

References – Halachic Issues

With every suggestion, we attach a shidduch resume with references. Before meeting, it is the customary practice to call not only the references provided by the person in shidduchim, but neighbors, teachers and other acquaintances. Historically, the *birurim*- the process of finding out about a suggestion was performed intensively, as it was the essential part of the Shidduch. The meetings or dates themselves were to get an impression of the person, yet did not necessarily detract or add to the suggestion. There are still communities today which follow this *hanhaga*.

In the Anglo-Charedi Community, it became the custom to check less intensively, as the Shidduch was based primary on the dates, while the *birurim* merely serve to see if the person should go out or not. Because the initiation of a meeting hinges on the references, they are caught in a double bind – saying too little because of worry about speaking lashon hara looks like there is something to hide and saying too much or being prodded too far leads to lashon hara.

Yismach would like to provide guidelines as to what a reference is allowed to reveal. Rabbi Yisrael Gans, Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah, has clarified exactly what a reference can say. You can see and hear his shiur [here](#).

To summarize:

- ❖ When taking a call, as a reference, one must verify that this information is for the purpose of shidduchim.
- ❖ Source of information: it is forbidden to ask information from someone who is in dispute with the prospect or the prospect's family.
- ❖ One cannot express his or her opinion, rather just state the facts as they are.

Five key points:

1. Personal knowledge: The reference must first consider whether the answer is something which he/she has firsthand, direct, personal knowledge, or whether it something the reference knows secondhand. If she/he knows it firsthand, she/he can relay the information. Otherwise, he/she cannot.
2. Don't exaggerate: Well-meaning exaggeration to get a shidduch moving is forbidden, even if the exaggeration is positive, and all the more so if it is negative.
3. Be objective: People view others by ways of their own preferences. Someone who is loud and can't tolerate a quiet type may automatically project, and relay falsehoods about that person. The reference must be objective. If the reference feels that she cannot be objective, or she is saying negative things out of hatred etc., then she/he is forbidden to answer.
4. Avoid Lashon Hara: If it can be said without lashon hara, then that is how it should be said. If, for example, the person knows both sides, she can advise and say - I don't think it's suitable. But if questioned, he/she can respond with the minimum details but in accordance to the above conditions, avoiding lashon hara. Adding details will just damage the person.

5. Know the caller: The reference may not reveal information to someone who will spread the word. If the caller is one who cannot keep a secret, and may damage the shidduch, it is forbidden to say anything negative about the person in question.

On the one hand spreading rumors is terrible, but standing idly by while someone makes a fatal mistake is unconscionable. This creates a very difficult balancing act and in very specific situations, one is not only permitted, but obligated to relay negative information:

- One must relay negative details which will hurt *hakamat bayit yehudi* and can lead to divorce. Personality disorders, lack of Tzniut, lack of Yiryat Shamayim, and serious health conditions. These are all issues that must be revealed, as they fall under *lo tamoed al dam reecha*.
- If one knows about a serious medical condition, one should relay the information. If there is a *safek*, ask a rav. If it is after the engagement, and most likely will not change anything, then there is no *toelet* and one should not say.
- If it's a serious issue, but the person doesn't know the information first-hand, the person should answer, "I don't know exactly. Perhaps you can inquire further about this issue." However, one should say outright that "I only heard it as a rumor and not first-hand so don't rely on me." Therefore it will carry less weight. The nature of a person is to accept bad information rather than good information. If it's hard to answer, or one doesn't know for sure, then instead of being evasive, one can say "I don't know." In regards to other neutral issues, if they ask, one can respond. But if they don't ask, then there is no need to provide the information (i.e. Does she speak English) – if it is important the caller will ask. The reference should not offer information that was not specifically requested. If the respondent has a *safek*, then they shouldn't say.
- One is forbidden to label people. - i.e. sociable, serious, warmhearted, anti-social, negligent, miserly, hot-headed, beautiful, modern, not modern, lacking personality, because people will jump to judge accordingly. One should just state facts in clear terms. The act of labeling is greatly harmful to prospects in Shidduchim.

If the girl and boy meet and either one does not want to meet again:

- The prospect should tell the shadchan it's not suitable, or "not for me", and not reveal the reasons -- not even to the shadchan, even if they press for info. If it was a serious defect such as personality disorders, lack of Tzniut, lack of Yiryat Shamam, or serious health conditions, then one should say.
- A shadchan is forbidden to ask why the prospect does not want to go out again.

Conclusion:

In choosing references, one should take care to select individuals who are both knowledgeable both about the person, and aware of the halochos of loshon hara. When

calling references, Yismach urges you to limit your questions and structure them according to the parameters delineated in the Shiur of Rabbi Yisrael Gans, Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah.