

Bashert: The Real Soul Mate

Thought for the Week:

In our culture, we believe that a person should marry whoever he or she falls in love with. This is a bad plan. It is possible to fall in love with the wrong person. It is possible to fall in love with many wrong persons. Falling in love is a terrible criteria upon which to base a marriage. It would have been easy for Isaac to fall in love with any number of Canaanite girls. Why didn't he? Because Abraham would not allow it. Abraham placed clear and specific limits around Isaac's potential mates.

Commentary:

May she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. (Genesis 24:14)
Abraham's servant Eliezer was sent to find a wife for Isaac. He prayed that God would indicate which woman He had appointed for Isaac to marry. God miraculously singled out Rebekah. Later, when recounting the story of his encounter with Rebekah to her family, they had to admit, "The matter comes from the LORD" (Genesis 24:50). By all appearances, God had appointed Rebekah to be the wife of Isaac.

This teaches that God appoints each person's a spouse. Some people call this appointed person a soul mate.

How do you know when you have found your soul mate? And what exactly is a soul mate? The idea is that each individual has one other person, somewhere out there, who is his or her preordained, perfect match. A person's soul mate is the ideal complement to fulfill his or her physical, spiritual and psychological needs. Soul mates are like two halves of the same soul, and if you marry the wrong person, you will never be truly happy because you missed your soul mate. This is not a biblical idea.

The search for a soul mate sounds romantic, but how do you know if the one you are with is really your soul mate? Isn't it possible that you missed your true soul mate, or might still encounter him or her? What if you were married previously and are now on your second marriage? Was your first spouse your soul mate, or is this one the true soul mate? The soul-mate concept is a foolish idea that ultimately discourages people from getting married because they fear that their prospective match might not be their soul mate. For people already married, the soul-mate concept can lead to discontentment and uncertainty.

The soul-mate idea does exist in Judaism. It was probably born from a misunderstanding of the Jewish concept of soul mate. Among Yiddish-speaking Jews, the term for soul mate is *bashert* (באשערט). *Bashert* is a Yiddish word that means "destiny." A person's ideal spouse is called his or her "destined one." How is this different from the romantic soul-mate concept? You cannot seek your destined one, because you will not know if you are destined to be together until you marry each other. Once you are married, destiny has been fulfilled and proven your soul mate. In other words, your spouse is your destined one. The person you are married to is the person God has ordained for you. If he or she was not, you would not be married.

So don't waste time trying to find your soul mate. She/he does not exist and will not exist until you get married. Once you are married, you can be confident that your spouse is your true *bashert*.

Middot U'Mitzvot (Character and Deeds)

The Matchmaker

In Hebrew, a match between a man and a woman is called a *shidduch* (שידוך). Finding a *shidduch* for someone else is considered to be a great mitzvah (good deed). It is a responsibility that the whole Jewish community takes seriously—after all, the future of the nation depends upon successful matches.

Everyone remembers the matchmaker from the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*. A matchmaker is called a *shadkan* (שרקן). A person with a special talent for matchmaking is referred to as a *shadkan*, but it is not a field reserved exclusively for professionals. Everyone in a community is supposed to be keeping an eye out for potential matches. It is such a serious duty that even the great rabbis are known for keeping notes concerning potential mates for the purpose of making matches.

It may be true that opposites attract, but they don't stick together very well. A successful *shadkan* looks for mutual compatibility. He tries to match people on the basis of personality, disposition and character as well as watching for similar family backgrounds, values, social and economic standing. It's not an easy job, but it's an important one. The responsibility of making matches is so important and so difficult that the rabbis claimed that God Himself has been occupied with the matter ever since creation.

In the small and splintered world of Messianic Judaism, every person needs to contribute to the effort of matchmaking.