

5 Steps to a Great Marriage

#1: Be Friends and Lovers

5 practical tools on becoming "beloved friends."

I meet so many couples who just don't know how to be married. They don't know what to do, or more importantly, they don't know *what's expected of them* to make their marriage work. Marriages improve drastically when partners understand what their responsibilities are and commit to fulfilling them.

Here are five "objectives" that form the basis of being successfully married. Examine these five "objectives" one by one. They are:

- be friends and lovers
- be a team
- be life builders
- be king and queen
- be masters of growth and healing

OBJECTIVE #1: BE FRIENDS AND LOVERS.

This is the first and most important task of marriage and the primary responsibility for a husband and wife. In the *Shevah Brachot* that are read at every Jewish wedding, we bless the bride and groom that they should become "beloved friends." This is the foundation of any good marriage and it is something that must be worked on constantly.

People often erroneously think, that friendship is something you either have or don't have. You either like someone or you don't. Fortunately, we know that a fundamental psychological truth is that we can create loving feelings by acting in loving ways. Many couples don't try hard enough and give up, because they falsely believe in the romantic notion that "love is a happening." They think that cupid either hits you with the arrow or he doesn't; it's out of human control.

I'm reminded of a story that Dr. Laura told on her radio show about the man who decided he had to get a divorce because he no longer loved his wife. Unfortunately, circumstances were such that he could not file for the divorce for six months, and so he was stuck with his unlovable wife. But being a reasonable man, he decided that for the heck of it, he would make the most of the situation by making a list of all the things he would do, if he truly loved his wife. He then began doing these things. At the end of six months, he was madly in love with the woman he couldn't stand six months ago!

In order to improve an average marriage or to repair a damaged one, we must understand that it is necessary to work at being friends and lovers. The key lies in what we do. Here are some guidelines:

• **Stop having bad fights.**

To become good friends you must know the difference between a good fight and a bad fight. A bad fight results in one or both of you ending up feeling hurt and damaged. You feel that you have not been heard or understood. There's no resolution that leads to the inevitable growth of resentments. Bad fighting on a regular basis almost always leads to divorce, so if you're having them, you must stop them immediately.

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Instead of verbal fights, some couples have silent fights, where issues are constantly pushed under the rug and ignored. This is also a "bad fight" because the result is the same. The Torah tells us, "Turn from bad and do good." You can't begin to be friends until you turn from the bad, which in this case, means refraining from this kind of damaging conflict.

- ***Spend time enjoying each other.***

As obvious as this sounds for many couples this is a big secret. Dr. William Doherty, author of the book, *Take Back Your Marriage*, has based his entire marriage counseling on this one principle. He points out that most marriage problems are the result of a husband and wife not spending enough time together. How can you have a chance at being friends if you the majority of your time together is spent having conversations about the business or managing your family? Simply taking walks together can do wonders for building your friendship. Date night is essential. Once a week might be too difficult for the average stressed-out couple with children, but do it on a regular basis.

- ***Develop love and intimacy rituals.***

We need to develop good "connecting" rituals. The more we turn towards our spouse, rather than turning away from each other, the more positive sentiment we produce.

For example, how do you greet each other at the end of the day? One husband had his own "greeting ritual," where he would come home, find his three kids and give them a hug, and then go to his room for twenty minutes, change his clothes, flip on the TV and watch the news. Finally moving towards the kitchen, where his wife was cooking dinner, he'd greet her with something like, "We have to eat quickly tonight in order to make the PTA meeting!" Now how's that for a love ritual that promotes closeness and friendship! Something has to change! How about come home and hug the wife first, ask how her day has been – taking time to listen to her, then hug the kids, then do the rest of your coming home ritual.

Here's a much better "greeting ritual" which another couple came up with. The husband noticed how his dog greeted him. Every night without fail, as soon as he walked in the door, the dog would come running, tail wagging, and jumping all over him with delight. Being a man of great wisdom, he realized that maybe he could learn something from his dog! He proceeded to ask his wife if they could try greeting each other as their dog greets them. So get this picture in your mind. When he walks in the door, the two of them race towards each other, smiling and laughing and expressing how wonderful it is to see each other. It worked so well, they've been doing it for ten years. And imagine the positive impact it has on the children.

A little too much for you? Fine. But could you and your spouse find a better way to greet each other -- the way you'd greet each other if you really liked each other and were good friends?

- ***Schedule in romance.***

Want to improve your sex life? Here's one of the most profound pieces of advice I can give you: Schedule it! Doesn't sound very romantic, I know. But it works. Because when you both agree to make time for each other, you'll be more motivated to enjoy the time you have together. Waiting for that "magic moment" when you're both "in the mood" may be romantic, but it's not always practical.

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I know one couple that's been waiting and waiting and... you get the picture. Others complain that one of them is a night person and other a morning person. Here's the answer. Go to bed at the same time. This doesn't mean the night person has to stay in bed, but at least you are both in right place at the same time!

• ***Don't cause pain; give pleasure. This is the "golden rule of marriage."***

Have you every heard of friends who are careless about whether they cause each other pain or not? What sort of friend causes his friend pain? Yet, husbands and wives often do. The main reason is that they don't think about what the consequences of their words and actions.

There is no such thing as down time when you are with your spouse. Everything you say or do either brings you and your spouse closer together or pushes the two of you further apart.

Try this for two days: Both you and your spouse make a commitment to keep a journal of all your interactions with each other, noting whether you acted in a way that promoted friendly feelings or negative feelings. Try to be conscious of every decision you make in your spouse's presence.

At the end of the two days, sit down and compare notes.

How did it feel?

Did you feel any improvement in your relationship?

If you're serious about truly being "beloved friends," it's hard to believe that you would not make a commitment to apply this principle for the rest of your life!

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PS

Inviting God into your marriage and life is the most positive attribute I can ever imagine. It only makes sense, the creator who created you both knows how to work within your heart and mind. Ask Jesus Christ to be your Savior and to help you become the best mate that you can be to your mate.

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