

## A Dating Guide: 3 Ways to Transform Your Dating Experience



There are probably thousands of articles written about the dating experience in both the shidduch and non-shidduch worlds. Though there are many variances between them, one thing is certainly universal - dating is hard: it's hard to have patience, it's hard to weather rejection, and it's hard to not get discouraged when the process becomes longer than we anticipated.

The most empowering action we can take is to use dating as a tool for self-development. We can grow from every positive and negative dating experience we have, as each encounter offers a rich understanding of ourselves and our areas in which we can improve. Relationships are like mirrors that give us a chance to see ourselves through somebody else's eyes. Everything that happens on a date is teeming with information about how we are perceived as a potential husband or wife. The feedback we get from a potential life partner, from what they say and don't say, to the way they treat and look at us offers a wealth of information we can use on the road to getting married.

**HERE ARE THREE TOOLS THAT CAN EASE THE DATING PROCESS AND TRANSFORM IT INTO A REWARDING LIFE STAGE AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITY.**

### **1** Know Your Why

In his famous Ted Talk "How Great Leaders Inspire Action," Simon Sinek shares his groundbreaking theory called *Start with the Why* that explains why some businesses succeed while others fail. He discovered that companies who truly knew their Why, meaning they knew what they wanted to accomplish as a business, garnered a stronger and more loyal customer base than ones with better or fancier products. He explains that people don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it.

This concept can also apply to the dating world, and really any time we are embarking on a new chapter in our lives. The Why represents the reasons we want to do something, it symbolizes the motives and drives behind our actions, and it is important to know the Why before we set out to accomplish something. When it comes to dating, starting with the Why means we dig deep and ask ourselves *why* we want to get married to begin with.

This may seem like a funny question to ask ourselves but answering it can help give us the clarity we will need to make the right decisions in tough circumstances, prevent us from compromising on our true goals and values, and help us deal with the inevitable rejection that comes with the dating process.

It's important to note that it is possible for our Why to change throughout the dating process. When we decide to start dating, we think we know what we want, but it's perfectly normal to discover that we may find we want different things; it means we are learning from our experiences.

## **2** Set Your Efforts, Not Your Goals

Once we understand why we want to get married, we can start working towards the goal of getting married. This is a good time to remind ourselves about what is and what is not within our control. Demoralized singles frequently share with me how powerless they feel because they have not yet gotten the title change of husband or wife. This feeling of disappointment is completely understandable, stemming from our natural tendency to look at our goals in terms of results rather than efforts. However, there are more effective ways to structure our goals.

Take, for example, the goal of boosting energy levels. This goal is stated in terms of the results you would like to see; now compare that with the goal of getting eight hours of sleep a night, and drinking ten cups of water a day. Doesn't the second version sound much more attainable? That's because it is. Getting married, feeling high energy, receiving a promotion at work, and almost any other goal we set for ourselves will involve many factors that are outside our locus of control. We don't have the power to put the right dating prospects in our zip code, change our genetics, or make our professional competitors disappear. So, then what can we do? We can focus on our efforts.

We can take that voice inside our heads that says, "I need to be married by June next year" and replace it with "I want to meet 50 new people this year, whether they are potential dates, shadchanim, guests at a Shabbos meal, or people at events." We can set the goal of reading three books or seforim on self-improvement, daven or meditate, or take up new and interesting hobbies. The physical, emotional, social, and spiritual efforts we put forth, whether through prayer, therapy, networking, fitness, or socializing, when done consistently over time, will undoubtedly bring us the closest we can possibly get to our marriage goals; and at the very least, yield tremendous personal growth and satisfaction.

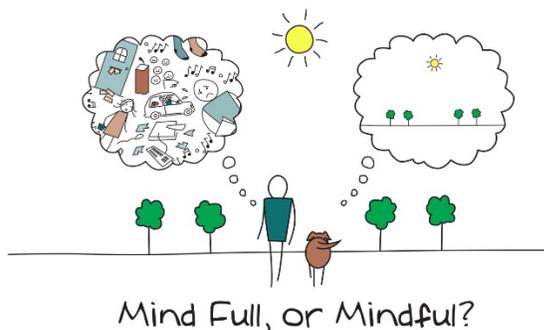
### 3 Mindfulness

With everything there is to consider, with so much on the line, and with so many other additional pressures that could surround our dating lives, it's no surprise that we might spend our dates contending with an endless stream of internal questions and concerns.

After all, whenever we think too deeply about an experience as we are experiencing it, it runs the risk of detracting from the experience itself, even a positive one. For example, imagine treating yourself to your favorite scoop of ice cream after a hard day at work, and as you taste the sweetness of your dessert, your mind starts thinking "I hope this ice cream takes the edge off the day I had and makes me feel pampered!"

It may sound silly, but our internal dialogue on dates can become just as distracting. The best thing that we can do in those moments is to stay in them and not allow our thoughts to pull us away.

There are many short exercises we can try which ground us in our present reality. One such exercise is to push off the distracting thoughts by telling ourselves we will get to those later. If we tell ourselves we cannot think about those thoughts at all, we will find our mind bringing us back there. Telling ourselves "not now but later" addresses the mind's concern to make sure we give attention to those thoughts at some point. The next step is to reorient ourselves to what is being said in the conversation with our date. Like adjusting the lens on a camera, our minds can only focus on one dimension at a time, so staying grounded and keeping ourselves attentive to our conversation partner's joke or story prevents us from wandering off into thoughts *about it*. By engaging in conversation and asking concrete questions, we take the focus off ourselves and our internal experience and can be more grounded in our dating experience.



It's hard to learn much from our dating process, or even enjoy it for that matter, if we aren't fully present for any of it. This is even true of the dates that we don't think are right for us. We say every day *hameichin mitzadei gaver*, G-d gives us the experiences we need for our personal growth. Every person we meet in our lives, every experience we have, is just as meant to be as the person we marry. We can relax and simply enjoy a conversation with another human being

for a couple of hours rather than putting undue pressure on ourselves and the other person. Even if the date is quirky or different or “so not for us,” there is something to learn from our time with everyone. This mentality doesn’t just make dating more enjoyable, it also relieves some loneliness as it helps us appreciate and feel more connected to others.