

Let's Get Practical...

Top Tips to Increase Matches in Your Community

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Our beautiful Jewish legacy is replete with stories of matches and ways that our ancestors were united in marriage. In reviewing many of those accounts of the Tanach and Talmud, one common theme becomes clear: their diverse ways of meeting had nothing in common. Each one was unique, no one method was utilized and each had its own *hashgacha pratit* (individual Divine intervention).

Yitzchak and Rivka were united through an “old fashioned” matchmaker, Eliezer. Rachel met her husband, Yakov, at the well. Moshe Rabbeinu was a “*ben-bayit*” (long-term guest) at the home of his future father-in-law, while King Shaul hand-chose David the warrior to be the intended for his daughter Michal. And, it should certainly be noted, Ruth met Boaz in the workplace. We also see through the tale of one of the most joyous days of the year, Tu B’Av, that there were community-sanctioned public gatherings in Yerushalayim and its environs which historically turned into an auspicious day for matchmaking and betrothals (Mishna, *Ta’anit* 26b).

The phrase *harbe shluchim LaMakom*, Hashem has many messengers to carry out His will, is therefore apropos in bringing a bride and groom together. In today’s day and age, where Grossingers doesn’t exist and many bemoan the difficulty of finding their spouse in this highly internet-connected but socially-disconnected world, YUConnects fills the void by aiding individuals and communities in expanding their horizons and creating new opportunities.

In fact, there are numerous practical suggestions that anyone entering the dating world can incorporate. These “top tips” are simple and offer commonplace ideas on a personal and communal level. *Davening* (praying) for *siyahta d’shimaya* (Divine help) remains of paramount importance of course, and Hashem’s blessing is what truly matters. At the same time, *hishtadlut*, personal and communal effort, is essential.

What are the best ways on a **personal level** that a single individual can increase his or her opportunities for suggestions and introductions?

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- **Network (and network, network, network!):** Many of the suggestions for successfully landing a job apply equally as well to obtaining a date. Speak to everyone you meet—in an upbeat, positive way. While some disparage a written “profile,” putting something tangible on paper offers definite advantages. It serves as a permanent physical reminder for a friend or matchmaker who can have the details handy when recommending you; of course, you also get to clearly articulate what you are seeking. The debate about whether to include the “dreaded photo” will not be resolved here, but it should be noted that many young adults have their profiles and photos very visible on the Internet already through the various social media. A photo on a profile allows one to immediately “put their best face forward” since they will invariably be Googled by a prospective match.
- **Be active in community events and activities:** Expand horizons beyond work or school, meet as many new people as possible, participate in social *chessed* activities and accept opportunities to grow spiritually while making new connections.
- **Register online:** In the recently published groundbreaking article led by Dr. Eli Finkel² that examined current online trends, the researchers noted that by 2009 more romantic relationships were begun online than through any means other than meeting through friends. Some databases that exist nowadays offer the best of both worlds—they have access to thousands of members but are discreet and allow for directed personal matchmaking through an intermediary. The matchmakers of SawYouAtSinai and YUCnects are able to view a profile and make appropriate suggestions as they arise. Numerous options exist that allow the member to choose how public, private or visible a profile will be to others.
- **Attend singles events:** Appropriate social events offer so many distinct advantages. They allow one to meet dozens of suitable suitors at in a single evening or day, plus one can network with facilitators or matchmakers and suggestions often arise for you or for friends (see next point!). Events and activities are interesting, enjoyable and YUCnects specializes in providing venues that are comfortable, relaxed and selective. Recent YUCnects events have ranged from *chessed* projects for homebound seniors to a multimedia trivia panoply game to exciting food competitions modeled after the Food Network shows, plus many more fun-filled programs. Even if an event does not lead to a direct date, it is a great way to get out and keeps a person on other people’s minds.
- **Make suggestions for others:** By thinking of your friends and neighbors, and coming up with suggestions for them, you not only do a *chessed*, but it is a great way to keep your name in the minds of those you speak to.
- **Meet matchmakers:** Certainly don’t rely on any one matchmaker. The most important thing to realize is that they are overwhelmed with hundreds, if not thousands, of names running through their heads. Therefore, stand out. Make the extra effort to meet them in person. Become a real individual to them and not simply another young person who “loves to read, travel and spend time with family.” Please bear in mind that matchmakers who seem not to care because they have not made any suggestions are not necessarily ignoring you.

² Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P.W., Karney, B. R., Reis, H.T., & Sprecher, S. (2012). Online Dating: A Critical Analysis from the Perspective of Psychological Science. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13(1), 3-66

They may simply be inundated or have been turned down by prospective matches. Remind them with a friendly e-mail once a month or with a quick call before Yom Tov wishing them a happy holiday. Many *shadchanim* are volunteers and are very dedicated, so being *mentschlich* and nice should be a given.

And for those who want to get inspired and help others, so much more can be done. The YUConnects office has guided communities across the globe—from Los Angeles to Chicago to Panama and Israel. Some steps are common and simple and can be taken by any shul or community that wants to get involved.

The YUConnects staff offers the following helpful and practical tips for **communities**:

1. **Create a database:** Start with the basics. Gather names of those men and women in the community who would appreciate more suggestions and events. A simple e-mail with links to a Google document spreadsheet is one of the easiest and most efficient ways for a community to gather basic information and build a potential database of potential matches. Similarly, generate a list of interested shul members who can be quickly and electronically contacted to help publicize and recruit attendees to fun events or interesting mixers. Finally, don't overlook the possibility that willing community volunteers can become matchmakers on existing online sites to advocate and network specifically for their neighbors and friends.
2. **Organize a Networking or Shidduch Brainstorming Night:** Invite area residents to participate in a session where profiles can be formally presented or young newly married couples can gather to offer suggestions. YUConnects regularly assists shuls and other organizations in running such successful brainstorming programs. Some community meetings invite singles to present themselves in person, offering a live impression, and the networking continues much more successfully thereafter.
3. **Run A Singles Event:** There are a panoply of ideas—including running a “panoply” multimedia trivia game where participants switch tables each round to work together in selecting the correct game answers, *chessed* activities, food-based programs, lectures or trips. An event or Shabbaton allows natural meeting venues and expands horizons for many.
4. **Home Hospitality:** Start small. A couple or a shul can invite Shabbat guests who are compatible. This can create the ideal forum for meeting in an informal setting. Our experience has found that the best model is three or four men and women (table for eight total) allows for the easiest flowing conversation.
5. **Power in Numbers:** Shuls are banding together and sharing their databases in new ways. “Shul Shares,” founded in Brooklyn, or “Shul Links” in Monsey bring together compatible *kehillot* in scheduled meetings to exchange suggestions or ideas.
6. **Promote a Resource Fair:** Have a *melava malka* with matchmakers present or lists of matchmakers available to your community for future meetings. Provide lists of organizations or online websites that can be useful to the single members or their families.
7. **Sensitivity and Inclusion:** Our friends and neighbors who are unmarried are talented members of any community who can, and should, be included in development or planning within local organizations. Include them in committees, boards and other communal activities. This great pool of activists is unfortunately frequently ignored, to the detriment of all.

8. **Enlist the Pros:** Invite speakers or workshops to come to your community who can offer guidance on the entire dating experience. There are established programs offered by The Relationship Couple, Sasson V'Simcha in Israel, SHALOM Taskforce, National Council of Young Israel, the OU or YUConnects that provide advice in profiles, maximizing networking, and—most important—moving relationships forward.

This article's intention is meant as a starting point. Everyone is familiar with the famous Gemara that states that making marriages is as difficult as splitting the Red Sea (*Sotah* 2a). Hashem is there to help, he sends many messengers and each one of us must do our part. Certainly, the path to success in making matches is tumultuous and overwhelming at times, with many challenges along the way. But if each of us does our part and makes our personal and communal efforts, *b'ezrat Hashem*, we will be successful.