

## The Hidden World of Shidduchim

Rav Aryeh Zev Ginzberg | Wednesday, August 24, 2016

Over the past decade, when the calendar turned to Tu B'Av, known as the Yom Tov of *shidduchim*, multiple articles have appeared (many by this author) on the painful and heartrending topic of older singles.

Who can possibly forget the heartfelt *besped* that the Telshe Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Chaim Stein זצ"ל, gave at the *levayah* of his son, when he cried out, “*Fargess nisbt alleh Yiddisbe techter vos darfen hoben zivugim* [Please do not forget all the Jewish daughters who need a *shidduch*]. *Gei tzu Kisei Hakavod ubn zug, Kra ro'a gezar dineinu* [Go up to the Heavenly Throne and plead, ‘Rip up the terrible decree’].” The Rosh Yeshivah tearfully repeated this sentence three times before concluding the *besped*.

Why does this *gezairah* exist? The venerable *mashgiach* Rav Moshe Wolfson *sblita* explains: Chazal imply that just as Adam had to recover his lost rib by marrying Chavah, the normal state of affairs in the world is that a boy must search for a girl. However, when there is a *kitrug*, a Heavenly accusation, then unnatural forces disrupt the natural course of events. There is a tremendous *kitrug* on Klal Yisrael today, both here and in Eretz Yisrael, in all of our *kehillas*, and it must come to an end.

Much ink has been spilled over the years on how to remove this *kitrug*. We’ve all heard the pleas of the *gedolim* and leading *askanim* that all of us should work on at least one *shidduch* every single day. We’ve often quoted the insight of the Maharsha (on Shabbos 10a) on one of the questions asked of each individual in the *Olam Haemes*, “*Asakta ba’pityah va’ribiah?* [Did you pursue the mitzvah of bringing children into the world?]” which he explains as, “Did you involve yourself in *shidduchim* in your time in this world?”

And while baruch Hashem tremendous resources have been expended against this *kitrug* over the past few years, the painful reality is that the numbers of older singles are growing significantly, *Rachmana litzlan*.

While we must redouble all of our current efforts — including increased *tefillas*, as advocated by Rav Chaim Kanievsky, both privately and publicly — maybe we can take a glimpse beneath the surface to look for additional things singles can do to help themselves. Unlike various supposed *segulos* that have no basis in Torah *hasbkafah*, these solutions are based on the thoughts of our *gedolei hador*, whose very words we live by.

The Tzemach Tzedek, in his *sefer Meab She’arim*, says the root of *shidduchim* is in the *alma d’iskasia* — the hidden world. It’s impossible for mere mortals to understand Hashem’s ways in regard to the complex world of *shidduchim*. However, every once in a while, our *gedolei hador* provide us with the merest peek into that celestial world. Recently the 103-year-old *zakein hador*, Rav Aharon Leib Steinman, did just that.

My *yedid* — indeed, the *yedid* of all of Klal Yisrael — Rabbi Shlomo Bochner of Bonei Olam, shared with me an incredible insight he heard directly from Rav Steinman, with whom he is very close. Rav Steinman recently told Reb Shlomo there are two situations in Klal Yisrael that allow him no peace of mind: the *gezairah* of older singles, and the number of married couples unable to have children. After a moment of silent reflection, the Rosh Yeshivah added, the Torah itself shows that these two *sugyas* are interrelated, and each may just be the solution for the other.

Rav Steinman explained that Sarah Imeinu was barren, and when she enabled Avraham Avinu to have a child by giving him Hagar — as the Torah says, “*Ulai ibaneh mimenah*” (Bereishis 16:2) — only then did Hashem send the *malach* to tell her

that she would give birth (see Rashi). The Torah is teaching us that only after a person is *mezakeb*, assists and enables another to have a child, does there come the *havtachab*, the promise, that this person will also be *zocheb* to a child. And since this can only happen via marriage, the person's meritorious act will be a *zechus* for him or her to find a *zivug*.

The Rosh Yeshivah's deep insight into *shvilei d'Rakiah* teaches us that another avenue out of this crisis is open to us as well: if a single can provide the financial support that enables a childless married woman to access the many fertility programs available today, it would be a Torah-directed "*segulab*" for a successful *shidduch*.

Now, another very different but nevertheless important factor in *shidduchim* that is tied to *alma d'iskasia*. First, an amazing and frightening story.

