

The Marriage Manual

Principles that Create a healthy marriage

By Mahatma Das

What follows are the main principles I teach in my marriage workshop entitled Sacred Union, The laws of relationship. Following these principles can help a bad marriage become good, a good marriage become better, and turn around a marriage that seems doomed to fail.

I, and many others, have found these principles extremely valuable in creating a good marriage. Please put these principles into practice in your marriage and share them with as many people as possible. These principles are common sense, yet both profound and extremely effective, and they can be successfully used by anyone.

Is a healthy marriage really important?

After you read all the principles on creating a healthy marriage, you might be thinking, “It’s a lot of work to create a good marriage. I don’t know if I can do all of this. And anyway, is it really worth all the trouble? Is a good marriage really that important? Aren’t we supposed to be more detached? And if the relationship isn’t good, isn’t it just my karma and thus Krishna’s mercy to help me become more detached?”

This begs the question, “What does it mean to have a good marriage in Krishna consciousness?” I have never seen Prabhupada instruct his disciples to have a bad marriage because that would make a marriage “good,” meaning the couple will be so disturbed that they realize that they can’t be happy in the material world.

If you advance in Krishna consciousness, you will naturally realize that real love is with Krishna and that there is no happiness anywhere in the material world. But this doesn’t mean affection doesn’t exist and your married life will be successful when you become disgusted with it. Your married life will be successful when you develop love for Krsna. If we can’t even learn to love our family members, it will impede our ability to love Krsna.

Our scriptures state that the goal of family life is to eventually become detached from

family life. But how do you become detached? One of the best ways of becoming detached, although this seems contradictory, is to have a fulfilling marriage.

The point is this:

Marriage is meant to fulfill material desires in a way that one can eventually give them up.

If those desires never get fulfilled, then one may find him or herself hankering to fulfill those desires later in life at a time when they would have been winding down had they been married.

A good marriage also means staying together and creating a happy and peaceful home for your children. As Prabhupada said, "Get yourself married and live peacefully together."

The direct goal of marriage, however, is not to be happy. The goal is to be happily married. There is a difference. Don't look to your spouse to make you happy. Look to make your spouse happy. If you do this, you will be happily married.

When you are happily married you create a peaceful platform, an asrama, from which you cultivate your Krishna consciousness well. It is by cultivation of Krishna consciousness that you actually become happy.

No one has ever become happy trying to satisfy their desires. At the same time, if basic relational needs are not met, one will not be peaceful. Being peaceful is a necessary foundation upon which we can cultivate our Krishna consciousness.

Sense gratification is not the goal of household life. The goal is to execute Krishna consciousness. If you believe it is your spouse's responsibility to make you happy, and you expect this from him or her, you will likely be let down and frustrated. Rather, think it is your service to make your spouse happy, to serve them, and to be a good example of Krishna consciousness. This will make you happy.

We know that ultimately the only thing that will make us happy is Krishna consciousness. So if we utilize the grhastha asrama to increase our Krishna consciousness, helping one another in our service to guru and Krishna, we will be happy because we will be advancing in Krishna consciousness.

Laws of relationship

Creating a good relationship is not a mystery. There are laws that create connection. If you are married, or want to be married, as a service to your spouse you need to learn these laws.

There are many books and websites on marriage, in and outside of Krishna consciousness, that can help you better understand how to make a marriage work.

The main point is:

Your spouse can be likened to a machine, and you need to learn the skills required to operate this machine well. If you don't, the machine will not operate properly, or even break down.

When your spouse complains too much, it is likely an indication that you are not operating the machine well. So how do you learn how to better operate the machine? One of the best ways to do this is to ask your spouse how the machine functions best.

And then listen to what he or she says and try to implement the advice as best you can.

You should enter grhastha asrama with the goal of making the asrama successful by becoming the servant of your husband or your wife, not enter it to become the controller or enjoyer of your spouse. View success in this asrama as success in your Krishna consciousness.

“Succeeding” in your marriage is a part of what it means to succeed in Krishna consciousness.

The right paradigm

Can you make a 6 out of the symbol “IX” using only one line?

You either are going to figure out how to do this right away, or you are not going to get it. It depends on how you are looking at this, on your paradigm.

Sometimes people fail in their marriage not because of any lack of effort, analysis, or

care. Sometimes people fail because they're locked in the wrong paradigm.

If you're not seeing your marriage or your spouse in the proper light, then you won't succeed. And no amount of effort will change that. The only thing that will get you different results is a different perspective. Once you adopt the right perspective, having a good marriage can be as easy as placing an "S" in front of "IX" to make "SIX."

The point is this:

Unhealthy paradigms that we bring to our marriage become the negative operating programs undermining our marriage, and thus can become the cause of a failed marriage. Similarly, healthy paradigms form the basis of a successful marriage.

Do you have any unhealthy paradigms that are undermining your marriage?

In ISKCON, unfortunately, negative paradigms about women, children and marriage are common. We hear that marriage is a fall down, women are an entanglement, and it is a dark well. Such considerations, when not balanced with the positive sides of grhastha life, can be toxic to a good marriage.

