

Sound Advice: An Introduction to Navigating the Dating Process

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INTRODUCTION: 6

CHAPTER 1:..... 7

“STARTING THINGS OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT” 7

When to Begin7

Finding a Date..... 9

A. *Shadchan* 9

B. Friends and Family 9

C. Single vs. Married Friends..... 10

D. Dating Websites..... 10

What to look for in a date:..... 11

Preparing in Advance: 11

Four Plus Four = One 12

Goals and Aspirations 13

Learning How to Choose 14

How to effectively use a *Shadchan* or Go-Between 15

A. Before Dates:..... 15

B. After Dates: 15

CHAPTER 2:..... 17

HOW TO PROGRESS IN THE DATING PROCESS / A ROADMAP TO A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP 17

Creating an emotional bond 20

Talking between dates, don’t leave things hanging: Finding things to talk about..... 21

Shabbos meals together: 22

Moving things along: Vulnerability versus Caution 24

“Looking past” and “looking back” 27

Red Flags..... 28

How to end a relationship: 28

CHAPTER 3:..... 30

ENGAGEMENT 30

How do you know if you are ready to get engaged? 30

But I am not excited? 31

But I am not sure? 31

ENGAGEMENT PERIOD 33

“Why am I so nervous?” – Pre and post-engagement jitters 33

Premarital Counseling 34

Prenuptials..... 34

Chosson and Kallah Classes..... 34

CHAPTER 4:..... 35

ASSORTED POINTS TO PONDER 35

(4:1) First phone calls: 35

(4:2) Why to say “yes” after the first date 36

(4:3) But the emotions are not there?..... 37

(4:4) Dating more than one person simultaneously 39

(4:5) List of names – Why have them? 41

(4:6) “ROLE PLAY”: The role of the parent and friend 41

(4:7) Location – where to date and where not to date 44

(4:8) Singles’ Events – the positives and negatives..... 45

(4:9) The Age Old Question 47

(4:10) Why don’t you become a *Shadchan*/Matchmaker? 48

FRIENDSHIP MAP OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS..... 51



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To Whom It May Concern:

Rabbi Kalinsky has provided an invaluable service to the orthodox community by providing a concise and clear roadmap to help navigate the potentially rocky waters of the dating process. His years of experience working with individuals dating, coupled with his extensive rabbinical and mental health training has resulted in an, all too rare, synthesis of the wisdom on negotiating this crucial process in a healthy and wise way.

I highly recommend this work to parents, educators, *chasson* and *kallah* teachers, and, most importantly, to those that are currently involved in the dating process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Pelcovitz".

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Mordechai Willig, Rabbi

September 15, 2010
ל' תשרי תשע"א

Sound Advice is a perceptive guide for young men and women contemplating marriage. It is firmly grounded in Torah values, yet focuses primarily on practical pointers.

This duality reflects the personality of its author. Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky is a *talmid chacham* of note, having learned Torah seriously in our Yeshiva and Kollel for many years. He presently teaches and serves as an administrator in Torah studies.

Rabbi Kalinsky's degree in social work is a manifestation of his desire to help others. His remarkable success in matchmaking, in partnership with his wife Elisheva, is proof of his success in the real world. His readiness to undertake challenging shidduch situations and resolve them appropriately is particularly noteworthy and exemplary.

May this pamphlet assist young men and women in finding their life partners. May the efforts of the author, together with all those who share his passion and involvement in Hashem's work of matchmaking, be crowned with success.

Mordechai Willig

Introduction:

The purpose of this pamphlet is to discuss some of the most common issues confronting men and women who are dating, and to offer advice based on my personal experience and counseling of peers and friends involved in the dating process. I would like to acknowledge some of my mentors who have guided me in the area of relationships and who have read and enhanced this document with their insightful comments: Dr. David Pelcovitz, Rosie Einhorn LCSW, Sherry Zimmerman JD, Msc, and Dr. Sara Barris. Many of the ideas presented here are gleaned from books, articles, lectures, and conversations that I have had with these unique individuals. My wife and I have successfully set up many couples, organized a number of singles events, and been involved in counseling singles over the past ten years. My experiences, and therefore my comments, are primarily geared towards the Modern Orthodox “machmir” dater, however the overwhelming majority of the content presented here is relevant to anyone. Although many ideas are generalized and each circumstance should be assessed on a case by case basis, I hope to convey a clear and fundamental approach to dating, as well as to offer perspectives on specific issues that typically arise in the dating process. Please feel free to email me any comments or questions or visit me at <http://rabbikalinsky.blogspot.com/>

Chapter 1:

“Starting Things Off on the Right Foot”

When to Begin

The first question that many college students ask themselves is: “When should I start going out?” The simple answer is – when you are ready. Too often a young man or woman starts dating purely out of peer pressure at a stage in life when he or she is not mature enough to develop a serious relationship.

Sara recently returned from a year-and-a-half of studying in a seminary in Israel. Upon her return to the U.S. and completion of a semester in college, she begins to wonder whether she is ready to begin dating. It seems that most of her friends have already begun and her mother is worried that if she does not get married by the time she finishes college, she'll have a harder time getting married. Should Sara take the leap? How will she ever know if she is ready?

David was nervous to start dating at twenty-two even though most of his friends were dating, and some were already married. His concern was that he was not clear about where he was headed in life although he was considering graduate school in psychology. He was worried about the responsibility of providing a steady income for a family at a young age, and therefore could not envision himself in a relationship. Should David start dating because some of his friends are already married? Should he wait until after he finishes his education?

Before you start dating, ask yourself if you can imagine yourself living and sharing everything with a spouse. **If you are not ready to get married then you are not ready to date.** You cannot assume that it will take a few months or years before you find your mate and that you should start dating at 19 in order to get married at 22. Who knows? *Hashem's* plan may be for you to find your spouse sooner than you, or your parents, expect.

For some people, it may not be the best idea to date while they still have many more years of education ahead of them. It can be very difficult to juggle all the details involved in starting a home, and engagement and wedding plans, and still have enough time to do well in school. Although many people do marry young and even go on to graduate school, if you don't feel pressure to date the minute you return from Israel, you may be better off.

Some have the attitude that waiting to date until they are more mature or settled makes more sense than starting young. You need to be aware, however, that dating does not get "easier" when you are older. On the contrary, the more life experience and years of education or a profession you have, the more complicated your schedule and life becomes. Additionally, as people mature, habits, routines, and life goals become more rigid and difficult to alter, making it harder to "fit" someone else into our plans.

Perhaps a good indicator for dating readiness is having confidence about making your own choices, taking responsibility for yourself and the consequences of your decisions, and feeling a sense of responsibility for other people. Additionally, it is wise to know that you are *hashkafically* stable, which can be broadly ascertained if your overall world-view and future plans are the same today as they were six months ago. There is no secret formula or tool that can help you gauge when you're ready. What is clear is that you shouldn't jump into dating without giving it significant thought first. Remember you are about to begin the process which will hopefully lead to the biggest decision you will ever make. This is a very serious and holy endeavor which should be embarked upon only when you feel you are capable of letting things take their course, and that you are prepared for the outcome of the dating process: engagement and marriage. (This doesn't mean that you can't have fun on dates; on the contrary, relationships progress better if you enjoy spending time together!)

Finding a Date

A. *Shadchan*

In addition to speaking to their married friends, many daters use a *shadchan* to set them up. A *shadchan* can either be a professional matchmaker or anyone else who carves out time from his or her schedule to think of appropriate matches and set people up on dates. It is in your best interest to be as open and honest as possible with a *shadchan* when describing yourself and your interests. Prepare yourself for questions such as these: Describe your personality, What do you do in your spare time? What are your professional goals? Where would you like to live? What qualities you are looking for in a prospective spouse? It is also helpful to have a family friend, teacher, or Rabbi who knows you well as a reference, in case the *shadchan* wants to inquire further or hear another perspective.

B. Friends and Family

Another avenue preferred by many singles is to be set up by their friends and family in a more casual fashion than a formal *shadchan* or matchmaker. Friends can be very valuable assets, as they may know many eligible singles from their social circles and should generally have a good idea of who you are and who would be an appropriate match for you. Married friends can be particularly helpful as after a friend marries, his or her social circle doubles, and the new couple can work together to make possible suggestions for you. However, be sure to sit down with your friends to review what is most important to you in a spouse. Family members can also be helpful, especially if you have family members of the opposite gender in your social circle.

Adam returned home from a date completely frustrated and irritated; this was the third girl in a row that he'd gone out with that was completely off the mark. He began to wonder why this occurred. "Don't my friends know that I'm looking for a quiet girl? Just because I'm outgoing does not mean that I'm interested in marrying someone just like me!"

If only Adam would have taken the time to sit down with his friends and clearly explained to them what he was looking for, he would have been less frustrated and could have expedited the process of finding a wife.

C. Single vs. Married Friends

While many successful couples find their mates through suggestions made by their single friends, it is important to be mindful of the experience that a married couple has, especially when they have been married for more than a few years, which perhaps makes them better equipped to set up dates. It is even more advantageous if a couple has more than their own personal experience, and has advised other individuals with different backgrounds and personalities, so that they can help you work your way through issues that might arise. Additionally, a married couple has already gone through the various stages that occur along the course of a relationship. Unlike your single friends, they know what it feels like to form an emotional bond, to be on the brink of engagement, or the jitters before a wedding. Also, the husband and wife can simultaneously listen to your questions and reflect separately and collectively. Finally, your friend's spouse may have an easier time speaking to the person you are dating than your friend. If a single friend makes a specific suggestion you can still ask a married friend to set up the date or to be available for discussion as the relationship progresses.

