

Marriage Dating

by Rabbi Avrohom Kass, M.A., R.S.W., R.M.F.T.

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Marriage is the greatest joy that is to be found in life. When a soul descends into this world it is divided into two parts; one part going to a man and the other a woman. Finding your *zivug*, your perfect match, means these two parts are to be reunited as one healthy and whole being.

This explains the tremendous joy that comes with marriage—the two *lost* and *separated* soul halves are reunited. As one perfect whole, made up of two strong individuals, they start a family. Then, in partnership with Hashem, the couple is blessed with children.

Marriage, like any journey, starts with the first step. And “dating” is the “first step” toward marriage. If you, or someone you know, is involved in “dating,” knowing the challenges and normal feelings that may occur along the way can help make dating more successful.

Dating and marriage are two completely separate entities. Yes, dating leads to marriage, but being a great husband or wife has very little to do with being a “great dater.” Successful dating requires its own set of skills. As well, typically the feelings felt during dating are *not* predictive of what it would feel like being married. This is an important point that must be kept in mind. Unfortunately, some sincere individuals find it difficult becoming “engaged” because they assume their confusing “dating feelings” reveal what marriage will be like. They become frightened, experiencing great emotional tensions, or worse, these “dating” feelings become obstacles to become engaged and then married. Your challenge will be to *separate* your “dating feelings” from your true feelings about your potential mate.

Nobody is perfect. Nobody gets the *perfect* “mate.” But you will get the *perfect* “match.” And this is what matters. Know that Hashem cares for you, and that you will be given that which is for *you*, the perfect match—exactly what you need to grow as family and develop yourself spiritually. In this sense, there are no compromises. However, “dating reality” dictates you be prepared to make some compromises. For example, if your parent’s are not esteemed Torah scholars, likely you will *not* have the opportunity to marry a boy or girl from a family of Torah scholars. If your parents divorced (even though they may both be wonderful people), matchmakers may tend to suggest boys or girls from other families that went through similar unwanted changes. If you have a health challenge, such as diabetes, likely you will be suggested dates that also have health challenges.

Naturally, everyone involved is looking for the best possible match for their loved one. Like a peacock, spreading its feathers to catch the attention of an appropriate suitor, the hopeful “dater” wants to inform his or her potential mate of his or her assets, accomplishments, and good character traits. Here is a list of what I think is important when looking for a spouse. Certainly, you can (and should consider) modifying this list.

Most important you should seek a *shidduch*, finding your soul mate, as you would a lost item. If you lost something important certainly you wouldn’t sit with your arms folded. Rather, you would actively search for the missing item. So too, in finding your *zivug*, your perfect match. You need to exert considerable effort until he or she is found. And as our Torah promises, “If you try you will succeed.” If you keep at it you will be successful. As you know, increasing your learning of Torah (*Toras HaNigleh* and *Toras HaChassidus*), and the careful performance of *Mitvzos*, are important ways to increase Divine Assistance.

Dating can be broken down into the following four sequential steps: Research, Discovery, Negotiation, and Engagement. Let’s explore them one at a time:

1. Research

Somebody suggest a boy or girl for you to meet. Likely they will have positive comments about the proposed date. But before you meet this date, a serious effort must be made to determine if this proposed boy or girl will meet your needs and standards. If thorough research is not performed, much time may be wasted or worse, you may end-up married to someone that will make *sholom bias*, domestic peace and harmony, difficult to achieve. Once married, we understand your partner is your *besheret*, your perfect match given to you by Hashem. But before marriage, you have to make every effort to find the right person. To do so you need to get accurate information about the proposed date and his or her family. Sometimes this can be challenging. Unfortunately, not all the information you get will be 100% accurate. That is why it is necessary to interview as many people as possible so that you can gather all the points of view together, analyze them, and then determine if this proposed boy or girl is for you. If he or she is, then move on to arranging a time and place to meet. If he or she is not suitable to you, than respectfully decline meeting. Your research should give you information about the following important details:

Family functioning. We all have G-d given freewill. Yet not all of us are free from the patterns set during our formative years. Just as the mind is developed by schooling, the emotions are shaped by one's family. Optimal emotional health is realized when an individual's family is permeated with *sholom bias*, domestic peace and harmony.

Ideally, your prospective mate should come from a stable home where respect and love were common place. If this was lacking, or there was a divorce, remarriage, an unwell parent, or other major relationship changes, you need to be careful to make sure your prospective mate has overcome any emotional injuries he or she may have suffered when growing up.

Health. You need to determine that you potential mate is healthy physically and emotionally. Don't be afraid to ask pointed questions if you have any suspicions. For example, does your proposed date take daily medication? If so, for what? Has he or she ever been hospitalized? If so, for what? Ask if your proposed date has ever experienced major trauma in his or her life. If you get a "yes" answer, you need to direct your research to determine if there has been any lasting injury. Ask about school attendance and performance. If it was less than "average," find out why. What about work? Can they keep a job? These, and many other questions, must be answered *before* you actually meet. If, for whatever reason, you start dating and some questions have not yet been answered, continue asking. Dating doesn't mean you automatically become engaged. It's just a starting point. Keeping asking until you feel you have the necessary answers.

You want your husband or wife to be healthy. Certainly, no one is perfect. But at least have all the facts before you agree to marry. Unfortunately, some people find out some surprising details only after they are married. Every reasonable effort should be made to avoid this.

Age. The age of the two individuals should not be too different. This is especially true when the girl is older than the boy. One reason is that if she ages sooner than him, she may seem less attractive in his eyes.

Generally speaking, individuals are most comfortable when the boy and girl are either the same age, or the boy a year or two older. If the girl is somewhat older, check with a Rav. Also, if you are a boy, make sure you are comfortable with a wife that is older than you.

Personality. When asking others questions about the proposed date, it is difficult to get good information about someone's personality. Most people don't know how to properly evaluate personality. Personality is very complex, even trained professionals have difficulties accurately defining it. For example, most people can not distinguish "shyness" from "introversion." A person that is "shy," when they become socially comfortable, they can be very charming, outgoing, and

warm, whereas an “introverted” will tend to *always* focus on solitary activities. Unless you get a clear-cut and loud reading about a particular personality trait that is a definite turn-off, it is best to actually meet the intended date and discover for yourself what he or she is like.

Emotional maturity. Personality tends to be a lifetime character trait—rarely does it change. On the other hand, emotional maturity develops over time and is constantly changing. Nevertheless, you are not interested in marrying someone who at the time you are ready to start a family, is emotionally immature. Some signs of emotional immaturity are:

- Won't take responsibility
- Blames other for problems
- Sleeps late in the morning
- Can't figure-out what he or she wants to do with his or her life
- Is excessively drawn to “fun” activities
- Has few friends
- Has a reputation for getting into conflict with others (parents, siblings, teachers, friends)
- Can't save money
- Drives recklessly
- Quits when things become difficult

If you marry someone that is “emotionally immature,” you are headed for conflict and disappointment. The dating candidate may be a fine person, but he or she needs time to mature. If you marry them when they are like an unripe fruit, by the time they “get-it-together,” your prior experience of disappointment or conflict may be difficult to overcome. If the proposed date is immature, move-on.

Education. You and your spouse need to respect and honor each other. If you have very different educational backgrounds, it becomes more difficult to do so. For example, if the boy went to public school for most of his life, and the girl went to a serious Jewish school and graduated with honors, she may have a hard time fully respecting the boy if he becomes her husband, and he will likely feel insecure when compared to his wife. Although it can work out beautifully, it is a challenge. Put it on a scale and weigh it together with everything else you have learned about this proposed date.

Physical appearance. This factor is extremely important. Physical intimacy is essential to a healthy and happy marriage. And physical attractiveness is a prime ingredient in a healthy and satisfying intimate life. “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” is a well know saying. Thus, you must recognize for yourself what is attractive to you. However, remember the “dating reality.” If you are overweight or your physical appearance is not your strongest quality, don't expect to marry someone that could win a beauty contest. If you are not realistic, you may never get past being “single.” Accept compromise. As important as physical attraction is, it is *not* everything. Hashem will help when you need to be attracted. Marry for the many other important reasons, and Hashem will help you do the rest. Certainly, if you are clearly turned-off by the person's appearance—move-on. Sometimes you may need to meet the proposed date to actually determine if you are attracted or not.

Financial status. Money and material acquisition is *not* the goal of life. Truthfully, this factor should be completely unimportant. And for many people it is. But for some it is not. Certainly you need enough to comfortably sustain yourself and your family. Beyond that, money is a blessing from Hashem and you will be tested for how you use any wealth you are given. Still, money can be a problem. For example, if you are a man, and you have come from a financially modest home, and you chose to marry a woman coming from a wealthy family, she may place extreme pressure on you to replicate the material wealth she had when growing-up. You maybe crushed by this burden. Be realistic, if it seems unlikely you can provide for her the way she is has grown accustomed to, or you will have to go to her father to seek financial help, seriously consider moving-on.

