

Articles about Shidduchim by: Rabbi Yosef Tropper

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Table of Contents:

The Shidduch Crisis Part 1- Dating Sensitivity

The Shidduch Crisis Part 2- Building the Best Match

The Shidduch Crisis Part 3- Bridging the Gender Gap

A Beautiful Torah Marriage (Part 1 of 2)

A Beautiful Torah Marriage (Part 2 of 2)

Life Coach- A Torah View

The Shidduch Crisis Part 1 – Dating Sensitivity

There has been much written about the issue of Shidduchim or lack thereof over the last few years. Many have pointed their fingers at the statistical disproportion between the large number of girls and the shortage of boys. Many have talked about the difference between a “good” boy and a “good” girl. Others have blamed the age differential of when each gender begins dating. Others have claimed that not enough people are getting involved in actually suggesting matches. The list goes on, as we all painfully know. Whichever reason you see as the crux of the matter, there is one issue which I feel compelled to point out here because of its great importance and yet its virtual neglect from public discussion. Perhaps it is this issue which is truly preventing people from coming together. That is: **Are the daters doing their part to act with proper care, consideration, and sensitivity towards others?** Are they being taught and are they putting into practice how to be the “mentsh” that both girls and boys always state that they are looking for?

Disclaimer

I hope that we will find ways to enhance the lives of our dear fellow people. Please let my words find merit on their own accord. If you feel that I have raised a good point, then I am happy; if you disagree with me, I respect your opinion as well. So here is an extrapolation of what is on my mind.

Care and Consideration

Our Nation is known as compassionate and caring toward others. However, my experience working with people in the parsha has led me to see that unfortunately, many people are getting hurt daily in the process of finding their mates. Why is this so? Perhaps people realize the great responsibility and seriousness of choosing a spouse; they see the great lifetime ramifications that depend upon this decision and thus they become extra protective and cautious for their own safety. This may cause an inadvertent neglect in factoring how one’s words or actions could hurt other people. It is my hope to tap into people’s true sensitivity in order that we can realign our actions to be consistent with our Torah understanding of true derech erez, respectful decorum.

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Questions to Ponder

I am going to ask a series of questions. I understand that many of them can be answered, and some of them very well. Perhaps I am missing information, perhaps I am being too judgmental or extra sensitive, or perhaps you are not guilty of anything listed below. Indeed if some or all of my words do not apply to you then I salute you for being such a considerate person who thinks about others! Perhaps then I will be able to strengthen your resolve towards sensitivity. All I wish to show is the many areas of sensitivity and consideration which I think should be thought about more by our young men and women, and their parents, in their search and quest to build a Jewish home for Hashem. The questions are meant to stimulate the mind to point out the issues and to represent the numerous feelings and sentiments as they have been expressed to me by those that raised them.

Remember that before you can walk in someone else's shoes, you must first take off your own. Try to see and feel the side of the victim, you will find this most enlightening. This way we will heighten our awareness and learn how to make this world a happy place for all. All of the stories below are true to the best of my knowledge.

The Questions

- Are we courteous and respectful as the Torah dictates from us?
- Why is it permissible to speak any lashon hara, slander, and justify it by calling it "research" or "I feel that this is relevant"? Why can we insult people or hurt their feelings so freely?
- Why do people blatantly lie?
- How do people know what the "dater" will find attractive, intelligent, lively or fun, that grants them the right to inform people not to go out with someone? Doesn't everyone have different tastes? Do we not find ourselves surprised all the time by people's ultimate selections?!
- Why do all of his/her friends have to know, and in great detail, about every single girl/boy they ever met or were suggested and "knew" that she/he wasn't "good enough" for them?
- Why do people not return phone calls? Why do people make suggestions and not call back with the details that they promised? Why do people neglect to reply with an answer to suggestions that they were offered? Why do people not call politely to remind them?!
- Why do people dismiss a Shidduch suggestion with two lethal words- "THAT family?!" "THAT seminary/Yeshiva?!" "THAT Shul?!" "THAT city?!" or even "THAT Shadchan?!"
- Why do boys complain that they couldn't find the girls house, because no light was left on, and when they finally thought they found it, no sign or number was in sight to dispel their doubts? Is there a way to make it easier for the dater to find the proper house?
- Why was a boy given a 45 minute unannounced impromptu test and psychoanalysis, by her parents, on everything he ever learned and the detailed recounting of his ultimate life goals, as he waited nervously before meeting the girl for the first time?

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- Why was one boy who called a woman for information three days before Pesach told that he should call back after Yom Tov as she was too busy then, only to be called on Erev Pesach by that exact woman asking him for information about his friend for her daughter?!
- Why do boys complain that girl's written profiles contain no vital updated information, wrong ages, wrong numbers and many vague descriptions? Why do girls complain that boys don't even have a written profile? Couldn't things be much better clarified by giving over a clear written document?
- Why can't people write their actual date of birth, education, present occupation, family details, descriptive personality and haskafa of themselves and what they would appreciate in a spouse along with any other pertinent information which they know would be of relevance?
- How did a boy who dialed a reference number which he was given on a printed profile end up on the phone with the prospective girl's mother?
- Why do official references say all the time, "I'm sorry, I don't really know that person!" Why don't people choose references who are articulate, patient and updated about their life goals? Why don't references just call their friend directly to clarify the questions which they cannot answer? Why not give a large selection of references, with a short relationship description, so that there are many people to be called in case some of the references cannot be reached?
- Why do so many people refuse to speak or write a profile for themselves leaving it all to their parents? So many shadchanim say that they only realized who the person was when they met or spoke to **them in person** to hear what they themselves were looking for and not what their parents wanted?!
- If one is mature enough to get married, are they not mature enough to speak to the shadchan themselves between dates? Surely one can discuss what they will say with their mentor(s), but why play broken-telephone by sending messages through others?
- Why do people ask insensitive and irrelevant questions, such as, "list me off all of the prospect's character faults!?"
- Why is it common practice for a boy or girl to wait a week or two or longer for an answer? Do people not know how much stress and anxiety this causes?
- Why do people turn exchanging dor yeshorim numbers into such an issue? Why can't it just be done, and not mean anything, whenever one side asks for it, whether it's before the dating begins or any time after? The entire process takes literally 2 minutes (try it and you'll see)!? Why do people lose their dor yeshorim number or not have it available, thereby looking careless? The official paper is not needed, one can simply write down the nine digits and carry it in their wallet or phone! Why isn't it done as early as possible before two people become quickly emotionally involved?
- Why are people so tense, serious and uptight on dates, wouldn't one represent their real self better if they just relaxed and opened up gradually instead of attacking? Why was a girl's first words to a boy as they pulled out of her driveway, "so what are your life-goals?" and "tell me about your entire family?" What happened to formalities or "how was your trip here?"
- Why are people so quick to jump to conclusions, why don't we talk and clarify things together?

