

Dear Dr. Yael

By Yael Respler, Ph.D.

Dear Readers, I do not generally receive anything in my column. I am sharing the following letter with my reader because of the beautiful content of the story. The writer has excellent ideas about being more open-minded in the dating environment on page 16.

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RESPLER...

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I would appreciate my readers' responses to this letter and to this type of medium for dating.

Hadassah And David

I'm sitting here and thinking about how my whole world changed on April 7, 2005. I say to myself, "Kiddo, it is time to send Frumster a letter about how they made me the luckiest person in the world." I also have a little advice for the hundreds of people in the same boat I was in last year, waiting for their husband.

I have to begin with thanking *Hadassah* for sending Hadassah into my life. She is the best thing that ever happened to me. On Friday night before *Kiddush*, we say "Hinei Chafetz Me Yotzer" - A woman of value, who can find? The answer to that is very simple: "I did."

Let me introduce myself. My name is David, and you are one of the hundreds of people who have found their husband on Frumster. I had been a Frumster member for over two years. Last April, and throughout that time I alternated between basic and premium membership. I had also been on other online Jewish dating sites but left them all and stayed with Frumster.

Now on to your story, the real reason you're reading this, right? On April 7, 2005 I was at work as usual. I had my laptop and checked out the Frumster site, as I did on a regular basis, to see if there were new members or if anyone had replied to my messages. In the corner of my eye I saw a member who seemed to be new, so I checked her profile. In fact, Hadassah had just signed up with Frumster and had been listed on the site for less than 12 hours when I saw her profile. I hesitated to send a message, however, because she was a widow with a young daughter. Not that there is anything wrong with that, but I was not ready to take on the responsibility of a child, especially one without a living biological father to share the "itty-bitty duties."

Then a voice came out from the Heavens (yes, a halutz still exists) and said, "Do not look away. Send her a message and see what happens. After all, it is only a message." So I did and her my standard first message, adding a few words that were particular for her profile. The next thing I know I couldn't leave my computer, because if I did, when I got back a short time later, there would be one or two messages already waiting for me. Let's just say that two weeks later, we had about 80 pages of single-spaced messages. When we felt comfortable enough we exchanged actual e-mail addresses and communicated that way.

After a couple of weeks we exchanged pictures, but we still were not talking on the phone until her rabbi checked me out and vice versa. We both felt it was important to go through that step, but Hadassah, a protective *Ima*, really insisted on it. Once we got the rabbinic "okays," that neither of us was a psychopath, Hadassah gave me her phone number. Our first phone conversation lasted five and a half hours (and I kept the phone bill to prove it). Obviously, communication was easy. It was time to take the next step and meet in person. This was a little more challenging for us than some,

since Hadassah was living in New York City, and I was in the Midwest. We decided to meet over *Chafetz Me Poush*. I traveled to see her, and we had a great time (we went back this *Chafetz Me Poush* to the place we had our first date). For the next three months we continued dating with my making several trips to New York City. On July 4th weekend, I asked the most important question of my life, the four most famous words, "Will you marry me?" I actually gave her a scratch-off ticket that had diamond shapes on the outside and when you scratched them off, said, "Will you marry me?" she said, "Yes." After that, we started to plan our wedding, which took place on December 18, 2005, 17 *Elul* 5766 in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Here are some of the "lessons" or advice I want to highlight from our success story. One of the reasons for writing our success story is to share our experience with others and hopefully inspire other people to never give up.

First of all, I always said (even as I got older) that I was not ready to go into a marriage with an instant family. Obviously, this is a very serious responsibility to undertake, and I am not saying that is the right decision for everyone. I am so grateful, however, that I was willing to consider something that was outside what I thought I wanted. Our daughter isn't that amazing phrase - "our daughter" is a source of joy. Hadassah and I encourage her to remember her *Ima*, and I make sure she knows I am not here to replace him. I am looking forward to being the father for this part of her life, and when she calls me "Daddy" it melts my heart.

