

**“Love and Marriage According to ‘the Bachelor’”**  
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For anyone who lives with or works with teenagers, you most likely have been put into contact with a television program that has gripped their impressionable imaginations. The program presents a romance that only Hollywood could contrive, that by the end of a television season is supposed to produce a life-long commitment and marriage. For those of you unfamiliar with ABC’s *The Bachelor*, I offer the following brief description:

A single, invariably good looking, and more often than not wealthy young bachelor is introduced to 25 single women in an effort to find a bride. On the first episode, he narrows the field to 15 women. On the second episode, he will take five women at a time on three different dates. Then, he will choose to keep eight. After introducing the women to two of his friends, they help him narrow the field to four. Then, with the remaining four, he will meet their families and they will meet his. Finally, the bachelor will narrow it to three, and he will go on a fantasy date with each. For the last show, there are only two remaining, and he will select “the one.” In the upcoming episode a 34 year old prince, yes you heard me right—he is an Italian prince born in Milan—although he now works in Manhattan as a cosmetics entrepreneur, will have to choose between 23 year old Sadie from California or 24 year old Jennifer from Florida...both, not surprisingly, buxom, beautiful blonds. Right before he tearfully eliminates one and ultimately chooses his bride to be, he will be shown smooching up the one not chosen, in his deliberative, painstaking efforts to select the “right one.” Recently on a grocery line at Tom Thumb, I glanced the following headline on a tabloid magazine. . . Find out if the last Bachelor couple is still together.

What a strange question, I thought . . . He just proposed to her on national television?! She said ‘I do’ amidst tears and quivering hands! Yet the paparazzi wonder are they still together only a handful of weeks later.

They wonder this, of course, because the construct that reality television portrays is in fact the farthest thing from reality. Without even dwelling the near flawless beauty of every bachelor and bachelorette, the notion that lifelong commitment, love, and matrimony is something that can be shopped for like a car or an article of clothing speaks to something insidious going on in our society. I wonder how teenagers who watch this show will imagine what it is to fall in love and make a lifetime commitment to a partner when our media regularly speculates about the latest material breakup in Hollywood.

In our parasha this week we see a radically different model of how love is born, albeit in its uniquely ancient Near Eastern milieu. Abraham’s servant Eliezer sets out to find an appropriate candidate for Abraham’s son Isaac to marry. Rather than falling for one of the Cannanites in their midst, Abraham prefers he marry a nice Jewish girl. This is, as one of my Seminary teachers said, the first Jewish dating service. On his way to

field a candidate, Eliezer devises a plan for how he will know who to introduce Isaac to...Remarkably, the test has nothing to do with beauty, or wealth, or lineage. The test Eliezer concocts is one of character. Positioning himself near a desert well, he waits to see how he will be treated. Upon seeing the hot and thirsty traveler, not to mention his camels, Rebecca without hesitation runs to wash his feet, to give him water to drink, and without even being asked, starts schlepping jugs of water for his ten camels as well. She assures him that he will have a place to spend the night in her father's house, and sees to it that he is fed and warmly welcomed. She is a *tzaddeikis*, thinks Eliezer; This one is a keeper. What distinguishes Rebecca is not a superficial dating game or a night in the fantasy suite, but the humanity and generosity she exhibits for a stranger she doesn't even know. Not everything will be perfect between Isaac and Rebecca, and they will have their challenges, as all marriages do, but the fact remains that their love is based on a profound set of shared values and commitments. *Vayikach et Rivkah, va'tehi lo le'ishah, va-ye-eh-ha-veiha*....And Isaac married Rebecca, says the Torah, and she became his wife, and he loved her...

You know, Judaism has always placed the family at the epicenter of its orbit. The corner stone of family is the bond of marriage, sanctified as a holy partnership at Mount Sinai. In so many places in our t'filah and the religious poetry of the siddur, the relationship between God and the people of Israel is symbolized in the marital image of two loving partners. Recall, for example...

*Lekha dodi likrat kalah p'nei Shabbat n'kabbelah:*

Come, my beloved, to greet the bride, to welcome Shabbat.

*Ve'erastich li-le'olam*...I will betroth myself to you forever, we say in the words of the prophet Hoshea, as we wind the tefillin around our fingers like a wedding band each day.

The Book of Genesis relates the emotional outpouring of Adam when he realizes that Eve is not only his helpmate, not only the biological partner with whom he will procreate, but sees her as "the flesh of my flesh." Now that's romantic! In reflecting on Adam's realization, the Torah comments, "Hence man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh." Those of us who are married know that deciding to spend the rest of your life with one other person is serious business.

In a famous story in the Talmud a Roman matron accosts the Sage Rabbi Yossi: "You say that your God created the universe. And what has your God been doing since then?"

"God has been occupied making matches," Rabbi Yossi replied.

"Making matches? Is that all? Why anyone can do that!" And to prove her point, the Roman matron quickly returned home and lined up all her hundreds male and female servants, randomly pairing them up and marrying them off.

The following morning, two servants knocked on her door, beaten and bruised, and complained, "I do not want the spouse you assigned me."

The Roman matron thereupon summoned Rabbi Yosi and conceded that matchmaking is, indeed, a complex task worthy of the Creator of the universe.

What I take from this story is not necessarily that God is a heavenly *shaddchan*, making matches day and night—fanciful as this may sound—but I read this story as a reflection of awe at the covenant of marriage...The miracle of finding someone with who you can share honestly and openly your deepest hopes and dreams. Finding someone with whom you will venture into this world, create a family, and share a home with for a lifetime. Marriage is truly miraculous; a gift in this life—*lo tov lihiyot adam levado*—the ideal is not to be alone, but to share our life with another. That is why I am so concerned about the concocted marriages we watch on TV, or the string of fly by night celebrity marriages and divorces that grace the covers of People Magazine and Entertainment Weekly.

As the divorce rate in our country climbs to over 49% I worry for teenagers who might imagine that falling in love as a process of elimination or fantasy dating. I worry for the kids in our high school program who I love so dearly and who are on the cusp of looking for a life partner, that the goodness and decency of a person's heart and character might be overshadowed by the glamour and fortune espoused in the subliminal values of reality TV. My prayer is that we would look to our matriarchs and patriarchs, people like Rebekkah and Isaac about whom Ramban writes in his commentary to Genesis—*ki mipnei tzidkatakah ve'chishron ma'aseiha aheiva*—it was because of her righteousness and her fitting deeds that Isaac loved Rebecca. Long after the nubile beauty of newlyweds wears off, and years after the glow of the wedding night is a distant memory, it is marriages built on these values that will stand the test of time.

May God bless all of us with marriages that deepen, grow, and mature as the years go on. May God bless us with the wisdom and sensitivity to endure whatever trials life may bring, as we provide unconditional love and support to our life partners. And may God bless us with relationships of friendship, trust, and longevity.