



Introduction

Inside marriage are two holy *neshamos* (souls), each of whom came down into this world for a holy purpose. Male and female Hashem created them and asked them to join together in holy matrimony to serve Him.

Each is a world in his/her own right. Each was born to parents, into a family and a community which influenced him/her. Each has a nature with which he or she was born, along with a multitude of gifts and challenges from Hashem. Each is unique, different from anyone else who ever was or will be. Each carries a spark from Hashem that it is his/her job to make visible in this world. Each is a part of *Klal Yisrael* tasked with a different contribution to make to the collective whole. Each is making the journey through this world according to Hashem's plan for him/her, entering and leaving according to Hashem's timetable.

So much about a man's and woman's life in this world is his or hers alone to contend with. This remains true even after that man and woman become husband and wife. The awesome togetherness that Hashem made possible through marriage doesn't remove the enormous responsibility that each person

has for himself in this lifetime. A person will face judgment in the next world on his own, and be held accountable for his deeds, for how he spent his time, for the extent of his *teshuvah* (repentance), and so much else. The quality of one's relationship with one's spouse will be part of that accounting, but again on an individual – not a joint – ledger.

Yet, the consummate oneness that Hashem made possible only through the holy vehicle of marriage is a gift of unimaginable proportion. It gives us an opportunity to experience unity with another to a degree that no other relationship offers. The very differences between a man and a woman, in addition to all the many differences between the two people themselves, are what make the experience of oneness that can be achieved so profound.

Hashem is One. Whenever we are able to bridge duality and come into oneness, we come closer to Him. Marriage is the ultimate opportunity to do this. With its roots in oneness – literally a shared soul root, a common source, from which both husband and wife derive – it invites us to continually reconcile our singularity with the union that envelops, but never totally extinguishes, it.

From the Torah we learn that Hashem intended marriage to be beautiful, powerful, healing, and transformative. We meet our ancestors individually and in marriage. Their greatness is made known to us on both levels. It is a model we are meant to emulate. We are meant to understand that the work asked of us as individuals is not eclipsed or eliminated by marriage. On the contrary, it is marriage that helps us do that work. A true *zivug* is the person with whom you can best realize your G-d-given potential, the person whose very being will prod you to become who you were created to be, the person who will challenge you in just the way you need to be challenged and who will complement you in just the way you need to be complemented. That's why matches are *min haShamayim* (from Heaven). Only Hashem knows who we really are on a soul

level, why we are making the journey through this world, and what we need to accomplish during our time here.

So how do we embrace and enjoy this most miraculous of opportunities to unite with another holy soul and come closer to Hashem than we ever could on our own? How do we acknowledge and accept that challenges are to be expected, a willingness to grow is needed, and that the whole venture is a continual work in progress? How do we make Hashem a constant in the picture? How do we remember to ask for His help always? How do we remind ourselves that the purpose of our lives, individually and together, is to serve Him? How do we treasure our spouses for who they are, to respect and value them in the context of their own journeys and not just as puzzle pieces in ours?

I've been blessed for years now with the opportunity to help myself and many others tackle these questions. As a result, I've come to appreciate on a deep level the care and commitment demonstrated by so many husbands and wives as they labor to build Torah-true marriages. It is incredibly moving to witness the sincerity that people bring to this endeavor, in the face of so many difficulties and hardships.

Often what is missing is adequate preparation for this most challenging of life tasks, the actual skills needed to accomplish what is desired. Awareness is also often lacking, making it hard for a couple to identify what needs work. They end up blaming each other for what is actually nobody's fault, rather the result of two good people being thrown together without the tools they need to do what is being asked of them.

Baruch Hashem, today we live in a world where many couples are ready to face the truth and do the work they need to do to grow themselves and their marriages. Also, there are many *Torahdik* avenues available now through which to seek help. This is not an accident. Reconciling the relationship between the masculine and the feminine, which permeates every

aspect of creation, is crucial to the *geulah* (redemption). It is the final *tikkun* (repair) that *iy”H* will bring Mashiach. And every couple who is doing the work that marriage demands is contributing to that *tikkun*. May this book be of help to those engaged in this holy endeavor and inspire us to come closer to our true selves, our spouses, and Hashem.

Note for Readers

This book doesn't contain quick, easy formulas. It recognizes that each marriage involves two distinct, unique creations of Hashem. So by definition, each marriage is also a unique, one-of-a-kind union through which the two particular sparks from Hashem it contains will fulfill their purpose in this world and make their contribution to *Klal Yisrael*. Each couple needs to discover the way forward for themselves, taking into account who each person is and what is best in their particular circumstances. To do that, you need to approach marriage as adults, ready to take responsibility for yourselves and be there for each other simultaneously.

Remember, you are on a lifetime journey together. The road is long and at times may meander into difficult terrain. When you have the tools you need to handle such times, they become just another stretch of road to be navigated as gracefully and productively as possible, not a reason for alarm. In fact, just the opposite.

The willingness to face and tackle difficulties within yourself and within your marriage is a mark of maturity. It demonstrates true *emunah* and *bitachon* as you work with whatever Hashem puts on your plate at any given moment, trusting that inside the experience is something good with your name on it. It might be something you learn, a new strength you acquire, a deeper level of understanding you reach, a *tikkun* you need. Whatever it is, it is from Hashem and ultimately for your good.

This mindset opens the door to endless possibilities in marriage. It allows for continual movement inward and upward to ever-deepening connections to Hashem, Torah, and *Klal Yisrael* from the most true, core place in both of you. In the process, your deepest self finds expression in ways that wouldn't be possible without your mate. That's true no matter how actively one or the other participates. It's an intertwined movement that never stops.