Negative paradigms can be toxic by creating attitudes that make it difficult – or impossible – to have a good marriage.

Another factor that can negatively impact a marriage is holding our spouses to stereotyped roles that are difficult or impossible to fulfill, or assuming roles ourselves that are inappropriate (based on our misunderstanding of sastra).

One such example of this is the teaching that a husband is the guru to the wife. To explain how this teaching is misunderstood, and thus can be harmful to a good relationship, I have written an article titled "Husband as Guru" which is available on my website and on dandavats.com

It is your duty to love

Our consumer values of, "We want what we want, when we want it," and then quickly getting it, are entering into our marriages. Today we are less accustomed to working (and waiting) for things than we were in the past. Spouses are becoming a bit like old

cars: if the spouse isn't working well, we trade him or her in for a new model.

Dharma means we do something because it is right, not that we only do something because we like doing it. The point is:

Our duty is to love our spouses, whether or not we love them.

Maharaja Priyavrata was a wonderful kind, loving and caring husband. Yet sastra says he was not at all attached to his wife. This appears contradictory. How can one be so loving yet so detached?

He took loving his wife and family as his duty. Therefore he was the best husband and father. Although we might find this kind of "love" artificial, the so-called love in the material world is more artificial because it is based more on emotions than duty. And if the emotions wane, the relationship also wanes.

When a spouse says, "I don't have the same feelings for you I had when we were younger," this translates into, "I don't love you anymore." The underpinning is this: "Since I don't love you anymore, I feel the need to find someone else to love."

If you want to base your relationship primarily on the feelings of "love" rather than duty, the chances of your marriage lasting, or being a fulfilling relationship – even if you stay together – are rare. But if we take it as our dharma to "love," the "love" will last.

Dharma is higher than feeling.

Did I marry the right person?

You might sometimes question whether you married the right person. This is the wrong question to ask. As mentioned above, the key to a successful marriage is showing affection, kindness, and sensitivity to the person you found.

The point is:

It is not whether you married the right person, but whether you are "loving" the person you married.

Anyone can fall in love. It takes absolutely no work. And the relationship automatically stays good in this romantic stage. Why? It is because when "in love" you secrete

hormones that intoxicate you. This intoxication makes you blind to the faults of your partner. Many of the wonderful things they did when you first “fell in love” become the very things that disturb you later on. You just didn’t pay attention to these things when you first met. You were so in love that those things seemed cute.

How is it that “good” relationships often later become bad. It is because after the romance stage the couple needs to learn relationship skills, skills they didn’t need to have during the romantic stage when everything they did was wonderful and seemingly perfect. If they don’t learn them, then they may never learn how to adjust to their differences and the things they don’t like in one another. In other words, after the romantic stage is over, how we choose to act will determine the success of our marriage.

For devotees this is a serious consideration. We are meant to be examples to the public. But we are failing in general to set an ideal example of ghrastha life. Our divorce rates are no different than those outside of Iskcon. Some devotees say they are even higher. If our philosophy is supposed to be perfect and solve all problems, our marriages should demonstrate this.

Why is this? More about this in the next principle.

Problems are caused by a lack of connection, not a lack of communication. Contrary to popular belief, effective communication is an effect of a good relationship, not the cause of a good relationship. If you want to improve the communication, first work on improving the relationship. Then the communication will automatically improve. Good communication is the result of a good connection. Every couple that has a good relationship naturally has good communication. When couples are first “in love” they have great communication. Bad communication is a symptom of a relationship problem.

Marriages don’t change because people talk; they change because people change and thus become closer. So talk about things that will make you connect more. Problems get dissolved when the connection between husband and wife improves. The main point is this:

Trouble in marriage means a lack of connection. If you want to make things better, establish a better connection.

The more effort you put into improving your relationship, the stronger your marriage

becomes. Sometimes all this means is spending more time together. It can be as simple as making sure you spend time every day sharing your mind with one another (sharing one's mind in confidence is one of the loving exchanges). Tip the balance too much in favor of things that minimize time together and your marriage drops in priority (occasionally this could even mean time spent in seva, with friends, or with the kids).

Becoming the right person

Succeeding in marriage is less about finding the right person and more about becoming the right person. Why? Because you affect those around you.

A man once came to a town and asked the local sage, "I'm thinking about moving here. What kinds of people live here?" The sage asked the man, "What kinds of people live in the town you came from?"

"Where I'm from the people are liars, cheaters, and mean spirited," the man responded. "The people are the same here," said the sage.

Then another man came to town and asked the sage the same question. The sage asked the man, "What kinds of people live in the town you came from?"

"Where I'm from the people are wonderful, kind, and courteous," the man responded. "The people are the same here," said the sage.

The point is this:

We are not just an objective observer of the people in our life; we're a subjective influence on them.

In other words, our presence changes people and thus changes what we observe. Your relationship is not simply a function of who you pick; it's also a function of who you are.

