

Dating & Shalom Bayis

Tips and Tidbits

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Background Differences

Oftentimes, a person will gravitate towards dating and marrying someone who shares a similar familial background as their own. The natural course of deciding who to date primarily focuses on those who share such homogeneity as the person themselves and their origins. In specific, Sephardim and Ashkenazim tend to stay within their own circles of either Ashkenazim or Sephardim and date someone who is more similar than different.

This phenomenon is understandable and with reason. People are generally more comfortable and familiar with someone who shares a similar background and who presents with more alignment to themselves. At the same time, it is also valuable to consider some noteworthy points, given that the opportunity to date others who are not exactly of the same stratum of orientation is widely available and has proven, in numerous cases, to produce successful marriages.

First and foremost, make sure that you are being honest with yourself. If you are only comfortable dating Sephardim if you are Sephardi, then you do not need to date Ashkenazim just to please people. As has been mentioned and cannot be emphasized enough, it is you who is getting married and will live with the person; not anyone else. If, however, you do not have any preference one way or another or in fact are positively open to dating someone else, then think of the following when doing so.

Identification with Familial Heritage. One of the bigger concerns which is voiced by people who prefer not to date someone who is outside of their Ashkenaz or Sephardi circle is that they come from almost a different “cultural” orientation. Their family is different, and thus the way the boy or girl was raised and shaped is different. It is at times akin to entering a new world with different *minhagim* (customs), unique

familial constructs and interactions and ideological perspectives which may be unfamiliar.

This stark contrast between your own style of living and that of a potential dating partner can be a deterrent to even meeting once. However, it is important to bear in mind that there are varying degrees of an individual identifying with their personal family background and heritage. For example, one’s parents may have immigrated from the Middle East to American and lead their lives steeped in the culture with which they were raised themselves. At the same time, their own children (and the person you would date) are very distant from that world and are Americanized. This chasm that exists between their parent’s generation and their own is what has led them to become more acculturated and similar to the life standard and style that you may have experienced yourself.

Given this to be the case, dating someone who may seem to very different from you on paper may not actually be the case in reality. You may in fact learn that they do not strongly identify with their familial heritage, and if they do, it is minimally and would not cause any significant clash with your way of living. The question to therefore ask is: *how identified are they with their family background?* This is in no way meant to demote the value and virtue of following’s own familial heritage. It simply reorients daters to the reality of where everyone stands and allows potential gaping distances to be correctly re-understood as being minimally present or non-existent.

Fit with Family. An additional looming concern for daters when considering dating someone whose background differs from their own is how they will fit in with the other person’s family. Even if the person you date yourself is not oriented to their family background themselves, the family itself may be. In regard to this, for one, remember that you will not be marrying the family, but *into* the family. Of course,

your life will be intertwined with his or her parents, who will become the grandparents of your own children and impact your own family's future. However, the quantity of time and quality of interaction will be immeasurably more with your spouse than with his or her family. Moreover, it need not be said that the quality of people that his or her parents and siblings are far outweighs anything else. If you get along with her family and feel comfortable, then any barrier in language, style of dress, food, home orientation is far less of an issue.

Compatibility and Attraction. As compatibility is completely a matter of subjective opinion, there is no way to offer guidelines. Some individuals will find that they mesh well with someone who comes from a different background, both as it relates to physical attraction and personality, and some will not. The only point to bear in mind is that, when dating, attraction should grow commensurate to duration. As you get to know a person more and learn who they truly are, even if your initial attraction was minimal, your appreciation for who they are as a person develops and grows. In turn, this underlying appreciation and admiration makes them more beautiful in your eyes. In many instances, what appeared to be little physical attraction blossoms into a marriage, as the two daters find special qualities in each other and that itself enhances the attraction. Do not shortchange yourself too quickly unless you are absolutely certain. Differences in complexion, style of dress and looks may grow on you and become something you are in fact fond of.

Arguing Over Wedding Plans

In planning for the wedding, there are details upon details to consider. It is not uncommon that a difference in opinion arises between the boy's and girl's families and the question becomes what to do and if and where to compromise.

Most important above all, you want the process to be smooth and one which leaves both sides of the family feeling good. There is no reason whatsoever to get into a heated argument and leave anyone feeling snubbed because of wedding plans. While this sounds plainly obvious, in the moment when situations like these occur, no longer is this obvious.

If the disagreement stems from the parents of the boy and girl, then most certainly, the matter should be

agreed upon easily and smoothly. As it is the children who are getting married, it is always unfortunate when the parents argue, and it then trickles down and causes discomfort and conflict between the children. As parents, do whatever will end the disagreement the quickest within reason.

On the other hand, if it is something which the *chassan* and *kallah* disagree about, that becomes an opportunity for them to put their relationship to the test. This is something to be welcomed and worked out. It is not unheard of that either the boy or girl has preferences for something, which the other one doesn't. Here, you need not capitulate merely to avoid conflict and keep the peace, but should use it as a growing experience and strive to find understanding and common ground. If the issue can be resolved between the two of you, keep it there and do not include anyone else. That will only bring about more confusion and more voices to reckon with.

There are situations, however, where given the parental involvement in paying and planning for the wedding, you will want to defer to them to have a say in how matters are arranged. Again, here, the key is for all those involved to allow the joy of the children getting married to overwhelm ancillary or less important factors. It is more important that the two families walk into the wedding in positive spirits and feeling fond and respectful of each other than having the dress or flower colors be that which they want. Focus on what is important and allow the planning to flow with more ease and comfort.

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