

# Dating & Shalom Bayis

## Tips and Tidbits

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### Simulating Marriage While Dating

One of the more open-ended aspects of dating which has led to significant pressure for both young men and women is the amount of time to spend dating before getting engaged. In order to properly and thoroughly address this issue, let us lay down everything there is to know.

First and foremost, there is an inherent flaw with the question altogether. And the reason that is so is because, as has been mentioned before, the decision to get engaged should be organic. It should not be a decision, but rather a natural consequence and seamless flow from the experience of dating. If you need to weigh the positives and negatives and especially ask for advice, you should already know your answer: no. The very fact that the question must be asked as to whether you should or should not get engaged or if it is the right time indicates that it is not an organic process, but a choice which is gray and you decide one way over another. That is not the way you want to decide who to marry for the rest of your life.

In essence then, you want to date for the length of time it takes to know with absolute comfort and certainty that this is who you'd like to shape your future with. To put a time frame on this is not only a mistake, but can actually dampen the very process of dating. All too often, external pressure is placed on those dating to "make a decision already," "you've gone out on 10 dates... it's getting close..." These comments, albeit well-intended, are simply unhelpful and in fact damaging. The best reaction to anyone who ever pressures you in any which way is to simply tell them, "Thank you for your input. I am the one getting married and I will decide when I am ready to take that next step."

Now, an important question must be noted. How can you plan on getting married if you have never lived under the same roof with this man/woman? How can you be absolutely sure that it will end up being a passionate and incredible relationship? The answer is *not*, as you likely have heard many times, "You just don't know with absolutism. There's a certain gamble that you take. You do as much research as you can, date him/her for some time, and if everything seems right and aligns correctly, you proceed further."

In truth, gambling one time with hundreds of dollars, and even thousands, does not necessarily translate into throwing your life away. But, no one in their right mind would want to gamble with their marriage and life? If that is so, what can be done to ensure that dating, engagement and marriage is not a gamble, and not even a decision, but as mentioned, a natural, organic consequence of dating?

That is an excellent question. The answer is to simulate what it would be like to live with the man/woman you are dating without actually doing so. In other words, generally speaking, dates in *frum* circles are calculated, with select times and places. They may last, starting with the first date, between 2 and 3 hours, and move anywhere to 5 and 6 and longer as the number of dates proceed. The catch with this is that usually there are activities involved, some more active, some less, but it takes the context of a "date." What you want to do is transition from "dating" to "living" without actually living in the same house. This slow transition is felt more so during engagement, as the *chossan* and *kallah* begin planning their wedding and marriage and open up in new ways that were not experienced during the dating phase. Even the engagement phase, however, falls short of real marriage. The point is to come into contact and create the context that is felt during marriage when you are *dating*, even before you are engaged. How do you do that?

Think about a married couple you know and picture a concentric circle. Now ask what makes up their relationship? What is the grist for the mill of their marriage? The answer will depend upon the couple you have in mind. Now, on the peripheral part of their relationship, you will see spouses working a full-time job and part-time job, taking care of the kids, managing the household cleaning and shopping, and paying the bills. That is what occupies their outermost context, or the furthest concentric circle from the center. Go further inwards. You may notice that they are often critical. Go further. If you would know, you may (hypothetically) discover that one of the spouses doesn't feel passionately in love with the other spouse. It is a mediocre relationship in their mind, and they are not absolutely thrilled to be in their relationship and feel more responsibility and obligation than passionate love.

Let's pause here. This above relationship may be one that is five years old, ten years old, or three. The way to gauge and predict what your relationship could look like depends on what exists at the core and center of the concentric circle. Running errands, making dinner, washing the dishes, bathing the kids, paying the bills will all be affected by the state of the inner part of the concentric circle. And what rests there? It is not this elusive love, which everyone throws around as a word but means little. Contrary to what the Roman poet Virgil said, love does not conquer all. It is rather *value and benefit to your life*. Does the person you are interacting with enhance your life?

This does not mean that it is easy, but it is similar, to borrow the analogy, to exercising. You strain and stress your muscles, but you embrace the struggle, because it is enhancing your life, and you are benefiting. The same is true of a relationship. You, of course, don't

need this relationship to make you happy, but it is such a great desire and so refreshing that your interactions give you vitality. Your relationship gives you *life* that you could not have without it. It is like taking a drink of cold water on a hot, blazing day. It replenishes you and is full of passion and pleasure.

