

THE MATCHMAKER PARADISE REGAINED

Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures. Samuel Johnson

A long time ago, a noted English man of letters, Samuel Johnson, asserted that a second marriage represents the “triumph of hope over experience.” I have always taken that to mean “marriage is the triumph of folly over reason.” My profession seeks to overcome this deficiency by introducing reason into the process leading to wedlock. I am a “Shadkhan”, which is the Yiddish term for “Matchmaker”. As far as I know, just about all my ancestors of which I am aware were also Shadkhans.

There was a time when common sense prevailed in matters of this sort. Marriages were arranged rationally for economic, political, social and straightforward biological reasons. Not only the compatibility of the couple but also the suitability of the families were taken into consideration. The bride and groom had very little say. It was just as well, since romantic folly based upon nothing more than sexual attraction would have prevailed. Romantic idealism arising from a deceptive political philosophy labeled liberal democracy would have taken over, as it did during those foolish times ranging from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. My profession nearly disappeared. Its unlikely savior was the appearance on the scene of a fantastic transformative technology. The digital computer changed everything. I will elaborate shortly.

Actually, if you think about it, matchmaking is the oldest profession in which humanity was involved. What do you think God’s role was in the Garden of Eden? By the contemporary standards of our profession, our Lord did not do too well. The couple that bonded in that idyllic place was really not well suited to each other. He was a meek and submissive twerp. She turned out to be a pushy and spoiled vamp – the first example of the JAP (Jewish American Princess) – responsible for starting humanity down a very slippery slope. Perhaps her major accomplishment was mothering the human race’s first murderer who committed the double sin of fratricide. So much for fraternal affection! It is probable that apologists and believers in the divinity of Genesis are responsible for the ‘pop’ school of psychology known as “blame the victim”.

Although the Bible does not describe in detail how marriages were arranged, Genesis, chapter 24:1-67 tells how Abraham’s servant chose a wife, Rebekah, for Isaac. The story implies that the servant had the authority to use his discretion in making the choice and thus, this servant was the first known Shadkhan. See how far back our profession goes.

Our profession is also a most venerable one. Famous Rabbis earned their livelihoods from it. A 17th century writer cautioned matchmakers, “When you are arranging a marriage between two parties, never exaggerate, and always tell the truth.” He added that “in earlier times none but scholars were *Shadkhanim*.¹ Rabbis and scholars were the natural go-betweens in the Middle Ages when fathers were anxious to obtain learned and pious sons-in-law. Besides, they had to eat, and this was a profession that was well rewarded when its practitioners were successful. In time, the traditional integrity of my profession declined. The peculiar persuasiveness and social talents required stimulated the development of a unique type of personality. A classic type in Jewish folklore and

¹ Shadkhanim is simply the plural of Shadkhan.

fiction, the Shadkhan is portrayed in all gay plumage of his or her loquaciousness. Prime examples in the 20th century were the Broadway musical, "Hello Dolly", and the cinematic productions, "Crossing Delancy" and "Fiddler On The Roof". The Shadkhan's genius for euphemistically glossing over the physical and character defects of clients is legend.²

Enough said about the history of my profession. It is only because I am so enamored with my vocation and its accomplishments that I feel obliged to make brief mention of it. Its importance over the last five hundred years cannot be over-emphasized. Again I digress. Let me get on with my tale.

It commenced in the first half of the twenty-first century, about five hundred years ago. A seemingly innocent conversation between an ancestor of mine, Morris the Shadkhan, and his spouse Rachel turned out to be akin to the beating of a butterfly's wings in Manila causing a typhoon in Tokyo as per "Chaos Theory". They were having their usual one-way heated discussion about how little she was appreciated. Thinking about them has often led me to wonder about who cuts a barber's hair, or who does a lawyer choose for a lawyer or a doctor for a doctor. Who arranges a matchmaker's union? How successful are they when the matchmaker does his own selecting? These questions are only relevant from a historical point of view. As you will see, today they are totally academic. Again I stray.

"What did I ever see in you", Rachel asked for the umpteenth time. "You must have drugged me with some insidious narcotic to convince me to marry you," she continued.

Now Morris had heard these complaints many times and had learnt to keep his counsel by not responding. Somehow, this moment may have been the one that broke the proverbial camel's back and he retorted rashly.