Would your spouse be a better or happier person married to someone else? It is painful to admit this could be true.

Okay, your spouse may be contributing to bad dynamics. But you play a role as well. I've never seen a marital situation caused only by one spouse. What can you do to

improve the situation?

Even if your spouse had an affair, you're partly responsible. What was your spouse seeking outside your marriage that was not available within it?

Don't just sit there waiting for your spouse to change. If you want your situation to change, then change it! Do your part. Because if you change, then everything around you changes too. And you've got to make the right changes. Like a scientist, you have to know what changes to make to get the outcome you're looking for.

One of the easiest ways to know what changes to make, and probably the most overlooked, is simply to ask your spouse how to be a better partner.

It only takes one person to change a marriage

One person can change a marriage. If you have two chemicals and mix them, you get a third. If you want a different result, you only have to change one chemical.

The point is this:

If you change, you will get different results in your marriage.

A family is a system. There are interlocking parts that affect one another. Of course, it is better if both partners are involved in improving the marriage, but you still can make a difference. A marriage needs a leader. If you don't feel like doing anything to improve the relationship until your spouse is also willing to improve, then nothing may happen.

Don't give up. Work on yourself. Do what you can to improve the marriage. When a broken bone heals it becomes stronger than it was before it was broken. So if your marriage is in trouble (or even gets in trouble) it can become stronger than before things broke down between you.

Quick Fixes

When a person learns that their husband or wife doesn't "love" them anymore, they usually try to find a fix for their problem. The same is true for couples trying to resolve serious differences before it's too late.

Many people go online and search for THE answer. But finding a solution to your marriage problems is not like finding a solution to a financial problem. You can't just click, get a loan, and have an instant solution.

Today people are into quick fixes. But you can't "microwave" a relationship. Relationships work according to the law of the harvest. In the spring time you plant. Then you water and fertilize all summer long. And, of course, you wait. Then you harvest the crop.

Relationships are similar. They take time to grow and improve. But most people look for short cuts. Today everything is about efficiency. Efficiency works with machines, business, and finances. But efficiency does not work with relationships.

Relationships, like crops, are governed by the natural laws of the universe. If you skip a step, you'll short-circuit the process and slow yourself down. Taking time, going step-by-step is how you improve a relationship.

Once a man was desperately trying to "win back" his wife and he read an e-book which recommended THE solution: date other women in order to make his wife jealous. The idea is that this would bring his wife back to him.

But his wife left him because she wasn't happy with him. Even if he gets her back, if he doesn't change she'll leave him again. So if your relationship isn't working well, and if you don't change in areas that will improve it, then you will have accomplished nothing in the long-term.

The point is:

The only way you can change your marriage is to change yourself. You've got to become the man or woman that your spouse would want to be married to.

You have to learn what your spouse wants in a marriage. And you need to learn how to implement relationship habits so that you can offer them what they want consistently.

Words can break the heart

Kids in the US have a nursery rhyme that goes like this: "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me." But the fact is the words do hurt. Words do

more damage than breaking bones; they break hearts.

In frustration or anger people say stupid things and use obscene language. Even if you or your spouse didn't mean to say it, once it's said, the damage is done. That's why it's so important for spouses to learn to control themselves and watch what they say.

The point is this:

The most common request married couples have is that they just want their spouse to be nice to them.

Can we not learn to be nice to the very person we vowed to serve and protect? It sounds simple but it is often a challenge. Of course, a devotee is meant not only to be nice to his family, but he or she is meant to be nice to everyone. And more than nice, we are meant to be compassionate. Isn't it an irony that we are sometimes challenged to speak nicely to our spouses?

You need to learn how to:

- Express your feelings in a healthy way.
- Say what's on your mind without destroying your spouse.
- Understand what it means to be honest with your spouse?
- Control destructive impulses.
- Listen so your spouse will talk.
- Talk so your spouse will listen.

You can be right or you can be happy

In a courtroom, a hospital, or an office, right and wrong determine success or failure. The decision to prescribe the right medicine, for example, could be the difference between life and death. The relationship between the doctor and the patient is secondary. Being right is what matters and what is rewarded.

But in marriage, being right has no value. All that matters is the relationship. Sometimes you have to choose whether you want to be right or you want to be happily married!

Just because your right/wrong paradigm works at the office doesn't mean you should bring it home. "He who is a hammer thinks everything is a nail." Some things work perfectly in one area of life and fail terribly in another. In marriage, you have to be like a carpenter and know which tool to use. The right/wrong mode is the wrong tool to use in your marriage.

The point is:

The more you insist on being right, the more you will be miserable in your marriage. Don't go for right; go for relationship.

IQ is a measure of your intellectual intelligence. The higher your IQ, the better your ability to process information and determine what's "right." EQ is a measure of your emotional intelligence. The higher your EQ, the better your ability to connect with people and succeed in relationships. Just as some athletes are strong but not fast, many people have a high IQ but a low EQ. In fact, a high IQ coupled with a low EQ can be a disastrous combination for a marriage.