Now, the above description is abstract, but with intention. At the core of this in very simple, concrete terms is *deep respect* and *complete acceptance*. Think about it. What makes you feel like a million dollars? Not love. *Deep respect*. Deep respect is what strikes the innermost chord of a person and makes him or her reverberate with passion and pleasure. It reaches your soul. In fact, the defining name for *neshama* (soul) is exactly that: *kavod* (respect, honor). Dovid Hamelech, in referring to the soul, uses the expression “*k’vodi*,” *my honor/respect* (e.g. *Ura k’vodi ura*,” “*Awake, my soul, awake*” – *Tehillim* 57:9). Relationships that crumble always lacked deep respect.

The greatest benefit to your life will be when your spouse deeply respects you. Their deep respect, which makes up the core of the concentric circle, will overlay and extend to even the most outermost circle. For example, when they respect you, they will respect your effort in putting the kids to sleep, despite it not going as smoothly as it does when they do it themselves. When they respect you, they will allow you to work on your project late into the night because they want you to succeed. When they respect you, they will run the dishes for you because you’ve had a long and hard day and they respect your efforts to help support the family. These expressions of respect fill your life with value and benefit because you become a better person and succeed in your missions and dreams. Respect is selfless, because it focuses on the other person’s worth and not on yours. I value you, therefore I respect you and want to bring more benefit to you.

When this is felt at the core of your relationship, your days in this world gain vitality, passion, and life. There may be criticism, but it is selflessly aimed at helping your relationship and it quickly passes. When there is respect, there is never, ever contempt. There is never caustic sarcasm, mockery or one-upping. Never. If one spouse forgets to pay the bills, there is never sarcasm, “So you forgot again! Maybe I should hang up a reminder on your mirror...” Your spouse is someone who doesn’t ever drain energy from you, but provides energy to you. Toxic people and relationship makes you feel fatigued and drained afterwards. They suck life out of you. Healthy and passionate relationships give you even more life and vitality than you had before. That is the key. They give you LIFE. If you feel that to your bones, then you will feel that the relationship is right.

Now, to get to this stage takes time. Not a little bit of time, though. You don’t want to fool yourself into believing that your euphoria of being in a relationship with a man or woman is making you feel alive. That is an illusion and your emotions talking. The difference is that *truly feeling alive* is something that can be verbally articulated and described by experiences. And why is that so? Because you can concretely put into words how your life is enhanced and more valuable because the other person is in it. You can discuss how you are respected and how you are more energized after spending time with your date. There is never this indefinable and obscure “love” that you tell people you “just feel” but cannot put your finger on it.

If you would truly be in love, that person would bring you extreme benefit, and you could certainly put that into words.

Simulating marriage during dating thus entails translating the inner concentric core of a passionate relationship, filled with deep respect and invaluable enhancement to your life, to the outer circles. Spend time with your date’s family and make a meal together. *Do those activities that make up a married couple’s life while dating and determine if you feel mentally and emotionally energized or drained after them.* Of course, you may feel physically tired; the emphasis is on your thoughts and gut feelings. And then ask yourself...

What was that experience like? Do you feel more drained or more energized? Are you more drained because you spent time with him or her preparing food, washing dishes, talking about finances, or do you feel more energized, because despite those menial chores, your life was enhanced by that experience, spending time with him/her and you feel absolutely great? If contemptuous, mocking lines were exchanged about your culinary skills or lack thereof, making you feel disrespected, your life was not enhanced. Always think *enhanced value of life*. That will clue into knowing that a potential marriage up ahead will be passionate and not grow dull.

*To sum it all up, you want to date for as long as it takes to have the next step of engagement and marriage be organic. In order to allow for that seamless process to occur and have it backed by comfortable certainty, you want to ascertain if deep respect and enhanced value overlays all the aspects that make up a married couple’s life. Actually engage in those activities if you can, and if not, make sure to talk about them. Afterwards, ask yourself if you feel energized or drained. After months of these experiences, you will become confident and comfortable in progressing further towards marriage because you actually know the person you are marrying, and you are not left guessing who they really are and waiting for surprises after the wedding. And that is real dating.*

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