

Response:

When it comes to shidduchim, we are well aware that the ultimate shadchan is Hashem. I don't know whether your zivug is someone you would consider geographically undesirable or the girl who lives next door. But here is what I do know. Tragically, all of society has been struck with a global epidemic that scientists are still grappling to figure out while trying to save lives.

History has proven over and over that what has continually sustained Bnei Yisrael is that in the midst of disasters and all-encompassing calamities, there have always been batches of simchas thrown in here and there. In the past few weeks alone, while patients have been struggling to stay alive, tiny yet beautiful weddings like in the days of the European shtetls still took place, and precious new Yiddishe neshamos are, baruch Hashem, born every single day. That is the circle of life.

No, my friend, you most definitely should not wait this out to meet your bashert. If you feel physically and emotionally healthy, continue to allow shidduchim to be redt to you. Despite this unexpected catastrophe, as a society we have been blessed with the technology to continue doing what we can and as best as we can regardless of the recommended social distancing and medically advised quarantining.

Minyanim have ceased, but Torah is still thriving by the utilization of technology, with Zoom, conference calls, FaceTime, WhatsApp, etc. And of course, the old standbys — old-fashioned phone calls, texts, and e-mails. You sound like an intelligent guy, and so I have no doubt that you are knowledgeable in how to communicate electronically when a face-to-face meeting is impossible.

I will agree that in-person meetings are better, and I will also say that the electronic methods can distort the features, so that you will not necessarily get a clear-cut image of the person you are communicating with. However, there is an interesting twist to this. There are those who feel more at ease to speak by phone or text initially, rather than in person, especially if they are shy. Such people are more successful in building relationships by demonstrating their true personalities, specifically because they are not face to face with the person they are speaking or texting with. Regardless, this is what we have to work with, and people are trying to make the best of the current situation.

When bad things happen, it is natural for people to endeavor to find a solution to the problem. When it becomes evident that there is no quick and easy answer, people oftentimes fall into a state of non-acceptance and denial. After a while, the abnormal starts to become normal. Because it is natural to want to continue living, life in the abnormal takes on a new normal, and life resumes.

Social distancing and quarantining have become the new normal in our society, to such an extent that the calls I receive for shidduchim have increased tenfold. Singles who had taken a break from dating have come back on the scene in a big way. Not only are they reaching out to me to find them a shidduch, but they are zealously pursuing people they have previously declined. It might stem from an urgency for human contact which they are otherwise now denied, or perhaps it's the reality that life is indeed short, and that being alone is no longer as much fun as it used to be before we were all hit with this horrific coronavirus.

I recommend that when a shidduch is suggested to you and it makes sense, go for it. How can you date this person? Start by texting the young lady and asking her when she is up for a phone call. Keep the first conversation as long or as

short as you were accustomed to doing prior to the present situation. But here is where the difference will be. Instead of agreeing on a day and time to meet in person, you can set a day and time to FaceTime or Zoom. I know it's not your thing, but I am sure there are lots of things that you have no choice but to do differently now.

Again, bear in mind that features can become distorted, both yours and hers. It wouldn't hurt to crack a joke about that while having your first phone conversation. Use your imagination and apply your own personality when making a quip. Humor releases stress and puts people at ease while making them feel more drawn to the person they are communicating with.

How do you prepare yourself for the date? No pajamas or old stained shirt, please! I caution you to make yourself as presentable as possible in the same way as if you would be going on an in-person date. Practice good hygiene that will make you feel good about yourself, and, yes, wear something similar to what you would wear on a real date. When you prep yourself, it will help if you make believe that you will see your date in person. Unless you are talking on the phone (without video), how you physically present can make a huge difference on the impression you create.

If that first date goes well, then you continue the relationship electronically. If you want that second date to be a conversation by phone again, that's OK. If it progresses to a third date, I recommend an activity to make it fun and exciting. There are endless amounts of online games that are available for people to play together — word games, board games, card games, tic-tac-toe, question-and-answer games, YouTube games, etc. There are also apps that you can use to share screens. You might even consider having a fun virtual cooking date and eat

the foods you prepare, or you can even take virtual tours. Use your imagination, and also search for apps for more ideas. There are endless options for activities, and the best part is that you don't have to worry about spending money that ordinarily could add up to huge costs. The possibilities for remote relationships are infinite. To keep the anticipation high, plan for what you will do together when the time comes for in-person dates!

In response to your last question with regard to what is everybody doing now, the answer is that everyone I am speaking to in the shidduch world is increasing their spirituality, and by that I mean that their connection to Hashem has grown by leaps and bounds. The emunah and bitachon that I am witnessing among singles is awe-inspiring and it's drawing single men and women of all ages to one another. Spirituality is a common bond between people. Singles are bonding more than ever before. As they get to know each other through deep and meaningful conversations — in addition to the fun dates — relationships are growing in profound ways like never seen before.

Bnei Yisrael will not only overcome this challenging and tragic mageifah but will also thrive in powerful strength. When this pandemic will be declared over, iy'H, I anticipate many engagements and marriages. We have previously seen that happen in the aftermath of calamities that have befallen us. Who knows? Maybe the shidduch that you once said no to because she lived farther away than you were comfortable with will now have a chance.