



Does the Torah Have Guidelines for Finding our True Soulmate?

Hashem – The Ultimate Matchmaker

The shidduch process is not always easy, neither for singles nor their parents. I was lucky and blessed to meet my husband at a Shabbat table and get married at 20 without ever needing to consult a matchmaker. My mother took off work and flew to Israel to check out to whom her wild teenage daughter had become engaged. It could have been a crazy hippy without any education, but it turned out to be a doctor like her husband and herself, from a very good family. Clearly G-d was behind the scene. When we were young and carefree, all that mattered to us was the feeling of connection and attraction. Family and education seemed so insignificant. Now, when we're on the other side, marrying off our children, such matters do have great importance. Yet, it seems that most tweens whether religious or not, don't give a hoot about the family of their prospective. They aren't interested in the siblings, or in the profession of the parents etc. They are looking for connection and attraction, just like we did, when we were their age. Unfortunately, many singles remain unmarried well past their prime. Again, I don't think it makes a difference whether they are Torah observant or not. Looking for a partner at parties, bars and dance clubs doesn't always bear fruit. Neither does going on shidduch dating. Hashem is the ultimate matchmaker. He has his own plan and His timing is not always understandable to us. Yet, without proper guidelines for seeking our other half, we are left in the dark. This can require a painful process of confusion, betrayal and abuse. However, the Torah has guidelines for everything in life, from the moment you open your eyes in the morning till you close them again at night. So, there must be proper guidelines for finding a marriage partner in the Torah. What does the Torah recommend regarding investigating the family before beginning to date?

Seeking a Marriage Partner in the Most Suitable Places

Parashat Chayei Sarah describes the process of finding a wife for Yitzchak. The selection of Rivkah and their subsequent marriage is a prototype that sets the parameters for Jewish matchmaking in the Torah. This is according to the principle, "The deeds of the fathers are a sign to their children" (*Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 34a*).

ספר בראשית פרק כד פסוק ב-ד וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל עַבְדּוֹ זֶקֶן בֵּיתוֹ הַמְשַׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ שִׁים נָא יָדָךְ תַּחַת יְרִכִי: (ג) וְאֲשָׁבִיעַךָ בַּהֲשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵלֵהֶי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבּוֹ: (ד) כִּי אֶל אֶרְצִי וְאֶל מוֹלַדְתִּי תֵלֵךְ וְלִקַּחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי לְיִצְחָק:

"Avraham said to his servant, the elder of his house... I will make you swear by Hashem...that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose midst I dwell. But you shall go to my land and to my birthplace, and you shall take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak" (*Bereishit 24:2-4*).

Avraham sent his trusted servant to seek a bride for Yitzchak from Avraham's country and birthplace because he knew that people from there had good *midot* (character-traits). From this, we learn to seek a marriage partner from the places that are most likely to have people who possess the good qualities we desire. Looking for a girl from a certain *midrasha*, that seems to be compatible with the way of a certain Yeshiva seems to be included in this principle.

Which is the Most Important Character-Trait to Seek?

We can also learn from the selection of Rivkah which character trait is most important when looking for a marriage partner:

ספר בראשית פרק כד פסוק יד וְהָיָה הַנֶּעֱרָ אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלֶיהָ הִטִּי נָא כַדָּיִךְ וְאֶשְׁתָּה וְאֶמְרָה שְׂתָה וְגַם גְּמַלְיֶךָ אֲשַׁקֶּה אֶתְּךָ הַכֹּהֵן לְעַבְדְּךָ לְיִצְחָק וְבָה אֵדַע כִּי עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם אָדָנִי:

“And it will be, [that] the maiden to whom I will say, ‘Lower your pitcher and I will drink,’ and she will say, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels,’ her have You designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak, and through her may I know that You have performed loving kindness with my master” (*Bereishit* 24:14).

Rashi commented: She is worthy of him for she does deeds of benefaction. This episode is juxtaposed to the episode of Ephron the Chitite, for he too was a descendent of Canaan... Ephron had an evil eye; therefore, Hashem commanded to keep the Canaanites at a distance, as they were masters of the evil eye. For money will answer and bear witness to everything, and every person is recognized by his pocket, whether his deeds are pure and honest. ...Knowing this, Eliezer examined Rivkah only regarding this character-trait [loving/kindness], whether she had a good eye and performed deeds of benefaction. This is why, he asked, “I will only request from her to give me a drink, and if she will answer me, ‘Drink, and also your camels shall I water,’ certainly she is a master of benefaction, for she is giving me more than I ask.” Therefore, “*She, you have designated for my master Yitzchak,*” for his house is clothed in kindness for others” (*Kli Yakar* (Rabbi Ephraim of Luntshits) b. 1550, d. 1619).

Kli Yakar tells us that the nature of a person is recognized through the way he uses money and does deeds of **חסד/chesed** – ‘loving/kindness’ to others. Therefore, Eliezer tested Rivkah specifically in this character-trait, whether she had a good eye and performed deeds of **חסד/chesed**. We can determine the rest of her character according to the **חסד/chesed** she performs. This is because **מידת החסד היא** *midat hachessed hi binyan av l'chol hamidot* – the character trait of chesed is the foundation of all other character-traits.

