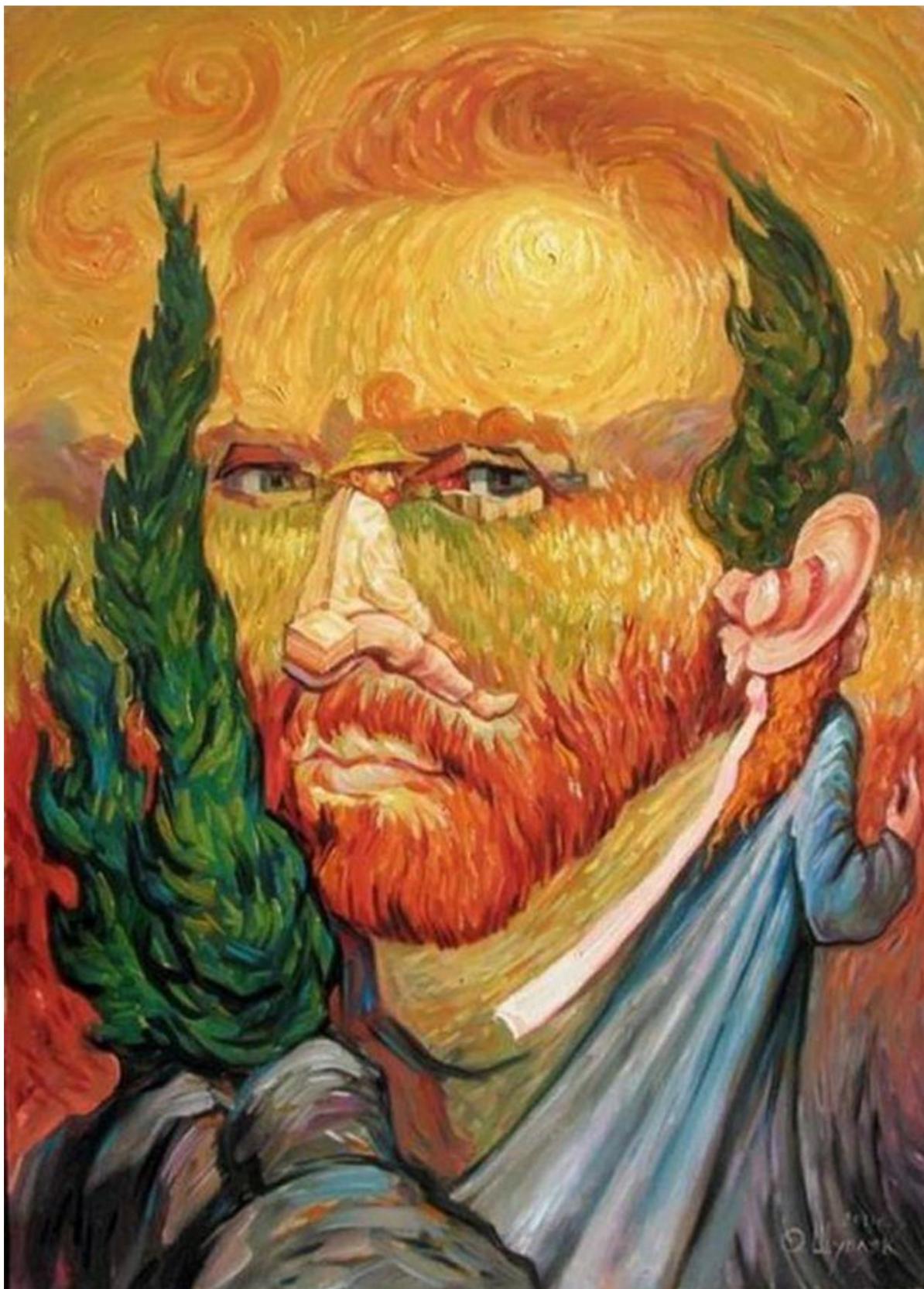


YISMACH GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED

Distortions And Illusions In Shidduchim



Biases & Distortions in Shidduchim

Vanity of vanities – all is vanity! We all are fairly confident in our perceptions, judgements and memories. Judaism, in sharp contrast, deems them as flawed. Throughout the Torah we see numerous examples of biases & distortions that affect halachic rulings. For example: the accuracy of the memory when witnessing events, a Soneh, or Ohev are not believable witnesses. We tend to believe that “seeing is believing” that what we see is what others see. Yet if two witnesses testify in Bes Din the exact same testimony of what they saw and heard, this testimony is NOT believed. All perceptions and memories are flawed. These biases and distortions affect the way

- shidduch resume is (mis)interpreted,
- feedback from references is (mis)interpreted,
- pictures give false impressions,
- first impressions from the initial meeting is (mis)interpreted,
- relationships do not get off the ground, and
- relationships do not get to engagement.

It is important to be aware of these many biases and distortions in order not to fall prey to them.

