

Is There a Mitzvah to Arrange *Shidduchim*?

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Does anyone in the broader Jewish community not know of somebody who wishes to get married but has as yet been unsuccessful in finding a suitable spouse? It would seem fairly obvious to any sensitive human being that if one does know of such a person, one should do whatever one can to be of assistance in his or her quest for the right match.

The question is, is there an actual “mitzvah,” in the precise sense of the term, which is performed when one does so? And if so, what mitzvah is it? Upon whom is it incumbent? The following presentation puts forth a number of classic Torah sources which point to the suggestion that there is in fact a mitzvah to help arrange *shidduchim*; it is hoped that this will serve to encourage those who are committed to the observance and fulfillment of mitzvot to become further sensitized to this issue and to get involved in helping those seeking to get married to achieve their goal and build additional *batei ne’eman beYisrael*.

Areivut – Responsibility for a Fellow Jew

In one of the two sections of the Torah known as the *Tochachah*, which presents a list of the punishments which will unfortunately be visited upon the Jewish people should they fail to properly observe the laws of the Torah, the verse states: “וכשלו איש באחיו כמפני חרב ורדף אין,” meaning that people will stumble over one another and fall as if fleeing an attack, even though there is in fact no pursuer (Vayikra 26:37). Understood in context, as explained there by Rashi (s.v. *Kemipenei*), this description is one of panic and confusion, of the pervasive sense of terror when people are running for their lives. The Gemara, however, singling out the first phrase of this verse, derives from it a general concept:

“A man will stumble over his brother” — [this means that] a man will stumble because of the sin of his brother; this teaches that all [Jews] are guarantors [and thus responsible] for one another.

Sanhedrin 27b

וכשלו איש באחיו איש בעון אחיו,
מלמד שכולן ערבים זה בזה.
סנהדרין דף כז:

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The famous and oft-quoted idea that every Jew has some sort of responsibility, as a kind of guarantor, for every other Jew, known in general as the principle of “areivut,” is thus rooted in this notion that a person can potentially be brought down himself on account of the inappropriate behavior of somebody else, a fellow Jew (see Rashi to that Gemara, s.v. *Ish Be’achiv*).

The Gemara elsewhere teaches this lesson even more poignantly and clarifies the circumstances under which it is applied. The context there is a discussion about what one may and may not allow one’s animal to wear outside on Shabbat, as related to the prohibition against carrying or otherwise transporting items from one place to another on Shabbat. The Mishnah (*Shabbat* 54b) declares that R. Elazar ben Azaryah permitted his cow to go out on Shabbat wearing a certain kind of garment in opposition to the ruling of the rabbis. Finding it difficult to believe that such a great sage would in fact do such a thing, the Gemara comments:

It was taught [in a Beraita]: It was not [actually] his [i.e., R. Elazar ben Azaryah’s] cow, but rather it was [the cow] of his neighbor, but because he did not protest against her [action, and try to correct her behavior] it was identified with his name. Rav and R. Chanina and R. Yochanan and Rav Chaviva taught: ... Whoever has the ability to protest against [the inappropriate behavior of] the members of his household but did not protest is punished [himself] for [the sins of] the members of his household. [And whoever has the ability to protest] against [the inappropriate behavior of] the people of his town [but did not protest] is punished [himself] for [the sins of] the people of his town. [And whoever has the ability to protest] against [the inappropriate behavior of the people in] the whole world [but did not protest] is punished [himself] for [the sins of the people in] the whole world.

Shabbat 54b

תנא: לא שלו היתה,
אלא של שכניתו היתה,
ומתוך שלא מיחה בה
נקראת על שמו. רב
ורבי חנינא ורבי יוחנן
ורב חביבא מתנו... מי
שאפשר למחות לאנשי
ביתו ולא מיחה - נתפס
על אנשי ביתו, באנשי
עירו - נתפס על אנשי
עירו, בכל העולם כולו -
נתפס על כל העולם
כולו.
שבת דף נד:

In short, we learn from here the remarkable notion that a Jew who sees a fellow Jew or group of Jews violating any precept and has the opportunity and the wherewithal to prevent the deed from being done, but instead fails to intervene, is held accountable as if he himself had committed that particular transgression. It is noteworthy that the Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 4:1), in a comprehensive list of various behaviors that prevent the person who engages in any one of them from being able to do *teshuvah* in a complete and proper fashion, includes among them not objecting when confronted with the chance to stop others from sinning.

