

Your Bride or Your Mother?

A mature young man who lived together with his elderly widowed mother was having a great deal of trouble finding a suitable match. The reason for his predicament was that before meeting a girl, he would stipulate that she must agree to allow his aged mother to live with them for the rest of her life. This condition proved to be the stumbling block to every prospective match.

The relatives of this man begged **Rabbi Shlomo-Zalman Auerbach** to convince him to place his mother in an old age home, since this would make it easier for him to find his intended. The *Rosh Yeshiva* thought otherwise. In his view, the young man was right! In a *shiduch* ('match'), priority must be given to good character traits,¹ and a girl who refuses to keep husband's mother in her home displays a lack of good-heartedness.

"What's more," the *Rosh Yeshiva* pointed out, "since the young man is trying to fulfill the *mitzvah* of honoring his mother, we may not force him to give up his demands.

"Furthermore, it will breed resentment and threaten future domestic peace if the wife was the one who caused the mother to be removed from the house."

A while later, Rabbi Auerbach met a relative of this fellow, who happily reported that the young man had found the right match and was engaged to a girl who had agreed to his condition. Upon hearing the good news, the *Rosh Yeshiva* asked to have the *chassan* (man engaged to be wed) come and see him.

The *chassan* was as thrilled and honored to meet personally with the world-renowned rabbi as he was unprepared for the surprise to come.

"I think you should make plans for placing your mother in an old age home," the *Rosh Yeshiva* said." "It will be difficult for a young couple to have an elderly mother living with them."

Noting the fellow's amazement, he continued, "You did the right thing in insisting that the girl must be willing to have your mother stay with you. But now that you found a *kallah* (bride-to-be) who agreed to this condition, and thereby proved that she has an excellent character, you should think about making things easier for her by placing your mother in an old age home."

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<sup>1</sup> When Eliezer was searching for a wife for Yitzhak Avinu, he said, "If I say to a girl, 'Tip over your jug and let me have a drink, and I will also water your camel,' she will be the one whom You have designated for Your servant Yitzhak."(Gen. 24:14) *Chessed* ('kindness') was the single quality Eliezer was looking for in a wife for Yitzhak. All other considerations were unimportant. This teaches us that when it comes to a *shiduch*, the most important consideration is the girl's quality of *chessed*. If a girl is kindhearted, we may be sure that she has all the other characteristics that will make her a good wife. [*In the original, this paragraph was placed as the introduction to the episode.*]

*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from “*Reb Shlomo Zalman*” by Y.M. Stern (CIS); translated by R. Avraham-Yaakov Finkel.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Shlomo-Zalman Auerbach** [23 Tamuz 5670 - 20 Adar, 5755 (July 1910 – March 1995 C.E.)] was born and spent his entire life in the ‘Shaarei Chesed’ neighborhood of Central Jerusalem. He was one of the most knowledgeable and important decisors of Jewish law in Israel in his generation. Religious Jews from across the spectrum of observance and, famously, from the secular academic, medical and scientific communities as well, flocked to his home for Torah perspective on all aspects of life. Local police estimated that at least 300,000 people attended his funeral.

*Connection:* The Weekly Reading contains the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20); ‘Honor your Father and Mother’ is the 5<sup>th</sup>.