Whatever approach you take to finding dates, it is important to always be courteous and appreciate the efforts that friends or *shadchanim* make to help you. Once you are contacted about a possible suggestion, try to respond to the call or email within forty-eight hours with a decision.

D. Dating Websites

In the past ten years there has been a tremendous proliferation of websites dedicated to matching singles up on-line, in both the world at large (to the extent that match.com boasts

20,000 new members daily!) and the larger Jewish community (with Jdate claiming to have more than 500,000 members). The Orthodox community has also joined this business and many websites have opened up recently providing matchmaking services online. There are two basic types of online dating services, discreet and non-discreet. In other words, some websites allow you to post a profile and search others, without any screening or matchmaker as a go-between. If you read a profile that interests you, you simply contact the person through the website and begin the relationship, usually at first via e-mail. The major downside of this process is that many online websites are notorious for providing fictitious information, and you have no way of knowing whether the person you are contacting is indeed the person behind the profile. Other websites ask you to fill out a profile which is then searched by matchmakers who will contact you with an appropriate match. The advantage of these websites is that there is greater certainty that the profile is legitimate and the matchmaker has the ability to contact the individual or check references before suggesting the match to you.

What to look for in a date:

Introduction:

This topic is arguably the most important topic to consider, but at the same time the most confusing. It is important to realize that we are all unique individuals comprised of many different backgrounds, personality traits, and life experiences, all of which shape us as human beings. We all have our faults and idiosyncrasies and should recognize that no one is perfect. You should not be looking for the perfect person whom everyone admires and respects; rather, you should be looking for someone who complements your personality and shares your life aspirations. You are looking for a 'partner' to share your life experiences, with all the highs and lows that inevitably come along the way.

Preparing in Advance:

Before you begin to date, take time to reflect upon yourself and take stock, similar to a *cheshbon hanefesh*, of where you are headed and what your goals and ideals are. The purpose

of this process is two-fold. First, before you embark on your search for a life-partner, you need to have a basic knowledge of what you aspire to do with your life, because only then can you look for someone to join you on this journey. Second, this type of self-reflection will hopefully keep you focused on the primary purpose of the dating process – to find someone that you can connect with and can accomplish the goals that you set out together- and not to get caught up with externalities and social pressures. The greater clarity you have about who you are and what your personal ideals and aspirations are, the better off you will be when looking for someone to share them with.

Four Plus Four = One¹

The next step is to think more specifically about yourself and to define four personality traits or interests that are unique to you. Some examples of traits are: outgoing, creative, bookworm, intellectual, free-spirited, organized, ambitious, warm, artistic, patient, and spiritual. Then, think of four characteristics that you feel would match or complement you with someone else. Be prepared to be flexible with your list, as one of the fascinating aspects of dating is discovering qualities you admire in another person that you never thought would be important to you. Sometimes people are looking for characteristics that are different than their own, while others search for four traits that indeed mirror their own traits. Be aware, however, that the common idea of “opposites attract” may not be true in regard to finding the right spouse. In truth, research shows² that couples with similar temperaments and styles are more likely to complement each other, leading to an enhanced relationship.

The purpose of this exercise is to focus on the personality traits that make you different from your peers and will be helpful if you decide to meet with a matchmaker or *shadchan* to assist you in finding your mate. Additionally, it will help you appreciate the traits that you are looking for when you see them in the person you are dating.

¹ This concept comes from “Talking Tachlis” (1998) by Rosie Einhorn LCSW and Sherry Zimmerman JD, Msc.

² For a detailed longitudinal analysis see “Ideal mate personality concepts and compatibility in close relationships” by Marcel Zentner in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* vol. 89, no. 2 (2005) in which Dr. Zentner concludes “there is reason to believe that the degree to which two personalities match should be influenced not only by their actual characteristics but also by their ideal mate concepts.”

Limiting the list to four traits allows you to concentrate on what is central to you and to avoid being distracted by the non-essential. Often, when I ask someone “what he is looking for,” the response involves a list with upwards of ten specifications. The problem with such a lengthy list is that it will invariably include non-essential, superficial items. (See Chapter 4, section 5 for more details regarding lists).

The primary point to remember is that you are dating a person and not a list. Very often a person will date “with a list in his hands” and have a very difficult time forging a relationship, because every ten minutes he mentally refers to his list to check whether the person he is dating matches up”, instead of simply focusing on enjoying the date. Lists are useful before you date; once you have decided to commence a relationship, place your checklist on the side and put all of your efforts into getting to know the person on the date. When people begin to focus on the personalities and the relationship instead of their lists, they enjoy the experience that much more. Often, people find that they enjoy spending time with someone that does not perfectly match what they had envisioned their future spouse to be.

Goals and Aspirations

In addition to making your 4+4 list of characteristics, you also need to look for someone whose values and goals for the future are compatible with but not necessarily identical to yours. The goals can be on the individual level or that of the couple or future family. Some areas to think about are what type of career you see yourself headed towards and what are your thoughts on your future spouse’s career ambitions. Especially for Orthodox daters, it is important to think about and discuss what type of religious level you aspire to and what types of communities you envision yourself living in.

If someone is significantly different in terms of *hashkafa* (or broader religious perspective on life goals and aspirations), or if he or she envisions a path in life that doesn’t fit in with your own hopes for the future, you may want to rethink pursuing the prospect. You should not be too rigid in this category, however, and understand that people are constantly

growing and changing. Be careful not to categorize people based solely on their profession or future vocational goals. You may plan to marry someone with a career in education, but perhaps someone that you are compatible with feels more comfortable in an office during the week, while engaging in informal education on weekends.

Learning How to Choose

Yaacov is twenty-four, comes from a distinguished family, and has been dating for two years. He has just started working in an accounting firm and learns night-seder when he returns from work. Last night, Yaacov received three messages, one from a friend and two from shadchanim, each asking him if he would be interested in pursuing their suggestion for a date. He doesn't know how to decide which girl to go out with - they all sound so similar! They each come from respectable homes, studied in a seminary in Israel and Stern College, and they all are "very nice, warm, and attractive." He has heard that some friends in a similar dilemma simply flip a coin. What should he do?

Julie is a senior in college and is interested in marketing. She recently received two text messages from family friends about fellows in RIETS. Both studied in Israel for two years, majored in psychology at YC, and hope to teach after they complete Azrieli Graduate School. What criteria should she use to choose to go out with one over the other?

I assume that many of you, in some way, can relate to each of these situations. My advice is twofold. First, sometimes it is more telling to focus on who is presenting the suggestion than the specific person being suggested. For example, if one of the three people who called Yaacov actually knows him very well, has a general idea of what he is looking for in a wife, and is trustworthy, then that should clearly outweigh a random idea by his mother's cousin's sister's next-door-neighbor. Additionally, it is worth reiterating the importance of meeting a *shadchan* or married friend. Doesn't it make more sense to choose a few selected

people to be the ones who suggest ideas for you instead of anyone with access to your cell phone number? Why use a different go-between every time you date? In light of these questions I'd like to suggest an innovative approach to dating. Pick one friend or *shadchan* and have him or her set you up. If the first attempt doesn't work out, talk to him or her about it. Explain the specific reasons and issues that hindered the relationship from developing, what you liked about him or her and what made you feel uncomfortable – this will allow your friend to get a real feel for who you are and to accurately understand what you are looking for. Then, based on new insights, have her/him suggest someone else. Again, if it leads to another failed attempt, discuss and figure out what was the cause. My presumption is, that after a few attempts, this *shadchan* or married friend, assuming he or she is competent and has access to a large number and range of eligible singles, should lead to a successful shidduch sooner rather than later. Of course, this is not to dismiss the many couples that do meet randomly or through the efforts of a distant relative or acquaintance; rather, I am presenting a somewhat more systematic and logical approach to the dating process.

How to effectively use a *Shadchan* or Go-Between

A. Before Dates:

Using a *shadchan* can be very helpful for some people. When you meet with a *shadchan*, present yourself in a positive and honest way. Use the 4+4=1 model to describe yourself and what you are looking for in a prospective spouse. Ask the *shadchan* how often they would like you to follow up to remind him or her to “have you in mind” to think of prospective dates. If you hear about a specific person that you are told may be a good match for you, mention it to the *shadchan*. Often a *shadchan* may have overlooked an obvious idea and would be more than happy to follow through with your suggestion.

B. After Dates:

While some couples prefer to be direct with each other and not use an intermediary or *shadchan* after each of the initial dates, for those that do, it is also important to be open with the *shadchan* when reviewing the date. Try to explain to the *shadchan* why you did or did not have a positive experience on the date, because he or she may have a clearer and more objective and experienced perspective on whether you should continue going out or should end the relationship. Sometimes you can get only a limited picture of a person while on a date. Therefore, it is important to hear from a neutral party, because he or she may know more information that will give you a fuller picture of the situation.

