership. That mentality is exhausting at best and damaging at worst. By restoring a sense of *emuna* on these two fronts—satisfaction with the other and being loyal and trusting in our constant commitment—we allow for the relationship to thrive.

Only once we regain the clarity of the relationship we have as being the one that offers us *shleimut* (wholeness) will we experience the inner peace and peaceful coexistence—the *shalom*—that we all seek.

Guarding Your Tongue While Guarding Marriage: *Lashon Hara* and *Shiddukhim*

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman¹

Introduction

One of the most consequential, controversial and complex aspects of the laws of *lashon hara* (gossip) is that known as “*to’elet*” or “purpose.” This notion indicates that when the information is necessary to a third party for that individual's protection, it is not only permissible to relate the information, but obligatory. Consequential, then, in that the presence of this idea, an action flips from forbidden to mandatory. Controversial, not in its existence, which is undisputed, but in its application: The evaluation of *to’elet* is resistant to generalized legislation and is often dependant on painstakingly considered judgment. One of the *dayanim* (rabbinic judges) in 19th-century Vilna, R. Yisrael Isser Isserlein,² wrote that while so many spoke forcefully about the prohibition of *lashon hara*, an equally important issue is neglected: the failure to speak when innocent people are at risk of harm. Similarly, a contemporary authority, R. Moshe Shternbuch, in his responsa,³ represents rabbinic concern of the issue when he expresses in forceful terms the pressing need to be well-versed in the intricate details of *lashon hara* regulation. As he observes, as severe a prohibition as *lashon hara* is, neglecting to inform when necessary can be a violation of equal or greater severity. Thus, as well, the complexity.

This is all particularly relevant when the question of a potential shiddukh is raised. The stakes are unusually high: on the one side, failing to disclose relevant information can wreak extreme and ongoing harm upon an unknowing marriage partner; on the other, inaccurate or irrelevant information can not only unnecessarily or unfairly derail the match currently under discussion, but all future possibilities for this individual.

Examining this question involves looking at two planes, which we will attempt to consider simultaneously, or at least in an overlapping fashion: a) how much must one reveal to a potential

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² *Pitchei Teshuvah*, O.C. 156.

³ *Resp. Teshuvot V'Hanhagot*, I, 558.

spouse prior to marriage (or even earlier)? and b) how much must be revealed by a third party, if the date does not directly reveal it, or if the third party is asked first?

These questions do not have easy answers, nor do they have absolute ones. While the principle of *to'elet* is indeed an undisputed one, judgment is called upon in order to decide what enters that category, considering the risk of passing on information that is false, subjective, exaggerated, outdated, or irrelevant. While this is always the case, the dating process adds a new element: timing. While it may be indicated that certain data should be conveyed, it may still be unclear when that should happen. To do so too early may place undue emphasis on an item, which, if considered within a broader perspective, would diminish in importance. In the language of many *poskim*, premature revelation is dangerous because before the couple has had a chance to meet each other, *kol davar katan mikalkeil* (any small matter will damage the prospect).⁴ In other words, the potential date may assume, "Why should I go out with this 'flawed' person, when there are so many 'perfect' people out there awaiting me?" However, once there has been an opportunity for the two to see the appealing qualities each has, negative information can be evaluated in a wider context (whether or not that context is more "objective" is open to debate, but it is certainly different⁵). Assessing the appropriate timing, which will also be affected greatly by variables such as the cultural norms for the pace of a relationship and the nuances of an individual *shiddukh*, is a highly complex endeavor. Of course, this timing consideration is only relevant if there is a possibility that it will make a difference; if the issue is one that will almost definitely interfere, then to delay the revelation will only cause pain to all involved and incur egregious violations of *ona'at devarim* (causing anguish).⁶

There is an additional complexity to this time consideration. It would only appear necessary for a third party to reveal something if the man or woman themselves neglects to disclose something crucial. However, since there is legitimate reason to delay that disclosure until a later date, the third party may misread the situation and assume the subject is failing to disclose when that is not the case, and consequentially may interfere in a very damaging way.⁷

While the prevention of harm is certainly enough reason to mandate disclosure when appropriate, there is also another consideration particular to the transactional nature of the marriage commitment. Failure to disclose relevant information can constitute a violation of *geneivat da'at* (providing a false impression), even if that information would have not stopped

⁴ See *Kehillot Ya'akov*, *Yevamot*, #38, and *Responsa Iggerot Moshe*, O.C. IV 118, and E.H. IV 32:4. See also R. Tzvi Shpitz, *Mishpetei HaTorah*, I,91, regarding further considerations of timing.

⁵ Even the familiar yardstick of "*v'ahavta l'reakha kamokha*, love your fellow like yourself" is difficult to apply in this regard (even if one only considers one of the parties involved). On the one hand, one might think, if it were me (or my daughter), I would demand that I have all the information in advance, so I can decide accordingly; thus, I owe that information to others. On the other hand, many happily married people (or parents of such people) are deeply grateful that certain facts were not relayed too early, as they would have interfered with a very successful *shiddukh* to the detriment of all involved. Thus, such people would argue that treating others as they would want to be treated would mean *not* revealing information too soon.

⁶ Note the discussion of this in R. Yitzchak Eizik Silber, *Mishpetei HaShalom*, p. 251.

⁷ See *Zera Chaim* p. 337. See also R. Binyamin Cohen, *Chelkat Binyamin* to *Chafetz Chaim* p. 364, who suggests a distinction between one who is asked and one who isn't.

the *shiddukh* from going through. However, if the information is material to the point that one party would have refused the marriage had it been known, together with the violation of *ona'ah* (fraud), there is the possibility that the marriage itself is considered a *mekach ta'ut* (mistaken transaction) and is null and void.⁸ Accordingly, the stakes involved in assessing what should or should not be discussed are raised even higher.

This brief article makes no claim toward either comprehensiveness or authority in addressing this topic. Rather, the hope is that in broadly surveying some of the analyses and conclusions of the *poskim*, a background will be created to give context to the questions that need be asked in similar situations. Further, the recognition is that perhaps more than other areas of halakhah, judgment and situational assessment will often be the determining factors in whether a discussion is mandated, encouraged, allowed, or resolutely forbidden. As such, while it is difficult to assert sharp and absolute guidelines, exposure to the deliberations of the experts will contribute to that informed sensibility and thus increase the prospects for an appropriate conclusion.

General Principles

At the outset, we may note some general principles. The *Chafetz Chaim*, in determining the standards for *to'elet*, mentions some direct applications to considerations of *shiddukhim*.⁹ Addressing a third party, he writes that if a couple is about to marry, it is appropriate to inform one of them of a major flaw in the other—including in this category issues such as heretical beliefs and hidden illnesses. However, he is quick to note that there are traits that are clearly outside of this grouping, offering as an example one who is naïve and unaware of the guile of others. Apparently, such a characteristic is not sufficiently objectively problematic to merit an unsolicited revelation. Further, asserts the *Chafetz Chaim*, it is wrong to relate that the young man is an inferior Torah scholar: it is the burden of the woman's family to research this area, to have the man tested by competent scholars. If they fail to do so, they accept responsibility for the consequences (*ihu afsid anafsheih*).¹⁰

From the *Chafetz Chaim's* specific examples some general guidelines emerge: a) a clear negative impact on an unwitting potential spouse mandates unsolicited intervention by a third party; b) not all attributes that could be viewed negatively meet that threshold of “clear negative impact”; and c) if an attribute could be investigated by the potential mate (or the advocates of that mate) and isn't, the responsibility falls on them and the third party need not volunteer involvement.¹¹

⁸ See *Kiddushin* 50a; *Sefer Chasidim* # 507, and note commentary of R. Reuven Margoliot, *Mekor Chesed*; and *Even haEzer* 61:1. See also *Resp. Achiezer*, 27:3.

⁹ *Hilkhos Rekhilus*, *Klal* 9, *tziyur* 3.

¹⁰ See, on this classification, R. Moshe Kaufman, *Zera Chaim*, p. 436.

¹¹ On that last point, it should also be noted that the *Chafetz Chaim's* particular focus, the Torah scholarship of a potential groom, is subject to some adjustment in the modern context. On the one hand, if the woman is indeed concerned about this area, it is not necessarily the case that she has the ability to have the man “tested” as was once the practice, and thus the accuracy of the *Chafetz Chaim's* premise may have changed. See *Zera Chaim*, *ibid*, on this point, who also notes that it may be the case that the parents were charged with “research,” and if they did so inadequately, it may not be fair to assign the responsibility for accepting the “loss” to the woman herself. Accordingly, the details of this particular consideration require further deliberation and application.

From the perspective of the questioner, the *Chafetz Chaim* confirms that it is his or her prerogative to ask questions, despite the fact that this may prompt the respondent to say negative things.¹² Further, he or she can ask about whatever they consider important, without limitations.¹³ Similarly, they may ask multiple people, if doing so contributes to clarity in the matter.¹⁴ He also requires that the questioner make clear that his motives are for the *to'elet* of a *shiddukh*, asserting that otherwise the justifiable intent may not attach to the third party, who may relay negative information without the validation of necessity and thus violate *lashon hara*.¹⁵

Again, setting down absolute guidelines in what is a situation of clear negative impact is difficult and subjective. However, insight can be gleaned from moving from the general principles to surveying some of the specific cases that have been addressed in the *Responsa* literature.

Questions Posed to Poskim on Medical Matters and Related Issues

R. Moshe Feinstein¹⁶ responds regarding the case of a woman who has not yet begun a menstrual cycle, although her doctor tells her it will come with marriage. R. Feinstein rules that the likelihood that she will be able to have children is strong enough that she need not reveal the condition. In coming to this conclusion, R. Feinstein asserts that if there is a delay in becoming pregnant, or if there would be fewer children overall, this does not affect his conclusion, as not all husbands would be discouraged by those outcomes. [This would seem to be a debatable point; perhaps R. Feinstein is assuming that the couple would be expected to discuss in advance if there were a specific desire for a larger family.¹⁷] In the case of a woman who definitely cannot have

Alternatively, as many authorities have perceived, it is important for one who is asked about this quality to understand what the woman or her family are genuinely concerned with: i.e., are they looking for a man who is a future *posek* or *rosh yeshiva*; one who is respected by his peers; one who takes his religious obligations seriously; one who establishes time for Torah studies; one who is quick-witted or analytically gifted; or all of the above? If the question is properly understood (sometimes a daunting task) then one being asked can answer in an appropriate manner. See, for example, R. Nissim Karelitz, *Chut HaShani, Shemirat HaLashon*, 7:1.

¹² *Hilkhot Lashon Hara*, Klal 4:11, with *Be'er Mayim Chaim*.

¹³ From the perspective of the answerer, R. Ovadiah Yosef (cited in *Yalkut Yosef, Hil. Kibbud Av vi-Eim*, p. 495) asserted that if the inquiry is not about an issue of consequence, the Talmudic license to alter the truth for the sake of peace (*Yevamot* 65b) would apply. However, it bears determination if, apart from the halakhic issue, such an approach is wise; further, as some have noted (see also *Mishpetei Shalom* p. 249), such an approach may risk a violation of *geneivat da'at*. On the importance of honesty in these matters (even on secondary issues), see also *Sefer Chasidim*, #388.

¹⁴ See *Zera Chaim*, pp. 442.

¹⁵ The Chafetz Chaim's assumption, that conveying objectively necessary data is not justified if the speaker is unaware of the necessity, is questioned by R. Moshe Shternbuch, *Resp. Teshuvot Vi-Hanhagot*, III, 479.

¹⁶ *Responsa Iggerot Moshe*, EH, III, 27.

¹⁷ See *Mishpetei HaShalom*, p 251.

children, R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg¹⁸ was emphatic that a third party—in his discussion, a doctor¹⁹—must reveal this even if not asked.

R. Baruch Reuven Shlomo Shlesinger²⁰ addresses the situation of a woman who had a tumor removed, and currently takes pills to prevent a recurrence. He concludes that anything that the spouse could conceivably never have to confront over the course of a marriage is not necessary to disclose. He understands the circumstance in his responsum to be in that category, while noting the ruling would be different if: she has a tumor now that is growing and could endanger her life; or is epileptic; or has a major concealed blemish that a possible husband would likely find objectionable. However, it is often difficult to assess the likelihood of recurrence; accordingly, R. Nissim Karelitz²¹ emphasizes that an illness that has receded but is likely to come back, and is currently addressed by pills, must be revealed, with the possible exception of a situation where the pills are clearly only an extra precaution. He notes as a principle that any condition that may interfere with *shalom bayit* must be disclosed.

R. Moshe Shternbuch,²² in asserting that emotional and psychological challenges must be revealed, considers an exception in the case when the issue is one that was in the past, has no current impact, was rooted in a cause no longer present, and presents no risk of recurrence, as attested to by “outstanding doctors renowned for their expertise.” R. Meir Brandesdorfer writes similarly in a responsum²³ but emphasizes that if there is any lingering doubt about the recurrence of the condition it would be deceptive to conceal it. He further stresses that conditions that are not serious enough to invalidate the marriage if concealed often merit disclosure regardless. In another responsum, R. Shternbuch²⁴ goes through a long list of ailments and conditions affecting the prospective groom or bride, and endeavors to evaluate the impact and the scope of each one, and to assess accordingly, sometimes ruling a third party must reveal even if not asked; sometimes only if asked; sometime only the potential spouse need reveal; and sometimes no revelation is required.

As R. Moshe Feinstein notes, a condition that even has a chance of being transmitted to a child must be revealed.²⁵ R. Shmuel Wosner²⁶ considers the case of a woman who currently wears a wig temporarily, due to a past illness, and rules that this should be disclosed before final commitments

¹⁸ *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer*, XVI, 4.

¹⁹ The impediments posed to this discussion by a doctor’s ethical and legal requirements of confidentiality are outside the scope of this treatment and must be independently analyzed. See also the discussion of R. Ya’akov Breisch, *Resp. Chelkat Ya’akov*, E.H. 79, regarding a doctor’s revelation of a young man’s terminal illness to a potential suitor; in his situation, neither the man himself, nor his family, were aware of the diagnosis.

²⁰ *Resp. Birkat Reuven Shlomo*, IV,69.

²¹ *Chut haShani, Shmirat HaLashon*, 7:1, p. 372.

²² *Resp. Teshuvot ve-Hanhagot II*, 624.

²³ *Resp. K’neh Bosem I*, 121.

²⁴ *Resp. Teshuvot ve-Hanhagot I*, 879.

²⁵ *Resp. Iggerot Moshe*, IV, EH 73:2.

²⁶ *Resp. Shevet HaLevi*, VI, 205.

are made. R. Menashe Klein,²⁷ while stressing that one must not conceal a serious illness, does not include in this category one who is restricted to a specific diet that bans certain foods.

Drs. Yoel and Chana Katan, in an extensive review of opinions focusing primarily on medical conditions published in the journal *Techumin*²⁸ cite a statement of R. Menashe Klein that one is not required to volunteer any condition that would not bother the majority of people. They further cite, as a general guideline, R. Yitzchak Zilberstein's advice that one should be "*migaleh tefach umichaseh tefachayim*"; in other words, reveal a little at first, and thus, having indicated that there is more to know, they can allow the potential mate to probe further if they so desire and respond accordingly.

Outside of the medical realm, other issues considered by *poskim*, and subject to the same range of responses as above, include: whether either party is a convert;²⁹ considerations of halakhic status that are not sufficient to prohibit the relationship;³⁰ the moral history of the man or of the woman³¹ and of the parents;³² as well as past medical history of the parents.³³ R. Yitzchak Weiss³⁴ addresses the situation of a young man who committed a "major sin" in his youth; if he did so only once, and nothing has been heard recently regarding any such behavior, and he now leads an exemplary life, and has repented, it need not be revealed. If he sinned repeatedly, this must be disclosed, and even if he has repented, caution is necessary and the sin should be revealed. [Of course, the evaluation of whether another person has or has not repented is itself a difficult assessment.]

Solicited and Unsolicited Advice

It is noteworthy that in many of the above cases, there is a distinction drawn between whether or not the third party is asked about the particular issue. If the justification to reveal such information is premised on the mandate to protect the innocent from harm, it would seem to be irrelevant whether or not the question was asked; the information is either necessary for protection or it is not.

One approach to this question is to assume that there are objective problems, which require proactive revelation, and subjective problems, which need to first be defined as problems before justifying discussion. Thus, the inquiry expressed by one side defines the subjective issue as relevant. A different but related approach is advanced by R. Shlomo Rozner.³⁵ As long as the subjective issue is not brought up, its damaging impact is uncertain (*safek hezek*) and thus discussion of the issue is not justified in light of the definite damage it will wreak upon the

²⁷ *Responsa Mishneh Halakhot* V, 254.

²⁸ Vol. XXV, pp. 47-58.

²⁹ See *Responsa Minchat Yitzchak* VII,4; *Responsa Teshuvot VeHanhagot*, II, 627; *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer* XVII,49:3.

³⁰ See *Responsa Shevet HaLevi* IV, 162; *Responsa Minchat Yitzchak* VII, 107; *Responsa Imrei Yosher*, 114:8.

³¹ See *Resp. Chavatzelet HaSharon*, 63; *Resp. Maharsham* VII, 152 ; *Resp. Iggerot Moshe*, O.C., 2,118.

³² See *Responsa Minchat Yitzchak* V, 44.

³³ See R. Chanina Yisrael Rotenberg, *Diverrei Chayil*, 23:2, as well as R. Chaim Kanievsky, quoted in *Ma'aseh Rav*, I, ch. 7, # 12; and *Beit Chatanim*, p. 17 n 1.

³⁴ *Responsa Minchat Yitzchak* VI:139.

³⁵ *Responsa Le-Chafetz BaChayim*, I, 19.

subject. Alternatively, R. Nissim Karelitz³⁶ suggests, in interpretation of the *Chafetz Chaim*, that it is only definite harm that falls under the mandatory rubric of “*lo ta’amod al dam reiekha*, do not stand idly by your neighbor’s blood.” Issues that are more subjective are revealed due to a different mandate, that of the requirement of providing good advice and avoiding bad advice, which are only triggered by an affirmative inquiry.³⁷

Further Considerations of *Lashon Hara* and *Shiddukhim*

In addition to the specific disclosure considerations, there are a number of other relevant issues in considering *lashon hara* and *shiddukhim*. To briefly note a few of them:

Among the *Chafetz Chaim*’s criteria to justify a conversation under the heading of “*to’elet*” is that the one speaking not be a “*sonai*” (literally, a “hater”), someone with a bias against the subject of the conversation. In addition to concerns for the speaker’s transgression, there is the serious worry that the listener will receive flawed or skewed reports. In the environment of dating, even while avoiding the extreme label of “*sonai*,” there are many people with reason to be biased against an individual under consideration for dating. For example, the speaker may be someone themselves interested in dating either party under discussion, or an embittered ex-date. It is incumbent on the one making the inquiries, both for halakhic reasons and for functional personal ones, to ensure that the people they turn to for information do not have any alternative agendas, even subconsciously.

Similarly, a less blatant but equally relevant concern exists, in that the responder may not have a bias against the individual under discussion, but also may not genuinely know the person well. Often, families inquire with the one person they know with any connection to the potential date, regardless of how strong that connection is. As this person is their only source of information, they accord to this person more authority than would be deserved, and form misimpressions, again contrary both to their personal interests and to halakhah.