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- Why did a shadchan dismiss a Rosh Yeshiva's concerns about why a shidduch fell through by simply stating, "I never would have set them up in the first place!"? Are we God?
- Why was a person dumped after many long and serious dates without being talked to in person, or even over the phone, and even the shadchan who called to inform them that they were not getting engaged had no explanation to provide?
- Why do so many boys and girls not have a trusted rebbe or mentor to speak to? How do they think that they can navigate the complex issues and dangers of dating on their own or by only speaking to friends their age with insufficient life experience to guide them properly?
- Why do people double-date?
- Why do so many people only focus on themselves and not try to make the other person comfortable? Even if one is not having a good time and recognizes that their date is not for them, can't they still exercise common courtesy to another human being?
- Why are so many people so quick to dump? Relationships take time to develop and very often so does attraction!? Why are so many people so quick to get engaged? What's the rush?
- Why do so many people not communicate their concerns and questions directly to the one they are dating? Isn't that something important for a partnership?
- Why do so many girls only speak to their rav, without even speaking to a rebbetzin or trusted woman mentor who can help her with her feelings which her rav does not necessarily specialize in and will advise her of this as well? Why do boys not ask their mothers and sisters for advice on how to understand the opposite gender?
- Why is so little appreciation given to the boys and especially to the girls who spend hundreds of dollars and hours traveling in just to date? If one is not comfortable expressing appreciation verbally, doesn't he/she at least deserve more than one short date?!
- Why do people do a timed-date, how could you develop a relationship with someone by telling them that the clock is ticking, "the date must be from four to six", without a sensitive justification?
- No one said you have to marry this person, but why should they walk away from dating you with much pain and questions on your middos?
- Why is it so difficult for you to even consider a date, at least provide the one suggesting it with some justification that he or she can better understand what you are seeking.

Application of Answers

Reading through these questions should give you a feel for the areas that deserve thought. I reiterate that I am not looking for answers to these questions; There are many valid and thoughtful ones to be found. I am looking to heighten sensitivity and awareness. Everyone wants to be nice and respectful and perhaps this is a great project to work on for those seeking to get married as well as those wishing to grow together in their marriage.

To sum, shidduchim is about finding the right person, at the right place, at right time, and in the right manner! May we all be zocheh to live with health, happiness and harmony!

The Shidduch Crisis: Part 2 – Building The Best Match

Imagine if the Torah commanded you to spend the next consecutive year straight shaking a Lulav and Esrog, the four species, for the majority of the day throughout your waking hours. This would be a very tiring task!

There are different types of mitzvos. Some apply *constantly*, like love and fear of God, some *daily*, like wearing tefillin and davening, and some come *periodically*, like eating matzah on Pesach or redeeming a first born son when applicable (see Derech Hashem IV:1:2). But there are none that just start one day of your adult life and then last for one year straight... well... except one!

Unique Mitzvah

If you are reading this essay, you probably know that we are discussing the topic of marriage and that is precisely where this unique mitzvah is found. It is called “shana reishonah, the first year of marriage.” There is a Biblical commandment for a man to spend a year getting to know his wife and learning how to make her happy! The couple thereby develops a deep and loving friendship and bond. Imagine having to shake a Lulav and Esrog for one year straight! Let us try to understand this unique phenomena. But first...

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who took the time to read my first article on Dating Sensitivity. Just the sheer number of readers brought me much joy to see how many people so passionately desire to improve the dating situation. Your feedback to me expressed this even more powerfully.

I never intended to write a second article, but because of all of the emails, questions and comments I received revolving around my first paper, I felt that this second and third part could prove to be beneficial.

The majority of the feedback was positive and many people made me aware of other factors and perspectives. I thus would like to bring up one more theme and incorporate answers to some of the questions you all raised. To answer individual questions such as “how should I date” and “what should I do look for” is too detailed of a task and often cannot be given in general terms. Instead, I wish to offer one clear point that I believe cuts to the heart of the issue and can help immeasurably in many aspects of dating and marriage when properly applied.

One Theme

My theme is quite simple, but I wish to illustrate it well for those who want to understand and apply it. My thesis is as follows. The most important key to marriage is the *mutual dedication* to work together to grow and succeed. Everything else is just details! Part of

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working together entails understanding the other person and respecting their feelings. It means realizing that our outlooks, opinions and modes of operation may differ from one another. We then strive to find the right balance in how to effectively make decisions together. I believe that this effort begins during dating and develops continually throughout married life. **Working together with shared respect and understanding is the key to true happiness and achievement.** Having an advisor who is wise, experienced and sensitive to others will help us to achieve this ever-important task upon which our entire happiness depends.

Two Examples

Rabbi Shaya Ostrov, LCSW, dedicates much time to this idea in his book “The Inner Circle – Seven Gates to Marriage”. His second and third principle for successful dating are:

- Affirmation: I strive to give over the message to you that I’m ready to seriously explore the possibility of a relationship with you; I take your life seriously and would like to get to know you properly.
- Inner History: One should not judge the other’s actions at first glance. Rather one should seek to understand the other’s noble motives, by asking, listening and learning to trust.

