

FAMILY ISSUES

Feuerman

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tenance “fun” date is also important, but when there are very specific time and money constraints it may not be possible. Either way, you and your spouse must

get time together regularly without kids around.

Lastly, get help! See if relatives can chip in with childcare. Prioritize your spending so you can have babysitting covered for times to relax, not just work. If you are having communication issues, and need professional help, don't wait until the problem gets worse. Dr. Gottman reports that couples on aver-

age have 6 years of problems before getting professional relationship help. There is no need to wait until you hate each other. Getting professional help is not shameful.

Eta Feuerman, LMSW will be leading a discussion group on this topic contact her at eta.feuerman@gmail.com for more information.

Lieberman

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As we observed, *teshuvah* comes from the level of *Keser* and is bequeathed with the power to change the larger picture because it operates outside of time and space. *Tefillah* and *chesed* also tap into this realm. We are reminded that prayer that originates from the deepest recesses of *ratzon* can change a soul's essence, reformulating its *mazal* and its place in creation. Regarding *chesed*, we recall a passage in the Zohar that states that acts of righteousness and loving-kindness are done “above the sun,” outside of time and space.⁵

Reshuffling The Deck

Imagine a rocketship heading to the moon. At takeoff, a minor course correction – a fraction of a degree – in the coordinates can save the craft from going hundreds of miles off course. At the beginning of its flight, minor adjustments affect significant changes. However, once the craft approaches its destination, even larger deviations – that is, efforts – prove less meaningful.

The longer an unpleasant situation is allowed to fester, the more effort it will take to repair the damage. Consider a person with an infection. He may eat better, get more rest, and quickly recover. But if he doesn't take care of himself, he might have to take medication. If he doesn't treat himself, then the infection might damage his organs and he may

need surgery. The earlier he takes action to stop the progression of the affliction, the easier it is to cure and the better chances he has of a complete recovery.

Hashem works through nature; the more visible the reality, the greater the merit one needs for Hashem to grant him a miracle that alters the natural unfolding of events. When we rise above our nature, Hashem operates beyond nature in a concealed way. For those who are on an even higher spiritual level, Hashem will alter nature to produce a miracle, even where it is an apparent violation of the natural order. As *Chazal* explain, “Hashem decrees but a *tzad-dik* can revoke the decree,” for such a person has the *zechus* to do so.⁶

When reality has yet to emerge, less merit and effort are required to influence conditions. “Had you arranged your prayer before the onset of difficulty, then all would fortify your strength.”⁷ On this, our Sages teach, “Always pray before tragedy strikes.”⁸

In times of crisis, it is common for people to make a *kabbalah*. We pray to Hashem and perhaps we promise that we will do something specific should our prayers be answered, because intuitively we know what He wants from us and what we need to do – we just don't want to do it. The question we need to ask ourselves is, “What are we waiting for?”

Hashem has given us an arsenal of weapons to wage war against our fate: *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, and *tzedakah*. Why wait until a painful reality has already begun to materialize before we are provoked into action? In the words of the familiar English axiom: “An

ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Rashi quotes a parable from the *Midrash (Sifra)* to explain: “You shall strengthen him” (referring to a person who is in need). He writes, “Do not leave him alone so that he descend and fall, for it will be hard to raise him up. Rather, support him from the time his hand slips. To what might this be compared? To a burden on a donkey: While it is still on the donkey, one person can grab it and set it straight. But if it falls to the ground, even five people cannot put it back on.”

It is once again crucial to remind ourselves that when we cannot rise above a decree, we can make the bitter pill more palatable and perhaps, for the person who chooses to be extraordinary, turn it into a lavish feast. *Mazal* affects happenstance, but as we learned in Chapter 8, “Life in Context,” we have the final say on our happiness. The emotional laws of free will – including, most important, life satisfaction – run on the track of reward and punishment (*hanhagah hamishpat*), which is always a function of choice. Life's challenges are not equally distributed, but the power of choice is the great equalizer.

1. See *Teferet HaChinukhi, Parshas Vayeira*.
2. Maharal, *Chiddushei Aggados, Kiddushin* 31a.
3. See *Inner Space*, 55.
4. Ibid.
5. See *Zohar* II:59a.
6. *Moed Katan* 16b.
7. *Job* 36:19.
8. See *Sanhedrin* 44b.

Pachter

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demanding, and it is eye opening to picture your dating partner in a variety of situations.

Ask Others

Taking the advice of others can be beneficial in finding out the true character of a dating partner. Thus it is helpful to have your trusted loved ones meet the person you are seeing. Needless to say, it is your opinion that matters most, but gauging the reactions and intuitions of those you trust the most can help you see a side of the person you might not

see yourself. Sometimes those closest to us may fear voicing their opinions, not wanting to interfere, but asking those who care about us will keep the channels of communication open. It is important to ask not just if they like your partner, but also if they like the *you* that comes out while dating him or her. Make sure to be selective in regards to whose opinion you ask for; it is crucial to only ask only those whose values and judgment you trust.

Take Your Time

Getting to know someone should be a natural process, without outside temporal pressure to move the relationship forward. This means noticing how someone reacts to a variety of situations, both stressful and

happy. How someone interacts with strangers can also reveal a lot about his or her true character, and these situations will come about naturally through the passage of time. An important stipulation to this recommendation is that in order to truly take our time, it must be clear that you and your partner are in the relationship for the same reason. Early on in the dating process, it is appropriate to express your feelings about the level of commitment you are ultimately searching for. Clarifying your relationship goals in an honest fashion will ensure that both partners are on the same page. Once this is established, you can take the time pressure off and allow yourself to really get to know each other.

Examine Your Comfort Level

It is very telling to analyze how you feel about yourself when you are with someone. Are you comfortable peeling off those layers? Can you share earnest thoughts without feeling that they will be brushed aside? Oftentimes, feeling that you can open up is a reflection of the other person, and feeling that you can be yourself is an indication that the relationship is comfortable and safe. When there is a difference between the way in which you present yourself and the reality of who you are, it might mean that you don't feel secure enough in the relationship, or that the other person is not really opening up.

Finding a life partner is one of the most complex, challenging, and exhilarating experiences we go through, and making sure that we are being our truest self in the relationship, as well as getting to know the most genuine version of our potential mate, are valuable ways to make sure you are setting yourself up for a long and successful marriage.

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