





Getting Along

STRAIGHTFORWARD ADVICE HOW TO
BUILD A SOLID MARRIAGE AND HOW
TO SUCCEED IN GETTING ALONG THE
PATH TO MARITAL BLISS.

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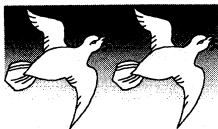
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One of the greatest challenges of marriage is the preservation of marital harmony. The marital relationship is uniquely prone to conflict and strife, as Rabbi Nachman of Breslov commented, "*the Satan insinuates himself in a Jewish home in order to break it and drive the couple to divorce (Sichot Haran #263).*" Therefore a Jewish couple must be more deeply committed towards keeping the peace between each other. For when a man and woman live together in peace, harmony and love, then they are worthy of the Divine Presence resting in their home. We find an

allusion to this idea in the Hebrew language, as the *Talmud* points out (*Sotah*, 17a), when the letter *YUD* from the word man (*eish*) is combined with the letter *HEH* from the word woman (*eishah*), the name of G-d is formed — indicating that the success of a marriage is dependent on the presence of G-d in the marital union. However, if these decisive letters, *YUD* and *HEH* are missing — signifying the absence of G-d's presence from the marital union — then the remaining letters spell out twice the word, fire (*eish*)— meaning that the couple are like two fires that consume each other.

2. THE ALTAR SHEDS TEARS

The *Talmud* states (*Gittin* 90b), that when a couple divorces even the altar

sheds tears. Yet, the Holy Temple contained various sacred objects such as the candelabra, the table, and the laver, so why is it that only the altar weeps? Why was the altar selected to symbolize the tragedy of divorce? The answer lies in the tragic consequences of divorce that are inflicted on the innocent children, who are caught in the crossfire of the embattled couple. It is out of sympathy for them that the altar cries, because she protests, *"I have enough sacrifices, why are you divorcing and bringing me more"*? It is widely known that children who are the products of a divorced home are more likely to be emotionally scarred. In fact, a perceptive teacher can usually identify from amongst the students in a class, those children who come from broken homes; because, even when they

appear outwardly happy, they are haunted, by feelings of resentment and disappointment at having witnessed the ugly fights and nasty arguments of their warring parents. Therefore it's the altar that cries out in protest for the pain and suffering of these children whose welfare is sacrificed when their parents divorce.

3. A CLIMATE OF FAITH

*I*n order to avert the tragedy of divorce, and to live with your spouse in peace, harmony and love, you must invite G-d into your relationship. You must create a climate of faith in your home by speaking to each other about G-d. When a spirit of faith permeates the atmosphere of a house, it generates a feeling of optimism and

enthusiasm about life. The husband, feeling secure and hopeful, finds the strength to be encouraging and supportive of his wife, even during difficult times. Likewise, inspired by faith, a wife will preach optimism to her husband saying for example, *"Don't worry, my dear husband, even if we can't make ends meet, eventually we'll climb out of our financial hole, because G-d is with us!"*

4. THE ANSWER IS COMMUNICATION!

But how can the couple feel the impact of G-d on their lives, living in a society engulfed by religious apathy, in which G-d Himself is largely ignored? The answer is communication! Rabbi Nachman of Breslov strongly recommended that in

order to become close to G-d you have to talk to Him every day in your own language, using your own words. To be sure, you are still obligated to recite the three daily prayers, but prayers that are improvised in your own words will be uttered with more sincerity because they pour out from your heart. Informally conversing with G-d, on a regular basis, will also strengthen your faith, because the practice is inherently self-reinforcing; in order for you to speak to G-d you have to believe He exists and is listening to you, and if you believe that He is listening to you then you will continue to speak to Him.

5. A STEADY SUPPORT SYSTEM

*I*n addition, opening the lines of communication with G-d, provides a steady

support system, so that the whole family functions better. Confident that he has G-d to rely on, a husband will feel secure with himself so he can lead his family without getting easily broken by adversity. Faith will permit him to assume a supportive role with his wife so that she becomes self-assured. Likewise, a woman who forms a strong connection to G-d, and speaks to Him, will find the inner strength to be an encouraging and supportive wife to her husband. Together, such a couple, transform their home into a paradise. And, in such a house where the love is always brewing and the parents are mutually supportive, the children flourish and grow up equipped with a sturdy faith, and naturally self-confident. But, a family that pulls the plug on faith in G-d, removes

itself from its very life-support. Having to rely on his own resources, and growing increasingly insecure, the husband becomes overwhelmed and panicky about the mounting pressures of marriage and life in general, and he proceeds to vent his frustration on his wife. Feeling very insecure and vulnerable herself, the wife reacts defensively, instead of with support, and a shouting match ensues. With the constant bickering and tearing at each others throats, the couple eventually tear their own house down.

