

THE JEWISH VIEW OF MARRIAGE

Marrying Your *Ezer K'negdo* - Soul Mate

Two startling trends have come to light in recent years. These developments threaten to undermine the traditional nuclear family that has compromised the bedrock of society for millennia.

Over the past 20 years, the divorce rate among baby boomers has surged by more than 50 percent... At the same time, more adults are remaining single... About a third of adults ages 46 through 64 were divorced, separated or had never been married in 2010, compared with 13 percent in 1970... Sociologists expect those numbers to rise sharply in coming decades as younger people, who have far lower rates of marriage than their elders, move into middle age. [Moreover], a record-breaking 40% of babies born in 2007 had unmarried parents (that's up 25% from 2002). (Based on Rachel L. Swarns, More Americans Rejecting Marriage in 50s and Beyond, from www.nytimes.com, March 1, 2012 and Lisa Selin Davis, "All but the Ring: Why Some Couples Don't Wed Monday," from www.Time.com, May 25, 2009)

From a Jewish perspective, these statistics are much more than an interesting sociological study; they portend catastrophe – for the hallmark of Jewish society is the strong family. The home and the family form the foundation of daily life within which Jewish values are integrated and transmitted. Much more than a legal construct or a convenient social arrangement, in Judaism, marriage is the very building block of personal development, society, and the entire Jewish people.

The changing demographic landscape makes this Morasha series of classes on Dating, Love, Marriage and Taharat HaMishpacha all the more critical. However, there really is some good news on the horizon – people who embrace traditional Judaism's time-proven model of dating and marriage, consistently develop highly successful relationships and families despite these larger trends.

Whereas the idea of marriage in general may speak to fewer people these days, Judaism offers a compelling and invigorating model – one based on seeking and marrying one's *ezer k'negdo* (soul mate). In this sense, Jewish marriage is unique; it builds an eternal soul connection between two partners.

This series is comprised of four shiurim: *Marriage, Love, Taharat HaMishpacha and Mikvah* and finally *Dating*. While the way of the world is to first date, form a relationship, and then consider marriage, in this series we have reversed the order. From a Jewish perspective, dating and love can only be approached with the ultimate end in mind, that of finding one's soul mate and building a lifetime of love together through marriage.

As such, we start this series with an exploration of the end goal, our soul mates. We

will then discuss what love actually is and how it can only be truly realized within the context of marriage. The third class addresses how the framework of *Taharat HaMishpacha* (the laws of Family Purity) sets up a structure for soul mates to become “one” through the intimate aspects of marriage. Only when our essential goals are clear can we then address dating Jewish style – the exciting, discerning process of searching for one’s soul mate.

In this class we will address the following questions:

- ✧ What is a soul mate?
- ✧ Why do I need to find my soul mate?
- ✧ What misconceptions about marriage are contributing to its decline today?
- ✧ How does a Jewish approach to marriage avoid those pitfalls?
- ✧ What are the irreplaceable benefits of Jewish married life?

Class Outline

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INTRODUCTION – THE STATE OF OUR UNIONS

For well over a year, I campaigned for my boyfriend and me to wed. “I don’t see what the point of marriage is,” he’d say. Public avowals of love, I suggested – or presents? I’d ask, mostly joking.

Eventually I gave up and moved on to the next topic: babies. Absolutely, he replied. We’d been together for 2½ years by that point, and while he didn’t want to bother getting married, a family was something he could happily commit to.

It turns out he’s in good company. More than 5 million unmarried couples cohabit in the U.S., nearly eight times the number in 1970, and a record-breaking 40% of babies born in 2007 had unmarried parents (that’s up 25% from 2002). Sure, there are plenty of baby-daddies in the Levi Johnston vein, i.e., young and accidental. But non-marital births have increased the most among women ages 25 to 39, doubling since 1980, thanks in part to a small but growing demographic a sociologist has dubbed “committed unmarrieds” (CUs). These are the happily unwed – think Brad and Angelina, Oprah and Stedman, Goldie and Kurt – whose commitment to their partners is as strong as their stance against marriage. (Lisa Selin Davis, “All but the Ring: Why Some Couples Don’t Wed Monday,” from www.time.com, May 25, 2009)

There can be no doubt that marriage is on the decline in the Western World these days. Young people are finding fewer and fewer reasons to marry, the traditional notion of marriage – one man to one woman – is under question, and those who do marry are finding more and more reasons to get divorced.

Over the past 20 years, the divorce rate among baby boomers has surged by more than 50 percent, even as divorce rates over all have stabilized nationally. At the same time, more adults are remaining single. The shift is changing the traditional portrait of older Americans: About a third of adults ages 46 through 64 were divorced, separated or had never been married in 2010, compared with 13 percent in 1970, according to an analysis of recently released census data conducted by demographers at Bowling Green State University, in Ohio.

Sociologists expect those numbers to rise sharply in coming decades as younger people, who have far lower rates of marriage than their elders, move into middle age. The surge in the number of older, unmarried Americans has been driven by several factors, including longevity, economics and evolving social mores, according to sociologists.

People are living longer, and many couples in their 50s and 60s – faced with the prospect of a decade or more in unhappy marriages – are reluctant to stay the course. Women, who are increasingly financially independent, are more willing and able to go it alone.

*And many baby boomers, who came of age during the sexual revolution of the 1960s and ’70s, feel less social pressure to marry or stay married than their parents and grandparents did. (Only about 17 percent of adults over 64 in 2010 were divorced, separated or had never been married, census data show.) Being divorced or single later in life also no longer carries the stigma that it did for previous generations. (Rachel L. Swarns, *More Americans Rejecting Marriage in 50s and Beyond*, from www.nytimes.com March 1, 2012)*

Why do Observant Jews choose to marry, and then remain married, when so many other people do not? One may claim that divorce is taboo in Orthodox Judaism. Yet traditional Judaism has perhaps the oldest and richest tradition of laws and literature relating to divorce, and sees break-up as a mitzvah when necessary. Until recently Jewish divorce was extremely rare, and even as western culture influences traditional Jewish life, divorce rates are still much lower than average. Why should this be? What makes the Jewish marriage different?

The answer is: the Jewish marriage is different. It is a bonding of soul mates, and therefore filled with meaning unmatched by other love relationships. The notion that husband and wife – and only husband and wife – can be soul mates, bound together from before their birth into this world, is fundamental to Jewish thinking and the foundation of Jewish living. We will start our discussion of love, marriage, and dating with an exploration of this concept of soul mates.

SECTION I. DO I HAVE A SOUL MATE?

How many guys have chased after the girl they “can’t be without”? How many girls have yearned to find the guy of their dreams? Is this a purely biological instinct in order to procreate? Or is there something deeper going on here?

PART A. IT’S BASHERT!

The Torah informs us that there is a reason why we long for a companion. It tells us that we each have a soul mate. The Jewish notion of a *bashert*, a predestined soul mate, is fundamental to the philosophical outlook that Judaism professes.

1. Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 22a – Each one of us has a soul mate.

Forty days before the formation of a fetus (i.e., at conception), a Heavenly Voice proclaims, “The daughter of so-and-so is destined for so-and-so.”

ארבעים יום קודם יצירת הולד בת קול יוצאת ואומרת:
בת פלוני לפלוני.

Judaism teaches that one of God’s main occupations is making matches of soul mates. We see this in the way couples often come together from opposite ends of the earth.