Strikingly, though, the Rambam there also mentions that the same is true of one who prevents others from performing a mitzvah. While the simple reading of that Rambam indicates that he is referring to someone who deliberately stops others from fulfilling a mitzvah, R. Moshe Schick, in one of his *teshuvot*, takes this idea a step further, saying:

A person is also obligated, if possible, to assist his friend so that he will [be able to] do a mitzvah; one is obligated in this based on areivut. The Rambam in Hilchot Teshuvah enumerates this among the twenty-four things that prevent [proper] teshuvah; one of them is stopping one’s friend from doing a

וגם מחוייב האדם אם אפשר לו לסייע את חברו שיעשה מצוה, הוא מחוייב בזה מצד ערבות. והרמב"ם בה' תשובה מונה זה בין כ"ד דברים המעכבין את התשובה, ואחד מהם המונע את חברו מלעשות מצוה... שמצוה לסייע לחברו

mitzvah ... for it is a mitzvah to assist one's friend [in the performance of a mitzvah] because of areivut.

Shu"t Maharam Schick, Orach Chaim #322

משום ערבות.
שו"ת מהר"ם שיק חלק אורח חיים
סימן שכ"ב

Because one is, in his view and in his understanding of the Rambam, actually obligated to enable someone else to perform a mitzvah, R. Schick discusses the possibility there that one can be forced by the local *beit din* (rabbinical court) to allow somebody else to use his *sukkah* when he needs it on Sukkot. Irrespective of his conclusion regarding that particular question, though, R. Schick is clearly of the opinion that not only may one not prevent someone else from performing a mitzvah, but that there is also a mitzvah, based on the principle of *areivut*, to actively help someone else perform a mitzvah which is incumbent upon him.

This is by no means a lone view among the *poskim*. The *Aruch HaShulchan*, for example (*Orach Chaim* 655:3), allows an etrog to be brought by a non-Jew from one town to a second town when the latter has none available for people's use on Sukkot (a situation which, while difficult to conceive of today, was not uncommon at one time in Europe). Although it is generally rabbinically forbidden to ask a non-Jew to do such a thing on Yom Tov, that prohibition is suspended in order to enable people to perform a mitzvah; the *Aruch HaShulchan* concludes there that one is indeed obligated to assist others in their performance of a mitzvah based on the aforementioned concept of *areivut*.

The *Mishnah Berurah*, in likewise ruling that one may do what is necessary to enable another Jew to be able to fulfill the mitzvah of taking an *etrog* on Sukkot, states succinctly:

For we are commanded because of areivut to see to it that a fellow Jew will do the mitzvot of the Torah, and if [any fellow Jew] will lack [the opportunity to perform a mitzvah] it is as if I am lacking it.

Shaar HaTziyun, 655:5

דהא אנו מצווין מטעם ערבות לראות
שגם חברו בן ישראל יעשה מצות
התורה, ואם יחסר לו הרי הוא כאילו
חסר לי.
שער הציון לסימן תרנ"ה אות ה

Clearly, then, these authorities maintain that based on the principle of *areivut*, there is indeed an obligation, categorized as a mitzvah, to do what one can so that others will be able to perform a mitzvah which they wish to perform. It would thus seem that involving oneself in making *shidduchim*, arranging for prospective marriage partners to get together and ultimately, if all goes well, to get married, is actually a full-fledged mitzvah; the *Shach* in fact writes clearly (*Choshen Mishpat* 73:22) that one is considered to be doing an actual mitzvah himself when trying to arrange a marriage for others.

R. Yaakov Ettlinger, in his commentary to the Gemara in *Sukkah*, goes so far as to say that this mitzvah may be biblical in nature:

Since all Jews are responsible for one another, then one who enables his friend to fulfill a biblical mitzvah is himself also considered to be involved in the performance of a biblical mitzvah...