What About Family Lineage?

Although my husband is from the USA and I hail from Europe, our family background is very similar. I’ve always believed that “likes attract likes.” (This is a poor translation of the original Danish expression, which literally reads, “equal children play best”). Perhaps, that’s how it worked out that my husband and I just clicked, without even giving a thought to each other’s family background. Yet there is a limit to how much investigation of the family is necessary. Too much focus on family lineage, rather than upon the prospective marriage partner may even be disadvantageous, as we know ‘some apples **do** fall far from the tree.’ Although it turned out, that Rivkah was related to Avraham’s family, a close reading of the text reveals that Avraham never specifically made this a requirement (See *Meshech Chachma* 24:4). Moreover, both Rivkah’s father and her infamous brother, Lavan were tricksters. Therefore, Rivkah was called “a rose among thorns” (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 63:4). Thus, it seems that extensive checking of family background before allowing the young man and woman to meet, can be counterproductive and over-controlling, as if trying to force Hashem’s will. It is very possible that the true *zivug* (soulmate) is from a completely unexpected family background. Furthermore, it is interesting to note, that Eliezer actually gave Rivkah gifts of jewelry before inquiring about Rivkah’s family (See *Bereishit* 24:23-24). This strongly indicates that the selection of the prospective marriage partner(s) should be based (primarily) on his or her own merit, rather than that of their parents and their *yichus* (lineage). Going overboard checking the family lineage is not a prerequisite for seeking a suitable match for one’s children. There is certainly room for differences in how much and in which way parents should get involved in selecting suitable marriage partners for their children. Everyone needs to find the right balance and what is suitable for them.

What is the Torah Way of Dating?

There is a wide spectrum of ways for young people to find their soulmates. In the past, and still in many Chassidic circles today, the parents from compatible families – after having checked on the prospective marriage partner for their son or daughter – meet to arrange their marriage, even before their children have become of age. Then, when the time comes, the young prospective couple meet, usually in the dining-room of one set of parents. If the girl finds favor in the eyes of the boy, he proposes to her on that first date or soon after. Since everything else has already been found compatible by their parents in advance, all the young couple needs to find out, is whether there is connection and attraction between them. That usually takes no more than three dates. In a way, I find this way of shidduch dating very beautiful. It offers the maximum protection for the young inexperienced youths who lack the life-experience of their loving parents, and who really care and know what their children need. Yet, this way isn't suitable for many young people today, and certainly not for older singles. Ba'alei Teshuva, for example, are too sophisticated for this kind of dating. Their parents also are unsuited and unfamiliar and with the shidduch investigation process. Matchmakers take their place and are often successful in pairing up young people, but on the other hand, going out on one blind date after the other, without success, can be very discouraging. Then, there is online dating, which I recommend, especially for singles above the age of 30, because they can save much time and aggravation by checking possible matches on their own without being dependent on intermediaries. But again, none of these shidduch methods safeguard singles from the painful experience of being set up with weirdoes.

What Could be the Problem with Meeting a Guy in a Café?

Whether using matchmakers, online dating, suggestions from friends or parental pre-arranged marriages, the story of Rivkah teaches us that it is prohibited to marry off a daughter without her consent:

ספר בראשית פרק כד פסוק נז וַיֹּאמְרוּ וַיִּקְרָא לַנְּעִמָה (כתיב לנער) וַיִּשְׁאַלְהָ אֶת-פִּיהָ:

“And they said, ‘Let us call the maiden and ask her’” (*Bereishit* 24:57).

And ask her: From here we learn that we may not marry off a woman except with her consent. — [*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 60:12]; (Rashi).

We may wonder, what made Rivkah agree to marry Yitzchak, before even meeting him? Perhaps, she had heard about him and his famous parents and yearned to be part of this holy family who had such a strong connection with Hashem. Today, no one would agree to marry a person they had never met. Actually, the halacha teaches that it is prohibited for a man to marry a woman before he has seen her (*Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin* 41a). Perhaps, this is the reason for the custom of the groom to lift the veil of the bride before the chuppah (wedding canopy). Some people prefer meeting their prospective spouse on their own, without any intermediaries. It can work out beautifully, meeting in a more natural setting, such as the Shabbat table. Yet, the problem with meeting a guy in a café, party or on the bus is that it is impossible to know the intention of the other, whether, he is serious about meeting to marry. Many men are looking for a temporary fling, which is not always clear at first. Over the years, I've counselled numerous young women that became attached to a man who enjoyed their company and their infatuation, without being interested in ever marrying them. They may keep a young woman on the hook without moving the relationship forward into a more serious stage. Thus, the poor attached woman, who doesn't have the guts to end the relationship, closes herself off from finding her true soulmate. She might have been better off going on a shidduch date with a guy whose integrity and good intentions for marriage had been checked out by people whom she trusts.