Further, it is crucially important that the inquirer and the responder speak the same “language.” It is often the case that the questions or answers are imparted in vague generalities or idioms that miscommunicate either what the inquirer wants to know about, or what the responder wishes to say. In either event, the goal that justifies the conversation can be missed.³⁸ It is also possible, when parents are doing the inquiring, that the parents and the child are not completely in agreement as to what is desired, and this poses a responsibility on the responder to evaluate what kind of response is truly considered a *to’elet*.³⁹

Another point at which it is especially important to be sensitive to concerns of *lashon hara* is when a relationship doesn’t work out. At that time, there is often a tendency to discuss why the *shiddukh* failed, but doing so is fraught with risk. Unless the former date poses a danger to others, it is generally wrong to relate to uninvolved parties what was undesirable about the

³⁶ *Chut HaShani*, *ibid.*

³⁷ See also R. Moshe Faniri, *Beit Chatanim*, p. 16.

³⁸ For several examples of this, see *Mishpetei HaShalom* p. 246, and see also *Zera Chaim*, p. 445.

³⁹ See *Chut HaShani*, 7:1; *Zera Chaim*, pp. 446-447; and R. David Ariav, *LiReakha Kamokha*, VII, p. 302.

individual. This concern applies even when talking with parents or with a shadkhan. While those individuals are tasked with finding an appropriate match for the one speaking, and thus could benefit from constructive feedback that sharpens the picture of “the right one,” it is crucial that the conversation is limited to that constructive content, preferably in general terms, and does not needlessly disparage the former date.⁴⁰

Conversely, there is also a serious risk of damaging *lashon hara* in the opposite situation, when a relationship does work out, or has reached the point where it seems unlikely to be derailed by any further information. At that stage, sharing negative information may be counterproductive; it will not deter the parties from getting married, but it may nonetheless have an effect on their respect for each other. Consequently, the individuals will indeed marry, but at moments of tension down the line will see their relationship suffer as they recall disparaging items they were told.⁴¹ In this vein, it is worth remembering the opinion of Hillel,⁴² who advised praising a bride even in an exaggerated manner, once the relationship is already a committed one.⁴³

Business or Personal?

As a closing note, it is instructive to return to one of the issues referenced above. An overwhelming concern in this area has been avoiding a “*mekach taut*,” a mistaken transaction, where one party enters a commitment unaware of information that, had they known, they would not have gone forward. It is universally agreed that any information in that category must be revealed, either by the principals themselves, or by a third party, prior to marriage. However, there is a secondary issue that is harder to avoid: *geneivat da’at*. This addresses information which, while not crucial to the decision to proceed with the marriage, creates by its nondisclosure a false impression. The result is that the party marries someone who they would have married regardless, but does so thinking the spouse is more “perfect” than they actually are.

The parallel in the business world would be as follows. If one sells an item under false pretenses, such that the buyer would not have made the purchase had he known the truth, this creates a *mekach ta’ut* and voids the sale, and, if the sale is not voided, constitutes *ona’ah* and monetary theft. If, however, the purchaser would have bought the item anyway, and at the same price, but the seller conveyed the misimpression that the item was worth more, the seller violates *geneivat da’at*.

This second scenario, if transferred to the world of *shiddukhim*, seems impossible to avoid. Granted, any issue that would have invalidated the marriage would be disclosed. But it will not be the case that every lesser “flaw” will be disclosed. No person will reveal every imperfection, no matter how minor, before marriage, and if they did, that person would never get married. How, then, can any marriage take place without a serious violation of *geneivat da’at*?⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See *Yalkut Yosef*, *ibid*; *Chut HaShani*, 7:1, p. 371; R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, cited in the journal *Mevakshai Torah*.

⁴¹ See *Chut HaShani* 7:1, p. 372.

⁴² *Ketubot* 17a.

⁴³ See *Mishpetei haTorah*, *ibid*.

⁴⁴ For an extremely thorough analysis of this issue, see R. Yisrael Weinman, *Mishnat Yisrael*, ch. 21, pp. 359-383.

One approach to this question was suggested by R. Yisrael Ya'akov Kanievsky, the Steipler Gaon.⁴⁵ He explained that the comparison of marriage to the business world is an imprecise one. When dealing with merchandise, the purchaser has no attachment to the individual unit that he purchases. Thus, if the unit he buys is flawed in some way, while he may not regret the purchase, he would happily agree to trade his item in for a perfect alternative, if given the opportunity to do so.

This has no parallel in marriage or in human relationships in general. Any happily married person—meaning, one who does not regret marrying their spouse—would not seek to trade their spouse in for a “perfect alternative.” There is no such thing; every human being is unique, and being happy with one’s mate means accepting them in totality, the pluses and the minuses. Accordingly, the merchandise model of marriage falls seriously short.

A different approach can be seen from the writings of the Klausenberger Rebbe, R. Yekutiel Yehudah Halberstam.⁴⁶ He notes a statement of the Rama⁴⁷ that in later generations, the custom has been to not be too exacting (*medakdek*) in matters of *shiddukhim*, as long as there is no halakhic impediment to the couple marrying. He interprets this to mean that there is a custom to “look the other way” from certain “imperfections” when looking to marry, and, following the merchandise model, compares this to a trade policy enacted for the betterment of the community. In other words, while strictly speaking, there may be potential issues of *geneivat da'at* (or even *mekach ta'ut*, in some cases), those who enter the shiddukh “market” agree to suspend their right to demand full disclosure, in the interest of allowing for harmonious marriages to take place.⁴⁸

Both approaches are helpful in gaining perspective on this issue. True, marriage is a deeply serious commitment with lifetime consequences. As such, no material information should be concealed when it is necessary to make a responsible decision, or certainly when necessary to protect an innocent party from one who may cause them harm or misery. However, in the context of investigating the other party, it is often too easy to get lost in the details, and to approach marriage like a business investment, assessed in terms of objective profits and losses. It is necessary sometimes to be reminded that we are dealing with unique human beings, who are not interchangeable, and cannot be reduced to numbers and value assessments. Further, failing to deviate from a “merchandise” approach will often affect one’s perspective to such an extent that they cannot see beyond the details to what could be a wonderful lifelong marriage. In a broad sense, the laws of *lashon hara* serve to protect the individual from losing his or her uniqueness in a blur of gossip and disconnected detail. It is hoped that the proper appreciation of these laws, and their careful application, will go hand in hand with the mutual respect and esteem that allows two individuals to truly come together as one.

⁴⁵ *Kehillot Ya'akov, Yevamot*, #38.

⁴⁶ *Responso Divrei Yatziv*, E.H. 15.

⁴⁷ *Even HaEzer* 1:3, citing Rivash.

⁴⁸ See also R. Yitzchak Shmuel Shechter, *Responso Yashiv Yitzchak*, XXV, 44.

Reflections on the Mirror: Meditations on Attraction, Decision- Making and Values

Yitzchak Schechter, PsyD¹

Physical attraction is an important part of the healthy marital relationship and bond. While the details and dynamics of what is termed attractive shifts over time, its importance remains a truism from an intuitive, psychological and even religious perspective. The majority of people in what are generally called happy and successful marriages find their spouses physically attractive. The Gemara *Brachot* 57b in fact says that an *isha naeh* (pleasant/attractive wife) is one of the things that goes beyond settling one's mind but expands a person's experience and thinking. Similarly, many of the greatest heroes and heroines of the Torah are described by the *midrash* as being extremely physically attractive on top of their noble character and deeds.

As many know in real life terms, and several research studies reinforce, the details of attraction and how attractive someone is rated is fluid; attraction is not objective or static but dependent on many factors including context and content. Both objective and subjective factors intersect to create one's overall attractiveness. Simple examples of this are that with increased familiarity (Principe and Langlois, 2012) and positive time spent together, people tend to rate each other more attractive, and with increased fear or excitement, attractiveness of people increases (i.e. going on a roller coaster and bungee jumping—perhaps good date ideas) (Langlois et al., 2000).

This fact has practical relevance for many during dating (other than dating ideas). Despite the stereotypical storyline of Hollywood—eyes meeting across a crowd and sparks flying as violins play—love at first sight is just an illusion; in reality, attraction, as relationships in general, need

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to develop. The closeness and connection that emerges in dating nurture a sense of interest in and attraction to the other person. While there are statistical anomalies, people who would be objectively rated as extremely unattractive or extremely attractive, physical attraction, which many often think of as automatic, can mature through relationship when given the opportunity. For this reason, when I and other psychologists frequently hear, “We’ve been dating for a little while, I think s/he is a great girl/guy, and I think there are a lot of good things about him/her, but I am not sure I am attracted to him/her—should I continue?,” barring other more complicating factors and issues, we generally may offer a nudge toward giving the attraction an opportunity to mature. In short, giving a date a chance despite assumptions of attractiveness can, in many cases, make sense, since looks can “grow” on the person with time together.

The Role of Attraction in the Decision-Making Process

Attraction is appropriately an essential part of the dating experience. People dating seriously should find each other attractive, but the fundamental question vis-à-vis dating is how large a role does attraction have or should have in the decision-making process of dating and spousal choice.

It is undoubtedly one decision factor amongst many, but why is it such a significant and powerful deciding force in dating and marriage? While this question seems obvious or even downright silly, the answer is a key to understanding how physical attractiveness can become overvalued and misappropriated in the decision-making process.

First, attraction is a natural force and an intuitive drive. It is of the more instantaneous and visceral means through which one can know and judge people. Currently, in the digital age, information, and pictures in specific, are readily available and generally a part of the matching process. Looks are perhaps used more in the decision-making process today than ever before, and decisions about those looks are probably calculated quicker than at any other time in the past, with more expectations and more competing images in memory than ever before. [Digital era notwithstanding, pictures remain pictures—imperfect, distorted and manipulable.]

Many studies have shown that with attractiveness comes the assumption of greater success, goodness and positivity (Langlois et al., 2000). Securing an attractive date or spouse would then be a testament about oneself and become an instant boost to one’s potential self-worth. Even more so, attaining the attractive date or spouse may earn the respect of friends and peers as an “appropriate” match, reflecting his or her true status. In this way, the match is not only a personal affair but one that invites many commentators; dating is not happening in a vacuum in the company of two people deciding on the goodness of their fit, but is encroached upon by a gallery of spectators that opine on whether the date is a good match, good-looking enough, appropriate, etc. The values and expectations of everyone from parents, friends and community impact on the very personal process of dating and decision making. While the set of expectations discussed here is physical attractiveness and beauty, the same influence on decision making can be said of any communal, familial or personal value, including but not limited to choice of profession, educational attainment, community status or wealth.

Attractiveness is also a feature that people use to fill in incomplete data about people, with people generally assuming that better-looking individuals are better people. For that reason, in dating systems where there is limited contact and information about the dating partners, attraction may be even more significant in people's decision-making process.

Not surprisingly, the need for attraction is more common among males (many studies, such as Buss, 1989; Todd et al., 2007; and Bokek-Cohen, et al., 2008, along with any matchmaker, can corroborate this). In addition, the basics of a market economy in which men (either in fact or belief) are in "more demand," and therefore have a larger range of choices, support this preference. In fact, this setup reinforces the attitude of men being able to be particular about their preferences (e.g., attractiveness, age, level of familial support, or any random preference), as they are encouraged by their long lists and no market forces encouraging them to compromise from their ideal (realistic or not). (This description is not a statement of fact of all dating men but a description of statistical norms.) This cycle leads to an overvaluing of beauty with no economic incentive to decrease the behavior, leading so far as to have much buzzed-about columns and blogs espousing the importance of cosmetic surgery for girls who are dating and a slew of excessive beauty tips and obligations to "catch your man."

In fact, the sense of male advantage continues through marriage with some research showing that men who are rated as objectively more attractive than their spouse, and thus at an "advantage," tend to be less supportive in their marriages, given their sense of having settled or feeling that they could have done better (McNulty et al., 2008).

Given this potential for a dangerous overvaluing of physical attractiveness, a closer consideration of its role is required.

Is attraction a necessary prerequisite for marriage or simply an entrance fee to the position of spouse, but wholly disconnected from the actual responsibilities that the role demands? While we certainly know that caring, flexibility and selflessness are important characteristics in successful marriage partners, is attraction even on the list or is it residual from the desires of adolescence and emerging adulthood? Even if it is important, how important is it and how much attraction is needed, and does this youthful sort of attraction pass the test of time if not cemented by the bonds of the travails of a journey together?

Values in Decision-Making

It is here where our higher sense of values kicks in and pushes us from responding to simple drives, market forces, peer pressure or strutting our plumage like peacocks as subjects of evolutionary biology. It is the decision-making leading to long-term and meaningful commitments that shapes who we are and what our future lives are going to, in large degree, look like. At this crossroads of life is where we express our humanity, and even more important our psychological and religious development, that we raise ourselves from reflexive and automatic experience to reflective and proactive choice.

This perspective of dating is consistent with what is known as the Stimulus-Values and Role model of dating and spousal choice (Murstein et al., 1970). At first, during the open field process—the initial dates and meeting points—couples attend to the various stimuli of their date or prospective date (e.g. physical attractiveness, intellect, family type, age, schools, etc.), but as dating and closeness increases there is a deeper assessment of values, including longer-term goals and vision for marriage and life. This stage expresses much more of the personal self and leads to greater vulnerability but also greater closeness. It is this post-stimulus stage that propels the young couple forward to the next stage in their relationship, when there is a particular assessment for the compatibility and fit of the couple as they have a wider range of knowledge of the person, his personality, history and context. [Though in many dating couples in the Orthodox community the values and roles stages are largely consolidated into one, the concept remains the same.] Dating starts with the basic observable stimulus and moves as the relationship progresses to the more internal and substantial qualities upon which the decision-making of marriage rests. That is the typical and most natural course of action.

In a similar vein, but from a different vantage point, a very recent (Funyama et al., 2012) and novel fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) study of men and women during a spousal contemplation task where subjects were asked to think if the person they saw on the screen would be a suitable spouse or not, an interesting pattern emerged. While there were significant differences between men and women, with men showing a distinct pattern of amygdala stimulation (related to urges and sexual availability) and women showing a distinct pattern of neocortex stimulation (related to long-term planning and elaborate simulation or imagery) in support of evolutionary biological models of spouse selection criteria (procreation for men and being taken care of for women), what was indeed common to both men and women was that the posterior region of the left superior temporal sulcus lit up during that task, a brain region reported to be stimulated during evaluation of character and self-assessment. On the neurophysiological level, a core element of the spousal choice task is self-assessment, whether that is to see the goodness of fit, likelihood of acceptance by the other or just a self-evaluative process in entering into the relationship—the science cannot yet tell us precisely, but evaluation beyond the stimulus is critical.

Following this idea, **what many refer to as the shidduch crisis may be nothing more than a crisis of values.**

Psychological and Religious Values of Attraction

So what are the psychological and religious values of attractiveness in marriage?

To begin with, it is one of the many factors that draw people together, a basic stimulus that can attract interest from others. It is only a stimulus that requires relationship to fill it in with substance, meaning and sustainability. As the *midrash* describes, marriages motivated by extrinsic and less than ideal motivation and not suffused with meaning are doomed to produce a negative outcome. [(*Yalkut Shimoni Ki Tetzai* (525) in the parsha of *eshet yifat toar*—a cautionary tale of lust-based marital choice; *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu Zuta* -17). There are four archetypes in regard to marriage choice. Some choose a spouse on the basis of their sexual

desire, some for wealth, some for status and some *leshem Shamayim* (for its own intrinsic value). The progeny of inappropriately motivated marriages experience fitting ironic ends: children of lust-alone marriages can end up being despised (i.e. *ben sorer umoreh*, wayward and defiant son); children of wealth-alone marriages can end up poor; and children from status-alone marriages can end up with a decrease of status; only an appropriate union leads to the ideal outcome. In fact, an over-focus on sexual or physical attractiveness can lead to an underdeveloped emotional relationship with limited interest in each other or limited problem-solving skills. [An initial study I conducted of couples who carefully observed *taharas haMishpacha* (family purity) demonstrated that those couples had an improved ability to problem-solve cognitively and verbally as opposed to resolving issues with physical contact solutions.]

It is undoubtedly true for the majority of people that finding their spouse physically attractive is an important ingredient to a successful marriage. This notion was found even among elderly couples (above age 70) and not only was that feeling important for the relationship, but it was also predictive of physical health (Peterson & Miller, 1980).

Furthermore, having one's spouse think of oneself as attractive builds a sense of esteem; one wants to be seen as attractive by one's spouse because a spouse in a healthy marriage is generally the most important person in one's life and the source of much of the person's self-esteem. This is no different than people wanting their spouse to appreciate and perhaps express good feelings and thoughts about them that they are good, intelligent, successful, etc.

The positive value of attraction further leads to the connection of the couple. In the extreme example, Chazal (*Sotah*, 11b) describe in great detail how the Jewish women in Egypt caused the national redemption through using their allure for the purpose of pulling the men out of despair and building the nation. Attraction and connection go together, expressing both a pragmatic purpose and a deeper vision of connection. The women's mirrors, tools of vanity, found their ultimate purpose as the source of purity in the *kiyor* (laver) of the temple (Rashi, Shemot 38:8).

Using attraction is a laudable and important feature of marriage, as demonstrated by Abba Chilkiya (*Taanit*, 23a) the great and enigmatic *chasid* of the Mishna who the Jewish people would turn to during difficult times. When a group of young rabbis visited him, they saw many puzzling behaviors, all of which showed his piety and upright character. When they returned to his home from the field, they saw his wife all dressed and adorned in her best jewelry and finery. He explained that his wife greeted him in this way so that he would never stray from her and maintain his fidelity. Using the natural attraction and keeping passion internal to the marriage is a value, not only to avoid sin, but more important, to build and maintain healthy attraction and marital satisfaction. Interestingly, this is similar to studies demonstrating that attraction is important throughout marriage with greater prosocial and supportive behavior when the wife is rated as more attractive than her spouse (McNulty et al., 2008).

Perhaps this ultimately highlights a truth of our interaction with reality, whether in the psychological emotional world or even with the physical world, that it is only our subjective investment of relationships that imbues meaning. Physical and aesthetic beauty can be given higher purpose through its subjective meaning just as we can be elevated through spiritual, religious and psychological meaning.

One final clinical footnote. Describing attraction as a shifting dynamic and secondary to emotional and purposeful attachment is not meant as a denial and abnegation of the physical self but rather placing it in its proper place. Denying one's genuine feelings of attraction, repulsion or indifference is potentially unhealthy. Some may be tempted to deny such "primitive" feelings as attraction or the importance of physical appearance and simply rely on what they say to themselves and others say to them, "it will come" or, "is it really that important?" Perhaps it is their aspiring to a lofty psychological and spiritual maturity or following the exhortations of their matchmakers or teachers, even if they, at some truer point are not fully comfortable with that advice. This denial of genuine self-experience is one potential factor in early divorces and broken engagements (especially for women) in our community. There are times that, despite ignoring the lack of attraction or hope that it will come, feelings of attraction and connection may just not come. In such situations seeking guidance, before and during the deliberation and engagement period, from a competent and attuned therapist and/or rabbi is critically important.

The balance between the realism of the stimulus and the substance of the relationship and its values are the critical key to success.

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Omission Impossible: Why Complimenting Is Vital to Relationships

Rabbi Shmuel Maybruch¹

Case Studies

Case study #1 – Shani and Jeremy: Shani and Jeremy have been dating for close to nine weeks. However, Shani feels that neither of them is as emotionally involved as she would have expected after two months of dating. Her gut also tells her that Jeremy is a really nice person and great on paper, but there doesn't seem to be any chemistry. After some deliberation, she discusses it with Jeremy, and he echoes her assessment of their dating. Some of Shani's friends remind her that there are many fish in the sea. Should she follow their advice?