As a general rule, look for someone that comes from a financial background similar to yours. Certainly, financial *differences* need not be “deal-breakers.” Put it on the scale with everything else you have gathered, and consider it one more factor to help you decide the appropriateness of the proposed date.

Religiosity. You need to be comfortable in your marriage. You do not want conflict. Couples that have *significant* religious differences are often burdened by arguments and disappointment. For example, if you are very “black hat,” don’t look for a mate that is “modern.” Or if you want to live a very secluded life in a segregated Jewish community, don’t look for a husband or wife that desires to be part of the greater non-Jewish society. If you marry with such substantial value differences, you are likely to experience future problems making *sholom bias*, domestic peace and harmony, difficult.

Relationship with G-d. You want a partner that is *yeraí shamimim*, G-d fearing. When someone is strongly connected to G-d, they will take seriously the Torah’s directives on *how* one Jew is to treat another, how a husband is to treat a wife, and a wife a husband. Torah is G-d’s Wisdom. Within its pages are essential guidelines on how to create *sholom bias*, a peaceful and happy marriage. Academic Torah knowledge, although extremely important, is not sufficient to make a good husband or wife. You want your spouse to be a “*mentch*,” a good person—right here in the real world. When your spouse is a person of good *medos*, excellent character traits, you will then have a successful and happily life together. The greater his or her respect and attachment to G-d, the greater the likelihood he or she will be the type of person you can love, and can love you.

To this point you have gathered information necessary to make a decision as to the appropriateness of meeting the proposed Boy or Girl (Man or Woman). Even if you decide to meet, you must continue to gather more and more information to help you decide if this is your *ziviug*, your soul mate. Marriage is serious business, and you can’t take the chance of making a mistake because you have not done your due-diligence (necessary effort). Until you are engaged, research should continue. Once meeting each other, and with the decision to continue dating, you must seriously gather additional information. Now you have the advantage that you can carefully observe your date first hand. This phase in the dating process is called, “discovery.”

2. Discovery

You are on your first, second, or more dates. Have fun. Relax and enjoy yourself. When you can do this, it is a good sign that this person you are dating maybe right for you. However, keenly observe everything that happens. What you gather is important information that will help you make the *big* decision and answer the question: “Is he or she my *besheret*, my perfect mate given to me by Hashem?” As you meet—talk, make arrangements, do things together—carefully note the following:

Decisions are shared. You both decide where and what time to meet. Is your date comfortable when he or she doesn’t get his or her way? You want to be married to someone that values your opinion, is willing to put you first, and with a smile, accepts limitations to his or her freedom.

Feelings can be shared. When you discuss your feelings, does he or she listen? Or do they jump in with a comment that negates what you are trying to say. How you and your partner talk with each other will likely be the most part of your relationship. When you feel safe and comfortable sharing your feelings, it is then easy to feel close with each other.

Opinions are rarely given. A person that gives “opinions” freely is likely to be a difficult person to get along with. Strong “opinions” may indicate a strong and uncompromising will. Preferable is a person that only occasionally expresses his or her opinion, or does so when asked.

Has opinions. You don't want someone that is dead inside or very insecure and can't assert themselves. You want an interesting partner and that has a sense of self. Find someone that knows him or herself and is not afraid to share his or her point of view when appropriate.

Doesn't try too hard to impress. If your date is trying too hard to show you his or her good points, and it sounds like boasting or bragging, be careful. Being married to a person like this may lead to a superficial relationship. As well, once married, they may turn their attention away from you in an effort to impressing others. You want someone that is secure and confident, and does not have an excessive need to show-off. Rather, you want his or her focus to be on you and the family.

Can relax. Initially, both of you are likely to be on edge. Meeting strangers is difficult enough, but of the opposite sex just raises the stress level. However, after a few dates, both of you should start to relax. If not, perhaps your date has a nervous or high-strung disposition. Being married to him or her may be challenging if he or she is constantly "on edge." Marriage included the ability to enjoy life together, and only a relaxed person can successfully enjoy life.

