

MADE IN HEAVEN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Instead, go to my land, my birthplace, and bring back a wife for my son Yitzchak. (Bereishis 24:4)

Marriage is not a popular topic in the Torah because it has so many other issues to deal with. We even have to rely on a exegetical principle to learn some very important details about what makes a kosher Jewish marriage. The first couple of pages of Maseches Kiddushin discuss this in detail.

If any parsha is a good excuse to discuss the topic, including the idea of shidduchim, it is this week's parshah. So much of it is consumed with the account of Eliezer, Avraham's trusted servant, going on a mission to find just the right wife for Yitzchak. So many interesting details are provided regarding what went on to find Yitzchak Avinu's soul mate.

First there is the idea of a soul mate. Does everyone have one, and even if they do, does everyone find his or hers once they decide to marry? What if a person doesn't find their soul mate? Can they still marry and live happily ever after? Can their match still be one that is made in Heaven?

Yes, according to Kabbalah, everyone has a soul mate but, no, not everyone finds his or hers. This should be obvious from the fact that people divorce and remarry, sometimes even many times. Even great marriages can end with the death of a spouse, resulting in the successful remarriage of the surviving one.

According to the Arizal, some souls just won't be available until Yemos HaMoshiach. Their souls mates will obviously have to marry other people until that time each time they reincarnate. Apparently Aharon HaKohen, whose wife was Elisheva, did not marry his ultimate soul mate.

In fact, reincarnation can be a reason NOT to find one's soul mate, as it says in Sha'ar HaGilgulim. It is usually sin that forces a soul to reincarnate, not the kind of merit that encourages Heaven to make soul mate finding very easy. In fact, Heaven can even make it next to impossible in some instances.

This does not mean, however, that a person cannot find a suitable spouse and have a great marriage. On the contrary, though everyone has one particular soul mate, there are other souls that are similar enough in nature to take its place. Such marriages are also "made in Heaven."

How does one know when they have indeed found their soul mate? Surprisingly, it is not necessarily by how well one gets along with their potential spouse during the dating process, though that helps. It is how well they get along with each other once they are married. According to the Arizal, if fighting is continuous and persists after marriage, it is a good sign that the spouses are not meant for

each other.

On the other hand, there are many instances when marriages started off well but over time disintegrated. The opposite is true as well. Some marriages have rough starts but get on track after a couple of years, perhaps with some outside help.

All this means in the end is that marriage is high risk. There are so many important unknowns that remain that way, perhaps until years into a marriage. Some spousal tendencies do not reveal themselves until after the children have been born, quite late in the relationship. Not all of them are pleasantly surprising.

This is why it is worthwhile spending a moment thinking about what Eliezer, Avraham's trusted servant, did to limit his risk of failure when seeking out Yitzchak's soul mate. It may seem antiquated, but some words of advice never get old.

There he rested the camels on their knees outside of the city by the well towards evening, the time when the women go out to draw water. (Bereishis 24:11)

On a simple level, a well means a well. It was the local place to draw water, and there was no better place, at least at that time, to gain access to the women of the community without a shadchan. More than likely the women coming to do something as menial as drawing water possessed some humility, a good trait with which to start.

On a deeper level, water symbolizes Torah. Going to a well means drawing from the depths of Torah. Thus, Eliezer, who was a talmid chacham in his own right, drew from the depths of Torah to determine how to find the perfect wife for Yitzchak. Thus, the next thing he did was pray to God for help:

He said, "God, Lord of my master Avraham, please make it happen for me today, and perform a kindness for my master Avraham." (Bereishis 24:12)

Even though Eliezer was the one who needed the Divine help, he asked for it in the merit of Avraham, his master. He did not assume that God owed him anything, even though he was on a holy mission and was self-sacrificing. Had Eliezer mentioned only himself he might not have merited to be the "shaliach" for the mitzvah, though it was for righteous people. Being a shaliach for good is also a big merit.

This was especially important since Eliezer was asking for a miracle. Even unworthy people can have miracles happen for them, but they usually come at the cost of eternal reward (Shabbos 32a). Asking for a miracle in the merit of Avraham shifted the "cost" away from Eliezer. Since Avraham did not ask for the miracle himself, it could not impact his eternal account.

The preliminaries out of the way, Eliezer focused on the matter of the hour:

"I am by the well, and the daughters of the people of the city are going out to draw water. Let the girl

to whom I say, 'Please tip your pitcher for me to drink' and who answers, 'Drink, and let me water your camels as well' be the one whom You designate for your servant Yitzchak." (Bereishis 24:14-15)

It is interesting to note that an extreme act of generosity was not enough to convince Eliezer that he found the soul mate of Yitzchak. Such an act may not have been common among all the women who came to draw water that day, but it only had to be common to two people to create the possibility of error. Eliezer, therefore, asked that Hashgochah Pratis handle that unknown for him, so that:

"Through her I will know that You have done a kindness for my master." (Bereishis 24:15)

How clever. How resourceful. Only one problem. He asked for a sign from Heaven to know which girl was meant to be the future wife of Yitzchak. By what sign did he know that he had indeed been answered and that Rivka was intended for his master's son?

He didn't have one. He didn't need one. That was where bitachon and emunah—trust and faith in God—came in. Eliezer did his part to succeed at his mission. It was time to step back and rely on God to do His.

In fact, this is the most important message to come out of this story. It is the key element, not just in finding a shidduch, but in any redemption. In truth, an exile occurs just to set up the opportunity to trust in God and to have faith in His willingness to save us.

Redemption may not always come in the form we want and when we ask for it, but trust and faith in God says that this too is for our good. Failure does not mean God has abandoned us in our time of need, especially if we had real bitachon and emunah. It means that God defines success for us in a more ultimate sense, something we may not understand until later, perhaps only in the World-to-Come.

One final note. Even if someone does go through a lifetime without their soul mate, they will not in the World-to-Come. Everyone has a soul mate, and eventually each one is paired with his or her forever. In Heaven, all marriages are made in Heaven.