Case study #2 – Rachel and Jonathan: Rachel and Jonathan have been dating for approximately a month and appreciate spending time with each other. Their conversations are pleasant and they enjoy their dates. However, they both would like to know how to proceed with their dating to the next level. Some of Rachel's friends have told her that it is a matter of time. If she gives it time, their relationship will grow. Are they right?

Are You Positive?

There is an important part of relationship-building that is simple, elegant, powerful and relationship-altering. It is the bedrock of productive dating and it is fundamental to developing any relationship. However, individuals are often scared to use it, and relationships that could soar and flourish struggle and flounder instead. This technique is providing routine expressions of positive feedback to each other, also known as complimenting.

Complimenting is essential to relationship building for at least three reasons:

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1. First, it is almost impossible for two people to cultivate a relationship if one perceives that the other sees him or her as just “another guy” or “another girl.” Therefore, one of the most important steps to creating a relationship is for the woman to convey to the man that she views him as an individual, and for him to do the same. This is effectively accomplished through complimenting. When each of them communicates specific, positive aspects of one another’s behavior, actions, or thoughts, it sets a powerful emotional sequence in motion that can sow the beginnings of a successful dating experience. When a man compliments his date, he validates her and indicates that he sees qualities that make her unique. In turn, as she recognizes that he considers her more than just “another face” sitting across from him, a potential relationship can sprout. Likewise, when a woman provides brief positive feedback to the man she is dating, she begins that cycle of validating him and acknowledging his uniqueness, which should be followed by his recognition, and then a possible relationship.
2. Second, in many relationships, there are remarkable characteristics about the people involved that are readily noticeable to objective individuals. Yet their dates turn a blind eye to those same qualities. This is partially because critical eyesight is part of human nature. As Rav Shlomo Wolbe highlights,² quoting the words of the Rosh in *Orchos Chaim*, “The way of people is to hide the positive [about others] and to reveal the negatives.” In addition, a dating individual can sometimes feel as if he or she is on a tightrope, carefully balancing the desire to see if “it will work” with necessary—and sometimes culturally imposed—investigative proclivity. For example, while a woman is trying to see if the man she is conversing with is a suitable husband, she is also intent on seeing if there are negative traits or behaviors that might suggest that she should terminate the match. Such a double-faced approach often continues for much of the dating process. With these backdrops, it is often difficult for a dating individual to become aware of—and certainly to verbalize—positive traits about the other. However, thinking about a person’s positive qualities in order to develop a compliment can also enhance one’s overall ability to appreciate him or her.
3. Third, Shlomo Hamelech observes in Mishlei (27, 19) that just as water reflects one’s image, so does one person’s heart reflect the emotion expressed to him by another— כמים הפנים לאדם, לפנים כן לב האדם לאדם. In social psychology, this is sometimes termed “reciprocal attraction.”³ It is evident from the literature that one of the most powerful predictors of whether one person will like another is whether the other likes that person.⁴ Even in the very nascence of a dating relationship, where the couple might feel that the term “like” is premature, positive feelings can be generated when a man shares with his date that he has been thinking about her, or she relays that same message to him. When he compliments her on a date, he is indicating to her that she was on his mind for at least a few moments that day,

² *Alei Shur*, vol. 2, p. 279.

³ Kenny, D. A., & Voie, L. L. (1982). Reciprocity of Interpersonal Attraction: A Confirmed Hypothesis. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 45(1), 54–58.

⁴ Spitzberg, B. H. & Dillard, J. P. (2002). Social Skills and Communication. Allen, M., Preiss, R. W., Gayle, B. M., Burrell, N. (Eds.), *Interpersonal Communication Research: Advances Through Meta-analysis* (89–108). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

while he thought of the compliments to share with her, and vice versa. The “real estate” that each takes up in the other’s mind is a powerful precursor to a possible future relationship.

Your Money’s Worth

The power of providing brief positive feedback was investigated by Dr. John Seiter of Utah State University.⁵ Seiter observed that many restaurant food servers rely on tips as a significant part of their wages. He conducted an experiment to see if he could help them increase their tip income. Seiter recruited two waitresses to serve almost a hundred different parties at restaurants. Half of the parties would receive a compliment from the food server right after they ordered, and half of them would not. Seiter found that when the waitresses complimented the customers, their tips were significantly higher. This technique, which is sometimes referred to by social psychologists as ingratiation, is a proven way to increase likeability and produce tangible results.

One might explore if the food servers’ behavior would be deemed inappropriate in the eyes of the halacha, as it might be considered to be insincerely motivated.⁶ Nonetheless, Seiter’s findings underscore the importance of compliments in human interaction. In a dating or relationship-building situation, a true and sincere compliment can help two well-meaning individuals create the beginnings of a relationship or enhance and improve an existing one

Develop It

In years of experience meeting with couples, I have seen many relationships that did not blossom because they lacked complimenting. Conversely, many relationships that were floundering took off beautifully once complimenting was introduced. I have observed that complimenting is so powerful and essential that, in instances where one member of the couple notices that the other one is not engaging in it, he can share the importance of complimenting with her. This may appear to an onlooker as if it is contrived, as if he is fishing for compliments. In truth, he is just explaining their importance and not telling her what to say. The specific compliments that each of them shares with the other are unique products of their own minds and they have the power to propel the relationship extraordinarily.

⁵ Seiter, J. S. (2007). Ingratiation and Gratitude: The Effect of Complimenting Customers on Tipping Behavior in Restaurants. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37(3), 478–485.

⁶ The Talmud, *Maseches Chullin* 94a, discusses the concept of *geneivas daas* (providing a false impression). Also see their codification in Rambam *Hilchos Deos* 2: 6 and *Hilchos Mechira* 18: 1. It is interesting to note that the Rambam’s dual placement of these laws seems to indicate that they have both a religious-ethical component as well as a legal, monetary aspect. One might consider that even if a specific practice would be permitted on the business axis, the Rambam might view it as an ethical violation. See also *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 228: 6 and *Drisha* 228: 7, where the *Drisha* rules that a behavior that is customary is not considered *geneivas daas*. This is in possible contrast to his words in *SeM”A* 228: 6, where he seems to rule that it is permissible only in order to avoid embarrassment.

This is similar to evidence suggested by a seminal experiment conducted by Dr. Neil Minkin and his team at the University of Kansas.⁷ The researchers videotaped junior high school and college-aged women and had judges rate their conversational ability. They discovered that individuals who provided positive feedback to the individual with whom they were conversing were rated by the judges as better conversationalists. However, more important, Minkin and his team found that those who were rated lower by the judges could be trained to use compliments and would be rated significantly higher when they conversed again.

Meeting on the A Train

In some instances, a couple includes an intermediary's involvement in some initial aspects of their courtship. They move into direct communication once both parties agree that there is some level of interest in exploring their relationship further. Colloquially, this change is termed "dropping the *shadchan* (matchmaker)." Many dating individuals think that this shift alone—of removing the intermediary and communicating directly—is a milestone in the relationship. However, this process itself is largely insignificant, as evident from the fact that many individuals relay that they do not sense measurable progress after dismissing the intermediary.

Instead, moving to direct communication should be an outgrowth of a conversation sharing positive feedback with the other party. In this way, the move concretizes and capitalizes on the positive sentiments expressed. One example of such a conversation might be: "Shira, we have gone out on several dates. During this brief time, I have noticed that you are a considerate person, you are thoughtful and you are happy. These are important things to me and I would like to continue to see how things progress. Would it be OK if I call you?" Yet many dating individuals are reluctant to have a conversation similar to the one above. A primary reason that is reported for the hesitation is that he is concerned that "Shira" might reply back in the negative. He feels that he went out on a limb to compliment her and will feel even more awkward if she rejects him.

This insecurity might be addressed with "The A Train Parable." Suppose that I meet someone for the first time on the A Train (an express subway line in New York City) as we embark together at the uptown stop at 181st Street. As we talk, I notice that he is a fascinating person and I enjoy a stimulating conversation until he needs to exit the train at 59th Street in midtown. As the train comes to a halt, I tell him that he is an extremely interesting conversationalist and that I am so glad that I met him. He thanks me for the compliment, reciprocates, and leaves the train. Should I feel awkward because he does not want to become my friend? After all, I complimented him—and he left.

It is evident from this illustration that a compliment does not necessarily mean that one wants to jump to having an everlasting relationship. It merely means that he sees positive attributes to the other person and that he is not too shy to share them with him. Although there are many

⁷Minkin, N., Braukmann, C. J., Minkin, B. L., Timbers, G. D., Timbers, B. J., Fixsen, D. L., Phillips, E. L., et al. (1976). The Social Validation and Training of Conversational Skills. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 9(2), 127–139.

differences between my fictitious A Train encounter and that of dating individuals, the common denominator between them is that compliments do not mean that one is certain that he or she should continue the relationship. Compliments are simply statements of fact. This applies in a dating interaction as well. Even if “Shira” were to turn around and explain that she does not want to continue, the objective positive feedback that he gave her is something that he thought is true. Of course, it is often unpleasant to be on the receiving end of a “no.” However, the compliments themselves should not add embarrassment to the uncomfortable situation of being declined another date.

Complimenting is Key

With this background, we can glean greater insight into the case studies that we discussed earlier. In case study No. 1, although Shani and Jeremy are dating for almost nine weeks on the calendar, they are really in the infancy of their relationship. They think that they have been dating for a long time, yet they have been mostly sitting parallel to each other, but hardly dating. If their relationship did not have a steady flow of compliments after the first few dates, it is expected for them not to feel the often sought after “chemistry.” In case study No. 2, Rachel’s friends might be correct that time will help them feel closer together. However, in order for them to proceed, it is usually necessary for them to compliment each other as well.

Compliments are essential in forming and enhancing dating relationships. Relationships that are lacking compliments are often like gliders without the wind to propel them, which will fall to the ground in a matter of time. Yet by harnessing the power of compliments and introducing them into a relationship, that relationship can soar. Compliments have the power to be the cement that holds the bricks of the *bayis neeman* (faithful home) that the couple will build together, to the pride and joy of *klal yisrael*.

Fighting Fair: The Art of Constructive vs. Destructive Arguing

Alex Bailey, PsyD¹

Inherent in every relationship is the potential for argument. In fact, from the *Avot* and *Imahot* in the Torah to our very own parents, people in relationships inevitably disagree with one another. But while psychologists agree that the potential for discord and argument exists in all relationships, they also agree that disagreements need not be viewed as negative or as bad for the relationship. It's all in how you fight. If you do it right, disagreements actually can serve to strengthen the relationship.

John Gottman, a famous researcher in the realm of relationships, has shown that the crucial determinant of whether a couple ultimately will succeed is how they handle arguing with each other.² He observed couples fighting and then was able to predict with great certainty whether their relationship would last for longer than another six years. Based on his research, Gottman cautioned that couples need to be aware of four components that spell disaster in relationships, what he calls the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”: criticism, chronic avoidance, defensiveness and contempt. Couples who either avoid arguing altogether, or who, when they do argue, are insulting, sarcastic, defensive and use body language that indicates they do not value what the other person is saying, are fighting destructively and likely will not survive as a couple.

So, how **should** couples fight? Couples need to recognize that arguing offers an opportunity to strengthen and improve the relationship. It's about sharing concerns and giving the other the chance to understand and respond to those concerns. In other words, productive, constructive, valuable fighting boils down to good communication.

Each stage of a couple's relationship offers its own challenges. Let's take a look at various stages and see how engaging in honest communication, especially during times of conflict, can ultimately lead to greater empathy, love and commitment.

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² Nan Silver; Gottman, John (1999). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Our first scenario involves a couple well-established in their dating relationship:

Michal and David have been going out for six months and know that engagement is imminent when they have a really “serious” argument. David wants to live in Chicago, where he has always dreamed of living since he graduated from college there. Michal wants to live in Queens, where she grew up. They have been skirting around the issue for months, but finally realized that they have to make a decision if they are going to get married—and the conversation became a fight. Michal breaks down crying. “I hate fighting,” she says, “I’m scared every time we argue that we are going to break up.”

I want to make two points about the scenario above. First, people often confuse arguments and disagreement with anger and flaws in the relationship. If two people want to be in a relationship, then arguing—even seriously—doesn’t have to signal the end of that relationship.

In our example, Michal and David have an opportunity to use this difference of opinion and needs as a chance to strengthen their bond. Michal should share what scares her about moving away from her hometown, where she is comfortable, knows the neighborhood and has friends, and David needs to respond to those concerns. David, too, needs to share why he feels Chicago is so appealing, and Michal’s job is to demonstrate that she understands those reasons and to look for ways to address them. An argument that revolves around communicating worries and concerns and addressing those concerns as a team is a constructive argument, and one that should not be feared.

This argument between Michal and David is a great opportunity to highlight a fundamental tool of constructive arguing, what psychologists label the “I” statement. Most literature on relationships will discuss the power of the “I” statement, wherein members of the couple are urged to express how they are each feeling rather than what they think the other person is doing. In this scenario, Michal should say, “I feel like my needs are not being made a priority” rather than, “You don’t care about what I want.”

Why does the “I” statement work? Two reasons. One: Considering the example above, if Michal were to accuse David of not caring about her needs, David need only respond with “Yes, I do” and the conversation will devolve into a he-said, she-said argument. However, if Michal states that she feels unheard, David cannot disagree with that—after all, she is describing her feelings! David, for his part, can do the same thing. He can be much more effective in promoting a useful and productive conversation by saying, “I feel that my comfort level takes second place to yours,” rather than saying, “You only care about making yourself comfortable.” Again, Michal will have a much harder time disagreeing with or dismissing David’s concerns when he expresses what he is feeling rather than attacking her with assumptions about her behavior or motivation.

Reason number two: When making “I” statements, neither person is attacking the other. Remember what John Gottman said above; namely, that one of hallmarks of destructive fighting is defensiveness. Anyone feeling attacked will automatically go on the defensive as a self-protective measure. Anyone who feels attacked, attacks back. If, however, the individual focuses on talking about himself or herself, then it keeps the other person from feeling attacked, and hence from needing to attack in return.

Let’s take another scenario to illustrate how good communication can help resolve conflict in a relationship:

Joshua and Deborah have just gotten engaged and now it is time to begin planning the wedding. By and large, the two agree on almost every detail of the wedding, but there are a few places where they disagree. One of those places is who walks down the aisle. Joshua has a lot of family who he feels close to and wants them all to walk down the aisle. Deborah wants the wedding party to be small. Deborah keeps on complaining to her mother that she doesn't understand why her fiancé is so insistent that "all those people" walk down.

As has been illustrated above, the most important thing to keep in mind is that couples must attempt to understand each other and explain their needs and work toward compromise. However, what often happens is something else entirely. Murray Bowen, a famous family psychologist, discusses a concept called triangulation. There are three points on a triangle and Bowen explains that in an attempt to avoid the unpleasant nature of conflict between two people, one of the parties will often bring a third into the conflict (metaphorically forming a triangle). In our example, instead of Deborah and Joshua working out the issue between them, Deborah goes to her mother and complains to her about how unreasonable Joshua is being. In this case, assuming Deborah is not trying to figure out solutions to bring back to Joshua, but rather, simply looking for someone to agree with her, her mother becomes the third point of the triangle. Please note that triangulation doesn't have to involve a third *person*. Joshua may decide that he does not want to deal with the issue and spends hours and hours at work so that he is unavailable to talk to Deborah. In that case, his avoidance through work makes his job the third point in the triangle.

In both cases, Joshua and Deborah are avoiding talking to each other. The danger of a triangle is that it allows both parties to avoid confronting the issue that must be dealt with. Inevitably, the partner who is not triangulating feels left out and further distanced from his or her partner. Triangles are very stable shapes in geometry, which makes them very hard to break. It is only through a conscious awareness of the process and a willingness to avoid triangulating that a couple will be able to make sure they are dealing with an issue appropriately, fighting fairly, and thereby strengthening their relationship. In our case, Joshua needs to explain what it means to him to have "all those people" walk down the aisle—and Deborah needs to listen with an open mind. Similarly, Deborah needs to explain why she wants a smaller wedding party—and Joshua needs to listen with an open mind. If each of them is committed to the relationship more than they are committed to having things their way, then there is hope for relationship-strengthening compromise and resolution.

The values of good communication we've been discussing apply even early on in a relationship, when there isn't any actual fighting yet. Consider this:

Shlomo and Miriam went out on a first date, after which Shlomo returns home to his roommates. He reports that Miriam is pretty and funny and interesting, and he would really like to go out with her again. However, she comes from a family where the men daven in a minyan every day and some learn daf yomi—both things that Shlomo does not do regularly and doesn't know if he has an interest in doing. Shlomo is now wrestling with whether it's even worth a second date with Miriam, since it's likely he isn't what she is looking for based on what her family is like.

Now clearly, there isn't any fighting going on in this scenario. After all, what can two strangers fight about?! But as with instances of interpersonal conflict, Shlomo's internal conflict can be resolved through communication. (And, it can even be said that his internal debate is a form of triangulation, since it leaves Miriam out of the discussion!) He should talk to Miriam honestly and openly about his concerns and find out if Miriam would expect him to be like members of her family. This is important because individuals who come together as a couple must want to be with the other person *as he or she is*. While all individuals develop and grow throughout their lives (and this often leads to changes in perspectives, opinions and behavior), entering a relationship expecting to change the other person can only lead to frustration, disappointment and fighting. (There is an old Yiddish saying that roughly translates into, "if you wanted to make potato kugel, you shouldn't start with noodles.") On the other hand, compromise and negotiation also are crucial in a relationship.

If Shlomo and Miriam had a positive first date, perhaps it's worth going on a second date, talking about the issue, and then seeing if it's a "make or break" issue or if there is room for compromise—in either direction. It is important to remember that in the description above, Shlomo finds a lot that he likes about Miriam. Being ready to fight for a relationship is a crucial prerequisite to being able to confront or address an issue.

As you see, fighting fair is hard work! It takes consciousness to avoid dangers such as Gottman's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and triangulation. It takes consciousness to remember to use "the I statement" and to listen attentively and with an open mind to what your partner has to say. It takes willingness to confront an issue head-on and live with the temporary discomfort that may result. That being said, good, loving relationships are worth the effort it takes to ensure that when conflict does arise, you are arguing constructively and not destructively. Disagreements happen, inevitably and regularly, at all stages of a relationship. But if the couple has a joint goal of maintaining a long-term, successful relationship, most arguments and disagreements can be dealt with and resolved.

Active Listening: Are We Really Present?

Rabbi Eliezer Zwickler, LSW¹

There was a radio commercial a few years back that I absolutely adored, about a little girl who couldn't hear. Two voices spoke almost simultaneously about very different treatment options. The first voice represented one medical facility where the girl received treatment and the second voice represented a different, hypothetical facility. The commercial was clearly paid for by the former, where she received a cochlear implant that allowed her to hear. The commercial ends with a representative of the successful facility saying that the girl is now like every other 4 year old, "She hears, but she doesn't listen!"

It's a phrase that might ring true for many of us.

