

“And take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak.” (24:4)

Sixty-six *pesukim* are devoted to the search and eventual discovery of a wife for Yitzchak. This clearly underscores the significance of the institution of marriage and clarifies the qualities one should seek in choosing a mate. In response to the overriding importance and often misunderstood nature of this subject, we will cite some ideas and advice from the *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah leaders, of previous generations. In *Choreb*, *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, speaks to the young man in search of his life's partner: “When you choose a wife, remember that she is to be your companion in life, in building your home, in performing your life's task. You should choose accordingly. Wealth, physical beauty or brilliance of mind should not be the determining factors in your decision. Rather, you should seek a young woman who exemplifies richness of heart, beauty of character and common sense and intelligence. If you need money to set up your house and it is offered freely – take it. Woe to you and to your future household, however, if you are guided only by considerations of money.

“Study well the character of your future wife. Since character is revealed only by contact with real life, and since the young woman comes into contact with real life only with marriage, look well at her family who have already established its character in real life. One should seek a mate whose physical, moral and emotional well-being makes them suitable for enduring the hardships and burdens of maintaining a household.”

In describing one's mate, *Horav Hirsch* uses the word “companion”. In the Hebrew translation, the word which is used is *chavrusah ba'chaim*, as in study-partner/comrade in life. This is a new twist on the husband/wife relationship. In a partnership, two people share in a project – or in a piece of property – with each one undertaking to perform his share of the work or to take care of his share of the property. A companion / comrade / *chavrusah* is different – he/she shares in every aspect of a given endeavor. A companion accompanies an individual throughout his trip. A comrade never leaves his friend's side. Two partners, however, do not necessarily have to maintain such a relationship in order to be partners. One's wife is his *chavrusah* in life – for life.

Horav Shulsinger, Shlita, writes that when his granddaughter was of age, he came to his *rebbe*, *Horav Yaakov Kanievsky, z.l.*, the *Steipler Rav*, to ask him the specific qualities which he should look for in a young man. The *Steipler* told him to look for these things: *hasmadah*, diligence in Torah study; *middos tovos*, good character traits; and *seichel ha'yashar*, common sense. *Horav Shulsinger* asked the *Steipler*, “Since the young man was a *masmid*, diligent in his Torah study, and apparently a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, would he not in any case possess good character traits?” The *Steipler* said, “Let me explain to you. A *masmid* is one who has diligently studied in the *yeshivah* for a number of years. He rarely leaves his *shtender*, table upon which his books rest, for idle chatter. He takes his studies seriously. Indeed, he has incredible *shalom bayis*, domestic harmony, with his *shtender*. It never asks him for anything – not to take out

the garbage, not to go shopping, not to wash the floor. Never once did the *shtender* appear upset or depressed. Never did he have to appease or console his *shtender*. Never did the *shtender* become ill so that he would have to minister to its needs. Suddenly, he has to leave the *yeshivah* and his trusty *shtender* to move in and begin a new life (in conjunction with the *yeshivah*) with another person, who has feelings, emotions, and needs. For this, one must have exemplary *middos*, because his *hasmadah* has not prepared him for this.”

Upon hearing this, *Horav Shulsinger* asked, “If this is the case, if *middos* are to be the determining factor, why does everybody exalt the *Torah* learning? We should demand perfection in *middos* as the deciding factor of a *ben-Torah*.” The *Steipler* said, “If one does not learn, he has the possibility of becoming a wild animal who plunders and kills. Only through diligence in *Torah* study does one stand the chance of breaking the *yetzer hara*’s, evil inclination, grip. Only then can he reign over his spiritual dimension. Only then can he become a true *baal-middos*.”

Horav E.M. Shach, z.l., sums it up in a letter to one of his students, in which he instructs him to seek a young woman who is a *baalas middos*, of a refined character, who exemplifies the *middah* of *chesed*, kindness, caring for others. Indeed, as *Horav Shach* states, *Eliezer* did not decide to take *Rivkah* because of the water that rose to her. Miracles did not impress him; *middos tovos* determined who would be the next Matriarch. If more people would follow this criterion, it would truly be a phenomenon.