

## **10 Questions to Ask Before Getting Married - How to know you're ready to tie the knot. By Rabbi Dov Heller, M.A**

When you start thinking that he/she may be the one, make sure you ask these ten questions before you tie the knot.

### **#1: Do We Care about Each Other as Good Friends Do?**

When you're getting serious about someone, don't ask: "Are we in love?" The question to first ask instead is: "Are we becoming good friends?"

"Being in love" often means infatuation, romance, and high chemistry – things that are essentially selfish. This type of "love" is not a good reason to get married, but friendship is. Friendship is not selfish. Real love is about giving to and caring about another person's life. As Shaya Ostrov says in his book, *The Inner Circle*, "I'm watching you, hearing you, paying attention to you. I've put it all together and have arrived at the conclusion that you and your life mean something to me." That's why the essence of real love is friendship

In a Jewish wedding ceremony, the bride and groom are given seven blessings. Not once but twice, we bless the couple that they should become "beloved friends." Make sure you're friends first and then lovers. A lover who is not your friend can easily hurt you. A friend who is your lover will never hurt you. And if they do, they will make every effort to repair the hurt, just like you do with your best friends. Friends care about each others' happiness and well-being.

### **#2: Are We Emotionally Honest and Vulnerable with Each Other?**

Two people who cannot be emotionally open with each other can never have true intimacy and love. When we share our feelings with another we connect and feel close to that person.

We tend to be afraid to share what we feel because expressing it makes us vulnerable; it's dangerous. With the person you're considering marrying you must be sure you feel safe.

How do you know if the two of you are emotionally open and honest? The next time you have a conversation with your partner, ask him or her, "What do you feel about me right now?" or, "How does what I just said make you feel?" If you can communicate like this with each other consistently, you have the potential for building an intimate relationship.

### **#3: Do We Consistently Reach Win/Win Resolutions To Our Problems?**

To get married, you must be sure you have great communication. The reason is that marriage is nothing but problems! I know this doesn't sound very romantic, but it's very realistic. Couples often mistake good chemistry for good communication. Just because you can talk for hours on the phone and feel very connected, doesn't mean you have good communication. The only way you know if you have good communication is when you have problems. When there is a disagreement of any kind, small or large, this is when you find out how good or how bad your communication is. The essence of good communication is that you can consistently reach win-win solutions to your problems and disagreements. This means when you are finished talking, both of you feel good about the solution. There are no bad feelings on either side. Problems that don't get fully resolved turn into resentments. And when resentments build, love departs. The problem is not the problem. The communication about the problem is the problem.

### **#4: Do We Take Care of Each Other's Needs?**

One of the most important principles of marriage is: If it's important to you, it's important to me. Taking care of each other's needs is about wanting to give each other pleasure. Being a giver is probably the most important character trait to have for getting married. People are naturally takers. It takes a great deal of effort to become a genuine giver. Giving in order to get something back is being a taker.

An important question to ask yourself is, "Do I enjoy giving to this person or do I find it burdensome?" Gary Chapman in his book, *The Five Love Languages*, suggests that each of us has a dominant love language or emotional need that makes us feel loved when another "speaks" that language to us. They are: gifts, quality time, acts of service, words of affirmation, and physical touch. What is your partner's love language? Do you enjoy taking care of this need? Giving builds love. Taking destroys it.

**#5: Do We Admire And Respect Each Other?**

We need to respect and admire the person we marry. We respect a person's good character, meaningful aspirations and goals he/she is committed to, and the good deeds he/she has done, not the way he/she looks.

How do you talk to each other? If you truly respect someone, you talk to that person with respect and dignity. Do you criticize or put each other down? Are you patient or impatient with each other? Do you make jokes about the other person in front of others and then try to cover it by saying, "I was only joking"? One of the biggest ways that couples demonstrate a lack of respect for each other is by playing games. Playing games is immature and childish. Mature people who respect each other don't play games. They are consistently up front, open, and honest.

**#6: For the Man: Are You Ready to Take Responsibility for a Wife and Family?**

When my three sons told me they wanted to get married, the first question I asked each of them was, "Are you ready to take on the responsibility of taking care of a wife and family?" If you're not ready to be fully responsible, you're not ready to get married. For a man marriage isn't about getting his needs met. It's about taking on responsibility and being a giver. Judaism understands that the essence of being a man is to give and provide. Boys are takers; men are givers. Are you ready to be a man?

The strongest need of a woman is to be cherished. The three A's of cherishing a woman are: Attention, Affection, and Appreciation. Neglect destroys a woman's spirit. Making your wife feel loved and cherished is not just a nice idea; it's a Torah obligation.

**#7: For the Woman: Do You Believe in Him?**

Your man needs your respect and support. He needs you to believe in him. Men today are under so much pressure and so many demands are being made of them. The one place he doesn't need to feel more pressure is at home. He needs you to believe that he is trying hard to provide for you and the needs of the family. The cruelest thing a wife can do is nag her husband. If he's a good man and he's trying hard, give him your love, not your list of demands. So before you commit your life to him, make sure you don't have any hidden agenda or unexpressed expectations. Be up front. And if you decide to be his wife, then be his friend as well. Don't turn on him.

**#8: Do I Trust This Person Completely?**

The emotional foundation of love is trust. Without complete trust, you can't build love. (I highly recommend Dr. John Gottman's new book, *The Science of Trust*.) The essential issue of trust is captured in the question, "Are you there for me?" A solid marriage is built on solid trust. Can I trust that you will provide a safe home for my feelings and needs? Can I be sure I can be vulnerable with you? Am I afraid you will abandon, reject, or shame me?

A key way to build trust is by respecting and validating another person's feelings. Listening to another person's feelings is one of the greatest acts of kindness we can perform. If you don't trust each other with your feelings, think twice about getting married.

**#9: Do We Want the Same Things Out of Life?**

One of two things happens in a marriage: People either grow together or grow apart. Spiritual compatibility is one of the best ways to insure you'll grow together. This means you are on the same page in terms of your values, priorities, and life goals. Rabbi Noah Weinberg, of blessed memory, would often teach that life's most important question is "What am I living for?" He maintained that until you can answer this question, you have no business getting married. A soul mate is a goal mate. Marriage is risky. Two people who don't know what they're living for may have a difficult time growing together and staying together over the long run.

**#10: Do I Have Peace of Mind About This Decision?**

To have peace of mind you have to identify and resolve the things that bother you about getting married or about marrying this person. To identify everything that bothers you, you must be ruthlessly honest with yourself and listen to your feelings. If you don't have peace of mind about marrying this person, track down the reason. If you are diligent, you'll discover the reason why you are dragging your feet. And if you can't track it down through your own efforts, see a competent therapist to help you.