



PERFECT MARRIAGE

*A man will therefore leave his father and mother and be united with his wife.
They will become as one flesh.
—Genesis 2:24*



***L**ike all things so too is marriage comprised of two parts—body and soul.*

The body is made up of the laws and guidelines structuring and directing its every detail. These include the laws of purity, which form the majority of this volume, as well as the laws of financial and moral responsibilities (see Appendix). The latter, are the basic commitments pledged under the canopy (chupah): delegation of financial responsibilities, interpersonal relations and child bearing responsibilities. They begin before marriage and reach until burial, thus creating the family atmosphere and framework. This is the body of married life.

The body requires a vitalizing force, a spirit to enliven it. This cannot be legislated. It develops along with and to a degree due to the body of marriage. This is the emotional bond created between husband and wife.

Love, as achieved through adherence to a Jewish life-style, can be likened to a good wine, maturing over the course of growing together and building a common life. It ripens and is cultivated by shared experiences, overcoming common obstacles and raising children. This is the idea behind, “A man will therefore leave his father and mother and be united with his wife. They will be as one flesh.”

True emotion develops over time. It is anchored by an attribute of the personality called da'as¹.

Da'as means personalized integrated knowledge—knowledge that is lived. So too, the basic emotions between husband and wife are based and nurtured through the common daily partnership of life's burdens and toils.

Take to heart the following pages of this chapter. Here we delineate the words of our greatest leaders, illustrating the ideals towards which husband and wife should strive. Accordingly, each partner matures from a self-centered awareness to one in which concentration is directed on the family as a unit. The ultimate goal is the successful working of this family unit.

Husband and wife, according to this outlook, do not see one another in competition. Quite the contrary, they form a team. The foremost ingredient of this team is mutual respect and consideration.



A marriage based in the laws of our eternal Torah is destined to be infinitely enduring.

—The Rebbe, *Likutei Sichos*, vol. 1, p. 36

By definition, there *is* no perfect marriage. Perfection is without flaw. It even suggests effortless. Marriage is not this.

Marriage is a framework in which two distinctly different individuals, from separate backgrounds and families, each with his/her own personal needs, form a new entity—a couple. Now, what really matters is the mutual good—the success of the marriage.

To suggest that this can be achieved in an offhand manner would be misleading. Marriages undergo evolutionary changes. They are dynamic. They begin as the union between two lives. With the passing of time, these lives adapt, and with the achievement of mutual goals (raising children, paying bills, buying a home) merge into one.

This is an evolutionary process unattainable so long as each partner continues to be concerned mainly with his or her personal satisfaction. This is simply not a marriage.

The key to a harmonious and wholesome marriage lies in the couple's realization that they must satisfy one another's spiritual, emotional, and personal needs. This may be a conscious effort and it may require work. It needn't happen overnight. In fact, in most cases, it is not a fast process, rather, an evolutionary one. A marriage may start out in one style and develop into an entirely different one. Age, working to build a common life, and time all join together as allies towards building this unity called a couple.

How husband and wife should view one another is stated succinctly and clearly in the words of our

1. See the end of Chapter Three of *Tanya*.

most profound codifiers.

RAMBAM

“The Talmudic sages commanded: The husband is to honor and love his wife more than himself. For example, any monetary wealth he may have should be used firstly for her benefit. He must not use intimidation for coercion. He should speak softly and endearingly, not abruptly or impatiently.

Similarly, they commanded: The wife should honor her husband, even to the point of feeling awe towards him.

These are the true paths of Jewish couples—pure in their marriages. These ways ensure pleasant and wholesome families².”

It is important to emphasize that respect is a two-way street. The husband is not to use force in extracting that which he wishes from his wife. He is to remember to speak to her always in a soft tone, one fitting a daughter of the Jewish nation. The wife, likewise, is not to take advantage of this and is expected to reciprocate the respect and honor that the husband needs.

Consideration, endearing speech, respect. These very qualities are stated explicitly in the marriage contract, the *kesuva*. At the wedding, the husband accepts upon himself all of these responsibilities.

This behavior is incumbent upon the husband the moment he signs the *kesuva* and places the ring stating: “You are betrothed to me, with this ring, according to *the Laws of Moses* and *the Jewish People*.” *The Laws of Moses* refers to the Written Torah. *The Jewish People* refers to all that is included in the Oral Torah and later.

In fact, it is not only in the realm of ethics that these qualities find expression. Throughout Jewish law similar examples abound. For example: In return for the husband’s basic obligation to support his wife economically, the wife is responsible for the upkeep of the household. “The wife’s household work burden is compensation for the husband’s financial obligations³.”

If the economic level of the couple (or in some cases the social norms) allows for it, the wife has some inherent legal rights to request the aid of a housemaid. She can request assistance with those household chores which would otherwise fall into the realm of her matrimonial duties⁴.

However, there are a number of tasks which, regardless of their financial status, the wife is *not* permitted to delegate in any form to someone else⁵. These she must personally perform. *She* is to spread

2. *Rambam, Hilchos Ishoos* 15:19, 20.

3. *Ma’aseh yodeah tochos mezonoteha, Even Haezer* 69:4.

4. *Even Haezer* 80:7, 8.

5. *Even Haezer* 80:5.

the sheets on her husband's bed. *She* is to draw water for his bath and pour his drink⁶. These are tasks of *endearment* and therefore must be done personally by the wife.

In a similar vein, the husband must buy clothing and jewelry for his wife prior to holidays. This is based on biblical law, “And you shall rejoice on the holidays, you, your children and *your whole household*.” Based on this verse is his obligation, according to his means, to buy clothing, and jewelry—items which will cheer his wife before the holidays⁸.

THE REBBE

“In today's world, people emphasize the idea that everyone lives for oneself, concerned only about his or her private needs, salary, things with personal benefit⁹.

In this regard, the Torah emphasizes the importance of the *family*.

The family is *one* cohesive unit. Indeed, it comprises two separate individuals, created uniquely different, with different roles. However, this doesn't imply that each one is to fulfill his role for his own benefit.

The opposite is true. They work together, complementing one another. Together they form the basis of the family.

From the family is built the entire Jewish nation, whose goal is to enlighten the world that there is One G-d who rules it and gives life to all.

Every family has its role in the scheme of the world. However, this role is only fulfilled when husband and wife work cooperatively.

In a confused world, where the importance of mutual respect and cooperation are minimized, and people justify taking advantage of others for their personal gain, it is the Jewish family's responsibility to be a living example of ‘Love your fellow man as yourself.’

This is accomplished, firstly, by living this verse themselves¹⁰.”

We are not suggesting that the goal of a harmonious loving marriage overrides the fulfillment of any of the laws delineated in this book. The guidelines found in this book, based on biblical verse, Talmudic

6. *Even Haezer* 80:4, *Chelkos Mechokak* 80:10.

7. Deuteronomy 16:11.

8. *Shulchan Aruch Admur Hazoken* 529:6, 7.

9. In the beginning of this dissertation, the *Rebbe* explained how the family unit is *the* basic building block from which the nation is comprised. This is based on the verse, “Count the Jews—each one according to his family,” Numbers 1:2.

10. The *Rebbe*, to the 16th convention of *Neshei Chabad* (May 23, 1971; 21 *Iyyar*, 5731). Published in *Megbaos Ashureinu* pgs. 25-31.

legislation and accepted custom, remain incumbent upon us. Our intent, rather, is to accent what the Torah sees as a perfect marriage in its overall context, in the hope that this understanding will accompany us through the remainder of this work.

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