2. Bereishit Rabba 68:4 – God’s main occupation is arranging marriages.

A [Roman] matron asked Rabbi Yossi bar Halafta, “In how many days did the Holy One, blessed be He, create His world?” “In six days,” he answered. “Then what has He been doing since then?” “He sits and makes matches,” he answered, “assigning this man to that woman, and this woman to that man.” “If that is difficult,” she giped, “I too can do the same.” Said he to her: “If it is easy in your eyes, it is as difficult before the Holy One, blessed be He, as the dividing of the Red Sea.” She went and matched up [her servants], giving this man to that woman, this woman to that man and so on. Sometime after, those who were thus united went and beat one another, this woman saying, “I do not want this man,” while this man protested, “I do not want that woman.” Straight away, she summoned Rabbi Yossi bar Halafta and admitted to him, “There is no god like your God; it is true, your Torah is indeed beautiful and praiseworthy, and you spoke the truth!” Said he to her: “That’s why I told you, ‘If it is easy in your eyes, it is as difficult before the Holy One, blessed be He, as the dividing of the Red Sea.’”

מטרונה שאלה את ר' יוסי בר חלפתא אמרה לו לכמה ימים ברא הקב"ה את עולמו אמר לה לששת ימים כדכתיב (שמות כ) כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ, אמרה לו מה הוא עושה מאותה שעה ועד עכשיו, אמר לה הקב"ה יושב ומזווג זיווגים בתו של פלוני לפלוני, אשתו של פלוני לפלוני, ממונו של פלוני לפלוני, אמרה לו ודא הוא אומנתיה אף אני יכולה לעשות כן כמה עבדים וכמה שפחות יש לי לשעה קלה אני יכולה לזווג, אמר לה אם קלה היא בעיניך, קשה היא לפני הקב"ה כקריעת ים סוף, הלך לו ר' יוסי בר חלפתא מה עשתה נטלה אלף עבדים ואלף שפחות והעמידה אותן שורות שורות אמרה פלן יסב לפלונית ופלונית תיסב לפלוני, וזיווגה אותן בלילה אחת, למחר אתון לגבה דין מוחיה פציעא, דין עינו שמיטא, דין רגליה תבירא, אמרה להון מה לכון, דא אמרה לית אנא בעי לדין, ודין אמר לית אנא בעי לדא, מיד שלחה והביאה את ר' יוסי בר חלפתא אמרה לו לית אלוה כאלהכון אמת היא תורתכון נאה ומשובחת יפה אמרת, אמר לא כך אמרתי לך אם קלה היא בעיניך קשה היא לפני הקב"ה כקריעת ים סוף.

The following story demonstrates how seemingly unrelated chains of events come together to produce couples.

Joanne Ness was a nutritionist in Los Angeles whose clients were mostly professional athletes. In her personal life, Joanne had become a baalat teshuvah and was becoming increasingly more observant.

She had been invited to speak at a nutritionists' conference in Philadelphia, and as she packed her bags in Los Angeles, she took along a book she had received from a friend, "From Generation to Generation," by the renowned psychiatrist Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski. She was due to arrive back in Los Angeles at 2 p.m. in time for the first night of Shavuot, which would start at 8 p.m. that evening. But there was terrible fog in Philadelphia and the airport was closed! Finally she managed to get on a flight to Pittsburgh, but the onward flight to Los Angeles was delayed for mechanical reasons.

She became concerned as she realized she would have to stay in Pittsburgh for Shavuot – and she did not know a soul. Then she remembered! The author of the book she was reading lived in Pittsburgh. He seemed like a kind and generous man with a family that cared for fellow Jews. She found Rabbi Twerski's address in the phonebook, got into a taxi and set off.

Rabbi Twerski and his son gladly made phone calls and found her a family to stay with. Joanne was invited to eat the lunch meal with Rabbi Twerski's family, which she gladly accepted and thanked him for his wonderful book. In true Twerski tradition, there were numerous guests at the table, one of which was a close friend of Rabbi Twerski, Mr. Brad Perelman. Brad had been looking for a shidduch (spouse) for many years and as he sat at the table it occurred to him that maybe his shidduch had come to him. He considered, she consented, they dated – and six weeks later they were engaged.

But there is more. Years earlier, Brad Perelman had told Rabbi Twerski in a heart-to-heart talk, "Rabbi, your family tradition is so rich and so inspirational; you must write and publish the stories of your parents and their remarkable way of life." From that conversation, Rabbi Twerski eventually wrote from "From Generation to Generation." In the introduction he thanks Brad (not mentioned by name) for encouraging him to write it. Today Brad and Joanne Perelman thank Rabbi Twerski for publishing it. (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, *Echoes of the Maggid*, p. 110)

See further the Morasha classes on Hashgachah Pratit.

PART B. TWO SIDES OF THE SAME SOUL

A soul mate is the ultimate human relationship, one unlike any other. Although the love that exists between parent and child, sisters and brothers, you and your friends may be deep, "soul mate" refers to something totally unique. It describes two people who are separate in body, but are in essence one.

Let us begin with the earliest source – the first human being:

1. **Bereishit (Genesis) 1:27 – The original person was neither male nor female; he was both. This combination of male and female is termed, "the image of God."**

God created Adam in His Image – in the image of God did He create him; male and female He created them.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא
אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אוֹתָם.

Before there was Adam and Eve, there was a single person both male and female, who perceived these two aspects to be one within him. [Note: calling Adam a "him" is only a grammatical structure to describe this androgynous person.]

The genesis of the soul mate concept is the splitting of this original person into male and female parts.

2. Bereishit 2:21-22 – God split the male and female within the original person into two distinct identities, one male and the other female.

So the Lord, God cast a deep slumber upon Adam, and he slept. He took one of his sides and closed the flesh back in its place. Then the Lord, God built the side that He had taken from the Adam into a woman and brought her to Adam.

...ויפל ה' אלהים תרדמה על האדם וישן ויקח אחת מצלעותיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה ויבן ה' אלהים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה ויביאה אל האדם.

Now we see the first distinct male, who retained the name “Adam,” and the first female who was taken from the internal being of this original Adam and formed into a new separate person with a new name, Chava (Eve).

3. Rashi to Bereishit 2:20-1 – The original Adam had two sides, male and female.

One of his sides – That is why [the Rabbis said (Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 18a) regarding the original Adam], “Two faces [sides] were created.”

זהו שאמרו שני פרצופים נבראו:

The story of Adam and Eve, their creation as soul mates and their marriage, is not a fairy tale, nor is it academic to us. Their story is our story too. There is a common adage that “opposites attract.” The Torah qualifies and gives depth to this observation: Men and women, who are notoriously opposite, attract not because they are opposite but because they were originally one. This desire for oneness is the deeper source of their attraction.

4. Rabbi C. Kramer, *Anatomy of the Soul*, Ch. 40, p. 397 – Marriage is the mitzvah that rebuilds the soul connection.

The Zohar teaches that every soul actually contains both “male” and “female” characteristics. When the time comes for a given soul to descend to the physical world, it separates and its characteristics become a “dual entity,” one part being male and one part being female. This is the great significance of marriage and the marital union: it brings the “two halves” of a soul back together again.

5. Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, *Wellsprings of Faith*, pp. 83-85 – Adam and Eve contained us all.

On a very deep level, whatever occurred to Adam and Chava [Eve] also occurs to their descendants. This is because in the hidden spiritual sense Adam and Chava contained within themselves all the souls of their descendants. Initially God created Adam and Chava as a single unified being. Every chatan and kallah (groom and bride) are also created as one. The beginning of every couple is unity. Through the mitzvot of *Kiddushin* and *Chuppah*, the original unity of their souls is reaffirmed and revealed in this world.

All mitzvot in Judaism create spiritual realities. So too the mitzvah of marriage creates a reality where two souls are able to bond together. The Jewish commandment to marry has two parts, called *Kiddushin* and *Nesuin* (or *Chuppah*), which build the spiritual connection between husband and wife. *Kiddushin* establishes the exclusivity of husband and wife, even prior to consummating the marriage. In contrast, according to Noachide law, non-Jews are not married until they live together. They have no requirement to perform *Kiddushin*. However, in Judaism, the act of *Kiddushin* creates a spiritual attachment, even before any physical bond has been created. Why should this be so?

The reason is that we understand that the marriage, while establishing a legal relationship, is really just revealing the spiritual bond that was always there.

6. **Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, Wellsprings of Faith, pp. 80-81 – Kiddushin merely reveals the pre-existing invisible connection between man and wife.**

In this light it is clear that the halachic act of *Kiddushin*, the Jewish marriage ceremony, does not “create” a marriage from nothing. On a hidden spiritual level the chatan (husband) and kallah (wife) were already connected to one another. The effect of the act is simply to strengthen that connection and to make it manifest. It turns an invisible connection into a public fact, and it imposes a set of legal obligations and restrictions.

Hence, the Torah concept of soul mates refers specifically to the reestablishing on earth of the preexisting unity of the souls of two Jews.

PART C. ONENESS

How is a soul mate relationship different than all other relationships? Indeed, how do we know that soul mate relationship is unlike other relationships? One may argue: Maybe the Torah is simply describing physical attraction? Maybe this would occur with any female non-relative? In answer to this, the Torah tells us a fascinating Midrash.

1. **Otzar HaMidrashim, Alpha Beta D’Ben Sirah, p. 47 – God’s first “attempt” at a spouse for Adam was a female creation.**

When God created Adam individually, He said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” So He created a woman for him from the ground, just like him, and called her Lilith. Immediately they began to argue with each other.

כשברא הקב"ה אדם הראשון יחיד, אמר: לא טוב היות האדם לבדו, ברא לו אשה מן האדמה כמוהו וקראה לילית, מיד התחילו מתגרין זה בזה.

2. **Rabbi David Fohrman, Affairs of the Heart - Teacher’s Guide: Class II – The Love of soul mates lasts because they are from a common source.**

Who was Lilith? According to some Midrashic sources, Lilith was Adam’s first wife. Unlike Eve, Lilith was not created from Adam’s [side], but was rather fashioned directly from the earth, as Adam himself was. Thus, she was never a “part” of him.

Lilith, Adam’s “first wife” according to [the Midrash], was a beautiful woman. But ultimately, she couldn’t be Adam’s mate. Why? Because she was “created out of green smoke,” as it were. That is, she had never been part of Adam, so she and he could never join together to recreate their original unity. She was essentially foreign to him.

From the Midrash above we derive that there are two different types of physical attractions. This Midrash teaches that there is a pure physical attraction of two “equals” (both being made from the earth, not unlike two men except one is female). This attraction does not build a lasting relationship. In contrast, from the union of Adam and Chava, we see that there is a “soul attraction” (which also has an element of physical desire) which drives two people to seek out and reveal their original bond.

Even a love as deep as a parent for a child does not match the intensity of the soul mate relationship. The

unique nature of this new relationship is in its oneness: "...and [he] cleaves to his wife and they shall be as one flesh." This kind of relationship can only exist between a man and a woman who are husband and wife.

3. **Bereishit 2:23-24 – Adam abandons other relationships as secondary once he perceives himself to be at one with the woman.**

And Adam said, "This time it is a bone from my own bones, flesh of my own flesh; she shall be called "Isha" (woman), since she was taken from "Ish" (man)." Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife and they shall be as one flesh.

... ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי
לזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה זאת על כן יעזב איש
את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד.

4. **Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 58a – Only husband and wife can "cleave" to one another.**

"And cleave" – but not to another man; "To his wife" – but not to another man's wife.

ודבק - ולא בזכר, באשתו - ולא באשת חבירו.

Adam understood that within this relationship he will unite to be totally one with another. Moreover, he will at last gain his true individuality and wholeness for which he was searching. The Jewish people have inherited the spiritual goal of humanity, which began with Adam and Eve. This is reflected even in the most intimate aspects of marriage.

5. **Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz (Shelah), Sefer Shnei Luchot Ha-Brit, Shaar Otiot, Kedushat Ha-Zivug – Man and wife together form a complete person.**

All marital relationships resemble the relationship of Adam and Eve – who were created in His image and likeness – because Jews are a continuation of Adam. So when husband and wife then engage in marital relations in sanctity and in purity, then the likeness (of the original creation) and holiness is enhanced.

And this is the meaning of what is written (Yevamot 63a): "Rabbi Elazar said: Any man who does not have a wife is not a man, as the verse says, 'male and female He created them... and He called their name *Adam*' (Bereishit 5:2)." This is so because man must resemble his Heavenly form...for then he can be called a complete person. Then the blessing will rest on a complete entity. The lower (physical) connection awakens the higher (spiritual), and all are blessed from the Source.

כל זיווג הוא מעין זיווג אדם וחווה הנעשה בצלמו
ודמותו יתברך, כי אנחנו ישראל נקראים אדם)
יבמות סא א) כי אנחנו אדם ממש ... וכשעוסק אחר
כך בפריה ורביה בקדושה וטהרה אז מרבה הדמות
והקדושה מתרבה ...

ולזה אמרו (יבמות סג א) אמר רבי אלעזר כל מי שאין
לו אשה אינו אדם, שנאמר (בראשית ה, ב) זכר ונקבה
בראם וגו' ויקרא את שמם אדם כי צריך להיות האדם
דוגמת היצירה העליונה... ובזה יקרא אדם שלם, ואז
תשרה הברכה במקום שלם. ובחבור התחתון מתעורר
העליון והכל מתברך מן המקור.

In this passage, the *Shelah* reveals to us three foundational ideas about Jewish marriage. Firstly, sexual relations in the framework of marriage differ from relations outside of it; physical intimacy out of wedlock is a physical experience. The second idea is that relations between a Jewish married couple involve not only the physical but also the spiritual, forging a bond that links their souls to each other.

6. **Rabbi M. Schlanger, Ohel Rachel p. 41, Ch. 7 – Marriage gives intimacy the power to fuse a couple's two distinct bodies into one shared soul.**

In the words of the Maharal: *"It is fitting that there be physical unity just as there is unity of soul. And that unity can only be attained through marital relations. As it is written, "And they shall become one flesh." When there is a unity and merging with one's wife, then the soul – which is united – is at peace with the body. (Be'er HaGolah Derashot, p. 81)* Food consumption sustains human existence by fusing the soul and the body. Similarly, marital relations sustain the existence of the couple by fusing their one soul to their bodies. And this brings peace to all areas of their lives.

(The importance and role of marital intimacy will be discussed fully in the Morasha shiur on The Philosophy of Taharat HaMishpachah & Mikvah.)

Thirdly, the *Shelah Ha-Kodesh* explains that Jewish soul mates help each other fulfill the task of Adam and Eve, bringing the world to perfection. Therefore, the souls of the Jewish people were split into two halves in order to find one another and accomplish this mission together.

7. **Rabbi C. Kramer, Anatomy of the Soul, Ch. 46, pp. 456-7 – Jewish marriage is about more than love; it unites two souls on a joint Godly mission.**

At its source the soul is a single unit. When it enters this world, the soul is divided into two separate bodies which parallel two opposing forces – the male and the female – both of which must be harnessed in order to strive for Godliness. Each half must at first undergo a great deal of individual growth, and each must eventually seek out the other. The two can then be reunited this time in marriage.

Even though love and desire can exist between people of all genders and religions, a non-soul mate connection will not build the oneness so many of us desire. For this reason, the Jewish concept of "soul mate" between man and woman naturally precludes same-sex marriages or casual relationships. The next section discusses how the merging of male and female in marriage produces a new reality that only the two can achieve together. This unification enables both to achieve their spiritual potential and refine their character by completing one another.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I.