Aruch LaNeir to Sukkah 25a, s.v. Hacha Tarid

כיון דכל ישראל ערבים זה לזה א"כ מי
שמביא חבירו לידי קיום מצוה דאורייתא
מקרי ג"כ עוסק במצוה דאורייתא ...
ערוך לנר לסוכה דף כ"ה. ד"ה הכא
טריד

R. Ettliger therefore posits that from the fact that the Gemara later in *Sukkah* (25b-26a) exempts a groom's attendant and other members of a wedding party from certain mitzvot based on the well-known maxim that one who is involved in the performance of one mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah at that time (העוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה), one cannot infer that this maxim applies even when the first mitzvah is only rabbinically mandated, because those assisting someone in his marriage arrangements are considered to be performing a biblically mandated mitzvah. The same may well be true of someone who works to help someone else meet a suitable spouse and eventually get married, assuming, as the *Shach* said, that one who does so is considered to be performing a mitzvah. This assumption that one is indeed considered to be doing a mitzvah when arranging *shidduchim* forms the basis of a comment by R. Yosef ben Lev in his *Shu"t Mahari ben Lev* (1:100; 99 in some versions) about whether one may accept money and if so, how much, for successfully matching a couple for marriage, given that he is indeed performing a mitzvah.

It may be noted at this point that according to Rabbeinu Saadyah Gaon, as understood by R. Yerucham Fischel Perlow (in the latter's encyclopedic commentary on the former's *Sefer HaMitzvot, Parashah 57*), the obligation, which he classifies as communal in nature, to assume responsibility for one's fellow Jew in terms of his mitzvah observance is in fact enumerated as one of the 613 commandments of the Torah; it may thus be argued that this is the mitzvah fulfilled when people work on arranging *shidduchim* for others.

The Mitzvah to Get Married and Have Children

The premise underlying the aforementioned assertion that one performs a mitzvah by helping someone get married is that the person who gets married is indeed fulfilling a mitzvah himself (or herself) by so doing. Exactly which mitzvah is this?

The Rambam writes:

The 213th mitzvah is that we were commanded that one should have relations [with a woman] through [the acts qualifying as] "kiddushin" (defined as betrothal or engagement, the first stage of the marriage process) ... this [then] is the mitzvah of kiddushin ... indeed it has already been explained that the mitzvah of kiddushin is from the Torah.

Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Asei 213)

והמצוה הרי"ג היא שצונו
לבעול בקדושין... וזו היא
מצות קדושין... הנה כבר
התבאר שמצות קדושין
דאורייתא.
ספר המצוות להרמב"ם
מצות עשה רי"ג

The Rambam is clearly of the opinion that there is a mitzvah to marry (see also his assertion in *Hilchot Ishut* 3:23 that the *Birchat Eirusin*, the blessing recited at the beginning of the formal wedding ceremony, is like the blessing recited before the performance of any other mitzvah); this mitzvah is independent of the mitzvah to procreate, which he enumerates as a separate requirement (*Sefer HaMitzvot ibid.* 212). The *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 552) concurs with this view. According to these sources, then, both of which cite a phrase from the Torah (Devarim 24:1) as the basis for their position, the matter is quite simple: there is a biblical mandate to get married and one who helps someone else get married is thus helping someone fulfill a mitzvah from the Torah; he is therefore considered to be performing a mitzvah himself by providing this help.

It is true, of course, that not all authorities agree with the Rambam and the *Sefer HaChinuch* that getting married constitutes an independent mitzvah. The Rosh, for example (*Ketubot* 1:12), maintains that there is no independent mitzvah to marry; there is a mitzvah to procreate (“*peru u’revu*”), and the proper way to do that is to first get married, but marriage alone does not constitute the fulfillment of any mitzvah (see there for his claim that the *Birchat Eirusin* is thus not a blessing on a mitzvah, but a blessing of praise relating to the joyous occasion of the wedding). This dispute, however, does not at all impact the present discussion, because even if the mitzvah is not to marry but to procreate (with marriage being simply the appropriate vehicle via which one should ultimately have children), one who participates in arranging a marriage is still assisting someone in fulfilling a mitzvah from the Torah—the mitzvah to procreate—and he is therefore still considered to be performing a mitzvah himself by providing this assistance.