Why Shidduch Profiles and Shidduch Resumes are (Mis)Interpreted

Shidduch resumes sometimes simply list schools, family members and references. Whenever the shidduch resume has a section "About Me" and "Looking For", descriptions of their personality, supposedly tailored specifically for them, are in fact vague and general enough to apply to a wide range of people. This is called the **Forer effect** (also called the **Barnum effect**). In 1948, psychologist Bertram R. Forer gave a personality test to his students. He told his students they were each receiving a unique personality analysis that was based on the test's results and to rate their analysis on how well it applied to themselves. In reality, each received the same sketch, consisting of the following items

1. You have a great need for other people to like and admire you.
2. You have a tendency to be critical of yourself.
3. You have a great deal of unused capacity which you have not turned to your advantage.
4. While you have some personality weaknesses, you are generally able to compensate for them.
5. Disciplined and self-controlled outside, you tend to be worrisome and insecure inside.
6. At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing.
7. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety and become dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations.

8. You pride yourself as an independent thinker and do not accept others' statements without satisfactory proof.
9. You have found it unwise to be too frank in revealing yourself to others.
10. At times you are extroverted, affable, sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary, reserved.
11. Some of your aspirations tend to be pretty unrealistic.
12. Security is one of your major goals in life.

On average, the students rated its accuracy as 4.26 on a scale of 0 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). Only after the ratings were turned in was it revealed that each student had received identical copies assembled by Forer from a newsstand astrology book. The quote contains several statements that are vague and general enough to apply to a wide range of people.

In another study examining the Forer effect, students took a personality assessment and researchers evaluated their responses. The researchers wrote accurate evaluations of the students' personalities but gave the students both the accurate assessment and a fake assessment using vague generalities. Students were then asked to choose which personality assessment they believed was their own, actual assessment. More than half of the students (59%) chose the fake assessment as opposed to the real one.

The effect is so consistent because the statements are so vague. People can read their own meaning into the statements they receive, and thus the statement becomes "personal" to them. The most effective statements contain statements based around the phrase: "at times." Such as: "At times you feel very sure of yourself, while at other times you are not as confident." This phrase can apply to almost anybody, and thus each person can read their own meaning into it.

It is very common for people to write on their shidduch resumes something to the effect of: I am looking for someone "serious but fun". By including the contrast of the polarized ends, they include everyone on the spectrum which is interpreted subjectively by the individual reading it as relevant to them. This is called the **Rainbow ruse**. It works because personality traits are not quantifiable, and because nearly everybody has experienced both sides of an emotion at some time in their lives.

Statements of this type might include:

- "Most of the time you are positive and cheerful, but there has been a time in the past when you were very upset."
- "You are a very kind and considerate person, but when somebody does something to break your trust, you feel deep-seated anger."
- "I would say that you are mostly shy and quiet, but when the mood strikes you, you can easily become the center of attention."

It is not only that the personality descriptions are vague and generic, and not only when the whole spectrum is covered, but also social desirability causes distortions in personality descriptions. **Self-serving bias** is found when participants were given a list of generic traits and asked to rate how much they felt these traits applied to them. The majority agreed with positive traits about themselves and disagreed with negative ones.

Self-serving bias can cancel the Forer effect if the generic description is perceived as negative but attenuates the effect if the perceived description is positive. For example, when the reader of the shidduch resume comes to the section of “What I am looking for”, when it comes to one word that is “NOT” what the reader is looking for, the Forer effect is canceled, but if it generically fits, it makes the Forer effect stronger so that generic descriptions are perceived as a “perfect” fit.

Because the self-serving bias distorts cognitive or perceptual processes to maintain and enhance self-esteem, it perpetuates illusions and error. People in shidduchim present to both the shadchanim and those that they are suggested to, a distorted description. Either the writing “about me” and “what I am looking for” is so generic to that it applies to most anyone (Forer Effect) or gives an exaggerated one sided “socially desirable” persona (self-serving bias). As the bias is so strongly ingrained, we are taught to judge people favorably- not just to hypothesize the justification of their actions, but also not see them in a different light from rumors about them.

Example of Shidduch Resume Subject to Distortions:

About Chaya: *Chaya is pretty, intelligent, sensitive to other’s needs, kind, Tzenuah, chesed oriented, fun, and always striving to do the right thing. She can be outgoing- not quiet but also not loud. Chaya likes to be open minded and think out of the box. She is close to her friends and family and tries to always see the best in everyone.*

Looking for: *Chaya wants to marry someone with Yirei Shamayim, and good midos, someone who always strives to grow. She would like to support someone in learning for as long as she is financially able to.*

In this shidduch resume, note the self-serving bias (lack of negative qualities) and the Barnum statements. Note also your initial impression even though an age or height or background was not stated. How ‘open minded’ do you think she is? Note the rainbow ruse - How outgoing is she really? Trying to over read into this resume is futile and only reinforces your own biases. Because of these biases, these shidduch resumes lead to a lower rate of rejection when decisions are based on the resume alone. Specific and defined shidduch resumes are rejected all too often for being perceived as rigid and inflexible. When reviewing a resume, don’t jump to conclusions.

Reports from References are (Mis)Interpreted

Not only are “shidduch resumes” misleading, reports from references can be giving a wrong picture. Yismach clients were asked whether the references provided accurate information and over 43% said no. Providing references and calling

references and others before a date is a relatively new development historically. There is good reason to believe that this is counter-productive.