- ≈ Each of us has a soul mate. This is because each of us was originally part of a soul that was both male and female just like the first couple, Adam and Eve. Our attracting force is due to a sense of mutual oneness.
- ≈ The soul mate relationship is therefore unlike any other relationship, because it attempts to reveal oneness through love attachment.
- ≈ Even though love and desire can exist between people of all genders and religions, a non-soul mate connection will not build the oneness so many of us desire. For this reason, the Jewish concept of "soul mate" between man and woman naturally precludes same-sex marriages or casual relationships.
- ≈ Marriage was designed to protect the spiritual nature of the bond between soul mates. Love needs a place to grow. The love of soul mates thrives in the secure home we call the traditional Jewish marriage.
- ≈ Jewish marriage is totally unique in its ability to forge a spiritual bond.

SECTION II. SOUL MATES COMPLETE EACH OTHER

According to the Torah, why was the creation of a male/female relationship necessary? Why did God create Adam differently from all the other animals whom the Torah says were created originally as male and female? Why did Adam have to be split only to ultimately reunite with his “other half”?

PART A. IT'S NOT GOOD TO BE ALONE

1. Bereishit 2:18 – Adam without relationship is termed “not good.”

The Lord God said, “It is not good for Adam to be alone; I will make him a helper opposite to him.”

ויאמר יקוק אלהים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו
עזר כנגדו:

This verse arouses some important, glaring questions: Does God make mistakes – why did He create Adam and only later say Adam was “not good”? Everything else that God made in the first six days of creation meets with God's approval. What was wrong with Adam?

The answer is that everything else that God created, He created complete. But not man.

2. Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 63a – Man or woman alone is an incomplete creation.

Rabbi Elazar said: “One cannot be a [complete] human being while unmarried. For it is written, ‘God created them male and female, and He called their name, Adam [human]’ (Bereishit 5:2).”

א”ר אלעזר כל אדם שאין לו אשה אינו אדם שנאמר
זכר ונקבה בראם ויקרא את שמם אדם (בראשית ה':
ב).

Only man is created incomplete; God gave man the task to partner with Him in completing creation. In fact, this is the meaning of the Midrash we saw earlier about God's occupation – matchmaker!

3. Maharal of Prague, Be'er HaGolah #4 – Only a match of husband and wife is a truly new creation.

The question being addressed (by the Midrash) was regarding something new [i.e., what does God create nowadays since He already completed creation?]. Regarding this, the Midrash states that He makes matches. What this means is that just as God matched Adam and Eve, so too does he pair up each husband and wife.

Each of these matches is a new creation, not like the (perpetual) creation of mankind which is really just nature running its course, not essentially anything new. But pairing up this particular man with that particular woman is certainly a new creation.

השאלה היא על דבר חדש. ועל זה אמר שהוא מזווג
זיווגים, וביאור ענין זה כי כמו שהש”י היה מזווג את
חוה לאדם כך הוא מזווג בכל יום את זיווג איש עם
אשתו.

וכל זיווג הוא מעשה חדש שאינו כמו בריאת האדם
עצמו, כי הבריאה בודאי אינו נחשב דבר חדש כי
העולם כמנהגו נוהג ואין חדש. אבל מה שמחבר את
האדם הפרטי זה לאשה פרטית זאת, הוא בודאי דבר
חדש.

Rabbi Ezriel Tauber (Pirkei Machshava, HaBayit HaYehudi, p. 63) explains that since only man was created in a state of “not good,” only he is in need of continued creation. Everything else continues along the natural course that God set up at the time of its original creation. But man’s completion requires further creativity, for his completion can only come about by way of marriage to his soul mate. Therefore, every act of bringing a couple together is a further instance of creation by God – the only one He still engages in!

Why did Adam need to reach his completion with a new creation, Chava; what was wrong with partnering with the animals, which he indeed attempted?

4. **Rashi on Bereishit 2:23, based on Talmud Bavli Yevamot 63a – Adam was not fulfilled by the animals.**

Adam said, “This time” (Bereishit 2:23 – see Section I. Part C, #3 above) to teach that he tried to find a mate among the animals but was not satisfied until he found Chava.

זאת הפעם - מלמד שבא אדם על כל בהמה וחיה ולא נתקרה דעתו בהם עד שבא על חוה:

What did marrying Chava achieve that he could not accomplish with the animals?

5. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Parsha Insights Acharei Mot, p. 6 – Since Adam and Chava were created from the same being, they were able to achieve a high state of unity.**

Targum Unkelos translates לא תקין as לא טוב, i.e. this is an uncorrected or incomplete state. Man, at that stage, was in an intrinsically not good reality for the only being that can stand alone and yet still be in a complete state of unity is God Himself. Therefore, it had to be that man would have a partner. The animals also needed partners. However, man was first created as one being and only afterwards was his partner created from him. The animals, on the other hand, were created as two beings from the very outset. This is to give man a greater possibility of achieving unity, given his unique place in the creation.

This places man between God and the animals. He is not a total unity like God, for, as a created being, he needs a partner. Yet he has a dimension of unity to him, being created one at the outset and making him more connected to unity, more able to achieve that state of unity which he began with at the outset.

The reason that God first made Adam one and then two was not because he changed His mind. It was rather that each male and female should have the potential of becoming one, of cleaving to each other and becoming one flesh. They become one because they were once one. And when they become one, they are imitating the unity underlining the whole of creation. (Based on Gur Aryeh, Bereishit 2:18)

The idea of unity goes deeper. What changed that led to the ability of Adam and Chava to achieve a higher level of unity?

6. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Parsha Insights Acharei Mot, p. 7 – Adam needed to feel that he was lacking, and then partner with another human being.**

Originally, Adam was created male-female in one being. Man’s faces, his inner spirituality, faced the world from every side. Man was complete; there was no back to man where lack or transgression could take place. Man, being complete, had no need to face him/herself; there was no deficiency, no need for the male/female parts to give to each other to fill the deficiency; consequently, man faced away from himself. In this state there was no possibility of imitating God by giving to another. Man was simply a spiritual robot.

This state was **לֹא טוֹב**: It was not good for Adam to be alone and maintain the state of independence in which he/she does not feel the need to relate to others. Initially, Adam thought that the solution lay in becoming a giver to the animals. However, uniting with the animals did not provide Adam with the sense of completion which he needed. For he might complete them, but they do not fully complete him. Animals do not possess a human soul nor ethically-based human reasoning, creating an unconquerable gap between man and animal. His completion of them, therefore, only involves some of his general potential, but not the full force of his human uniqueness. For a perfect match, Man therefore needed a fellow human being that he could connect to with all of his unique potential.

The solution to this was to take Adam himself and create two beings from one. Adam needed to find himself/herself divided so that he would feel he lacked half of himself. The whole Adam was now being sub-divided into two parts, neither one complete on its own. The creation of an incomplete being was reflected in the deep sleep, which God caused to fall on Adam at the time of the Woman's creation. Now each half of Adam had a front and a back. The back represented the missing half, what man lacks in his existing state. Man now exists as a potential to be actualized, like the ground he comes from. (Based on Machshevet Charutz, Rav Tzadok HaCohen)

Adam and Chava, then, became two human beings from one soul who work to unify their soul connection. This is the paradigm for each married couple. Yet there is more. There is a unique capacity that enables the husband and wife to complete one another and reach their potential.

PART B. OPPOSITIONAL HELP – THE MEANING OF “EZER K'NEGDO”

How does this completion come about? Does marriage magically make everyone perfect? Not quite. The Torah gives us only one way to fix this state of being “not good.” The only thing that can help make Adam “good” is a relationship with a dynamic called “ezer k'negdo.”

As we have seen, the general Jewish term for soul mate is *bashert* or destined one. But within the context of marriage the term more often used is the Torah's description for Eve, “ezer k'negdo.” The word “ezer” means “helper,” and the word “k'negdo” means “opposite to him.” These two terms would seem contradictory. A helper helps; she does not oppose. But within the context of a Jewish marriage, opposition can be the most helpful thing of all.

