

LOOKING OUR AGE / THE SHIDDUCH CRISIS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #963 – Taking A Niftar To Eretz Yisroel: When Does the Aveilus Begin and for Whom? Good Shabbos!

In The "Olden Days" (Before Avraham) People Did Not Get Old

There is an interesting Medrash in Parshas Chayei Sarah: On the *pasuk* "And Avraham was old, coming in days..." [Bereishis 24:1] the Medrash points out that Avraham asked for (signs of) old age. Avraham Avinu was the first person in the history of the world to "get old" and the Medrash says he in fact asked to "show his age".

His argument was that a man and his son (who would look like each other and both would appear to be young and vigorous) would come together to a new place and the townspeople would not know to whom to give more honor and respect. In our world, we have many cases where fathers and sons look alike, but it is very obvious as to whom is the father and whom is the son. The individual who is wider around the waist and white in the beard and the head, the one with more wrinkles on his skin – he is the father. Avraham and Yitzchak had a problem. They looked alike and they both had black beards and their skin was the same.

The Almighty told Avraham that his request was a reasonable one. "By your life, this phenomenon will begin with you!" From the beginning of the Torah until Parshas Chayei Sarah the Torah does not use the word *zikhnah* [old age], until this parsha where we read "And Avraham was old...".

This request for "old age" and G-d's concurrence, as it were, that it is a good idea runs counter to the mindset that we have today. Today, people do not want to get old, they don't want to look old. People spend billions of dollars in order to remain and to look young. They use face lifts, cosmetic surgery, Grecian formula or Botox injections. People spend a lot of money in order to not look old. As Rav Shimshon Pincus, z"l, writes in his sefer, this has even crept into our circles.

We refer to certain great teachers in our tradition as "The Alter from Slabodka" and "The Alter from Kelm". This literally means "The old man from Slabodka" or "The old man from Kelm". This is not a pejorative and it is not a derogatory term. On the contrary – this is a badge of honor. In *Eretz Yisrael*

where these individuals are referred to by a Hebrew (rather than a Yiddish) title, they are not referred to as "*HaZaken mi Slabodka*" or "*HaZaken mi Kelm*", rather they are referred to as "*HaSaba mi Slabodka*", etc. (the "Grandfather" from Slabodka, not the "old man" from Slabodka). Why? It is because even today, "*ziknah*" is something to be embarrassed about.

So what is the deeper message of Avraham's request for "*ziknah*"? It is obvious that this was not merely a practical matter of trying to identify who is the father and who is the son. It would have been a much simpler idea to have them wear name tags. The father could have had the name 'Avraham' embroidered on his shirt and the son could have had a matching shirt with the name 'Yitzchak' embroidered upon it! Problem solved.

However, Avraham said, "No. I want to be old and I want to look like an old man." And the *Ribono shel Olam* said, as it were, "It's a great idea!". So what has happened between the time of Avraham Avinu and our day and age? I don't know historically when this focus on youth began – whether it's a twentieth century phenomenon or a nineteenth century innovation. I am not sure when it started -- but that is certainly the mindset today. People do not want to be old and they do not want to look old.

R. Shimshon Pincus, z"l, offers the following insight: If a person has had an accomplished life and can look back proudly at his years, he is not upset at the fact that his future may be very limited. A person can look back at what he has accomplished and be proud of it. On the other hand, if people look back on their lives and do not have so much to show for them, the only thing that consoles them is the future that lies ahead of them. If you are 30 years old and you have a good 40, 50, or 60 years ahead of you then you have no problem with that. However, someone who is 60 or 70 years old knows that he has already lived most of his life. He faces the specter that "he may not have much time left". A person wants to delude himself to think "I am still young. I still have a long time ahead of me." What about the fact that I go to the mirror in the morning and I see that I am not so young? Well, there is a way of getting around that. There is cosmetic surgery, there is hair coloring and there are there are face lifts. I want to be young or I want to look young. I want to feel young. Why? Because I want to tell myself that the future still stretches in front of me.