A few weeks ago, Rabbi Shmuel Kaufman, a world-renowned Detroit *mechanech* for more than 60 years, left us to receive his eternal reward. His lifetime accomplishments were recounted at length in every Torah-observant newspaper and magazine. One particular story captured my attention. Reb Shmuel had been married several years and was not yet blessed with children. He went to *gedolim* from all camps for *brachos* for a *zera shel kayama*. The Lubavitcher Rebbe asked him if he had ever in his life caused any pain to a *bas Yisrael*. At first Rabbi Kaufman responded, "Of course not." The Rebbe asked him to think back to his dating experiences — maybe there was someone he had hurt? Rabbi Kaufman pondered a while and remembered one young lady he had been involved with. He had decided it was not for him, and she harbored some resentment.

The Rebbe told Reb Shmuel that he would never be *zocheb* to children until he asked for and received forgiveness from this woman, for there is no greater *kitrug* than a *bas Yisrael* having *tainebs* on him. After much searching Rabbi Kaufman finally located her brother, and called him to request a meeting with his sister so he could ask her for *mechilab* after all these years. The brother promised to do what he could, but reported back that his sister, who was still unmarried, continued to blame Rabbi Kaufman for her predicament and said that she would never be *mochel* him.

Rabbi Kaufman went back to the Lubavitcher Rebbe and said, "Rebbe, she will not forgive me. What should I do now? Am I destined never to have children?"

The Rebbe responded, "Tell her in my name that she should be *mochel* you, so that you will be able to have children, and so that she in turn will be *zocheb* to find her *zivug b'karov*."

Rabbi Kaufman went back and communicated the promise from the Rebbe. This time the woman was *mochel* him, after so many years of carrying a grudge in her heart. Not long afterward, the Kaufmans were expecting their first child, and were soon very pleased to hear that this woman had become a *kallab*.

As amazing as this story sounds, it has a precedent many years earlier, in the time of the Chasam Sofer.

This story is found in many places (most recently in *sefer Siach Nechamah* by Rav Chaim Kanievsky, page 192). Rav Mordechai Banet was the *rav* of Nikolsburg for many years. Though old and weak, he agreed to travel to the city of Carlsbad to attend an important meeting of *rabbanim*. The trip was too much for him and he passed away on Erev Shabbos. So that his *keverab* would not be delayed, he was buried in the city where he died.

The people of Nikolsburg were very upset and wanted their beloved *rav* buried in the city he had served so faithfully for so long, so that they would be able to regularly visit his *kever*. The people of Carlsbad refused to comply. They wrote a letter to the Chasam Sofer, the *gadol hador*, to rule on the question of where Rav Banet should be buried. There was a delay of a few months in his response, but finally the Chasam Sofer sent a *psak* that Rav Banet should be transferred to his hometown of Nikolsburg.

The Chasam Sofer, who usually answered all *sh'eilos* immediately, especially such important ones, was asked why it took him so long to send a response. He gave the following incredible explanation.

As soon as he had received the letter with the *sh'eilab*, he sat down and wrote a lengthy *teshuvab* ruling that Rav Banet's body should be returned to Nikolsburg. However, as soon as he finished writing it, his inkwell tipped over and spilled all over the letter, obliterating what he had written. The Chasam Sofer felt strongly that this was a sign from Heaven that he should not *pasken* to move the *rav's* body from its current burial spot. So he just didn't respond at all.

Three months later the Chasam Sofer had a dream in which Rav Banet appeared to him and related the following: "Many years ago, I was engaged to a girl from Carlsbad and we were engaged for three months, but for certain reasons I broke off the *shidduch*. Since I caused pain to this *bas Yisrael*, it was decreed in Shamayim that I be buried near her for three months. For this reason, I had to die far from my home and be buried in that cemetery, near the grave of that girl. Now that three months have passed, my body is allowed to be transferred to Nikolsburg, where my community awaits my return."

When the Chasam Sofer awoke, he wrote a new letter permitting the transfer of Rav Banet to his hometown, appending the apology, "My response was delayed until now."

When I shared the above with Rabbi Bochner, he shared with me a story with a similar message, involving similarly revered personages.

Everyone is surely familiar with the painful story of how Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky lost his only child, a daughter whom he mourned for the remainder of his life. What is not so familiar is the prophetic insight of the saintly Chofetz Chaim as to the cause of her passing. As her illness progressed, Rav Chaim Ozer left no stone unturned to try to heal her. He sent a confidant to Radin to ask the Saba Kadisha, the Chofetz Chaim, to daven for her. When the confidant arrived at the house, the Chofetz Chaim was occupied with a *chavrusa* and wasn't to be interrupted.

