

Then Lavan and Besuel answered, and said, “The matter stemmed from Hashem.” (24:50)

In the *Talmud Moed Kattan* 18b, *Chazal* view this response (although it came from Lavan and Besuel) as a clear indication that Hashem pre-ordains man’s proper mate. Otherwise, the Torah would not have recorded these words. Any true, believing Jew is acutely aware of Hashem’s management of the marriage process. One who does not see Hashem’s guiding hand in this process either suffers from some form of myopia or, worse, lacks the capability to discern the events that take place in life.

Much has been derived from this *parsha* concerning the manner and approach one should take towards *shidduchim*, matrimonial match, but, most significant, is the lesson, *Mei Hashem yatza hadavar*; “The matter stemmed from Hashem;” it all comes from Hashem. It might take time, almost a lifetime, to see how it all works out, but it does ultimately work out. One well-known *shidduch* story was related by the **Gaon, zl, m’Vilna**, to his primary disciple, *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*. It was a story that the *Gaon* felt was an incredible story, worthy of passing on through the generations. I take the liberty of sharing it with the reading audience. I have attempted to be brief, but it is difficult to abbreviate relating Hashem’s handiwork.

The *Gaon* attempted to reach *Eretz Yisrael*, because he had a burning desire to live in the Holy Land. Alas, it was not to be. He made it to Amsterdam, where he decided to rest for a while in order to gather his strength for the return trip to Poland. He came upon a small village near Amsterdam, where a wealthy Jew had invited him to stay as a guest. The host did not know the *Gaon*, but he was an intelligent man who realized that the *Gaon*’s countenance and behavior reflected a sublime nature. The *Gaon* made good use of his stay, immersing himself in the volumes of *Talmud* and commentary available in his host’s vast library.

Once the *Gaon* felt that he had regained his strength, he bid his host farewell and was prepared to reimburse him for his hospitality. The host refused, claiming that it had been an honor to have a person of his exalted stature as a guest in his home. He did make one request. Since he was an individual who made every attempt to adhere to all *mitzvos* meticulously, he wondered if the *Gaon* had noticed any deficiency in his behavior. The *Gaon* responded that, in fact, he did.

“The *Talmud Sanhedrin* 76b states that the love a husband manifests towards his wife should be as (he would towards) his own body, and he should honor her body more than he does his own body. I have noticed that the love you show your wife exceeds that which you do for yourself. Every morning, you bring your wife a bowl, water and towel so that she can wash up, and then you bring her a cup of coffee. I do not see you drinking coffee in the morning. This is what is meant by giving more than his own body.” Obviously this was not a rebuke, but, since the host had asked the *Gaon* to identify any shortcoming on his behalf, the *Gaon* had responded.

When the man heard the *Gaon's* (sort of) rebuke, he smiled and said, "I would like to tell his honor the reason for my behavior. I grew up in Poland where, at the age of nine, I was known for my brilliance. I studied Torah with my father most of the day and became quite erudite at that young age. Sadly, my parents lived in abject poverty, living on bread and water for most of the week. I became engaged at the age of nine to the daughter of a very wealthy man. He provided me with a brilliant Torah teacher with whom I studied all day and a good part of the night. He saw to all my physical/spiritual needs. I could now spend all of my waking hours engrossed in Hashem's Torah.

Six years later, as we prepared for the wedding, my father traveled to the house of my bride to be to see to the last minute arrangements. I cannot describe the shock on his face when he discovered that the wheel of fortune had struck my father-in-law-to-be in the most devastating manner, leaving him destitute, physically and emotionally battered. As much as he did not want to do it, he was nonetheless compelled to break the *shidduch*. My "future" depended on the material support my future father-in-law had promised. To my immediate chagrin, the matter was promptly settled. The two young fifteen-year olds were not getting married.

"I was very much against this change of events. First of all, I wanted to marry the girl. Second, the last thing I wanted to do in life was to humiliate a Jewish girl. My parents, however, were adamant. The marriage was off. It was not long before it had become known that I was once again available. A wealthy man proposed a match with his daughter. I could learn for the rest of my life. All my needs would be addressed. Personally, I was not interested, but, in a short while, I was engaged to be married. What a gala wedding it was. Everybody had such a wonderful time. Deep down, I was in pain for the girl whom I had been compelled to reject due to financial considerations. I was told to forget the past and focus on the future – which I attempted to do.