The way that a reference describes the one in shidduchim has disproportionate impact on the decision of whether there will be a first date. Specifically, information that is vivid, concrete, and personal has a greater impact on our thinking than pallid, abstract information. This is called **The Vividness Criterion**. Events that people experience personally are more memorable than those they only read about. Concrete words are easier to remember than abstract words, and words of all types are easier to recall than numbers. In short, information having these qualities is more likely to attract and hold our attention. It is more likely to be stored and remembered than abstract reasoning or statistical summaries, and therefore can be expected to have a greater immediate effect as well as a continuing impact on our thinking in the future. Personal anecdotes, actual accounts of people's responsiveness or indifference to information sources, and controlled experiments can all be cited ad infinitum "to illustrate the proposition that data summaries, despite their logically compelling implications, have less impact than does inferior but more vivid proof." It seems likely that shadchanim and those in shidduchim assign excessive weight to anecdotal information. Other facets which plays havoc with the way you judge others is:

Absence of Proof: Rav Yisrael Gans, Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah delineates the parameters of what a reference can say, stresses the importance of the reference to report what they personally know. In deciding shidduch appropriateness, it is probably more difficult to recognize that important information is absent and to incorporate this fact into judgments on the shidduch. As an antidote for this problem, those in shidduchim should identify explicitly those relevant variables on which information is lacking, consider alternative hypotheses concerning the status of these variables, and then modify their judgment and especially confidence in their judgment accordingly. They should also consider whether the absence of information is normal or is itself an indicator of unusual activity or inactivity. In other words, it is not only what the reference does report, but what the references do not report that is important to consider. However, the absence of proof is not proof of the absence.

Coping with Proof of Uncertain Accuracy: There are many reasons why information often is less than perfectly accurate: misunderstanding, misperception, or having only part of the story; bias on the part of the ultimate source; distortion in the reporting chain from sub source through source; or misunderstanding and misperception. Further, much of the proof the references bring to bear is retrieved from memory but references often cannot remember even the source of information they have in memory let alone the degree of certainty they attributed to the accuracy of that information when it was first received.

The human mind has difficulty coping with complicated probabilistic relationships, so people tend to employ simple rules of thumb that reduce the burden of processing such information. This is called a "best guess" strategy. Such a strategy simplifies the integration of probabilistic information, but at the expense of

ignoring some of the uncertainty. If references have information about which they are 70- or 80-percent certain but treat this information as though it were 100-percent certain, judgments based on that information will be overconfident.

A more sophisticated strategy is to make a judgment based on an assumption that the available proof is perfectly accurate and reliable, then reduce the confidence in this judgment by a factor determined by the assessed validity of the information. For example, available proof may indicate that an event probably (75 percent) will occur, but the shadchan cannot be certain that the proof on which this judgment is based is wholly accurate or reliable. Therefore, the one in shidduchim reduces the assessed probability of the event (say, down to 60 percent) to consider the uncertainty concerning the proof. This is an improvement over the best-guess strategy but generally still results in judgments that are overconfident when compared with the mathematical formula for calculating probabilities. The reference limiting his reporting only what was personally witnessed are the only facts that should be relayed and those in shidduchim should discount all reports that are not personal knowledge.

Persistence of Impressions Based on Discredited Proof: References that relay false information damage not only the chance that an otherwise perfect fit will not get to meet each other but can destroy the relationship being built because the false information has persistent effect even after the false information has been discredited. Impressions tend to persist even after the proof that created those impressions has been fully discredited. A speculative explanation is based on the strong tendency to seek causal explanations. When proof is first received, people postulate a set of causal connections that explains this proof. The stronger the perceived causal linkage, the stronger the impression created by the proof. Colloquially, one might say that once information rings a bell, the bell cannot be unring. The ambiguity of most real-world situations contributes to the operation of this perseverance phenomenon.

So you cannot blindly trust what you read, nor trust what you hear, and you cannot even trust what you see.

Pictures are Misleading

First impressions: Although most are certain that they can tell personality traits from facial features, the master`s thesis of Prof. Shmuel Neumann shows the flaws in this almost universal belief. In his study, he took pictures of students in a college who shared a residence for 3 years, then seniors in college. The students rated each other on 20 personality traits. He then showed these pictures to groups of other students who attended a different university which was 40 miles away and each student rated the person in each picture on the same 20 personality traits.

What he then did was take these pictures to an employee of the police department who is hired to draw composite sketches and using his criteria broke down the faces of those people in the pictures and each feature was rated by this expert.

What he hoped to find was empirical validation of the basis of first impressions. He wanted to know how much agreement there was by people who knew them well by living together for 3 years and know how much agreement there was by people rating others by their picture alone. (Reliability) He wanted to see how much agreement there was on ratings of people they know well, and ratings based on picture alone – or how valid was first impressions. He then wanted to find how these first impressions are deduced from facial features.

What he found in his thesis (later published in professional journals), was that there were very high reliability quotients in both groups, meaning that there was a great deal of agreement on all 20 personality traits of each person rated. To oversimplify, 9 out of 10 students who rated the person by picture alone agreed and 9 out of 10 of the students who lived together for 3 years agreed. However, there was wide discrepancies in ratings of each trait between the two groups.

