

# Bashert

Jewish Wisdom on Love, Dating and Marriage



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Rabbi Dan Silverman

## Three Ingredients of a Successful Marriage

Marriage is the commitment  
to pursue life goals together.

How many people hope to plan on getting married at some point in their lives? Most of us, if we aren't already, will end up getting married.

How many of us plan on getting divorced? If statistics are right, there's a good chance half of us will.

The relationships in our lives largely determine the amount of happiness we have in life. Who we choose to marry is arguably the most important decision we will make in determining our happiness and our children's happiness (and even your parents' happiness).

We train and license people for almost every conceivable activity. Doctors, lawyers, plumbers, chefs, interior designers – they all have to prove their competence before we would dare use them.

But for the big issues in life, for the things that really matter, there really is no training – no degrees in parenting, schools for happiness, PhD's in relationships.

For most of us we approach the issues in love and marriage as orphans, without learning from the cumulative experience and wisdom of past generations. We approach the key questions – What is marriage? How do I find the right person? How do I ensure a happy, fulfilling marriage? – alone, making all sorts of mistakes as we try to figure it out and get it right. That method would work – if no one got hurt along the way.

Today, marriage seems to be a kind of evolutionary accident. After a period of getting acquainted, dating and becoming romantically involved comes the stage of

restlessness. The couple confronts the terrifying question of: What next? The default answer puts them on the altar of marriage, vowing to live happily ever after. Hopefully.

Jews believe that God created the world for man to have a life of meaning and pleasure. He wants us to have it all. And He gave us an instruction book telling us how to get it. The Torah is *Toras Chaim* – literally, the instructions for living.

How do you think the Torah describes the state of being married? Eternal bliss? Chained?

"A man should therefore leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Marriage is the process of becoming one flesh. Marriage is not two people coming together to form a partnership, nor an agreement to be roommates permanently. It's not a method to get a tax break, or a way to share household chores. The Jewish idea of marriage is two halves becoming one, completing each other.

What does the couple need in order to accomplish this sense of unification? Imagine marriage as a journey down the path of life. Car, gas, food – we're ready to go. What is necessary for the two travelers in this car to "unite" for this trip?

a) Destination: They have to know where they're going in order to commit to go together. If one wants to go skiing, he can't get there with someone who wants to go to the beach.

b) Commitment: Two people won't arrive at their destination if one can back out at a second's notice.

c) Affinity: If they can't stand each other, it's going to be an intolerable ride.

### Life Goals

The essence of marriage is the commitment to pursue life goals together.

Marriage needs to have clear goals shared by husband and wife. It's so obvious, but so often ignored. I know a couple who almost ended up divorced because after a few years of marriage he wanted children and she didn't want the burden of raising them. They dated for five years – yet never discussed if they wanted to have children!

Don't think this a far-out example. Couples break up over many issues: How to raise their kids, where to live, how much a part religion will play in their lives, giving priority to a career or family, whose career will come first if they're in conflict.

Shared values and priorities provide a structure which unites the couple and allows them to work on becoming "one flesh."

Some of us think that marriage itself is enough of a life goal. We are fed the illusion that you don't need any goals outside of one another. "All you need is love."

Not true. Marriage itself is not a life goal. It puts an unbearable strain on a relationship if the partners expect the relationship will satisfy all their needs.

Love is not all you need. Marriage is a powerful tool to help us pursue the things we care about in life with added energy, with an added sense of self. If you're depressed, aimless and single, you'll be depressed, aimless and married.

Life goals are the things in life that mean everything to you, the values that you stand for, that you're willing to sacrifice for. If they're so easy to change, then chances are they're not so important to you.

What do we mean by values?

Honesty, integrity, loyalty, kindness. If she's not nice to her own family, there's a good chance she's not going to be nice to yours, either.

This person is going to be the parent of your children. How will they shape your kids?

You can't delay discussing life goals, hoping you'll come to an agreement once you're married, expecting the other person to change. Ideas and tastes change, but character is something very hard to change. Don't expect her to change. You have to be ruthlessly honest.

For many people, the problem is the lack of clear life goals. We spend years going to college, learning how to make a decent living, but we are rarely challenged to confront the issues of what priorities supersede our financial goals.

Sure, we all have a vague sense of what we want in life: to be good, raise a family, make the world a better place. These are lovely sentiments, but in the words of Gloria Steinem, "We best know our values when we look at our check stubs." Our true values are most revealed – not by what we say, but by the way we spend our time and money.

If we aren't clearly defining our life goals, then they are being defined for us. We tend to adopt society's values, and today society's main value is wealth and success. *People* magazine is filled with the lives of the rich and famous, not the wise and happy. There once was an advertisement that showed the sun setting behind a luxury automobile. The caption read: "You are looking at 3,500 pounds of life goal fulfillment."

We spend so much time and energy on becoming rich and successful, yet we all know that that is not what it's all about. We will never hear a eulogy of how he "was a very classy dresser, he always drove this year's model, and his house was enormous."

Besides this, success and career as life goals are not necessarily conducive to a good marriage. Success requires a lot of time and energy, and that often comes at the expense of one's spouse and family.

Before you can contemplate marriage, you need to know your life goals: What do I want to do with my life? What are the things that mean everything to me? And why?

Here are two exercises that might help clarify things:

a) Life goals are those things you'd regret not having done if you died tomorrow. Rabbi Noah Weinberg zt"l said: "You don't know what you're living for, unless you know what you're ready to die for. Articulate the essential things that make life constantly purposeful. Go further and ask, "Why? Why am I ready to die for this?" Be clear. And then: If you're ready to die for it, live for it. What else could be more meaningful?

b) List three people you respect most in the world. Identify what you respect. Why do you value this?

Couples may argue over a stray toothpaste cap or whose turn it is to get up with the baby, but no matter how heated these run-ins become, they should never destroy a marriage.

Know your own goals in life. Then you can talk about whether or not the person you're dating is moving in the same direction.