Dr. John Gottman is a renowned expert on marital success. His hands-on experience in the field has proved him to be able, within five minutes of watching a couple’s interaction, to predict with 91% accuracy whether a couple will succeed together. He watches for certain traits that exhibit success and four negative behaviors that connote dysfunction and deep-rooted problems (criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling). His greatness though is not to predict *failure*, but rather to show which traits need to be developed in order to have a *happy marriage*. His books and workshops offer advice on how to do just this.

He states a profound idea which I feel is worthy of contemplation. He says that he could divide the entire process of dating and marriage into *three stages* and express **one key element** that determines success at each time.

1. Dating: While **dating** a strong factor that will determine whether the two people will subsequently marry is the **good time** that they share together. How they enjoy each other’s company and long to be together.
2. Early Years: During the **early years** of marriage, a strong factor for their success is how well they **resolve disagreements** stemming from their diverse outlooks and approaches. This is called **conflict-resolution**. This is the most dangerous time. Many will either give up or not seek guidance on how to do this. However, the successful couples will put in all their effort to learn to appreciate each other’s strengths and thereby maximize the decision making ability. This will transform them into a loving and strong couple.
3. Later Years: During the **older years** of marriage, the factor for success is how they enjoy sharing **good times** together. It is no longer a conflict related issue. They have gotten through the rocky conflict stage and have made most of life’s big decisions already. The factor which now determines their happiness is ironically the exact same one that brought

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them together in the first place! Will they suffer from “empty nest syndrome” (the condition where after their children have all grown up and moved out, they have nothing left in common and find that they do not care for each other) or will they enjoy spending quality time together.

These are the three stages. While there is room to argue or redefine certain points found here, I wish to focus on the truth and relevance of what he is stating. I believe that what emerges from his assessment is that there are **two major points** to be considered when choosing a life-partner.

1. The first is to ask yourself: can this person be my **best friend**? Can we laugh and have a good time together?
2. The second and more important question is to determine: do I trust that we can **work together** through the disagreements and trials of marriage? Can we jointly navigate life and all of its challenges? The **majority of marriage** is about making decisions and working out a proper course together. This is the most important consideration.

I believe that people dating should be made more acutely aware of both these factors. Unfortunately, we have all seen couples who got so caught up in their intellectual connection through life goals, that they failed to see how their personalities were incompatible for having “fun” together. Their marriage was a master *business deal*, lacking in comradeship! We have also seen, even more tragically and all too common, couples that have gotten so **enamored and blinded by the fun time** that they were having together, that they never took the time to think about whether things would still be so “fun” if they did not see eye to eye and had to work out life decisions together! They never properly examined whether they indeed shared common goals, values and mutual respect and the *desire and willingness to work together*. This is terribly sad, as mutual respect and the dedication to work together are the foundation for succeed in the future.

Consider another point that John Gottman brings up in his bestselling “Seven Principles For Making Marriage Work”. He stresses the importance of “letting your partner influence you”. Simple advice, but his research shows that many people don’t understand the magnitude of this *mutual respect indicator*. So much so that he states that of the many who did not practice this, he found that 81% had a failed marriage.

He also stresses a key factor in marital success which I found quite fascinating. He saw that people who get along productively were all experts in sending **repair attempts**! This means that sometimes two people disagree, that is normal and expected. Two intelligent people can have two varied opinions. The problem is when the *disagreement escalates* into an *argument* and the argument into a *fight* and the fight into a *bitter shouting contest*. This sad scenario is the result of people getting carried away. In each person’s heart they have no desire to fight or suffer this sadness. However, because of the typical dynamics of high-tension conversations, one shout is returned with a louder one and viciousness and resentment are unleashed. How is this solved? By having a reality-check. A repair attempt is where one spouse catches the *spiral* that has just begun and does an act or gesture to remind themselves (and their spouse) that there is love and respect here and that s/he is attempting to calm the raging argument. This could done be

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cracking a joke so they both laugh together, giving a smile or a kiss, something that brings both to pause and rethink what they are doing. It breaks the tension and prevents a fight from becoming a destructive forest fire. “Please, honey, let us work this out as two mature adults.” Repair attempts and how they save marriages once again prove the vitality of establishing mutual respect and the desire to work with one another.

John Gottman states in “The Marriage Clinic” that his goal is to find empirically based answers to fix a marriage, and not just utilize unproven *therapeutic techniques*. Considering that marital issues are the **largest problem** which people seek counseling for, this is a relevant objective. As stated, research has proven that working on mutual respect and understanding are the keys to happy marriages.

John Gottman also records in “What Predicts Divorce?” the responses and feelings of upset spouses. Unhappy women often complain that their husbands are too **withdrawn**, and not willing to connect with her. Unhappy men often complain that their wives are too **conflict-engaging**. She is thereby tripping off his ego with her lack of respect. I believe that these responses can be well understood by considering the different emotional needs that a man and women possess. She strives for a deep and vibrant **relationship**, she wants to be **adored and appreciated**; he strives for **authority and honor**, he wants to feel like “**he’s the man**”. He is withdrawn because he doesn’t understand how to talk to her and offer reassurance. She seems engaging because she doesn’t know how to respect his space. He is acting with her as he wants for himself, but she is a woman and has different needs. She is making the same mistake. If each would learn to understand and respect the other, they would be able to work out their upset feelings.

What emerges clearly is the powerful idea that a strong and content marriage takes effort and patience. When both sides passionately pursue the shared objective to respect and understand the other, then they will be able to live the magic of marriage together. This is the general food for thought which I offer you. The rest of dating and marriage are all details that revolve around this goal.

We can now understand why the Torah strives for us to experience a peaceful and powerful beginning to our marriage. The Torah says that we should love and understand our spouse. Chazal (Yevamos 63a) tell us to respect one’s wife **more than** one respects himself! This starts from the moment that one gets married and really even before that!

The theory of weight homeostasis dictates that although the body’s weight fluctuates, it hovers at a basic set weight, unless a strong diet and exercise regiment alters it. So too, marriages are set and fluctuate back to a certain level. Where that “comfort level” lies is determined by the couple. This is the importance of “Shana Reishonah”, to begin marriage properly and to get off to a solid and positive start!

