

# Ten Ways to Marry the Wrong Person

by Rabbi Dov Heller, M.A.

**Blind love is not the way to choose a spouse. Here are practical tools for keeping your eyes wide open.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here are four character traits to definitely check for:

*Humility:* Does this person believe that "doing the right thing" is more important than personal comfort?

*Kindness:* Does this person enjoy giving pleasure to other people? How does s/he treat people s/he doesn't have to be nice to? Does s/he do volunteer work? Give charity?

*Responsibility:* Can I depend on this person to do what s/he says s/he's going to do?

*Happiness:* Does this person like himself? Does s/he enjoy life? Is s/he emotionally stable?

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are three basic ways we connect with another person:

1. chemistry and compatibility
2. share common interests
3. share common life goal

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

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

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

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

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

#### **#6. You pick the wrong person because you do not have a deeper emotional connection with this person.**

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

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

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

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

Ask yourself the following questions: Do I feel calm, peaceful and relaxed with this person? Can I fully be myself and express myself with this person? Does this person make me feel good about myself? Do you have a really close friend who does make you feel this way? Make sure the person you marry makes you feel the same way!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Author Biography:**

Rabbi Dov Heller is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who holds Masters Degrees in Clinical Psychology from Antioch University and in Contemporary Theology from Harvard University. He also holds a B.A. in philosophy and was ordained a rabbi in Jerusalem in 1982. He is presently the director of the Aish HaTorah Counseling Center in Los Angeles and in addition to teaching extensively for Aish HaTorah, runs a private practice specializing in adult psychotherapy, marriage counseling, and personal guidance.