

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

IT'S HASHEM WHO MAKES IT WORK

The first miracle described in *Sefer Shemos* is the rescue of the baby Moshe from the Nile River. Contained in this story is a powerful life lesson for us all.

An Egyptian princess walking along a river bank sees a basket floating on the water, far away from her. She reaches out her hand and, miraculously, it extends and lengthens until she succeeds in grasping the basket and drawing it toward her. When we give this some more thought, we realize how strange it is; why did she even try? After all, she had no reason to believe that a miracle would be performed for her.

R' Yitzchak of Vorka explains that while this *nes* was necessary to save the life of Moshe Rabbeinu, it was also necessary for each one of us in our own lives. What Hashem is telling us here is that if we really want something so badly, then even though logically it seems unobtainable, our intense desire makes it seem within our reach and when we do what we can and just stretch out our hands, Hashem will fill in the rest.

We all face seemingly impossible situations in our own lives, from smaller challenges to the momentous ones. On paper, certain things can seem impossible; in practice, we know that Hashem helps and the impossible happens. When we really, truly want to do *ratzon Hashem* and put in the effort we are able to — no matter how small it may appear — we receive the necessary *siyatta diShmaya*. Getting married and building families are tremendous undertakings and can only be accomplished with help from Above.

If we see the responsibilities as too much to handle, we may despair and stop short. That's what happens when we forget that the outcome is in Hashem's hands and that He wants us to succeed even more than we want success for ourselves. It's a shame to give up and let stunning achievements slip through our fingers when it's all there just waiting for us to really want it and aim for it. We just have to try.

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Parshas **Shemos**

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Dear Rabbi Gruen,

It took me a lot of courage to reach out to you with my question.

First, some background. I'm a twenty-something-year-old girl from a Chassidishe community who recently got engaged, *baruch Hashem*. I have always been labeled as "different" and "out of the box, "out there" and "not the typical." Although all kinds of boys were suggested to me, I always had a basic idea of what I was looking for. However, even after voicing my wants to my parents, a suggestion came up and it happened really fast and led to my engagement.

Now, for the most part I'm happy and blessed. He's a very nice and smart individual. I don't want to come across as ungrateful or not smart, but I feel that he's too frum for me. I know it might sound childish, but it's something that was niggling me from the second I met him. I find myself wanting him to be someone he's not, especially since he's not the type I originally thought I would marry. I find myself wanting him to be a bit more chilled — not less frum Torah-wise, *chas v'shalom*, but with things like how he dresses etc. I'm anxious and worried and also concerned that I might be too chilled for him. I was suggested many boys who I thought were more my type but my parents weren't on the same page.

So, I'm concerned. I want things to work out. How can I learn to accept him the way he is and openly see how he is my *bashert*?

Thank you



How to find the "right" *shidduch* and know it's the right one is a concern that strikes almost everyone at your stage of life, no matter what their background. Those who go on multiple dates (before and even after getting engaged) and make up their own minds on whom to marry often find themselves confronting the very same anxiety that you describe. It's perfectly understandable. Here are two people who don't know each other very well, planning to spend the rest of their lives together. Who can predict all the difficulties that may crop up, all the "incompatibilities" they'll discover (despite exhaustive pre-engagement inquiries), and all the challenges that life will throw at them? It would be far more odd if you weren't anxious.

Would you feel more settled and confident if your *chassan* was more like the mental picture you built up of him? That's not at all certain. There are still so many unknowns, and superficial similarities can actually blind people to deeper differences that remain hidden until certain life circumstances cause them to surface.

It's common for people feeling anxious about an unknown to try to pin their uncomfortable feelings onto something specific, just to make sense out of the uneasiness they're experiencing, and it's possible that this is what you're going through.

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If you feel that your parents somehow pressured you into accepting a decision not your own when you wanted something different that they dismissed, that's something you should deal with — but separately. It actually has nothing at all to do with the person you are now engaged to. As you write, you should feel confident that he is your *bashert*, regardless of how it happened. Isn't that what *"bashert"* is actually all about?

Your *chassan* can be your *bashert* even if you think that he is so absolutely different to you that you can't imagine how you'll bridge the differences. The emotional connection that it takes to be happily married and "feel" the *bashert* has nothing to do with being similar. Emotional connection is built on acceptance and a willingness to stretch and adapt, on learning to find and appreciate the other person's good qualities, and aiming to reach the same goals.

When a *chassan* and *kallah* come from similar backgrounds, this can make things easier and more familiar at first — I'm not advocating for people to pay no attention to similarities and to marry people who are diametrically opposite to them. Family and community offer important clues to compatibility, but they aren't everything.

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You describe your *chassan* as "very nice and smart." I assume you mean that he has good *middos*, and is intelligent and focused on the important things in life. These are both extremely important qualities, and I'm happy for you, for finding someone like that.

