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The distinguished author of this new book called “Infinite Marriage” has once again provided a valuable resource to the world community to help focus and improve on the most significant relationship that humans can have, and that is the relationship between husband and wife.

A previously published author, Coach Ratner—after a successful career in business—moved several years ago to Yerushalayim and has become an influential educator at Aish HaTorah. He focuses all his talents and efforts on fostering meaningful relationships amongst married couples that can and will enhance and increase *shalom bayis* in many homes.

Coach Ratner discussed some of his thoughts and insights with me, and I found them to be original, creative, and innovative in helping to foster better and stronger relationships amongst couples. I highly recommend this new book and extend a tremendous collective “*yasher koach*” to him for making this book available to the larger public, who will without doubt benefit from the refreshing ideas and concepts that are outlined in these pages. We have grown accustomed to working on our relationships with fellow workers, siblings, and the general community. However, we have been neglectful in working on the most important relationship that we have and that is the one with our spouse. Now Coach Ratner has provided the tools to do so.

I wish him much *hatzlachah* with this new book, as well as the other projects of self-improvement that he is involved with. May the improvements that will come from this book help each and every home to be stronger and better, and that will provide the next generation with the proper role models to improve their homes as well.

Respectfully submitted,

Rabbi Chaim Aryeh Zev Ginzberg

Cedarhurst, NY
Chanukah 5784



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I have known Mr. Daniel Ratner for many years and delighted in seeing him thriving in his many roles as a community pillar, generous philanthropist, **מכניס אורח** extraordinaire, and passionate teacher.

Daniel brings much freshness, insight, experience, and most of all passion to all he touches, especially his many efforts in sharing his learning and Torah thoughts. Daniel's words are tailored for practical everyday living, and not left for abstraction and hypothetical.

Daniel, a prolific teacher and author, has now embarked on a project to share his many powerful insights on the sacred institution of marriage. Anyone encountering Daniel's ideas on this will have much to grapple with, considering their breadth, perspective, clarity, and wisdom.

I wish Daniel continued success in all his many outstanding endeavors, and may he and Ilana, his **אשת חיל**, and their entire family have continued **ברכה והצלחה**!

Menachem Winter
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PHASE ONE

THE CRUSH

Date them, don't mate them.

THE FEELING OF BEING IN LOVE

Before we even get into understanding the first phase of love, we must have a common definition of what love is. The reason for this is that what love means to you may be different than what love means to the person you are dating. Defining your terms *before* you get into a serious relationship will cause you to avoid many headaches in the future. At the very least, you need to agree on a common definition of love, even if you don't agree on mine. The reason that you want to define love is that it can easily be confused with infatuation. Infatuation can eventually transition to love, but you may not know when that transition happens, or if it will happen at all. That can be a recipe for a disastrous relationship.

I have decided to add an additional explanation of love. Besides the definition, I will introduce the idea of what it feels like to be in love.

14 *Infinite Marriage*

The feeling of being in love is when you want to give to someone without expecting anything in return. On the other hand, infatuation is a temporary moment of desire because someone has something that you want. It's technically a chemical by-product in the brain that keeps you from making logical decisions. Many marriages occur because of infatuation, not love. People are infatuated with those they are attracted to, but they love those they are infatuated with *and* invest in. When we love someone, we want to give to them. We see that with our children. We give to them and don't expect anything back—except maybe grandchildren.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski (1930–2021), a well-known psychologist, warns about a concept called “fish love.” Fish love means you found someone who could provide you with all of your physical and emotional needs. For example, if you love to eat fish, it's because it tastes good, not because you love fish. We don't really love fish, because if we did, we wouldn't fillet it and eat it for dinner. Instead, we would put it on our nightstand in a bowl of water, read it stories at night and take it to the park for playdates. Now that's crazy because we don't love

fish! We love the pleasure and taste that the fish brings us. Fish love means each partner is looking out for themselves for what they can get out of the relationship. The other person becomes just a vehicle for their gratification.

On the other hand, real love is what you have when the relationship is not about getting, but about giving, because when we give to someone—and I don't mean just baubles from Tiffany—we are investing ourselves in them. Giving of our heart, emotions, vulnerability, time, and attention is really investing a bit of ourselves. We are giving them an opening into our feelings, desires, and emotions, because the ultimate gift you can give to someone is to be emotionally available for them.