"Indeed, why did you marry me? You know very well that your accusation about drugging you is ludicrous. You must have had a reason for marrying me."

Rachel was nonplused and taken aback. This was not Morris's usual reaction. She had become accustomed to either a conciliatory or a silent response from him. Contritely, she replied somewhat rhetorically.

"I married you because I believed that you would satisfy my deep seated needs, as a provider, lover, friend, nurturer, etc. It is true that you have been a good provider but as for the rest, that is, those needs that I can list and others I sense, you have been a total failure."

Morris was a very astute individual. While Rachel's reply had caught him off guard, he sensed there was more there than her usual shallow diatribe. He decided to give it serious thought. To do that he needed peace and quiet. He resolved to get rid of Rachel. How he accomplished that feat remains a mystery to this day. Then he was able to concentrate. It paid off. As you will see, it changed the history of the world.

At that time, my profession was enjoying a marginal renaissance. One reason was the very high divorce rate. Sascha Guitry, a well known humorist of that time who had been

² All mention of pre 20th century history is taken from the Encyclopedia Judaica.

married five times and had had countless affairs, when asked whether he believed in marriage, responded with his usual acerbic wit. "But, certainly! It is the only way to get a divorce." In any case, a measure of disillusionment with the prevalent and capricious manner of mating had set in and people were beginning to seek other means of bonding.

Despite the fact that my profession's methodology had hardly changed over time, many sought its assistance. Now, a matchmaker's success was often related to the number of eligible contacts he or she had and to the ability to keep in touch with them. This feature was greatly enhanced by the computer of the time, very primitive by current standards. Further, the matching that took place was related to what the client desired. In other words, most clients would ask their matchmakers to provide someone endowed with what they viewed as specific desirable traits. The matchmakers would then go to their databases and try to find someone most closely matching their clients' wishes. Of course, finding an exact match was impossible. So they spent a good deal of time trying to sell the person or persons their computers had come up with. If you can believe it, their success rate, due mostly to the computer and their sales pitch, enhanced the profession's standing to a new high. The trouble was that the number of Shadkhans grew. However, they used mostly the same methodology, resulting in fierce competition.

Morris was very well aware of all this. His experience had also taught him that the choice of many for a mate was based upon some deep-seated neurotic traits. He categorized marriages into four groups. He recognized the danger of pigeonholing people into neat little boxes but decided that these parcels were not absolute. All they did was indicate a propensity. The first two cases were similar, in that in one the female marries a father figure and in the other the male marries a mother figure. These are not successful situations but can last if the parties involved accept their respective roles. The third case occurs when a female seeking a father figure marries a male seeking a mother figure. This is a total disaster and usually ends in a quick divorce or some unmentionable form of mayhem. Only when both are sado-masochistic can such a situation last. In the final case, they are able to truly satisfy each other's needs, by him protecting her like a father when required and by her nurturing him like a mother when he wants it, for the two to behave like immature adolescents when they wish and for them to feel that they can be totally honest with each other at all times without any fear of recrimination. Morris reflected sadly that this last category was indeed rare and as far as he was concerned, existed only in his mind.

While contemplating what Rachel had said and his view of the ideal marriage, he was struck by a marital principle that had never occurred to him before and to his knowledge not to anyone else. Of course, this tenet was not really original with Morris. However, no one else had ever thought about how to translate this precept into something tangible. Simply put, this marital principle stated, 'a successful marriage is based on the satisfaction of need, not of desire, except when they coincide.'

Following from this, Morris realized that his profession had been going about its business in a rather unrealistic fashion. He decided then that all his future clients would surreptitiously undergo a battery of tests conducted by a panel of psychologists whose specialty was family dysfunction. They would attempt to determine the clients' needs and how and who could best satisfy them. This information would be kept quite confidential in a computer database that only Morris could access.

Much to his surprise, Morris's business took off. No one could match his success rate. All efforts to ascertain the secret of his mastery failed. He kept his methods a closely guarded secret. Not even the psychologists knew what he was about. However, there was one exception. His daughter Malka, a brilliant scholar, computer expert and psychologist in her own right, was told when Morris realized that he was getting on in years and did not have long to live. Shortly after, he passed away and Malka took over.