In line with this last idea, it is interesting to consider a statement in the Gemara in *Shabbat* (31a), according to which one of the questions that one is asked after his time on this earth is up and he is facing the Heavenly judgment is “עסקת בפריה ורביה” — “*did you engage in procreation?*” The Maharsha comments:

The Gemara did not say [that one is asked] “did you fulfill [the mitzvah] of procreation,” but rather “did you engage [in the mitzvah of procreation],” meaning, “[did you take steps] to marry off orphans.”

לא אמר קיימת פריה ורביה אלא
עסקת דהיינו להשיא יתום ויתומה.
מהרש"א חידושי אגדות לשבת
דף ל"א. בד"ה עסקת

Maharsha, Chidushei Aggadot to Shabbat 31a, s.v. Asakta

The Maharsha clearly understands that being engaged in the mitzvah of procreation means more than fulfilling that mitzvah by having children oneself; it includes doing what one can to facilitate the fulfillment of that mitzvah by others, by people who are less fortunate and who may never have the opportunity to get married and perform this mitzvah without the efforts of others. One who helps someone else get married and thereby enables him to carry out the mitzvah of having children is thus fulfilling this requirement of “involvement” in procreation; even if procreation—and not getting married itself—is in fact the only actual mitzvah relating directly to marriage, one is therefore still involved in a mitzvah when providing this help. And this is considered so significant a deed that it is one of the first things one is held accountable for when he leaves this world.

From these sources, it would appear that the mitzvah of *peru u’revu* includes facilitating the opportunity for others to fulfill the mitzvah. Since one who does so may thus be said to be performing that very mitzvah in a way himself, this can be viewed as something beyond, or independent of, the broader notion of *areivut* discussed above. It should be noted that the *Sefer Chareidim* writes in general (end of Chapter 61 in the newer arrangement) that one who encourages others to perform a mitzvah is considered as having performed that very mitzvah himself.

This idea that one performs a mitzvah by enabling someone else to fulfill his mitzvah to procreate emerges as well from the comments of the Ran at the beginning of the second chapter of *Kiddushin*. The Gemara, explaining the opening line of the Mishnah there (*Kiddushin* 41a), teaches that while it is acceptable, as the Mishnah says, for a man getting married to appoint an

agent to carry out the technical act of giving his bride the item needed to effect the *kiddushin*, or the betrothal, the first step of the halachic marriage process, it is nonetheless a greater mitzvah for the man to do the act himself rather than through an agent (מצוה בו יותר מבשלווחו). In subsequently explaining the next line of the Mishnah, which states that a woman may likewise appoint an agent to receive the item that will effect the *kiddushin*, the Gemara says that it is similarly a greater mitzvah for the woman to receive the item herself rather than have an agent do it for her (מצוה בה יותר מבשלווחה). In view of the fact that the mitzvah to get married (according to those who hold that that is indeed an independent mitzvah), as well as the mitzvah to procreate, are mitzvot incumbent specifically upon men (though a woman's participation is obviously necessary), the question is, what does the Gemara mean by saying that it is a greater mitzvah for the woman to receive the item herself? What mitzvah is she performing? The Ran explains:

For even though a woman is not commanded in [the mitzvah of] procreation, she nevertheless has a mitzvah because she is helping the husband to fulfill his mitzvah.
Ran to Kiddushin, 16a-b in Rif, s.v. Ika De'amri)

דאע"ג דאשה אינה מצוה בפרייה ורבייה מ"מ יש לה מצוה מפני שהיא מסייעת לבעל לקיים מצותו.
 ר"ן לקידושין, דף ט"ז-ט"ז: בדפי הרי"ף בד"ה איכא דאמרי

In the same way, then, arranging a *shidduch* may thus be at least a partial fulfillment of the mitzvah of *peru u'revu*.

