

“Marriage That Endures”

Historically, the family has been considered the basic unit of society. Certainly in Judaism, the strength of the *mishpacha* is said to be a major factor in Jewish survival. In the general population, the family has suffered serious casualties. One out of three children in the US lives in a single parent home. The statistics in the Jewish population are not as grim, but whereas divorce used to be a rarity, it is now commonplace, and the fragility of the family unit certainly has an effect on the children.

Many relationships begin with two people falling in love. While this seems to be perfectly logical, listen to what George Bernard Shaw said: *"When two people are under the influence of the most violent, most insane, most illusive, and most transient of passions, they are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal, and exhausting condition continuously until death do them part."* Even if they do not take a formal oath to that effect, they probably believe that their passion will be eternal.

Of course, love is essential to a marriage, but see what the Torah says about the marriage of Yitzhak to Rivka, "He married Rivka, she became his wife, and he loved her" (*Breishis* 24:67). Look carefully at the sequence of the words. Yitzhak's love for Rivka developed *after* the marriage rather than before it.

Abraham's servant, Eliezer, who was sent to find a wife for Yitzhak, watched for a young woman who championed *chesed* (acts of kindness). "Let it be the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Please tip over your jug so I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will even water your camels,' her will You have designated for Yitzhak."

The basis for the relationship was a commonality of values, not "the most violent, most insane, most illusive, and most transient of passions." This was a relationship in which true love could develop.

The Talmud says that the relationship of a husband to his wife should be "to love her as much as he loves himself, and to respect her even more than he respects himself" (*Yevamos* 62b). It is of interest that Rambam, in citing the Talmud, reverses the order and places respect *before* love. Why? Because it is unrealistic to expect that one can have so intense a love from day one. It takes time for true love to develop. However, respect is something that can begin on day one.

Of course there is passion in a marriage, but Shaw was right. A marriage based on passion is on a fragile foundation. The mutual love and respect for one another that develop *after* the marriage is the cement that can bond the couple throughout their entire lives.

It is, of course, essential that each partner should behave in a manner that is conducive to the development of love and respect. The formula for this is simple, albeit not easy. It is Rambam's version of the Talmud, "to respect her even more than he respects himself, and to love her as much as he loves himself." Rambam continues that the wife's attitude toward the husband should be similar, to honor him and fulfill his wishes. Having first established that the husband must respect his wife, it is obvious that his wishes will not encroach on his consideration of and respect for her.

The Jewish family is now at greater risk than ever before. The Torah teaching about marriage can be our salvation. (*Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski, Torah Web Foundation*)