

Dating & Shalom Bayis

Tips and Tidbits

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Ready for Marriage? (Part I)

Very often, a young man or woman is approached by relatives or friends and asked the often-heard words: "Are you dating?" The conversation then ensues into what you are looking for in a prospective spouse. While this can get matters going for you in your dating life, there is a question that must be asked beforehand, which is often not asked to begin with, or instead, is answered without hesitation or true appreciation for what it fully means.

"Am I ready for marriage?"

Think to yourself. Have you asked this question of yourself or have others thought of asking it? Generally speaking, it is not asked but assumed. It is presumed that if a Jewish boy or girl is in their early twenties and have gone through high school, seminary of a few years or *yeshiva*/school, they are ready for marriage. And even if the question of readiness for marriage is asked, the answer will often be along the lines of, "Yes, he/she is mature, has exemplary character and is capable. I believe they will make a wonderful spouse."

While no categorical statement can be made to apply to every individual, this question must absolutely precede the question of what type of person you are looking to marry. The reason is simple: even if you marry someone who fits you well as a spouse, you will invariably and inevitably struggle unless you are ready. It is the same with many things in life. To borrow the analogy, if you are looking to obtain your driver's license, and are given the perfect car to practice with – it is comfortable for you, the seat is positioned well, it is not too overwhelmingly big a vehicle – you will struggle to drive because you simply do not know how to. The fact that the car is a good match for you is irrelevant so long as you don't know how to drive. Yes, you will like the car, but you will crash. (This doesn't mean that the car will be totaled, or the marriage will end in divorce. If a young couple unprepared for marriage chooses to get married, but are committed to each other, they can go on to live a happy life. The challenge is that being unprepared can lead you to marry the wrong person, or even if it is the right person, the challenges can be so significant, that the strain it has on the marriage is enormously damaging and dangerous).

In this regard, before even considering to date and asking yourself or responding to people, "What you are looking for in a husband or wife," ask yourself the above question: *Am I ready for marriage?*

Now, you may quickly answer, "Of course I am ready! I am mature, I know how to run a household and I am on my way towards a career or have a learning plan..." Those are wonderful assets, but when it comes to relationships, a different set of standards need to be met. Knowing how to run a household does not mean you are ready to be married, nor does having a career. Rather, there are qualifications for a long-term committed marriage, and they are different for men and women.

Let us first turn to that of a man.

Self-sufficiency. As a man, you absolutely need to stand on your own two feet and be your own man. This extends beyond financial independence, but refers to an attitude and lifestyle, where you do not rely on your parents, friends or everyone else to take care of you. You are capable and comfortable tackling something you don't know how to do. You can be relied on and your word is your word. In the sense of relationships too, you don't need a woman either to make you feel fulfilled. You don't seek women's approval and need a women's flattery to boost your self-worth. You are happy as you are.

Master the art of making other people feel better about themselves. In your own unique way, you are capable of filling up a person with good feelings and eliciting a smile on their faces. Why is this important in a relationship? Because to love a woman means that you take care of her the best you can. If you come home after a long day, you want to have mastered ways in which you can make your wife feel like a million dollars. "You know," you tell her with a warm smile, "I thought of you as I was walking out of my office today. Here is something for you" (as you hand her one little rose pedal with a small sticky note that says, 'I love you'). This may seem simple and easy to do, but unless you know how to make a woman feel happy to be married to you every day, it will not happen by itself. If you have not found your own personal brand of making other people (and in particular your wife) feel better about themselves, then your relationship will grow dull. This also means that you have fun, innovative and interesting ways to take care of your wife. Being such a person who lives with this attitude and mentality of knowing how to make others feel better about themselves will not happen automatically. It must be present before marriage, or else, you will struggle with your wife.