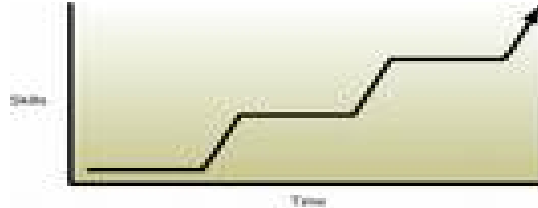
In general, you should use the *shadchan* for at least three or four dates. This means, after each date call the *shadchan* and tell him or her whether or not you want to continue the relationship. This makes it easier for you to end the relationship at an early stage without having to directly explain yourself to the other party, which can be awkward and embarrassing since your reasons may be superficial or may relate to a lack of chemistry between you. Usually it is best to always say “yes” after the first date unless something went very wrong on the date (see Chapter 4 section 2).

After each date try to relay to the *shadchan* an assessment as to how the date went, with some detail. This will give the *shadchan* a better feel as to how things are going, and he or she may now be able to relay some of those sentiments to the other party, if necessary. For example, if you are tentative about where things are headed because your date was too quiet and subdued, you should express these sentiments rather than simply telling the *shadchan*, “I don’t see it.” The *shadchan* can pass this along diplomatically, by saying something like, “He (or she) thought you were a little quiet last night and didn’t have much to say.” He (or she) may respond, “Actually, I was up the night before until 4 am studying for a midterm and I was trying my best to have energy and enthusiasm, but the exhaustion simply overwhelmed me.” The *shadchan* can then call you back and explain why your date was so subdued and suggest that you give it another try. Finally, always try to communicate with the *shadchan* or friend who arranged the date **within twenty-four hours** of the date to notify him or her if you would like to continue dating or not.

Chapter 2:

How to Progress in the Dating Process / A Roadmap to a Healthy Relationship

It is common for singles to date without having a perspective on where they are headed or how a healthy relationship should develop. The purpose of this “roadmap” is to guide you with a basic framework within which to view your relationship and its progression³.



Examine the diagram above. Notice how the line begins in a straight pattern but then rises and plateaus, then rises again, only to plateau, and then the pattern repeats. Keep this image in mind as you start the dating process. Relationships don’t usually start with electricity or fireworks and they may even start out somewhat flat, but that does not mean that you should end the relationship.

For the first few dates don’t attempt to see if your character traits and lifetime goals match up perfectly. Rather, evaluate whether or not the conversation is interesting and whether you enjoy time spent together. You do not have to feel connected or drawn to the other person. As long as you have what to talk about and enjoy some similar interests, it is worthwhile to continue dating at this point.

After the third or fourth date it is important to have a discussion about how you think things are going. It is usually more comfortable for the man to initiate and begin by saying that he’s been enjoying the time spent together. That should lead to a comment about something positive regarding a specific personality trait or goal that he respects in the woman he is dating. It can be a characteristic or aspiration or accomplishment: something that

³ Many of the ideas from this section and the framework of the roadmap are gleaned from conversations with my esteemed brother-in-law Rabbi Beinsh Ginsburg.

impresses him about her. Hopefully, in return, she relates that she too is having an enjoyable time together and points out something positive about him.

The objective of the conversation is to create a connection and to begin to open up regarding your perspectives on the relationship. You may feel uneasy if you have no idea how the other person feels about you or how the relationship is developing, so this discussion enables you to be honest and begin to feel more comfortable talking about more serious matters. A successful discussion will hopefully result in moving the relationship to the next level.

As depicted in the diagram, after each step there is a plateau. This represents how after each stage, after each step forward, there is “neutral” time in between. This time is just as integral to the dating process as the positive movements upwards. These plateaus correspond to a period of simply enjoying each other’s company and doing fun activities together. Sandwiched between serious talks about life and the relationship itself, it is important to have dates that are less intense and more fun-spirited, since **the main indicator of a good relationship is if you enjoy spending time together, coupled with mutual respect and compatible life goals**. Try to choose an activity other than eating for a change. Go to a miniature golf course, sports arena, or a ferry ride, or bring along a board game or a deck of cards. Dating is about getting to know someone and you can only accomplish that by doing different things, to see the many sides of the person. Take the opportunity to discuss anything that is important to you. Usually family is a solid topic, because it gives you insight into the person’s background and sphere of influence. In short, now is the time to see if you enjoy each other’s company. Capitalize on the opportunity.

After the next set of three to six dates, have another conversation about the relationship. This time, similar to the first such conversation, begin with positive characteristics, but then turn the conversation away from a description of one another to a discussion of the relationship between the two of you. Try to point out what you have in common and how your personalities work together, or how your differences enhance the relationship. Open up as much as you can, even if it makes you vulnerable, as this is a

necessary step in moving the relationship to the next level. You may hesitate and think to yourself, “What if he/she doesn’t feel the same way that I do?” But don’t let that prevent you from sharing your thoughts and feelings. The process is sometimes referred to as “meta-communicating” because you are discussing aspects of the relationship and how you communicate with each other.

By now you should have noticed a pattern. A relationship moves in stages; you build the relationship by having discussions about each other and about the relationship itself. But don’t expect a straight uphill climb, without any dips or plateaus along the way. It is important to note that not all relationships necessarily develop in a linear way, always moving forward and upwards. Relationships are dynamic and each one is its own special journey. Sometimes there may be a “step-down” that may allow a better grounding for the relationship and a strengthening of the bond. When that happens, try not to lose sight of the broader picture and all of the positive time together. As long as you enjoy each other’s company and feel that there is potential and some movement to the relationship, continue seeing each other in order to attain greater clarity on the matter.

When I speak with people I try to remind them that there is not always constant movement in a relationship and one should not look for it from date to date. The best approach is to sit back and enjoy the time together and reflect on it in chunks of a week or two at a time. Additionally, sometimes we need to be conscious of and accommodating to the “learning curve” of the people we date. If you have a certain expectation for how you want to be treated or are looking for a specific character trait or response to a particular comment and do not receive it the first time around, give feedback and tell the other person about it. For example, if you prefer to take a cab home instead of the subway after 9pm, tell him about it. Or, if you just opened-up emotionally about a particular experience, or a sensitive family-related issue, and your date stares at you blankly, tell her that you need more empathetic listening after such a discussion and that it would make you feel better if that happens next time.

Creating an emotional bond

Like many experiences in life, building an emotional bond and connection takes time and is a gradual process. It is a process that begins by talking about the small things such as past experiences, schooling, summer experiences, and your opinions about other people and issues. Soon, however, it gradually moves to more personal and reflective topics about yourself and what makes you unique. In the broadest sense, conversations on dates should move from talking about yourself, to reflections about the other person, and eventually about the relationship that the two of you have built over time together.

There is an exercise developed by Dr. John Gottman, a world-renowned psychologist and marital therapist, which guide couples through this stage of creating an emotional bond⁴. The underlying principle of this exercise is that the greater knowledge we have about each other, the closer we become. Therefore, if we can create a cognitive map of the world of the person we are dating and know all about their history, concerns, and preferences, a stronger friendship and bond is created. Unfortunately, sometimes two people are dating for many months, but somehow do not even know the answers to some of the basic “getting to know you” questions. Perhaps this is the cause for many of the post-engagement jitters that some couples have as they try to sleep at night and are haunted by the question, “but do I really know him/her?” Couples need to go through this process of “knowing” each other. The exciting thing about this process is that it never really ends. People are always changing and their cognitive world is changing with them, so this process must be updated throughout the relationship, both pre-marriage and post-marriage on an ongoing basis.

“Friendship Maps” are created by asking open-ended questions that cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no”. This process can be transformed into a game, which often makes it more enjoyable, by making a deck of cards, each with a different question. One person picks the top “card” from the deck and asks the other person the question. For more advanced relationships, where the couple may know a lot about each other, you can have

⁴ For more information see www.gottman.com and his book “The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work” (1999).

each person answer the question for the other person and then he/she can either agree with the answer or fill in more correct information.

Some examples of simple discussion topics that can create an atmosphere conducive to forming an emotional bond are: what is your favorite color, your favorite toy as a child, or your favorite candy or food item? The next level may be about what *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov* is like in your home, where you have traveled, or how your family celebrates birthdays. Another area might be, what have you started but not finished, or what you are afraid of. Think about your relationship with your best friend and what makes the two of you close. It is probably the experiences you share together and the fact that each of you knows things about each other that most people do not know. Begin to think about those things and try discussing them with the person you are dating⁵.

Once you have talked about some of these items you will begin to feel more connected to each other as you share more of your life's story. This should lay the foundation for getting to know each other. What is beautiful about this process is that it is never-ending. A good relationship and one that eventually leads to marriage is about getting to know each other, on a constant basis and on many different levels. Now you can begin discussing your relationship and commonalities and how you complement each other or have similar interests. These conversations will help you as the relationship progresses. Throughout the entire relationship and especially during these conversations, it is crucial to work on your listening skills, which include validating what the other person is saying and giving feedback as to how you feel about what he or she is saying. Positive listening skills also help develop mutual respect for each other, which is another critical element in the relationship.

Talking between dates, don't leave things hanging: Finding things to talk about

It is important to create momentum in a relationship. The most efficient way of building this momentum is by going out around twice a week and talking between dates. Although in some circles talking between dates on the phone is not encouraged, I believe that in most

⁵ For a fuller listing of questions helpful in developing a "friendship map", see the appendix.

circumstances it enhances the relationship and creates a continuum from date to date. As with everything in life and with dating, there needs to be a progression. After the first few dates it may be awkward to talk on the phone in between dates beyond the requisite time to set up the next date. However, after the third or fourth date I would recommend that you try to have a longer conversation on the phone at least once before each date. You may feel these conversations to be unnatural and perhaps a little “forced”, but they are a necessary component of getting to know each other. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that some people are “phone people” and can talk forever on the phone, while others prefer to talk in person. The focal point of the dating relationship is the time that you spend together in person. A dull phone conversation is not indicative of anything wrong with the relationship as long as you enjoy each other’s company on the dates.