Finally the confidant could not wait any longer. He said to the Chofetz Chaim, "The Rebbi's close *chaver*, Rav Chaim Ozer, asked that you daven for his daughter's recovery."

The Chofetz Chaim gave a *kerechtz* and said, "What can I do when a *bas Yisrael* has a *hakepadab* against her?"

The visitor was surprised and said, "But Rebbi, she's only a young girl of 16."

The Chofetz Chaim responded, "Who is talking about her? I am talking about her father."

When this comment from the Chofetz Chaim was relayed to Rav Chaim Ozer, he quickly traveled to the home of a woman to whom he had been briefly engaged to many decades earlier before breaking it off. He went by himself to the door and knocked. When the man of the house opened the door and saw the *gadol hador* himself standing there, he almost fainted. He asked what he could do for the Rav.

Rav Chaim Ozer said to him, "Please ask your wife if I can come in to speak to her for a minute."

The man went to speak to his wife, and soon came back and said, "My wife refuses to see you."

Rav Chaim Ozer pleaded with him, "My only child is deathly ill, and only your wife being *mochel* me for what happened so many decades ago will bring a *refuah*. This comes directly from the Chofetz Chaim."

The husband went back inside and after some time returned and reported, "I'm sorry, but she refuses to be *mochel* you."

Rav Chaim Ozer returned home, walked into his daughter's room and said to his wife, "Unfortunately I was not successful. Let's prepare ourselves for her *petirah*." A few days later his daughter passed away.

This method of removing a *keitrug* involves an older single trying to remember if someone's feelings had been hurt, and if there might be any *hakepadab*. If there is, then the only hope is to receive *mehilab*. I asked Rav Chaim Kanievsky whether this *hakepadab* is limited only to a *bas Yisrael*. What about pain caused to a *ben Yisrael* because of a hurtful action by a *bas Yisrael*? He responded clearly, "*Nisht kein nafka mina* [There is absolutely no difference]."

This is an important factor for older singles, both male and female, to think about. Perhaps in their dating careers they caused pain (even inadvertently) to someone they had been introduced to, and there is a remaining *kepeida* or grudge still in place. This may be causing Shamayim to hold back their proper *zivug*. The simple act of asking *mechilab* will go a long way toward having it removed.

In that vein, my wife and I are undertaking an initiative, on the recommendation of the *gadol bador*, that will be done as a *zechus* for our daughter Sarala ז"ל. Every child born or *shidduch* completed via this initiative will be a *zechus* for an *aliyas nesbamah* for Sara Chaya א"ב bas Rav Aryeh Zev, who never had the opportunity to develop her own future generations.

The initiative will work on two tracks. One track will match older singles and couples needing assistance. Organizations like Bonei Olam will pass along the names of couples experiencing difficulty with having children and who require many expensive treatments. Any single who wants to take part in the initiative should contact us via e-mail ([ohelsarala@gmail.com](mailto:ohelsarala@gmail.com)). Participating singles should share how much they would like to give to the *tzedakah* fund set up for this purpose. There will be no overhead or administrative costs, but the fund will be monitored by a team of dedicated volunteers from Sarala's Circle. They will transmit the funds directly to the couples needing assistance, in consultation with Bonei Olam (or whichever organization the couples are working with). The couples will be given the names of the singles, to daven that they should quickly find their *zivugim* (no last names will be given). The singles, in turn, will be given the names of the couples (no last names will be given), to daven for their *yeshuah* as well.

The other track will try to remove the spiritual roadblock discussed above. If any older single feels that his or her situation might be the result of a *kitrug*, due to a grudge from someone who may have been hurt personally, the single should send contact information to the same e-mail address ([ohelsarala@gmail.com](mailto:ohelsarala@gmail.com)), and a *rav* will begin work on getting a *shtar mechilab*. This will be done in complete confidence. (Please note that if full contact information is not provided, no attempt will be made.)

While we as a community cannot afford to leave any stone unturned to alleviate this *gezeirah* in our midst, hopefully, by following the suggestions made by our *ziknei bador*, we can shine a light into the "hidden world of *shidduchim*," and through Ohel Sarala, we can be *zeches* to continue building new generations in Klal Yisrael, until, in the words of Chazal, "*ad sbeyichla nefashos shebeguf*," all the Jewish souls will be born, ushering in the era of Mashiach.

May it happen speedily in our days.