6. DEFINING JEWISH MARRIAGE

A person has to know that marriage is not a game; you don't get married to have fun. Marriage is a *Mitzva*; it's a

serious commitment to fulfill the divine imperative to *"be fruitful and multiply"* in order to add more links to a Golden Chain of a tradition that began long ago at Sinai; raising children in the Jewish faith so that they will have faith, and then they in turn, will transmit that very faith to their children for generations to come. When the primary goal of marriage to enhance G-d's reputation in the world by raising religious children who recognize their Creator, is given priority over the typically romantic and selfish motives for marrying, then the whole relationship becomes profoundly more meaningful and satisfying. The attachment the couple feel to G-d in their marriage also deepens their own commitment to each other; he remains faithful to her; she remains loyal to him,

and the need to seek diversion outside the marriage ceases to exist. By definition a Jewish marriage is a satisfying one, because the principles of the Torah promotes a spirit of cooperation and collaboration.

7. YEARNING TO BE LOVED

*B*ut as a result of the long exile and the dispersion of the Jewish People over the four corners of the globe, traditional family-life has become increasingly rejected by many, in favor of the pleasure-seeking lifestyle of the surrounding culture. So he starts echoing the popular complaint voiced by so many self-centered men today, that marriage no longer satisfies him; she suddenly feels compelled to bring a

marriage of decades to an abrupt halt because she needs her space! Both become obsessed with doing their own thing, so that they lose common ground, and their conflict-ridden marriage starts to disintegrate. But, no man is an island; every person instinctively yearns to be loved and cared for by another person. As the *Zohar* states (*Vayikra 7b*), "*Whoever doesn't have a wife is not a fulfilled man*". A person is called ADAM — "Man", when he's married and has a wife; when he's single he is considered incomplete — only half a body. That is why the Sages say (*Berashis Rabbah 8:9*), "*A man cannot be without a woman and a woman cannot be without a man, and they both cannot be without the Divine Presence*".

8. DEMAND FOR TEAMWORK

The task of marriage, however, is not merely accomplished by uniting the couple under the canopy. A far greater challenge awaits them, in the demand for teamwork that's required afterwards, to keep the relationship going. The potential for success of any good team is determined by the degree of solidarity amongst its players, that if we win, we are all winners, and if we lose, we are all losers. Competition, on the other hand, undermines team spirit; teammates turn into opponents, so instead of working for the common good of the team, they each steal the credit for the wins, but blame each other for the losses. Marriage is a partnership for life, and as a team, a husband and a wife are expected to cooperate with each other; not compete

with each other. If they wish to triumph in the game called life, then they have to know that when the chips are up, the victory belongs to both of them, and when the chips are down, both are responsible; but no one is to be blamed. Remember, a house in which they compete, meets with defeat; but working together, will keep you together, because this by definition, is a healthy house!

9. FEELING HELPLESS AND UNABLE TO COPE

*T*he problem is that most newlyweds, still aglow from the magic of their wedding night, cannot fathom the trials and tribulations that lie beyond the shimmer of the bridal canopy? Life can be very tough and often doesn't go as we please. As the

saying goes, *"Not everything you want you get, and not everything you get you want!"* The morning after, the couple awakes to the harsh reality of day to day life. Suddenly, food has to be put on the table; month after month, the rent must be paid; and the bills, if ignored, just mount higher and higher. It doesn't take long for the romantic bubble to burst, once the heart becomes stricken with dread over the woes of practical survival. Feeling more and more helpless and unable to cope, the arguments begin to erupt, as the *Midrash* says (*Otzar Hamidrasim*), *"When the pantry is bare the yelling begins"*. Whereas before, the earth wasn't large enough to contain the torrent of love and passion that the couple showered on each other; now, there's only room for insult and injury; she berates him

for being a poor breadwinner, and threatens to walk out on him if the situation doesn't improve. Offended by her insensitivity and stinging remarks, he vows never to forgive her for the way she's treating him. Instead of turning towards each other with support, the battered couple turns against each other, driving the marriage into ruins, and destroying the lives of their children.