Sometimes it happens that even as the relationship develops nicely, the phone conversations remain subpar, and this may frustrate one or both of the parties. A suggestion I often give to people dating that experience difficulty in trying to find topics to discuss during phone conversations in between dates is to pick a *sefer* and learn it together, a paragraph every night. The purpose of this suggestion is twofold. First, it allows you to maintain contact on a daily basis and offers an opportunity to connect on a different level from the more mundane day to day chat. Secondly, often you can begin a deeper conversation or discover an insight into the other person through the learning together. At the same time, don’t expect this to be a true *chavrusa* to its fullest extent; you are simply looking to connect with each other and learn something along the way.

Shabbos meals together:

Another avenue to explore that not enough people take advantage of while dating is spending a Shabbos together. I think that some daters believe that you can only spend Shabbos together after you’re already engaged and you are ready to introduce your prospective Chassan or Kallah to your community of friends and family. In my opinion, the time to spend Shabbos together should be well before any commitments are made. In fact, I

believe that the time spent together on Shabbos often acts as a catalyst in strengthening the relationship and getting to know each other on a deeper level.

The rationale behind spending Shabbos together is that it provides an opportunity to see each other from a completely new perspective. Most of the time during the dating process you date alone and either sit across the table from each other at a restaurant or lounge or interact in an activity as a pair, but rarely do you engage in an activity with other participants, unless you are at a singles event or hanging out with a bunch of friends in a group. A Shabbos table provides a completely new atmosphere of a relaxed environment with friends and often children, and this allows you to see how the other person interacts with other people and plays with children, something you cannot see on a date. It is these experiences that provide a “fuller picture” of the person you are dating⁶.

As an aside, sometimes people ask me, “Well, I am not sure if this is the right one because I don’t feel like a couple yet, how do I get to feel like a couple?” The simple answer is to do things as a couple—to “try it on and see if it fits”. One area of acting like a couple is going places together, and perhaps one of the most comfortable places is a “neutral” Shabbos table. I suggest that couples meet in a “neutral” home, such as the home of a friend of either or both sides, as opposed to the home of a relative, because it relieves the pressure that accompanies visiting a relative with the person you are dating. Also, if you go to a relative you may have to deal with the other issue of “being seen in public” together, whereas, often you can find a friend in a neutral community. If you decide to spend a Shabbos together, it does not have to be for all three meals. Depending on the circumstances and how comfortable you are with each other, one meal may be all you are ready for, or perhaps two. I would even suggest that unless things are very serious, it may be better not to have all three meals together, in order to give each of you some space and time alone.

At what point in the relationship is it appropriate to spend a Shabbos meal together? On average, if things are progressing, anywhere between 4-8 weeks. I say as early as four

⁶ Another possible added bonus if you spend the meal at a friend’s is another opinion of someone you trust as to how they perceive you as a couple.

weeks, because if you are enjoying each other's company and making the arrangements is not difficult, then it should be pursued. The relationship itself can even be enhanced by just beginning the discussion of making plans for a future Shabbos. Often, talking about doing things two and three weeks in the future enhances the relationship and takes away some of the pressure of the date-to-date perspective and the fear that things might end on the next date.

Moving things along: Vulnerability versus Caution

One of the most common problems that daters face in a relationship is the ability to move things along through the various stages. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, relationships develop in stages similar to that of climbing a mountain; there is a climb and then a plateau. Some daters have an easy time getting through the first few stages, but often get to a point in the relationship where things are stagnant and the relationship peters out. How can you move the relationship along during the middle stages of the relationship?

The main objective to moving the relationship along is to continuously nurture the relationship. How do you nurture the relationship? By giving to each other and showing that you care for each other. Part of caring for each other is accommodating each other's schedules for dates and genuinely taking interest in the other person's life and daily activities. If you are going out to a park make sure you bring along a drink and snack. At the end of the date if you are escorting her home, make sure she gets into the building, and if she is going home separately, call and make sure she arrives safely.

In addition to actions, it is critical to express in words how you are feeling about the other person and the relationship. Every three to five dates, as the relationship plateaus you should discuss how things have progressed and how you feel closer to each other. Sometimes you may feel closer after a particular event. Perhaps you had a great date at a museum or special dinner, or maybe you visited a grandmother and felt a special connection there. What is important is that the feelings you feel inside be expressed in words. For some this may be a

difficult exercise, especially if you are introverted to begin with or do not feel comfortable expressing your emotions, but it is the only way to move the relationship forward.

I once heard the following concept from Dr. Sara Barris, a noted psychologist who specializes in working with couples in the Modern Orthodox community. She says that **only** by discussing topics that are more personal and by making ourselves vulnerable are we able to deeply connect with each other. The advantages of discussing your vulnerabilities are three-fold. First and foremost, it builds the emotional connection which is critical to all relationships. Second, it gives you the opportunity to not only speak about things that are close to you but also to observe your date's reaction and response, whether it be one of concern and empathy or disinterest. Thirdly, it allows for greater dialogue concerning a topic that is important to you. For some more experienced daters this may be more difficult; after all, how many times can you "open up" and discuss those things that only a few people know about you when you have not seen positive results, i.e.: dating that leads to an engagement, in your prior relationships? There is no shortcut, however, for becoming closer with another person without developing the relationship through sharing experiences and becoming, at times, vulnerable. Of course, this is a two-way street, and if one side opens up the other person should follow suit and do the same.

I have found that for those people that have a hard time expressing in person how they feel, sending a nice e-mail, card, or text message can also do the trick. Often, especially in the area of relationships, people feel more comfortable saying more in these formats than in person. If you would like to use all of these suggestions and communicate with each other both in person and digitally that is also helpful.

Buying small gifts and mementos is also a good way to show that you care. It does not matter if it is a book or a stuffed animal, as the concept remains the same. The gift expresses that you thought about your date and decided to buy something to give him or her. Another option is baking cookies; you should do whatever comes naturally and you are comfortable with. If you are together for Shabbos, or if you are away for more than a week, flowers are almost always appreciated by women.

In my opinion, it is not appropriate to comment about a female's appearance on a date even as the relationship develops. Of course, this may depend on the particular individuals and the specific woman's comfort level in these areas, but the safest approach is to refrain when in doubt. From what I am told, many modest religious women feel very uncomfortable when their date comments about how they look or how they are dressed. I believe there are times that it is appropriate to say, "You look nice", but not more than that. In addition to embarrassing your date, it is critical to maintain boundaries of *tzinut* throughout the dating process and this is a clear expression of that ideal. Obviously, in all other areas it is appropriate and encouraged to compliment your date, as I already elaborated upon, since that is what creates the emotional bond in the relationship.

While on the topic of movement within the relationship I would add that it is important to pace yourself and not try to move things along unnaturally. A relationship is dynamic and it cannot be rushed. Once in a while there may be some special chemistry at the beginning of a relationship and things will feel that they are moving along very quickly. Do not get carried away and start going out every night of the week. A relationship needs time between dates for the two people to process the experience and build upon it. Keep in mind; dating is a long marathon, not a 100 meter dash. If you try to sprint at the beginning you may run out of energy and endurance, and things will inevitably begin to feel stale very shortly thereafter. Take your time and enjoy your experiences together, and build upon them from date to date. This in itself can also be a good topic to discuss together, i.e.: whether you each feel comfortable with the pace and way that the relationship is developing. Obviously it is nearly impossible for each of you to develop the same feelings for each other at exactly the same rate, but it is important to check in with each other to make sure that you are moving at relatively the same pace. If you have friends that got engaged after three months and you are still dating after four months that is fine, as long as there is positive movement in the relationship. What matters is the end result, not how you get there.

“Looking past” and “looking back”

Even as a relationship develops you may find that in some areas the two of you match up well and that there is compatibility but not in other areas. How do you weigh your decision whether or not to continue if not everything lines up perfectly? Towards the beginning of the relationship, as long as your feelings are “neutral” and you see potential, you should continue dating in order to get a better and fuller picture of each other. At times there may even be a particular personality trait, family history, or professional goal that may not be what you were expecting to find in a mate; nonetheless you should try to “shelve” those concerns in light of the overall perspective on things. As you continue to date you should try to focus on the positive components, and one of two things will eventually happen – either those particular items that previously bothered you will no longer trouble you (either because you over emphasized them or they were not what you had originally perceived them to be), or you will be exasperated to the extent that you must obviously end the relationship.

However, once in a while one of these “things” lurking in the background becomes less prominent, yet may still seem to bother you, perhaps less than before, but it is still ever-present. What do you do then? At this point you need to step back and evaluate the situation from a more “holistic” approach. Think to yourself, or even better yet, write down a list of all of the positive qualities you admire in the other person. Then make another list of the items that you dislike or are troubled by and examine these two lists carefully. If you are having difficulty doing this on your own you may want the help of a married friend, *shadchan* or parent for an unbiased assessment. Try to keep things in perspective and think about what truly is integral to your relationship and what can you “get past” and what is a “deal breaker”. Hopefully this exercise will assist you with this decision.