When people live empty lives, they do not want to get old, look old or feel old. Avraham Avinu had no problem with this. Avraham was "*bah b'yamim*" – he made good use of every single day. He looks back – at this point in his history – and says "Yes, I know most of my life is over, but that does not upset me because I have what to show for it." Therefore '*ziknah*' – old age, is a badge of honor to wear. "I am old, but look what I have done." Therefore Avraham asked for *ziknah*. It is only when a person cannot be proud of the past and his whole mindset is "there is still a future" that he needs this charade that he still has a long and glorious future ahead of him even though chronologically that may not be the case.

Hashem Makes Matches But We Can Do Something Ourselves To Help Solve The Shidduch Crisis

The parsha deals with the episode of Avraham Avinu sending Eliezer on the most important mission of his life – to find an appropriate mate for Yitzchak. The future of *Klal Yisrael* depended on this match. The narration records that Avraham makes Eliezer swear that he will not take a girl of Canaanite lineage. As we have explained many times in the past, Avraham knew that Canaanite personality traits (*midos*) were not what he wanted in his daughter-in-law.

Avraham further instructed his servant not to take Yitzchak back to the land of Avraham's birthplace and family: "Hashem, G-d of the heavens, Who took me from the house of my father and from the land of my birth; and Who spoke concerning me, and Who swore to me saying, 'To your offspring will I give this land'; He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there." [Bereishis 24:7].

Rashi notes that in Chapter 24 *pasuk* 3 Avraham uses the expression "I will have you swear by Hashem, G-d of the heavens and G-d of the earth" but in *pasuk* 7, a scant 4 *pesukim* later, Avraham merely invokes the name of "Hashem, G-d of the heavens..." without any reference to G-d also being the "G-d of the earth". Why is this so? Rashi says (on *pasuk* 7) "...now – at this moment in history – he is the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth for I have familiarized Him in the mouth of the people (i.e., for I have put people in the habit of mentioning him); but when He took me from my father's house, He was G-d of the heavens, but not G-d of the earth, for those who lived in the world did not recognize Him.

I saw an interesting observation in the *sefer Shemen HaTov* from Rav Dov Weinberger. Is Avraham bragging to Eliezer? Is he saying, "You, know Eliezer, it is only because of me that G-d is now considered G-d of Heaven and G-d of earth as well!"? This is not Avraham Avinu. He is not boasting and he is certainly not boasting in front of Eliezer. So why does he stress "and G-d of the earth"?

Avraham Avinu was telling his servant, "Eliezer, now you are going to go do something called 'finding a *shidduch*' for my son. In order to find a *shidduch*, you need not only an *Elokai haShamayim* (G-d in Heaven), but you need an *Elokai haAretz* (G-d of the earth) as well. *Shidduchim* come about because of the direct involvement of the *Ribono shel Olam*. You cannot do this on your own and we cannot do this on our own, we need the involvement of the Master of the World.

As the Chazon Ish once said, in our day and time, when the Divine Providence of G-d is so often hidden, there is still one area of life where we can see the direct involvement of the *Ribono shel Olam*. That is in marriage matches. We see that indeed "marriages are made in heaven".

Here on the threshold of sending his servant to find a match for his son, Avraham mentions that Hashem is the G-d of Heaven and also the G-d of earth. He is personally and actively involved in all that happens in helping us make our *shidduchim*.

This brings me to the following comment. As everyone painfully knows, there is a phenomenon that impacts our community that is commonly called "the *shidduch* crisis". Unfortunately, there are hundreds if not thousands of singles in our community who want to get married but have not yet able to do so. While this is a problem that affects both boys and girls, it seems to be a much greater problem when it comes to girls.

I constantly receive calls inquiring about different boys in the Yeshiva. I can many times hear the panic and terror in the parents' voices when they have an older daughter and she still has not yet found a *shidduch*. It is in fact a terrible crisis. Some time ago, a group of people joined together and initiated what is referred to by the acronym N.A.S.I. – The North American *Shidduch* Initiative.