Identify your terms and do not compromise them. This qualification is arguably the most important of all and the biggest struggle for young men. What is meant by terms? Your masculine identity. The more masculine of a man you are, the more feminine your woman can be. This is supremely important, as a male-female relationship requires polarity of the masculine and feminine, and if you are not a man, the relationship will suffer. Likely, and what oftentimes happens, the woman will intuitively notice if an imbalanced polarity exists and overcompensate by becoming the “man” in the relationship. The husband will then begin feeling as if he is walked all over by the woman and begin despising himself and the relationship. The antidote is being a masculine man. The more masculine you are, the more polarity you create in the relationship, because you allow your woman to be a feminine woman. And in order to step into yourself as a man, you must first and foremost define your *terms* as a man.

Your terms are those core principles that define your masculinity. They are unalterable and non-negotiable. They are your values which are never, ever broken, no matter the circumstances. For example, *I keep my commitments*. This is not taken lightly. If you have a commitment to learn with someone daily, you do everything humanly possible to be there every single day on time. If you miss even one day without clearing it with the other person, you are not living in honor. As a Jew, we are fortunate to be guided by honorable values which direct our life. Your terms can therefore partially be comprised by the things which you *adhere to in Jewish law (halacha)*. If someone therefore tries convincing you to do something which infringes on *halacha*, it is not a question. “I honor my commitments and I cannot do that,” you say. Period. End of discussion. Otherwise, you are not living by your terms as a man (and in this case, as a Jew). Hard-fast, unalterable terms are needed for a man to live in honor. This has, unfortunately, become a lost art in the larger contemporary society. A handshake used to mean a full commitment; now it means little. But, as a real man, what you say you mean, and you follow through. This is supremely important in relationships, as your spouse will never be able to push you around and walk over you. This does not mean that you are a domineering dictator. Far from it. It means that you *cooperate without compromising your terms*. You are not even adversarial about it and you don’t become emotional about it. You are simply a man of commitment. Your dating partner or wife will respect you for that and know that you have principles and values, and they will not be tampered with. If she tries testing you and pushing you to bend those limits, you will pass her tests and keep to your terms.

Success is of the greatest importance to you. Men are innately driven by their competitive ego. This is why men revel in watching people compete. G-d has placed into the nature of man the insatiable drive to be the best and excel and exceed beyond limits. In the sense of relationships, this provides man with the continuous motivation to steer and strive towards excellence and not drift in life. However, how you expect to attain success must be formulated with a concrete vision. Floating around in life and “seeing where things will go,” but

having no course of action will lead to nowhere. A goal without a plan is just a dream. As George Bernard Shaw remarked, “To be in hell is to drift; to be in heaven is to steer.” As a provider for his family, the man must know where he is going and what he is doing. Obligations of work, responsibilities of daily studying, commitments to family time. Whatever job a man sets out to, he must strive to be a 10 out of 10, and if he is not, he must question what he can do to get there. To quote, “When you want to succeed as bad as you want to breathe, then you will be successful.” And to succeed, you must know what you want to succeed *in*. It is disastrous to get married and have no idea what you are doing with your life. Going to school or planning to learn is only a goal when there is a plan that comes along with it. Otherwise, it is drifting masquerading as steering.

Be in control of your ego and your emotions. While a man’s competitive ego drives him in everything he does, he must remain grounded, humble and in control. Commitment to the truth comes before ego. If you made a mistake, being defensive and making excuses is not the way to go. Admit your mistake and honor the truth. Issues arise in relationships when you allow your ego to control you. The same is true of emotions. Imagine the picture of a landscape with weather. The man is the landscape and the woman is the weather. If she becomes emotional, remain calm and composed. Don’t become emotional yourself. Remain present for her and take in her powerful energy, keeping yourself strong and rock solid all the while. The same applies overall as a man living life. Do not allow your emotions to debilitate or overwhelm you to the point of distress. There are of course exceptions, but as a principle, let your emotions come and go, but don’t dwell on them and allow them to control you. If someone cuts you off when driving, do you become angry and start honking your horn like a madman? Or do you tell yourself, “Okay, he almost hit me, but what can I do now moving forward?” As a man, focus on asking yourself, “What action can I take?” Don’t waste emotional energy on needless things. This calming presence which focuses on action will carry over into your relationship and ground your wife and family when a challenge hits.

To be continued...

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