## Commitment

When it comes to the topic of marriage, many people wonder: Why bother? I'll just have the relationship without the marriage.

Let's understand the Jewish idea of marriage.

In describing Adam, the first human, the Torah says, "Male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). We learn from here that originally Man was created as male and female in one complete entity. They were then separated, and brought together again as a couple. Marriage is the unification of two halves into one complete entity, described as "one flesh."

It's not just poetics.

What is my commitment to my hand?

I am not committed to my hand. I *am* my hand. My commitment to my hand is one I'd reconsider if it became gangrenous, and I was left with no choice but amputation.

But I wouldn't reconsider my commitment to my hand if it were broken, or ugly, or if I met someone with a nicer hand. If your hand is killing you – then you get rid of it. The commitment of marriage is until it's killing you.

Divorce is appropriate when the marriage has become an abusive, destructive relationship that can't be cured. Amputation is never casual. Often people get divorced because they simply get bored with each other. The marriage goes stale and flat. "We don't laugh like we used to anymore."

If someone told you that he was amputating his hand because "The fun went out of it" you'd say he's nuts. Marriage is exactly the same.

If that sounds a bit extreme, it's because we have a faulty definition of comfort and pleasure.

Comfort is not pleasure. Comfort is the absence of pain. Lying on the beach, a cold drink, falling asleep – this is nice and comfortable.

Pleasure, on the other hand, requires effort and work. In fact, all meaningful accomplishments and deeper pleasures necessitate the struggle to achieve them: Raising kids, mastering a sport or an instrument, getting ahead in your career. If it doesn't require pain, if it comes easily without challenge, then it's not as pleasurable. It doesn't mean as much to you.

Make no mistake about it: Marriage is not comfortable. Marriage demands a lot of work and pain. You can't continue avoiding your weaknesses, living in your tailor-

made world of illusions. Marriage requires confronting yourself and that is hard.

Marriage doesn't decrease demands and responsibilities – it adds to them in heaps and bounds. There isn't only "me" to think about anymore – there is a whole other person, who is surprisingly different than you. Marriage forces you to get out of your self-centeredness. It demands an emotional intimacy that for many of us is new and frightening.

Squeezing two people together to form one flesh is bound to create some tension. And there will come a point in the middle of a fight when you're ready to throw up your arms, thinking "This person is nuts – I can't take it any longer!" At that point the future of your marriage hangs in the balance. Take a deep breath and resolve to work it out. Then you're on the road to building a great marriage. If you feel like taking the easy way out, then it's only a matter of time – maybe 6 months or 6 years – but eventually things will get too tough and the relationship will crumble.

Marriage requires work and the commitment to make it work. Without that commitment, do not get married! It's only a matter of time before it gets too difficult, and you'll be out the door.

So maybe you'll ask (and many people are asking today): Why bother getting married? What makes the effort worth it?

Marriage makes a person into a full human being.

By oneself, a person is destined to remain a self-centered egocentric being, his main concerns in life being the fulfillment of his need for power, prestige and gratification. Marriage gives him the chance to overcome all that and become, instead, a giver – one who is concerned about another person's needs.

Marriage is the way to build a family and a home, share your life with someone you love, deepen your emotional

capacities, and open yourself up to another like you never have before.

Those who ask, "Can't I have all this without marriage?" are really saying: "Do I really have to make the level of commitment that requires me to stick it out when the going gets tough?"

Without that commitment, you're roommates. It's not the same as marriage. Whatever you build together is built on quicksand. Because as long as there's an exit, that exit, at some point in the relationship, will be taken.

Commitment is the backbone of marriage. Of course, if you want the other person's total commitment, you have to make the same level of commitment yourself.

## Love and Infatuation

So where does love fit into all this? How can we talk about marriage without talking about love?

When we talk about love we have to make a distinction between "love" and "infatuation." Infatuation is: We met on the beach, I was struck by her beauty, it was so wonderful being with her, with the sunset shimmering through her golden hair. I knew this was forever."

Do you think this relationship is going to last?

Because it stems from desire, infatuation rarely lasts. Love, on the other hand, comes from a genuine appreciation of who the other person is. Infatuation is blind, love is a magnifying glass. If you think she's perfect, then chances are you're head over heels in infatuation. If you can't stand the way she says hello, then you're in love.

Love comes from really knowing a person and seeing his/her beauty, strength of character and what he/she is really made of. You can't love someone until you know them. It's like saying you love a book you haven't read. All you got to know was the outer jacket.



Which brings us to a shocker: True love comes after marriage. The Torah says that Isaac took Rebecca into his tent and he loved her (Genesis 24:67). Love should grow continuously as your appreciation of your spouse grows.

A friend of mine was sitting with his father and said to him, "Dad, after five years of marriage, I think I finally understand what love is."

The father said, "Wait till you're married 25 years, then you'll understand what love is."

The grandfather was also in the room and overheard this exchange. He told them: "Wait till you're married 50 years. Then you'll *really* understand what love is."

## Putting It All Together

Of course, you need to be attracted. Intimacy is a foundation of marriage, the true "binding of one flesh" described in genesis. You can't develop a loving relationship with someone who repulses you. But the goal is not to win a beauty contest. What is important is that you have a basic attraction. This will grow as your appreciation of their inner beauty grows. The intimacy becomes an expression of the emotional closeness that you've built.

Of course, if you're seriously looking for a lifelong partner, it's important to get to know the person while remaining as objective as possible. Now is not the time to get swept off your feet; now is the time to take a really honest look at who this person truly is. It's not enough that she's nice and attractive.

So remember: Look for a marriage partner with:

- Same destination – life goals
- Shared commitment
- Affinity and attraction

Define your goals, and then commit to marriage as the vehicle to get you there together. It is life's most precious journey.

Rabbi Aryeh Pamensky

## Finding Your Soul Mate

Know when to say "I do."  
And then the real work begins.

A story in the Talmud says that centuries ago, when a young man would get married, people would ask him a curious question: "Have you found, or are you finding?"