She decided to go far beyond her father's wildest expectations. Under her brilliant leadership, she opened an 'Institute of Matchmaking' to which very carefully selected candidates were admitted. To be accredited, they had to stipulate that they would work together as, first a national and then an "International Alliance of Shadkhans, the IAS, and of course, under her leadership. Links to a master computer and its database would be made available. Under no circumstances were they to establish their own database. Their computers would be carefully monitored and any attempt to circumvent this rule would be met by immediate ouster from the alliance.

Malka devoted a great deal of time to improving the master computer. It took her many years, but she finally created a computer that could carry out the functions of the panel of psychologists that had been in place for these many years. Further, the computer had an infinite memory, had links to a universal multitude of peripheral computers continuously feeding in new data and updating information about new and old clients as well as more details about the relationship between psychological profiles and human needs. Because of her breadth of knowledge and experience, she was able to monitor carefully all new developments in this field and perfect her matchmaking to an unbelievable new high.

Her final contribution to the new art and science of matchmaking was to clearly enunciate seven principles of matchmaking which, being true to her ethnic roots, she labeled, "The Principles of Shadkhanism". The one that initially created a great deal of consternation and subsequently had the greatest impact was the fourth. Briefly, the Principles of Shadkhanism are:

- 1) Successful human bonding or mating is based upon the satisfaction of needs, not desires. The latter are normally a manifestation of deep-seated neuroses, which plague us all. No one is immune from this affliction.
- 2) The needs are usually not apparent, especially to those seeking our assistance.
- 3) Each of us has a plethora of needs. There is no way they can all be satisfied in any time frame. Fortunately, there is no requirement to satisfy them all since there is a hierarchy of needs.
- 4) No one human being can satisfy all of the critical needs of another. These can only be met by a selected set of individuals.
- 5) It is the Shadkhan's function to identify this group.
- 6) The satisfaction of a particular individual's need by another must also fulfill the need of both. In other words, every satisfaction of a need has to be a win-win situation for both parties involved.
- 7) The mutual satisfaction of needs in no way compromises anyone's individuality. Everyone has specific needs that differ from those of others and it is this distinction that characterizes their uniqueness.

As you can well imagine, this new approach had an immediate and controversial impact. Remarkably, the controversy did not endure. Monogamy was out and it appeared that

polygamy was in. Actually, it turned out that monogamy often prevailed still for those who continued to feel that a sexual liaison with more than one mate was immoral. After a while, even that self-imposed restriction disappeared.

Simply put, Malka's approach was to provide each of her clients with a set of individuals who would respond adequately to their unique needs and who also were her clients. This way, everybody was happy. Of course, without the computer and the modifications that Malka had initiated, none of this would have been possible. It became practical because the computer was able to ensure that the needs of both parties were met in any interaction. Let me elaborate. If party A was to interact with party B, party B had to be able to meet a particular need of party A at that time. Simultaneously, party A also had to meet a particular need of party B which could be totally different than party A's need. Complicated, isn't it? Now if you include all the critical needs of each party, it gets a lot more complex. I must admit, I do not really understand the algorithm that Malka devised and neither does anyone else. There has been long lasting debate about it. In any case, it works, as witnessed by subsequent events.

Before Malka passed on, she ensured that the computer would continuously enhance itself and that there would be an ongoing succession of elite Shadkhans to carry through overseeing what she and her father Morris had created. The rest is history. For a detailed account, any decent history text will do.

In a nutshell, what happened is as follows. Malka's International Alliance of Shadkhans took off in big way, so much so that in a matter of about fifty years, it became the largest multi-national organization. Moreover, the speed of communication and transportation technologies increased by several thousand orders of magnitude. Thus, people from all over the world were quickly available to satisfy the needs of others while having theirs met. Perhaps the most important development was that 'satisfaction of need' became the primary ideology of the world. With the mind set change coupled with technological political, social, financial and economic advances, radical transformations revolutionized institutions. Governments in the traditional sense, no longer exist, so that power struggles of all stripes are now a thing of the past. The only authority left is the International Alliance of Shadkhans who are not really authoritarian but rather administrative, ensuring all systems are operational. So far, they have been eminently successful in that role. I am the current Shadkhan Emeritus.

It is as if everybody in the world is married to everyone else by being available to meet a nearly infinite variety of needs. Indeed, paradise has been regained. It is a matter of conjecture as to whether we will be able to retain it.

Oh, I must go now! According to the computer, my current immediate need is sexual. I know that the man selected by the computer will be up to it.

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