10. THE RELATIONSHIP IN TERMS OF "US"

So, even if the grocery bill hasn't been paid in weeks and the grocer refuses to extend any more credit; and, to top it all off, your facing eviction; or, even if you just lost your job and you can't meet the tuition payments for the kids, nor can you buy

them the new clothes they desperately need; is this the time to start ruthlessly attacking each other by tossing the blame at one another? Think about it, you may have lost everything you own in the world, but don't you still have each other? As the wise King Solomon said (*Koheles*, 4:9), "*Better two than one*", upon which the *Midrash* explains (*Koheles Rabbah* 4:8), "*Better two — the man and his wife — than each one by themselves*". In a deeper sense, when the couple learns to think of their relationship in terms of "us", instead of "I", then the whole tenor of their marriage switches from one of rivalry, to one of reciprocity and mutual care. When darkness falls they pick each other up; if one cries the other one wipes the tears; and if one succeeds the other applauds. This is

a marriage that works, because both sides are working together for each other. No matter what the forecast holds for them in life, they will weather the storm because they can count on each other.

11. PROPER GUIDANCE

*B*ut what most young newlyweds lack is proper guidance on how to treat each other respectfully. Growing up in today's "me" oriented society, the husband and wife enter into matrimony asking not, what can I do for my spouse, but rather what can I get out of my spouse? A husband has to understand that he is acquiring a wife not a servant; she is to be cherished, not exploited. Her feelings should always be considered first, because women in general

are more sensitive, and more easily prone to tears. Is it really worth all the time and effort spent on arguing and hurting the one you love most, when one kind word of conciliation can make you the best of friends again? Lower your pride, and you will save your marriage; insist that you are always right and she is wrong, and you will eventually be shown the door. Can you really afford to lose her? Remember, your wife is your greatest asset, not only figuratively, but literally as well, as the *Talmud* cautions (*Bava Metziah 59b*), "*Respect your wife and you will be rich*"; value her like diamonds, otherwise your pocketbook suffers; as Rabbi Nachman stressed, "*wealth is in the hands of the wife!*" (*Likutai Moharan* #69).

12. SENSITIVITY AND SELF-RESTRAINT

To keep the knot of marriage tightly secured, a wife must likewise employ an approach that combines the dual qualities of sensitivity and self-restraint. Men, by nature like to rule, and when there is no one else to dominate, a husband will try to dominate his wife. So, what do you accomplish by barking at him, when he'll only respond by roaring back at you more loudly? How many women are trapped into a relationship that's a stalemate, because they stubbornly insist on locking horns with their husbands? Refusing to yield an inch, they're willing to forfeit the entire marriage! Wouldn't you rather turn your marriage around by making your husband more agreeable, than to live the rest of your

life alone? Then stop answering him back and start agreeing with him. A defiant wife only succeeds at wounding her husband's exaggerated ego. So, be smart. Humor him! Let him think that you're allowing him to have his way. Ultimately you will be paradoxically surprised to discover that he will start letting you have things your way.

13. INEVITABLE STRESSES AND STRAINS

Along the winding road towards marital bliss, however, lurks the danger of the romance getting derailed, as it collides with the inevitable strains and stresses of married life. Out of desperation and despair from all the problems that keep cropping up, it's easy to resort to a device that is as old as mankind itself: blaming your spouse

for all the marital woes. As we see by Adam, the first man, when he is confronted by G-d for eating the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, he responds ungratefully with the retort, *"It was the woman whom you gave to be with me — she gave me of the tree"* (Beraishis 3). Instead of acknowledging his mistake, he shamefully casts the blame on the wife that G-d gave him, and forever darkens the destiny of mankind. So, if the storms of conflict and strife rage outside and threaten to sink your marital ship, don't think you can save yourself by throwing your spouse overboard. This is the time that you have to huddle together, and pull each other safely to shore. Start practicing the art of appreciation, by being grateful to G-d for the best present in life He has given you:

your spouse! Never lose sight of how lucky you are to have each other to hold on to, and then you will never get broken by other things you lack in life. Having a 'gratitude' attitude is the best secret to achieving marital harmony.

14. SEEING EACH OTHER IN A MORE REALISTIC LIGHT

Yet why are today's marriages so plagued with unrest? Aren't the promiscuous trends of contemporary society supposed to generate more "openness" between the sexes, so that the quality of married life improves? So why is divorce being considered by so many couples as the primary solution to common marital pressures? The problem lies with the distorted images of love and romance

that has been promoted by our media-driven society. A generation of youth, raised on movies and TV, have been deceived into thinking that there is such a thing as love before marriage. Imitating their favorite screen stars they look to 'fall in love', by plunging into instant intimacy without even getting to really know each other. This is not true love; this is blind passion and narrow self-interest, masquerading as love. Once they get married, their eyes open to the naked truth and they begin to see each other in a more realistic light; "Hey, she's not the girl I was looking for", he protests. "Hey, he's not the guy I wanted", she complains. As the passion wears off, and the couple find themselves no longer in love, that's when they're ready to exit the marriage.