The questioner would then quote a verse, depending on the groom's answer. If the groom says that he "found," they'd quote the verse: "One who found a wife has found good" (Proverbs 18:22).

If, however, he answers that he is "finding," they quote the verse: "I am finding something more bitter than death, a wife" (Ecclesiastes 7:26).

The attitude for a great marriage is displayed by the groom who answers, "I found." He is saying that he is fully committed to this woman as the one for him. He is no longer going to be checking out to see if he's possibly made a mistake.

He understands that with all the future hardships and broken fantasies, with all the personality flaws and shattered dreams, with all the arguing and tears that will be shed, even with all these things, this is the one for him. They are going to persevere and work through all their issues and create the relationship that they both deserve.

A husband who has "found" his wife and constantly makes her feel that she is the only one for him, "has found good."

On the other hand, the husband who is constantly "finding" – i.e. still checking out to see if he's made the right decision, makes his wife feel judged and never really gives her a sense of security in the relationship. If she

can't trust him that he will be there for her no matter what, then the situation will feel to him "more bitter than death."

Most people believe that a good marriage is a "happening." If you marry the right person, you will have a great relationship. This is not true. Marriage is a skill. You need to work on these strategies daily. Small gestures and cosmic connections all add up to the sum total of your marriage. How you make your spouse feel today is what great marriages are made up of.

The lesson: You have to constantly treat your spouse as if they are your soul mate. The truth is that you will never really know anyway, until you have been married for a long, long time.

Whenever I say this to single people, they usually stop me, give a double take and declare: "Are you saying that you cannot know before marriage whether the person is your soul mate?!"

That is correct. You cannot really know. You hardly know the person. Even if you have been dating for years, the nature of the relationship is such that without the sense of security that a lifetime commitment brings, you will never show all your cards. People are always shocked that after marriage, everything changes. It is as if you have married a different person.

It takes time to build the confidence necessary to show the real you, to let your spouse in deeper and deeper, as you peel away the layers of fear, anxiety and pain caused by past broken trusts.

This is why it takes years of marriage to find out who you are really married to. Truthfully, it can take years of marriage to find out who your really are, too. The best and worse of you are revealed through this marital dance.

After years of growing closer, and treating your spouse as a precious and intimate part of yourself, you will inevitably become soul mates.

Of course, marrying the right person can make this process easier. But then again, there are multitudes of "soul mates" in divorce court.

## Flesh and Bones

So if you cannot know whether the person is indeed your soul mate, how should you make the decision who to marry?

I have asked thousands of single people why they are not married. They nearly all give the same answer: "I haven't met the right person."

So I ask: "How will you know when you've met the right person?"

They answer: "I'll just know." Just know? Will there be a moment of intense clarity from deep within... an inner-voice... an epiphany? Or perhaps butterflies in the stomach, fireworks in the sky, and the sound of bells peeling in your head?

I know of a few couples who have gotten married under these circumstances. But if this is your strategy for finding a spouse, it is like buying a lottery ticket as a wealth strategy. Possible, but very highly improbable.

The story of how Adam and Eve met is a wonderful lesson on how to find a spouse. Adam was by himself, and God said that it is not good for man to be alone; therefore, He would make for him a woman.

But before the Torah tells how Eve was created, it goes off on a really strange tangent. It tells of how God brought all the animals to Adam for him to name them.

After he completes this task, Adam declares that he has still not found his wife. Well, what did he expect?! You think today's dating market is tough – look at the zoo that Adam had to go through! Picture the scene: God brings an elephant in front of Adam and asks, "What do you think of

this one?" Adam, not wanting to hurt the elephant's feelings says, "Well, she has nice ears... but I just don't think she's for me." He then names the elephant and God brings the next animal: "How about this one?"

What's going on here? Did God really think that Adam was going to find a wife this way?!

The answer is that naming the animals is the prerequisite for Adam to get married. A name describes the essence of a being. As Adam peered into the nature of each animal, and searched for the trait that best encapsulated its essence, he first had to identify that trait in himself. If he did not have it within, he would never have recognized it in the animal.

Naming the animals was a process of self-discovery for Adam. Only after he had understood who he really was, could he then recognize what he was lacking, and appreciate that he was truly alone.

God then immediately created Eve, and Adam declared that she was "the flesh of my flesh, and the bones of my bones." Adam had stopped trying to "find" a soul mate, and was now certain that he had "found."

The most important prerequisite to know if you should marry a person (or not), is to know yourself first. If you don't have a clear sense of who you are and where you are going, if you don't have clear life goals and a thought-out path in life, you can never expect to recognize if the person in front of you is the one you should marry.

In other words, if you think that you're not married yet because you haven't met the right person, you are probably right. The person you have yet to meet it yourself.

Know yourself, and you will have a much easier time recognizing your future spouse.

And then, when you get married, if you treat your spouse as your soul mate, you will create it to be so.

Sara Yoheved Rigler

## Eat, Pray, Love, Then What?

Why marriage matters.

A Jewish response to Liz Gilbert's bestseller.

*Eat, Pray, Love* is Liz Gilbert's tale of her one-year quest to find wholeness after a devastating divorce, a miserable love affair, and a deep depression. She travels to Italy, India, and Bali, masterfully recounting her inner and outer adventures. In Bali she meets a Brazilian man 17 years her senior, whom she pseudonymously calls "Felipe." The book concludes with her and Felipe deciding to live together in America, Australia (where his grown children live), Brazil, and Bali.

Their love story picks up in Gilbert's sequel, *Committed*. They have settled in Philadelphia, and have pledged to each other lifelong fidelity. In addition, since they are both survivors of painful divorces, they have, as Elizabeth writes, "sworn with all our hearts to never, ever, under any circumstances marry." The villain who wrecks their dreams then appears: the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security. One fateful day at the Dallas airport, Felipe is stopped by the authorities, interrogated for six hours, and then told he will not be allowed to enter the U.S. ever again. Felipe's only hope of return, Officer Tom suggests to them, is to get married.

They spend the next ten months traveling in Southeast Asia, the cheapest place to live, since *Eat, Pray, Love* has not yet burst into stardom. Outwardly, they are "killing time," waiting for the bureaucratic process to grant Felipe's fiance visa. Inwardly, Elizabeth is going through an even more arduous process, trying to make peace with what she repeatedly calls "the institution of marriage." "What I really wanted, more than anything," she explains, "was to find a way to somehow embrace marriage to Felipe when the big day came rather than merely swallowing my fate like a hard and awful pill."



## Giving It All Away

The essence of Elizabeth's stubborn resistance to marriage is embedded in the story of her Grandmother Maude's coat. Grandma Maude was born, on a farm in Minnesota in 1913, with a serious cleft-palate deformity. Even after surgery, she was left with a visible scar in the middle of her face that rendered her, in everyone's estimation, unmarriageable. Since she would have to support herself through life, she was allowed to finish high school (a luxury her siblings on the farm were not granted). After graduating, while all the other girls in her society were hunkering down to marriage and motherhood, Maude embarked on a great adventure. She traveled to Montana all by herself, worked in a restaurant, got herself a haircut and a fancy permanent wave from an actual hairdresser, went to the movies, and read books. Returning to Minnesota, she got a job as a housekeeper and secretary to the wealthy Mrs. Parker, a socialite who threw parties with the best steaks, booze and cigarettes.

Writes her adulating granddaughter Liz: "Her youthful independence is best epitomized by one symbol: a gorgeous wine-colored coat with a real fur collar that she bought for herself for \$20... I believe you could pick your way through my family's genealogy with tweezers and never find a woman before Maude who'd ever bought something so fine and expensive for herself."

Then, to everyone's surprise, Maude married a handsome, hardworking farm boy. She moved into a single, Spartan room in her father-in-law's small farmhouse, and proceeded to give birth to seven children. "Her life after that was pretty much unremitting hardship and hard work," writes Liz. The cruelest cut came when Maude's first daughter was born. Maude cut up her cherished wine-colored coat and used the material to sew a Christmas outfit for the new baby.

Her anguished granddaughter writes: "That has always been, in my mind, the operative metaphor for what marriage does to... the women in my family... Because

what my grandmother did with her fine coat (the loveliest thing she would ever own) is what all the women of that generation (and before) did for their families and their husbands and their children. They cut up the finest and proudest parts of themselves and gave it all away."

With that, Elizabeth unveils the fear that spawned this entire book, her desperate attempt to understand the purpose of marriage in the Western world. But asking what is the purpose of marriage requires asking what is the purpose of life, because marriage is just one course in the great curriculum called "life." Elizabeth makes her core mistake in assuming that the purpose of life is self-expression rather than self-transcendence.

## Why Marriage Matters

Elizabeth, who spent four months in an Indian ashram (chronicled in *Eat, Pray, Love*) on her hands and knees scrubbing the temple floors, surely learned there that the enemy of the Higher Self is the ego, which must be tamed, trained, trounced, and transcended. Liz's guru would have considered the fancy-coat-decked-out Maude, enjoying hairdressers, movies, and sumptuous parties, to be a deluded prisoner of her own ego, and the married, mothering Maude, in giving and serving mode, to be cutting through a bar of that prison every time she put others first. (Indeed, Liz is flabbergasted when her grandmother tells her that the happiest period of her life was not when she worked for Mrs. Parker, but rather the first few years of her marriage.)

When self-transcendence is the goal, marriage is not the great spoiler, but rather the great facilitator. The daily discipline of relinquishing your preferences for your spouse, of going Chinese when you prefer Italian, of sleeping with the thermostat set to a frigid 64 when you prefer 68, can liberate you from the prison of egotism and self-centeredness.

Judaism, alone among the great religions, has always regarded marriage as the highest spiritual path. After documenting how early Christianity was pro-celibacy and

anti-marriage, Elizabeth asserts: "So when modern-day religious conservatives wax nostalgic about how marriage is a sacred tradition that reaches back into history for thousands of uninterrupted years, they are absolutely correct, but in only one respect – only if they happen to be talking about Judaism."

According to Torah (Genesis 1:27), the first human being was created half male and half female. Then this androgynous being was separated, with God detaching one side (not rib, as often mistranslated, but side) to become a separate female being. The primordial wholeness can be restored only through marriage. When two Jews marry, something mystical happens under the chuppah; their two souls are fused into one. And this new, joint entity can become the resting place for the Divine Presence in this world. Indeed "bayit," the Hebrew word for "home," is the same word used for the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, where the Shechinah or Divine Presence, the manifestation of the Infinite God in the finite world, dwelled. As the Talmud states: "No man [should be] without a woman, no woman without a man, and both of them not without the Shechinah."

Rather than diminishing the self, as Elizabeth fears, marriage expands the self to include the spouse. In this sense her metaphor of marriage as relinquishing the fine "coat" is apt. A coat encloses the person and protects her from cold, wind and other outside forces. A coat delineates the borders of the self; there is no room for anyone but you inside your coat. By contrast, a chuppah is a piece of fabric that protects all those who stand under it: the couple and their families. The chuppah symbolizes the home (there's that word again) that the new couple is about to build. It is their shared garment and shared goal.

In Judaism, the purpose of marriage is to create a sacred space where the Divine Presence can dwell. Since the Holy Temple was destroyed, there is no other way to bond with God on all levels than through bonding with one's spouse.

This process is difficult (as all worthwhile endeavors are) because men and women are so different in their physical, psychological, and spiritual make-up. That's why commitment is necessary. As long as there's an escape route, a person will take it when the going gets rough. When there's no escape route, a person will tap every bit of his/her potential to fight for victory.

Relationships sans marriage have many convenient exits. Once a person commits to marriage, however, there's only one exit: divorce. While Elizabeth, with her Christian background, regards divorce as "sinful," in Judaism divorce is a valid exit offered by the Torah. Even so, the door of divorce is a tight, barbed wire trimmed exit; no one gets through it unscathed. Which is precisely why the married person is more apt to stretch, change, adapt and grow in order to make the relationship succeed.