Since we ultimately love ourselves more than anyone else, if we give something of ourselves to someone else, we ultimately love them as well. This is why when relationships are just based on the giving of gifts, they are destined to fail, because the gifts are compensating for their mutual lack of emotional availability. There are plenty of former wives driving around in the Mercedes or Maserati that their husbands gave them shortly before they became their exes.

This is why people who have a hard time opening up emotionally have a much harder time with relationships. It is because *that* is what real love is based on. This is why

if we are emotionally damaged from a previous relationship—such as a heart-wrenching breakup or dysfunctional or divorced parents—we are internally damaged and have a lot of repairing to do.

DEFINING LOVE

Having already explained what it feels like to be in love, it is now time to define it. Why do I give both a feeling and also a definition of love? Because if you ask someone how they know they are in love, they won't give you a definition, they will tell you how they feel; they just know it from their "feelings." Are your feelings ever wrong? I'll let you answer that.

The definition of love is the emotion that you feel when you recognize another person's virtues and you identify and associate them with those virtues. To put it another way, everyone is crazy, so you better focus on why you fell in love in the first place. Everyone has quirks or eccentricities about them that you didn't know about before you married them. If you choose to focus on their negative traits, you'll be unhappy, so you better focus on why you fell in love in the first place!

Almost anyone you decide to marry is eventually going to cause you some sort of pain. This is almost a given. To

get to the point in your relationship where you are Never Leaving, you need to stay focused on why you decided to marry them.

This is why *only* being infatuated will not lead to a lasting relationship. That feeling will eventually go away. You need the infatuation to get you started, but you will need it to evolve into so much more. People unfortunately overlook the reason they were attracted to their spouse in the first place and instead concentrate on their faults.

Do your kids (if you have any) have faults? Most likely, yes, but no one falls out of love with their children. Even parents of serial killers still love their children (although they despise their actions)! You don't get to pick your children, yet you do choose your spouse. Why do parents love their children no matter how they behave, but are quick to divorce if they don't like their spouse's behavior?

People get divorced because they stop focusing on why they got married in the first place. There were reasons why you fell in love and you got married. What happened to those reasons? You stopped focusing on them and started focusing on your spouse's negative traits. How can we solve this problem of losing focus on your spouse's virtues?

In order to prepare yourself for the unknown surprises in your relationship, I am going to use an analogy from the Food Network's popular cooking show *Chopped*.

CHOPPED: FIRE UP YOUR RELATIONSHIP!

The show starts off with four contestants that have to compete for the final prize of “Chopped Champion.” They have fifteen minutes to make an appetizer and then they get judged. At the end of the first round, one person is “chopped off” the show and then the remaining three people have twenty minutes to make a main course. At the end of the second round, another chef gets “chopped off,” and then the final two contestants have to make a dessert to compete for “Chopped Champion.” The catch is that right before the contest begins, each contestant has to open a box of very unusual ingredients that they each must use in their dish. These ingredients are so unusual that most people, even many professional chefs, have never used them before. For example, items such as crocodile tail, snake meat, black squid ink, or dried crickets. There is no kosher edition of the show...yet. But when there is one, it will have ingredients such as p’tcha, cow tongue tips, and water locust (when we eventually find out which locust is kosher).

The chefs then have a very short time to try to figure out how they are going to use these ingredients in their dishes.

This concept is very similar in marriage. We all have our own unusual character traits whether we recognize them or not. Most likely, some of your unusual traits will be

something your spouse is unfamiliar with. Unfortunately, they can really damage a relationship. They can be as simple as being lazy or quick to anger, or it can be much worse, including traits such as the inability to trust, having major dysfunction, being unable to connect emotionally, or having a large ego. Many of these deficiencies don't become a problem that may ruin a marriage until they reveal themselves in later years. A potential spouse may have noticed that their partner gets angry easily, but they don't consider it enough of a problem to end their relationship. Then twenty years after they got married, their anger gets considerably worse—or it's not worse, but now that you live with them, you notice how prevalent it is.

In the end, we have to try to “make a dish” with our partner, so to speak. We may not even be aware of our own issues, yet we have to try to handle someone else's emotional problems as well. Sometimes we try our best for many years, but if it gets to be too hard, the relationship suffers greatly.