1. Bereishit 2:18 with Rashi – A soul mate is one who helps his spouse fulfill his soul's mission in this world, through a combination of help and opposition.

The Lord, G-d said, “It is not good for Adam to be alone; I will make him a helper opposite to him.

Rashi: *helper opposite to him* – If he is worthy, she will be a helper; if he is not worthy, she will oppose [him] in strife...

וַיֹּאמֶר יְקוֹק אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הָיִית הָאָדָם לְבָדּוֹ אַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ
עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:

רש"י – עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ - זָכָה עֶזֶר, לֹא זָכָה כְּנֶגְדּוֹ לְהִלָּחֵם:

The Jewish definition of soul mate is about a relationship of two people helping each other complete the mission they were sent to accomplish in this world. Therefore, if a person is doing a good job, then the soul mate is encouraging, and if not, the soul mate becomes oppositional.

2. **Rabbi S. Benyosef, *The Light of Ephraim*, p. 339 – One’s soul mate will not always behave as one may wish, but rather the way one needs in order to grow (provided both parties are healthy, stable individuals).**

If she behaves in an antagonistic way, she is giving him the chance to rectify his character defects. The fact that they are together means that God entrusted the two of them with a *tikkun* (completion) that they can bring to fruition only when they are together, a job that he can do only with her.

Marriage requires a constant battle against one’s natural tendency to self-centeredness.

3. **Jonathan Rosenblum, “In Praise of Marriage” from *Jerusalem Post*, March 27, 2009 – Spouses challenge each other to grow by presenting an oppositional element.**

In Jewish thought, the purpose of life is to subject one’s screaming id (“I want”) to a higher command (“I should”). Marriage, in that view, is the best school for self-improvement, for it cannot work unless one is prepared to take account of another’s needs and desires. The Torah describes one’s spouse as an “ezer k’negdo” – both as a helpmate and in opposition. Sometimes the greatest help is that oppositional element.

4. **Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon, *Shidduchim: Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, in *Shidduchim, Shalom Bayis, and Beyond*, p. 200 – A soul mate is the one who helps us fulfill our soul’s mission in this world.**

Marriage is the means for bringing a person to completion, so that he can achieve his ultimate goal: Each spouse is intended to complete the other, to enable the two together to overcome their inherent inadequacies... God intended that each person help his or her mate achieve their assigned goals through understanding each other’s needs, and overcoming obstacles so as to realize these goals. This is what the verse indicated with the comment: “It is not good for Man to be alone.”... In fact, the Talmudic source for this concept is, “Forty days before conception, a Heavenly Voice proclaims, ‘the daughter of Ploni (So and so) for Ploni.’” But that Talmudic statement continues, saying the same regarding “the house of Ploni to Ploni... [and] the field of Ploni to Ploni...” The same Heavenly Voice that declares whom one will marry also proclaims which house one will live in, and which field one will acquire. These too are “bashert”... We recognize, of course, that at the moment of a child’s birth, a soul is sent into its body to fulfill a specific mission. The soul has a complement of tools necessary to achieve that purpose... All of the above factors mentioned in the Talmud, including Bat Ploni – the person who will be one’s life partner – are integral components in enabling an individual to achieve the specific purpose for which he was created.

When a person lives his life with the objective that he must achieve the purpose for which he was sent into the world, he will approach marriage with that role in mind. When seeking a helpmate, his criteria will be based on “which person will enable me to achieve my purpose?” if one becomes sidetracked from what his focus should be, and concentrates on extraneous matters – such as beauty, wealth or honor – he is in effect losing sight of the purpose for which marriage was created. The Heavenly Voice that declares “Bat Ploni to Ploni” is saying that each partner has potential to enable the other to achieve the ultimate purpose for which he and she were created. Herein lies the deeper meaning of the verse, “It is not good for Man to be alone.” While alone, a person cannot achieve this ultimate purpose; it is only the proper helpmate who can bring him to this goal.

5. **Rabbi Aharon Feldman, *The River, the Kettle and the Bird*, pp. 11-12 – Marriage facilitates a paradigm shift that enables man to fulfill his purpose in life.**

Man's *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) drives him to concentrate on his own physical desires, power, and prestige... If a human being fails to stand up to these internal promptings, he will become increasingly removed from the real goals for which he was created. This *yetzer hara* is therefore a trap keeping him from the happiness and success which God intended to bestow. Consequently, the greatest gift to man is that which enables him to avoid this trap. This is precisely what marriage offers.

Marriage makes it possible for man to overcome his inclination toward self-centeredness. It permits him to change the focus of his existence from lust gratification to that of the spiritual goal of selflessness... Marriage forces a person to cease his own preoccupation with his own advancement and to concern himself instead with the needs of his [spouse] and children. As he learns to become concerned with another's interests, man's drives for greed and power are slowly tempered. As a result, his personality is directed away from natural self-centeredness towards other-centeredness. This is the key to spiritual growth.

Marriage is, of course, not an immediate ticket to spiritual perfection. We see that most of mankind is afflicted by selfish obsessions despite their being married. However, marriage puts righteousness within reach. For if one chooses to use marriage properly, marriage can make a reorientation of one's aims possible... redeeming himself from his spiritual wasteland.

Ever since the revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the Jewish people have required Torah study and mitzvot to reach perfection. These are our essential modes of connecting to God and eternity; they are our lifeline and essential nourishment for the Jewish soul. Since the Torah itself established marriage as a Jewish ideal, it is therefore essential for a Jew to marry another Jew, his *ezer k'negdo* and together to build their soul relationship through Torah and mitzvot.

KEY POINTS OF SECTION II.

- ⌘ Only man is created incomplete, in need of his soul mate to help reach completion.
- ⌘ The purpose of having a soul mate is to help us develop personally in order to be able to fulfill our mission in this world. This is accomplished through a combination of help and opposition.
- ⌘ On the one hand, couples help each other by giving to one another. But this giving also serves to refine each one of them, taking them out of their natural selfishness by challenging them to become other-directed.

SECTION III. MARITAL ILLUSIONS AND REALITY

Although there may be cynicism about marriage today, Judaism sees the modern marriage malaise more as the product of illusions than disillusionment. Somehow fantasies about what marriage should do for us have replaced the traditional notion of what we should do for marriage. Although there are many factors that can undermine marriage, we will mention three key areas contributing to the decline of marriage today: false expectations of how perfect and easy marriage should be, lack of understanding the very purpose of marriage as a means to mutual self-perfection, and the notion that commitment is limiting rather than expansive.

PART A. FALSE EXPECTATIONS

Marriages often fail due to false expectations. Without a proper understanding of marriage, two well-meaning people set off on a goal where neither finds what they are looking for. Expectations are never met. Anger and resentment build, and they break apart.

1. **Rabbi Aharon Feldman, *The River, the Kettle, and the Bird*, pp. 21-22 – In conjuring the myth of romantic love, Western culture has created false expectations for marriage.**

Marriage is not the fantasy world that many couples believe it is. While fantasies are not real, they are not necessarily harmless. If the fantasies are not put to rest quickly, the shock of disillusionment can be disastrous.

The major fantasy about marriage is that it confers eternal bliss. Two corollaries follow from this: (1) that married people are constantly in love, and (2) that spouses have no faults. Fantasies, like all dreams, are largely forms of vicarious wish-fulfillment. Thus, whatever our innermost desires – lust, power, prestige, or even the spiritual goals of Torah acquisition and character perfection – we fantasize that marriage will achieve them all for us.

The fantasy of “marriage as eternal bliss” thrives especially among those who have grown up under the influence of Western values. From their early years, children are informed that the close company of a woman produces quick and permanent ecstasy. The victim of too many of these messages naturally expects to find instant bliss in marriage.

