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# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

## Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

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### An Attractive Bride

[From parashah sheet "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Parashah Devarim 5768

Translated by Rafael Blumberg]

Question: I am involved in matchmaking and I don't know what to do. Even boys from the best yeshivot treat outward appearances as the main thing. I am disgusted!

Answer: True, they've learned a lot of Torah, but they missed out on the main point: what's important is inside. Unfortunately, they learned superficial Torah and they've remained superficial themselves. If they exercised a bit of common sense, they would understand that beauty is of no benefit in educating one's children, in fine character or in the fear of G-d, neither does it help the couple to love each other. If the girl is attractive but egotistical, she becomes like Chanukah candles, which we have no permission to touch but only to see. When all is said and done, a person's essence is not his outward appearance but his soul. "Grace is false and beauty is vain. It is the G-d-fearing woman who is praiseworthy" (Mishlei 31:30).

How impressed Rambam is in his "Guide to the Perplexed" by Avraham never having gazed at his wife Sarah the way the non-Jews look at women (3:49).

The Ra'avad (Rabbi Avraham ben David) brings a Talmudic source recommending that when a yeshiva student weds he should bring a simple Jew along with him to ensure that no other woman is substituted for his own bride (Rambam, Hilchot Isurei Bi'ah 21:3). This indicates that Torah scholars would not customarily take an interest in externals. After all, Esther was not particularly attractive. Our Sages state that quite the contrary, she had a unattractive skin tone. Even so, "she impressed all who saw her" (Esther 2:15), even non-Jews. How did this happen? It was due to her good character traits, her refinement and nobility. We thus may derive that what is inside has an influence on one's outward appearance, and that is what we learn from the Torah, contrary to the view of the materialists, that externals have an influence on what is inside. Why then does the Talmud recommend our praising a bride's physical appearance at her wedding? Beit Hillel says that we must praise every bride, in the groom's presence, as being beautiful and graceful. Beit Shammai counters that we should praise her precisely as she is, for physically she may not be so beautiful. Yet Beit Hillel holds that we always do praise her beauty. Beit Shammai asks, "What happens if she is lame or blind? Do we call her beautiful and graceful? Doesn't the Torah say, 'Stay far removed from falsehood' (Shemot 23:7)?" Beit Hillel replies, "By your approach, if someone made an unfortunate purchase should his friends praise it before him or speak disparagingly of it? Surely they should praise it. In line with this our Sages said, 'One should always stay attuned to the human mindset.'" Certainly it is forbidden to lie. Yet here, at the wedding, there is no lie. It is all true. Maharal explains in his "Netiv Ha-Emet" (the Pathway of Truth), from his work "Netivot Olam," that subjectively speaking, even the unattractive bride is attractive to her husband. Otherwise, he would not be marrying her. Where beauty is concerned, the subjective is objective. The groom considers her very attractive, and if we attune ourselves to the groom's mindset, then we will understand that it is all true. Put simply, it is not because she is beautiful that he loves her. Quite the contrary, his love for her makes her the most beautiful woman on earth, and it doesn't bother him one bit that she is lame or blind. Certainly one should wed a person he finds pleasing. Yet that is not necessarily a matter of external beauty. There is also internal beauty, the beauty of the soul. Precisely in order to understand this point, we learn Torah.