One may say that it is too late as they are already married for years and regret missing out on Shanah Reishonah. A great Torah marriage therapist responds that if one feels that they did not have a productive and proper first year, there is a solution, **start it now** for the next year, and see where it takes you! In fact, it comes as no surprise that the Sefer HaMitzvos HaKatan (285) states that the Biblical obligation to make happy one’s wife is not limited to the first year alone, but is applies **always**, throughout married life!

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When we become sensitive to other's needs, and dedicate ourselves to the task of loving and respecting our spouse, of being their best friend, the gates of Heaven open up and pour upon us only blessings and happiness. This is true bliss in this world. Mutual love and understanding. A beautiful ideal which we all seek to achieve!

The Shidduch Crisis: Part 3 – Bridging The Gender Gap

In the last article, I developed the theme of *working together*. We saw how the most effective way to achieve harmony and fulfillment in marriage is to undertake the vital task of caring for and striving to understand the other. In this final continuation, I wish to illustrate a point that is important to be aware of when working towards mutual respect and cooperation. It is the idea of the natural differences between men and women.

Perhaps a significant factor that makes harmony so difficult is the gender difference. It already puts the couple at a disadvantage before they even try to communicate. Indeed, men and women are diametrically different. When one recognizes these differences and appreciates their spouse's needs, this will allow them to work together most smoothly. We are a team and wish to help out our teammate so that we can perform best together. *This is done by acknowledging that we are different, and have different strengths to offer.* Many people erroneously think that their *personal* feelings, opinions and preferences are the only possibilities for a healthy person to have. This thinking causes them to nullify any other person's opinions. "If I wouldn't be hurt, embarrassed or upset in that situation, then you have no right to be either!" However, the art of productive interaction with others is to strive to respect, validate and be sensitive to other perspectives outside of our own. A man and woman see the world differently; a sensitive spouse will learn to acknowledge and work with this reality.

My point here is to stress that once this is acknowledged, we will be more sensitive and aware of how these potentially anger-triggering differences play a vital role in our relationships.

In the New York Times bestseller "You Just Don't Understand", Deborah Tannen illustrates common things that trigger misunderstandings as one spouse was ambiguous in their communication and the other misread the cue. For example:

- When she asks "what would you like?", this is not *necessarily* a request for information, as a man tends to see it, rather, it can be an opening for a *discussion*.
- To Josh, "checking with his wife" means asking her permission, which to him implies that he isn't independent, and it is thus childlike. To her, it shows **respect** and that their lives are *interrelated*. Both must know this, communicate their feelings and recognize the other's needs.
- Her questioning him for details can be seen by him as a challenge, requiring a counter. She sees it as a request for understanding (information) with girl-style polite engaging. If both people strive to comprehend each other, these issues can be discussed, and then fixed or avoided altogether.

In the powerful book "Boys and Girls Learn Differently", Michael Gurian brings out the undeniable physical differences between genders that invariably affect their respective emotional and psychological temperaments. His findings are obviously not the concrete, only possibility for every person, as we are all different and operate differently. However, these were the results of careful scientific study and at least deserve some thought, as they represent many deep-rooted diverse strengths and tendencies. Here is a partial list of these differences:

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- There are many brain differences between the genders. The male brain stem is at rest and is thus quicker to respond physically. The amygdale is larger in males thus making them more aggressive. Males comprise over 90% of all cases of hyperactivity.
- The arcuate fasciculus develops earlier in females, thus, they speak in sentences earlier. The female brain is more developed in the broca area which is responsible for speech development. The cerebellum provides smoothness, balance and speech and is more developed in females. The frontal lobe effects emotions and communication skills; the female's is more developed. Werencke's area links language and thought. This area is highly active in females. 99% of females have comprehensible speech and vocabulary by age three. This is only achieved by males at age four and a half.
- The cerebral cortex provides higher intellectual functions and memory. The male's is thicker on the right, thus he is right-brained dominant. The female's is thicker on the left. The left hemisphere affects language, writing, consciousness, self-image, denial and listening. The female is superior here. The right hemisphere helps tone of voice, music, spatial discernment and visual memory. Males use this more. Female use **both** sides *more than* males use **both**.
- The cerebrum allows one to multitask; the female's is always active! Female toddlers can multitask more freely than male toddlers.
- The corpus callosum connects both sides of the brain. The female's has a better connection between both sides. This may give them greater focus on practical application.
- The hypothalamus of the male brain is denser and constant, it produces lust and anger. Pituitary glands are larger in males thus increasing their fight-or-flight instinct!
- Regarding the occipital lobe, females see better in lower light, males in higher (melatonin in females cause them to have greater sensitivity to brightness).
- The parietal lobe perceives bodily sensations, pressure, pain and temperature. The female's is larger, thus, they experience greater sensations. The male's is smaller, thus, they often excel at ignoring pain.
- The thalamus regulates one's emotional life and physical safety and monitors what is happening outside of the body. Females process faster here.
- Males develop testosterone which causes action and can escalate to aggression. Females develop estrogen which breeds hormonal changes and the desire for feelings and bonding.
- Males are more easily *angered*; females are more easily *saddened*.
- Males are often more restless as a fetus, whereas females are less active.
- Male are generally larger than females.
- Males have less serotonin (which is a relaxing agent).
- Male toddlers prefer mechanical or structural toys; females prefer soft and cuddly toys.
- Males look at objects for a shorter time but are more vigorous, whereas females gaze longer but are less active.
- Males gaze at their mother for **half** as long as females do.
- Females at one week can distinguish a baby's cry from background noise, whereas males do not respond yet. Females at four months can distinguish people's faces on photos, whereas for males it takes longer to achieve this.
- Females prefer sweets more than males do.

