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Rabbi: Welcome to The Marriage Restoration Project, a five-step action plan to saving your marriage.

Over the years I have counseled hundreds of couples that are feeling the same things that you are feeling today:

- Confusion
- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear
- Despair
- Helplessness

Marriage is one of the most important decisions you will ever make and now you see it deteriorating right in front of your very eyes. My wife Rivka and I are here to help you through this most difficult time and we are here to give you five concrete action steps that you can take now to save your marriage.

Rivka: The five steps are:

Step #1 . . . Commitment

Step #2 . . . Seal your exits

Step #3 . . . Detox your marriage

Step #4 . . . Acknowledge the other

Step #5 . . . Love infusions

During the course of this program we will explore each of the five steps in detail so that you can take immediate action to save your relationship.

Rabbi: Before we begin with Step #1, commitment, we would like to share with you why these five specific steps were chosen as the most effective actions you can take to save your marriage. After years of working with couples, I have observed that some couples are much more successful than others. While most couples are able to improve their relationship over time, there are the occasional few that don't make it. The question is why do you think that's so? Was their situation too difficult? Did they not try hard enough?



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Interestingly enough, I have witnessed couples recover from even the most difficult relationship issues such as abuse, infidelity and money problems. Yet others whose issues were not as devastating were not as successful. How could it be that I was doing the same therapy with all of my clients, the same structure, the same techniques, the same principles and experiencing different results?

While you may say that one size doesn't fit all, I have seen 95% of couples improve their relationship. I thought long and hard about why the 5% were not successful and I have distilled the winning ingredients into these 5 steps. If you master these steps, you **will** save your marriage.

These five steps will not only provide you with concrete actions you can take to save your marriage, they will help you view your relationship in an entirely new way. As you go along, you may find yourself listening to the program multiple times until it sinks in to every core of your being. Feel free to do this. It's as if you're re-reading important passages or paragraphs in a book to get its full and true meaning. Treat this audio the same way.

Rivka: Even though Shlomo and I have worked on our relationship, and we're always working on our relationship, it is even helpful for us to have a constant reminder of these principles so that we stay conscious and don't slip back into default mode.

So put the CDs in your car. Load them on your iPod and listen again and again. You've probably got years of negative tapes or messages playing in your brain about relationships and about your spouse and believe me, you're not the only one out there with all that negativity. It's going to take more than one listen for this new information to rewrite those tapes and rewire your brain.



MARRIAGE
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Rabbi: And that is why this program is so valuable. It is more than a couple of hours of audio that you will listen to once, learn a few tips, and let it collect dust on your shelf. It is like having your own personal coach with you whenever you need a little extra support; a cue to remind you of what you really want in your relationship and how to get it. What we are talking about is transforming the way you look at your relationship. You need support to make that shift and we are here to provide that for you and give you

the hope that you will experience success beyond your wildest imagination.

One final note: While there is a natural progression to the five steps, each step can also be applied on its own. So if you are not sure if you are ready to commit but you want to work on Love Infusions and bring more positive energy into your relationship, by all means do so. The more steps you are able to do, the more you will experience a shift in the relationship and that will enable you to practice the remaining steps.

The main thing is to **take action!** Do something.

Step #1: Commitment

Rabbi: The foundation of any successful relationship is commitment. Just as a building cannot stand without a foundation, so too a relationship cannot weather good times and bad times without commitment. When you are not committed to your marriage, you can't be present and participate fully in the relationship.

A quick story on that: I once had a couple come for counseling and I later found out that she had a deadline by which she needed to make a decision about the relationship. My natural reaction as I'm sure you can imagine was:



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What? What can this deadline possibly be about? Was this a promise she made to herself that she would give the relationship a shot for x number of months?

No. This was a deadline for an apartment in case she left her husband. Someone offered her an apartment for a good deal but she needed to let them know by a certain date. She was actually contemplating giving up on her marriage rather than miss out on this apartment.

No wonder she couldn't be fully present in the sessions! She had already mentally checked out of the relationship. If she had been more committed to making the relationship work, I guarantee you that she would have been successful in overcoming any issues that she and her husband were facing as a couple. Why couldn't she have taken three months to **eliminate** any thought of an exit plan and **commit** to working on her marriage? She couldn't commit because commitment is hard!

Rivka: Commitment is really hard when you are unhappy with your current situation, especially if you don't even think things are going to improve. On top of that, you're feeling so many emotions, confusion, despair, fear, sadness and anger. Why stay married to this person if you're destined to a life of suffering? What's the point?

Rabbi: Of course, this very question is problematic as it is emblematic of our disposable society. We are used to throwing things away if they don't work. Think of your computer. When the computer had a virus and crashed, my computer repairman advised I buy a new one.