First impressions are reliable but not valid: What this means is that your first impressions of someone and another person's first impressions of that same person will be highly similar. And if you both got to know this person over a long time, you both also would agree. And in retrospect if you looked at your first impressions, you both would agree that they were false.

If by looking at a picture there was such high agreement, Neumann tried to discover what facial features were associated with the personality perceptions. Running every factor analysis statistic known at the time (1970s) there were no connections between facial features – individually or in combination with other features which was at all connected to rating of any one of the personality traits rated on the picture.

Corroborating this thesis published as a journal article over 40 years ago, Alexander Todorov, a professor at Princeton just published a book in 2017, *Face Value*, which reviews his research and the work of others which consistently shows that first impressions based on pictures of faces are irresistible and compelling but usually wrong. In shidduchim, it is a grave mistake to look at a picture and decide whether you want to meet based on the picture alone.

Another common fallacy is that you need to see **pictures to see if you are attracted**. To dispel this point, in a study published in Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, what Prof. Neumann did is give male college students 8 x 10 photographs of females' faces and the students rank ordered them in terms of physical attractiveness. Then the student was hooked up to EKG and GSR monitors and was told that he would be shown slides of pictures and to just sit back in the comfortable reclining armchair. While the photos were shown they could hear what sounded like an EKG monitor beeping their heart rate. The heart rate however was false feedback so that with some pictures the heart rate accelerated and others no change.

They were then shown photographs of the girls faces mixed in with other photos and asked to separate those they recognized seeing before. They then were asked to rank order those same pictures which they originally rank ordered.

The order of pictures changed. Instead of being the same as the original rank ordering, they rank ordered them based on the false feedback. So that their physical attractiveness changed.

The point is that it is not just personality perception from faces that is not valid but also physical attractiveness can be modified. Those who divorced often report that while there was attraction initially, there was repulsion eventually.

Shadchan Distortions

There are many types of distortion that the shadchan can inadvertently induce. The way that someone in shidduchim sees the one suggested is influenced by the way the shadchan sees them. In psychology, this is called the observer-expectancy effect, a form of reactivity in which a researcher's cognitive bias causes them to unconsciously influence the participants of an experiment. Other prominent examples include facilitated communication and dowsing. A Shadchan must interview a person from an unbiased position, rather than show the client their own opinions and influence what they will say they are looking for or their description of themselves. A client who expects the shadchan to hold certain opinions and values will distort their own opinions and values to match those of the shadchan.

Distinction Bias from Suggesting Multiple Offers

Suggesting multiple suggestions at a time might seem to “level the odds” of success, but counter intuitively, this is not true. It reduces the chance of success because of **Distinction bias**, a concept of decision theory, which is the tendency to view two options as more distinctive when evaluating them simultaneously than when evaluating them separately. Research shows that evaluation mode affects the evaluation of options, such that options presented simultaneously are evaluated differently from the same options presented separately. In general terms the more alternatives, the less likely any one will be chosen, Barry Schwartz summarized his research in The Paradox of Choice.

Bottom line, less is more. The minhag of giving only one suggestion at a time should be adhered to. When starting to date, and a shadchan calls, they should be told that there is currently someone in the picture. That is specifically why Yismach set up the “available-unavailable” lever right under the client's picture so that shadchanim do not sabotage the current date. Suggesting someone while they have other offers on the table may lead people to reject a shadchan's offer as they are compared to others suggested.

False Impressions from the Date

It is also self-defeating to trust first impressions from the first date. There are numerous biases and distortions that also distort their reactions to the other in an initial meeting.

When they come back from the date, if they first call the shadchan as they are returning from the date, the memory is fresh and details more accurate. However, if they first discuss it with their mother, then father, then Rav, then 2 or 3 best friends, and then a day later call the shadchan, their reports of the date will be distorted by either Sharpening (retroactively adding vivid details in the retelling of

the date) or Leveling (excluding and toning down parts of the memory of the date and filling in memory gaps of the date). **Leveling** and **sharpening** are two contrasting automatic functions within our memory. Sharpening is the tendency to retroactively add vivid details in the retelling of self-experienced - and retold stories. Leveling is our tendency to exclude and tone down parts of stories in memory and to fill in memory gaps. There are other ways that your memory of the one you just dated is impaired, including but not limited to:

Confirmation bias, also called **myside bias**, is the tendency to search for, interpret, or remember information in a way that confirms one's beliefs or hypotheses. People display this bias when they gather or recall information selectively, or when they interpret it in a biased way. The effect is stronger for emotionally charged issues and for deeply entrenched beliefs. Any search for evidence in favor of a hypothesis is likely to succeed. So – in theory – when first meeting someone – if there are preconceptions, then the person is evaluated in accordance with the preconception with a tendency to confirm the preconception. Some research shows that dating someone you know nothing about is likely to be more successful than dating someone who you were given detail before the date.

Peak-end rule: A shadchan suggests two people that agree to go out. The first date didn't go well. The shadchan pushes for a second date. This time for the second date they both report back that it was great. However, on the third date, they decide to end it. Confused, the shadchan wonders: what happened? Similarly, a couple goes out for several dates, and it seems that it is going very well. All the sudden, they both report after another date that it was terrible and break off the shidduch. What happened?