The *eved ivri* is a Jewish slave who is sold into slavery. Rashi (Shemot 21:6) explains that this individual ended up as a slave for one of two reasons. Either he was sold into slavery by the court after having been found guilty of stealing, or he sold himself into slavery because of his poverty. At the conclusion of the sixth year of his servitude, the Torah informs us that this slave is to be granted freedom. If the slave wishes to stay in his present state, his master is told to bind his ear to the doorpost as a sign of the beginning of his lifelong servitude. Rashi quotes the Mechilta in the name of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai as to why the ear is punctured as opposed to a different part of the body.

Rashi explains that the ear is singled out because of the role it played in the Jew becoming a slave. In the case of thievery, the ear heard the words "You shall not steal" spoken at Har Sinai, but did not listen. In the case of poverty, the ear heard at Har Sinai that we are to be servants to Hashem only, but did not listen. The ear is punished through piercing because in either case, the Jewish slave failed to listen to Hashem's words. From this we learn that hearing is not the same as listening.

This is far too often the case for those of us who, Baruch Hashem, have been given the ability to hear. We hear, but we don't always listen. Is it that we don't want to listen, or do we unknowingly allow our minds to wander while someone else is speaking to us?

When it comes to dating and marriage, discerning the distinction between hearing and listening is critical. In our society, the term "being present" has become very popular. Being present

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means that one is engaged in an experience on multiple levels. In order to be present, an individual must be attentive to a particular experience on a cognitive, emotional and physical level.

Yet this is an area where many of us fail. We are not present. Rather we are everywhere but present. We often don't pay close enough attention to the people we love—the people who deserve our attention. Yet healthy relationships require us to show others how deeply we care. This failure, which is largely induced by societal changes, can and does seriously harm our interpersonal relationships. This is particularly evident in the way we communicate with our spouses.

There are two types of conversations couples typically have. The first kind we will refer to as a level one conversation. Examples of this include when one spouse reminds the other to take out the garbage or pick up the drying cleaning on the way home. These conversations are relatively quick and are content or action-based.

The second type of conversation we will call a level two conversation. These conversations require an investment. They require both partners to set aside time where they know they must fully engage. As opposed to a level one conversation that can be responded to with a few words, a level two conversation takes considerably more time, effort and attention. In order to have a level two conversation a couple must make the time, which usually means planning ahead. When these conversations are interrupted by cell phones, computers and other distractions, the ability for a couple to talk is adversely impacted and relationships suffer.

Chaim and Aviva were in their mid-to-late 20s when they were set up, and things seemed to really move along. Over their weeks of courtship they started to care deeply about each other. They had chemistry; they clicked. Chaim made Aviva laugh. He had a warm personality, a positive attitude toward life, and came from a great family. Chaim felt that Aviva was what he had been looking for: a modest person, kind, warm and a true baalas chesed. They enjoyed spending time together, had much in common and felt they had a great future ahead of them. It started to seem as if they were a match made in heaven.

As the relationship progressed and they grew even closer, Aviva started to become frustrated with Chaim. Aviva noticed that very often when they were on a date or on the phone, Chaim seemed to be focused on something else. When they were together, he checked his phone every few moments, and Aviva found herself having to repeat things several times. While Aviva tried speaking to Chaim about her feelings, he promised that she was important to him and that she always came first.

It wasn't long before Chaim and Aviva were engaged. During their engagement Aviva became increasingly frustrated. This time she shared her concerns with her friends who comforted her by saying that engagements are stressful, and that everything would be better after they were married.

During the week of sheva brachot, however, Aviva was overcome with sadness. She felt that Chaim had become a different person and that immediately they were beginning to grow apart. It seemed that whenever she told him he was not paying attention to her, he acknowledged her feelings, but remained disengaged.

Aviva decided that it was time for a heart to heart conversation with her new husband. She explained to Chaim that they needed to set some rules for their conversations. At first, he was confused. He was then shocked to learn that Aviva felt he didn't listen to her. She explained to him that listening isn't the same as hearing and that real conversations can't take place when someone is looking at his phone, reading a book or thinking about something else. By listening to Aviva—really listening as opposed to just hearing her words—Chaim realized his inattentiveness had created a huge wedge between them. After their open and honest dialogue, he agreed the rules were necessary to protect their marriage.

Chaim and Aviva jotted down a few ideas that they thought would help make their conversations fruitful and satisfying. They then shared their lists and agreed on rules for their level two conversations. Neither of them was allowed to have any cell phones or technology present in the room when they were speaking. If the house phone rang, they would let it go to voicemail. Aviva asked Chaim to repeat what she said so she'd know Chaim was really listening. Chaim insisted that they plan ahead for these important conversations so that work commitments wouldn't interfere.

At first they both felt a little strange about formalizing these rules, but having created them together helped put them at ease. After a few conversations they both began to appreciate the exclusive time that they made for each other. After just a few of these conversations Chaim and Aviva felt they were able to communicate better. Aviva felt that Chaim was really present and was listening to her feelings, while Chaim felt liberated at being able to focus only on Aviva since his phone, computer and other potential distractions were not allowed in the room. The fact that they both had to make eye contact and repeat each other's statements gave them each a real sense of satisfaction.

Chaim and Aviva's challenge is not rare. It is actually very commonplace in the Jewish community as well as our society. A 2010 Harvard University study by psychologists Matthew A. Killingsworth and Daniel T. Gilbert found that people spend 46.9 percent of their waking hours thinking about something other than what they are doing.²

"A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind," Killingsworth and Gilbert wrote in the study. "The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost."

The study concludes that as human beings, we spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about that which happened in the past as well as what will happen in the future. This suggests that we may not be automatically thinking about or focusing on the present. In a relationship, this could be critical.

Rina and Moshe didn't think that their first date was perfect, but they felt they had enough in common to go out again. Yet for most of their second date, they seemed to be engaged in small talk and could not really talk about anything of substance. Rina kept thinking about how Moshe reminded her of her friend's husband who was very outgoing and not at all right for Rina. Moshe, on the other hand, was so nervous about impressing Rina that his true personality could not come out. He spent the date worrying about what Rina would say to the shadchan and how that would affect future matches.

² "A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind." *Science*, November 12, 2010. Vol. 330 no. 6006 p. 932.

Without realizing it, both Rina and Moshe had emotionally checked out of their date. They were both present physically, but were not at all engaged mentally and emotionally. They were merely going through the dating ritual. Both Rina and Moshe's concerns were legitimate, but their concerns would have been best contemplated after the date itself. By allowing their minds to wander during the date, they weren't able to internalize and engage in the experience.

After Yosef revealed his true identity to his brothers, he sent them back to *Eretz Canaan* to tell Yaakov he was still alive. It was important to Yosef that this mission be accomplished as swiftly as possible. His father was not a youngster; time was of the essence. As Yosef sent them off he said, "אל תרגזו בדרך," which means "Don't become agitated on the road" (Breishit 45:24). Rashi explains that Yosef was concerned that the brothers, who appeared to be ashamed of their behavior, would start blaming each other for the entire drama that had unfolded. While Yosef was showing compassion for them, he was also concerned that if they were busy doing something else, like arguing, they would lose track of their goal—reaching their father as swiftly as possible.

We live in very different times from Yosef. But the lesson is true for us today as well. We, too, need to be wary of the distractions around us and how they detract from our relationships with people and the world around us.

This past summer I was among some 90,000 Jews who gathered at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ, for the Siyum Hashas, to celebrate the completion of the seven-and-a-half-year cycle of Talmud study. I had two of my sons with me as I wanted to experience this special moment with them. The highlight of the evening was the singing and dancing that took place halfway through the event. My sons and I were ingesting and enjoying the nostalgic moment when I noticed the thousands of flashes going off around the stadium at the same time. I couldn't help but think to myself that so many people were losing out on enjoying and living in the moment by trying to capture it on film. Attendees could have easily put down their cameras and joined the circle, as a sufficient number of talented members of the press were present.

Nicolas Carr in his book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* points out that over the last few decades we have become accustomed to everything being fast-paced. Carr asserts that "our desire for fast-moving kaleidoscopic diversions" has only gotten worse with the proliferation of the Internet. He continues by explaining that this fast pace, coupled with "multiple windows open simultaneously," erodes the human mind's ability to fully concentrate on the richness and depth of any one given experience. We live in a world with so much stimulation, yet we can no longer absorb the most precious and timely sights and sounds around us.

There are examples of this disengagement everywhere. Take for example someone attending the New York Philharmonic orchestra. Whereas in the past one would simply sit and listen to the performance, the Philharmonic now encourages those attending to vote via text messaging for the encore of the performance. It's no longer the social norm to simply take in the performance.

Our world moves super-fast, yet our senses have become dulled and our ability to connect—really connect with people—has also diminished.

Nowadays we are programmed or expected to be busy at almost every moment. While we may be able to accomplish a lot, our interpersonal relationships are challenged by our inability to be present and fully engaged at any given moment in time.

The more we are aware of this phenomenon, the easier it will be for us to re-engage, become listeners, develop strong as well as long-lasting relationships, and enjoy all of life's moments. May we be *zoche* to live life in the present—hearing, listening and fully experiencing the world around us.

The Importance of Premarital Education

Rabbi Daniel Schonbuch, MA¹

Editor's note: In partnership with the Shalom Task Force, YUConnects offers the S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop to educate engaged and newly-married couples to create strong and healthy marriages.

If the destination for a happy marriage ended with “*Harei at mekudeshet li b'tabaat zo kedat Moshe V'Yisrael*” (the statement made at the time of betrothal), there would only be fairytale endings written as happily ever after. However, as many couples have experienced, “I do” is only a symbolic beginning of what it takes to make a marriage work. Every decision made is one step closer or one step further away from happiness.

Consider the case of Sammy, 26, and Rebecca, 25, who came to speak with me about trouble they were having in their marriage. He was a law school student and rabbi, and she was an occupational therapist. Each was at the top of their class. They were charming, talented and full of life, but somehow over the last few months, they had lost their “spark,” and were more focused on pointing out each other's faults instead of finding their strengths. A common interchange would revolve around her feelings that her husband had lost interest in their relationship and his feelings that she was overly critical of his behavior. They often fought about house cleaning, raising their 6-month-old daughter, and how money was being spent.

I am aware that this may be an acute example of a young couple learning to adjust to their new lives, but I have seen many cases with similar or more complex problems presented by young Orthodox couples who were not prepared to deal with the relational or the financial issues that commonly arise in marriage.

Why Premarital Education is Important

For an Orthodox couple, premarital education is important for several reasons. First, it creates shared meaning. As individuals, we respond to challenges such as financial stress, difficulties in the workplace, and child rearing in different ways. Exploring how couples can act as a team to face challenges together creates a deeper bond where each individual's ability to deal with stress

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is strengthened by their partner's unique abilities. By participating in a premarital education program, couples are demonstrating that they are committed to collaborating together to solve problems that may arise.

Second, it helps couples to assess potential conflict areas stemming from different views on expectations concerning issues such as marriage, finances, work and children. Third, it gives couples a sense of confidence that if and when a problem arises, they have a set of skills that can help them resolve their challenges.

The S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop

Recently a new program called the S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop (Starting Healthy and Long Lasting Marriages) has begun to teach engaged couples the skills needed to have a successful marriage. The S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop teaches specific, easily learned methods for successful communication and effective problem-solving. The goal is that participants will emerge with a deeper self-knowledge and the tools to build a happy, successful and long-lasting marriage.

In just one or two sessions couples cover important issues such as:

- Increased understanding and sensitivity to each other's feelings
- Communicating effectively through a sense of mutual respect
- Promoting self-confidence in each other
- Financial management

The S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop, which has been presented to over 1,000 couples, is an evidence-based, scientifically-validated program designed to teach core relationship skills focusing on the centrality of bonding (attachment) and to develop a unique understanding of the logic of love and emotions.

Offered in various locations across the metropolitan New York area by a team of trained, Orthodox presenters (including presenters from Yeshiva University), S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop exercises are delivered to couples in either a private or group setting. The three-to-four hour-long program can take either one or several sessions to complete.

Couples learn practical, immediately-usable skills for improving interpersonal communication and understanding emotions. They learn how to navigate conflict and differences, uncover hidden expectations and assumptions that can otherwise sabotage close relationships, identify "emotional allergies" they each may have, and what may trigger strong reactions.

Results of a participant satisfaction survey indicated that the most valued components of the program are the interactive exercises designed to increase bonding, build self-awareness, and improve communication and conflict resolution skills. The couples most valued each of the following components:

1. **Stress Styles of Communication:** a graphic presentation designed to build awareness of their own typical reactions to stress and how their style of communication when they are under stress can create emotional distance instead of closeness and understanding.

2. **Daily Temperature Reading:** an exercise tool meant to promote healthy habits, such as looking for and expressing appreciation to one another, keeping up with developments in each other's lives, and expressing concerns along with specific requests for change.
3. **"I" Talk vs. "You" Talk:** an exercise in which couples practice framing critical messages and complaints in the language of "this is how I feel because of abc" rather than "abc is what you are doing wrong."
4. **Good Talking and Listening Skills:** an interactive discussion that promotes awareness of non-verbal communication, helps couples become both more effective speakers by recognizing the messages their spouse may actually be receiving from them, and more effective listeners by recognizing the message their spouse is actually trying to convey to them.
5. **Talking Tips:** an in-depth exercise designed to give couples a structure they can use to practice effective listening and speaking skills while confiding in their partner about a complaint. Talking Tips is a tool that teaches couples how to reveal their past hurts while embracing the value of listening with empathy.
6. **"Care Bank":** a practice that reinforces the importance of couples building and storing positive feeling toward one another through regular actions and through words that promote feelings of appreciation and love. The Care Bank helps each person articulate what uniquely makes them feel cared for.
7. **"Emptying the Jug":** a technique for identifying and expressing pent-up emotions and helping couples get in touch with each other rather than attack each other. This exercise stresses the importance of always ending the interaction with an expression of mutual appreciation—to the speaker for using the process of "emptying their jug," and to the listener for being present and for listening with empathy and respect.

Does S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop Make Marriages Better?

The feedback generated through self-reporting pre- and post-tests has been overwhelmingly positive:

- 98 percent said that they were better able to talk about their true feelings.
- 96 percent said they were more sensitive to each other's feelings.
- 93 percent said they had more realistic expectations about building a healthy marriage.
- 93 percent said they learned how to talk more respectfully.
- 93 percent reported that they learned how to become better listeners.
- 93 percent said they learned some valuable communication tools that they can use to discuss difficult issues.
- 93 percent said they learned how to express their opinions and ideas more clearly.
- 92 percent learned how to resolve their differences more effectively.

Maybruch Study

It is important to note that the positive data from these pre- and post-tests only reflected participants' attitudes at the time they took the workshop, either while they were engaged or shortly after marriage. However, clearer evidence of the long-term efficacy of the program was

revealed in 2011 by the results of a groundbreaking study on relationship satisfaction and premarital education, conducted by Dr. Chani Maybruch at Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration. The study, completed under the supervision of Dr. David Pelcovitz, Dr. Efrat Sobolofsky and Rabbi Dr. Chaim Feuerman, reviewed the relationship education that was being offered in the Orthodox community, examined the state of marriage relationships and considered what steps could be expected to have a positive impact. Over 2,650 respondents participated in an online survey, 91 percent of whom were married for the first time. The online survey included questions on relationship education, including high school and premarital education for engaged couples. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), modified for Orthodox respondents, was used to measure the level of marital satisfaction (Maybruch, 2012b).

Eight hundred and thirty-two S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop graduates were invited to participate in the online survey; 74 individuals (8 percent) completed the survey. A statistical test was conducted to determine whether or not there were differences in marital satisfaction as measured by the DAS between those who attended the S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop for engaged couples, another premarital workshop, or no premarital workshop. The difference in marital satisfaction between these three groups was statistically significant (that is, greater than would occur by chance).

According to Maybruch's study, those who participated in the S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop had the highest overall level of marital satisfaction, which was higher than both those who participated in another premarital workshop, and those who did not participate in any premarital workshop (Maybruch, 2012a).

Conclusion

Premarital education programs like the S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop may be the "silver bullet" that our community needs to help our young couple thrive in their relationships. By giving premarital couples important relationship skills and ways to build on their relationship strengths, couples will be able to get their marriages off to a better start.

Currently, several presenters have been trained at YUConnects and YU to offer the S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop for both engaged and married couples. To register or to find out more about S.H.A.L.O.M. Workshop, visit www.shalomworkshop.org or call 212.742.1141.

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The First Year of Marriage: Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Rabbi Eric Goldman, LMSW¹

In the first year of marriage, known as *shana rishona*, the potential for happiness is unparalleled. A couple has just started their lives together, experiencing everything for the very first time in a way that exudes a freshness and elation, and there is a palpable excitement that accompanies everything they do.

On the other hand, *shana rishona* also carries with it natural transitions, adjustments and possibly even challenges. The couple must make the adjustment from spending a few hours at a time together to living with each other. They may relocate to another community, state or country, leaving close friends and family behind. Routines shift, jobs may change, and responsibilities begin to pile up. Various scenarios arise, which the couple has not previously navigated through. All the while, they are learning new things about each other.

What, then, is the proper mindset with which a couple should enter *shana rishona* and approach their upcoming experiences and long-lasting relationship? This essay offers perspectives on the way young couples can take advantage of any upcoming challenges and reap the wonderful benefits of *shana rishona* and marriage.

Comparing Dating to Marriage: Apples and Oranges

In 1953, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, was approached by a young man who wished to determine whether or not he would have a successful marriage with the woman he was dating. The young man proposed a plan to rent two separate rooms in someone's house where he and the woman he was dating would be able to stay. This would enable them to experience as close to a marriage

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relationship as possible; they would be together within a few minutes of waking up and they would stay together until right before they would go to sleep. However, the young man was concerned about the prohibition of *yichud*² and so he brought his plan to Rav Moshe to gain his approval. In two brief paragraphs, Rav Moshe easily dispenses with the halachic side of the question. He then goes on to write the following:

This is only in regards to the halachic side of the question. In practicality, it is not fitting to do this because a person should not try to be too discerning [in these matters]. If the woman is found to be favorable in her appearance and her family, and she is known to be someone who follows halacha, he should rely on this and marry her with the hope that she is the one who was destined to him from the Heavens. The man should not test her beforehand, and if he does, it will not work, because these tests are meaningless. As the verse says, "you shall be wholehearted with Hashem."

Igros Moshe Y"D 1:90

וזהו לענין מדת הדין אבל למעשה אין זה כדאי לעשות כי אין להתחכם הרבה והאשה שמוצאת חן במראה ובמשפחתה ושמועתה טובה שהיא שומרת דת יש לסמוך ולישא אותה בתקוה שהיא המזומנת לו מן השמים ואין צריך לבחון אותה מתחלה וגם שלא יועיל כי אין הבחנה זו כלום ותמים תהיה עם ה' כתיב
שׁוֹׁת אַגְרוֹת מִשֵּׁה יוֹרֵה דַעַה ה' א
סִימָן צ

On the surface, one can question what Rav Moshe is trying to explain. After all, is this really true? Surely if a couple spends enough time with one another, learning each other's habits and moods, can't they better predict what their married life will resemble? What then is Rav Moshe implying with his response?

On a basic level, we could say that Rav Moshe is referring to the practical differences between being a married couple and a dating couple. We cannot compare being together 24/7 to even being together 17/7. However, I believe Rav Moshe was referring to something even more profound and insightful.