2. **Emunah Braverman, *Five Modern Myths of Marriage*, from www.aish.com – Myth #5: Marriage will make me happy.**

An unhappy single person is an unhappy married one. Marriage is not a panacea. We bring ourselves with all of our baggage into the relationship and our spouse brings their neuroses as well. This is actually not a recipe for happiness or fulfillment.

Modern thinkers suggest that “marriage” and “soul mates” wrongly defined cause us to abandon the ideal of marriage.

*Over the last four decades, many Americans have moved away from identifying with an “institutional” model of marriage, which seeks to integrate sex, parenthood, economic cooperation, and emotional intimacy in a permanent union. This model has been overwritten by the “soul mate” model, which sees marriage as primarily a couple-centered vehicle for personal growth, emotional intimacy, and shared consumption that depends for its survival on the happiness of both spouses. Thus, where marriage used to serve as the gateway to responsible adulthood, it has come to be increasingly seen as a capstone of sorts that signals couples have arrived, both financially and emotionally – or are on the cusp of arriving. (W. Bradford Wilcox, “When Marriage Disappears: The Retreat from Marriage in Middle America,” in *The State of Our Unions* 2010)*

There’s “deflated confidence” in the institution. Amid “bad” marriages and soul-sucking divorces, young adults are less optimistic about having a good marriage. Thus, the quest for a “soul mate” becomes even more pressing. A “soul mate,” after all, should always be loving, faithful, good in bed, wealthy, healthy and a good parent. (Cheryl Wetzstein, “Why Americans Put off Marriage,” from www.washingtonpost.com, January 31, 2011)

The modern definition of soul mate has contrived an ideal lover, a term that is impossible for anyone to live up to for two reasons. Firstly, no person can ever be what someone else imagines he should be. Secondly, if he is trying to live up to that other person’s ideal, it means he is not being himself. In other words that person does not love her, he loves his own fantasy that he expects the other to act out.

PART B. IT TAKES EFFORT

As we saw above, “soul mate” in popular jargon implies a life lived “happily ever after” with the perfect spouse. Statistically, few find this, as each partner has to face the person they ended up marrying. Jewish marriages have a higher success rate. In part this is due to the expectations of the couple upon marrying.

The main expectation of the Jewish couple is that real love takes real work. For a Jewish couple, the terms “soul mate” and “ezer k'negdo” do not imply instant, everlasting bliss. A couple needs to learn how to harmonize, like two different instruments that clash at first until they are tuned to play together. As we pointed out in the previous class, one's soul mate is connected to one's life mission, and this task often involves facing up to real interpersonal challenges. In that light, it is worth reviewing one of the sources we saw previously (Section II, B.2):

1. **Rabbi S. Benyosef, *The Light of Ephraim*, p. 339 – One's soul mate will not always behave as one may wish, but rather the way one needs in order to grow (provided both parties are healthy, stable individuals).**

If she behaves in an antagonistic way, she is giving him the chance to rectify his character defects. The fact that they are together means that God entrusted the two of them with a *tikkun* (completion) that they can bring to fruition only when they are together, a job that he can do only with her.

Marriage provides a framework for personal development, growth in character refinement, that simply cannot be matched in any other relationship or setting. Through the chemistry and commitment of husband and wife, they are able to refine each other, challenging each other's natural selfishness and providing each other with opportunities to give.

2. **Nachum Braverman and Shimon Apisdorf, *The Death Of Cupid*, p. 60 – A good marriage relationship requires constant investment; the dividends are well worth it.**

We all know what comfort is...Marriage is not comfortable. Marriage is deeply pleasurable. Unlike comfort, however, it requires the exertion of enormous effort and the acceptance of disquieting times.

All of our most meaningful accomplishments and deepest pleasures in life demand the investment of great effort...

Marriage doesn't allow much room for hiding. You have to repeatedly discuss, listen, re-discuss, work out and rework out all sorts of differences in opinion, personality conflicts and other sundry problems. You need to understand yourself, your spouse, and the unique reactions that occur when your diverse chemistries are blended together. You need the courage of a mountain climber, the endurance of a triathlete and the grace, poise and timing of a ballerina. In short, marriage demands no less than what it takes for an Olympian to win a gold medal – and Judaism believes that we've all got it in us.

As we will explore further in the class on Love, mindful giving is one of the main elements that build a strong basis for a marriage. This requires a constant battle against one's natural tendency to self-centeredness. In fighting selfishness and building a good marriage we are directly fighting the force that opposes us in every aspect of life.

PART C. SOUL MATES AND SOLE MATES

The 20s are a time to “be your own person.” Committing to a marriage looks risky when both people expect to “change” as they find their “true selves.” The resulting script says: Do the self-discovery part first, then involve “other

people.” (Cheryl Wetzstein, “Why Americans Put off Marriage,” from www.washingtonpost.com, January 31, 2011)

Contrary to popular belief, Judaism says that we only find our true selves within marriage, not without it. Instead of being free and open to self exploration, the unmarried state leads to more and more self-estrangement. As such, Judaism sees commitment – commitment to each other and commitment to a path of personal growth through the relationship – as a precondition to true self-discovery, for it is only within marriage that people are able to tap into their higher human faculties.

1. Sara Y. Rigler, Friend or Foe, www.aish.com – Without building a committed relationship we become strangers to ourselves.

The Torah repeatedly warns against submission to the “*el zar*.” *El zar* is usually translated as, “strange god,” but it can also mean, “god of estrangement.” The *el zar* is the force of disconnection and alienation. As the great contemporary sage Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe writes: “What a frightening force is the *el zar*, which transforms a person into being a stranger to himself, to others, and to his Creator – truly a stranger, without emotion, without understanding, without connection, without love!” [Alei Shor, p. 83]

The *el zar* or Force of Estrangement (F.O.E.) is counter juxtaposed to the true God, the God of oneness. The credo of Judaism, “God is one,” means something more profound than “one” in the sense of “not two or three.” God’s “oneness” is pure monism, the ultimate unification of everything in reality and beyond.

At any given moment, a human being is connecting to God by moving toward oneness or serving the F.O.E. by moving toward disconnection and estrangement.

When a husband and wife argue, the F.O.E. rejoices. When adult siblings become estranged from each other, the F.O.E. scores a victory...Of course, the F.O.E. itself is a creation of the One God, who, in granting human beings free choice, offers the polarities of good and evil, love and hate, connection and disconnection...God unleashed the F.O.E. in the world in order to maximize the free choice of human beings. The Talmud refers to this world as “*olam yididut*,” a world of closeness or intimacy, a world of relationship. The choice, however, between relationship and estrangement is entirely ours.

...It is a wily force, which disguises itself as righteous indignation, adherence to principles, and a multitude of other lofty claims. Whatever its costume, the F.O.E. can always be recognized by its effect: it creates distance.

The more intense and lasting a relationship one wishes to form, the more he must overcome this force of self-estrangement. Ironically, commitment, which feels like “losing out,” puts us in touch with our truest and greatest sense of self. Therefore, we become our true selves by choosing to selflessly invest ourselves in the most intense relationship possible. This relationship is marriage.

2. Rabbi Menachem Schlanger, *Al Ptacheinu*, p. 33 – A couple requires a lifetime commitment.

A relationship wherein each partner complements the other can exist only within the framework of marriage. Within marriage, the unique qualities of a woman are able to assist and benefit her husband, since they are directed toward one particular man. Similarly, the man is then able to truly give to his wife. When they are each faithful

יחס של השלמה בין איש לאשה, יכולה להינתן רק במסגרת הנישואין, אז סגולותיה של האשה מועילות ותומכות באיש, מכיון שהם מכוונות רק כלפי אדם יחיד, וכן השפעתו של האיש מיוחדת לביתו הקבוע. וכאשר שניהם נאמנים זה לזה בברית עולם של הנישואין, אז כל השקעה בקשר שביניהם בונה את שלימותם...

to each other in their eternal commitment, any investment in their relationship develops their perfection.