The peak-end rule is a theory that describes how humans hedonically evaluate past experiences. This heuristic process leads people to judge an experience by its most intense point and its end, as opposed to the total sum or average of every moment of the experience. It occurs regardless of whether a 'peak' is pleasant or unpleasant, and regardless of the duration of the experience. When people date, they tend to rehearse and remember that single moment of disagreement when the rest of the date went well, or alternatively, an intensely fun or funny moment, even though the rest of the time it was not. They will then relay to the shadchan whether the date was pleasant or not.

Choice-supportive bias: In cognitive science, choice-supportive bias is the tendency to retroactively ascribe positive attributes to an option one has selected. It is a cognitive bias. For example, if a person buys a computer from Apple instead of a computer (PC) running Windows, he is likely to ignore or downplay the faults of Apple computers while amplifying those of Windows computers. Conversely, he is also likely to notice and amplify advantages of Apple computers and not notice or de-emphasize those of Windows computers. A decision to meet someone or to continue dating is not rational but rather after the decision is made, then it is rationalized.

Biased memory: Another flaw that plays havoc with shidduchim during the dating process is our erroneous belief that our memory of the date is infallible. In general, even if people gather and interpret evidence in a neutral manner, they may still remember it selectively to reinforce their expectations. This effect is called "selective recall", "confirmatory memory" or "access-biased memory".

The "Seven Sins" Of Memory: Although we tend to think of our memories as retaining a perfect record of our experiences, human memory distorts in these seven ways, documented by Daniel Schacter:

1. **Transience:** Memories fade over time.
2. **Absent-mindedness:** Lapses of attention cause us to forget temporarily.
3. **Blocking:** When conflicting demands are placed on our memory, they may interfere with each other and block recall. The word may make it to the tip of your tongue but no further.
4. **Misattribution:** Memories are retrieved, but they are associated with the wrong time, place, or person.
5. **Suggestibility:** Memory is distorted to agree with a suggested result. See "suggestive context" above.
6. **Bias:** Memory is distorted by our own attitudes, beliefs, emotions, point-of-view, or experiences.
7. **Persistence:** Sometimes unwanted memories cannot be put out of mind.

Persistence of discredited beliefs even after initial dates: A common finding is that at least some of the initial belief persists even after it is discredited. Confirmation biases can be used to explain why some beliefs persist when the initial evidence for them is removed. In shidduchim people never recover from false negative reputations. A rumor about a shidduch is proven to be false, yet the negativity remains. Conversely, a shadchan(it) not involved in the shidduch says "I don't see it" or friends or teachers question the potential match in terms of intelligence, religiousness, "openness" the negative effect remains even after they meet the person and are certain that the others falsely labeled them, the negative belief persists. Conversely, someone may consistently select a type which is bad for them because of persistence of discredited belief of what others told them is what they should be looking for.

Factors That Underline Attraction

Familiarity: Research has demonstrated that familiarity typically promotes attraction, to the point where even mere exposure to a person increases liking. However, at times, mere exposure works in the opposite direction when that additional exposure reveals negative characteristics of the object or person in question—a conclusion supported by another recent study of online dating. In this research, Michael Norton and colleagues (2007) gave a survey to participants both before and after going on a date. Pre-date, all that participants knew about their partner was what they had read on a Web site profile, so their ratings of how much knowledge they had about their partner increased post-date. But their ratings of how much they liked their partner decreased after the date, as did perceptions of how similar they were. Why? Because the more familiar participants became with their partner during the date, the more they realized that their initial impression (based on an ambiguous dating Web site profile) was not that accurate. As they obtained additional information during the date itself, they came to appreciate all the ways in which they were dissimilar to this person, which in turn decreased average liking ratings.

Some evidence indicates that matching is driven more by rejecting dissimilar others than by liking similar others. In fact, as people get to know each other and find out about dissimilarities, liking goes down. Most people believe that the more they know about someone, the more they like that person—but, they tend to like someone less as they learn more. They start off assuming the other person will be similar. But once they find some dissimilarities, these seem to multiply, so that new evidence confirms dissimilarity and reduces liking. In an online dating study, researchers found, sure enough, that after the date was over people knew more about the dating partner but liked him or her less than previously.

Proximity: One powerful predictor of whether any two people are friends is sheer proximity. Proximity can also breed hostility; most assaults and murders involve people living close together. But much more often, proximity prompts liking. As an illustration, in one study students were randomly assigned to seats at their first-class meeting and then each made a brief self-introduction to the whole class. One year after this one-time seating assignment, students reported greater friendship with those who just happened, during that first class gathering, to be seated next to or near them. Though it may seem trivial, sociologists long ago found that most people marry someone who lives in the same neighborhood, or works at the same company or job, or sits in the same class, or visits the same favorite place. In a Pew survey (2006) of people married or in long-term relationships, 38 percent met at work or at school, and some of the rest met when their paths crossed in their neighborhood, church, or gym or while growing up. With repeated exposure to and interaction with someone, our infatuation may fix on almost anyone who has roughly similar characteristics and who reciprocates our affection.