There is also another possible mitzvah that might be fulfilled in this manner, a mitzvah that is similar to *peru u'revu*, but distinct from it. The prophet Yeshayah tells us:

For so said Hashem, Creator of the heavens, He is the God, Former of the earth and its Maker, He established it; He did not create it for emptiness, [but] he [rather] formed it to be inhabited: I am Hashem and there is no other.
Yeshayahu 45:18

כי כה אמר ה' בורא השמים הוא האלקים יצר הארץ ועשה הוא כוננה לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה אני ה' ואין עוד.
 ישעיהו מ"ה:י"ח

The earth is described here as having been created not to be empty and desolate, but to be inhabited and populated. *Chazal* infer from this statement that there is a mitzvah known as "*shevet*," from the word in that verse meaning *inhabited*, which requires one to help populate the world; one who has children is thus also fulfilling this mitzvah of *shevet*. It is clear from *Tosafot* in *Gittin* (41b, s.v. *Lo tohu*) and others that this mitzvah is operative even in situations where the mitzvah of *peru u'revu* is not; R. Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz, in his *sefer* known as the *Makneh* on *Kiddushin* (41a, s.v. *Mitzvah*), explains that this is the mitzvah which women, upon whom the mitzvah of *peru u'revu* is not incumbent, are included in when they get married, and it is that mitzvah to which the Gemara there refers when speaking of a mitzvah for women to get married. One who helps arrange a *shidduch* and thereby enables people to have children and populate the world may thus also be fulfilling, at least partially, this mitzvah of *shevet*, which, according to *Tosafot* in *Avodah Zarah* (13a, s.v. *Lilmod*), is ranked together with *talmud Torah* as a mitzvah which is of great importance.

Along the above lines, it may be possible to suggest that there is in fact a communal responsibility to help someone find a spouse and ultimately have children. The Gemara earlier in *Kiddushin* (29a)

teaches that there are a number of obligations that a father has concerning his son, including circumcising him, redeeming him (if he a firstborn), teaching him Torah and taking a wife for him, that is, helping him to get married. Regarding each of the first three cases, the Gemara (*ibid.* 29a-29b) questions why it is only the father, not the mother, who is required to take care of these matters for the son, and concludes that the mother is exempt because she is not obligated in that particular mitzvah herself, and thus does not have to see to it that it be performed by her son. Regarding helping him get married, though, the Gemara later (*ibid.* 30b), after indicating that a father must also see to it that his daughter gets married, does not say anything about the mother being exempt from this obligation. R. Yosef Engel, in his *Gilyonei HaShas*, posits that although the Gemara never says so, the fact is that the mother is indeed obligated in this case, and he adds that although she is exempt from the mitzvah of *peru u'revu*, she is included in the aforementioned mitzvah of *shevet*, and thus must likewise see to it that her children are able to fulfill this mitzvah.

We may now add that in view of the fact that just as in the case of circumcision, the Gemara (*ibid.* 29a) states that there is a requirement upon others in the community to get involved, if necessary, to see to it that the mitzvah gets done (a ruling accepted by the Rambam, *Hilchot Milah* 1:1, and the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 261:1), and likewise in the case of teaching Torah, others have a responsibility to get involved as well (as implied by the *Sifrei* to *Devarim*, No. 37, and cited by the Rambam, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:2, and the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 245:3), then perhaps the same is true of marrying off a child. If the parents—or the child himself or herself—are unable to arrange for the child's marriage, it becomes incumbent upon other members of the community to get involved and help see to it that the child gets married and will thus be able to fulfill whatever mitzvot that entails, and those who do so have some share in the performance of those mitzvot, as discussed above.

Assisting HaKadosh Baruch Hu & Emulating Him (*Imitatio Dei*)

The Midrash in *Bereishit Rabbah* (68:4; it appears as well in *Vayikra Rabbah* 8:1) relates a fascinating story regarding a certain noblewoman and the great *Tanna* R. Yose bar Chalafta. Aware of the fact that according to the Torah, G-d created the world in six days (Shemot 20:11), the noblewoman asked the *Tanna* what He has been doing since then. He replied that G-d spends His time arranging *shidduchim*, carefully matching people with suitable spouses. Assuming that there really is not much to this, the noblewoman proclaimed that she could accomplish that herself; as a rich woman she had many, many servants, both male and female, and she said that in a short period of time she could easily join each male with a female and thereby accomplish without much effort what G-d seems to find so difficult. After R. Yose bar Chalafta challenged her to go and try it, she did so and indeed paired together all her male and female servants in one night. The next morning, however, she was overwhelmed with the complaints of her servants, as so many of the new couples were in fact completely incompatible; the noblewoman subsequently acknowledged G-d's greatness to R. Yose bar Chalafta. Aside from whatever else may be learned from this story, one point that emerges is that G-d Himself spends much time, as it were, "working on" arranging appropriate *shidduchim*.