Why? I asked. I just bought my computer a few years ago! I am the type of person who would keep things forever. My car is 12 years old and it works so why replace it? The repairman said that my computer will be obsolete in a year so it is better to buy a new one than invest money to repair the old one.



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We seem to think, why invest energy in fixing our relationship when there is a new and better one out there?

Let me tell you something that will shock you: Your marriage is **not** a computer. You will not magically find someone better out there because **you** will be coming along for the ride. A relationship takes **two** people. As long as you bring **yourself** to the new relationship, you will bring with you the good, the bad and the ugly that is you.

Rivka: So, before you decide to look elsewhere, where more than likely you will experience the same disappointment and wish you would have tried harder the first time around, let's learn about why you should commit even if you are in pain.

Rabbi: Many couples stay in a relationship for the kids or for money, yet ultimately those reasons are not strong enough if you are suffering. If you are busy focusing on what your spouse is doing to you, it makes sense to think that leaving could make things better.

If you have studied Psych 101 you may remember the pleasure/pain principle. That principle states that it is natural for us to want to avoid pain. So how do we commit when it seems more pleasant to leave than to stay? The only way to commit if you're in pain is to see the bigger picture; the hidden agenda of marriage.

Rivka: And if you're a more spiritual kind of person, believing that g-d brought you and your spouse together is going to be a huge motivator to commit through your pain. Despite your suffering, you can take solace in the fact that your marriage is part of the divine plan. And even if you are not a believer, from a psychological perspective there is an unconscious agenda for marriage.



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Rabbi: In Imago Therapy, we say that marriage is for the purpose of growth and healing. Therefore, we are unconsciously attracted to someone who is familiar to us. We walk around with an image of our ideal partner, one that is a composite of the best and worst traits of our primary caretakers. Marriage is a chance to do over, to get it right this time. To get retriggered by our spouse in the very areas we need growth.

Commitment is what provides you the belief that you can do it and that even pain serves a greater purpose, that of growth and healing. Indeed, this has provided us a lot of hope in our relationship.

Rivka: For us, just knowing that there was an unconscious agenda to how we trigger each other was a huge breath of fresh air. It allowed us to throw away any doubt that we might have been in the wrong relationship. And it helped strengthen what we knew all along, that we were in the right relationship.

We committed to commitment. And that really gave us the security that we needed to stop doubting ourselves. All we needed after that was to put in the work.

Rabbi: And that we did.

And what this means to you is that someone else will not necessarily be better for you. For if we pick our partner based on an unconscious agenda, we will be attracted to a similar type of person the next time around! Spare yourself the heartache now and realize that the person you are married to is the right one for you. If you don't believe you are meant to be and that you picked each other for a reason deeper than looks, think back when you fell in love or decided to get married.

Rivka: Why *did* you pick each other? How *did* you used to feel?



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Believe it or not, most couples actually liked each other; otherwise they couldn't have gotten married. Why did you pick your spouse as opposed to someone else? There were probably lots of people along the way who might have appeared attractive or had a nice personality.

Rabbi: You picked them because you were drawn to them. Whether you fell in love or you just experienced a pull towards your future spouse, you chose your

spouse for a reason. This initial connection that you felt is enough to know that you made the right choice. But what if you feel like you never *really* connected?

Hard to believe, but I have met couples who don't remember ever really liking each other all that much. I often remark that unless someone forced you down the aisle there must have been something that you saw in each other that made you interested or willing. This usually helps them conjure up a memory or two. Yet, once in a blue moon there are couples who really can't think of anything positive. It makes you wonder how they got married.

Regardless of whether you ever liked your spouse or not, if you have built a life together and have brought children into the world, you owe it to your children and yourselves to make an effort. If you don't succeed, fine, but you **have** to try for the simple reason that...

Rivka: ...love can grow. It is definitely possible that if a couple decides to work on their relationship and performs loving acts, they can really actually learn to love each other. So even in a situation where you've never felt connected, it's definitely worth giving it a shot and making it work.

Rabbi: What happens if you are committed and your spouse is not? This scenario is often so painful. I often get calls from one spouse who desperately



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wants to come for help but cannot convince their husband or wife to join. Is such a relationship doomed?

The answer is **no**. The relationship is not doomed. Give unconditional love, be the best spouse you can be and you will be surprised how it seeps in. Many with unwilling spouses have seen their partners transform simply by making their own changes.

Rivka: What if you hate your spouse so much that you don't want

to commit?

Rabbi: I had a couple where one spouse hated the other. He constantly complained in front of his wife about how much he hated the relationship. I asked him, "What is stopping you from getting divorced? No one is forcing you to stay in this marriage!"