Anticipation of Interaction: Proximity enables people to discover commonalities and exchange rewards. But merely anticipating interaction also boosts liking. How good that we are biased to like those we often see, for our lives are filled with relationships with people whom we may not have chosen but with

whom we need to have continuing interactions—roommates, siblings, grandparents, teachers, classmates, co-workers. Liking such people is surely conducive to better relationships and to happier, more productive living. In shidduchim, the shadchan sets up the date and gets feedback right after the date so that they know that there will be another. This adds to the likelihood of liking each other.

Variables Affecting Relationship Enhancement

Getting past the first date the process of getting to know each other begins, getting past first impressions. This is the hard part. From here to the chuppah is an arduous journey full of obstacles and pitfalls.

One couple broke up after 8 dates because on the second date, the boy assertively asked the waiter for the check as he was taking her someplace else that evening. The girl's advisor advised her to end it because if he was mean to the waiter, he will be mean to the girl. This is an example of a cognitive distortion, **Overgeneralization**: The common example of the more general fallacy of basing a conclusion on unrepresentative evidence, it is incorrect to arrive at a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence. Consider a broad range of representative evidence before drawing a conclusion. Consider systematic evidence and dismiss anecdotal evidence. Each sample can be accurately interpreted only when all the samples are integrated to create a representative whole. From the first date on, there will be expectations of each other which will invariably be overgeneralizations. Keep an open mind and be mindful of this distortion.

A similar obstacle in building relationships is the failure to get to know the individual, but rather view him in the context of **Stereotypes**: Human memory is organized into schema which are clusters of knowledge or a general conceptual framework that provides expectations about events, objects, people, and situations in life. This attribute of memory leads us to rely on stereotypes. These are simplified, and standardized conceptions or images held in common by members of a group. While stereotypes are an essential feature of human memory, they can cause problems when the attributes associated with the group are incorrectly extended to an individual. Be clear-sighted. Of course, there will be cultural norms from various backgrounds, such as yekkie, Hungarian, Russian, or specific Middle East countries. But consider the individual.

Another couple broke up after many dates, because on an all-day date where he took her in the Golan Heights, he davened mincha without a minyan and the girl insisted that her father whenever they went on family trips always made sure that a mincha minyan would be part of the itinerary. The boy was a standard chareidi boy who learned in top yeshivas and who otherwise davens with a minyan 3 times daily. This is an example of **Polarized Thinking (false choice, dichotomy, primal thinking, false dilemma, black and white thinking)**: This is the fallacy of thinking that things are either black or white, good or bad, all or nothing. This fallacy can lead to rigid and harmful rules based on primal thinking when it is efficient to compress complex information into simplistic categories for rapid

decision making during times of stress, conflict, or threat. Polarized thinking underlies irrational perfectionism. The reality often lies in the sizeable middle ground between these extreme poles. Recognize and reject the false dichotomy. False dichotomies are harmful because they distract us from the many alternatives that could provide creative solutions or help us constructively resolve conflict. False dichotomies confuse complements with opposites. Keep in mind that most dimensions in a relationship are a continuum and expect variability rather than irrationally end it.

A couple was on the verge of engagement. She found him refined, brilliant, warm and strong but on one date he left a soda can on a wall rather than finding a trash can. She lived on a crowded street with no parking and he asked her to come down. Although he was attentive, empathic, caring and loving, she ended it, a classic example of another cognitive distortion, **Pattern Discernment**: We may think we see a pattern that isn't there; the outcomes are simply the result of random events. Or we can think we recognize a pattern that is different from what we see. We may also fail to recognize a pattern that is present. Relationships work best for most where there is room for spontaneity and room for variability. For others, predictability is most important, so pattern recognition will be more important for them.

A couple broke up on the direction of her Rebbetzin because on one date, he did not pour the water for her from the bottle to her cup. She was **Catastrophizing**: You anticipate an unreasonable disaster based on a small problem. Every scrap of bad news turns into an inevitable tragedy. It is the error of using a personal, pervasive, and permanent explanatory style despite contrary evidence. This is another example of the more general fallacy of basing a conclusion on unrepresentative evidence. Consider a broader range of representative evidence before drawing a conclusion. Strike a realistic balance between optimistic and pessimistic views. Most important, when dates are not what you hoped, it is not catastrophic. There is an ebb and flow in building relationships and some dates will not be as euphoric as others.

Often it is not what you do but the other mistakenly thinking why you did it. **Attribution theory**: You conclude, incorrectly and without considering other alternatives or testing your assumptions, that you understand how another person is thinking and what their reasons and motives are for acting. This is an example of the fundamental attribution error where you incorrectly attribute an action or intent to an agent. One example of this is drawing a negative conclusion in the absence of supporting information. Focusing only on evidence that supports a negative position, while neglecting to consider alternative positive explanations is the fallacy of not considering representative evidence.

It is a fallacy to believe you can correctly know a person's intent for behaving as they do. Their actions may or may not be deliberate. The person may not even be aware of what they are doing. Their actions may or may not be directed at you. Their actions may have unintended consequences or may result from an accident or chance. We judge others based on behavior and we judge ourselves based on intent. It is difficult to determine cause when only effect can be observed. This error is so

common and so misleading it has been named the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE). In short, you can never be sure why someone does something, and often the “why” is more important than the “what”. Be aware of this, challenge your assumptions that the intent was negative and give the other the benefit of the doubt and keep up your capacity to forgive. Good relationships seem effortless, but they maintain mutual respect by positive thinking.