It is perhaps for this reason that the Gemara in *Shabbat* refers to arranging marriages as צפ"ח דמי, *the business of Heaven*. The verse in *Yeshayahu* (58:13) teaches that we are to refrain on

Shabbat from doing our own business, from engaging in our own affairs, and from even talking about such things. The Gemara states:

And a Tanna of the academy of Menasheh taught: We may arrange for girls to be betrothed [and subsequently married] on Shabbat, and for a child to be taught a text or to be taught a trade. [This is all permitted on Shabbat because] the verse states: [Refrain on Shabbat] from engaging in your own business and speaking words [about such business; this implies that doing] your own business is forbidden, [but] the business of Heaven [i.e., an activity related to a mitzvah] is permitted.

Shabbat 150a

ותנא דבי מנשה משדכין על
התינוקות ליארס בשבת,
ועל התינוק ללמדו ספר
וללמדו אומנות. אמר קרא
ממצוא הפצך ודבר דבר,
הפצין - אסורים, הפצין
שמים - מותרין.
שבת דף ק"ג.

In other words, one may be engaged in and discuss activities that are mitzvah-oriented on Shabbat, as they are labeled as הפצין שמים, *the business of Heaven*, and not personal business; the primary example of such an activity which is in the category of הפצין שמים is arranging marriages. Actually, the issue of the permissibility of talking about *shidduchim* on Shabbat is the subject of a dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai in an earlier Gemara there (*ibid.* 12a), but the halachah follows the view of Beit Hillel that it is indeed permissible, as codified by the Rambam (*Hilchot Shabbat* 24:5) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 306:6), because it is included among the הפצין שמים. It would appear that this permission extends even to discussing the financial components of the marriage arrangement, as this is not considered a personal business matter, but a matter relating to a mitzvah, “the business of Heaven” (see the comments of, among others, the *Kaf HaChaim* there, no. 50, regarding this last point).

According to this presentation, it may be suggested that working on arranging a *shidduch* is a mitzvah not only between man and fellow man (בין אדם להבירו), as it would more obviously seem to be, but also between man and G-d (בין אדם למקום), as doing so is a means of assisting G-d in taking care of His business, as it were. Moreover, it would appear that G-d gets involved Himself in this activity because getting married is considered to be on par with only Torah study in terms of its relative significance. The Gemara in *Megillah* (27a), for example, teaches that a *Sefer Torah* may not be sold for any reason other than to enable one to study Torah or to get married; the Rambam (*Hilchot Sefer Torah* 10:2) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 270:1 and *Even HaEzer* 1:2) rule accordingly. The Gemara in *Avodah Zarah* (13a) similarly equates getting married with Torah study regarding a different halachah, also cited in the Rambam (*Hilchot Avel* 3:14) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 372:1). If, as indicated by these sources, along with the aforementioned Midrash, getting married is such an important value that G-d Himself chooses to spend time helping enable people to do so, it certainly stands to reason that it behooves others to assist in doing “G-d’s work.”

In addition to the above point, though, there may be yet another motivation for people to get involved in arranging *shidduchim* in light of G-d’s involvement in this matter, a motivation based on yet another mitzvah. The Torah (*Devarim* 13:5) clearly instructs us to “follow” G-d, something that, on the surface, seems an impossible task. The Gemara therefore explains what this means:

And R. Chama the son of R. Chanina said: What is [the meaning of] that which is written: "G-d, your Lord you shall follow" — is it possible for a person to [actually] follow the Divine Presence? For has it not already been said: "For G-d, your Lord—He is a consuming fire" [which cannot be "followed" by a human being]? Rather, [the Torah in the initial verse means to teach that one must strive] to follow [or emulate] the attributes [and the behavior] of the Holy One, Blessed is He. Just as He clothes the naked ... you too should clothe the naked. [Just as] the Holy One, Blessed is He, visited the sick ... you too should visit the sick. [Just as] the Holy One, Blessed is He, comforted mourners ... you too should comfort mourners. [Just as] the Holy One, Blessed is He, buried the dead ... you too should bury the dead.

