

*Rabbi Yosef Kushner*

**Question:** One of the major halachic issues that has arisen during the era of Covid-19 is *yichud* while dating. While couples going out on a date would have previously met in public places like a hotel lobby, many of those venues are no longer available for visitors. Instead, many couples have gone to private areas, such as empty office buildings, empty houses, and the like.

These locations often present potential problems of *yichud* (the prohibition of a man and woman being alone together). How can such dates be arranged so that they do not infringe on any halachic violations?

**Answer:** This phenomenon is a prime example of a sudden societal change during which people have not yet had sufficient time to carefully consider what they do and the potential concerns. Any case of using a deserted office building, even if it is not locked, in the evening for a date certainly may involve a serious question of *yichud*, as the couple does not expect anyone to join them in the building at that hour.

The best suggestion is to go to an office building that is still somewhat in use. Even if it is semi-private, if it is unlocked and people are nearby who may enter at any time, it is not considered a problem of *yichud*, just like a hotel lobby. One should make sure to keep the door and hallways open so anyone can enter when they wish.

However, a date that takes place in an empty house, such as an empty vacation house, where no one even knows they are present, is a very serious issue of *yichud*, even if the door is left open, as it is not expected that anyone might come and disturb their privacy in such a case.

**Question:** Does appointing another individual to occasionally enter solve the problem, since the couple will always be uncertain if and when this person would come?

**Answer:** Although it is preferable to avoid using an empty

office building, house or the like altogether, it is theoretically possible to create a situation where there is a real risk that the couple's privacy will be disturbed. This, in turn, prevents a problem of *yichud*.

But in order to be effective, this solution must be implemented properly. One cannot simply ask someone to drop in once, as after he leaves, there will again be a problem of *yichud* and the couple will feel "safe" that they are alone for the remainder of their time there. One also should not remind the person that they do not actually need to come, since in that case they may not (and probably will not) come at all.

Rather, one must arrange a situation where the couple feels that they are not truly alone, as someone may intrude on their privacy the entire time that they are there. This can be best achieved in a place where people are constantly coming and going. Otherwise, one must ensure that the person being asked to visit truly may enter multiple times during the evening, such that the couple never really knows if and when he will come.