Anyone can increase their EQ and learn to make their marriage right. So remember, the most important thing is the relationship. And if you have a good relationship, then you are right.

Patience

Do you know what happens after you plant the seed of a Chinese bamboo tree? Nothing. For four years you get nothing other than a tiny shoot coming out of a bulb.

But what's happening is that underneath the ground there's a massive root structure that's forming. Then, in the fifth year, the Chinese bamboo tree grows and grows, sometimes growing up to eighty feet tall!

Marriages sometimes grow like Chinese bamboo trees. You try and try to be kind by giving gifts, being gentle, or sharing a joke, yet sometimes it takes months, even years before you see the growth. But all the while you're making deposits into a secret account that all of a sudden (that's the way it seems, but, in fact, my point is

that it's not all of sudden) begins paying dividends.

It takes maturity to be patient.

The point is:

It takes maturity to be willing to give your spouse the time they need to grow – and to see that time as an opportunity for you to grow too.

What you feel and what you do

You need to distinguish between what you feel and what you do. Unfortunately people who feel bad also act bad. However, you can feel hurt but choose to behave in a loving productive way. So don't fall victim to your feelings. Align your actions with your values and goals, not with your feelings and impulses. The point is:

The outcome of your marriage will be an outcome of your actions, not your feelings.

You bring conditioning into your marriage from childhood, and many of these conditioned behaviors make marriage difficult. Don't say "This is what I am like and I can't change." When we say, "A leopard can't change his spots," we are saying we are animals. We are different from animals. We can choose to behave differently.

Personality versus character

"The difficulty with marriage is that we fall in love with a personality, but we must live with a character." – Peter Devries

Your "personality" is how people experience you. It's your public persona. Character is who you are when no one is watching.

When you and your spouse met, you met each other's personalities. You showed your spouse – and you were shown by your spouse – your public personas. It is just how you display yourself to others.

But marriage is in too close quarters for anyone to sustain a public persona. Personalities eventually give way to a self that gets revealed for the first time. And there you each stand, naked as if no one is watching. And that's when you meet a

different self for the first time!

You and your spouse don't meet the person who charmed each other's friends, bought gifts for each other's parents, and always smiled from ear to ear. No, this time it's a meeting of your characters. In many cases, it's not only that you're meeting each other for the first time, but it's that you're meeting yourselves for the first time.

The reason so many people fail at marriage and an attempt at marriage renewal is not that they don't like their spouse. It's that they don't like themselves. The point is this:

While everyone else in our life is like a mirror reflecting our personality, our spouse is a mirror reflecting our character.

And many people don't like what they see!

Many people would rather choose to be with someone else rather than remain with their spouse and have to continue to be with themselves. (Did you get that?)

Balthasar Gracian wrote in his 17th century manual on success, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, as follows: "You are as much a real person as you are deep. As with the depths of a diamond, the interior is twice as important as the surface. There are people who are all facade, like a house left unfinished when the funds run out. They have the entrance of a palace but the inner rooms of a cottage."

Marriage renewal and individual character development go hand-in-hand.

You Can Make It Better

Just because your marriage isn't working, or you were divorced, doesn't mean you can't do better. Freud documented the impact that heredity and upbringing have on a person's fate. We learn patterns early-on that play out over and over while we remain oblivious to how they control (and possibly destroy) our lives. But does that mean the destiny of your marriage was determined years ago?

There is no doubt that you have deeply rooted relationship instincts. But those instincts don't have to control you. Your past constantly vies for control of your future, but you have a choice whether or not you allow your past to control your future.

Your control takes place in the present. You can decide how to act. You can decide

how to act rather than be a victim to your past. After all, karma is a result of your past actions. Even what we do a minute ago affects us right now. Every effect has a cause.

This point is that you can consciously reject what you know doesn't work and then replace old habits with new ways of behaving.

The point is:

Most people are more comfortable doing what's familiar, even though destructive than doing what's unfamiliar although constructive. As crazy as it sounds, most people prefer doing what

they know doesn't work rather than breaking out of old patterns to do something different that would work better.

We need to become a "transition person." A transition person is someone who breaks free from unhealthy relationship patterns that have been in their family for generations. You are by no means a product solely of your heredity or environment. There is a third element: your decision. And that is how you deal with your past.

By the way, marriage education means to educate someone to acquire the ability to choose their behavior.

A successful marriage is not something that just happens; you have to craft it. It's a result of deliberate and conscious decisions to make your relationship work well.

Respect

What actions of yours demonstrate respect to your spouse? What actions of yours undermine respect?

Relationships are based on and nurtured by respect. Anger, yelling, criticism, sarcasm, inappropriate language, put downs, irreverence, not listening well, self-centeredness, not keeping promises – what to speak of physical abuse – all show disrespect. The point is:

Be aware of how you may be disrespecting your spouse and do more things to honor and respect him or her.

Relationships have an emotional bank account. Positive actions are like deposits. Negative actions are like withdrawals. However, it takes five positive actions to compensate for one negative action. If you keep making withdrawals, your relationship will be bankrupt.