"Everything seemed lovely. The sun shone on me – until, one day after *sheva brachos*, the week-long wedding festivities, I suddenly became ill. A doctor was summoned. He checked me out and gave me medication, but I became progressively worse. My entire body was filled with pus-filled boils, altering my entire physical appearance, as my body shriveled from my medical condition. My father-in-law was very understanding, and he sought out the finest physicians and specialists – all to no avail. There was no alternative but to give a divorce and free my bride from her misery.

"I went back to learning, which was my only solace. I drowned my sorrows in the sea of *Talmud*.

"This could not go on. One day, a man visited the center for critically ill people where I was living in seclusion, and, after getting to know me, made a proposition: 'I will rent a comfortable coach and line it with pillows, so that you can sit and rest, while I drive from village to village begging for alms. When people see how miserable you look, they will give us money, and, in this way, we will both have a means of support.'"

"I agreed to the idea. After all, I had no life, so I might as well do this. After a while, I became accustomed to the new reality. I was a cripple who was physically disfigured, with nothing to look

forward to other than more of the same. One day, we pulled into a town and chanced upon a man who had a similar coach bedecked with pillows. His passenger was a young woman who looked very much like a female version of me. She had a similar illness. Her driver was her father, whose appearance bespoke a miserable, difficult life. They, too, were going from town to town collecting whatever people gave them.

“Well, I began to speak with the young woman. Since we were both in the same situation, I decided to join them. Her father would drive us, and we would split the income. I thanked my driver and bid him farewell. The arrangement went on for a few weeks, until, one day, the girl’s father asked that I marry his daughter. After all, we seemed to be getting along quite well, and well – we both had similar afflictions. If misery loves company, we would have a wonderful life together.

“I thought it over, and it sounded like a rational idea. We drank a *l’Chaim*, ate a piece of cake that a kind home owner had given us out of pity for our plight, and planned the wedding. One month, our travels took us to a small town where we assembled a *minyan*, quorum of ten men, and together – *chassan* and *kallah*, both sickly and miserable, dressed in tattered clothes- we became husband and wife. The few people who had assembled put together a wedding feast consisting of some bread, a little herring and onions, and we were married. For the first time in quite some time, I felt happy. I was finally married to what appeared to be a fine girl. The reality was that I was physically infirm and covered with boils, and my wife was in the same boat. So, we might as well set sail.

“My wife was not so excited. As soon as we were alone, she broke down in bitter weeping. ‘Why do you weep?’ I asked. ‘This is your wedding night, you should be filled with joy!’ She then shared the story of her life with me. She had been engaged to an incredible Torah scholar at the age of nine. Six years later, when they were about to get married, the *shidduch* broke off because her father had lost all of his money. Her fiancé had moved on, and the misery brought on an unexplained illness from which she had been suffering for years. She and her father had been wandering from town to town in an attempt to collect a few pennies from which to live.

“As soon as I heard the story, my heart began to race. I asked her questions, and I began to describe her house, her town, her early childhood. I told her that her house was right behind a large haystack. She asked me how I knew this. I told her that I was her former fiancé.

“We both began to cry, as we ruminated over our lives and all that we had experienced until this wonderful moment. Hashem had planned for us to be married to one another – and nothing could stand in the way of Hashem’s plan! A young couple might be separated for years, but Hashem will somehow bring them together. We now looked forward to a long life together – despite our infirmities. Then, Hashem blessed us, as slowly, over a short period, we were both cured of our respective illnesses. And now, I ask your honor, should I not do everything in my power to honor my wife and shower her with love, for all of the suffering I caused her? This is why I accord my wife such honor. She deserves every bit of it!”

When the *Gaon* heard this story, he was so moved that he asked if he could remain in this holy house with this special couple for two more weeks. When he bid them farewell, he blessed them abundantly. He said, "It was worth my entire exile, with the difficult wanderings that I endured, just to hear this story."