

A few words about matchmaking in Aleppo. First of all, an Aleppo man marries an Aleppo woman. It is irrelevant whether she was born in Brazil or Panama, Milan or Buenos Aires, the important thing is that she come from an Aleppo family – “*min jama'ana*”, i.e. “one of us”, of our fraternity. And if she happens to be a cousin or some other true relative – so much the better! Then one has to see what her parents can give so that the young couple may launch their life on the right footing: a store already established – not bad; a branch of a bank – a little better; the chances of inheriting a factory – now that is really something, even if they do have to wait a little. Once they used to ask if there were wise men and scholars in the family, but in later generations the scales tipped in favor of business.

Matchmaking too is a business, but it also includes an element of *Mitzvah* (religious duty or good deed), both from the religious and social point of view. The satisfaction of the Matchmaker from his work, and the honor due him from the Community if his matches are successful (and that, of course, is something that the whole community knows about), are no less important than the income.

A Matchmaker worthy of the name makes an effort to find out the tastes of the boy and to whom the girl is attracted. A clever Matchmaker also asks (with a wink): “How does he seem to you, that young man?”. The factors of love and attraction exist and are taken into account. In the opinion of the Matchmaker, his work is the most important in the world, and many in the community would concur. What could be more important than the family, and what does the fate of the family depend on if not the selection of a suitable mate? The fate of your children, and of your children's children depends on the correct selection, so why not accept the help of someone who has experience, information and the ability to make objective judgments.

There were different types of matchmakers. There was the professional *Shadchan*, and there were respectable women who took up matchmaking as a pleasant hobby, although they were not adverse to taking a commission. There were good ones and better ones. As in any profession, however, fools or the truly incompetent did not last long in the business.

Looking back on what I have been relating, it seems to me that basically the Jewish family is the same everywhere, only the processes it undergoes may be faster in one place and slower in another. On the surface I have been talking about an Aleppo family, an Oriental-Sephardi family. But if we examine things more deeply we find that it is almost identical to a family of two generations ago in Eastern Europe, or three generations ago in Western or Central Europe. The number of children, the relationships within the family, methods of education and matchmaking, the mutual aid and the family economy, and whatever else you will, all these are more similar than different.

We immigrated to Israel of our own free will, in the true sense of the words. My older brother Yitzhak was faced with the choice of being the representative of Syrian Jewry in the Syrian Parliament (the candidacy had been officially offered him) or accepting the appointment which had been offered him by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; he chose the latter. Two other brothers, younger than him, were already in Israel, and their reports were enthusiastic. All of the brothers who reached Israel had something in common – something which had apparently been inherited from our father, the artist-craftsman, and from mother, the intellectual, who read and wrote so much. The Psalms and the songs of the Festival Prayer Books were common to both father and mother, but in mother's case there were also the proverbs of La Fontaine, and legends, poems and rhymed riddles in spicy French. Perhaps my love of painting, sculpture and oriental ornamentation came to me from my father, the artist of the