There is a possibility that even after attempting to “look past” a somewhat minor detail for some people, you may still feel “stuck” in your decision and cannot proceed to move the relationship forward. Even if you are able to list many wonderful attributes of the person you are dating, some daters maintain an overly analytical perspective and continue to revisit a specific issue, and assume that this must be a “red flag” and reason to end the relationship.

However, this is not always true. Sometimes, individuals who are very meticulous in many aspects of their life, or perhaps have a perfectionist personality, may be more prone to finding themselves in these circumstances. In such a case, it may possibly be helpful to seek professional advice to learn how to develop, nurture, and progress a relationship under those circumstances.

Red Flags

Obviously, there are a few items that should be considered “red flags” by all accounts. If you have any doubt about these categories or examples, please seek further guidance.

- If the negative times outweigh the positive times together in terms of quantity, even if the “good times” are amazing, this should concern you and the future of the relationship.
- If you find that there is an inability to repair the relationship after conflicts, and that one or both sides holds onto a grudge, anger, or defensiveness and is not capable of understanding the other person’s perspective.
- If you find a high level of criticism or degrading of your essence and not simply a disagreement about a specific behavior, or if you feel that you always need to explain yourself and where you are to the person you are dating.
- Any indication of abuse, whether it is physical or emotional, or any hostility, aggressiveness, or demeaning behavior.

How to end a relationship:

Part of the dating process is learning how to end a relationship in a sensitive manner. Just as you do your best to put your best foot forward at the start of a relationship and hope to make “a good impression”, you should maintain that sense of respect and dignity when the time comes to end a potential courtship. If you are using a *shadchan* or go-between and it has only been one or two dates, it is accepted to tell the *shadchan* that you are not interested in pursuing the relationship further and he or she contacts the person with your decision. After the third or fourth date you should speak directly with the person you are dating about your

desire to end the relationship. Often this is uncomfortable, especially if the other person is interested in pursuing the relationship further. I would advise you to be fairly certain before you make the decision to end the relationship and not to make the decision without giving the relationship a decent chance to determine whether it has potential or not. It should be understood that most relationships do not begin with “sparks” and personalities do not necessarily “click” at first. It is common for people to go on three or more dates before they begin to feel comfortable and are able to connect with each other in a meaningful way.

Here are some basic guidelines of proper modes of ending a relationship.

- Never end a relationship by sending a text message or email.
- It is always most appropriate to end the relationship in person and not over the phone, especially if you have gone on more than four dates.
- Even after you end the relationship, be sure to be courteous and respectful until the date ends⁷.
- Even if you have a strong feeling at the beginning of a first date that this is not going to work out, do not make an excuse to end the date after less than two hours. Finish the date at the usual duration and maintain proper *kavod habrios*.

⁷ On many occasions, after you date and get to know each other, after you end the relationship you or your date may think of friends that may be a more appropriate match for each other.

Chapter 3:

Engagement

How do you know if you are ready to get engaged?

We all want to be swept off of our feet in order to feel comfortable with our decision that “he or she is the right one”; however, that does not always happen. Not only does that not always happen, in reality it almost never happens. Some relationships may begin with “sparks”, but that is just superficial chemistry which may be based upon physical attraction or other factors. For a relationship to last it needs to be nurtured for a much longer time and on a much deeper emotional level.

The following is a list of questions that comprise the basic ingredients for a healthy relationship, which make up the fundamentals of an emotional bond that can last:

- Do you enjoy spending time together?
- Do you look forward to upcoming dates or meetings?
- Do you like his or her personality as a whole?
- Is there a basic physical attraction?
- Does he/she bring out the best in you?
- Do you have common goals and aspirations?
- Is there mutual respect of ideas and opinions?
- Are you flexible and supportive of each other?
- Can you envision spending the rest of your life with this person?

In addition, before you get engaged make sure:

- You did some form of genetic testing either at a hospital⁸ or with Dor Yeshorim, an organization that offers genetic screening to members of Orthodox Jewish community⁹. The objective of this screening is to minimize the occurrence of genetic disorders common to

⁸ If you do the genetic testing at a hospital you can find out if you are a carrier for any major diseases or not.

⁹ There are different opinions as to when the most appropriate time is to check that you are compatible genetically. Some suggest checking early on in the relationship, while others advise waiting until things get more serious. I would advise at least discussing the topic on a date after four to six weeks of dating.

Jewish people. To find a participating testing site near you or to request a brochure, please call Dor Yeshorim at 718-384-6060.

- You have each met the other's parents, barring unforeseen circumstances or geographical barriers.

But I am not excited?

As people date for a few months it can happen that one party in the relationship is ready to make the commitment and the other side is still unsure. The role of the person who is "ready" is to be supportive and caring and allow the other person the space and time to come to a decision. This is not the time to "pull back" in the relationship. On the contrary, if the relationship has what it takes to move forward then you need to continue to nurture it and each other. Sometimes people need a little more time to feel comfortable making a decision of this gravity and they are entitled to that time. Even if your initial response is to be upset that "you have to wait", realize that a few more weeks is nothing compared to a possible lifetime together. This time period is just as critical for you as it is for him/her. As always, being open and sharing with each other is critical at this stage. If you feel that dates are becoming routine and stale, make sure to do something different – have a long day date at an amusement park or go on a picnic if the weather is nice, but keep it different and interesting.

As I outlined previously, relationships work in an upward movement with stops along the way. If you get stuck at any point for too long things may begin to unravel. I have seen numerous relationships that go from tentative to definite within a short period of time. If you focus on the positives everything else should hopefully fall naturally into place.

But I am not sure?

After all is said and done and even if you can check off everything from the list above, engagement is still a stressful decision, as it may be considered the most important one of your life and therefore is understandably not easy. Everyone should expect some level of nervousness as he or she contemplates engagement, some more than others depending on

personality. There is always a “leap of faith” no matter how well you know the other person and how many months you’ve dated; you can only know so much about a person on a date. If, however, you have had a lot of experiences together, beyond sitting across a table from each other, in several forums and settings, and your family supports your choice and it simply “feels right”, these are all healthy indicators that you should take the relationship to the next dimension. Sometimes even if everything lines up and it “makes sense”, at least intellectually, you may be unable to make the decision in the affirmative. Perhaps there is an added layer of anxiety that is holding you back, or something in your history. Whatever it may be, it would be helpful to seek some professional counsel at this point to sort it out. Countless singles visit with mental health professionals while they date and they can be very useful in clarifying issues and defining problems with an eye towards solutions.

Here are some guidelines that may assist you in recognizing whether you may need to seek professional guidance. You may want to go alone or together as a couple, depending on whether the issue is individual-based or couple based.

1) If you have an indecisive personality to the extent that you feel crippled by anxiety when you need to make a decision related to the relationship. Often, people who have perfectionist tendencies may be more prone to this.

2) If you feel that the relationship is moving very slowly or if you have not felt forward movement in two to three weeks and cannot find an easy explanation for it, such as one of you went out of town for two weeks.

3) If you find that disagreements and fighting begin to dominate the relationship and that you have problems communicating with each other, but you are still fond of each other and want to make the relationship work.

You may just need a few short sessions to put things in perspective and to understand why you are feeling this way. Don’t think any less of yourself if you need to seek professional guidance it may be one of the best decisions you ever make.

Engagement period

Once you decide to make the commitment and “get engaged”, it is time to plan for the wedding and your new life together. This period is typically filled with feelings of ups and downs, of elation and stress, and of certainty and doubt. In short, engagement is a rollercoaster of emotions. While some couples can deepen their relationship during this period, even in a healthy relationship this may not always happen, simply because of the pressure and time commitments that come along while the couple prepares for the upcoming wedding and their life thereafter. But don’t lose track of the excitement and fun that comes along with all the planning, and try to make sure that amidst all of the shopping and preparing you continue to nurture the relationship and have fun and relaxed time together once a week. You should try to make engagement a time of growth in your relationship. You do not want to forget, in the midst of everything else that may be going on in your busy life, why you made the decision to marry each other in the first place. Also, although you may want to have months and months to plan and fret over every last detail of your wedding, if it is at all possible, try to keep the engagement period to a three to four month window. This should be a long enough time to prepare adequately without prolonging this period of waiting for the wedding. It is healthier for your relationship to minimize this period and to get to the next stage of the relationship where you can truly give to each other on a constant basis.

“Why am I so nervous?” – Pre and post-engagement jitters

Imagine you find yourself waking up the morning after your *LeChaim* or *Vort* wondering, “What did I just do, I don’t even know him or her?” Do not worry; you are in perfectly good company. It is very common to have second thoughts after making what is perhaps the most important decision of your life. At those moments try to remember all of the good times you spent together and what made you want to become engaged to this person. If the issue persists or feels insurmountable, seek professional help before things are

blown out of proportion. If your natural tendency is to be nervous and second guess yourself, this anxiety may just be an outgrowth of that.

Premarital Counseling

I would also recommend that each engaged couple entertains the possibility of attending a premarital counseling session with a professional therapist in order to be better equipped for building their marriage together and starting things off on the right foot. The purpose of these sessions is to educate the couple about relationships and to teach them how to invest in their relationship and to deepen the friendship that they developed during their courtship and to help them best prepare for situations that may arise after marriage. *Shana Rishona* is a very special and critical time for the relationship and solidifies a strong foundation for the couple. Having a few pre-marital sessions will hopefully enhance this period in your life together and the many years to come.