Sensitive. You want to marry someone that is going to pay attention to you. You want him or her to understand your feelings, be caring about your needs, and make every effort to make you happy. On your date *notice* the little things that happen. Does your date wait to eat until you have your food or drink? When walking does he or she try to walk *with* you. When ending a phone conversation, do they do so with sensitivity for your feelings? Do they ask you questions if they don't understand what you mean or want? Do they speak respectfully about other people? How do they treat waiters or cab drivers? It's the *little* daily behaviors that add-up and will determine how you would feel together if you were married.

Confident. Does he or she look you in the eyes when talking? Are they comfortable when you have an opinion that is different from theirs? Or does he or she debate trying to get you to agree with his or her point of view. A confident person does not have to convince others that he or she is correct. Can they seem to make decisions on their own? Certainly they may need to consult others on major decisions, but not on minor ones. Are they willing to try new things?

A confident person is a healthy person. A person that lacks confidence is prone to low self-esteem and perhaps anxiety and depression. Confidence is a sign of emotional health and you want to marry someone that is not only physically healthy, but equally important, emotionally healthy.

No anger. When there is anger, there can be no love. Everyone occasionally becomes "angry," even if the goal is to always remain calm. Unlikely your date will openly become angry with you, because they know they will never see you again and also ruin their reputation. What you are looking for is patterns. Listen carefully to what they say. Do they talk negatively about other people? Do they angrily blame others for their disappointments? Are they proud that they have *stood-up* for themselves with others. Do they talk about being angry at parents, teachers, friends, and neighbors? If they do, these are warning signs that this person may have a worrisome anger problem.

You cannot have a happy life if you are married to an angry person. If you notice "anger," talk to others that know your date. Try to find out if this is a pattern. If you suspect your date—man or woman—is prone to anger move-on, find someone else.

Positive disposition. You want to marry a person that is reasonably happy, content, and optimistic. Marriage to you should *not* be the source of his or her happiness. This would put too much pressure on you to constantly feel responsible to keep him or her happy. You can *contribute* to his happiness, as he or she to yours, but you cannot be responsible. As well, a sad person is no fun to be around. Look for someone that is content. Then you can enjoy his or her company.

If you are a woman, nurturing comes easy and naturally. Don't fall into the trap of thinking: "He is unhappy, but when I marry him I will make him happy. Together we can solve all his problems. I will 'nurture' him and we will have a great life together." Doing so will create a dangerous, unstable, and unhealthy situation. Many women have unfortunately tried to "cure" their men, and ended-up drowning along with him. If he cannot care for himself, that is, make himself happy and successful, move-on.

Your personal feelings. During the dating period you are experiencing "real life." You are in a relationship with a person you may or may not marry. Much is at stake. The choice of a person to marry is likely the most important decision you will ever make. Typically, your feelings will be jumping from one extreme to the next. This is normal. And, they are not predictive of how you might feel once married. They are "dating feelings." Not "married feelings."

After several dates you need to sort out your feelings. You need to understand how you feel about your date *separate* from the emotional intensity of dating and feelings coming from realizing you are making the most important decision of your life. There are no clear formulas on how to do this. Every person is different. Some people can sort out their feelings through talking to others, whereas other individuals need private time to think.

If you are having difficulties figuring-out your feelings, consider taking a break for a few weeks to see if you *miss* your date, and he or she, you. Have no contact whatsoever. Do you miss him or her? Are you eagerly looking forward to resuming contact? If so, these are good signs that you have positive feelings.

Certainly, if you have strong feelings of dislike, even if they seem irrational, pay attention to them. This is true even if your "advisors" are telling you otherwise. If those feelings persist and you marry, likely you will run into problems. But if you have pleasant feelings for the boy, and positive data is coming from your research and dating, he or she is a good candidate for marriage. Marriage requires the development of strong attachment and love. This can *only* come overtime. But certainly you should at least enjoy being around your date, talking to him or her, and doing things together. Having positive feelings and mutual attraction are essential before going to the next step.

Some girls have the expectation that they should *feel* strongly in love with the boy before they agree to marry him. This is unrealistic. Love comes from shared experience overtime. You cannot love someone after meeting them five or ten times. You can become infatuated, but *not* in love. "Infatuation feelings" often come from physical attraction and imagining certain things about the other person that may or may not be true. It is not particularly important that you have feelings of infatuation. If you do or don't, likely it is more of a reflection of *your* emotional state, and have very little to do with him. The decision to marry should be based on your research and dating experience.