Sotah 14a

This is the idea known as *imitatio Dei*, imitating, or emulating, the behavior of G-d and doing the kinds of things that He does to the best of our ability.

Another verse in the Torah (Devarim 28:9) similarly teaches that people must "go in G-d's ways" (והלכת בדרכיו); the Rambam, based on a Gemara in *Shabbat* (133b) explains this mitzvah as follows:

They [i.e., the Sages] learned the following in explaining the meaning of this mitzvah: Just as He is considered gracious, so too should you be gracious. Just as He is considered compassionate, so too should you be compassionate. Just as He is considered holy, so too should you be holy. And in this manner the prophets referred to G-d by all the various appellations [such as] "Slow to Anger and Abundant in Kindness," "Righteous and Just," "Perfect," "Mighty," and "Powerful" and others like them, to make known that these are good and just modes of behavior and that a person is obligated to conduct himself in accordance with them and to emulate Him to the best of his ability.

Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 1:6

If, then, it is true that G-d arranges marriages, as an expression of His kindness, then based on this mitzvah to emulate Him we are obligated to do the same. Indeed, R. Yitzchak Zvi Leibovitch, in his work on *Shulchan Aruch Even HaEzer* entitled *Shulchan HaEzer* (3:1, in the side commentary called *Simlah LeTzvi*) specifically links acting as the go-between to help someone find an appropriate spouse with this mitzvah of emulating and cleaving to G-d, adding that the Torah itself was given to the Jewish people through the agency of a go-between. And in a similar vein, R. Yitzchak Lampronti, in his *Pachad Yitzchak*, an encyclopedia of Talmudic and rabbinic terms, writes (s.v. *Zivugim*) that there is a mitzvah to become involved in arranging *shidduchim* between suitable men and women; he too notes that the Torah was given through an intermediary and adds that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* Himself was the very first *Shadchan*. When one works at arranging a match, one is thus emulating the actions of G-d Himself.

ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, מאי דכתיב: אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו? וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה? והלא כבר נאמר: כ"ה ה' אלהיך אש אוכלה הוא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה, מה הוא מלביש ערומים... אף אתה הלבש ערומים; הקב"ה ביקר חולים... אף אתה בקר חולים; הקב"ה ניחם אבלים... אף אתה נחם אבלים; הקב"ה קבר מתים... אף אתה קבור מתים.
סוטה דף י"ד.

כך למדו בפירושו מצוה זו, מה הוא נקרא חנון אף אתה היה חנון, מה הוא נקרא רחום אף אתה היה רחום, מה הוא נקרא קדוש אף אתה היה קדוש, ועל דרך זו קראו הנביאים לאל בכל אותן הכנויין ארך אפים ורב חסד צדיק וישר תמים גבור וחזק וכיוצא בהן, להודיע שהן דרכים טובים וישרים וחייב אדם להנהיג עצמו בהן ולהדמות אליו כפי כחו.
רמב"ם, פרק א מהל' דעות הלכה ו

Tzedakah and Gemillus Chessed

In addition to all of the above, it appears that there also may be an aspect of the mitzvah of *tzedakah* associated with helping arrange *shidduchim*. The Torah states regarding the obligation to give to those in need:

Rather, you shall open your hand to him and you shall grant him whatever suffices for his needs that he is [presently] lacking.

Devarim 15:8

כי פתח תפתח את ידך לו והעבט תעביטנו
די מחסרו אשר יחסר לו.
דברים ט"ו:ח

Rashi there (s.v. *Lo*) explains that this includes helping him find a wife. In other words, if what a person is lacking is not necessarily money or possessions, but a spouse, part of the mitzvah of *tzedakah* may be to help him find one. The Gemara in *Ketubot* (67b) teaches, citing this very verse, that when an orphan—who presumably is unable to afford the expenses associated with getting married and setting up a household—wishes to marry, it is incumbent upon others to provide him with whatever he needs in order to be able to do so; the Rambam (*Hilchot Matnot Aniyim* 7:4) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 250:1) rule accordingly. There is some debate as to whether this is a communal responsibility or whether the obligation devolves upon any individual who is able to help (see the comments of the Ramo there and of the *Shach* there No. 1, among other sources); the *Torah Temimah* to the above verse in *Devarim* (No. 27) makes a cogent argument that it is certainly required of an individual to be of assistance in such a case if he can be. Now, while the implication of this discussion is that the case is one where the orphan in question has already found a spouse and is just seeking help for the financial piece of the marriage, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that if the person needs help finding the actual spouse that assistance too should be provided for him.