Can one Predict the Future? The Ever-Changing Present

During the dating stage, a man and woman have a certain focus and goal: they are trying to determine their attraction for one another, both physically and emotionally. This attraction can be based on numerous factors, differing for each individual. Some women may be attracted to an outgoing and confident man, while others feel more drawn to someone who is more on the sweet and reserved side. Some men prefer a woman who is involved in the world around her, constantly helping others and working with numerous *chesed* organizations. Conversely, some men prefer a woman who can give an informative lecture or inspirational *shiur* while others prefer those who simply keep to themselves and focus on their own personal growth.

While these factors may be crucial in allowing the attraction to develop between the couple, they would be wise to keep in mind the possibility that there are still many unknowns and that things may change and evolve after marriage. These changes may take place for a number of reasons.

² The prohibition against seclusion of a male and female. The details can be found in *Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer* no. 22.

Firstly, no matter how much time the man and woman spent getting to know one another, they simply cannot possibly know everything about the other person. Further, it is impossible to predict how each spouse will act or react given certain scenarios that will naturally arise in the future. How will they each respond emotionally to certain events that come their way? How will they handle stressful situations? As an example, dating couples often discuss how they will act as parents in certain situations: Will they be more strict or more forgiving? Will they be more actively involved or more removed, allowing the child to gain independence? Yet, no matter how much they pontificate these matters in advance, one can never be sure how they will act or respond until they are in that given situation.

Revealing Layers of Understanding...

The various experiences of early marriage, family life and life itself allow couples to continue to learn more about themselves and their respective spouse. Marital therapists refer to this as layering. A couple is constantly revealing deeper layers of the other's emotions and psyche. The more life stages the couple goes through, and the stronger the couple works to bond with one another, the more layers that will be revealed.

Rav Eliyahu Dessler eloquently made the same observation. In his various essays about relationships and self-awareness, Rav Dessler relates that a wise person may believe that he or she knows the prospective spouse “fully” before marriage; however, this is incorrect. The depths of true knowledge come after marriage through multiple experiences of giving and sharing (*Michtav MeEliyahu* Vol. I, page 73).

A second important shift that takes place between dating and marriage is that our own needs may shift. Therefore, what may have been attractive for someone while he or she was dating, not only may become irrelevant for that person within the marriage, but may even become an obstacle. For example, a woman may be very drawn to the active and athletic lifestyle of the man she dated. However, after the wedding, when he continues to go out one or two nights a week to play ball or exercise, she realizes that she would rather be able to spend more time with him and perhaps it would be better if he wasn't as athletic. Similarly, a man may have been attracted to a woman because of her outgoing and friendly personality while they were dating. However, once they settle into their marriage, and he begins to feel the expectation on his shoulders to be just as outgoing and social as she is, her social nature can become a burden for him. Examples such as these can permeate every relationship.

In a series of *vaadim* (discussions) on *shalom bayit* (peace in the home), Rav Shlomo Volbe, zt”l, *Ma'amarei Hadracha LeChatanim* (p.24), explains that it is impossible to avoid differences between a husband and wife. After all, they each come into the marriage with 20-plus years of different influences and various environments. That is in addition to the simple fact that just as we all have different physical appearances, so too we all have a unique emotional and psychological makeup.

For this reason, Rav Moshe felt the strategy presented by this young man would not be beneficial. There is only so much we can plan and figure out before marriage. We, of course, must make sure there is a physical and an emotional attraction. But after that, we have to accept

the reality that marriage (and life itself) is a journey that brings some uncharted territory. It is specifically within that unknown space that we truly have the ability to forge an intense bond with our life partner. As Rav Volbe says, having differences is not a sign of a weak marriage, but rather a sign that the couple is bonding together in a deeper and more powerful way.

True Growth...

True growth can only happen if we are open to these experiences and potential differences. If we approach marriage with expectations that everything will proceed exactly as “planned,” when these differences arise and layers become revealed, they may serve as challenges and obstacles. However, if we enter marriage with an open mind and a willingness to accept with love whatever it is that may come, then we have given ourselves the ability to turn challenges into opportunities and obstacles into stepping stones. As the *sifrei machshava* (see, for example, *Tzidkat HaTzadik* no. 49) explain, our shortcomings are not our weaknesses. Rather, it is specifically where we struggle that Hashem grants us the potential to accomplish greatness.

Drs. John and Julie Gottman, world-renowned marital therapists, offer a practical tool for all married couples to facilitate this acceptance: building love maps.³ These therapists highly encourage couples to check in with each other periodically throughout marriage, and answer a list of questions regarding everything from past experiences to current likes and dislikes. Using the underlying premise that people evolve and differences are constantly arising, it is imperative that a couple attempts to keep track of these differences so that they do not turn into roadblocks, but rather are used as methods of nourishing a deeper and stronger bond.

May Hashem give all of us the insight and perspective to approach *shana rishona* and our marriages with the open-mindedness and acceptance that allows natural transitions, differences and even challenges to become the strengths of our marriages.

³ John and Julie Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic* ([W.W. Norton](#), 1999), p. 81.

Newlyweds and Beyond: What Can You Do¹ ?

Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, MA, LMSW²

Introduction

There are many different modalities through which singles may meet dates, ranging from using a more traditional matchmaker, to meeting through friends, to dating events and websites. Nonetheless, there are still singles who find it difficult to find prospective dates. We as a community can no longer leave this responsibility upon the shoulders of a few dedicated individuals. All members of our community can play a major role in assisting the matchmaking and meeting process. This article will target a few segments of our community and suggest specific steps they can take to involve themselves in the shidduch process.

Newlyweds

Some people think that newlyweds are too young, busy and inexperienced to involve themselves in *shidduchim*. However, the fact that a young couple is blessed with finding their soul mate should inspire them to assist others in finding theirs as well. Given some direction, if every young couple is empowered to dedicate **two hours a week** to helping facilitate dates for their single friends, many more marriages would take place. Consider the impact on our community if every married couple felt a responsibility to help facilitate at least **one** couple's marriage! Young couples are closer to the age range of the average dater and know them more as friends than as matchmakers. This makes the entire process more comfortable for everyone. Prospective daters are more likely to listen to suggestions if they originate from a friend who knows them, rather than a *shadchan* who doesn't know them as well. There is also a side benefit for the couple themselves. Thinking of possible dating ideas together and facilitating dates is a wonderful bonding activity and may enhance the beginning of their marriage experience.

Here is a simple step-by-step process all newlyweds should try:

¹ Many of the ideas herein and more can be found in my monograph entitled "Sound Advice," available on YUTorah.org.

² Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky (YC '00, RIETS '03, AZ '05, WSSW '09) is the Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Torah studies at Yeshiva University. He and his wife have been involved in *shidduchim* for the past 12 years and reside in Washington Heights, NY.

- After settling in to your new apartment or home, sit down and make a list together (on paper or computer) of all of your single friends in two columns, one for men and one for women.
- Read the list a few times and jot down notes if you think of any compatible matches.
- If you don't know all the relevant background information or have lost touch with some of the people on your list, call/e-mail them and set up a time to catch up and casually ask what they are looking for in a prospective mate.³
- If you have a specific match idea, make the initial phone call to each party and set it up.
- Understand that the measure of success in this area is not defined by whether or not each couple you set up marries, but rather by whether they had an enjoyable date. This indicates that your idea was on target.

If at first you do not succeed, try again and do not get discouraged. Do your best to avoid setting up “random” dates with people who do not have much in common. Try to look for similar interests, aspirations and backgrounds/*hashkafa* when considering a possible match.

It is also advisable that you connect with an older couple, who may be more experienced in this endeavor and who can guide and mentor you for related questions or concerns. This way you will not feel as hesitant to suggest a match or offer some advice to those who are dating. Additionally, community leaders should consider facilitating this process by matching up couples with years of experience in the area of *shidduchim* with neighboring younger couples. For example, my wife and I are fortunate to reside on the YU campus in Washington Heights, a beautiful growing community of young couples. We recently ran a workshop for young marrieds in our area, where we presented on how to be effective *shadchanim* and offered advice as they begin getting more involved in facilitating dates for their friends.

Married Couples

But what if you are no longer a newlywed—what can you do for the single community? Don't worry, there is much to be done.

#1 - Open your Home

If you are comfortable opening your home, consider inviting singles to your Shabbat tables as often as possible. We sometimes forget that singles are an integral part of every community in which we live. Get to know and befriend them. Once a month, invite six to eight singles and have a mixed meal. A relaxed Shabbat table is one of the best and most comfortable ways to meet people. If you are more adventurous, get in touch with an organization and offer your home for a singles' event, or donate your time to that organization.

³ A helpful tool that I advise others to use is referred to as the “4+4” model, based upon the writings of Rosie Einhorn and Sherry Zimmerman in their book *Talking Tachlis* (1998). The basic idea is to delineate four personality traits or interests that are unique to an individual in order to help the *shadchan* get a better understanding of who they are and what makes them different from others. Some examples of traits are: outgoing, creative, bookworm, intellectual, free-spirited, organized, ambitious, warm, artistic, patient, and spiritual. Then think of four characteristics that you feel would match or complement with someone else.

#2 - Be a Mentor/Role Model

Act as a mentor or sounding board for single friends who are dating. Provide encouragement and support throughout the sometimes difficult dating process. Even if you assist one single or dispel one concern, you have made a major impact on their lives. In addition, invite couples who are dating to join your family at a Shabbat or weeknight meal together, which offers them a perspective on seeing the other within the context of other adults and a family setting.

If you have children of marriageable age, do your best to model appropriate perspectives on the dating process by focusing on the essence of the individual, and not on the outer trappings of externals and money. Encourage your friends and children to look for good *middot* and similar aspirations. Have your sons who are dating consider suggestions of women who are a little older than they are.

Singles

Singles are also great contributors to the broader dating process. In many communities, singles host Shabbat meals and organize events on a regular basis. These are wonderful initiatives and have led to many dates and marriages. In addition, if a prospective date does not work for you, consider whether that person is perhaps more suitable for a friend and try to facilitate their meeting each other.

Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* no. 8) teach us that G-d Himself spends time every day making *shidduchim*. If the Almighty has time for this holy endeavor, then we surely must carve out time from our hectic schedules to do whatever we are capable of and to share in the communal responsibility of building more Jewish homes and hastening the final redemption.

What Makes a Successful Matchmaker?

A YUConnects Research Study

Rabbi Ariel Rackovsky, MS¹

There are currently 86 million single Americans, 32.9 million of whom live alone.² Within the past three decades, the percentage of adults in their early 30s has risen from 9 percent to 30 percent for men, and from 6 percent to 22 percent for women.³ As more Americans remain single, alternative forms of meeting prospective romantic partners have proliferated. A study conducted by Forrester Research in 2012 reveals that the online dating industry is currently worth more than \$2.1 billion, with approximately 1,500 dating sites estimated to exist in the United States alone, catering to every conceivable religious, political and even racial niche. According to a study conducted by Harris Interactive for eHarmony.com, from January 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009 an average of 542 people were married every day in the United States because of that online dating service alone. During that period, eHarmony created more than 148,311 marriages, or 4.77 percent of all new marriages in the country.⁴

The Orthodox Jewish community also benefits from the technological advances available today, in which dating sites can host thousands of profiles and use sophisticated algorithms to generate potential matches. Sites such as frumster.com, SawYouAtSinai.com, J-date.com, YUConnects.com and ChabadMatch.com are populated with new members each hour, and other new sites emerge regularly. Given the effectiveness of matchmaking as a vehicle for marriage, whether through online sites or more traditional methods, YUConnects conducted a qualitative study examining the methodology (leaving the technological matchmaking algorithms aside for the purpose of this study), traits and attributes of successful matchmakers, with the objective of identifying and formulating best practices for others.⁵ There are many

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² www.unmarriedamerica.org

³ www.matchmakinginstitute.com/singlesmarket/.

⁴ www.eharmony.com/press-release/31/.

⁵ This survey study was designed by YUConnects and conducted by Rabbi Ariel Rackovsky under the mentorship of Dr. Efrat Sobolofsky. Rabbi Rackovsky analyzed the data response and reported the results and conclusions in this article.

people who would like to be more involved in matchmaking, both formally and informally, but are hesitant to do so, and others who dabble and would like to be more effective.

Survey Methodology & Sample Description of Matchmakers

Respondents completed an online survey or did so during a personal phone call, answering a series of detailed, open-ended questions about their involvement in matchmaking. They were questioned about areas including which population they serve, how much time they spend on matchmaking, what are the compatible factors they look for in potential matches, how involved they are in the course of a couple's relationship and if and how much they are compensated upon success.

Eighty-two matchmakers around the world, comprised of 75 women and seven men, responded to the online survey, representing a response rate of 26.6 percent of the 300 matchmakers e-mailed. The sample spanned the ideological spectrum of Orthodox Judaism, with representatives from the Modern Orthodox, Israeli Dati Leumi, Chabad, American Yeshivish and Chassidic communities. Several of the matchmakers responded anonymously, claiming it increased the truthfulness of their responses.

Matchmakers surveyed reported a wide range of successful matches leading to marriage. Out of 82 respondents, five (6 percent) reported having made no matches yet, and 40 (49 percent) had made between one and 10 matches. Twelve matchmakers reported making between 11 and 20 matches and two reported making between 80 and 90 matches. Six respondents refused to reveal the number of matches they made, and one respondent reported 15 successful matches a year. At the time of the survey (2011), two matchmakers were responsible for over 250 matches, and one matchmaker was responsible for over 1,000 marriages.

For those matchmakers who were compensated for a successful match, the amount varied from about \$500 to \$2,500 per side, with the modal response being between \$1,000 and \$1,800 per side. Three matchmakers give their monetary gift to their favorite charity; two of the three mentioned that they sponsor a wedding using their gift. Several matchmakers indicated that they don't request any given amount, and allow the couple or parents to use their own discretion. Pieces of silver and jewelry were identified as gifts by three matchmakers, but the majority referred to monetary gifts. One matchmaker who does matchmaking voluntarily said he asks for 25 cents to allow the families to keep with the traditional and halachically-based practice of *shadchanus*, or paying a matchmaker, but the families typically give him more.

Aside from varying rates of success, respondents reported differing areas of concentration in their matchmaking efforts, ranging from those who specialize in older singles to those who focus on a younger population. Some said they work with singles across the gamut of contemporary Orthodox Judaism, while others specialize in certain communities or subgroups.

The following points emerged from the data, which should assist those who wish to undertake this sacred mission and to advance the techniques of those who already do.

Matchmaking Methodology

Matchmakers were asked how they get to know the singles they are matching up. Fifty-two out of 82 matchmakers (63 percent) responded that they prefer an in-person meeting before setting someone up, especially when geographically feasible.

The matchmakers were then asked to identify and list the factors they apply in considering match compatibility. The responses, a total of 144 free-form comments from 82 matchmakers, were categorized and aggregated into the most frequently stated themes. Overall, matchmakers listed religious observance levels “*hashkafa*” (27 percent), personality and character traits (17 percent), and common goals and values (13 percent), as the three most significant factors they employ in considering compatible match possibilities for people in similar age groups. Additional key compatibility factors included: similarity in family background (11 percent), intelligence and education level (10 percent), and common hobbies and interests (5 percent).

The majority of matchmakers indicated that they first contact the man (or, in more *yeshivish* circles, his mother) to suggest the match and once he accepts and says he is interested, the matchmaker proceeds to ask the woman. Interestingly, three matchmakers noted that in a situation where it may be challenging to sway the woman in the match to agree to meet the man, matchmakers may want to consider approaching the woman first to ensure that she will accept the idea before contacting the man. “This saves time and aggravation later,” in the event that she is definitely not interested, commented one of these matchmakers. Respondents explained that information is shared over the phone or as part of a general e-mail, no matter who is contacted first. If the single or parent expresses a level of interest, a more specific e-mail follows with the profile of the prospective match providing more details (including family background, current occupation or schooling), references and sometimes a photo.

Three matchmakers articulated the importance of gathering as much information as possible about the people they are representing, because doing so enables them to enthusiastically describe one to the other and highlight the unique character traits that the other party would find most appealing. One matchmaker, with over 225 marriages to her credit, said, “What I am is a saleslady—I sell people to other people.” Once there is an affirmative answer from the man, the woman is contacted with information about the young man and decides if she wishes to meet.

Matchmakers who use online dating sites such as SawYouAtSinai and YUCnects use technology to perform the same matchmaking tasks. When they send the man the profile of the woman, it is usually accompanied by a personal e-mail sharing why the matchmaker is suggesting the match, whereupon he can choose to accept or decline the match. Once the man accepts, the matchmaker forwards the man’s profile to the woman accompanied by a personal e-mail, and she, too, can accept or decline the match. If both parties accept, a mutually approved match is made.

Five seasoned matchmakers echoed the sentiments of one matchmaker who has facilitated over 300 marriages, and said that for best results, it is critical to “suggest ideas people want—not what you think they *should* want.” Similarly, another matchmaker shared that she prides herself on

sending targeted ideas, as opposed to numerous match suggestions, and her online members thank her for never insulting or depressing them with any “way off” prospects.

Matchmaker Prerequisites & Traits

A Matter of Time & Accessibility: Two features common to all successful matchmakers were investment of time and accessibility or availability to the singles and parties involved. Those who wish to be involved should be prepared to dedicate significant time to matchmaking, particularly if it is a source of income. While most of those surveyed had no set amount of time they spend on matchmaking, those on the low end spend between three and five hours a week doing so, and others spend more than 20 hours a week. Indeed, a typical (though vague) response to the question of how much time was dedicated to matchmaking each week was “all the time,” or “too much.” In fact, two volunteer matchmakers said they would benefit from a secretary to field their calls. Investment of time not only refers to the time spent in suggesting a match, but being accessible and getting the various parties to agree to meet. In some circles, the respondents shared, it also means making the phone calls to arrange the first few dates. Efficiency and speed are also critical skills. One matchmaker said, “People do not like to be kept waiting—you have to make your phone calls in a timely fashion. I can have 14 people out on a date the previous night, so it can take me until 1 p.m. just to follow up on all seven couples.”

As a follow up, we asked whether and how matchmakers guide couples throughout the dating process, and at what point (if at all) they encourage singles to proceed on their own without the guidance of a matchmaker. Here, 70 out of 82 (85 percent) replied that they don’t have a specific time frame and that they encourage the singles to “drop the *shadchan* or intermediary” when comfortable. The next most common answer, often overlapping with the first, was the one given by 26 out of 82 (32.5 percent) respondents, who indicated that most dating couples proceed on their own after three or four dates. Interestingly, a few matchmakers indicated that while they are happiest not functioning as day-to-day micromanagers, couples expressed appreciation for their periodic texts or e-mails checking in and reminding them of their availability to be called upon for assistance. Several successful matchmakers shared that if prompted, they use those interval “check-in” opportunities to offer gentle recommendations on ways to advance the relationship, including advice about appropriate romantic gestures demonstrating emotional closeness.

Additionally, prolific matchmakers treat every social encounter they have as a potential “lead,” and utilize any conversation with a new person they meet or with old friends as an opportunity to network. This author was asked several times by enterprising matchmakers in the course of his research if he knew people who fit into various specific ideological demographics and age groups. Anyone wanting to be a matchmaker should be prepared to act on any encounter that may lead to a shidduch, and to follow up if necessary, being ready to answer questions and make phone calls with alacrity.

Sensitivity, Respect and Building a Relationship: Close to 10 matchmakers strongly asserted that matchmaking requires deep sensitivity, unconditional respect for anyone they serve and an overall level of passion and dedication for the cause. A matchmaker who focuses on matching

baalei t'shuva shared that it is most helpful to put oneself in the single's position, fostering the right empathy skills, and recognize that "no single (or married person for that matter) wants to be nagged, lectured, or harassed, by a stranger or a devoted matchmaker."