Everyone has different theories as to the source of the problem. N.A.S.I. arranged for a group of actuarial scientists to 'crunch the numbers'. They came up with the theory that the *shidduch* crisis is being exacerbated by the fact that boys tend to marry girls that are several years younger than them. The problem, they feel, derives from the rapid growth of the '*frum*' community. If one assumes a 3.5 - 4.5% growth rate per year and a 2.5 – 3.5 year gap between the age when boys are getting engaged and when girls are getting engaged, the mathematical basis for the problem is evident:

If we assume a 4% growth rate per year, 100 ten year olds there will be 104 nine year olds and 108 eight year olds. So if boys on the average marry at age 23 and girls on the average marry at age 20, this means that for every 100 boys there will be 112 girls. This translates into a community that has a serious problem. The math decrees that there will be girls "left out" if all boys marry girls younger than themselves.

To solve this problem, N.A.S.I.'s goal is to encourage boys to marry girls that are closer in age to themselves and even to marry older girls. This is something tangible that can be done to address this problem. True the *Ribono shel Olam* is involved in the process, but we need to make our own efforts. Therefore by encouraging this shift in mindset as to what age girls and boys should consider marrying, we are doing something tangible to solve this problem.

N.A.S.I. is offering monetary rewards to people who make *shidduchim* where the boys are closer in age to the girls they marry or even younger than them. When *bochrim* in the Yeshiva come to me and ask me this question – and I get this *shaylah* very often – "Is there anything wrong with marrying a girl who is older than me", I tell them the following fact: Rebbetzin Neubereger, ob"m, was older than Rabbi Neuberger ob'm and that Rabbi Neuberger even then was a smart man. To my knowledge, they had a wonderful marriage. In short, there is nothing wrong with going ahead with such a *shidduch*. So what if a girl is six months or even a year older than her *chosson*? Even two years older, so what? Actuarially, men live fewer years than women. What is the problem?

This is an idea that is important to discuss on Parshas Chayei Sarah, the parsha of *Shidduchim*. We should have this idea in mind and people who have sons of marriageable age should encourage them to marry girls that are near their age or even older. Let us all take these ideas to heart and

hopefully help contribute to the solution of this very painful problem.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Chayei Sarah is provided below:

- # 030 - The Shadchan in Halacha
- # 072 - Superstition in Halacha
- # 121 - The Jewish Cemetery
- # 168 - The Laws and Customs of the Hespel
- # 214 - Pilegesh: An Alternative to Marriage?
- # 258 - Intrusion on Another's Shidduch
- # 304 - The "Mazik" of a Child: Is He Responsible?
- # 348 - Determining the Salary of the Shadchan
- # 392 - Purchasing a Burial Plot
- # 436 - Daughters: Shidduchim & Parental Wishes
- # 480 - Calling Off an Engagement
- # 524 - The Badekin
- # 568 - Feeding Your Animals
- # 612 - Dating Etiquette
- # 656 - Getting Paid for Mitzvos
- # 700 - More Mincha Insight
- # 744 - Turning 20: A Scary Birthday
- # 788 - Be Careful What You Ask For
- # 832 - Burying a Man Next to A Woman - Is This a Problem?
- # 876 - Kavanah in the First Bracha of Sh'monei Esrei
- # 920 - Shidduchim - Check Out the Brothers
- # 963 - Taking a Niftar to Eretz Yisroel: When Does Aveilus Begin...?
- #1007 - The Obligation to Marry Off Children: How Far Must You Go?
- #1051 - Fulfilling P'ru U'revu -- With Boys or Girls
- #1094 - Oops! I Already Davened Mincha
- #1137 - I'll Buy Your Esrog/Tefillin & Make You An Offer You Can't Refuse
- #1180 - Shadchan Shailos

A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD

2117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.