

SEEKING THE SAME

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Seeking the proper shidduch (marriage partner) for one's child is time consuming, anxiety ridden, and ultimately important. Parents hoping to find a "good shidduch" engage in investigative techniques that are otherwise best left to the gumshoes and heroes of cheap mystery novels. However, despite the somewhat facetious analogy, conducting an investigation into potential suitors and their families is significant and proper.

At best, marriage is a game of chance, and parents have the obligation to do everything possible to reduce the odds in favor of success. The variables in finding the right mate are immeasurable. The possibilities are endless. The chances for success or failure are equally balanced. Pre-dating information is among the few factors that can reduce the probabilities of failure and increase the hope for success.

What should parents be looking for in their investigation? Before beginning the search, it is important to decide which values are important to your family and what criteria should be used in evaluating a potential shidduch.

After deciding what you are looking for in the categories of character, family, finances, and looks, evaluate your list in relation to your child. Are you being realistic in your search? Does your child deserve the potential prince or princess that you imagine? Are you underselling your child and limiting his or her choices? Will the son or daughter-in-law you imagine make your child happy? Do you really know better than your children do who and what they need in a spouse? The Rav of Manchester, Harav Segall Zt'l, once told my uncle, Rav Yoseph Tendler Shlit'a that after all is said and done, a parent has the obligation to find a shidduch that will make his child happy. It is therefore important to include your son or daughter in the process. Find out who their fantasy spouse is and challenge them to be more realistic and honest. It is a parent's responsibility to lower or raise a child's expectations.

This week's Parsha is the only place in the Torah where a shidduch investigation is initiated and conducted. What values and criteria were contained in Avraham's instructions to Eliezar? An analysis of the verses reflects a singular emphasis on the country and family of the girl. The character of the girl is not even mentioned. Why was Avraham concerned with the girl's family, more so than with the girl herself?

Rav Dessler Zt'l, in *Michtav MeEliyahu* (Strive For Truth), explains the concept of *Zechus Avos* -

Ancestral merits.

Rav Dessler explained that the title of "Father" and "Mother" is reserved for those unique individuals whose actions influenced the future abilities and destinies of their children. The impact Rav Dessler refers to is far more than the role modeling that every parent does in educating his or her children. The actions of a "Father and Mother" affect the soul of a child.

For example. When Avraham chose to be thrown into the fiery furnace rather than bow down to Nimrod he instilled in the spiritual genes of his children the courage and strength to die "Al Kiddush Hashem - for the sanctification of G-d's name."

This past week, Rabbi Holland Shlit'a explained to me that Rav Dessler's approach is based upon the Ramban's (Nachmanidies) understanding of the Avos and the Imahos. The Ramban explains throughout Bereishis that history as we know of it did not have to be as it was. At every juncture, the decisions of our forefathers and mothers could have altered the destiny of the Jewish people.

For example. If Avraham had decided to stay in Canaan and not go to Egypt, the Bnai Yisroel would have never had to go to Egypt. It was because Avraham decided to leave Canaan rather than staying and trusting G-d to somehow provide for him that his children ended up going to Mitzrayim for 210 years.

In next week's Parsha, Toldos, we find another example. When Rivkah conspired with Yaakov to "steal" the blessings from Eisav, the Ramban explains that had they not done so, the blessings would have happened to Eisav. There would be nothing that anyone could have done about it, including Yitzchak. G-d would not have corrected the imbalance between Eisav and Yaakov. The children of Yaakov would have had to contend with a totally different reality.

At the end of Parshas Vayetzei, Yaakov unwittingly cursed Rachel for taking her father's idols. Because of the curse, Rachel died! Rashi explains, "A Tzadik decrees and G-d must fulfill"! But why? Had Yaakov known he certainly would not have cursed his beloved Rachel. Had Yitzchak known who Eisav really was, he would have never wanted to give the blessings to him! Why, if given by mistake, could they have not been altered? Why if Avraham made the wrong decision by going to Egypt did his children have to suffer for over 100 years? (The last 100 years in Egypt.)