Is your marriage rich or is your marriage on the verge of bankruptcy? You can make it richer with more deposits and less withdrawals.

Appreciation

Do you notice the beat of your heart? Nobody really does. And something that doesn't get your attention doesn't get your appreciation. What stirs gratitude within us is when something uncommon or infrequent is done for us. If a friend invites you over for a meal, you thank them many times. If your wife cooks for you every day, you probably take it for granted. So the more you get something, the more you expect it – and the less likely you are to appreciate it.

This is one of the great challenges of building a lasting marriage. We crave appreciation. The point is:

A successful relationship depends upon appreciation.

People can't live fulfilling lives without it. But the longer we're married, the less likely we are to appreciate our spouse. So we need to be aware of this natural tendency and be proactive about not letting it happen.

There's no easy way to fill your marriage with appreciation. It may not always come naturally. You have to make it a conscious discipline. Before the day is over, make sure you say at least one word of appreciation to your spouse. And do this every day.

Expressing feelings

Sometimes openly and honestly expressing your feelings can be very hurtful to your spouse. You might feel that it is important to be honest about your feelings, but if honestly expressing your feelings is hurtful to the other person, then it will damage the relationship, and thus is inappropriate.

The main point is (explained in the Gita thusly):

Austerity of speech consists in speaking words that are truthful, pleasing, beneficial, and not agitating to others, and also in regularly reciting Vedic literature. (BG 17.15)

Focus on the positive/solutions rather than on the problems

Don't focus on the difficulties or problems in your marriage; focus on what you can do to make your marriage better. By doing this, many (or all) of the negatives will vanish. Once you make your marriage better, you will be able to more easily and successfully deal with any remaining negatives.

Focus on action. Focusing on listening and discussing problems rather than doing things to make the marriage better, doesn't work. Although this may help you have a better understanding of each other's point of view, what you actually need is an action plan to improve your marriage.

Talking about the problems in a marriage can actually make the problems worse. This could lead to arguments and bad will.

The real point is this:

You will never talk yourself out of a problem that you behaved yourself into.

Marriages change because people change. Say little; do much. Speak in a vocabulary of your actions. New choices resolve marital problems; discussions don't. Solving problems does create more affection; creating more affection solves problems.

Your needs

You should not be upset because your spouse doesn't know your needs. You may have to communicate your needs to them. Don't be unhappy that they are not always aware of your needs. Be happy if they respond to the needs you tell them you have.

The point is this:

Don't expect your spouse to be a mind reader.

Yes, we should try to feel what our spouse needs, but we shouldn't have that expectation of them for ourselves. We should communicate our needs to them.

Keep your problems private

One of the most important values in a marriage is privacy. Therefore, it's a mistake to talk about your marriage or your spouse to family or friends. It's a violation of your spouse's privacy and it is wrong.

We like to talk to their friends about their problems. Sometimes we need to talk about our problems. But it is not right to reveal your marital problems to your friends, even if you think you need them to help you solve such problems. The point is:

It is unfair to your spouse to reveal your personal problems with him or her to your friends or family unless you have their permission.

If problems are serious they can be addressed by professionals.

Don't ignore the problem, face it

If you are having any difficulty in your marriage that needs fixing, there are basically two ways to deal with it: you can either ignore it or focus on it.

People who run from their problems seek relief, but end up in pain. People who face their issues experience pain, but end up relieved. A problem doesn't go away because you run from it; it gets worse.

It is important to realize that we get exactly the problems we need in our life to fix the things about ourselves that need fixing. In other words, problems in marriage are not coincidental; they are a sign that you have a weakness that needs work. If you ignore it, the pain will increase until you finally say, "Okay, I'll deal with this."

The point is:

The worst suffering occurs when you run from your suffering. The worst pain comes from avoidance. The healing magic is attention. The only way out of your suffering is through it.

The problems in your life are like fingers pointing toward answers to your most crucial questions. They are transformations trying to happen. They're birth pains. Let it come! It'll hurt, but that hurt is a path to your healing.

There's an ancient Chinese proverb that says: "The gem cannot be polished without friction; nor man perfected without trials."

Quarrels

If you had to pick one thing that would best predict a marriage headed for trouble, what would you pick? You might say "conflict." If you fight a lot, then that's not a good sign, right?

Wrong. The number one predictor of divorce is the habitual avoidance of conflict. The point is this:

A couple who runs from conflict is at the greatest risk of having a bad marriage because they are not talking about what bothers them.

The closer you are to someone the more likely it is that you step on each other's toes. If you express your upset it is actually a sign of hope because it means you want to improve the relationship. Apathy, on the other hand, is cause for great concern because it means you are not trying to make things better.

I am not saying fighting is healthy. I am saying people in healthy marriages talk about differences. So if you want to be happily married, you have to learn to "argue" in ways that produce positive results.

Successful couples know how to discuss their differences. This is not something that comes naturally to most people, so most of us have to learn this skill. And once you learn it, the energy that goes into your quarrels will propel your relationship forward.