As Rabbi Nachum Braverman explained the Jewish view of commitment and divorce: "What is my commitment to my hand? I'm not committed to my hand. I *am* my hand." In a similar way, your spouse is part of you. And as you wouldn't amputate your hand unless it became gangrenous and was threatening your life, so divorce, which is an actual amputation, should be considered only when keeping the relationship is killing you.

## Greek vs. Hebrew

After conducting a mental debate with the author throughout *Committed*, I was startled to turn a page near the end and find my debate in print. Elizabeth comes to the conclusion that she is so stubbornly resisting marriage because she is "Greek," as opposed to "Hebrew." She explains:

It has long been understood by philosophers that the entire bedrock of Western culture is based on two rival worldviews – the Greek and the Hebrew – and whichever side you embrace more strongly determines to a large extent how you see life.

From the Greeks... we have inherited our ideas about secular humanism and the sanctity of the individual... "Hebrew" is shorthand for an ancient worldview that is all about tribalism [Her repeated references to Jewish "tribalism" make me feel like I'm wearing a tiger-tooth necklace with a bone dangling from my nose], faith, obedience, and respect... The collective is more important than the individual, morality is more important than happiness, and vows are inviolable.

The problem is that modern Western culture has somehow inherited both these ancient worldviews – though we have never entirely reconciled them because they aren't reconcilable... Our [American] legal code is mostly Greek; our moral code is mostly Hebrew. We have no way of thinking about independence and intellect and the sanctity of the individual that is not Greek. We have no way of thinking about righteousness and God's will that is not Hebrew.

...The perfect Greek lover is erotic; the perfect Hebrew lover is faithful. Passion is Greek; fidelity is Hebrew.

In the end, with the Department of Homeland Security holding the shotgun, Greek Elizabeth marries Felipe. And this Hebrew reader hereby gives her a wedding gift in the form of this blessing: All that you were searching for in Italy (pleasure), in India (closeness to God), and in Bali (balance), may you find at home within your marriage.

Rabbi Dov Heller, M.A.

## Ten Ways to Marry the Wrong Person

Sage advice for how to avoid divorce court.

With the divorce rate over 50 percent, too many are apparently making a serious mistake in deciding who to spend the rest of their life with. To avoid becoming a "statistic," try to internalize these 10 insights.

### #1. You pick the wrong person because you expect him/her to change after you're married.

Never marry potential. The golden rule is: If you can't be happy with the person the way he or she is now, don't get married. As a colleague of mine so wisely put it, "You actually can expect people to change after their married... for the worst!"

So when it comes to the other person's spirituality, character, personal hygiene, communication skills, and personal habits, make sure you can live with these as they are now.

### #2. You pick the wrong person because you focus more on chemistry than on character.

Chemistry ignites the fire, but good character keeps it burning. Beware of the "I'm in love" syndrome. "I'm in love" often means, "I'm in lust." Attraction is there, but have you carefully checked out this person's character?

Here are four character traits to definitely check for:

- Humility: Does this person believe that "doing the right thing" is more important than personal comfort?
- Kindness: Does this person enjoy giving pleasure to other people? How does s/he treat people s/he doesn't

have to be nice to? Does s/he do volunteer work? Give charity?

- Responsibility: Can I depend on this person to do what s/he says s/he's going to do?
- Happiness: Does this person have good self-esteem? Does s/he enjoy life? Is s/he emotionally stable?

Ask yourself: Do I want to be more like this person? Do I want to have a child with this person? Would I like my child to turn out like him or her?

### **#3. You pick the wrong person because the man doesn't understand what a woman needs most.**

Men and women have unique emotional needs, and more often than not, it is the man who just doesn't "get it." Jewish tradition places the onus on the man to understand the emotional needs of a woman and to satisfy them.

The unique need of a woman is to be loved – to feel that she is the most important person in her husband's life. The husband needs to give her consistent, quality attention.

This is most apparent in Judaism's approach to intimacy. The Torah obligates the husband to meet the intimate needs of his wife. Intimacy is always on the woman's terms. Men are goal-oriented, especially when it comes this area. As a wise woman once pointed out, "Men have two speeds: on and off." Women are experience-oriented. When a man is able to switch gears and become more experience-oriented, he will discover what makes his wife very happy. When the man forgets about his own needs and focuses on giving his wife pleasure, amazing things happen.

### **#4. You choose the wrong person because you do not share a common life goals and priorities.**

There are three basic ways we connect with another person:

- chemistry and compatibility
- common interests
- common life goals

Make sure you share the deeper level of connection that sharing life goals provide. After marriage, the two of you will either grow together or grow apart. To avoid growing apart, while you're still single you must figure out what you're "living for" – and then find someone who has come to the same conclusion as you.

This is the true definition of a "soul mate." A soul mate is a goal mate – two people who ultimately share the same understanding of life's purpose and therefore share the same priorities, values and goals.

### **#5. You choose the wrong person because you get intimately involved too quickly.**

Intimacy before the commitment of marriage can be a big problem because it often precludes a fully honest exploration of important issues. Physical involvement tends to cloud one's mind. And a clouded mind is not inclined to make good decisions.

It is not necessary to take a "test drive" in order to find out if a couple is physically compatible. If you do your homework and make sure you are intellectually and emotionally compatible, you don't have to worry about it. Of all the studies done on divorce, incompatibility in the intimate arena is almost never cited as a primary reason for divorce.

### **#6. You pick the wrong person because you do not share a deep emotional connection.**

To evaluate whether or not you have a deeper emotional connection, ask: "Do I respect and admire this person?"

This does not mean, "Am I impressed by this person?" We are impressed by a Mercedes. We do not respect someone because they own a Mercedes. You should be impressed by qualities of creativity, loyalty, determination, etc.