I guess my second piece of advice is along the same lines. Never dismiss a *shidduch* because the person doesn't fit the description of what you thought you wanted. Here *Im Chana* and my beloved wife is a *halutz Imah*. Not only that, she has many *pele* weaknesses. Maybe that's why the wedding started exactly one hour late, joking aside. If Hadassah - whose first husband was a *halutz Imah* - hadn't been willing to look past the high percentage of animals and plants on my side and consider me as a person, I wouldn't be writing this success story. We also come from vastly different educational backgrounds. Hadassah has a graduate degree. I'm a product of the Hungarian Chassidic, *cheder/yeshiva* system. Rather than focus on the differences, we were both willing to look at the other person as an individual and consider who *he/she* is and what *he/she* has to offer. We weren't focused on whether the other person passed a preconceived list of criteria. Don't write someone off for reasons that ultimately aren't important. Ask yourself, "Is this someone with whom I can build a life? Will this person help me reach my goals? Can I help him/her reach his/her goals? Can we help each other grow in our *Avodat Hashem*?" We need to remember that Hadassah has a plan for everything and everyone. His plan might not look like what we expected, but all we have are our *himutzim*. If Hadassah would allow us to see the future, even for one minute, we would understand everything clearly. As with everything in life, trust in Hadassah.

My third piece of advice concerns distance. Yes, dating someone in another time zone is challenging. Even after Hadassah and I were engaged, we still weren't sure

where we would ultimately settle. It doesn't make sense, however, to rule out your potential husband because it is easier to date the wrong person living in your own area.

Frumster is a wonderful service that can help you find your husband, but only if you are completely honest, both in your profile and interactions with other members. Remember that you are trying to find the person with whom you will spend the rest of your life. Don't pretend to be someone you aren't. You want to find someone who will love and value you for the real you, not the "fictional you" you create online.

I would like to share another part of my success story. Being a guy, I was usually the one to initiate the first contact. When someone reaches out to you, it would be very nice if you respond back, even if it is with the standard Frumster, "This is not for me" message. I understand some are just basic members of the service, but when you do upgrade (or get a few days free from Frumster) please respond accordingly. Premium members can respond with ease. It is only fair to the other person and in the decent thing to do.

My final advice is obvious, but needs to be mentioned. Keep dreaming; there is never too much of that. Everything is in *Hadassah's* hands. Don't forget to keep the lines of communication open.

I now know why I wasn't able to get married earlier. It wasn't *Im Hadassah's* plan. Why I don't know, but that is the fact. I needed to wait until the time was right to meet Hadassah. I know it is hard to keep going and not despair when it is taking a long time to find your husband and you don't seem to be making progress. I have been, however many of you are still. "Never say never" never give up hope. Keep your head up high and remember that every girl has a *halutz Imah* but a *shidduch* for everybody including you. I know you are now in your late 20s, early to mid-30s, 40s, and, yes, your friends from *yeshiva/school* already have teenage children, and you are so light at the end of the tunnel. It is painful at times, but stop and think. Look around and see each tree has its branches, leaves, etc. and, some of those leaves or flowers are so small and hidden. Yet *Hadassah* takes care of every bit of it and those millions of other trees, and let's not forget the billions of little creatures (bugs, ants, worms, etc.). Do you still think *Hadassah* has forgotten about you? I am living proof that He does not forget!

Being married is great. I guess, because I married the best woman in the world. She has changed my life for the better (even while we were still dating). I always asked the question, "How will I know when the right one comes around?" I still can't answer this question with a clear list of "signs." It is a special feeling *Hadassah* puts into your heart. You just know.

Thanks again to the Frumster team for all their professional help and efforts to make this great idea work. Thanks to all the women who took the time to read and respond to my messages. Thanks again to *Hadassah* for sending the best present I could ever have asked for.

And last but not least, I have to thank my dear wife Hadassah for saying "Yes" - I could have not done it without you! ■