A matchmaker who specializes in a broad range of singles in their 30s and early 40s across the Orthodox spectrum said that she works especially hard to develop relationships with her numerous online members built on active listening, trust and respect. The warmth and deep-rooted care she shows enables each person she serves to maintain a positive attitude and the confidence helpful for the dating process. Furthermore, one woman added that when a matchmaker gets to know the singles she or he works with, the singles are more likely to accept that matchmaker's suggestions.

Persistence, Patience and Resilience: Aside from time and availability, there are three character traits that are critical for any matchmaker—persistence, patience and resilience. Persistence was shown to be an important trait in making matches because a significant percentage of those surveyed indicated that if they felt an idea they had for a match had potential, they did not drop it even if it was initially rejected by one or both parties. Some would provide a more detailed reason behind the suggested match and present it again immediately, others would wait some time (even several months) and then suggest the match again if they felt the members of the potential couple would be more open to it. One matchmaker said, "I am very persistent when I truly believe in something, and I will continue bothering people for years if I feel the shidduch is a great idea." Along the same lines, one matchmaker reflected that very often people reconsider their earlier hesitation or rejection to meet someone when the initial decline was for unsubstantial reasons.

Matchmaker patience is critical as well. When suggesting a match to someone, the person being set up may not be able to follow up immediately, either because they have already accepted another match suggestion, have begun dating someone else or have other commitments and obligations that make dating difficult. In other instances, it may take some time for a person to get back to the matchmaker about a suggestion. In the former case, to see such matches come to fruition, it is often necessary to wait for some time, perhaps even in the order of months or years.

Finally, matchmaker resilience is a key character trait because rejection and frustration are routine for those seriously involved in matchmaking. While it may be easy to feel that one's sincere efforts have gone for naught, and feel affronted as a result, the key ingredient to success in matchmaking is to continue in spite of these perceived setbacks. "Hashem credits you for trying your best, not necessarily for securing an engagement," a matchmaker commented. Three other matchmakers elaborated on this trait and advised that other matchmakers should "recognize their own limitations and be honest with themselves when they need to shy away from situations where they may not feel comfortable or successful, in representing or matchmaking." Another matchmaker recommended that her peers take brief breaks from matchmaking to energize themselves to resume their holy work. Two matchmakers suggested focusing on a specific niche (an age group, a hashkafa, a localized population, etc.) to maximize results, and as a way of counteracting burnout.

Recommendations for Change Offered by Matchmakers

Another question on the survey asked matchmakers to identify one area in the contemporary “shidduch system” that they would like to see change.

An Equal Playing Field: Among the most common answers were that the current “system” is weighed too heavily in favor of the men—13 out of 82 (16 percent) responded along these lines. Three matchmakers elaborated on how this unequal playing field manifests itself. The first matchmaker focused on the delayed response time, or lack of a response altogether, when a man is presented a match. “I know he may be overwhelmed with suggestions, and after I follow up and call him back a few weeks later, he’ll say that he has to get back to me and does not. I would even appreciate a response which resembles, ‘thank you for thinking of me, but I am not interested.’”

The second matchmaker referred to the difference in approach between men and women in dating. Women, she asserted, are more forthcoming in signing up for events, networking with matchmakers, and joining online dating sites and databases, while the men are slower to do so. “We need more men coming forward earlier in their dating careers, so that we can be more helpful to them and many others,” she commented.

A third matchmaker added that the current system shifts the traditional paradigm, in which men functioned as the pursuers. She insightfully shared that “in today’s time, a man enters the dating stage, often told by many that there are dozens of suitable women available to him, quickly inferring that he is in the esteemed position. Shortly thereafter, through dating and serious courtship, the messages begin to change. The man is then expected to make the correct adjustment, demonstrate chivalry, and genuinely place the needs of his wife-to-be before his own.”

More Focus on Character: Five matchmakers pleaded in their responses that we work together as a community to focus less on externals and labels and instead emphasize personal qualities and characteristics. One matchmaker asserted that “the improper importance placed on physique (beauty and dress size) and money does not lead to healthy relationships,” while another expressed concern that the portrayal of immediate attraction and love as found in Hollywood and Western culture leads to the premature conclusion of potentially promising relationships.

“TMI” Available Today: A related concern was the role of pictures in the dating process. Four respondents said that they would like to abolish the practice of providing pictures and three matchmakers responded that the prevalence of Facebook is detrimental to matching couples. “The phenomenon of ‘TMI’—too much information—posted and available before a date, available at lightning speed, is contributing to the quick rejection of match ideas, leading to a decrease in first dates,” one matchmaker explained.

More Social Events, Networking and Meeting Opportunities: Another recurring suggestion, mentioned by nine percent of correspondents, was the need for more venues and opportunities for singles to meet in a non-threatening, non-segregated manner. One matchmaker reminisced about a well-known forum for singles to meet several decades ago: “I feel very strongly that there

should be an ongoing weekly program for singles in a central location, like weekly lectures at Lincoln Square Synagogue many years ago. That was the one place that people could meet and re-meet.” Another recommendation asked for more efficient and fluid ways for singles to share suggestions for their peers, leaning on previous dating and networking experiences.

Further Matchmaking Training: The final question asked matchmakers for areas where they would benefit from additional training. The most common response, given by 20 percent of respondents, involved advancing their skills in mentoring singles properly, especially those who have been dating for longer. One matchmaker honestly shared the concern that “sensitivities are involved, and no one wants to be responsible for an unhealthy relationship or marriage.” Similarly, another matchmaker said, “I would never want to encourage something that’s really not meant to be.” Other responses to this question included specialized training in sensitively serving second-time singles and mentoring in properly assisting those with emotional or psychological challenges.

Conclusion

The results demonstrated that while there may have been slight differences in the way the respondent matchmakers meet and match their singles, six compatibility factors matchmakers use in considering matches were highlighted: religious observance levels, personality and character traits, common goals and values, similarity in family background, intelligence and education level, and common hobbies and interests. The data clearly showed that time, along with accessibility and availability to the singles or parties involved, are prerequisites for success.

Being sensitive, treating all singles with dignity and respect, and taking the time to develop relationships built on care and trust, are task requirements that increase match and networking opportunities. Persistence, patience and resilience are attributes a matchmaker should keep on hand to promote healthy relationship-building for the people they serve and to avoid burnout. Finally, the matchmakers raised awareness and shared a few recommendations for improvements in the system. The matchmakers also asked for more matchmaking training to assist them in becoming more proficient and specialized in their role.

While there were limitations in this study, in that it used a qualitative approach and responders were not mandated to answer each question to participate, it is hoped that the information gleaned will encourage and guide more people in becoming involved and assist those who are already trying to reap success in their pursuits.

The Medrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:4) relates that now that the world has been created, G-d spends his time making matches. It is most noble for people to help do the same as a partner and an agent of G-d. As one of the matchmakers concluded her survey, “Put your heart into it, and pray to Hashem that He allows you to be a *shaliach*—a messenger—in this very important mitzvah. Think of it as teamwork, open your eyes and ears to their needs (not your own), and finally, make yourself available to another. In this way, may we all merit to see more success in our efforts.”

The Case for Professionalizing Matchmaking in the Modern Orthodox Community

Sherry Zimmerman, MSc, JD
Rosie Einhorn, LCSW¹

In the song, “Matchmaker, Matchmaker” from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, three sisters sing of their hopes that Yente, the matchmaker in their small Russian town will find each of them the right man to marry. For many contemporary daters, the idea of using a *shadchan* is as far removed from their lives as Yente’s fictional 19th-century village of Anatevka. They view the practice as antiquated and irrelevant to 21st-century life, or associate using someone outside of their social network to find a life partner as an admission of their inability to find a spouse on their own. Although the matchmaking profession has continually thrived in *yeshivish* and *chassidish* communities, many Orthodox Jews who don’t identify with those communities are extremely uncomfortable with the idea of using a *shadchan*.

Matchmaking in the 21st Century

And yet, matchmaking is as much a part of contemporary living as cell phones and the Internet. In business, we use real estate agents, mortgage brokers and executive headhunters, all of whom make matches of one sort or another. Dating partners meet thanks to the informal matchmaking efforts of friends, co-workers, neighbors and relatives who set them up on blind dates, “casually” introduce them to someone at a *simcha* or event, or strategically arrange for them to sit next to an eligible single at a Shabbat meal or dinner party. Orthodox singles join SawYouAtSinai and similar online services and view them as Internet “dating sites” rather than the matchmaking services they really are.

¹ Authors Sherry Zimmerman, MSc, JD (SCW ’74), a certified family therapist and family lawyer, and Rosie Einhorn, LCSW (WSSW ’79), a licensed psychotherapist, have worked extensively with singles in their private practices and have trained a new generation of matchmakers and dating mentors through Sasson V’Simcha – The Center for Jewish Marriage, Inc., (www.jewishdatingandmarriage.com). Sherry and Rosie came in from Israel during the launching stages of YUConnects to properly train the staff members and a group of volunteers about best matchmaking techniques.

Throughout our 15-plus years of experience in dating education and mentoring, we've advocated for the revival of the matchmaking profession throughout the Jewish community. Our experience has shown us that most Orthodox married couples first meet each other through some sort of formal or informal matchmaking process. We believe that by increasing the number of professional matchmakers in Modern Orthodox communities, and by encouraging more singles to consider the advantages of using them as resources, fewer marriage-minded men and women will have to struggle for years to find partners.

We encourage daters to take advantage of every reasonable resource for meeting potential husbands and wives, including small-scale social events, Jewish Internet dating sites and above all, networking, which is a leading way for them to meet suitable people to date. Yet even though friends, relatives and acquaintances have introduced many daters to their future husbands and wives, their impact is limited by certain practicalities. Life in the 21st century is busy and stressful, and many people don't take the time to think of potential matches for people they know, let alone follow through with the lengthy process of putting a *shidduch* together. There may be a volley of telephone calls to garner information about the parties, another exchange of calls to answer questions and get contact information for references, followed by calls to convey a "yes" or a "no" answer, follow up with each side after the first date, efforts to convince one or both daters to try a second date, and remaining "on call" to help guide the couple through possible bumps in their developing courtship. Unless they're genuinely committed to helping match two people together, many people either avoid the matchmaking process entirely, or drop the ball when they feel their "duties" are too much to handle.

Developing a Matchmaking Profession

The fact that there aren't enough "amateur" matchmakers to go around is the strongest reason we advocate for the development of a "matchmaking profession" in the wider Orthodox community. Professional matchmakers would be men and women trained in all aspects of arranging and facilitating matches,² and who dedicate a considerable portion of their time and attention to matchmaking. Ideally, many of these professional matchmakers would receive salaries for their work, while others would be dedicated volunteers who commit a minimum amount of time each week to matchmaking. Some could choose to work exclusively with Modern Orthodox singles while others would extend their services to all Orthodox daters.

Experienced matchmakers know that it can take hours upon hours to develop an idea for a match, exchange information between the parties, wait for them to check references, help the couple arrange the first date, smooth the bumps that often appear at the beginning of a courtship, and be available to guide the daters as they hopefully move forward to engagement and marriage. An "amateur" matchmaker may devote himself to helping a friend or family member find the right person to marry, while a professional may be working on many matches simultaneously. The professional matchmaker usually has the advantage of a larger and more varied "database" of singles than an amateur, particularly when he or she follows the growing

² While both men and women are matchmakers, in this article we frequently refer to them using the generic term *shadchan* or the female pronouns "her" or "she."

trend of sharing client profiles with a network of matchmaking organizations and individual colleagues. This factor is particularly helpful to clients who don't fit neatly into classic generic categories.

It's difficult to find statistics that compare the success rates of professional versus amateur matchmakers. However, in our work with five community-based matchmaking organizations in North America and Europe, we've seen a clear advantage to using a professional matchmaker. Four of the organizations we worked with were initially staffed by sincere but untrained volunteers, and had negligible success. Each decided to hire one or more full-time matchmakers, restructure the roles and requirements of their non-salaried matchmakers, and provide some type of training. They began to see a meaningful number of their matches result in marriage. The fifth organization was staffed with paid matchmakers from its inception, and it has consistently facilitated a number of successful matches each year.

One of the keys to the success of organizations that use professional volunteers is the commitment of time these individuals agree to set aside for their clients. The matchmaking website SawYouAtSinai relies exclusively on over 300 unpaid volunteer matchmakers. Each of the volunteers has agreed to devote at least six hours a week to reviewing the organization's database and facilitating matches, and many of the site's most prolific matchmakers spend far more time at their avocation. YUConnects is blessed to have one full-time paid matchmaker housed in its administrative office, in addition to 100 online volunteers.

Compensation for Matchmakers

A dedicated matchmaker can easily invest more time each week to matchmaking than he would devote to a full-time job. In addition to the time and energy required to follow an idea for a match from its inception through the progression of a courtship, a matchmaker has to invest time and energy to meet and interview a critical mass of singles, follow leads about new potential "clients," maintain up-to-date records, and frequently review them to come up with ideas. The communities that have continually used matchmakers understand this aspect of the profession and consider the matchmaker to be a broker for the parties. *Yeshivish* and *chassidish* communities require payment to the matchmaker when a match-up leads to an engagement.

Shadchanis gelt, as the compensation is called, is paid to whoever sets the couple up, whether it is a professional matchmaker or a mutual friend. Although a matchmaker is free to choose to waive her fee, the common and expected practice is for each side to pay a fee to the matchmaker. The obligation to pay the matchmaker's fee is taken so seriously that a matchmaker may force payment through *beis din* (rabbinical court).³ Many believe that failure to pay the matchmaker is a bad omen for the couple.⁴

Several professional matchmakers in certain communities rely on matchmaking as a source of *parnassah*. However, since the fees are usually standardized, they may not reflect the amount of

³ Moishe Dovid Lebovits, "The Shadchan," *Halachically Speaking*, Volume 3 Issue 32, citing the Rama, *Choshen Mishpat*, available at: www.thehalacha.com.

⁴ *Ibid.*, citing the *Chazon Ish*. Rabbi Beryl Wein, "Second Look - The Shadchan," available at: www.torah.org.

time the matchmaker spent putting a *shidduch* together and don't compensate the matchmaker for her many suggestions that didn't lead to a marriage. A matchmaker must be prolific to be able to rely on matchmaking as a significant source of income.

The idea of paying a *shadchan* is less common outside of *yeshivish* and *chassidish* circles, and today it is more customary for the couple to give a gift at their discretion.⁵ We surmise that this is because over the past two generations, the Modern Orthodox communities stopped relying on *shadchanim*, and considered matchmaking, often done by friends and family, to simply be an act of *chesed*. Now that our communities are beginning to re-appreciate the value of professional matchmakers and understand the devotion and effort they expend to help bring about a successful match, we hope that they'll resume the practice of properly compensating the *shadchan*. Until then, we have to fill the void in our community by giving men and women an incentive to consider matchmaking as a career. We can accomplish this by developing training programs that will clearly identify matchmaking as an admirable profession, and by creating many salaried positions for full- and part-time matchmakers.

Current Modern Orthodox Attitudes Toward Matchmakers

When we first started suggesting that Modern Orthodox daters consider using matchmakers almost 15 years ago, some of them considered the idea so distasteful that they responded with comments such as, "I'm not that desperate," or, "That's like admitting I can't find anyone on my own." In addition to their concerns that using a matchmaker would have a negative impact on their self-image and reputation, many daters told us they were scared away by the negative stereotyping of the matchmaking profession. They'd heard horror stories of matchmakers who put couples together with little regard for their goals or personalities and insulted their clients by matching them up with less than ideal prospects, or pushed reluctant daters to continue with ill-suited partners.

Over the past decade, those attitudes have begun to change. It's become very difficult for singles to meet prospective dating partners on their own, and they've come to rely more on networking and go-betweens to set them up. They recognize the limitations of friends and family who may not have extensive contacts, make several unsuitable suggestions, or fail to follow up leads. The popularity of the matchmaking websites, the dedication of volunteer matchmaking networks such as L'Chayim, and the success of community-based organizations like Chicago's Simcha Link and Toronto's Sasson V'Simcha have contributed to the appeal of using a professional who has a broad client base.

⁵ "According to the Rama, the minhag [of paying the *shadchan*] is the determining factor... for the existence of payment at all," Rav Daniel Mann, Eretz Hemdah Institute and lecturer at the RIETS Israel Kollel. Rav Mann encourages the Modern Orthodox community to begin using paid professional matchmakers along with "the free services of friends and family." See also, Lebovits, *Ibid.*, citing the Rama, *Choshen Mishpat* 264:7, that payment of the *shadchan* depends on local/community custom.

Interestingly, there is also a growing trend toward using matchmakers in secular society. In 2005, *The New York Times Magazine* profiled two high-profile professional matchmakers and a successful amateur.⁶ All had high success rates with upscale men and women who were frustrated with Internet dating and wondered if they really were “their own best advocates in the search for a partner.” Clients were willing to pay initiation fees of \$10,000 or \$20,000⁷ and follow the advice of the matchmaker’s wardrobe stylists, cosmeticians and image consultants to increase the likelihood that they would attract and begin to relate to one of the matchmaker’s suggestions. The matchmakers’ high success rates may be related to the fact that their clients take them seriously, that the suggested matches are based on criteria of common social class, goals and values, and that the matchmakers coach and advise their clients throughout their courtships.

In the United States, professional matchmaking has become a multi-million dollar industry according to The Matchmaking Institute, which was formed in 2003 to establish a code of ethics and strict quality standards for the matchmaking industry.⁸ The institute estimates that there are over 1,500 independent professional matchmakers in the U.S., earning over \$250 million in annual revenues. It trains and certifies matchmakers and has formed the Matchmakers Network, a global industry trade association that helps matchmakers and dating coaches network to improve their services to clients.

It’s time that the entire Orthodox community move into the 21st century by developing its own network of trained, professional matchmakers and dating mentors to competently and sensitively help single men and women from across the religious spectrum find suitable dating partners and guide them to healthy relationships that lead to marriage. Concurrently, we in the Modern Orthodox community would do well to change our mindset and encourage daters to use trained, savvy matchmakers, as well as interpersonal networking and other social resources. *Yemei iyun* (forums) and lectures are perfect venues to incorporate the idea into the mindset of new daters by discussing the advantages of working with *shadchanim*, and how to select and work with one.

Matchmaker Training

Training, ongoing supervision and networking are essential components of the “new” matchmaking profession, which will earn the trust and confidence of hesitant singles. Some people seem to have a knack for matching people together, but many of today’s most successful matchmakers tells us that it took a year or more of building a client base, making suggestions, following leads and making many missteps before they were able to celebrate a wedding for one of the many couples they set up. Matchmaker training can jump-start the process so that a newcomer can establish her practice in a way that will maximize her effectiveness and avoid

⁶ Melanie Thernstrom, “The New Arranged Marriage,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 2005.

⁷ One of the featured matchmakers currently charges between \$50,000 and \$500,000 according to the Dating Industry News Blog, August 2, 2010: blog.datingpro.com/news/expensive-matchmakers-are-reporting-that-business-is-up.html.

⁸ www.matchmakingpro.com

burnout. She'll become familiar with the mindset and social environment of contemporary singles and the many common issues and stumbling blocks her clients may encounter. Training will help her develop the sensitivity and awareness she'll need to relate positively to her clients, make appropriate dating suggestions and respond to clients' concerns, and give them confidence in her dedication, abilities and discretion.

Training also focuses on helping matchmakers develop skill sets for the many aspects of their role. They learn methods of interviewing and keeping records, selecting criteria to use for matching people together, and presenting suggestions to both parties. They study the optimal ways to build a healthy relationship that can lead to marriage, so they can guide many of their clients through different stages of the courtship process. Training can teach them how to help clients develop reasonable expectations about a developing relationship, when to encourage a couple to continue dating and when to stop pushing, and how to use matches that don't work out to fine-tune future matches for clients. Even seasoned, successful *shadchanim* benefit from training, which refreshes their skills and introduces new insights and skills that can enhance their practices.

Above all, training helps *shadchanim* be aware of their own limitations—that they are merely *shluchim* (intermediaries) whose success depends on *siata d'shemaya* (help from G-d), and that there will be situations that they cannot or should not deal with. They'll learn to identify many of those situations and use a list of resources and experts, including rabbis, therapists, coaches and even wardrobe and image consultants, whom they or their clients can turn to should the need arise.

What Makes a Good Matchmaker?

As ancient as the matchmaking profession is, its modern version is still in its infancy, and professional standards, guidelines and certifications are yet to be developed.⁹ Nevertheless, at the same time we encourage daters to utilize *shadchanim*, we can let them know what to look for when choosing a matchmaker. The matchmaker is a facilitator—she does the groundwork to make an introduction, and offers information and guidance to enable the daters to navigate their courtships with knowledge and clarity. Her advice may be invaluable to many daters, but ultimately it's her job to empower her clients to evaluate the relationships they build and make their own decisions. Dater and *shadchan* alike should be comfortable with the matchmaker's supporting role in the process.

⁹ The Jewish Matchmaking Alliance, comprised of organizations throughout the Orthodox spectrum that provide matchmaking and dating education for singles, may be at the forefront of matchmaker education. JSMatchpoint and SawYouAtSinai are considering a pilot training and mentoring program for matchmakers. JMA held its inaugural meeting at YUConnects, Yeshiva University on April 25, 2012. Its mission is to increase collaborative efforts by leading organizations in developing constructive projects, professionalize education and pool resources geared toward enhancing opportunities available for the Orthodox Jewish singles population.

Most matchmakers interview their clients, preferably at a face-to-face meeting, or when distance is an issue, by a Skype session or telephone call, during which both parties obtain information about each other and decide if they wish to begin working together. A dater should feel comfortable with how the *shadchan* interacts with him, and have a sense that she's listening carefully to what he has to say and wants to understand who he is and what he's looking for. If the matchmaker asks thought-provoking questions, wants information about a topic that's uncomfortable to discuss, or offers an unsolicited suggestion about topics such as grooming, acquiring more clarity, or developing references, the dater should feel that she's acting with concern, sensitivity and respect.

Daters should feel comfortable asking a potential matchmaker to clarify the “technicalities” of her practice. What are her telephone hours? What procedure does she follow when she has an idea for a match? Can she be contacted for status updates? How does she handle follow-up after a date? Will she be available to mentor a dating couple? Does she expect a fee if the match succeeds? Can she clarify what the dater and the matchmaker should expect from each other? Do they both understand that the dater won't exclusively rely on the matchmaker and will be using other resources, such as networking, the Internet and other matchmakers? Does the matchmaker seem to accept the single for who he is and appear eager to work with him?

A dater will get a better sense of how well he can work with a matchmaker once he begins to hear her suggestions. How accurately does she describe the potential dating partners to each other? Are her suggestions “in the ballpark”—reasonably close to the type of person he's looking for? How does she react if the dater declines her suggestion? After a date, under what circumstances does she offer constructive feedback from the other person and when does she encourage another date? What's her style of doing so? Does she try to use an unsuccessful match-up as a way to fine-tune future suggestions? If a *shidduch* progresses, does the dater feel comfortable discussing it with the matchmaker or turning to her for guidance or advice? Does the dater feel she understands and respects his concerns, even though she has a different perspective?

Matchmaking for the Non-Professional

While the focus of this essay has been to encourage the widespread use of professional matchmakers by all Orthodox Jews who are searching for the right person to marry, the Modern Orthodox lay-community can do its own *hishtadlut* (effort) to help its many searching singles find the right people to marry. Just last week, we overheard a father of several marriageable young adults remark, “Someone just told me that I should be doing a lot more for my children than sitting around and waiting for the telephone to ring.” This phenomenon occurs in many similar homes.

We believe that singles, their families and friends should continually network, and the rest of us can also play a role in helping more couples come together. Two successful professional matchmakers enthusiastically insist that “everyone should be a matchmaker!” We concur. Anyone—married, single, dating, or not yet ready for marriage—can be a *shliach* who plays a role in helping a couple meet so they can decide if they are right for each other. Here are some

suggestions; make one or two of them your own, and play a role in helping a couple come together so they can build a *bayit ne'eman b'yisroel*:

1. Think of potential matches among people you know. If you can't make the suggestion, find someone else who will.
2. Spend some time brainstorming about matches with others—with guests at your Shabbat table, relatives at a family get-together, co-workers, your *chevrusah*. If you're trying to match up a particular person, try telephoning and e-mailing friends and relatives to ask if they have ideas for a *shidduch*. Keep a record of suggestions that come along, including the date, basic details, names and contact information. You'll be surprised how easy it is to forget. And once you hear of an idea or suggestion, don't drop the ball—it's important to follow through by checking on details and passing along the information.
3. The date didn't work out for you? Is he or she good for your friend? Suggest the match.
4. You may not have a good idea for a match or may feel uncomfortable suggesting your idea. But, since many people like to learn more details before agreeing to accept a blind date, you can help a dater you like and respect by agreeing to be a reference for them.
5. Become a dating mentor. If you're happy in your marriage and open to the idea of bring a sounding board and “coach” to a dater, you may be able to mentor someone you know through a courtship.¹⁰

¹⁰ See www.jewishdatingandmarriage.com/ttf2.html for more information about being a mentor.

The Role of Parents and In-Laws in the Lives of Their Adult Children

Dr. David Pelcovitz¹

Discussion of What Matters and What Doesn't

When a child is receptive to a discussion with parents about what to look for in a spouse, there is potential for an invaluable conversation about the enduring qualities that predict a successful marriage. Who knows the strengths and needs of their child better than a parent? Who is in a better position to share the life lessons learned from their own marriage—be it successful or challenging?

Research on what predicts successful marriage indicates that the following ingredients, though not exhaustive, predict marital satisfaction:

1. **Goals and self-Awareness:** While life is about change, a shared vision and dream is a core predictor of long-term success. While couples don't have to have identical goals, they have to generally share a set of values and dreams about what their new home will "look" like. Couples should keep in mind that change, particularly religious change, is part of life. The key is the ability to manage such change at each other's side, including an ability to openly discuss and share where they envision they are going in actualizing their shared vision and dream. In order to successfully negotiate this process, potential mates have to have a solid understanding of their own uniqueness—their own strengths, talents, goals and needs. Parents can often play an essential role in enhancing their child's engagement in this process.
2. **Ability to disagree in a healthy manner:** The ability to disagree and communicate effectively even in the face of strong feelings is an essential marker of marital success. As the

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Sefer Chasidim no. 88, says, “*acharis ketata charata*—after disagreement there is regret.” Researchers find that marital conflict, in and of itself, does not predict problems—rather it is the ability to work things out, to confront differences in a healthy manner, that reflects solid communication skills; reflecting a balance between honesty, assertiveness and an ability to respectfully hear the other partner’s views. Such couples are able to infuse their problem-solving discussions with humor, show genuine interest in what their partner is saying, and follow disagreement with letting go of anger—ultimately being able to express feelings of warmth and affection.

3. **Realistic and flexible expectations:** Couples need to understand that facing the inevitable stresses of life together in a manner that enables them to work jointly on overcoming adversity is an important component of a successful marriage. An aspect of this is an ability to view such stresses as part of life and to perceive sources of conflict as coming from temporary rather than permanent flaws.
4. **Bring out the best in the other:** Couples should strive to be close friends who enjoy each other’s company and bring out the best in each other. Some of the questions asked in research on this component of successful marriage are: Has knowing your partner made you a better person? How much has being with your partner resulted in your learning new things? How much does your partner help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are?
5. **Basic physical attraction:** While a basic physical attraction is important, this component of marital success is often less important than the first four ingredients and often grows as a shared life and years of mutual giving to one another is expressed in the physical realm as well. The vast majority of Americans believe in the myth of the instant “soul mate.” In fact, relationships require work, getting to know the person and developing lasting love through mutual giving, knowledge and intimacy.

One’s spouse develops into a “soul mate” over time, not as a result of an instant connection.

A brief note on what doesn’t matter. What is irrelevant in predicting marital success? A partial list includes subtle differences in background, parental profession, wedding-related conflicts, and minor differences in religious philosophy.

Understanding Changes in the Transition to Adulthood

In recent years, young couples have faced a drastically different set of expectations regarding their relationship with their parents than in previous generations. In the past, marriage generally signaled a shift to a life of financial and emotional independence.

The Torah teaches us that the way of the world is that a person should build a house, then plant a vineyard and then marry.

Sotah 44a

לימדה תורה דרך ארץ, שיבנה אדם
בית ויטע כרם ואח"כ ישא אשה
סוטה מד.

The shifting role of women, most of whom work, coupled with financial uncertainty and longer periods of education, has resulted in increased dependence on parents, often for years after marriage. Researcher Jeffrey Arnett reports that, in sharp contrast to previous generations, only 26 percent of young adults today think full-time employment is a necessary component of achieving adulthood. Only 15 percent consider completing one’s education as a necessary

component of achieving adulthood, and only 15 percent considered starting a family to be a core ingredient characterizing this stage of life.²

This new reality can be a breeding ground for conflict. Parents often feel that monetary support should translate to an increased right to have a say in their married child's life, giving them an active voice in deciding where their adult child should live and where their grandchildren should go to school. From the perspective of the parents, many have voiced feelings of resentment at what they perceive to be a sense of entitlement and lack of gratitude on the part of their children whom they generously support.

The Dangers of Over-Control

Psychologists and other mental health professionals have repeatedly found that a key task of couples in their early years of marriage is finding their own voice and setting on the path of achieving their dreams. When parents interfere with this delicate psychological process, they risk bringing on the very difficulties they were trying to avoid. It is essential that parents understand that they have total control over the decision of whether or not to financially support their married children. Once they have made that decision, they have no right to dictate the path that their children have decided to take in their own lives.

The renowned 19th-century author R. Yisrael Lipschitz, known as the *Tiferes Yisroel*, shared a fascinating psychological insight about the psychological task of young adulthood. He wrote (*Tiferes Yisroel, Avos, Boaz 4:2*) that a person cannot find his own voice in achieving his dreams until he leaves his parents' home. The process of leaving home and living independently, the *Tiferes Yisroel* said, allows one to achieve the unique blend of integration of his parents' values while at the same time developing his own unique vision of the life he wants to lead. Psychological research has found that interfering with this process of finding one's voice can lead to depression, anxiety, anger and a general sense of unhappiness.

Responsibilities of Young Adult Children

A frequent complaint on the part of parents of young adults is that their children often feel entitled to the support that they are given by their parents. The failure to show gratitude can be quite problematic. Recent studies have found numerous benefits that are present when an individual develops the capacity to express gratitude to others. Among the benefits of gratitude are that not only does the recognition of what we owe others make it more likely that they will continue to act kindly toward us, but in fact we are more likely to be generous to others when we develop this trait in ourselves. The same body of research has also proven that those who recognize the good that others do for them are also easier to get along with, more forgiving and less self-involved. Ninety-five percent of individuals who express gratitude describe feeling happy as they are thanking their benefactor. Over half of those people say that expressing gratitude makes them feel extremely happy. In a fascinating study, researchers divided study participants into three groups. One group was asked to write about five things they were grateful

² Arnett, J., (2004) *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from Late Teen through the Twenties*, Oxford University Press.

for during the previous week. The other two groups were either asked to describe five hassles from the past week or five events that affected them. The members of the group that expressed gratitude described better overall feelings about their lives during that 10-week period, were more optimistic about their future during this time-span, and even reported feeling physically healthier than those in the other two groups.³

The irony is that psychologists find that people tend to be more grateful when they experience kindness from unexpected sources while we tend to be least grateful to those we are closest to.

Keeping these insights in mind, young adults should develop in themselves the trait of recognizing how much they owe their parents and to expressing sincere appreciation of the support, love and kindness given unconditionally by parents well past an age where one can reasonably expect strong levels of financial support.

Handling Disagreement⁴

When parents or in-laws and their children or children-in-law find themselves repetitively engaged in angry interchanges, it is best to keep in mind that disagreements are often a helpful mechanism for handling tension and improving relationships. Research has found that it is not how often family members fight but *how* they fight that determines the health of family interaction. When such disagreements are dominated by high level yelling, screaming, criticism and lecturing, issues do not get resolved. Particularly disruptive are fights characterized by immediate spirals of emotionalism and expressions of intense emotions, as such disagreements, almost never end with each side listening to the other. Consequently, the same fight tends to be waged repeatedly with mutual feeling that the other side is not truly listening to the other's perspective. The antidote to this futile and unpleasant process is to engage in planned discussions. These discussions should be scheduled ahead of time when both parents and child or in-laws can make sure that there is no interruption and each has each other's undivided attention. A helpful set of guidelines for these discussions are summarized by thinking of the three Ps: (1) pullback response, (2) planned discussion, and (3) perspective-taking.

The pullback response. The pullback response is what takes place when both parents and child and/or in-laws discipline themselves to not respond immediately and emotionally to a perceived provocation. In pre-Holocaust Europe, Rabbi Baruch Ber Leibowitz of Kamenetz would not allow himself to give in to anger at family members until he put on a special "anger hat." When he found himself becoming angered by a student or family member, he would go into his bedroom and rummage through his closet until he found his anger hat and put it on. Only then would he allow himself to express his frustration. Of course, by buying himself the extra time that he took to find the hat, he was able to sufficiently calm down so he could engage in a more constructive discussion informed by the perspective of the other party. Recent neurobiologic

³ McCullough, M. & Emmons, R. (2004) *The Psychology of Gratitude*, Chapter 7, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

⁴ Portions of the rest of this article are adapted from the ideas of Rona Novick, PhD and Pelcovitz, D. "Marital conflict in relationships with in-laws," Chapter in: *Whither Thou Goests*, Sarah Shapiro, Devora Publishing, 2008.

research has found that when we give ourselves the few seconds that it takes to go from the short neural circuitry that connects our emotions to the primitive brain structures where animalistic anger resides to the longer neural structures connected to the front part of our brain where more mature thinking resides, we are better able to deal with our anger in a productive manner that leads to constructive problem-solving. In order to do this, however, we need to follow the old-fashioned advice of taking several slow breaths or slowly counting to ten or metaphorically putting on Reb Baruch Ber's hat. This process should save parents and children or in-laws from unnecessarily hurting one another's feelings and the tendency to engage in emotional interchanges that never lead to constructive problem-solving.

Planned discussion. The key to successful conflict resolution is timing. When family members carefully arrange their schedules so that their cell phones are off, work is put on hold and alternative arrangements are made for child care, an atmosphere is created that is conducive to getting down to the work of real communication. Please remember the keys to successful communication, which include (1) beginning with "I" statements, as opposed to "you" statements, which tend to engender blame and criticism; (2) disciplining one's self to stay on one topic at a time; and (3) bringing an air of curiosity to trying to understand the point of view of the other family member.

Perspective taking. Psychologists have found that the key to communication is the adage "To be understood, first understand." In the process of discussing areas of disagreement, the individual who initiated the conversation about the area of conflict should first take on the role of listening until he or she fully understands the perspective of the other. In a powerful technique often used in marriage therapy—the speaker-listener technique—each family member has his or her turn to assume either the speaker or the listener role. The job of the listener is to briefly paraphrase what he or she hears the speaker say. The speaker should express his or her feelings about the area of disagreement in brief sentences, never longer than three or four sentences at a time, after which the listener should briefly paraphrase what he or she heard. The speaker should then reflect back to the listener whether or not he feels understood. If he does not feel understood, he should correct the misconception until the feeling of complete understanding is achieved. It is important during this process that the speaker stick only to the topic at hand and not drag in other areas causing tension in the in-law or parent/child relationship. After the speaker feels completely understood by the listener, the roles should switch so that the speaker now becomes the listener while the listener describes his or her perspective regarding the problem. This powerful technique often leads to an ability on the part of both parties to really "get" the perspective of the other. Once each side feels truly "understood," a compromise solution will often follow automatically. It is important to note that should such discussions deteriorate into angry interchanges, family members should end the discussion and reschedule a meeting at a later time when, hopefully, a calmer interchange can take place.

In-laws: Strategies for Dealing with a Frequent Source of Marital Conflict

In a survey of almost 1,500 Orthodox Jewish couples in the United States, researchers found that close to 40 percent of couples in our community report conflict over in-laws to be a significant

source of marital conflict.⁵ Early in a marriage, the default setting is to assume that the new family will be governed by a similar set of rules and expectations that characterized their family of origin. Yet families are inherently different. Research in family psychology finds that the two main organizing influences of families is rule structure—ranging from rigid to chaotic—and emotional closeness—ranging from enmeshed to disengaged. If one comes from a family that is very organized, compulsive about time and emotionally distant, it can come as a shock to be exposed to in-laws who might be perceived as intrusive, disorganized and chaotic.

The key is not to see the inevitably different family culture as better or worse but rather as a variation on the theme of normal. Once one pathologizes this difference as a “defect,” one’s spouse is likely to respond by seeing this issue as one of divided loyalties where they have to choose between spouse and parents. This can lead to a non-productive defensiveness and escalation of conflict is likely to follow.

Hierarchy: Challenges Posed by In-laws

The rule structure of a family can range from rigid to chaotic.

In-laws with a chaotic style might pose difficulty for a son-in-law or daughter-in-law regarding issues such as:

- **Time management:** This might be manifested by in-laws being chronically late in arriving for Shabbos, showing up to watch the children, etc.
- **Disciplinary style:** A lax approach to watching or disciplining grandchildren can lead to discomfort on the part of a parent who is used to a more structured style of raising children.

Rigid in-laws might pose difficulty for a son-in-law or daughter-in-law regarding issues such as:

- **Formality:** In-laws might stand on ceremony if son-in-law or daughter-in-law isn’t careful about calling, remembering birthdays, etc. They also might be less understanding regarding lack of promptness and more likely to get upset at a perception of overly lax parenting style when spending time at children’s home. In turn, their discipline might be viewed as too controlling, overprotective or rigid when watching grandchildren.

Another major potential source of conflict is in the area of emotional connectedness. If a family is overly close, often referred to by family therapists as “enmeshed,” the potential difficulties might coalesce around potential sources of conflict such as unexpected visits, prolonged visits, or a set of expectations of closeness from a son-in-law or daughter-in-law with a “psychological allergy” to closeness that the child might perceive as smothering.

The other extreme of emotional closeness is lack of connection. In such families, in-laws might feel that visiting their children a few times a year and an occasional call is more than sufficient. This can easily be viewed as uncaring to a son-in-law or daughter-in-law who come from a family with a warmer emotional temperature.

⁵ Fox, D. and Pelcovitz, D. (2008) Aleinu Marital Satisfaction Survey, I, Los Angeles, California, Jewish Board of Family and Children Services.

