The best age to get married

The first Mitsva mentioned in the Tora is Piryia veRibyia, the commandment (and God's first blessing to mankind) to get married and bring children to this world

Two thousand years ago, in Pirqe Abot, the Rabbis said that a man should get married when he reaches 18 years old. They said that God himself "watches him and waits for him from 18 to 20 to see him getting married". However, the Rabbis themselves explained that if the boy is busy with his studies and fears that once married he will have to stop studying (itbabtel min haTora) he could postpone his marriage (Shulhan Arukh, Eben haEzer 1:3). Some rabbis suggest that marriage should not be postponed beyond the age of 24 years old, even in these circumstances.

Clearly, according to our Rabbis, it is preferable to get married young. But they themselves acknowledged that there are other elements beyond age to be taken into consideration. For example, the maturity of the boy and the girl, which is essential to have a happy life and a successful marriage (=Shalom Bayit), and the possibility to provide for the basic expenses of a family. Maimonides writes on this las point: "Those who are emotionally-balanced (derekh ba'ale hade'a) is that they first secure a job which enables them to provide for their livelihood; then they get a home, and then, they get married. But those who are emotionally immature (tipeshim), first, they get married, then they try to get a place to live, and then they look for a job…" (De'ot 5:11).

We can see that, in the Rabbis' opinion, the younger one gets married, the better. Especially when one is emotionally mature and has the means to live a decent life, then marriage should not be postponed unnecessarily.

Can a younger sibling get married before the older?

Normally, every family expects the older daughter or son to get married first. This is the accepted tradition and there are two sources to support this idea. One is an allusion to this ancient custom from the words of Laban to Ya'aqob, when Laban refused to give his younger daughter Rahel in marriage before Leah. He said: "In our place, this will not be done, giving the younger (to marriage) before the older" (Bereshit 29:26). The second and more solid source is the case of the five daughters of Tzelofhad, who according to our rabbis got married according to their age.

Nevertheless, the Rabbis see this tradition not as a matter of law but as a matter of preference. They do not mention any prohibition for the younger brother or sister to get married first, if she or he are at the age of marriage.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein has a very interesting interpretation of this tradition. In his opinion (IGM, EH'E 2:1) giving the priority to the older sibling to get married, applies only when both of them are engaged. Then, the wedding of the older sister or brother must take place first. But other than that, if the younger sibling finds her spouse first, she should not be prevented from the opportunity.

In many communities it is customary that in this case, the younger brother or sister asks formally permission from his older sibling (let us not forget that honoring the older sibling is part of the Mitsva of Kibbud Ab va-Em), and the older sibling is expected to give his or her blessing wholeheartedly.