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- Males have better narrow and depth perception. Females have better peripheral (side-line) vision.
- Males have a 25% higher mortality rate at infancy than females. This is being studied further.
- Males in kindergarten focus on individual games. Females focus on group activities. Males ignore newcomers until they prove their worth and value. Females welcome them warmly! Males prefer games that require bodily contact and competition. Girls prefer taking turns and indirect competition.
- Males prefer stories of excitement and action while ignoring victims. Females prefer stories of human dynamics and feelings.
- A male toddler's good-bye to his mom takes around 30 seconds. A female's takes 90 seconds!
- Males express emotions through **actions**. Females express feelings through **words**!
- Males in grade one through third are more able to separate emotion from reason than their female counterparts.
- Males are 50% more likely to be held back in eighth grade than females are.
- Males in High School focus much on personal career choice. Females focus more on personal relationships.
- 69% of H.S. males offered "fighting" as the best solution to an argument. The majority of females opted for "walking away" or "talking about it".

All of this illustrates quite vividly the great gender difference that a couple must deal with. We believe that Hashem gave us all different strengths to offer and a happy couple will learn to appreciate the other's strong points and thereby build a beautiful partnership together. (For further reading I suggest two books that offer relevant information regarding these facts: "Reviving Ophelia" and "Raising Cain".)

This is not meant to scare anyone! My point is to stress:

- The first key to a successful marriage is to *acknowledge that men and women are in fact very different!*
- The second task is to learn how to communicate with and how to *understand and respect the opposite gender!* The most important trait needed for this is **patience and sensitivity!** I hope that through the last two articles I have illustrated the importance of striving to work together and understand the other person. Through this, we can accomplish beautiful and fulfilling achievements.

One most useful suggestion for how to navigate through all of these potentially dangerous pitfalls and miscommunications is to find someone wise with experience and much sensitivity. When something is unclear to us or we need help, we can then talk to them and seek to improve our marriage. Anyone can succeed, it is in your hands!

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A Beautiful Torah Marriage (Part 1 of 2)

The girl (Esther) possessed a beautiful appearance... and when her parents died, Mordechai took her as his daughter (Esther 2:7)

Chazal tell us (Megilla 13a) that the word “bas, daughter,” in this verse is to be read as “bayis, house,” meaning that in actuality Mordechai took Esther as his wife.

There are many lessons inherent in our verse, let us examine some of them as we attempt to resolve the many difficulties found in understanding this verse.

The Numerous Issues

The first problem is, why does the verse describe Esther as being taken as *a daughter* if it really means *wife*, why not just say wife?! Also, according to Chazal’s elucidation, how do we explain the word “bayis, house” this is a strange reference to marriage as well?

Let us site an additional source that is hard to understand as it will ultimately shed much light on this important topic. The Gemara (Sotah 12a) states, “he who marries a women for the sake of Heaven is considered to have *given birth to her as his daughter.*” At first glance, this statement seems perplexing and hard to understand. What are Chazal trying to teach us? What does it mean to marry L’shem Shamayim, for the sake of Heaven? What is the parable and benefit of considering her to be his daughter?! Very perplexing?!

The commentators are surprisingly silent on many of these issues. One line from the Ben Ish Chai, though, opens up the gates of understanding for us. He connects this Gemara to another statement of Chazal (Bava Basra 141a). “If your first child born is a daughter, this is a good sign for your children who follow!”

He ends by stating that if one marries a woman for the sake of Heaven, then her presence makes it as if you gave birth to a *daughter first* and thus it is good for your children who follow. This is his answer! But what does it mean?

This completes all of our quandaries regarding many cryptic words; now we will try to find a proper explanation!

The Original Plan

When Hashem gave Adam his wife, Chava, this was the first marriage to ever take place. The Ramban and many other Commentators state that one must study those early events well and take note of every nuance expressed as it represents the foundation of all future unions as well.

One illustration provided by the Ramban is that Hashem did not give Adam his wife until Adam asked for her! Hashem first wanted him to recognize his deficiency without her and then to request her from Hashem and only after that would he be given the great gift of marriage, with newly-gained appreciation. This is a fundamental outlook for one searching for their mate and has connotations for those married as well!

An Extension

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The very first description which Adam gives upon seeing his wife is (Beraishis 2:23): She is a bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh, she should be called Isha, woman, for she comes from Ish, man!

Why in fact did Hashem create the woman from a *part of man* himself? Could He not have just used raw material from another source, perhaps from dirt just as Adam was formed?!

This is a simple yet fundamental question. The answer will prepare us to understand Hashem's goal for marriage!

Hashem wanted man and woman to be *one unified unit*! True, each one would have different personalities, tendencies and strengths, in fact very diversely, but, in essence they would blend and work together! By creating their bodies (and souls as well as stated in the Zohar) from one place, this gave them an intrinsic bond and connection that would last for eternity. Man and woman were to ponder their shared creation and realize the importance of building a deep relationship between them. Hashem created them from one body to teach them to work together to become like one! Their serving Hashem together by following His Torah and Mitzvos and treating each other with sensitivity and respect makes them into one! (based on Gra in Mishley 9:10)

Like One

R' Yaakov Yosef Herman was once waiting in an office together with his wife and newly married daughter and son-in-law, R' Chaim Pinchus Scheinberg. R' Scheinberg was sitting next to his own wife and his in-laws were on the outer ends of the two of them. He joked with his father-in-law saying, "I'm closer to my wife that you are to yours!"

R' Herman chuckled and then retorted with his own quick rebuttal, a lesson that would last a lifetime: You just got married, so for now, in order for you to be close to your wife, you must sit right near her, but my wife and I have been married for years and are so close and connected in our hearts that no physical distance can ever separate us! Thus, **I** am closer to **my wife**!

This is the Torah's perspective on marriage. Intimate closeness in heart and soul.

Bone and Flesh

One more point and then we will tie our original verse about Adam together!

The verse stated that the woman was created from Adam's "bone" and "flesh." We understand the reference to his bone as the verse earlier stated explicitly that Hashem created Chava from one of his *ribs*, hence she comes from his bone. But what is the "flesh" referring to? Where do we see that Hashem built Chava out of any *flesh* of Adam?!