Prenuptials

All engaged couples should fill out and sign a pre-nuptial agreement, which can easily be downloaded from the RCA website (www.bethdin.org) at no charge. Similar to the *Kesuba*, this agreement solidifies the commitment of the couple to each other and shows their utmost desire to care for each other under all circumstances. The increase utilization of pre-nuptial agreements is a critical step in purging our community of the distressing problem of the modern-day *Aguna* and enabling men and women to remarry without restriction. I suggest you use the RCA version of the prenuptial as opposed to hiring a lawyer to craft your own, as that strategy may lead to more complications that may cause more anguish than its intended purpose of dispelling fears.

Chosson and Kallah Classes

Choosing the appropriate *Chasan* and *Kallah* teacher depends on the specific individuals and their backgrounds. Before you choose a specific teacher you should decide on

the format you would feel most comfortable in. Some teachers offer classes to large groups while others teach individual *Chassanim* and *Kallahs*. It is also important to ensure that the information and *Halacha* taught during these sessions is consistent for both the *chosson* and *kallah*, so as not to cause possible confusion later on after marriage. Finding a *posek* who will answer your post-marriage questions is also something to discuss at this stage in the relationship.

In addition to these classes, which primarily cover *Halachik* knowledge for the new couple in the area of *Taharas Hamishpacha*, each couple should also consult either their *Chosson* or *Kallah* teachers or other mentors that offer a short individual class on other specific information related to marriage, which is often referred to as a “schmooze”. This talk is critical for all couples to engage in separately and you should consult your *mesader kidushin* if you are having difficulty locating one in your area.

Chapter 4:

Assorted Points to Ponder

(4:1) First phone calls:

If you are like many people, you may not look forward to or enjoy the first phone call, so here are a few short pieces of advice that may deal with some of your questions. First: why do we even have the “first phone call”? True, in some Orthodox circles the *shadchan* arranges the first date for both sides and simply tells them where and when, but I think in our circles it has become accepted that the two prospective daters discuss these details together on the phone before the first date. It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of the first phone call is to arrange a meeting, not to necessarily speak about your family background and life aspirations save that for the date itself. The first phone call should be very light and not longer than thirty minutes, unless you are really having a good time together and the conversation just flows. On the other hand, you need to strike a balance so that it is not too short either. For

example, a guy should not call up a prospective date, introduce himself, and immediately say, “So how about tomorrow night at 7pm?” Rather, you should begin with some discussion and lead into arranging the date.

Another point to keep in mind is that it is only a “first phone call”. Do not draw conclusions or analyze what she said or what he did not say or how boring it was. Be patient until after the first date (or more) to begin those assessments. I know of countless stories where the first phone call was a bit slow or awkward but the first date was fine.

(4:2) Why to say “yes” after the first date

Now that you have finally decided to date a particular person, had the first phone call, and went on a date, you need to make another decision – do you want to go out again? Well, if you take my advice, you will have one less decision to fret over. You should automatically agree to a second date every time unless it was a very negative experience. The logic is as follows: as you know yourself, a first date entails the jitters and awkwardness of trying to make a positive first impression, which not everyone excels in, and it therefore takes two dates to get a fair impression. If it makes you feel any better, view the first two dates as one long date with two parts. Sometimes a person returns from a first date and feels that “it went ok, but I do not see myself ever marrying this person” and decides not to continue the relationship. This is a mistake. During the first stages of the dating process you should not be focused on marriage, rather on developing the relationship and getting to know each other. After all, how can you expect to even contemplate marrying anyone after meeting him or her for a few hours? A person needs time to warm up, be comfortable, and act like who he or she really is, and that takes at least a few dates. If you say no after the first date, you are not saying no to the person you agreed to go out with, but instead to the first date impression they gave off. I know of many couples that at the inception of their relationship things were “ok” or “parve” without any excitement or sparks, but as the relationship evolved and as they nurtured it, they were able to see each other’s true personalities and connect. So, next time you are unsure whether to agree to a second date, make it simple and say “yes”.

I feel that this is also the place to mention a word or two about physical attraction. Everyone agrees that you need to be attracted to the person that you marry. However, that does not necessarily require you to feel that attraction the moment you meet or on the first date. As long as there is a neutral feeling towards the other party, over a short period of time as a couple gets to know each other, they begin to appreciate other facets of each other's personality, and a greater sense of attraction is developed. Unless you are very certain that you can never become attracted to the other person, continue the relationship.

(4:3) But the emotions are not there?

Once you agree to go out on a second and even third date you again need to make another decision whether to continue investing in the relationship or not. I would offer the following guidelines for your decision making process. For the first three to five dates you should continue dating as long as you see **some** potential in the relationship. Remember, you should not be expecting "sparks flying" or "butterflies in your stomach" every time you see each other, rather there should be some shared interests and common ground to converse about. Even if your feelings continue to be neutral you should continue dating, as it takes time for the feelings to follow.

After the fifth or sixth date you will want to make a decision as to whether you think that this is a relationship worth investing in, since at this point if you continue dating you can no longer call it quits on a dime—at this point you are "seeing each other" and should expect to go out at least a few more times before making another evaluation.

This is important for a few reasons. One is that you need to relax in the relationship and not be concerned that it may end after each date, because only then will you be able to speak more openly and get to know each other, which may include disclosing certain vulnerabilities. Second, it is very difficult to discern growth in a relationship if you keep on checking over your shoulder every ten minutes to examine if there is growth. The only way that you will notice movement in the relationship is if you step back for a week or two and simply focus on enjoying spending time with each other and then reflect on the past two weeks and see if you

feel any differently about each other or the relationship as a whole. As you spend more time together and get to know each other on a deeper level, your emotions for each other should grow as well. However, it may happen that you will go out with someone for a number of weeks, but still say to yourself, “but my emotions are not there” and want to prematurely end a perfectly healthy relationship after six weeks on the assumption that after six weeks in a relationship I should be feeling “x” amount of emotion for the other person, and I do not. The truth is that a relationship has many different factors, as do your feelings and it is hard to know how and when our emotions will naturally develop for another person¹⁰. All human beings are unique and each of us is at a different point in the spectrum of how our emotions develop over time affect our actions. That being said, sometimes you need more of a closer bond together before you develop those feelings and it is only a question of time.

Alternatively, maybe you have been rejected so many times in the past that you put up an invisible shield preventing yourself from getting “emotionally involved” in the relationship, or perhaps you are more cerebral than emotionally driven and therefore do not have strong feelings at this stage in the relationship. Whatever the specific reason may be for you, as long as you are enjoying the dates and feel a progression in the relationship, even if you do not feel those deep emotions inside, it makes sense to continue dating.

The rationale behind this is that part of the goal of dating is to have, to the best of your ability, **clarity** regarding the relationship. Clarity can come in a negative form, when you are sure that the relationship should end, or in a positive way, when you are sure that he or she is the one for you. What happens often is that daters are in a relationship and things begin to feel a little murky and cloudy and they become very uncertain, “Is he or she the right one?”, “Do I really like spending time with him or her?”, “What if he doesn’t get into medical school?” Because of these doubts one may assume it is safer to end the relationship than to continue under these uncertain conditions. My feeling is that by going out a few more times you will be able to turn the uncertainty to clarity, in one way or another. Therefore, it is always worthwhile to see how things play out and to continue dating. The same holds true if you

¹⁰ See also Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski in “I am I” (1993), p.153-157.

have questions about your emotional connection: go out a little longer and see if the emotions come. Chances are that if there are other issues lurking in the background that are compounded by your lack of emotion you will shortly end the relationship. But if all is well aside from your emotions, keep things going and try not to think about your emotional connection for a week or more, and then look back and reflect to see if your feelings are moving, even slightly, in the right direction.

(4:4) Dating more than one person simultaneously

It is always important to be mindful that dating for marriage is a holy process. You are looking for a partner to help you grow as a person, and hopefully, with the help of G-d, to raise a family dedicated to His service. Therefore, you should focus on each person that you date carefully and make sure that you do not dismiss the suggestion without thoroughly giving it a chance to work. Part of giving someone a chance is to remain focused on that person when you date him or her. We live in a society driven by technology, where we use search engines that can compute mounds of information in less than a second. This influences our desire for immediate answers when we date, and if it doesn't feel perfect right away, then we tend to move on to the next person. However, this is not the "holy approach" to dating. The holy approach says that each individual is unique and special and if for some reason I was destined to date this particular person¹¹ I should get to know who he or she is and see if we can make this work. Clearly, the concept of dating more than one person at a time is antithetical to this approach to dating. How can you focus on two people at the same time and give each your complete attention? People who "double date" are always comparing their dates in order to decide with whom to continue and with whom to end their relationship. Instead of concentrating on each person separately and seeing how the relationship progresses in order to decide if you want to pursue the relationship, you become entangled in comparing them to each other, which is unfair to the other person, and equally (if not more)

¹¹ It is told about the Rogatchover gaon that he would pay *shadchanus gelt* to every *shadchan* after each failed attempt because he felt every dating opportunity, even one that did not work out, was another step along the way of his finding his *zivug*.

unfair to yourself. The situation can definitely get sticky quickly if both relationships develop; leaving you exhausted (and broke) after two weeks of double-dating.

The other issue is how the other party will feel if and when they discover that you are dating someone else at the same time. They will feel cheated on, even if that was not your intention, and will almost certainly be left with a negative impression. In short, the stakes are too high for you to gamble when you date, and you are better off focusing on one person at a time than running the risk of spending less quality time with two people at once. Part of the dating process is the search for clarity in your decision making process and double-dating is one way to add uncertainty to your thought process.