Also ask: "Do I trust this person?" This also means, "Is he/she emotionally stable? Can I rely on him/her?"

## **#7. You pick the wrong person because you don't feel emotionally safe.**

Ask yourself the following questions: Do I feel calm, peaceful and relaxed with this person? Can I fully express myself with this person? Does this person make me feel good about myself?

Do you have a really close friend who does make you feel this way? Make sure the person you marry makes you feel the same way!

You should not feel you need to monitor what you say because you are afraid of how the other person will view it. If you're afraid to express your feelings and opinions openly, there's a problem with the relationship.

Another aspect of feeling safe is that you don't feel the other person is trying to control you. Controlling behaviors are a sign of abuse. Be on the lookout for someone who is always trying to change you. There's a big difference between "controlling" and "making suggestions." A suggestion is made for your benefit; a control statement is made for their benefit.

## **#8. You pick the wrong person because you don't put everything on the table.**

Anything that bothers you about the relationship must be brought up for discussion. Bringing up the uncomfortable stuff is the only way to evaluate how well the two of you communicate, negotiate, and work together. Over the course of a lifetime, difficulties will inevitably arise. You need to know now, before making a commitment if you

can resolve your differences and find compromises that work for both of you.

Never be afraid to let the other person know what bothers you. This is also a way for you to test how vulnerable you can be with this person. If you can't be vulnerable, then you can't be intimate. The two go hand in hand.

## **#9. You pick the wrong person because you use the relationship to escape from personal problems and unhappiness.**

If you are unhappy and single, you'll probably be unhappy and married, too. Marriage does not fix personal, psychological and emotional problems. If anything, marriage will exacerbate them.

If you are not happy with yourself and your life, take responsibility to fix it now while you are single. You'll feel better, and your future spouse will thank you.

## **#10. You pick the wrong person because s/he is involved in a triangle.**

To be "triangulated" means that a person is emotionally dependent on someone or something else while trying to develop another relationship. A person who hasn't separated from his or her parents is the classic example of triangulation. People can also be triangulated with things like career, drugs, Internet, hobbies, sports or money.

Be careful that you and your partner are free of triangles. The person caught in the triangle cannot be fully emotionally available to you. You will not be their number one priority. And that's no basis for a marriage.



Yehudit Channen

## True Romance

**I had a clear image of the man I'd marry. Until the day I met him.**

I spent a lot of my childhood reading my grandmother's large collection of *True Romance* magazines. My grandmother immigrated to America from Hungary when she was a teenager, and that's the highest literary level she ever achieved. Either that or she really enjoyed the glamour and escape those comics provided after a long day in the grocery store she owned with my grandfather.

At any rate, I found the melodramatic stories terribly intriguing, with all the complications and anxiety that romance can provide. There was always some sort of love triangle going on or an awful misunderstanding, with break-ups and make-ups that continued on into sequels. I was fascinated by the obsessions and heartache the characters endured, and I assumed I was learning all about love relationships. *True Romance* 101.

That was the beginning of an education that I should never have acquired. I got the rest of my romantic expectations from pop music and Hollywood films. Some of the major messages seemed to be:

- If your true love acts like a jerk, it's acceptable as long as you love him.
- Love involves emotions such as jealousy, possessiveness and the constant fear of losing your beloved to someone else prettier than you.
- You shouldn't care what anyone else, even close family members and good friends, think about your beloved. The main thing is that he makes you swoon.
- Unrequited love is a noble thing, and it's understandable to want to die if you're rejected by someone with whom you are infatuated.

By the time I was ready for marriage in the 1970s, I knew exactly how I was supposed to feel about the man I would marry. Until the day I met him.

The man that wanted to marry me aroused feelings much less intense and exciting than I was primed for. On some of our dates I was even slightly bored and happy to return to the chatter and chaos of my all-girl apartment. This man was open, reliable, ambitious and interested in me. He was not moody, never unpredictable, lacked mystery and had absolutely no criminal tendencies. He was straightforward and to my mind, dull beyond description. He seemed like a good person to have for a neighbor, not my golden opportunity for passion and glory. Where were the fireworks, the thumping heart, the tears of torment, the moments of rapture? I was miserable that I wasn't sick with longing. I hadn't lost my appetite and I slept just fine. How could this be love?

Thankfully, at that stage in my life, I was attending Torah classes and learning new lessons about love and marriage. I was supposed to look for good character traits, like humility and compassion. My friends and I dreamed of marriage to a Judaic scholar, a role model for the children, an asset to the community. That didn't sound like the musicians or artistic types I had always dreamed of.

The man who wanted to marry me was so normal. And my father actually liked him, which was something brand new. I just couldn't reconcile myself to him being "the one."

After awhile, however, his sweetness grew on me. So I took the plunge (I wasn't getting any younger) and we finally got married. Slowly and tenderly, we began to build our relationship, although I sometimes still fretted that we would never be the inspiration for a story in *True Romance*.

## Boring Vanilla

A few months later I was thrilled to discover that I was expecting a baby. One afternoon as we were walking through town, I decided we must have ice cream cones. In my pregnant state, I chose the black walnut raisin and brandy flavor. My husband opted for vanilla. "Oh c'mon!" I teased him. "Try something exciting!"

"No, I like vanilla." he insisted, "that's always good."

We paid for our ice creams and sat down to eat them in a nearby park. I took a big lick of my quickly melting cone and it was absolutely revolting! I couldn't believe this had been my choice – and I had ordered a triple scoop! I watched my husband settle down to enjoy his plain white ice cream and began to covet it intensely.

"What's wrong?" he asked me. "Everything okay?"

"This tastes terrible!" I admitted. "I can't eat this!" I felt especially bad because in those days we had so little money and an ice cream cone, believe it or not, was a luxury item.

He looked at me with a straight face and said, "You probably want me to trade with you, right?"

"Well," I said to my new husband, "I don't want to be rude."

"No, no, it's all right. Here, take mine."

He held out his cone and I gave him mine. He tried it. "Oh yum," he said loudly. "This is great, really delicious."