Chazal (Pirkey D'R' Eliezer 11) were perplexed by this exact question and thus explained the following. Hashem took *flesh* from Adam's **heart** and used it in the construction of Chava! The depth here is that one's wife has the power to capture his heart and this in fact is Hashem's plan for marriage! A deep and loving bond should permeate their lives together!

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To Summarize

Hashem desires for man and woman to connect and work together to grow. He set them up to unite and help each other. Their job is to become one and thus be a helpmate for one another in serving Hashem to their fullest. A derivative of this proper bonding will be that they will have children and their love for each other will then pour forth upon their children and inspire them too with an appreciation and dedication to the service of Hashem!

Selfish Spouse

Someone who gets married for selfish reasons does not appreciate this. He simply wants to marry for his own self-pleasure. He seeks to get and to take whatever he can from his spouse and has no plan for caring or sharing. He is thus failing to see that Hashem created man and wife to become one. He cares not for lofty goals, all he wants is personal gratification. He cares nothing of connection, only for fulfilling *his* desires! This is not the correct approach and his plan will surely fail. He cannot find happiness when he does not follow the Torah's prescription for fulfillment. Inevitably, he will get tired of her and will not feel very good about his life. This is because he neglected to serve Hashem. It is a tragic and vicious cycle. Very often, he will start to terribly mistreat her and show no appreciation as his only focus and desire is to fulfill his own wants, not caring about the needs of others. His marriage will be painful and his family will become dysfunctional. His children will be turned off from what he claims to believe in as they lack a proper role-model. This is not always the case, but it is the general course that a selfish person is on. How tragic indeed. Only one who follows the Torah approach will have much enjoyment and fulfillment waiting for him.

To Put It All Together

We now understand what it means to marry for the sake of Heaven. To see marriage as an opportunity for growing and encouraging Avodas Hashem together! To appreciate how Hashem created her from his bone and heart so that they can connect! As the Raavad writes, "the beauty of marriage is to be like *one single body and entity*, connected and working together."

The Maharal (Ohr Chadash p. 114) states that this is what it means by "if one marries L'Shem Shamayim, she is like your daughter." A daughter is built from you, she is an extension of you. The Torah wants you to view your wife as an extension of yourself. This is the most productive and beneficial outlook. It is meant in the most positive way, to be truly connected and close.

This is the exact meaning of marrying for the sake of Heaven and the explanation and benefit of considering her your daughter, your connection!

Our original verse is stating this as well. The verse began by stating that Esther was a most beautiful and attractive young lady! We know that her looks and charm even made her the winner of Achashvayrosh's beauty contest. But this was not the sole focus of Mordechai. He married her for her qualities. She was someone to work and grow with.

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He viewed her as his daughter, an extension of himself, fulfilling Hashem's plan for marriage!

What is the Bayis?

But still why do Chazal use the word bayis, house? The answer is that this ties everything together!

The Gemara quoted by the Ben Ish Chai stated that when a girl is born first this is good for the children who follow. He stated that if you marry L'Shem Shamayim you are considered to have had a daughter first already. What does this all mean?!

The Gemara there explains the benefit of this firstborn girl. As the oldest, she will care for and nurture all of her siblings under her! This is the benefit for her family! They will have a second loving and caring mother!

There is nothing that a parent would not do for their child. So if one asks what is the most important thing that I can do for can my children to prepare them for success? The answer is: *the best thing you can do for your children is, love their mother!* When children grow up in a warm and healthy environment this puts them at a great advantage for life!

If two people marry L'Shem Shamayim, to grow with their spouse in service of Hashem, they have shown that they will work together and be kind and considerate towards each other. They realize that she is his daughter, connected as one! Hence, they will work hard to have marital harmony. They will have the benefit of a loving and nurturing mother for she will be happy and encouraged by her husband who loves and believes in her. Their children will benefit from the "firstborn daughter" who cares for them so affectionately and carefully! A truly heartwarming and inspirational home! This I believe is the intention of the Ben Ish Chai and this I believe brings everything together.

Because she is the *bas*, they will have a beautiful *bayis*! May we all achieve these beautiful goals! The opportunity to live with this perspective is available **every day**!

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A Beautiful Torah Marriage (Part 2 of 2)

He (Mordechai) raised Hadassah, who was Esther... for she had no parents; the girl (Esther) possessed a beautiful appearance... and when her parents died, Mordechai took her as his daughter (Esther 2:7).

We have discussed (see Part 1) the idea of “Bas” and “Bayis.” Chazal tell us that Mordechai married Esther and together they built their Jewish home. There are two more beautiful lessons which I would like to develop based on this verse. They pertain to Hadassah and Bayis.

Why Call Her Hadassah?

What was her name? Throughout the entire Megillah, she is called Esther, except for one place. The very *first time* that the Megillah talks about our hero, she is named Hadassah! The Gemara (Megillah 13a) disputes which of the two names was primary. Nevertheless, both opinions must explain why the name Hadassah is used to *introduce her*? What is going on here? Also, why is she called by a name which translates as “myrtle,” and why is she called this specifically in the verse that hints to her marriage?

It also must be noted that we find the same occurrence by Haman. The first time that he is referred to, according to Chazal, is in the first Chapter of Esther, when a brazen advisor named “Memuchan” speaks before his superiors. That Memuchan was none other than Haman. That is the first and last time that he is called by that name. How do we explain this as well?

Wife is Bayis

Chazal tell us that the word “bayis, house,” hints to marriage. We find this same idea expressed in Shabbos (118b), “Rebbe Yosi stated that he never referred to his wife as “wife,” rather, he called her, ‘my house’.” What is going on here?

The Wedding Ring

In order to understand what is being expressed here we must first examine the rationale behind an interesting custom at the wedding ceremony. The Chasson, groom, stands under the Chupah canopy together with his Kallah, bride, and in front of two witnesses he recites his declaration of marriage and then places the ring on her finger. With her acceptance, they are now married. Customarily, he places the ring specifically upon her *index (pointer) finger*. Why is this so? Now, it certainly does not invalidate the marriage if he were to place it on any other finger or even in her palm, however, how do we understand this preferred custom? Why we do not tell him to place the ring upon her “ring finger” as would seem more logical?