15. STOP LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

So stop looking for love in all the wrong places, by realizing that love comes after the marriage; and not before. As the *Torah* writes regarding our forefather Isaac (*Beraishis 24:67*), "*He took Rebecca and she was for him a wife, and he loved her*". First you get married, then the love will come. When a husband and wife enter into matrimony, without the need to experience love first, they reveal that, their true motive for marriage is to fulfill G-d's will; and not their own. Their commitment to G-d's divine command to "be fruitful and multiply", helps them transcend their own needs, so they become more deeply committed to each other. This is genuine love; not the cheap and shallow version of

"love her and leave her", that's so prevalent in society today.

16. "WHEN TWO OPPOSITES COMBINE"

With variety being the spice of life, differences of opinions between spouses are to be expected, as the Sages say *"Just as their facial features are different, so are their points of view"* (Berachos 58a). The skill in resolving conflicts and disputes in marriage depends on how willing the couple is to compromise their individual needs for the sake of the *mitzvah* of preserving marital harmony. *"What is Shalom"*? Rabbi Nachman asks rhetorically (Likutai Moharan 80). The answer is, *"when two opposites combine"*. By attempting to convert others to your opinion so that

everyone thinks the same way is not peace; it's unrealistic and plain foolishness! The true challenge of achieving peace is when discrepancies between the couple arise and they are willing to compromise and work hard together to achieve solutions that are mutually satisfying. *Kaballistically* speaking, we generally find the interplay of two attributes, *Chesed* (compassion) and *Gevurah* (zealousness), operating in the marital relationship; sometimes he's more dominating, and she is more compassionate, and vice versa. However, because these opposite traits are complementary, the couple possesses the potential ingredients to establish a harmonious home. Remember the key to marital harmony lies not in smothering

differences that make you both unique, but rather it's mastering the art of compromise.

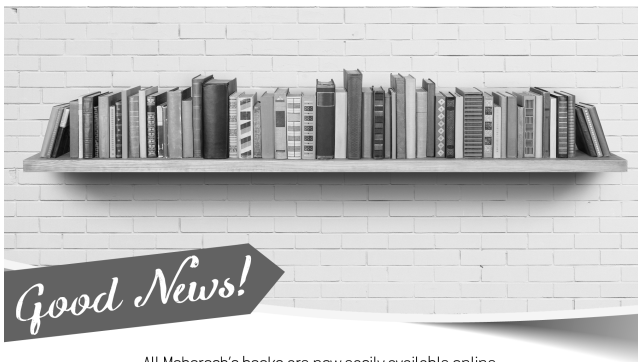
17. PERHAPS YOU'VE FORGOTTEN G-D?

At this point, however, you're both standing on the ruins of a relationship torn to shreds by incessant arguments and strife. Your marriage is hopelessly in tatters! It started out with such promise and hope, and you had such grand plans for life; but you just couldn't seem to get along, and the overwhelming pressures of marriage just seemed too much of a strain. Now you can barely look each other in the eye. Stop right there! Remember Rabbi Nachman stated that, *"there is no such thing as despair!; if you believe that you destroyed, then believe that you can repair"*

(*Likutai Moharan II #112*). Surely, you've made attempts to start over again and again, but things never got better — and sometimes they even got worse. But, perhaps throughout this whole ordeal you've forgotten one very important factor; G-d? The time has come to stop raising your fists at each other, and to start raising your hands in supplication to G-d. Of course a bad temper, like a bad habit is hard to break, and you've grown accustomed to automatically blaming your spouse for every marital misfortune. But once you recognize that G-d is controlling everything you'll feel less out of control. Open your eyes and realize that it's G-d, not your spouse, that has provoked all the marital circumstances, good and bad, in your life. Your anger and hurt will begin to subside,

permitting you to grow more sympathetic to your spouse. Go further, invite G-d back into your house by speaking about his intricate involvement in your lives, to your spouse and your family. When you speak about matters of faith to your household, G-d will no longer be a stranger in your life, and you will experience the warmth of His friendship. You will feel as if a big burden has been lifted from your shoulders. Your home will be transformed into a veritable paradise as sunshine once again returns to your lives. No longer will the neighbors be alarmed by the shouts of strife emanating from your house. On the contrary, your family will be the talk of the town, and the example for all to follow.





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