One girl after years of dating discovered that she is only attracted to arrogant jerks. She was surprisingly surprised to find that the arrogant jerk stayed an arrogant jerk throughout their relationship. **Fallacy of Change:** It is unrealistic to believe you can change other peoples` nature, personality, deeply ingrained habits, or strongly held beliefs. Be realistic about what you can change and what you cannot. Those who seek the “diamond in the rough” are doomed for disappointment. And be honest with yourself, the girl who finds nice guys repugnant, if she did succeed in her Pygmalion fantasy of transforming the arrogant jerk to a nice sensitive guy, she would no longer be attracted to him. Be careful what you wish for, you might get it.

One of the first things you learn early on in a marriage is that you can either be right or be married. Pugnaciously **Being Right (denial):** Dogmatically holding onto an opinion, belief, or defending an action can be a destructive result of stubborn pride. Denial is a failure to acknowledge evidence. Even if you believe you are right, decide if you would rather be right or be happy. Don` t waste time pursuing the fallacy of change described above. Examine your sense of justice and the assumptions you are making. Gather evidence to make an informed decision, but even if you are right, it may not be a battle worth fighting. Even worse is interpreting a difference of opinion as inherent defects in the moral character of the other.

No one is perfect and sometimes we find ourselves being judge, jury and executioner punishing the wrongness, an example of another distortion that plays havoc with building an open, honest, trusting relationship, **Just World Theory:** The mistaken belief that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. This is sometimes used as an excuse to blame the victim; "he got what he deserves." Approach a shidduch as an issue of fit rather than "good" or "bad".

Ok you are now going out twice a week and the relationship is enhanced by the **Mere Exposure Effect:** People prefer objects they have been previously exposed to, even if that exposure was so brief they do not recall it. Feelings apparently come first. Affect—our subjective feeling about something—precedes and strongly influences our cognitive judgments about what we like and don` t like. Quite often a statement such as: “I decided in favor of X” is no more than an after-the-fact justification—a confabulation—for the vague feeling that: “I liked X.” Most of the time information collected about alternatives serves us less for deciding than for justifying it afterward. Advertisers exploit this effect when they get you to prefer their product simply because you have seen it first or more often. This is within limits and at the other extreme, it is also true that those couple who went out longest are less likely to get married to each other and more likely to get divorced because of another cognitive fallacy, **Sunk Cost Fallacy:** Because sunk costs are already spent and cannot be recovered, it is irrational to consider the value of sunk costs

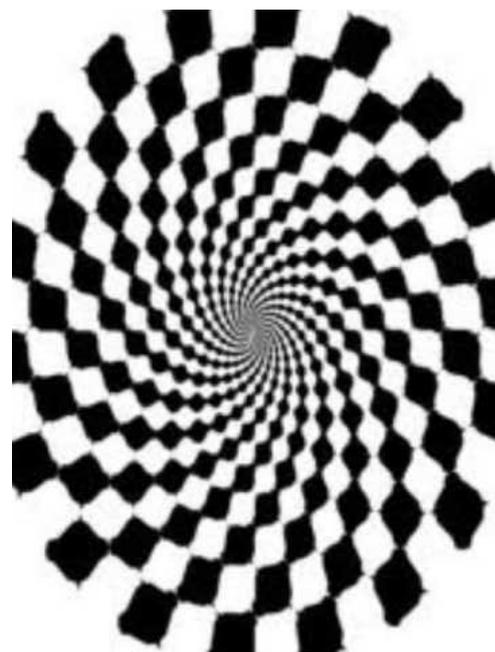
when considering alternative actions. Future actions cannot reverse past losses. Economics and business decision-making recognize sunk costs as the costs that have already been incurred and which can never be recovered to any significant degree. The fallacy of sunk costs is to consider sunk costs when deciding. Sound business decisions are based on a forward-looking view, ignoring sunk costs. Unfortunately, human beings continue to value a past investment of money, effort or some intangible quality (e.g., “credibility” or “face”) independent of the investment’s probability of paying future dividends. The irrelevance of sunk costs is a well-known principle of business and economics, but common behavior often ignores this fallacy of trying to undo the past. In dating, people falsely reason “I have too much invested to quit now” when it is rational to only look at the prospects of the activity. Just because you invested excessive effort does not justify continuing with someone you simply are not compatible with where there are irreconcilable differences. On the other hand, once you commit, then you do whatever must be done to sustain and enhance a relationship.

It is after you decide to stay or move on that you will later distort your thinking to justify what may have been a terrible decision. This mental distortion, colloquially known as “sour grapes” or “sweet lemon” is **Cognitive Dissonance**: Tension between thoughts and actions inconsistent with those thoughts. A tense and uncomfortable contradiction exists unless your actions support your thoughts and beliefs. To close the gap and relieve this tension humans often revise their thoughts to support their actions. People who bought the wrong car, lost money in the stock market, went on a disappointing vacation, or got a bad haircut spontaneously invent clever defenses for the actions they are now stuck with. What is remarkable is how strongly we believe these self-justifying stories when we make them up ourselves.