Now, truth be told, the simplest reason is just a practicality. The witnesses need to *see* the placement of the ring upon her and the easiest finger to stretch out in clear view is certainly her pointer! But there is more depth here as well, as we shall see.

Fingers and Senses

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Rabbeinu Bechayeh (Parshas Tzav) teaches us that the *five fingers* correspond to the *five senses* that we possess. More so, each finger is **naturally drawn** to the sense which it represents. Try to guess them yourself before you read on! Here is his list in summary:

1-Thumb: corresponds to taste (mouth). (There have been babies in their mother's womb who were observed sucking their thumbs!)

2-Index (Pointer): corresponds to smell (nose!) This one is well known!

3-Middle: corresponds to touch. Since it is the longest finger, it can reach and touch the furthest parts of the body.

4-Ring: corresponds to sight. Many wipe their eyes with this finger.

5-Pinky: corresponds to the ear and hearing. This one is also well understood!

Bearing this in mind, we now have a key to understanding fingers.

The Pointer of God

When Hashem performed the miracles in Egypt, the Egyptians called them "Etzbah Elokim, the **index finger** of God." What is the significance?

Four of the senses are all physical in their nature. We use taste, touch, sight and hearing to receive pleasure from this world. The sense of smell is the most spiritual from all of them. Chazal (Berachos 43b) state that a pleasure that only the **soul** benefits from is that of smell! It has spiritual connections. Hashem blew into Adam's nostrils to give him life. This was how his Neshamah, soul, was installed into his body. Thus, smell represents pure spirituality.

Hence, when the Egyptians realized that the miracles were not mere Kishuf, earthly evil black-magic, but rather emanating from the True Spiritual Source, they acknowledged this. They called the plagues by the term of the index finger, the finger linked to the sense of smell, the most spiritual element! They recognized the spiritual element of Hashem's actions in the world. When we remove wine from our cups on Pesach night upon mentioning the ten plagues, this is the reason that we do so utilizing our pointer!

The Marriage Finger

Now we understand why the wedding ring is placed on the pointer. When a man gets married he can do so for many reasons. His focus could be spiritual or physical. He may be marrying for his own personal lustful reasons, to satisfy his nerve endings and desires. Or he can approach matrimony with dignity, respect and holiness, recognizing the great spirituality involved. This is certainly the best outlook. Thus, our custom is that he begins the marriage by focusing on her pointer finger, the finger representing smell and spiritual growth, showing that he is marrying her in recognition of her *spiritual qualities* and will grow together with her in their pursuit of closeness to Hashem! He certainly cannot deny her beauty, indeed, that is a gift from Hashem *meant to be appreciated*, but his priorities are in order and his goals are properly balanced.

Those that get married utilizing the **ring finger** are expressing a different outlook. That finger corresponds to his eyes and *sight*. Following one's eyes is the most dangerous

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method to utilize when choosing a *life's partner*. That method begins with much lust and excitement but fizzles out disappointingly fast! Only one who focuses on qualities and growth can achieve marital happiness and success, with proper effort and sensitivity.

Grand Appearance

The first time that a name is expressed shows the person's essence. Haman is called "Memuchan" when we meet him, a name that Chazal (Megillah 12b) translate as "awaiting punishment." Throughout the Megillah, everything that Haman arranged in order to destroy Mordechai and the Jews, was ultimately one big contribution and lead up to his *own* destruction. This was his essence, clearly expressed by the name Memuchan.

The True Hadassah

Hadassah was Esther's essence. She was a sweet **smelling** fragrant *Hadassah, myrtle*, connected to Hashem and dedicated to growth. This was who she proved herself to be throughout the entire story as she sacrificed herself to save her Jewish brethren. She was a truly spiritually focused person, hence her original name expressed fragrant aroma, to connote her spiritual beauty.

How apropos that she should be called this name specifically in the verse that discusses her *marriage* to Mordechai! The verse is testifying to the great spiritual focus which they built their relationship upon. This is the very plan and advice of the Torah for a meaningful relationship. Now we understand why she is called Hadassah.

Same as Bayis!

And now for the Bayis! Chazal (Kesubos 17a) tell us that Rebbe Yehuda bar Ila'ah would dance before the Kallah with branches of Hadas, myrtle! Also, Reb Achah would lift up the Kallah and carry her on his shoulders! His students asked him if they could copy his custom. He replied, "if she is like a *wooden beam* in your eyes, then it is permissible for you to do this as well!"

With all that we explained, it is delightfully clear as to why the myrtle branch was present at the weddings! This expresses the focus upon the sense of smell, holiness and spirituality that we imbue our marriage with!

Building Beam

What is the lesson of Reb Achah and his wooden beam parallel? The lesson based upon the Maharsha is that many see women as objects of desire and sexual lure. This is not the proper Torah view. A woman is a *partner in building* a home for Hashem. This was precisely what Reb Achah wished to express. Just as a wooden beam is the support of the entire house, so too "the wisdom of a woman builds her home" (Mishley 14). We strive to view our wife as a partner in building and growth!

"My House"

Finally, this is what Rebbe Yosi meant by referring to his wife as "my home". He acknowledged her power of building and her spiritual insight that inspired him and their children to **grow**! A woman has tremendous power to inspire others and help permeate

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her home with the holy presence of Hashem. Together, man and woman can accomplish this. One who gears their focus on these elevated spiritual ideals will find much happiness and fulfillment. Indeed, even their **everyday** physical experiences will become more enjoyable as they are infused with true connection and service of Hashem!

Life Coach – A Torah View

The occupation of Professional Coach has grown tremendously over the last few years. More and more people are opting to find and pay for a coach to help them achieve success in their everyday goals, in all fields, including work, family and personal development.