The Ramban explains that the Forefather's actions created the future reality of their children. Had Avraham stayed in Canaan, he would have instilled in the souls of his children the strength of conviction and belief to withstand the pressures of an open society. There would have been no need for them to go to Egypt. However, once Avraham decided to go to Egypt there was no other choice. The Bnai Yisroel could not have stayed in Canaan and spiritually survived.

In Toldos, Yitzchak's intent was to give Eisav the blessings for material wealth in the service of spirituality. Had Rivkah allowed that to happen, Yaakov would have been left with the blessings for spirituality that were always going to be his. However, the means for accomplishing that spirituality

in the present material world would have been denied to him. In order to survive, Yaakov would have had to be dependent upon Eisav's largess and generosity! Instead, Rivkah and Yaakov intervened and the blessings for material wealth in the service of spirituality were granted to Yaakov. Therefore, the Bnai Yisroel have been able to make their way in this world depending directly on G-d, rather than Eisav. Therefore, G-d could proclaim to the Bnai Yisroel, "You are my servants and not servants to servants!"

In Vayetzei, Yaakov's curse was unqualified. He did not set conditions based upon intent. Therefore, regardless of Rachel's reasons for stealing Lavan's Trafim the curse had to stand. Rachel had to die. That is the power of the Tzadik. That is the power of the Av!

Furthermore, we can better appreciate in next week's Parsha Yaakov's reasons for "buying Eisav's birthright." Eisav's birthright was to be a partner with Yaakov in the creation of the Jewish people. Eisav should have married Leah and been the missing fourth Av. However, Yaakov recognized the depth of Eisav's perversion and was terrified of the effect Eisav would have on the future of the Jewish people. His power as an Av made him mortally dangerous. Rather than setting in the souls of his children the qualities of discipline, dignity, devotion, and G-dliness, Eisav would have done the opposite! Instead, Yaakov bought from Eisav his part in the creation of the nation saving us from his negative and destructive influences.

In this week's Parsha, Avraham sent Eliezer on a mission to find Yitzchak a shidduch. Avraham expressed only one criteria for Yitzchak's bride. "She must come from my homeland and my family." As far as the local Canaanite girls were concerned, we understand that Avraham wanted nothing to do with them. They were known to be immoral and promiscuous. They did not have the "midos - character attributes" deserving of the son of Sarah. Yet, there was another option. The daughter of the great Eliezar who had left behind the wealth of his father Nimrod and became partners with Avraham and Sarah in spreading the word of G-d! She appeared to be the perfect shidduch! Why take a chance on the children of his evil brother Nachor when Eliezar's daughter was right there?

In 24:38, Rashi references the Medresh that Avraham said to Eliezar, "I know that your daughter is a wonderful and deserving young lady, but what can we do? My son is blessed and you are cursed. One who is blessed can not marry one who is cursed!"

The above Medresh highlights both the greatness of Eliezar as well as the power of ancestry. Eliezar again proves his absolute devotion to his master Avraham and to G-d. Regardless of personal feelings or desires, Eliezar willingly and lovingly accepts the inherent limitations of his being a great-grand son of the cursed Cham. As such, the qualities of his soul were not the qualities necessary to father the Jewish nation. Yitzchak descended from the great Shem who instilled in the souls of his children the ability to sanctify the material world in the service of G-d. Avraham sent Eliezar in search of those latent qualities yet to be found in the children of his brother.

It was possible that their spiritual connection and qualities had been corrupted or severed. (see Rav

Dessler). However, that would be immediately clear if the girl did not wish to return with Eliezar. If that had been the case, G-d would have provided some other alternative. However, Yitzchak was not to marry a descendent of Cham. "One who is blessed can not marry one who is cursed."

As we know from this week's Parsha, Rivkah passed all the tests. Not only did she still have the qualities of Chesed and modesty, (the most important characteristics for sanctifying the physical world in the service of Hashem - think about it!) she also desired to immediately return to Yitzchak and the tent of Sarah. (24:47).

The shidduch business is not fun, but it is essential. As parents, we are obligated to search out those individuals and families that reflect our values and beliefs. Granted that we do not possess the strength of the Forefathers and mothers. However, we are all Avos and Imahos in our own right. The way we live and the focus of our decisions establish a template for our children's future.

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