Every successful couple has areas of disagreement. No two people are perfectly compatible. You'll have differences with anyone you pick. The question is whether or not you can learn to discuss and deal well with those differences, negotiate solutions well, and keep moving forward despite differences.

Thoughts on infidelity

Many victims of infidelity (and other emotional hardships) feel like leaving their spouse.

However, sometimes this cheating spouse transforms him or herself after getting the "I

want a divorce” wake up call from their spouse. This makes them less likely to make the same mistake again. In other words, once a spouse learns their lesson, they’re less likely to make this mistake than someone who’s never erred in that way before.

About 25 percent of women and nearly 50 percent of men cheat on their spouses. Thus, this often means that if one divorces a spouse who cheated on them, and then remarries, there is more of a chance the new partner will cheat on them than the repentant former partner.

The point is this:

A partner who is remorseful and has truly transformed is unlikely to commit the same mistake again.

Here lies an unfortunate irony. People wait years and years for their spouse to wake up and change their ways. Then when they finally do it, they’re told it’s too late.

It’s often the people who have made serious mistakes, people who have had the harshest wake up calls, who become the best spouses and are capable of forging the best relationships.

Do you see the irony here?

The mistakes that ruin relationships are those that transform the culprits into people capable of the most outstanding relationships. The unfortunate thing for victims is that often they don’t know how to heal from the hurt that would enable them to reap the benefit of their ordeal.

So the roles become reversed. The person who was ruining the relationship stands ready to transform it, while the person who wanted to work on the relationship all along becomes the cog in the wheel that inhibits it.

So think before giving up on a spouse who was unfaithful.

How To Get Over Past Hurt?

How do you get over past hurt? After all, you can’t change what happened in the past. Actually, to forgive someone you have to be able to give up all hope that things could

have been different.

You need to live your life from today forward. If not, the past will determine your future. Unresolved issues of resentment will play havoc in relationships. Many of the future difficulties you encounter with your spouse will be precipitated by today's unresolved resentment.

The point is this:

Without forgiveness, no relationship will be fully healthy.

So how do you get over the past? Well, the past is already over! Rather than dwelling on the past we should thank God it's over.

Let's move forward with a forgiving heart and live with the thought that today is the first day of the rest of our life. The past will only affect us to the degree we allow it to.

Is the right person, the right person?

Having found the "right person," the one you are most compatible with, you will shortly see they have another side which we will call "another person." "Another person" is the part of your spouse that you don't like. But what's important here is to know that you did get the "right person," and every right person comes along with "another person" you didn't meet when getting to know them (or you met them but pretended you didn't see this side of them). So, since you are happy to be married to the "right person," be happy that you have the "right person," even though you are also married to "another person." This is simply the price you must pay to be married to the "right person." Everyone has to also marry "another person" but at least you got the "right person" also.

No two people are perfect for each other, and when couples meet the "other person," they become frustrated with their marriage and their spouse. The key is not to divorce, but to know what to do when you meet the "other person."

Guess what? You are not the only one who will meet the "other person." Your spouse will also meet "another person." So are we going to have two people with two good reasons to separate

or divorce, or are we going to have two people who admit that we may not be "perfect"

– or even that perfect for one another – but we are going to accept, respect, honor and show affection to one another, no matter what. We are going to act lovingly towards one another.

And you did marry the “right person.” The “right person is still there, even if sometimes accompanied by the “other person.” So appreciate that you still have the “right person,” and think about what you like about the “right person.”

A few words on compatibility

Do “compatible” couples always have good marriages? No. Do “incompatible” couples always have bad marriages? No. Should we look for a “compatible” spouse? Yes.

Actually, compatibility is not the objective of marriage. Having a good relationship is the objective. You can be very compatible and have very little relationship. After all, do you have deep relationships with everyone you are compatible with? Many couples work on being more compatible when they should be working on having a better relationship because being more compatible is different from having an affectionate relationship. After all, everyone wants to love and be loved. Our deepest need is not compatibility, it is to love, and improving compatibility doesn't necessarily produce affection and a closer relationship; it just produces more compatibility.

Don't think that if you just “get along” you have a successful marriage. “Prabhu, we are doing well. My wife and I haven't verbally abused one another in six months. This is not the assessment of a good marriage, only the assessment of compatibility.

The point is this:

You might be getting along fine and have virtually no relationship.

And you are going to change over time. Your compatibility at twenty-five is going to change at fifty. When it does, if you based your marriage on compatibility, rather than on the relationship, you are going to run into trouble. Is your marriage insulated from the possible disastrous effects caused by character changes in you or your spouse?

A good example of this is my friendships with those who have left Iskcon to join or start other movements. Their leaving Iskcon is a compatibility issue. But the fact that we were close friends at one time, that we like one another, that we can still inspire one another now, keeps the relationship good, despite the so called compatibility

issues.

If your marriage is based primarily on compatibility, you are probably sitting on a time bomb. Things change in this world, both you and situations. How will you deal with these changes? Not well if you base your marriage on compatibility. But if it is based on the relationship, you will weather storms well together.