... The very basis of any constructive relationship between spouses is the everlasting exclusivity, based on the understanding that through marriage man has found the lost part of himself (Kiddushin 2b), and that they are predestined for each other from their very creation (Sotah 2a)

נקודת המוצא של קשר מועיל בין בני הזוג, היא
הבלעדיות הנצחית, המעוגנת באמונה שהאיש מוצא
את אבידתו (קידושין ב:), המיועדת לו מתחילת
בריאתו (סוטה ב.)

Once we understand that each of us has a soul mate, and that our soul mate helps us fulfill our life purpose – rectifying our character traits to become greater people – the institution of marriage can now be perceived as having great personal meaning, and can make a tremendous societal contribution. This understanding may well generate sudden energy to stand up against the movement away from marriage and prompt one to invest in such an awesome endeavor.

3. Sara Y. Rigler, Friend or Foe, www.aish.com – We need to foster real relationships.

A recent New York Times article documenting the decline of dating and affectionate relationships among America's youth quotes 16-year-old Brian: "Being in a real relationship just complicates everything." Brian's ingenuous admission may speak for more adults than would care to admit it.

In the Jewish worldview, the eclipse of relationships, which are defined by caring and giving, is not just another lamentable symptom of post-modern society gone awry. Rather, genuine relationships – with God, with other human beings, and with oneself – are the *raison d'être* of human existence. To spurn relationships is not only to lose the game, but to negate the very purpose of playing.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III.

- ⌘ We discussed three key problem areas that are contributing to the decline of marriage today: false expectations of how perfect and easy marriage should be, lack of understanding the very purpose of marriage as a means to mutual self-perfection, and the notion that commitment is limiting rather than expansive.
- ⌘ Without a proper understanding of the purpose of marriage and its goals, people often set up false expectations and are ultimately disappointed. Hence, many today see marriage as a meaningless institution.
- ⌘ Judaism sees marriage as a way to take two mature human beings and perfect them through a relationship of committed benevolence over the course of their life together.
- ⌘ We need to replace the concept of "the partner of my dreams" with a more focused Jewish definition of soul mate, or *ezer k'negdo*. This is the person who can help us, and push us if necessary, to accomplish our life mission. As such, one's true soul mate may be totally different than one expects – and may even oppose the partner. Without understanding the benefits of this friction, spouses may find great frustration in their marriages.
- ⌘ With the proper expectations, marriage makes sense and is worth the ongoing dedicated effort it involves. But for one to actually develop this relationship with one's soul mate, that person must

also be one's sole mate. A relationship that lacks this quality of commitment will not achieve its goal but will rather lead one to more selfishness and estrangement.

SECTION IV. THE ICING ON THE WEDDING CAKE

There are priceless benefits from Jewish marriage. The greatest, of course, is that in uniting with our soul mates we are creating a framework for true self-improvement and the fulfillment of the very purpose of our creation. But there are also more down-to-earth rewards of marriage the Jewish way.

PART A. PERSONAL AND NATIONAL LEGACY

Marriage provides the essential framework for building a family. And Jewish marriage particularly is vital to the cause of Jewish continuity. The benefit here is not just personal, it is national.

1. Bereishit 2:24 with Commentary of Rashi – Children are the fulfillment of a couple's unity.

Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife and they shall be as one flesh.

Rashi: *And they shall become one flesh* – through the child created from the two of them, they become one flesh.

על כן יעזוב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד.

רש"י: והיו לבשר אחד – הולד נוצר על ידי שניהם, ושם נעשה בשרם אחד:

Children, and what we pass on to them, are an extension of the couple that produced them. God chose Avraham because he knew that he would pass eternal Godly values on to his family and household.

3. Bereishit 18:18-19 – The Jewish family is the eternal legacy of Avraham.

[God said] Avraham will be a great and powerful nation; and all the peoples of the world will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him because he will charge his sons and his household after him to keep the path of God..."

ואברהם היו יהיה לגוי גדול ועצום ונברכו בו כל גויי הארץ: כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו דרך יקוק...

4. Rabbi Aharon Feldman, *The River, the Kettle and the Bird*, p. 11 – Marriage is an integral aspect of Jewish continuity.

Jewish society is based on a value system that can only survive through marriage. Generally speaking, only from within the Jewish family unit can Torah values be properly transmitted to future generations.

PART B. THE FAMILY UNIT

It's not just a mitzvah to have children; it's a mitzvah to raise them as well. Marriage provides the framework for raising productive and healthy people. Doing so can be the most rewarding enterprise of all. From a Jewish perspective, a person's greatest possible accomplishment is producing offspring who

understand and live with the notion that he is made in the image of God. Our national product is great people, and our production plant is the Jewish home and the family life it provides.

1. **Rabbi Pinchas Stopler, *Made in Heaven*, pp. XIII-XIV – A good marriage is the social structure to build great individuals.**

In the family structure we find the one human, social institution that is most indispensable for creating and forming the individual. Without the family, it is impossible to create a healthy individual, not only biologically but in any sense. When we create a child we literally “play” God.

The drama of a man’s partnership with God in creation does not end with the birth of a child. After birth, too, the father and mother must live together within the family unit. Thus children can be reared and educated in such a way that they will develop into men and women who are capable of fulfilling their human and spiritual destinies. Each person is to a large extent what his parents and family make him; if they are successful parents the children may even be better than they are. Jewish parents have always hoped to rear children even more successful than themselves, each more capable of fulfilling his own individual human and spiritual destiny.

In the historic Jewish view the family, and not the synagogue, is considered the basic institution of Jewish life and society.

The Jewish family has long been a model of harmony, love, and stability... Jews see family as the essential force in the development of a God-fearing individual and the creation of a home in which God dwells. Marriage is so significant that it is the point of origin of all mankind. It is the one human institution which can bring to fruition man’s greatest hopes and dreams.

From a Jewish perspective a family structure does more than just providing two nurturers in place of one nurturer. A husband and wife, via their relationship, have become two wholly rectified people. Children see two parents who via their relationship with one another have become far more complete. A child’s two role models are qualitatively different role models than had they been single. A child who himself enjoyed a truly fulfilled upbringing will strive to build a world of love and completeness through his own life and relationships.

PART C. FOSTERING LOVE

Whereas the modern world is plagued by men leaving their wives in the wake of a mid-life crisis, traditional Jewish marriage, with its laws and traditions on how to build love over time, sets a path for couples to grow in love, safeguarding them from the plague of the mid-life crisis.

1. **Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburg, *The Mystery of Marriage*, pp. 402-3 – Built on proper foundations, the Jewish marriage helps bring people to greater love, not fizzled-out love.**

The secular notion of romance is the tension preceding and leading to the consumption of love. Once this tension is resolved, boredom sets in and even hostility may follow; artificial means must therefore be found to reinstate the tension and renew the challenge... Jewish marriage is spared this need by the laws of Family Purity. The romantic dynamic of tension and fulfillment is built into these observances, which constantly refresh the couple’s romantic love on the physical plane. On the metaphysical plane, however, the intensity of romance is preserved by the couple’s modesty... Although there is a rational side to marriage, it is its super-rational aspect that affords its infinite depth.

See further the Morasha classes on Love and Taharat HaMishpachah - Mikvah.

PART D. TIKUN OLAM AND INCREASED SPIRITUALITY

Marriage affords a Jewish man and woman a role in Tikun Olam, bringing the world to perfection. Through marriage itself, a Jewish man and woman unite to continue the purpose for which humanity and the entire universe was created.