I looked at him gratefully and tried his vanilla. It was wonderful. And then I knew for sure: so was he.

"Exotic" may look good, but that's only from the outside. When you're building a home, in for the long run, and you're hot and tired (and pregnant), you want something – no, not "boring" – but steady, reliable and dependable.

What I now call True Romance.

Rabbi David Clyman

## Good Enough?

The dream to have the best is insatiable.

If I had a nickel for every time I heard "he/she's not good enough," I'd be rich!

A friend told me the following story. Still single, in his 40s, and wanting to marry, he gave it another shot. He went to a singles event, in a club with mirrored walls. He approached an attractive woman and started a conversation. The usual pleasantries were exchanged. Stealing a glance over her shoulder, he noticed yet another attractive woman. Wanting to "trade-up," he mentally juggled a number of diplomatic exit lines.

Just as he was about to say, in his most heartfelt apologetic tone, "You must excuse me. A friend just walked in whom I haven't seen in years," he realized that the "apple of his eye" was none other than the mirrored reflection of the woman he was about to ditch! He caught himself, red-handed, smitten and driven after the reflection of the lady he almost let go.

This self-revelatory experience shook my friend to his core. How was it possible to turn his back on the very woman he so much wanted to meet?

There are times people make questionable dating decisions because of deeper underlying psychological issues. Identifying these undercurrents and how they affect you can shed light on some surprising behavior patterns.

There are numerous reasons why we run from relationships that have great potential. A few possibilities relate to fear:

- fear of commitment
- fear of a failed marriage
- fear of intimacy

- fear of losing personal freedom
- fear of responsibility
- fear of losing self identity within the greater unit

Any of these phobias might compel you to run from a relationship that could be The One. But the most common excuse for not pursuing a person is the oft-quoted myth, "He/she is good... but not good enough."

## As the Garden of Eden

For the record, let it be stated loud and clear: There will always be a better one. In the end – whomever you marry – it is guaranteed that a better one can be found.

Case in point: You want to marry a woman who is exceptionally beautiful, so you luck-out and marry this year's Miss Universe. The only problem is that next year there will be a new Miss Universe. And what about 20 years from now? Your wife, the ex-Miss Universe, certainly won't match-up with that year's winner! So what's the solution? Keep trading up to the latest model?!

This dream, to have the best, is insatiable.

Thankfully, there is a solution. You've got to change your frame of reference.

Jewish tradition says that a newlywed couple is blessed on the day of their wedding with seven special blessings. One of these blessings states that the couple should be as happy with each other as were Adam and Eve on their wedding day in the Garden of Eden.

What was so special about Adam and Eve's joy that we continue to use it as the standard of marital happiness?

It was their undivided attention and love for each other. There were no other human beings vying for their love. All they had was each other. So they concentrated on what each had to offer.

We must try to create a similar mindset. The unique mix of personality traits, values and accomplishment that you

and your spouse share is something special. It cannot be duplicated with any other person. This one-of-a-kind collaboration needs to be accentuated and cherished. It requires your utmost attention and appreciation. Just as you are unique and there is no one like you in the whole world, the same is true about your partner. What you create together is equally matchless.

Of course, not every stated "he/she's not good enough" is an excuse. Sometimes it's an accurate assessment. It's possible that the other person is not an appropriate match. Nevertheless, it's my experience that many individuals scuttle what could be a blockbuster relationship because of their own lackadaisical approach to appraising their beloved's virtues.

Couples must learn to appreciate the qualities that are their trademark. Ask yourself: What is special about what we create together? And look at your beloved with the same undivided attention and appreciation that the first couple had in the Garden of Eden.

## Making It Practical

Commit 5-10 minutes a day over the next month to write down the following:

- 1) Make a list of your partner's strengths and weaknesses.
- 2) For 30 days, add one new virtue to your partner's virtue list, and share with him/her the specific virtue you picked that day. This exercise demonstrates to your partner that you're paying attention and enjoying what is uniquely his/hers. At the same time you're training yourself to enjoy what s/he already is and not suffering what they have not yet become.
- 3) Does your partner have a virtue that s/he is the all-time best at? Can you think of a second one? Make sure you appreciate this specialness every day.
- 4) How would the quality of your life be different if your partner lacked this virtue?

Rabbi Noah Weinberg

## The Power of Love

### Is it possible to command love?

"Do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am God." (Leviticus 18:18)

"Love your neighbor as yourself" is the Jewish response to "might makes right" – the brutish principle that determines too many interpersonal relationships.

The Jews transmitted a more refined ideal to the world. In fact, this idea has become so popular that few folks recognize its origins as Jewish! It rolls off of our tongues with little thought of the complexities involved. Yet, if you think about it:

- How can the Torah obligate love? Is it possible to legislate an emotion?
- What do the added words mean: love your neighbor "as yourself"?
- Why is this juxtaposed with "Don't take revenge and don't bear a grudge?"
- Why does the verse conclude with "I am God"?

### Is It Possible to Command Love?

At first glance, demanding "love" sounds impossible. Yet it's actually something that most of us do in our everyday lives.

Parents are naturally committed to loving their children. No matter how the child turns out, parents will be able to find something to love. But what if their child turns out to be an obnoxious brat? "It doesn't matter," they say. "We'll love him anyway."

What is behind this commitment?

Judaism defines love as "the emotional pleasure of identifying virtues in another person."

If we choose to focus on Bob's shortcomings, we will surely dislike Bob. Yet the more effort we make to focus on Bob's virtues, the deeper our love for Bob will extend.

Indeed, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The way we choose to view others is completely within our control. This explains how the Torah can obligate love.

### Love: Greek Style

The mythical idea of love is represented by the god Cupid. He flits around with his wings, shoots an arrow, and presto – Bob and Sue are madly in love! Bob did not delve into an exploration of Sue's character and then fall in love after coming to a deep understanding of who she is. Bob's love for Susie is not based on commitment and effort to reveal her virtues.