If you are going to love your spouse, you need to love the whole person, the good and the bad. It is normal to not like your spouse's flaws, but accepting and loving your spouse in spite of their flaws is what creates relationships. Trying to change their flaws is not what helps the

relationship. If they change so you are more compatible, as mentioned above, you have more compatibility but not necessarily a better relationship – and maybe a much worse relationship.

The main principle of surrender to Krsna is to do whatever is favorable to the relationship and avoid what is unfavorable. This is the main principle of a good marriage as well: do what is favorable to the relationship and avoid what is unfavorable. If every decision in married life is made on this basis, you are guaranteed of having a good marriage.

The point is this:

We shouldn't get hung up about what or who is right or wrong; we should get hung up about what makes the relationship work.

Does it really matter who cooks, cleans the dishes, is submissive, is the boss, is right, controls the home, makes the financial decisions, does the bulk of the parenting, etc? It only matters if it helps the relationship. If not, you can become an "ideal" textbook husband or wife and have an ideal "Vedic" marriage on paper yet have a horrible relationship.

You can be right, or you can be married. Sometimes the choice is this simple.

Do whatever helps the relationship. If you get nothing more from this manual than this one point, you have gotten everything (of course, we show you many ways to do this). This is the pivotal point of all that is written here. Everything in this manual is founded on this principle; and every problem in a marriage ultimately stems from violating this

principle.

As in surrender to Krsna, the principle of “do whatever helps the relationship” also has the component of “stop doing whatever harms the relationship.” So it is not just about doing what you should, it is also about not doing what you shouldn’t. How do you know that you are doing something that is harming the relationship? Often your spouse will tell you. “I feel uncomfortable with you spending so much time with your secretary;” “You spend too much time surfing the net when we should be talking;” “Your accepting that new position at work is putting you in lots of anxiety and it is hurting our relationship.”

Or sometimes you sense (or clearly see) that doing something new, changing a certain behavior, or starting to think differently about things is causing a problem for your spouse. Other times it is more subtle. You are innocently dedicating yourself to your work or service, but you become more emotionally involved in the service or with the devotees doing the service than in your relationship with your spouse, and they start to feel neglected or left out as if a part of you that belongs to them is now going elsewhere, that you are emotionally involved with your hobby, a friend or business partner in ways that you are not with them. And it’s often true.

Sometimes you can get so involved with a friend that it changes the dynamics of your marriage. Now, instead of sharing your mind and feelings with your spouse, you do it with your friend. Now, you spend less time with your wife because you are spending more time with the friend, business partner, band mate, devotees you are counseling or teaching, mother, sister, etc. Of course, in the worst case scenario this relationship ends up being with the opposite sex and

evolves into infidelity. But when with the same sex, it often evolves into emotional infidelity. If you are connecting more intimately with someone else, spending more time talking, sending more emails, compliments, gifts, and letting them know more about what is going on in your life than your spouse knows, you are committing emotional infidelity. Good marriages are devoid of this.

We are showing you principles of how to connect more with your spouse.

Accepting as is

Another aspect of relationship development is acceptance. Your spouse has a certain personality, certain nature, and certain idiosyncrasies, some of which may change

over time for the better or for the worse, and some that will never change. You will find many “weird” things about your spouse over the years. (I am referring to common character flaws, not physical or verbal violence, sexual abuse, continual cheating, etc.).

If you allow these weird traits to bother you, and you will be often disturbed with your spouse. And this is toxic to your relationship – and to yourself. If you accept this is just how he or she is, then those things will tend to bother you less, or not at all, Accepting what you can’t change is a fundamental tenet of Krishna consciousness. The more we adopt this practice, the better.

For example, your spouse might not be attentive to details, or tend to forget things you ask them to do. So how do you deal with this? Either don’t ask them to do something important, or if you do, check up on them to make sure they haven’t forgotten and understand exactly what to do and how to do it. Instead of getting frustrated when they forget to do something, thinking, “Why is he always so unreliable,” accept that this is just how God made him and love him for what you find admirable in him in spite of these flaws.

It is about “we,” not “me”

Conflicts can be easily resolved, or prevented, when you think in terms of “we” rather than “me.” If you think in terms of what is best for the relationship, what is best for the “team,” then disagreements become agreements in the sense that you are both on the same side; you want what is best for the team, not what is best for one or the other.

For example, if your wife says “I need you home from work earlier,” rather than argue that you can’t get home earlier, you could say, “Let’s brainstorm how we can do this.” You say this even though you are not sure how this can happen since you cannot possibly finish your work before 7 pm. But now you are on the same page trying to solve the problem together rather than arguing that it is not possible to come home earlier.

What might come out of this discussion is that you could come earlier, take dinner with the family, and then after the kids go to bed do the work you didn’t finish at the office. Although your wife might normally be upset when you work at home, because you worked on the decision together she accepts that for you to be home by 6 pm you will

need to put in extra work at home.