1. **Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, Horeb, Section VI, Ch. 111, p. 533 – We return the world to the state of Paradise, one Jewish home at a time.**

Every new married couple is a couple in Paradise; like the first one, a foundation-stone of human progress. We therefore pray for God's love, care and fatherly mercy that surrounded the first human couple: *Gladden the beloved companions as You gladdened Adam with Chava in the Garden of Eden (Sheva Berachot).*

2. **Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, Wellsprings of Faith, pp. 91-3 – Since Abraham's time to the present, the Jewish marriage is meant to bring the whole world back to perfection – one couple at a time.**

Since the hidden connection between the chatan and kallah is a spiritual connection, it is permanent. A shared spiritual identity even death cannot bring it to an end. Only the body is affected by death, but the life of the soul is eternal. For the souls of Israel originate within the *Kisei Hakavod*, the Heavenly Throne of Glory, and there in the realm above the world of time each chatan and kallah are one. At a wedding we recite the blessing "*vehiskin lo mimenu binyan adei ad* – He prepared for him an eternal edifice." We are referring to the hidden unity of chatan and kallah, to the unity of souls, for it originates in a world beyond time...

Avraham bought the [the Cave of] Machpeila [where he and Sara were eventually buried] in order to ensure that he and his wife would be united forever and his purchase shows us that a Jewish marriage is a *binyan adei ad* – an everlasting connection based on a unity...

Avraham and Sarah were the first Jewish couple, and so they contained within themselves the souls of the future Jewish couples. In a spiritual sense every chatan can be regarded as a part of Avraham and every kallah as a part of Sarah. The money that is used for Kiddushin is derived from the money that Avraham gave when he bought the Machpeila. (see Kiddushin 2) Thus when a Jewish chatan gives the ring to the kallah for Kiddushin, the chatan becomes a partner with Avraham Avinu at the very moment he performs the Kiddushin.

Just as Avraham's purchase of the Machpeila established his marriage as permanent and eternal, so too the chatan is establishing a marriage that is to be permanent and eternal – a *binyan adei ad*.

Thus the love between man and wife parallels the mission of the Jewish people – the mission begun by Avraham and Sarah, the first Jewish couple – to bring the world to perfection. Whereas in some non-Jewish traditions, spiritual seekers embrace a lifestyle of solitude and even celibacy, Jewish thought tells us that the only path to truly understand the mystical secrets of the universe is through a committed marriage filled with love and giving.

Additionally, by working to create a peaceful marriage, we are creating the building block for a peaceful world.

3. **Avot De-Rabbi Natan 28:3 – Peaceful marriage is the building block for a peaceful world.**

One who creates peace in his own home is considered by the Torah as if he had created peace within all of the Jewish People, upon each and every person.

כל המשים שלום בתוך ביתו מועלה עליו הכתוב כאילו משים שלום בישראל על כל אחד ואחד.

4. **Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburg, *The Mystery of Marriage*, p. 410 – The unity of marriage teaches a person about God's unity with His creation.**

Only after marriage can one experience the Divine mystery and intention underlying creation, God's desire for the union (or marriage) of His transcendent essence to his immanent Presence as manifest in his chosen people, Israel.

Of course, marriage's greatest impact is that it brings God's presence and unity to a world empty of it. This is a world where we rectify ourselves through loving human relationship. May we soon see a world filled with the endless love and good, a world with someone out there made just for you.

Would people want to get married if it gave them the following benefits?

- Attached them eternally to their other half
- Gave them an ever-deepening love throughout their life
- Completed their sense of individuality
- Brought them a sense of wholeness and peace
- Helped them accomplish the purpose for which they were born
- Brought blessing into their lives
- Taught them how to make all their relationships rich, meaningful and loving
- Allowed them to play a role in Tikun Olam – fixing the world
- Showed them how to raise children who are clear and passionate about what they are living for
- Made them into vessels for spirituality

If the benefits are real, any wise person would put such an opportunity on the top of his list of priorities, and would be willing to invest the time, energy and hard work necessary for achieving such goals.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV.

Jewish marriage provides priceless benefits:

- By uniting with our soul mates we create the framework for true self-perfection and the ability to fulfill our mission in life.
- It gives us the opportunity to build a personal and national legacy through having children.
- Furthermore, it provides the appropriate framework for raising those children to be productive and healthy individuals.
- Whereas infatuation fades and can end up in catastrophe, Jewish marriage fosters the love between husband and wife over time, making it grow rather than dissipate.
- Finally, Jewish marriage can help make us more aware of spirituality and God in our lives.

CLASS SUMMARY

WHAT IS A SOUL MATE?

A soul mate is the person for whom we are destined, having originally been a part of a soul that was both male and female, Adam and Eve. As such, it is a unique bond of oneness that exists only between a husband and wife. The purpose of having a soul mate is to help us develop personally in order to be able to fulfill our mission in this world.

WHY DO I NEED TO FIND MY SOUL MATE?

Unlike every other creature in the world, God created each person inherently incomplete. This is the state the Torah calls “not good” for a person to remain in. The only way out of this inferior and incomplete state is to couple with one’s soul mate. The interaction of help and opposition that soul mates provide for one another in the context of marriage is the one and only way to fulfill our spiritual potential.

WHAT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE ARE CONTRIBUTING TO ITS DECLINE TODAY?

On the one hand, there is a popular misconception that marriage should be a state of perpetual bliss. This has created false expectations both for the qualities of a marriageable partner as well as the experience of marriage itself. There is a notion that if this person is perfect for me, then everything should run smoothly, always – and that if it doesn’t, well then it wasn’t meant to be.

Attitudes about commitment are also contributing to the decline in marriage. People are looking at the prospect of monogamy as something limiting. As such, they feel that they need to explore, to “find themselves,” before “settling down.”

HOW DOES A JEWISH APPROACH TO MARRIAGE AVOID THOSE PITFALLS?

Judaism addresses these misconceptions head on. Marriage can be blissful, indeed it should be. But it takes work. The gratification is not instant but rather the product of a real attempt at personal growth. One’s soul mate is perfect for you; however that does not mean that he or she will always do or say what you want. Their role is to help you become a better person, and sometimes that puts them in an oppositional stance.

As regards commitment, Judaism looks at relationship without commitment not only as qualitatively inferior to marriage, but emotionally and spiritually destructive in its own right. It breeds insecurity and selfishness. On the other hand, the safety net of marital commitment offers us the room to grow and develop in a healthy and natural way together with the help of our soul mate, our sole mate.

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE JEWISH MARRIAGE SPECIFICALLY, AS OPPOSED TO MARRIAGE IN GENERAL?

In its ability to forge a spiritual bond, the Jewish marriage is totally unique. For a start, Kiddushin (or betrothal) is seen as beginning the process of souls re-establishing their Heavenly unity here on earth. In this way, Jewish marriage unites the soul mates in a joint life mission the two can only accomplish together.

WHAT ARE THE IRREPLACEABLE BENEFITS OF JEWISH MARRIED LIFE?

Judaism views marriage as the path for a person to reach perfection.

The first benefit of marriage is the opportunity to start a family. Having children should not be a selfish endeavor but rather an expression of the couple's love and their hope to pass on their good qualities and values to the next generation. Only within the structure of the family unit will children be able to absorb these values and develop into emotionally stable and spiritually growing people.

The Jewish approach to marriage, whether its laws or its outlooks, helps to structure married life in such a way that the couple is able to foster their love over time, drawing closer together as they develop together. In the process they see the hand of God in their lives and feel His presence in their relationship with each other.

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL READING

Rabbi Yirmiyahu and Rebbitzin Tehilla Abramov, *Two Halves of a Whole*, Targum Press

Rosie Einhorn and Sherry S. Zimmerman, *In the Beginning*, Targum Press

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Marriage*, ArtScroll Publishers

Rabbi Avraham Twerski, MD, *The First Year of Marriage*, ArtScroll Publishers

Rabbi Meir Winkler, *Ten Minutes a Day to a Better Marriage*, ArtScroll Publishers