Ultimately, you have the choice. You can either leave or make it work. You made the commitment to get married. So are you going to make it work? If you don't have tools, or don't understand how relationships work, you are not alone. But you are not giving yourself a fair chance. More and more in our society there is a lack of personal responsibility. If you owned a company and it failed, who is to blame? Do you blame the consumer for not buying enough of your products? No!

Any successful business person will tell you that the company must take responsibility for what it was doing wrong. *How come people did not buy my product? Did I not market it well? Did I deliver poor quality? What could I do better next time?* This is taking personal responsibility.

Rivka: If your relationship is failing, don't blame it all on your spouse. Look to see how **you** might be contributing to the problem as well.



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Rabbi: You will learn more in Step 3 about entering the world of the other and seeing the big picture, how it is not “all about me.” You will understand what you are doing, even inadvertently, to trigger your spouse. You will learn how to take responsibility for your part in the relationship.

Rivka: Even if you are getting divorced, it’s important that you make a conscious decision. You want to be able to live with that decision and know to the best of

your ability that you did the right thing. If you are merely avoiding the pain of the relationship and not examining your role, then you are not consciously choosing. The problem with not making a conscious choice is that you will remain unconscious if you choose to enter a future relationship. Better to figure it out now and avoid additional pain down the road.

Rabbi: One potential red herring that can be thrown into the mix when contemplating whether to commit to your marriage is that of mental illness. I have had many people contact me and claim their relationship is doomed because their spouse has OCD, BPD, MDD, pick your three letter word. I in no way intend to make light of mental illness, as it is real and can have a huge impact on a relationship. What I do intend to do is to differentiate between mental illness and ordinary stress as well as share with you the reality of living with a spouse who has a mental illness.

Mental illness and ordinary stress. I believe that many people are being over diagnosed by mental health professionals, by physicians, and even by their spouses. While diagnoses can be helpful as they may validate one’s suffering and allow one to take ownership to heal, they also can be a crutch.

Rivka: They can be a crutch for the identified patient as well as their spouse. If I am officially depressed, I don’t have to work on being happier at home. If my spouse is diagnosed as bipolar then I am validated that he’s the problem in



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this relationship and it will be impossible to repair our marriage. In a moment we will discuss what to do if you or your spouse has a bona fide mental illness.

Rabbi: Let's first understand more about diagnoses. Mental health professionals that submit to insurance or work in a clinic or hospital need to affix a diagnosis for billing purposes. This doesn't mean that they are trained in or experienced in using the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental

disorders. A correct diagnosis is a skill that comes through consulting with experts and colleagues, not something conferred with your college degree. This is especially important when it comes to more subjective diagnoses such as personality disorders.

It is important to note that these abnormal behaviors need to generalize themselves to a range of personal and social interactions, not just in your marriage where there might be some type of trigger. They also need to impair your day-to-day functioning. While your spouse may be sensitive to criticism and have a poor self-image, it does not mean that he/she is borderline.

Rivka: Many of us may identify with some of the symptoms of the various disorders and we may be somewhere along the continuum but unless it's getting in the way of our daily functioning, then it may not be pathological. This is also the case with mood disorders like depression. You may be unhappy and if your marriage is lousy, you have good reason to be.

Rabbi: But does this actually make you clinically depressed? Well, let me ask you: can you get out of bed in the morning? Are you holding down your job? Did you lose twenty pounds? Your mood may be depressed, but if it does not interfere with your daily life, it may not be worthy of a diagnosis. If your marriage were better, your mood may very well improve.



MARRIAGE
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Rivka: Creating safety in your relationship by following the five steps will help you deal with some of the stress and anxiety that often triggers these disorders. And sometimes the symptoms go away when the relationship is in a good place.

Rabbi: What if you or your spouse really does have a mental illness? What if you have obsessive compulsive disorder and wash your hands countless times a day, or repeatedly check the door to see if it

is locked multiple times before you go to bed?

Mental illness is real and I have worked with couples where one spouse is clearly suffering. In such a case, consultation with a competent psychiatrist can make a world of difference. While I am not the strongest proponent of medicating people, there are cases where it is beneficial and even necessary. The good news is that modern-day medicine has produced drugs that help make life more functional.

When working with a couple where the husband had severe OCD that was interfering with all aspects of his life as well as his relationship, I advised him to consult with his psychiatrist. Medication can take the edge off the symptoms so that they do not have to interfere or ruin the relationship. Once the symptoms have subsided, it will be much easier to work on the relationship. Even in the case of severe mental illness, if treated properly, a couple can function and have a successful marriage. Mental illness does not have to be a reason why you can't commit to your relationship.

We have explored the importance of committing to your relationship and how it is step #1 to saving your marriage. We addressed the many reasons or potential excuses why you would not want to commit and have proven them to be insufficient to warrant the breakup of your marriage. As we conclude Step #1, we leave you with one question: **Why not commit?**



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