On your own you might have never come up with this idea, or if you did, it might have been difficult to negotiate being able to work at home because your wife has always insisted that you don't bring any work home.

Another aspect of "we" is to take interest in and be supportive of things your spouse does that you don't have much personal interest in. Sometimes this might mean taking part in what your spouse does, being there while he or she does it, or supporting them in this. The point is that it is all too easy to become roommates and have two separate lives.

Of course, it is also great if you both have several similar interests. If so, capitalize on these by doing these together. Relationships tend to improve the more you do things together and degrade the more you live in your own worlds.

And you may have interests (or work) that occupy so much of your time that it gets in the way of time you need to be spending with your spouse. So going from "me" to "we" sometimes means giving up something you are attached to doing because it is harming your relationship with your

spouse. If something is occupying so much of your time that it prevents you from giving necessary time to your spouse, that activity needs to be minimized or even given up. The opposite end of this is to take part in something that your spouse is interested in.

Sometimes it is devotional service that gets in the way of the relationship because one does so much service or sadhana that his or her spouse is neglected. Of course, part of the solution is to see if the service or sadhana can be done together. But still, sufficient time together alone is necessary for maintaining a healthy relationship.

We have also seen that couples may not fully care for one another, or do duties normally associated with being a wife or husband – or even parent – in the name of service. Of course, service is important, but it is a paradox to have service destroy a marriage. This happens when we believe service is more important than being successfully married. Both are important, and we shouldn't sacrifice one for the other. It is all about balance.

Another aspect of "we" is that if your spouse has a problem tackle the problem

together. Support them in their struggle, rather than condemn them for it. Find resources to help them. Encourage them. Talk to them about the problem. Chances of succeeding are much greater if you work on the problem together. If you turn against them for their behavior, hold a grudge, or are angry with them, it will not help. And it will probably make things worse.

The bottom line is that when you get married your life must go from “me” to “we.” You won’t always get your way, but that is not the point. The point is that you are not making decisions together necessarily because you will make better decisions, you are making decisions together because this makes the relationship better. In some cases a wrong decision made together will be better than a right decision made alone. So try making more decisions together, even when your spouse is not as qualified as you in certain areas. At least he or she will know more about what you are dealing with. This can include what you are going through at the office or in other

areas of your life in which your spouse is not involved at all. Knowing what you must deal with will help your spouse better understand why you are acting in specific ways.

Decisions made together should not turn into quarrels about who is right. If so, the process is backfiring; you win the battle but lose the war. The point is that deciding together makes your relationship healthier. And you will ultimately be happier because of it.

Being a good parent

If you have kids you are probably trying your best to be a good parent. You send your kids to the best schools, help them with their homework, work hard to save for their college education, take them to the best doctors, plan special birthday parties, drive them to practice, and make their favorite meals. But there is something else you can do that is vitally important: that is to have a great marriage.

It’s hard to be a good parent unless you have a good marriage. That’s because you teach your children how to succeed in relationships by your own example. The point is:

Your children won’t learn about marriage from what you say as much as from what you do.

One of the most important things in your children’s life is to have a successful

marriage. They'll learn it from your marriage.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Who you are speaks so loudly, I can't hear a word you're saying."

There's nothing more devastating to a young person than to be the victim of a broken family. If your children don't see affection between you and your spouse, where will they learn it? But if they witness a good relationship between you and your spouse, you give them one of the greatest gifts you can offer, an example of a great relationship.

To be a good parent you must do everything you can to succeed in your marriage.

Choosing the right spouse

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In other words, choosing the right partner can save you from pounds of cure having to go into your marriage. Always be aware that maya may choose someone for you, exactly the wrong person.

The point to understand is:

Just because you like the way a person looks, walks and talks, doesn't mean you should marry them. Just because you feel good around the person doesn't mean they are the right person for you.

And even though he or she is a "good devotee," it doesn't necessarily mean you will get along well.

Choosing a spouse needs to be done dispassionately, not passionately. Choosing a life-long partner requires many things other than chemistry. It is best to have a list of the qualities and nature of a person that you believe would make an ideal partner so in the event that you start

becoming attracted to someone, you will be more able to objectively determine if this is the right person for you. Statistics tell us that arranged marriages (i.e. arranged with the right person) are not as happy as "love" marriages in the beginning, but after five years couples in arranged marriages are much happier than those in a love marriage. Why? Because the relationship was based more on compatibility than physical

attraction.

So do whatever you can to find the right person. Once you have found them, do pre-marital counseling to both confirm that you found the right person and that you are on the same page regarding your goals, values, and aspirations (my website has a series of documents with important questions to ask).

All this work is the “ounce of prevention” that can prevent a serious disease from destroying your marriage. It is a great accomplishment, and a great service to Srila Prabhupada, to stay happily married to one person throughout your life. Do everything before marriage to ensure this will happen. You need to decide with a lot of your head, not just a lot of your heart.

Did I marry the right person?

It is not about finding the right person to love but loving the person you found. It is your dharma, your duty to love your spouse.