

Insights Into Marriage

“⁷In the same way, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way. Though they are weaker partners, honor them as equal heirs of the grace of life. In this way, your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

In this week’s *Torah* reading, it is evident that our father Abraham thought highly of his wife Sarah – he deeply loved and cared for her. Abraham and Sarah have been modeling marriage for us. True marriage begins with a oneness (an *echad*) of spirit and Abraham and Sarah were *totally together* (right or wrong).

Are there hindrances that may be keeping your marriage from being all that *Yah* intends it to be? A deception, by its very nature, has within it a grain of truth that allures us to believe it. A partial truth was the principal tactic used by *Satan* in *Eden* with *Eve* and *Adam*. Here are seven such deceptions.

1. *“Most problems and hurts will go away if we just give them more time.”*
2. *“The wife should focus on submission, not on whether the husband is right or wrong.”*
3. *“Whatever is done in the marriage bed is permissible before Adonai.”*
4. *“If the husband rejects his wife’s appeal, she should simply pray.”*
5. *“Marriage partners have a right to privacy (my own private friends, thoughts, secrets, and activities). Don’t hurt your wife by confessing your failures.”*
6. *“Husbands should resist the wife’s tendency to dominate him because of the curse on Adam and Eve – the myth that wives desire to rule over their husbands.”*
7. *“Little inconsistencies do not matter in the long run. After all, no one is perfect.”*

The failure of both Adam and Eve marred the perfection of the relationship that *Yah* planned for them to have toward each other. Nevertheless, their failure did not set aside the basic principle on which *Yah* intended their relationship to be built. We could call theirs a relationship of *initiative and response*. According to this pattern, Adam, as husband, was responsible to take the initiative, and Eve, his wife, was responsible to respond. What are some of the main areas in which a husband should take the initiative? Scripture suggests six main responsibilities.

1. Love Your Wife: This is not a suggestion or recommendation. It is a command, clearly stated in *Ephesians 5:25*: *“Husbands, love your wives...”* To put it simply: If you do not love your wife, you are disobedient to Scripture. The same verse also tells you the way to love her: *“...just as Messiah also loved the congregation and gave Himself for her.”* Notice that this is not a *taking love* but a *giving love* – actually a self-giving love. It is the husband who should take the initiative in giving himself to and for his wife.

Many in our contemporary culture think of love as purely emotional. This is an incomplete and unscriptural picture. Genuine love is released by an act of the will. In *Psalms 18:1* David says, *“I will love You, O Adonai”* David made a decision: his love for *Yah* was released by an act of his will.

Furthermore, the word David uses here for *love (racham)* is related to the Hebrew word that can be translated *bowels* or *womb*. It was what we call in contemporary speech *a gut feeling*. It included both David's will and his emotions. That is the kind of love a husband should have for his wife.

2. Receive Input: The husband should always make room for his wife to speak her **mind** freely and be sensitive to what she is thinking or feeling, even when she does not express it in words. Her unspoken feelings are often her deepest, and tones of which her husband needs to be most aware. Communication failure is probably the most common single factor in the breakdown of a marriage.

A husband also needs to remember that his wife has her own special kind of wisdom, often called *intuition*. He may work out some conclusion by a laborious process of reasoning, but when he communicates this to his wife, he may be surprised when she responds, *I knew that all along*.

3. Make Decisions: Once there has been free and respectful communication between husband and wife, they come to the place where a practical decision has to be made. At this point it is the husband's responsibility to make the final decision. In many cases, if there has been good communication, the wife is happy to let her husband bear this responsibility.

4. Initiate Action: Generally, this follows as a logical consequence of the decision-making process just outlined. Normally the person responsible for taking the practical steps to carry out a decision is the man.

The husband may need to delegate many practical daily tasks to his wife, but he should be careful to shoulder a reasonable portion of their shared responsibilities as a couple, especially if they are also parents. And the division of labor could be based, in part, on their spiritual gifting. In addition, the wife should be able to count on her husband to be there behind her if she finds herself faced with a crisis she does not know how to handle.

5. Nourish and Cherish: One word should describe the attitude of every husband toward his wife: *special*. Every husband should say to himself, *my wife is special. There's no one else just like her*. For this reason, he should relate to her in a way that he relates to no other woman. This does not apply merely to their sexual relationship; it should apply to the way he thinks about her, the way he talks about her, the way he treats her. This is what we see in *Isaac and Rebekah*.

In *Ephesians 5:28-29* Paul states that a man should love and care for his wife in a particularly personal way: "*Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Messiah does the Congregation.*"

The two words *nourish* and *cherish* suggest an attitude of intimate concern that includes attention to what might appear to be small details. A husband should be concerned about his wife's health, her appearance, the way she does her hair, the perfume she uses. Everything that concerns her should concern him. She should always have confidence that to her husband she is the most important person in the world.

6. Give Praise: In our Shabbat tradition the husband describes and extols the character of the "virtuous," or excellent, wife by quoting from *Proverbs 31*. *Proverbs 31* points out her many achievements; then it closes with words of praise: "*Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: Many daughters have done well but you excel them all!*" (*Proverbs 31:29-29*).

Some husbands are stingy with their words of praise. That is false economy! They would be surprised to discover how much a wife longs to be praised-and how she responds to it. Giving praise to your wife is one of the best investments you can ever make. If a man has a faithful, committed wife, there is no way he can ever offer her in money what she is worth. As Solomon says in this passage, "*Her worth is far above rubies*" (*verse 10*). The least a husband can do is offer his wife words of heartfelt praise.

An experienced minister was once asked about someone, *Is he a good Believer?* He replied, *I don't know; I can't tell you yet. I haven't met his wife*. Wise answer! A husband's success is seen in his wife.

Why not apply this test to yourself as a husband? Perhaps you need to focus less on yourself and more on your wife. Ask yourself and her as well the following questions, in order to evaluate how you are doing: *Is she secure and fulfilled? Do I feel proud of her?* If the answers are yes, you are on your way to being a successful husband. But if there are obvious areas in your wife's personality that are incomplete, if she shows strain or insecurity, you need to check on your performance as a husband. Perhaps you would do well to read once more through the above list of your responsibilities as a husband. Then, if you see you have been delinquent, repent before *Yah* and ask Him for the grace you need to do better. *Shabbat Shalom!*