You mention that you would have liked him to be more "chilled." This is a word that means different things to different people so I'd like to examine some of the assumptions we make when we use it.

If being chilled means that a person enjoys life in a healthy way, approaches challenges with a positive spirit, is enthusiastic about the future, and so forth, then what could be better? *Simchas hachaim* can be found, thankfully, in every single community, although certain groups are less likely to call it being "chilled." Hashem clearly wants us to be happy and enjoy the world — one good example of this is the *Birchas Ha'ilanos* that we make every *chodesh Nisan*, thanking Hashem for the pleasure we derive from His creation.

But there's another interpretation of "chilled" which one might describe as "cool." It connotes someone who doesn't take life too seriously, who doesn't care too much about anything, who just "goes with the flow" and does his own thing. Clearly this does imply something "less frum Torah-wise" (in your words); it seems to mean someone less focused on the long-term and one's goals in life. What this looks like on a day-to-day basis is pleasure-seeking in the moment with little concern for the repercussions and a general unwillingness to commit to anything (or anyone) that demands hard work and sacrifice.

It's true that this kind of "chilled" person can appear very engaging and attractive. You might want to seriously consider whether a chilled-cooled-off person is going to make a good father to your children, or a devoted and attentive husband to you, especially when times are hard and you need more support than you do now when you are young, strong, and free of burdens.

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Before I discuss what you write about how your *chassan* dresses, I want to make it clear that I am perfectly aware that there are people who dress impeccably and are, *nebach*, rotten inside; there are also good *neshamos* who look a little less sparkling on the outside. We shouldn't judge people based on their exterior.

That said, we're now reading *parshas Shemos* where we learn that keeping a specifically Jewish mode of dress (among other things) was key to preserving our status as Hashem's people in Mitzrayim. This remains true to this day.

Being "chilled" in one's mode of dress can be interpreted in various ways, and it's hard to tell exactly what you are referring to. Jews don't have specific dress codes; we have *halachos* of *tznius* that preserve our refinement. If what you mean is being less attached to a specific way of dressing, then as long as one remains within the boundaries of *halachah*, there may be nothing wrong. However, if being "chilled" in one's mode of dress means that one approaches this topic in a less-than-serious manner, this reflects on one's entire approach to being Jewish, appearing Jewish, and representing Hashem in the world.

Beyond that, there are few if any people who don't "dress to impress." The only question is, who is one

trying to impress? It's something to think about, as the way someone presents himself says a lot about in whose eyes he's looking to find favor.

In any case, people aren't always what they wear, and I hope that you will choose to appreciate the wonderful *chassan* that Hashem decided is for you. It seems that, for reasons you might want to ponder, He knows that a "chilled" *chassan* is not what you need.

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The only real way to approach "Is he my *bashert*?" is with *emunah*, with faith and trust in Hashem that you were sent exactly what you need. You may object to the way it all happened and that could be legitimate, though it's a separate question entirely. But if you want to "openly see" that your *chassan* is the right one for you, the only way to do that is to fix your eyesight.

We look at the world as a series of decisions we need to make and sometimes agonize over them, tormenting ourselves with doubt over the various options and becoming desperately anxious lest we make the "wrong choice." There's no such thing. Hashem always controls the outcome.

If you want to be at peace with the way your life is turning out, the only way to do so is to wholeheartedly accept that this is the way it is meant to be, for your good. At times, reaching that level of acceptance is definitely a challenge and it's then that we need to remember that Hashem is sending us tests in *emunah* and *bitachon*, to find out whether we're going to flex our muscles and do what we can to pass with flying colors.



Now that you're already engaged, you need to turn the page on everything that led up to it and thank Hashem for bringing you to this point. You thought you needed a certain kind of *chassan*; Hashem showed you that you need something else. He isn't radically different from what you had in mind, and you aren't being called upon to up-end your thinking entirely, but you will need to stretch a little more than you perhaps wanted and accept that he is perfect just as he is and that you and he will work things out.

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Interestingly, the person your *chassan* is today may not be exactly how he'll be in ten, twenty, or thirty years' time. Chances are that he'll change and so will you, and that's fine as long as you accept each other at all points along the way. Trying to change one another by force is not just a contradiction of acceptance; it's also not going to work.

And just as you will need to accept that he isn't the "chilled" person you thought you wanted, he will also need to accept any apparently "chilled" aspects of your personality that he finds challenging. Naturally I am not referring to anything that is against *halachah*, but the nuances of your life together are going to have to be worked out between you, hopefully with the guidance of a rav or Daas Torah.

Marriage takes work, but that doesn't mean that it can't be enjoyable too. At times it may even appear impossible — how can two individuals ever live together in harmony without losing their independent selves? But when we know what we want, which is to build a home for the *Shechinah*, Hashem will show us that it's possible and that all we have to do is put in our best effort to see incredible success.

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