In the Western world, love is a stroke of fate with no rhyme or reason. You don't work on loving people. It either happens or it doesn't. Therefore just as easily as you "fall in love," you can "fall out of love."

In time, Bob and Sue get married, have kids, a big house, a large mortgage. Bob works hard to pay the bills, staying overtime at the office. While Bob is working late one night with his secretary Carol, Cupid sneaks up and shoots another arrow. Boing! Now Bob's in love with Carol.

Bob returns home to Susie and proclaims, "I fell in love with the secretary. But what can I do, honey, the bum shot me!"

Out goes Susie, in comes Carol.

In this view, love is not something you choose, love is something you are a "victim of." So if you want to stay married, all you can do is hope that you don't get shot by Cupid again! Is it any surprise that Western society has a 50 percent rate of divorce?

Contrast this with the relationship between parents and children. No parent ever gets up in the morning and decides: "I've decided I like the neighbors' kids better. They don't cough at night, and they get better math scores. You kids get out. The neighbors are moving in."

You kids get out. The neighbors are moving in. We don't "fall out of love" with our children because we understand that loving them isn't just a "happening." We don't stop caring about our children just because they annoyed us. We accept the obligation to love them despite the aggravation.

If we carried this same commitment into marriages and friendships, we'd be a lot better off.

## Don't Take Revenge or Bear a Grudge

Resentment is poisonous to the process of love. Someone wrongs you, and for months you cannot look at them without recalling the nasty thing that was done. This grudge renders you incapable of seeing any good in the person. Your resentment brews and you desire to even the score, to "take revenge."

Resentment blocks us from loving other people:

"My father and I hate each other. We haven't spoken in years."

"But what if you got hit by a car and ended up in the hospital? Who's going to be there day and night, making sure you get the best doctors?"

"My father."

"Okay, so you see your father doesn't hate you so much after all. Now what if, God forbid, you heard that your father died. How would you feel?"

"I'd feel terrible. I haven't spoken to him in years..."

"Well, good news! Your father is alive. Call him up! Tell him you love him!"

Often the success of a relationship depends on focus. If you want to love your spouse, your parents, all humanity – if you want to love your neighbor – don't take revenge.

## Others are Part of You

If you are slicing a carrot and accidentally cut your finger, do you respond by taking the knife and deliberately slicing into your other hand in revenge?

Of course not. Because your other hand is a part of you, too.

Humanity is one unit. Taking revenge on the other guy is as self-destructive as slicing your other hand with the knife. That's why the Torah says to love your neighbor "as yourself."

This is so important that if we don't realize it on our own, it may take an outside force to make us realize that we are one people. For example, the Nazis didn't differentiate between different types of Jews. They viewed us as all one people.

In marriage and friendship, too, the bond can be strong if we make the effort. This is what the Almighty wants from us. Remember that favorite song from Hebrew school? *Hi-nay ma tov u-ma-nayim* – "How wonderful it is when all God's children dwell together."

## A Story of True Friendship

At the time of the Roman Empire, two Jewish boys had grown up together in Israel and become very close friends. After awhile, they moved far apart – one living under Roman control, and the other living under Syrian control. Yet they remained close friends.

One time, when the fellow from Rome was visiting in Syria, someone falsely accused him of being a spy. So



they brought him to the Syrian Emperor, and he was sentenced to death.

As he was being led out to be executed, they asked if he had any last requests. "Please, let me go back to Rome to settle my affairs and say goodbye to my family. Then I'll come back and you can execute me."

The Emperor laughed. "Are you crazy? What guarantee do I have that you'll come back?"

The Jew said, "I have a friend here in Syria who will stand in for me. He'll be my guarantor. If I don't come back, you can kill him instead."

The Emperor was intrigued. "This I've got to see. Okay, bring your friend."

The Syrian Jew was called in. Sure enough, he agreed to take his friend's place in prison, and be killed instead if the friend did not return.

The Emperor was so startled by this arrangement that he agreed to let the Roman Jew go. "I'll give you 60 days. If you're not back by dawn of the 60th day, your friend is dead."

The Roman Jew raced back to say goodbye and put his affairs in order. After a hectic time and a lot of tears, he started back in plenty of time before the 60 days were up. But those were the days of sailing galleys, and sometimes you could sit for days waiting for the right wind to come. As luck would have it, there was no wind for several days, the sailboat was delayed, and by the time the Roman Jew arrived in Syria, dawn of the 60th day was breaking.

As agreed, the jailors took the Syrian Jew out for execution.

In those days, an execution was a gala affair. Early in the morning the crowds began to gather. Finally, as they were just about to perform the execution, the Roman Jew came running in. "Wait! I'm back. Don't kill him!"

But the Syrian Jew protested: "No, you came too late. I'm the guarantor. They've got to kill me instead!"

Each friend was equally adamant. "Kill me!" "No, kill me instead!" The executioner didn't know what to do. The crowd was in an uproar!

Finally, the Emperor was called. In wonder and amazement, he turned to the two of them and said, "I'll let both of you go free on one condition. That you make me your third friend!"

That's friendship. That's true unity.

That's why the same verse that says, "Love your neighbor," also says "I am God." Unity and friendship among God's children is so precious that God says, so to speak, "If you love each other, I want to be your third friend." That means if we're united, we have the power of God behind us.

Unity is so precious to God that even when we are not as good as we should be, our unity allows us to achieve far more than any one holy, talented, or great individual could possibly achieve alone. Unity is the quality that God wants most for His children. If we're united, we have the power of God behind us.

Conversely, when the Jewish people are fighting internally, we forfeit God's power. Strife within the Jewish people is the most insidious and debilitating enemy. It takes us from being the predominant force which can turn the world toward God, and reduces us to an impotent collection of self-absorbed individuals.

That's why the verse "Love your neighbor," concludes with "I am God." Because unity and friendship is so precious that even God wants to be part of it. He wants to be the third friend.

If we're divided, we're on our own. If we're united, the Almighty's with us. It's the power of love.