Moreover, it may be suggested that even if a person is not at all poor or needy in economic terms, but is lacking in the sense that he (or she) is unable to find an appropriate match, the mitzvah of *tzedakah* may be in force to mandate that others help him acquire what he is lacking. And having brought up the mitzvah of *tzedakah* in this regard, it is worth recalling the statement of the Gemara in *Bava Batra* (9a) that in a way it is even greater for one to inspire others to give than to give himself, a notion accepted by the Rambam (*Hilchot Matnot Aniyim* 10:6) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 249:5). It would thus make sense for people not only to engage in arranging *shidduchim* themselves, but to inspire others to do the same.

Finally, and perhaps most simply, one who helps someone else find the proper mate and thus be able to get married and eventually have children is obviously doing a great act of kindness for that person. Even if there may perhaps be no direct, specific Scriptural source for doing this particular kindness for another person, the Rambam (*Hilchot Avel* 14:1) already makes it clear that various acts of loving-kindness done to help others which our Rabbis discuss are in fact included under the biblical precept of *וואהבת לרעך כמוך*, *And you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (*Vayikra* 19:18), meaning that one should do for a fellow Jew everything that one would want others to do for him. It should be clear for this reason alone that one should make every effort to help those in need of finding an appropriate spouse.

In light of all of the above, it may be added that the directive to do for someone else whatever one would want done for himself would seem to be especially important if that which one does for the other person assists him in the performance of a mitzvah.

R. Moshe Schick, in the *teshuvah* cited above, thus writes:

To assist one's friend in a mitzvah matter is included [in the requirement] of doing acts of loving-kindness, for if it is a mitzvah to help him [by doing acts of] loving-kindness [directed toward] his physical well-being, then certainly it is a mitzvah to help him [be able] to do a mitzvah, through which he benefits [both] in this world and in the World to Come.

Shu"t Maharam Schick, Orach Chaim #322

לסייע את חברו לדבר מצוה
הוא בכלל גמילות חסד ואם
בחסד הגוף מצוה לסייע לו
מכ"ש שמצוה לסייע לו לעשות
מצוה שזוכה על ידה בעוה"ז
ובעוה"ב.
שו"ת מהר"ם שיק חלק אורח
חיים סימן שכ"ב

There is, then, perhaps a double mitzvah in the realm of *gemillut chessed* that one engages in by helping arrange *shidduchim*. There is the basic *chessed* done for a fellow Jew who is in need of help and there is the *chessed* which enables a fellow Jew to perform a mitzvah; what exactly that mitzvah is will depend upon the various views presented above.

In any case, though, it has been clearly demonstrated that one who is involved in arranging *shidduchim* can be said to be involved in any one—or perhaps all—of many possible mitzvot, even though it is understood that one's efforts will not always result in success. It is thus a noble pursuit for people committed to the performance of mitzvot to become active in whatever ways possible in the various programs, events and endeavors designed to bring people together for the purpose of establishing *batei ne'eman beYisrael*.

As a postscript, it is worth noting the meaning of the word "*shidduch*" as explained by the Ran, based on the Aramaic *Targum* of a verse in *Shoftim* (5:31):

[The word has] the linguistic connotation of quiet calm and serenity, [like that] which a woman finds in the home of her husband.

Ran to Shabbat, 5b in Rif, s.v. ein meshadchin

מלשון שקט ומנוחה שהאשה מוצאת
בבית בעלה
ר"ן לשבת, דף ה: בדפי הרי"ף
בד"ה אין משדכין

It is to be hoped that those who are married are indeed able to achieve what may be understood as the inner peace of mind apparently suggested by this often-used word, and that those who are not yet married will experience it soon through their union with the suitable spouse that they will find, with the help of G-d and those working with Him.