For whatever reason, if something you have found out about your partner turns-you-off or worries you, now is the time to end the dating. It is understood that dating is just an effort to "get the facts" about a potential mate. To the best of your ability try *not* to feel personally insulted or hurt when a dating cycle is called-off. This may be difficult, but for your own wellbeing try to be objective and positive about the future. When you are ready, seek another potential mate. G-d willing this next one will be your *beshert*, the person chosen by Hashem for you.

Accept as is. When you consider entering into a lifetime relationship with a marital partner it is essential that you consider him or her "fully acceptable and attractive," as they are now. Entering into a lifetime relationship on the belief that you can change and make your partner better is likely to cause serious marital problems. When married, if you try to change your partner, likely you will be disappointed, and they, resentful. If they are not acceptable as they are *now*, even though they have many fine qualities, it is best to move-on.

3. Negotiation

When it has been determined that you both have concluded you are seriously considering marriage, you need to talk about what you would like your future to be like. Make sure you are both in agreement on the following fundamental values and goals.

- Where to live
- Future work or study
- Having children
- Type of schooling for your children
- Career
- Financial goals
- Religious objectives
- Health requirements
- Disclosure of negative facts (ask a Rav if you are not sure if you should reveal them or not)

If you can agree on the above issues you are ready to seriously consider becoming engaged. Discuss all the above details with your parents, the matchmaker, or any other trusted advisors. Consider all you have learned about the person. Keep in mind no one is perfect. Only Hashem is "perfect."

You have done your best to determine if this is your *zivug*, your perfect match. If you conclude that he or she *is*, now is the time to push-away any lingering doubts. Trust Hashem. Believe He will assist you to successfully move forward. It is impossible work-it-out in your mind every eventuality and detail. Hashem, so to speak, has Broad Shoulders, let him carry any doubts you may have. Think positive and in the end, G-d Willing, all will be positive.

If green lights are shining in each direction you look, and your "date" feels the same positive feelings about you, as you feel about him or her, you *have* found your *bashert*, your perfect match. MAZEL TOV. When you both become aware of each others feelings, now is the time to make it official. This is called becoming "engaged."

The boy proposes, the girl accepts, and your emotional worlds turn upside down. You have begun the most important journey in your life. The private dating becomes public and everyone celebrates.

4. Engagement

Once you are "engaged," all research stops. You have found your *bashert*, your perfect match given to you by Hashem. This is *not* the time to develop your relationship. This time will come soon enough. Torah gives special significance to developing a strong bond between you and your partner-to-be. It is called *shanna reshona*, the first year of marriage. This is the time to develop an everlasting foundation of love and trust. Now, the time before the wedding, is when you, together with your parents, make all the hundreds of practical decision and arrangements. This important time before the wedding includes preparing yourself spiritually by learning *Chassidus*, inner dimension of Torah, and *Halacha*, laws of marriage.

Stay in contact with your *chosson*, groom or *kalla*, bride. Be sensitive to his or her feelings. But keep your contact brief and to the point. After the *chupa*, there will be plenty of time to get to know each other better. Your primary goal *now* is to confidently get to the *chupa*, the wedding ceremony.

It is very common during the engagement period to have doubts, question your decision to marry, or to marry *this* particular person. This is normal and understandable. Likely, together with your joy and excitement, there is also fear. Sometimes this "fear" can overcome you and make you anxious. Talk to those that love you. Let them reassure you. When wonderful things are happening, sometimes, temporary feelings of anxiety appear. This is normal. Now is the time to

trust in Hashem. Do your best to stop worrying. You have done your part—you have found your *beshert*—now let Hashem do His.

MAZEL TOV. Get ready to build an everlasting Jewish home—a home for you, your spouse, your children, and Hashem. MAZEL TOV.

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Rabbi Kass has been an honored educational Rabbi for many years in various Yeshivas and Seminaries. He was awarded in 1985 a ten thousand dollars prize by the Jewish Board of Education in New York in recognition of his excellence in Jewish education. The following year he was honored as the "Teacher of the Year" by the administration and staff at Oholei Torah Yeshiva in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

Most recently Rabbi Kass has founded Chabad Family Services. Chabad Family Services is primarily an information portal providing Chassidic lessons from the Lubavitcher Rebaim on how to make a healthy personal and family life. Visit @ [Chabad Family Services.com](http://ChabadFamilyServices.com)

He and his wife Golda live in Thornhill, Ontario and have been blessed with seven children, and three grandchildren.