



COURSE RATIONALE

Marriage is more than a symbiotic relationship; marriage is a union of two hitherto incomplete souls, and the bond between spouses transcends their individual needs and can create a new peak experience for the couple. Judaism is unique among other religions in that it views marriage and loving intimacy as a spiritual as well as a human ideal.

Jewish culture and tradition idealizes a joyful and content marital relationship and has a treasure trove of timeless advice on how to jumpstart and maintain a happy marriage.

The Art of Marriage is a six-week course that draws on millennia of wisdom, from the spiritual to the practical, providing concrete methods for improvement. The course also highlights many self-help and cognitive behavioral concepts and techniques sourced in ancient Jewish texts such as the Talmud and Kabbalah—which are finding widespread acceptance in the scientific community today.

The course will benefit newlyweds, couples happily married for fifty years, as well as those contemplating tying the knot. Married individuals will learn how to enhance their relationship and heighten their intimacy, and those looking to marry will discover the building blocks of a healthy relationship.



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COURSE OUTLINE

Lesson One: The Case for Marriage

Antiquated Relic vs. Existential Need

In November 2010, Time magazine featured an article titled, “*Who Needs Marriage? A Changing Institution.*” Though marriage has been an integral part of the human condition since the dawn of mankind, in recent times, many have argued that the marital institution is a relic of the age of patriarchy. Indeed, society has changed and many of the traditional reasons for getting married are no longer relevant, prompting many to predict the demise of marriage. Is there still reason to marry? This lesson will enlighten the discussion with timeless Jewish wisdom and secrets of the Kabbalah that resonate spiritually and emotionally.

The lesson will contrast the marital relationship with other (filial and non-filial) relationships, to highlight the uniqueness of marriage, the psychological need only it can fill, and how it trumps all in the hierarchy of needs.

Lesson Two: Bedroom Secrets

A Jewish View on Intimacy

Though the subject probably wasn’t broached by your Hebrew School teacher, Judaism has much to say about physical intimacy. It is common knowledge that Judaism doesn’t advocate celibacy; but many might not know that Judaism views sexual intimacy as sacred (and not only because of its procreative value).



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Intercourse can be routine or deeply fulfilling depending on the degree of intimacy—of soul, mind, heart, and body—between the couple. This lesson draws upon the wisdom of the Kabbalah and shares techniques to increase spousal intimacy and enhance a couple's sexual experience. The section will demonstrate safe and healthy boundaries that do not promote immediate gratification can help bring a couple close and provide opportunity for them to enhance their verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Lesson Three: Will My Spouse Ever Change?

What You Need to Know About Your Mate

"It takes two to tango," proclaims a popular adage, but what if only one partner is committed to improving the marriage? Can his or her solitary efforts make a significant impact?

When one partner has individuated; is self-actualized, mature and emotionally healthy, his/her impact on the relationship can be transformational.

This lesson examines the ideal of an expectation-free relationship, where one partner gives to the relationship without anticipating any reciprocation. In this relationship, love is defined as unconditional respect, valuing your partner for who they are and for what is important to them.



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Lesson Four: Are You a Mensch?

Becoming a Better Half

Marriage can bring out the best and worst in people. According to a 2010 study published by the American Psychological Association, the personality type of one partner alone can be a reliable predictor of marital harmony or distress. This lesson focuses on the character traits that influence marriage for better or worse. It provides practical key skills to being successful in marriage, such as how to be more appreciative of others and how to manage anger. We also explore how marriage can be a tool for self-improvement. By challenging us in our weakest areas, our relationship can be a catalyst for developing new strengths and a better personality.

Lesson Five: Sacred Space: No Trespassing!

Defining Marriage's Boundaries

In Judaism, a marriage is considered consummated before any conjugal act, when the bride and groom are secluded together for a few minutes following the marriage ceremony. The intimate space provided by this seclusion defines the marriage and should remain sacred and exclusive only to each other throughout the marriage.

How does one defend a marriage from the threats of boredom, lust, pornography, and extramarital affairs? This lesson introduces a mystical approach and practical ways to form and fortify an exclusive and powerful relationship. It provides a method and means for a couple to establish firm boundaries they commit not to cross, out of love and devotion to each other.



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Lesson Six: Make Up or Break Up

Negotiating the Challenge of Our Generation

Shared values and ethics and a commitment to a higher authority can have given religiously-committed couples an edge in the statistics of divorce. However, with today's macro-level complexities, divorce is a reality in every segment of the community. Surprisingly, the option of divorce can help stabilize a shaky marriage. This lesson explores Jewish insights on divorce that provide powerful instruction on how to stay married when the going gets tough.

A discussion of what constitutes grounds for divorce, according to the Jewish legal code, will demonstrate how far one might need to go to make a marriage work. What degree of tolerance can be realistically expected of any individual? And when is divorce the best option?



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