However, there may be an exception to this steadfast rule of never double-dating, though this should definitely be the exception and not the rule. One common example might be if someone is travelling a long distance to go out on a date in a different city and plans to be there for two weeks or more. Perhaps it may make sense to arrange dates with more than one person for that trip in case the first does not work out. A more complicated situation is if you are “waiting” to go out with someone and he or she was “busy” for a while and now become available, and in the interim you start dating someone else...what do you do?

Obviously every case is different, but I would give the following general guidelines. All things being equal, you should maintain the golden rule of one person at a time. However, if you have only dated the second person two or three times and it does not look promising, then you may consider dating the other person also. In all cases, if you have gone out more than four times with someone you should pursue that to its fullest before considering anything else.

One more pertinent point regarding double-dating: Beyond going out with two people at the same time, you should abstain from “looking into other options” while dating someone, even if you only went on a first date. Once you say “yes” and commit to going out, you should not accept any suggestions from anyone, even from your mother’s cousin’s next door neighbor’s best friend! This comment is also intended for *shadchanim* and matchmakers- before you suggest a name to someone, first ask him or her if he or she is available to take a

suggestion, and if he or she hesitate, end the conversation and encourage them to focus on whomever they are seeing and to return your call if it ever becomes relevant at some point in the future. Even more importantly, you should not use any online form of information or pictures to receive suggestions while you are presently dating someone. Turn your status to “dating” as soon as you accept to date someone until the relationship has completely ended. Everyone deserves the *kavod habrios* of your undivided attention, not to mention yourself.

(4:5) List of names – Why have them?

What is a “list” and what purpose does it serve? The positive aspect of maintaining a list is to keep track of suggestions in an orderly fashion, in order not to miss dating opportunities. A simple way of using a list is to take down names of suggestions and perhaps some biographical information with contact information. The downside of a list is that it can become overwhelming and distracting while you are in the middle of a relationship. For instance, if you are dating someone and continue to take down names and suggestions of other possible dates, you may fall into the “there are better fish in the sea” syndrome. This may hinder your focus from concentrating specifically on the person you are presently dating. Also, if you accumulate a list of more than five names it may become difficult to decipher who to choose to date next. Therefore, I would suggest you keep your list limited to no more than five names at a time. Additionally, when you are in a relationship, you should not take additional names to add to your “list”. You may also opt to record the name of the person making the suggestion in order to get back to him or her if and when you are free to date again. I would suggest this even if you are only at the beginning of a relationship, after two or three dates, as you are even more vulnerable then to the intrusion of thoughts about other dating possibilities on the horizon.

(4:6) “ROLE PLAY”: The role of the parent and friend

Parental Role – For good and for bad:

We live in an educational culture where the majority of Modern Orthodox youth attend Yeshiva or seminary in Israel after high school graduation. For many reasons this changes the dynamic of the parent/child relationship. Often students return after a year or more to the United States with a stronger connection to their heritage and attempt to maintain the same religious commitment that they established for themselves in Yeshiva. Unfortunately, when this transition home does not go as planned, for either the parent or the child, a strain is left on the relationship which may affect how they relate to each other going forward. This strain is felt poignantly when the child decides to begin to date for marriage. In some situations, these individuals look for guidance to peers and teachers instead of their parents in this realm, as they view this as a religious endeavor, and therefore something that they do not consult their parents about.

While your decision to seek religious advice in areas related to *Halacha* and personal growth may be relegated to Rabbinic authorities, it is important to keep the channels of communication open with your parents, whenever possible, in all other areas. Aside from some basic level of *hakaras hatov* and formal obligations based on *kibud av vaem*, our parents know us longer than anyone else and have many years of life experience. Hopefully, if you kept up your relationship with your parents through adolescence, they understand your emotional needs. Parents can be extremely helpful during the early stages of your dating process and can help you decide when you are ready to begin dating and what to look for in a prospective spouse. Also, unlike your single friends who have never experienced what it feels like to connect with someone on a very deep emotional level, your parents have and they can advise you as you go through the dating process. Even if you don't view your parents as "relationship experts", they still know you longer and better than anyone else.

At the same time, it is important to realize that the parent/child relationship can be complicated at times, and I'd like to offer a few guidelines. Parents need to know their boundaries and allow their children to make decisions for themselves, even if to them these decisions seem wrong. Part of the process of maturing and developing one's own sense of self is autonomously making both significant and insignificant decisions based upon your own

thought processes, intuition, and research. I have found that at the initial stages of the dating process most parents do not get heavily involved. However, when things begin to get more serious and engagement seems near, they may begin to question their child's choice of a spouse. Of course, if there is something objectively wrong with the match, parents should be the first ones to say something to their child. However, I have witnessed situations where parents are concerned with mundane and irrelevant details, and instead of showing love and support for their child they add anxiety and pressure to an already stressful situation¹².

Parents always want the best for their children. But this desire may be accompanied by a range of vicarious intentions and unreasonable expectations. Surely, most Jewish mothers want their daughters to marry doctors, lawyers, or honest businessmen (at least before the stock market crashed!), but does that mean that their daughters seek the same? You need to marry the person with whom you want to live the rest of your life, not with whom your parents want you to live your life.

Friend's Role:

Friends and especially roommates can be very helpful throughout the dating process as a source of encouragement and sympathy. You will go through many ups and downs as you date and a healthy support system of family and friends is critical. If your friend is dating someone seriously, give him or her space. Try not to make your friend feel guilty about not spending enough time with you if perhaps they may seem to be ignoring you in favor of the new figure in their lives. Understand that their lives may be a bit busier now and that they are trying to juggle all of their obligations, whether it is at work or in school in addition to their relationship. Perhaps try to spend quality time together over Shabbos or a meal together. If your friend recently ended a long relationship, try doing an activity together or go out for dinner to allow him or her to talk if he or she needs to release some energy or frustration. At the same time he or she may not want the sympathy, so you need to figure what works best for him or her. At any point, perhaps the best mitzvah you can do for a friend is to think of

¹² See also Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski in "I am I" (1993), p.67-69.

suggestions for him or her, whether it be an old acquaintance or someone you recently dated – you probably know him or her better than most people and your input and assistance can turn out to be invaluable.

(4:7) Location – where to date and where not to date

Perhaps just as important as what you talk about on the date is the medium or location that you choose for a date. Realize that you must plan in advance where you are going and what you are going to do on the date. Although traditionally this responsibility rests upon the man's shoulders, it is a nice touch when women offer to plan a date once in a while. What is most important about the choice of location is the concept of mixing things up in order to keep the dates exciting. If you go to too many restaurants, aside for bumping into all of your friends on dates, it can get quite boring. Also, realize that people dated before Starbucks ever existed - it can be done! In general I would suggest that you have an activity date (bowling, miniature golf, arcade, boat ride, sports game, hike etc.¹³) every three or so dates. Aside from keeping things more interesting, doing different things on dates allows you to see each other in new ways and can reveal sides of a personality that you were not aware of. Going to a new museum or participating in an artistic activity can also be helpful. Sometimes all a relationship needs to feel more exciting and to create that start of a connection is a fun activity to simply relax and enjoy each other's company. Try not to discuss anything serious on these "activity dates" -save that for a different night.

It is also helpful to go on a full day date at least once during your courtship, to know what it is like to spend 10 hours together. It should hopefully give you a fairly clear picture as to whether the relationship has potential or not to thrive.

¹³ It is important to be aware of other people's sensitivities and worthwhile to ask if they feel comfortable doing certain activities on dates. For example, some women do not enjoy the ambiance of an arcade or pool hall or may find bowling or hiking inappropriate for a date.

(4:8) Singles' Events – the positives and negatives

Part of the shift that has occurred in the more religious Modern Orthodox dating circles is a return to a wider acceptance of social events as an appropriate means to meet prospective dates. About thirty years ago events were the only way to meet people, and it was popular to go out together in groups. Today, as more orthodox singles choose to date exclusively through an intermediary, whether it is a friend, *shadchan*, or matchmaker, many have also shunned the option of broader singles events. However, in the past five years or so it has become more accepted for these same singles that otherwise would only date through a *shadchan* to also attend single's events.

What first needs to be clarified is that there are many different types of "singles' events" and they should not all be grouped together. For the purposes of this discussion I would categorize three different types of singles' event:

- Shiur / Lecture
- Weekend at a hotel with a large number of attendees
- Smaller and more selective group of attendees

The first type of event can often be awkward, especially if there are a disparate range of attendees with respect to age and background. Typically, there are no *shadchanim*/matchmakers present to speak to or follow up with afterwards. Therefore, for those of you who do not feel comfortable in new settings or with randomly approaching people and striking up a conversation, this may not be a helpful way for you to meet new people. If you can handle new crowds and enjoy shiurim, then you may consider attending, but make sure to go with at least one friend. The advantage of these types of events is that even if the crowd is not your speed and the refreshments are not appetizing, you still hopefully had the opportunity to hear an enjoyable shiur.

The second category of a singles' event is a "singles' weekend", usually at a nice hotel with plenty of scrumptious food. These events can be costly, but then again so is dinner and bowling in the city. The advantage of these events is that they are typically organized and

have many opportunities to meet new people, whether at meals, at organized activities, hanging out in the lobby, or interacting with the staff and *shadchanim* who are there throughout the weekend to facilitate. It is important to spend some time with the event's *shadchanim*, as they can be helpful to you after the weekend with either follow up or future suggestions.

