



The Key to a Successful Marriage

What's the biggest cause of divorce today? If you were to ask a group of your friends to list the biggest cause of divorce today, you would probably get a string of answers: money, children, religion, in-laws.

Interestingly, none of them are true.

While any one of these may create friction in a relationship, none of them are significant causes of divorce. The one and only leading cause of divorce today is fighting.

Now you may say, "Well, isn't that obvious? Of course couples breaking up are going to be fighting. But it's the issues that cause the fights. The issues are the crux of the problem."

But this is a misunderstanding. It's not the issues that cause fights. It's how the couple deals with the issues. That defines their relationship. It's not the children, or money, or religion, or in-laws causing the trouble. It's how the couple negotiates their differences over these issues. That determines the success or the failure of the marriage.

As an example: Irreconcilable Differences

Studies show that 70% of successful, long-standing marriages have irreconcilable differences. An irreconcilable difference refers to a major life issue when he wants one thing, she wants another, and there is no possible compromise. If he has a thriving business in NYC, and for medical reasons, she needs to live in San Diego, there is no middle ground. Chicago won't help either of them. If she wants to send the



children to a *chassidische* school, and he wants them brought up *Litvishe*, the solution isn't for the kids to grow *payot* just on one side. Or if he wants to have at least a dozen kids, and she feels that four is about all she can handle, there is no solution that will satisfy both of them.

These issues never go away. They remain part and parcel of a couple's life throughout their marriage. Yet despite having these types of differences, most couples are able to create a long-standing, harmonious union.

What's even more eye-opening is that studies show that about a third of the issues couples fight about have no compromise position. It's either your parents' house for the *Seder* or mine. We paint the living room green or blue. Mixing the two isn't an option. Despite these differences, many couples are able to maintain a loving happy relationship... and some aren't.

Two mature, reasonable people can manage to figure out a way to deal with almost anything that life throws at them. Sometimes my way, sometimes yours, but we're in this together, and we'll figure it out. And if they can't, there are always plenty of people who are older and wiser to guide them.

A big part of a happy marriage is realizing there are many things that won't go the way I want. And it's not because my spouse is mean or selfish. It's not because he always has to have things his way. And it's not that, "We aren't meant for each other." When you take two people with independent interests and values, it's inevitable there will be differences.

The more a couple works on their bond of love and affection, the easier these things become. It's much easier to give in to someone I have a deep regard for. If husband and wife can learn to have true regard for one another, they will be able to find a way around the issues that come up. But it still requires work, and more importantly, the understanding that "Of course, there will be differences, and naturally I will have to give in often." That is critical for a happy marriage.

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