Choosing your future spouse, with your head and your heart

The decision to select a wife or husband should be made based on two factors, which must be in agreement: our emotions and our mind. In other words, if we have feelings toward a certain person, i.e., attraction, but the mind says that “it is not a good idea”, or if the mind says “yes”, but there are negative feelings toward that person, the Shiddukh should be reconsidered.

In the area of the mind, one is advised to make sure that the other person has *middot tobot*, good qualities, that he or she comes from a decent family, and that values and character traits are more or less compatible. Some bad traits should be seen as red flags. Among them: arrogance, greed and a short temper. Those are character flaws which are very difficult to correct.
In the area of emotions, one does not need to feel an immediate attraction toward the prospective candidate, on the contrary, that might be a sign of looking superficially at a person. “Falling in love”, and especially, “love at first sight”, might be a dangerous trap. Because “falling” in love might imply a temporary shutting-off of our mind, which should be completely active at the time of making the most important decision of our life. In the area of emotions, one should be mindful of not having an emotional antagonism toward the other person =’rejection at first sight’. If those negative feelings are there, then, one should not proceed.
Most couples I know, the first few times they met, did not feel an automatic attraction, nor an automatic rejection for each other, they were emotionally ‘parve’. Then, when the head said “yes”, they invested some time for the emotions to be nurtured as they interacted as a couple in the dating process and got to know each other better.
Back to the “head”. The Shulhan Arukh (eben ha’ezer 2:2) writes that one should be sensitive of certain red flags in the family of the prospective candidates.
1. It mentions that it is not a good sign if the family of the

candidate is always fighting within themselves or with another family. One should look for a spouse that comes from a peace-loving family.
2. If a family is always trying to delegitimize other families, that family is suspicious of coming of an illegitimate ancestry (pesulim). As a rule, our Rabbis asserted that when one is overly critical of others in a specific area, it is probably due to his own guilt or complexes in that specific area. For example, if someone is obsessively looking to prove that other people are stealing, it is possible that he himself is guilty of it. The rabbis described this behavior with four words: *kol hapoesel bemumo posel*, "When someone is permanently criticizing others in a specific area, he or she is probably projecting his own flaws". In our case then, if a family has an obsession for legitimacy, it is possible that they are lacking legitimacy. (This pattern of behavior, as I explained, extends beyond the matter of 'legitimacy').
3. The Shulhan Arukh identifies the genetic setup of a Jewish person with the following words: Jews are innately compassionate, shy, and actively kind (rachmanim, bayshanim, gomle hasadim). So ingrained are these character traits in a Jew, that the Rabbis declared that whoever acts with cruelty towards others; does not show sensitivity toward other people's suffering; does not have a minimal dose of decency or displays a shameless behavior, might not be of a Jewish ascendance.
The more identifiable these three virtues are in a candidate, the stronger the case for considering him or her a suitable partner, and vice versa.