The downside of some larger weekends is that the sheer numbers of attendees can be overwhelming for some and it becomes hard to maintain focus. Often externalities become the main criteria before speaking to someone and you do not get enough quality time to actually meet many people that are in your range of prospective dates. Some of these events offer "speed dating", which may not allow for more than 2-3 minutes to introduce your self to another person, and does not facilitate getting to know people other than in an superficial fashion. On the other hand, many dates and marriages have come to fruition after these weekends and many singles still prefer these large scale events.

The third type of event is the smallest. It targets a specific age range (within five years) and *hashkafa* in order to focus the group of attendees and to give each person a good opportunity to meet similar like-minded people. The event can either be activity-based or more conversation based, with the goal that each attendee meets all of the participants there. Ideally, I would suggest that the organizers invite 16-20 men and the same number of women. In events that I have organized in the past everyone breaks up into groups of eight at arranged tables spread out in a home or backyard. We have two "rounds" or discussions based on questions left on each table or a small activity, then we break for a meal and more relaxed mingling time and resume with another two rounds. By the end of the event every person has the opportunity to interact with every other member of the opposite gender there, for at least 15-25 minutes, and has had an opportunity to spend extra time getting to know people during the break and after the final round. We have *shadchanim* there to meet people and to follow up with every person at the event to find out if they were interested in anyone that attended. When participants leave they are each handed a sheet with the names of each participant, where they were from, where they live presently, and what they do professionally, to assist

them in remembering who was present and who they met at the event. The advantages of these events are the quality time spent with each person there and the fact that each individual feels comfortable in the smaller setting, knowing that almost everyone there is at least somewhat *shayach* (or appropriate) for them. The disadvantage is that there are only a limited number of people at the event.

- What age should I begin to attend singles events? This is a bit tricky to answer, but it is safe to say that it depends. If you planned on meeting people solely through dating one-on-one, I would suggest that you wait until you have dated two to three years before trying a different method. If you always planned on meeting your mate through social events then go right ahead from the start.
- Can I attend an event if I am presently dating someone? I would advise against attending a single's event if you are seeing someone for more than three times. Now this may get complicated if you need to reserve in advance for a singles' weekend, but as a rule of thumb, if you are dating someone, the relationship should be exclusive, and going to a single's event negates this, as you will be speaking to many other people and this may obviously distract you from focusing on the person you are presently dating. If this event is a once a year opportunity and you do not want to miss it, you may want to be open with the person you are presently dating and explain the situation. After all, he or she may be contemplating the same exact issue, and it would not be the first time that a couple that started to date both attended the same singles' weekend or event separately.

(4:9) The Age Old Question

To what extent should age be a factor in your choice of a date? I would say broadly that within a range of about 0-3 years of your age it should not be a factor. In other words, if you are 25, regardless of your gender, it should be perfectly fine to date anyone from 22 years old to 28 years old. The choice to date someone between 3-7 years difference is more of a personal decision and may depend on many factors. Beyond an 8 year difference I would advise against, as a general rule, but there is always room for exceptions. The older you are

the less important the issue of age should be for each of you and compatibility should be your main focus.

I have a hard time understanding why some men feel that they can only date women younger than them. I could not believe it when I suggested a young woman to a particular young man and he rejected it based on age, fully knowing that he was one month *older* than her! My comments about how dating is a holy enterprise apply here as well. You should be looking for someone with similar ideals and life goals as yourself, and a partner to face life's challenges and joys together. A few months or years should not be that critical of a factor in this search. One more note, I have heard that some older men refuse to date women after a certain age out of fear that they may not be blessed with children, and they claim that it is their *Halachic* imperative to do so. While I am well aware of the *Halachic* implications, I still do not think that such an extreme position is necessary. Obviously a competent *Halachic* authority should be consulted, but perhaps it would suit them well to be a little more open in their search and thereby ultimately increase their chances of marrying in the near future.

(4:10) Why don't you become a *Shadchan*/Matchmaker?

Now that you have "survived" the dating process and have found that special person you should seriously consider thinking about how you can help your friends in their endeavor to find their spouse. Now you may be thinking to yourself, "Me? I can't do that?" Well, you really can, and let me tell you how.

The first step in the process of becoming an effective *shadchan* is to work closely together with your spouse in this endeavor. This is a wonderful activity for a new couple because it creates an opportunity to unite and work together on a project that truly needs both of your input. The best way to go about it is to sit down with a pen and paper (or index cards or an excel sheet document) and write down all of your friends, both male and female. Next, begin to think if any of your friends are possible matches--chances are that some of them should be in the same range if you and your husband come from similar backgrounds. If you have a friend that you don't know so well, or even a close friend that you have not caught

up with in a while, give him or her a call to fill in the gaps about either their past education or what they are presently doing. The best tool is to use the 4+4 model that I previously mentioned to get information about four qualities that make them unique and four qualities that they are looking for in a prospective spouse. Don't be shy, make the effort and you will see the fruit of your labor. Also, you need to be persistent. Sometimes you'll think of an idea and one of the parties will be "busy". Write it down and call them back in a few weeks. Once, I had an idea for a specific couple and I had repeatedly approached them for over a year until they finally became available. They listened to my suggestion and it worked right away beautifully.

After experiencing what it feels like to build a relationship and make a commitment to another person, you have a knowledge base to help guide your friends through that similar process. In actuality, you, more than a professional *shadchan* or matchmaker, are closer in age to the singles and can perhaps better understand their situation. Additionally, one of the advantages of being the same age as the people you are trying to match up is that you know many of the people you're working with personally and have a better sense of who they are than a matchmaker who has only interviewed them for an hour or so. For those of you who may have had less experience dating or are newly married, I would suggest that you consult with and link yourself up to another couple who may be more experienced in making suggestions and guiding couples through the dating process as mentors as you begin this "holy" and most important role.

Conclusion:

I'd like to end by offering two words of *chizuk*. First, a little while back someone told me how we are constantly creating our soul-mate and that "your *zivug* is created daily". For some reason, while this thought made sense to me intellectually, I had a hard time believing it to be true based on the sources (Talmud Bavli Sotah 2a) about the heavenly proclamation 40 days before a child is formed "בת פלוני לפלוני", "the daughter of so and so to the son of so and so". But, I noticed more recently, that if you continue reading that same passage you also find

another statement "אין מזווגין לו לאדם אשה אלא לפי מעשיו", "a person is matched with his/her mate based upon their deeds", which clearly expresses the opposite perspective and focuses on one's deeds after birth. Additionally, both the Rambam and Meiri explain that a *zivug* is destined to you based upon your deeds as either reward or punishment. That being the case, it would follow that one's mate is continuously changing as we change ourselves and we can positively affect who that special person will ultimately be. The better person we become, the greater our *zivug* will be as well!

Secondly, I found a Talmudic source that hints to the idea that in the area of shidduchim things can turn around with a blink of an eyelash. The *gemarah* (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 95a) states that three individuals merited to have the land move in order to hasten their traveling time, "תנו רבנן: שלשה קפצה להם הארץ: אליעזר עבד אברהם, ויעקב אבינו, ואבישי בן צרויה" and it is very striking to note that two out of three of these examples, that of Eliezer and Yaacov are related to *shidduchim*! Therefore, I think it is safe to assume that in this area there a special opportunity to "skip time" and even if one finds himself or herself in a rut or stint without positive dating experiences, we can be confident that Hashem is capable of turning things around and providing him or her with the proper *zivug* with much alacrity. We all know of stories of individuals who were feeling hopeless and desperate, and suddenly within a very short period of time they became happily engaged.

I hope that these sources are an inspiration for all individuals involved in the dating process and that we should always be confident and maintain our faith in the fact that Hashem has selected someone for us and that we can do something about it by improving ourselves and being the best person we can be. May all those searching for their *zivug* find it with much קפיצת הדרך and may we all merit to build homes filled with much love, admiration, and graced with the השראת השכינה.

Appendix:

Friendship Map Open-Ended Questions

- What are your favorite hobbies?
- Where were you born?
- Who is your favorite relative?
- What is your favorite flavor ice cream?
- Who was your favorite grade school teacher?
- Who was your closest friend growing up?
- Do you have a favorite color?
- How old were you when you began using email?
- What was your first email address?
- What is your favorite restaurant?
- What was your favorite family vacation growing up?
- What would be your preferred vacation spot now?
- What is your favorite movie?
- What is your favorite sefer?
- What was your bar/bat mitzvah parsha?
- What type of shul do you prefer to daven in?
- Did you ever have a pet?
- What is your favorite song?
- Do you prefer to listen to music or a shiur when you drive?
- What is your ideal job?
- What would you do if you won the lottery?
- What is your favorite Yom Tov?
- What was your family's Shabbos table like growing up?
- How do you envision your future Shabbos table?
- How does your family celebrate birthdays?
- What was your most embarrassing moment?
- Where do you turn to for emotional support?
- What have you started but never finished?
- What types of *tzeddakah* or *chessed* do you envision yourself getting involved in?
- Was your parent's house lively or calm growing up?
- What is the most stressful part of your day?
- What is the most stressful part of your job?
- What is your worst nightmare?
- What would the best present anyone could give you?
- How would you like to change your life in the next three years?
- Do you have a secret ambition?