Rav Walkin said that a segula for successful shidduch is secrecy. Once it is made public, you are now the victim of social bullies. **Asch Effect**: People often change their opinions to agree with the majority, despite the presence of clear contrary evidence. Be careful of being deceived by the consensus of opinions of a shidduch. Deciding to move forward or end a relationship for the sake of conformity is a grave mistake.

So, what is the Bottom Line?

Seeing is Believing? Not Necessarily – see the illusion on the cover and this one. Seeing pictures in shidduchim is counter-productive. First impressions are compelling and usually false. Nor can physical attraction be gauged by pictures. Those who initially have a strong physical attraction will eventually, if the relationship is horrible, find each other physically repulsive. Beauty is skin deep: Ugly is to the bone.



Trust your intellect? Just like there are optical illusions, there are mental illusions and distortions – which are normal and more the rule than the exception. No matter how smart you are, your thinking is the result of your unique perceptions, judgments, experiences, and biases. Your brain distorts reality to increase your self-esteem through self-justification. You present a one-sided argument to yourself. Not only is your perceptions and thinking distorted but your memory is flawed. It is essential to bear in mind that these universal distortions and biases exist throughout the shidduch process and prevent suitable shidduchim from actualizing.

The enemy is unrealistic expectations. Invariably, the shidduch which is perfect on paper invariably is never perfect. Invariably when you meet, you are disappointed. The less you know “about” someone, the more likely you are to marry them. Knowing about them prevents you from knowing them.

Hashem is the ultimate shadchan – believe it. You cannot trust your perceptions, thinking and memory but you can trust Hashem. You may want what you want – and think you know what you want – but you get what you get and it is for the best not just for you but for those yet to be born children, each one unique to the combination of the man who gives the baby צורה – form, and the woman who is the חומר – the material that makes the baby from her body and sustains the baby after birth. Hashem first created man and woman as one and then separated them, in body and soul, so that the man can seek his lost other half. A man looks for a wife like he looks for something valuable to him that he lost. When he finds her, he recognizes her as his lost other half. When he finds her, he cleaves to her in body and soul and become one. Shulachan Aruch Even Ezer in hilchos pru urevu reiterates that a man without a wife is without happiness, ergo our name Yismach.

So just be yourself, relax and if it is a fit, then it will happen, and nothing can break it. If it is not a fit, nothing can make it. Falling in love is like falling asleep: you let yourself fall asleep, it just happens; but if you try to force yourself to sleep, you will not be able to fall asleep. For those of us who are far from perfect, that perfect fit may not feel perfect. Those imperfections in our souls may be the same imperfections in the other half of that soul. When joined, both halves are tasked with fixing their shared imperfections. Conversely, imperfections may disappear because that other half of your soul when joined to yours may make you whole. **It’s all about the relationship** – not “About Me” or “Looking for”. If you

connect – then the man who found his wife found good – and if you do not connect – it is worse than death. The Maharal says that the Torah is called אישה טובה - the good wife - and Gehenom is called – אישה רע - the bad wife. Why? Because the Torah connects you to Hashem and in Gehenom there is no connection to Hashem.

For some, it need not be the one and only, the bashert, as some do not have a bashert and for some it is decreed never to find them. When the bat kol announces who the bashert is, for some it is decreed that that they will easily find their bashert, while for others it will only be with great difficulty or never. And some don't have a bashert – called Acher. Hashem has mercy and permits him to marry someone else's bashert. This is detailed in ספר דרך ארץ – which you can [download](#) for free. One salient difference between marrying a bashert or another is that the relationship with a bashert will be effortless. הרב יונתן אבר שליטא, who was the Mashgiach in אור ישראל, today in יצחק היכל told his son at a Shabbos table, unequivocally that a baal midos can marry anyone. Even, with irreconcilable differences, it is a moral imperative to maintain shalom bais. A husband has to sacrifice his all – sell all his possessions including his clothing – even the shirt on his back, and beg for charity, and even if there is no food for Shabbos, he must buy Shabbos lights, because lighting Shabbos candles is for shalom bais and shalom bais is that important that he must sacrifice his all. The shchina comes down through the shalom bais of the couple and through their bonding. Hashem's presence in this world is only through the existence of Jews and if we fail to repopulate then there is no purpose to the world and it will be destroyed. Bringing Jewish souls to this world is the most fundamental mitzvah.

Real Love only begins after marriage. The secret of a good marriage is no secret: Keeping the laws בין אדם לחברו. Rav Sholom Zalman Auerbach זצוק"ל who at the eulogy of his wife proclaimed that there is no need to ask for forgiveness because they lived their lives according to the Shulchan Aruch. All your actions should be le'shem Shamayim, including but not limited to shidduch dating. By relaxed determination, rather than frantic desperation, you will find your way to the chuppah, the husband and wife becoming a whole person as put eloquently at the end of kohels.

יג סוף דבר, הפל נשמע: את-האלהים ירא ואת-מצותיו שמור, כי-זוה כל-האדם.

13 The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole man.

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