Recommendation

Take an active role in educating your spouse about your family of origin's rules. It is easy to forget that in dealing with our parents, we have the benefit of decades of learning to accommodate to their emotional needs, demands and unique idiosyncrasies. Often our accommodation to their personalities is so much a part of us that we don't even realize how we have molded our behavior to minimize conflict and maximize effective communication. Bring a high level of empathy to your spouse, who doesn't have the benefit of this experience and is often expected to "instantly" master this complex and often inscrutable code of conduct.

This means that the most crucial ingredient in managing the often inevitable challenges of getting used to an alien family style is open communication between spouses. Spouses should explore a coping plan for dealing with frustration in part by managing their expectations and not pathologizing a situation where "different" doesn't mean crazy or insensitive. Perhaps the most important point is that validation isn't the same as agreement. When one calmly listens and validates spouses who are upset with in-laws, the son or daughter doesn't have to feel a need to defend their parent. This isn't a lack of loyalty to parents—it is simply supporting a spouse while helping them understand an alien culture.

Torah Insights: The Role of Parents and In-Laws in the Lives of Their Adult Children

Rabbi Mordechai Willig¹

What is a role of a parent in the dating process?

Take wives and give birth to sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and husbands for your daughters. They will give birth to sons and daughters, multiply there (in exile).

Yirmiyahu 29:6

קחו נשים והולידו בנים ובנות וקחו לבניכם נשים ואת בנותיכם תנו לאנשים ותלדנה בנים ובנות ורבו שם ואל-תמעטו.
ירמיהו כט:ו

Hashem's charge to those in exile in Bavel delivered through Yirmiyahu HaNavi to marry off their children is a timeless mandate to ensure the proper continuity of our People (*Kidushin* 29a, 30b). Nonetheless, the parental role in marrying off children varies from generation to generation and from community to community.

For example, in Talmudic times, it was common to marry off children in their early teens. Nowadays, marrying off children at this early age is no longer practiced anywhere. Similarly, a father has an obligation to enable his daughter to be a suitable marriage candidate by providing her with nice clothing (*Kidushin* 30b) and a dowry (*Kesubos* 52b). This obligation is understood differently in each segment of Torah society.

More fundamentally, parental involvement in marrying off children is approached in dramatically different ways. It often varies from community to community and from family to family. In some families, the parents play an active role as initiators, and in other families, the child leads the process and the parents are available for support. It may be helpful for the parents and child to have an open dialogue about their respective roles in the process. Parents should be appreciative of the many efforts done on behalf of their children, whether through a traditional matchmaker, a friend, or through a social venue. Parents and children should work together to identify the role of the parents and the child in the dating process.

From the perspective of *kibud av va'em*, what should a child do when his/her parents object to his/her choice of a spouse?

It is widely known that the Rama (*Y.D.* 240:25) rules that a son is not required to obey the

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objections of a parent to his choice of a wife. However, a more careful reading of the Rama's source (Maharik 166) and the *Chazon Ish* (Y.D. 149:8) yields a different conclusion. The child may ignore an unreasonable request of a parent, including a request not to marry someone suitable. However, if we can objectively determine that his/her choice is inappropriate and the parents' request is reasonable, the child must obey the request of the parent.

There is an inherent difficulty in implementing this rule on a practical level because when such situations occur, the parents will often assume that their request is reasonable and the child will argue that it is unreasonable. In order to resolve these issues, a halachic question must be asked by the child to a competent rabbi who knows and understands the prospective couple. The rabbi will take the following into consideration:

- The prospective couple may in fact be appropriate for one another, in which case the child need not obey his parents. However, the rabbi should make sure that the child is aware of the consequences of disobeying the request of the parents, which may cause friction and lead to stress, both personally and on a marriage.
- When considering whether a spouse is an appropriate match, the rabbi should consider both members of the match. Parents may object to a prospective spouse because of certain flaws that they see in the prospective spouse, and may not realize that their own child has similar or complementary flaws. While the parents may see their objection as perfectly reasonable, it is only because they may not have an objective perspective on the situation. In this case, the objection is unreasonable and need not be obeyed. [For a more detailed halachic discussion, see *Bais Yitzchak* Vol. 38 p. 190-192.]

What are some helpful guidelines for parents, in-laws and married children?

Once a couple is married, potential intervention is even more problematic. While the technical exemption from obeying a parent applies to a married woman (*Kidushin* 30b, See *Gur Aryeh*, Vayikra 19:3), the underlying logic may be that her marital responsibilities may make the parental request unreasonable. The identical exemption can apply if a parental request to a married man threatens his *shalom bayis*, marital harmony (Ibid, p. 191).

Wise parents make no demands of their married children, irrespective of the financial support they provide. Common flash points, such as where a young couple spends Yom Tov or what they name their children, are opportunities for parents to demonstrate the wisdom of silence. Even unsolicited advice often yields regrettable consequences.

Of course, good married children learn from parental role models and establish healthy relationships with parents-in-law.

In conclusion, parents should count their blessings when dealing with the challenges of both marriageable and married children. Good parenting, at every stage of a child's life, is critical to carrying out the biblical mandate of our People's continuity, and to yield lasting *nachas* and familial harmony.

A Conversation about the Prenup

Ilana Blass, Esq.¹

One of the major issues currently affecting the religious community is the issue of the modern-day *agunah*—a woman who is trapped in a marriage that has functionally ended, but has not been halachically terminated because her husband has refused to give her a *get*, a Jewish writ of divorce. Sometimes this refusal is temporary and is simply a manifestation of the anger and confusion that surrounds the initial stages of a divorce. However, the withholding of a *get* is often used as leverage by a husband to extract concessions from his wife during their divorce negotiations, such as a more favorable custody arrangement or a reduction in child support or maintenance (alimony) payments. Since 1992, the Beth Din of America (BDA), in conjunction with leading rabbinic and legal scholars, has promulgated the BDA Prenuptial Agreement (the “Prenup”),² which quickly has become the most viable and far-reaching solution to this modern-day *agunah* problem.³

Through my work as Administrative Attorney at the BDA, I am routinely asked questions about how the Prenup practically works. This article is meant to address the most commonly asked questions in order to give the layperson a fuller understanding of how the Prenup operates. This article, however, is not intended to be a comprehensive halachic or legal analysis of the Prenup.

Can you explain what the Prenup is and what it does? I thought a prenuptial agreement deals with financial arrangements in case of a divorce, I didn’t think it had anything to do with a *get*.

Generally, a prenuptial agreement signed in the secular world is a written contract between two people who are about to marry, which sets out the terms surrounding the treatment of assets should the marriage ultimately terminate. Like all such agreements, the Prenup is a written agreement that is properly witnessed and notarized and entered into by a *chassan* and *kallah* prior to their wedding. However, unlike a secular prenuptial agreement, the goal of the Prenup is

¹ Ilana Blass (SCW ’95, Cardozo ’03) is the primary manager of the commercial and matrimonial din Torah (arbitration) caseload of the Beth Din of America. She also plays a role in the Beth Din’s handling of contested *get* matters.

² The latest version of the Prenup can be found at www.theprenup.org.

³ It should be noted that although the Prenup generally addresses the problem of a man who refuses to grant a *get*, there are situations in which a man requests a divorce from his wife and the woman refuses to accept a *get*. The BDA is committed to helping all individuals, male or female, obtain a *get* in a timely manner.

not to stipulate the manner in which assets are to be divided in the event of a divorce.⁴ Rather, the objective of the Prenup is to ensure that certain procedures surrounding the *get* ceremony occur in the event that a couple decides to divorce.

There are two main provisions of the Prenup that work together toward the goal of preventing an *agunah* situation. These provisions state that:

- If so requested by either party, both spouses agree to (i) appear before a panel of *dayanim* (judges) arranged by the BDA, (ii) discuss when the *get* ceremony should occur and (iii) abide by the decision of these *dayanim* with respect to the timing of the *get* ceremony, and
- If the couple physically separate and is no longer living together in one home, the Jewish law obligation of the husband to support his wife is formalized, and the husband is obligated to pay \$150.00 per day (indexed to inflation), from the date he receives written notice from the wife of her intention to collect that sum, until the date a Jewish divorce is obtained.

Together, these two provisions ensure that a *get* is given in a timely manner while providing a financial incentive for the husband to abide by the decision of the *dayanim* with respect to the timing of the *get*.

One might think that the Prenup seems to disproportionately favor the wife. What is to stop a woman from requesting a *get* and then dragging out the process to ensure a large payment from her husband?

The Prenup is meant to ensure that a *get* is given in a timely fashion. It is not meant to be used as a means to extract money from a husband who is ready and willing to give his wife a *get*. It is important to note that the Prenup gives the *dayanim* discretion to decide when the support obligation begins once it is requested by the wife. Therefore, if a woman requests a *get*, the parties promptly agree on a date to appear before the *dayanim*, and the husband appears before the *dayanim* and abides by their decision regarding the timing of the *get*, little or no support obligation would be justified. Additionally, the Prenup states that the support obligation terminates should the wife fail to appear at the BDA or to abide by a decision of the *dayanim*.⁵

Does the Prenup really work to ensure that a *get* is given in a timely fashion?

The answer to this question is a resounding yes. Anecdotally, I can say that when we speak to parties on the phone regarding an impending divorce there is an implicit understanding by the majority of couples who have signed the Prenup that the *get* is a non-negotiable issue since the parties are bound by the agreement they signed prior to their marriage. The Prenup is a legally enforceable document and is based on well-settled principles of contract law. As such, attorneys in these cases routinely advise their clients that the Prenup will hold up in court and it is not worth the energy or money that would be necessary to contest the document. Finally, there have

⁴ It should be noted that the relevant portions of the Prenup can be incorporated as part of a larger prenuptial agreement. See <http://www.theprenup.org/prenupforms.html> for the appropriate language.

⁵ For further information see R. Mordechai Willig, "The Prenuptial Agreement: Recent Developments," *The Journal of the Beth Din of America* I (2012): 12.

been a number of highly contentious divorces that have occurred under the auspices of the BDA in which every issue was highly litigated, but where the Prenup was effective in ensuring that the *get* could not be used for leverage. The Prenup effectively stopped any argument for delaying the granting of the *get*.

I understand the importance of the Prenup for some couples, but I am certain that my marriage will work out. Why would I want to think about divorce during the happiest period of my life?

This is probably the most often heard objection to the Prenup. Understandably, many couples feel uncomfortable discussing the possibility of divorce during their engagement. There are two primary answers to this question that may help minimize this uneasiness:

1. *The signing of the Prenup is an expression of respect for your fiancée:* Although we hope that each and every marriage will work out, the reality is that this is not the case. While the signing of the Prenup may introduce fleeting, unhappy thoughts into the engagement period, this action is really an expression of mutual respect for one another. By putting your initial discomfort aside, you and your fiancée are committing to each other that regardless of what happens in the future, each of you will treat one another with dignity and respect should you be in the situation to need the Prenup.
2. *Sign it for someone else:* You have a wonderful relationship with your fiancée that will, with a lot of hard work and *siyata deshmaya*, develop into an even better marriage. However, the same may not be true for all couples. If the signing of the Prenup becomes universally accepted, then it will be there to help those couples for whom divorce becomes a reality. You therefore should approach the signing of the Prenup as an action that effectively will help others by making the Prenup standard practice among engaged couples.

I want to sign the Prenup, but I am nervous to bring up this issue with my fiancée and/or my future in-laws. Do you have any suggestions on the best way to do this?

Although engagement is one of the happiest times in a couple's life, it can be an extremely stressful period. Even small disagreements can potentially turn into major battles that threaten the integrity of newly formed relationships. While it is understandable to be nervous to speak about the Prenup with your fiancée and your future in-laws, it is nonetheless critical to have this conversation with them. The discussion should be couched in a manner that conveys that the signing of the Prenup is not an indication of your doubts regarding the viability of the marriage, but rather, as discussed above, it is an indication of your respect for your fiancée and a necessary step in the attempt to obliterate the modern day *agunah* problem.

If you really think this discussion would not be successful, it would be beneficial to confidentially discuss this issue with your parents and/or a trusted rabbi, rebbetzin, mentor or *chassan* or *kallah* teacher. It should be noted that many rabbis will not serve as a *mesader kiddushin* (officiator of the wedding) for a couple who has not signed the Prenup. It is advisable to contact your *mesader kiddushin* to find out his position on this issue and to ascertain if he is willing to speak with your fiancée or future in-laws about the Prenup.

What if I may live in Israel one day or I am getting married abroad. Should I still sign the Prenup?

If you are getting married in the United States, it is advisable to sign the Prenup regardless of any plans to live abroad. If you are getting married abroad but plan on living in the United States, you should sign the Prenup regardless of any temporary residence abroad or plans to move abroad in the future. If you are getting married abroad and plan to settle permanently abroad, please contact the BDA for more detailed advice.

I have a relative who is a lawyer and she wants to change some of the wording of the Prenup. Is that okay?

Certain portions of the Prenup can be altered, however it is very important that the BDA is consulted regarding any changes, to ensure that these alterations do not affect the halachic or legal enforceability of the document.

What should I do with the Prenup once it is signed and notarized?

The BDA recommends sending the original Prenup to us so it can be entered into the Prenup registry maintained by the BDA. The signed Prenup can be e-mailed to prenup@bethdin.org, faxed to 212.807.9183, uploaded using the upload function at www.theprenup.org or mailed to 305 Seventh Avenue, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10001. Copies should be made and kept by you as well as another party (such as a family member) in the event that it is needed.

Who can I contact if I have more questions about the Prenup?

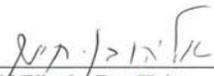
Please call the BDA at 212.807.9042 or e-mail info@bethdin.org and we will be happy to discuss your questions or concerns about the Prenup.

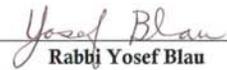
קול קורא לחבר הרבנים ולתלמידינו ולציבורנו

An Important Message to Our Rabbinic Colleagues, Students, and Community

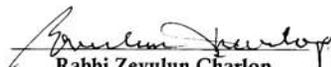
We are pained by the challenges facing individuals in our community who have been denied a *get* long after their marriages have been deemed irreconcilable. Many of these challenges could have been avoided had the couple signed a halakhically and legally valid prenuptial agreement at the time of their marriage. We therefore strongly urge all rabbis, educators, and community leaders to counsel and encourage engaged couples to sign such an agreement.

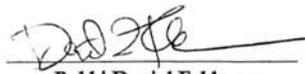
The widespread utilization of halakhic prenuptial agreements is a critical step in inoculating our community against the distressful problem of the modern-day *agunah*. Use of halakhic prenuptial agreements should become standard throughout the Jewish community for all engaged couples. Halakhic prenuptial agreements have been extremely effective in assuring the timely issuance of the *get*. Encouraging proper halakhic behavior in the sanctification and the dissolution of marriage will thereby demonstrate "*de'rakheha darkhei noam, ve'khol netivoteha shalom*" - the Torah's ways are pleasant and all its paths are peaceful.

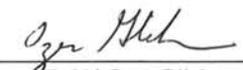

Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Haim

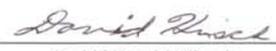

Rabbi Yosef Blau

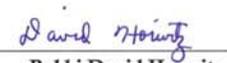

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

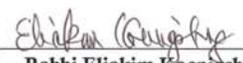

Rabbi Zevulun Charlop


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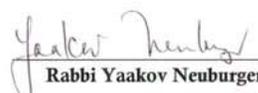

Rabbi Ozer Glickman


Rabbi Dovid Hirsch


Rabbi David Horwitz


Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg


Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

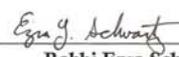

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

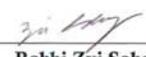

Rabbi Yona Reiss


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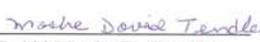

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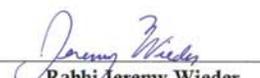

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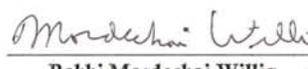

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In Honor of the Bride & Groom

May it be Your will,

Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our fathers that Your divine presence reside in this home and may You assist the groom and bride in building a home of joy and happiness. A home that consists of constant mirth, song, delight and rejoicing. A home full of holiness and purity. A home filled with the blessing of Hashem. A home that brings closer the redemption of Israel.

Please Hashem,

may the groom and bride merit to live with love, harmony, peace and companionship. May they merit to make one another happy. Bless them with ample sustenance and healthy and wholesome sons and daughters.

Please Hashem,

may we merit to gladden the heart of the groom and bride and may we fulfill (that which is written): "One who gladdens the groom and bride is as if he has brought a thanksgiving-offering, and has rebuilt a ruin from the ruins of Jerusalem." And may this joy continue for them and all of Israel, and may the joy increase and rise higher and higher continuously until we merit the complete redemption.

יהי רצונו מלפניך ה' אֱלֹהֵינו
וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינו שְׁתַּשְׂרֶה
שְׂכִינְתְּךָ בְּבֵית הַזֶּה וְתַסְמִיעַ
לְחֲתָן וְלַכֻּלָּה לְבָנוֹת בֵּית בְּשׂוֹן
וְשִׂמְחָה. בֵּית שְׂוֵאָה בּוֹ תָמִיד
הַגִּילָה וְהָרִינָה הַדִּיצָה וְהַתְּדוּוּהָ.
בֵּית מְלֵא קְדוּשָׁה וְשִׁהְרָה. בֵּית
מְלֵא בְּבִרְכַּת ה'. בֵּית שְׂמֻרָה
בְּאוֹתָם שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

אָנָּה ה', זַכֵּה אֶת הַחֲתָן וְהַכֻּלָּה
לְחַיִּוּת, בְּאַהֲבָה וְאַחֲנוּוָה שְׁלוֹם
וְרֵעוּת. זַכֵּה אוֹתָם לְשִׂמְחָה
אֶחָד בְּשָׁנֵי. זַכֵּה אוֹתָם בְּפִרְנָסָה
טוֹבָה. זַכֵּה אוֹתָם בְּבָנִים וּבָנוֹת
בְּרִיאִים וְשְׁלָמִים.

אָנָּה ה', זַכֵּה אוֹתָנוּ לְשִׂמְחָה אֶת
לֵב הַחֲתָן וְהַכֻּלָּה. וְיִתְקַיֵּם בָּנוּ
"כֹּל הַמְשַׂמֵּחַ חֲתָן וְכֻלָּה קָאִילוּ
הַקְּרִיב תוֹדָה, וְכִאִילוּ בְּנֵה
חוּרְבָה מִחוּרְבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם."
וְיִתְקַיֵּם בָּהֶם וּבְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל
הַשְׂמִיחָה הַזֶּה, וְתִרְבֶּה וְתַעֲלֶה
מֵעַלָּה מֵעַלָּה בְּלֵי הַפֶּסֶק עַד
שְׂנוּכָה לְגְאוּלָּה שְׁלָמָה.

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4 *How Do I Choose A Connector?*

After becoming an online member, you have the option of selecting two Connectors. Connector profiles are available online to assist you in selecting the two you think will best serve you. Connectors are present at events to meet you and get to know you better. They have access to many singles using our growing database.

We also encourage all YUConnects members to meet

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5 *What Are My Privacy Options When I Sign Up For YUConnects Online?*

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6 *What Types Of Events Do You Run?*

We have various types of small and large scale events—interactive, fun and educational. We also partner with communities to create unique activities that are tailored to their needs. As a YUConnects member, you will be the first to know about our special events!

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- ✓ Full-time Staff Connector available for personal meetings
- ✓ Dating and premarital workshops

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