

# SPOUSE HUNTING - CORRALLING A KALLAH

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

In parshas Chayei Sarah, Eliezer, Avraham's servant, is sent on a journey to find a wife for Yitzchak. He sets out with "ten camels, of his master's camels, and all the good of his master in his hand. [24:10]" What, asks Rashi, could Eliezer have taken in his hand to which the Torah refers as "all the good of his master?" Rashi explains that Avraham gave him a document in which he made everything he owned a gift to Yitzchak, in order that parents should be eager to send him their daughter.

Chazal, our Sages, tell us that, "Ma'asei avos siman la-banim, the deeds of the forefathers are a prototype for their children." If Avraham sent a document with Eliezer giving everything he had to Yitzchak as a "perk" for his kallah's family, there must be a message to us about finding an appropriate chassan or kallah for our children. What is so important the fact that Avraham gave everything he had to Yitzchak?

As a young adult, R' Aryeh Leib, better known as the famous Aryeh d'Bei Ilai, married the daughter of a wealthy man from Preimsle. It was agreed that his father-in-law would support the young couple indefinitely in order that his brilliant son-in-law could study Torah undisturbed by the burden of providing for a growing family. Unfortunately, it did not take long before his daughter grew tired of her husband's rigid schedule and lack of interest in anything outside of Torah and serving Hashem. Her father was a wealthy magnate who had connections with prominent businessmen and hobnobbed with the elite. At the dinner table, he would enthral his family with tales of trips to far-away places and exotic lands, and his meetings and dealings with the rich and famous. Deep down, she had hoped that her husband would one day too be a successful businessman in whom she could take pride. She began to pester R' Aryeh Leib, asking him when he would be finished his studies, so that he could get down to the business of building an empire. Incredulous, R' Aryeh Leib told her in no uncertain terms that he had no interest in empire- building. It became obvious that the two were not compatible, and before long they were divorced.

Soon afterwards, a shadchan (matchmaker) suggested that perhaps the righteous Chana, daughter of the famed tzaddik R' Moshe Teitelbaum, better known as the Yismach Moshe, would be an appropriate match for R' Aryeh Leib. The Yismach Moshe spent some time getting to know R' Aryeh Leib, and was taken aback by the young man's extreme dedication and unparalleled brilliance. There was no doubt in his mind: He would do anything to secure R' Aryeh Leib as a husband for his daughter. He went as far as to tell the shadchan that he was willing to obligate himself in an

unusually generous dowry.

His wife, when he informed her of his plans, was not impressed. "Should our daughter take someone else's leftovers? If he wasn't good enough for his first wife... And a dowry fit for a king to boot!"

"Let me tell you a parable," he said. "A simple farmer is plowing his field when his plow suddenly grinds to a halt. Upon examination, he discovers a wooden chest buried in the earth. Perturbed by the delay, yet with no choice, he digs out the chest. Inside he finds hundreds and hundreds of precious gems and jewels. Simpleton that he was, he assumes the jewels are seeds, and proceeds to soak them in water in order to soften them. When they become soft he will plant them. To his dismay, the "seeds" just don't seem to soften, even after many days of soaking. He takes them to a neighbour to ask his opinion. His neighbour, somewhat brighter than he, realizes what the "seeds" really are. 'You know,' says he, 'these seeds are old and won't likely bear fruit. Leave them here, and I will give you these other seeds instead. They are fresh and will give you excellent produce!' The simple farmer thanks his generous neighbour profusely for his help. Both the simple farmer and his wily neighbour are thrilled with their newfound wealth."

"If his first in-laws," said R' Moshe to his wife, "were so foolish as to discard the jewel they had been given in exchange for some simple seeds, should we not have the cunning to quickly grab up the jewel they've left behind?"

Since R' Moshe was not a wealthy man, and even after selling most everything he had, he still couldn't come up with the amount he had promised for the dowry, he asked his wife that she sell her jewellery. "Chazal say, after all, that one should sell everything one has in order to marry his daughter to a talmid chacham (Torah scholar) [Talmud, Pesachim 49a]! Rest assured that this young man is one of the future giants of our generation." After hearing such an impassioned speech from her husband, she did so without hesitation.

From Avraham giving "everything he had" to Yitzchak in order to secure an appropriate kallah, it appears that finding a suitable spouse for one's child is no small matter. If need be - give everything you have (and more!). There is nothing more important than assuring your child is going to "set up shop" with a partner that has similar views and hashkafos, and will be a positive influence on their life. This is the coming generation; it's what you're leaving over in the world. You've only got one chance - make it count!

Interestingly, Yitzchak at this stage was already forty. Son of a wealthy magnate, one might have expected that, with a little help from father, he might have already himself been a successful businessman. By sending Eliezer with a document giving "everything Avraham had" to Yitzchak, he is intimating to his future wife that Yitzchak has no interest in building an empire. If by the age of forty Yitzchak had taken no interest in amassing his own fortune, it was likely that fame and fortune were not what appealed to him.

It is noteworthy that Rashi's wording is that the need for the document was, "in order that parents

should be eager to send him their daughter." Why does Rashi make no mention about the eagerness of the kallah herself? If Yitzchak's future kallah were to be impressed with the wealth of her father-in-law, it would not bode well for her future as the successor of Sarah. Avraham was not looking for a kallah who dreamed of palaces and riches, of servants and seven-course meals. Perhaps he specified to Eliezer that the document was for the in-laws' eyes only, but let not the kallah's judgement be swayed by the wealth of her chassan. While it's natural for a parent to want the best for their children, when the children want "the best" for themselves, one might well be wary of self-centeredness and greed, which aren't always the best ingredients for a successful marriage.

While not every chassan is destined to become the next Rabbi Akiva, and not every kallah is going to be the righteous matriarch Sarah, finding a spouse that will help our children achieve their maximum potential in serving Hashem is no simple task. It requires dedication, a touch of realism, and above all a generous dose of *Siyata Di-Shmaya*!

Have a good Shabbos.

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