Throughout my involvement in this most uplifting field, I have discovered an interesting phenomenon which I wish to share. Firstly, I wish to define and quantify the role of the coach. Secondly, I wish to discuss the words of Chazal and the rabbinical sources which define and mention “coaching”. I believe that the idea of coaching has in reality been around for thousands of years. I believe that it is endorsed by Chazal and the Rabbinical Leaders throughout the generations.

Part I: Coaching Definition

Coaching is most eloquently described in the words of the authors of a most expert coaching book titled Coactive Coaching. They state that the primary outlook employed by a coach is that “the client is creative, resourceful and whole”. Meaning, it is not the coach who is calling the shots and establishing directives. It is only the coach that stimulates, helps promote self-clarification, expression and accountability to bring the ideas of development to fruition. The authors quip that it is not the coach that is powerful, rather “the coaching relationship is powerful”. Through the client and coach working together, goals are defined and implemented.

Stephen Covey (The 8th Habit) states that the best managers follow the formula of: “be a light, not a judge. Be a model, not a critic”. I believe that this applies to coaching as well. When you are committed to helping your client discover his own strengths and solutions, you will see tremendous success.

After recognizing that the client has input and solutions ready for self-discovery, the coach’s job is to help extract this. A most effective mode is through *powerful questions*. Questions such as, “so, what are the options available and which do you prefer?” and “in your optimal world, how would the situation look, now, how can you move toward that outcome?”, stimulate an honest and revealing articulation from any serious client who wishes to help himself.

Many psychological models have stressed the idea of non-didactic help. Perhaps most strongly was Carl R. Rogers in the development of his person-centered therapy. He stressed that only a humanistic approach, one that recognizes that the client deserves “unconditional positive regard”, will yield success. Rogerian therapy celebrates the individual’s strengths, abilities and autonomic decisions in how to proceed in life.

Regarding the power of questions, Jean Piaget espoused the view that the only way to learn new information is through questions and stimulation. He believed that only through cognitive disequilibrium that provokes questions, discussion and investigation will one gain understanding.

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Coaching means to me, believing in the client's ability to find answers and having the skill to stimulate, encourage and help oversee its discovery and implementation.

Part II: Chazal

The verse (Mishley 20:4) states, "Deep counsel is present inside man's heart, a resourceful person will draw it out". King Solomon, I believe, is referring to the ability to self-solve problems. This is the founding presumption of an effective coach. We help the client get in touch with their feelings and needs. They have the answers inside, they are encouraged to search out their internal truths.

The Talmud (Yuma 75a) discusses a dispute in how to read the verse (Mishley 12:25), "a worry in the heart of man, *yesichena*". One Talmudic sage reads it as, "push the worry out of your mind", The other reads it as, "tell it over to another person". The Vilna Goan comments that in truth they are not arguing, rather they are expressing two successive options. When faced with a challenge, first a person may try to deal with it by himself. If this doesn't work, then he is encouraged to speak it over with someone else. The other person's listening ear will produce a solution! This is the coaching perspective. Through speaking with the coach, one produces a solution.

The Talmud (Taanis 23a) states, "either give me a partner or give me death". Humans need someone to talk to and the coach is able to listen, respect and help a person be honest and productive with himself.

When dealing with some of the most important and fundamental concepts of Judaism, we find that Chazal employed the question form. Avos (4:1) states, who is wise? who is rich? who possesses strength? These are from the most primary aspects of life. Chazal felt that the message should be expressed by means of stimulating questions.

Indeed, the entire text of the Talmud is in the most conducive form of understanding: Questions that stimulate the mind and produce understanding. The Talmudic champions are most famous for their "bomb- questions!" This stimulates and builds Talmudic mastery.

As far as the format of the coaching itself, again the Torah proves to be the best source of recommendations in this department. Chazal state that the best way to learn is via questions. When the mind hears questions it is stimulated and the subsequent answers are processed more effectively and powerfully. "The one too embarrassed to ask will not learn" (Pirkey Avos 2:5).

The format of the Pesach Seder reflects this as well. On the night where it is a positive Torah commandment to give over and instill the beauty and truth of the Jewish religion, the format chosen is with great precision. *Make the children ask questions!* Begin with the most well-known question in the entire world, "Mah Nishtanah, why is this night different than all other nights?" Questions stimulate the mind and penetrate the heart.

Tanach and Chazal express the importance and power of effective questions. This is the benchmark of the successful coach. This is the way to succeed.

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Rabbis over the centuries have strived to help people turning to them to learn how to think for themselves and develop and implement solutions.

Part III: Conclusion

In parting, I wish to share with you (with permission from its author) a short excerpt from a very meaningful letter which I recently received from a young man, whom I will refer to as Jack to protect his identity. I have been working with Jack for the past six years. He has struggled to find himself and has been battling depression, a broken home, dysfunctional parents, a challenging drug and alcohol addiction and poor self-esteem. After he had a nervous breakdown last July, he finally agreed to seriously commit himself to join AA and seek psychological help. His heartfelt words express to me how I was able to coach him and help him develop self-esteem. His journey has just begun...

... You have seen me at my best and you have seen and heard me at my worst, and never once did you budge, become disheartened, or stop seeing the bigger picture. I value your friendship almost as much as I value your input wisdom and guidance, which have literally saved my life on numerous occasions..... Your resilience and optimism are a never ending source of pure water (or in my vernacular, the finest scotch Laphroaig 30). Thank you and I owe you a tremendous debt.

Of all my many friends, you are the most vaunted, mainly for your exceptional brain, but what speaks even louder volumes to me is your heart. Part of my motivation, and part of my inspiration to become the best I can be, is because I want my heart to be like yours, caring, unwavering, and most importantly true. Since you met me six years ago, your serenity and comfort of knowing who you really are inspire me almost daily to find my own serenity.

I am Jack, and because of you, will be the best Jack I can be, and hopefully along the way push and inspire people the way you continuously inspire and motivate me. I love myself, but without you there is a good chance that I would not, and it is because of you that I can sing praises and face another day.

May G-d allow me to permeate all of your teachings and insight, so that I can be the man you believe I can be, the man you convince me I will be...

Jack