Everyone has issues! There is no one in the world who is perfect, but there is someone perfect for you! Real love is when you focus on the other's virtues instead of their faults. When you are able to do that, then you will venture into a marriage, or any relationship, with much better tools and have a much higher chance of making

a beautiful, delicious dish together! And if you really want fish love, go marry a salmon.

CLARIFY WHY YOU ARE DATING

A woman from a small town was getting married at the age of ninety. A reporter from the local newspaper came to her house to report on the story. He asked her about her future husband, and she said that he was the local funeral director. Then she mentioned she was married three previous times. She told the reporter that in her twenties, she married a Wall Street investment banker; in her thirties, she married a Broadway show producer; in her late seventies, she married a priest; and now at ninety years old she was marrying a funeral director. The reporter inquired as to why she has married a wide variety of men with distinctly unique professions. The woman said, “I married one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go.”

Let's get crystal clear here. You want to find someone to fall in love *and* stay in love with forever. Since dating is part of the process, you need to clarify why you are dating. You need to honestly ask yourself what your purpose is. Are you just looking for physical pleasure like so many people in the secular world? If so, then dating will be really easy for you, because the only requirement you will need

from your date is that they provide you with the pleasure that you are looking for. Be aware: this can be dangerous! A person may enter into a physical relationship just for fun, but it can easily turn serious. Then, you may have a hard time differentiating between infatuation and love, and it may become difficult to make a logical decision about the relationship. This doesn't mean that you can't end up with a fantastic relationship from casual dating, it is just that the odds are way out of your favor for getting to the point of Never Leaving.

The most important decisions in life, such as whom to marry, need to be made with *some* emotion but mainly with intellectual clarity. Physical intimacy dulls your intellectual intelligence and spikes your emotions, which increases the chance of making a decision that you may regret. This is why physical intimacy, or even touching each other, is avoided before marriage in observant Jewish communities.

If you are dating for the purpose of getting married, you are pretty certain of what you are looking for. Ask yourself, "Is your date marriage material or not?" Dating becomes serious when you are dating with marriage in mind, as long as you are firm in your beliefs and needs. If you reach the stage where you are dating for the purpose of marriage, then you should have a pretty solid conviction of what you

want and why. Unfortunately, people who don't have clear ideas of what they want out of dating tend to compromise on their choices and beliefs.

I have known many couples in the non-religious world who have dated for years and years without being willing to take the step to commit to marriage. Why should someone date for a long time without making a life-long commitment? Wouldn't dating for more than a few months be enough time to see if you are compatible for marriage? What are people waiting for? Why do people hang onto a relationship indefinitely? It's likely because they are dating for physicality, or more than likely they are not clear about why they are dating. In cases like these, people just keep dating because it is easy and comfortable. This is not a good recipe for a long-term marriage.

Although not practical, the optimal way to date someone or to disqualify someone would be to interview them behind a curtain. This way you would remove the physical component and base your decision solely on whether or not you have an emotional connection. In some families, a potential date of one of their children is vetted in advance by their parents. Before their child even meets their date, the parents have already researched the date's family and checked to see if both individuals have the same outlook in life, the same religious standards, and if they would

be compatible on many different levels. The parents call references and even their rabbis! Only once both sets of parents have approved, do the young man and woman go out on a date. This takes a lot of work, but isn't it worth it? This is the biggest decision that a person makes in their life! How you choose is the difference between Never Leaving and just being another failed marriage statistic.

Another way to check out if your date is a good fit is to consult a dating coach or someone that you know who could play this role for you. This person will guide you to see the merits (and possible pitfalls) in a potential relationship. It is preferable for this coach to have insight and know you very well. Most importantly, the dating coach must be willing to tell you the truth—not just what you want to hear. You don't need someone to be your “yes” person. That is usually left to your best friend. You need someone who is willing to tell you the truth, even though it may be very difficult to hear. This coach may be a coworker, a relative, or your matchmaker. It may even be one of your parents if you have a great relationship with them and trust their opinion. This probably happens infrequently in the secular world, but if you think about it, who knows you better than your parents? But the best thing a coach can do is keep you from making a huge mistake and marrying someone who is not good for you.