



## Step 5: Love Infusions

**Rabbi:** A common complaint couples have about traditional marriage counseling is that it's too negative. How is it possible to salvage a relationship if all you do is spend time discussing what is wrong with it?

As we learned in Step 4: Acknowledge the Other, talking about problems in a safe and connected way can actually

enhance your relationship, bringing about compassion and increased connection. Nevertheless, for some couples, even that can be too heavy. For couples who see their relationship stalled even after completing the first four steps, love infusions, that is Step 5, is a sure way to change the energy almost instantly.

One couple recently shared with me that they entered last week's counseling session ready to kill each other but left the session kissing each other. Such a remarkable shift in 90 minutes? It was only when we started focusing on what was right with the relationship were they able to transform their negativity into love and joy. Let's explore a little more how the power of positive energy can have on your relationship.

**Rivka:** Dr. John Gotman has spent over forty years researching what makes a marriage work. One of his findings is that couples who were in a stable, happy relationship had a ratio of positive to negative interactions of 5:1 when discussing an area of disagreement.

If you can imagine a 5:1 positive to negative ratio when discussing an area of disagreement, imagine how much higher the ratio would be for general discussions! Take a look at your positive to negative interaction ratio and do your best to increase your positive interactions many fold.

Increasing positive interactions makes a huge difference in a relationship, especially one marred by hurt and pain. Instead of your



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relating being a painful experience, it will become more pleasurable. You will actually want to relate to each other when it becomes a consistently positive experience.

**Rabbi:** One way to increase positive reactions is by infusing more appreciations into your marriage. I always open my sessions with couples by having them share appreciations. It helps lighten up the mood and

distill any tension. You may be wondering how a **mere** appreciation can make such a huge impact. The truth is that it is not a **mere** appreciation.

Appreciations are not just a simple thank you. They are an opportunity to open up and express at length the gratitude you have for your partner. For example, you might be ***thinking or feeling*** thankful that your spouse called you at work today. But when you express it through speech you are awakening your feelings of love and appreciation to a greater extent. That is why it is so important to verbally express what you may feel is obvious. By articulating it with words, your positive feelings will intensify.

**Rivka:** Not only will you feel more positive towards your spouse, your spouse will appreciate your sharing and will respond in kind with warmer feelings towards you.

**Rabbi:** As you share what you appreciate, be sure to add the reason you appreciate your spouse. This serves to deepen the appreciation and allows you both to connect on a much deeper level by letting your spouse know why it means so much to you. Expressing appreciations not only strengthens your connection, it can also reinforce good behavior.



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**Rivka:** Like Shlomo, I know that when you appreciate what I do, it gives me an incentive to keep doing it because I like feeling appreciated. It also helps me know that you don't take me for granted.

Many couples complain that they don't feel appreciated. This exercise forces those who would not naturally express their feelings of gratitude to get in the habit of sharing what they like

about their spouse. It also helps couples see the good in their relationship. When you are looking for things to appreciate, you will be surprised that there is much more good in your relationship than you might have expected.

**Rabbi:** This is a huge relief to couples who are low on hope. As they see more good, and appreciate more good, more good will manifest itself until what's wrong with the relationship takes a backseat to all of the positive that is present in the marriage.

Believe it or not, this exercise can be hard for a lot of couples. Sometimes even harder than sharing the appreciation is receiving it. Are you the type that gets uncomfortable when people praise you in public? Do you have a little voice inside of your head that says, you don't deserve it, you aren't worthy, or they don't know the real you?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be suffering from self-hatred.

**Rivka:** While self-hatred is a strong term, most of us actually have it to some degree. It's the part of us that thinks we are not lovable, that we are not attractive enough, that we are not funny enough. It is the inner saboteur that does not let us hear the praise of others because we just feel like we don't deserve it.



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**Rabbi:** I remember a dramatic story one couple told me where the husband did something uncharacteristic. In the middle of a fight, he realized his wrongs and he tried to right them by going out of his way to meet his wife's needs. She was in utter shock and was quick to dismiss his actions. Later she realized that as much as she had been complaining for years about him not meeting her needs, when he finally did, she couldn't let him.

Buried in her unconscious was the belief that others cannot really meet her needs and that she was not worthy of him meeting her needs. This self-hatred explains why a couple can do all the right things in a marriage and one partner still never feels satisfied. While it is beneficial to explore the deeper roots of your self-hatred, being on the receiving end of appreciations can help.

**Rivka:** When your spouse typically thanks you, how do you respond? You're welcome? My pleasure? No problem.

The appreciations exercise will compel you to really feel appreciated and not just give a one line acknowledgement.

**Rabbi:** Besides the fact that you should preferably be sitting down and facing each other when doing this exercise, you will want to employ the same mirroring technique you learned in Step 4.

Instead of responding, repeat back all of the glowing praise your spouse shared, let it seep in, and ask for more! Give your spouse the chance to fully articulate all of their feelings of gratitude towards you. As you begin to give yourself permission to receive this gift, feel those old voices of self-hatred dissipate so that you can fully accept and be affected by your spouse's positive expression. Make sharing appreciations a priority.



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**Rivka:** Try to make time daily, whether it is at dinner or before you go to bed. Find a time when you can sit down for a few minutes and share with each other. Even if you have a hard time setting a time to share, make sure you express appreciations nonetheless.

**Rabbi:** The second love infusion that can jumpstart your marriage is date night. A simple

concept, yet one often too hard to achieve. What could be so difficult? Pick one night a week where you can go out alone with your spouse.

I know all of the excuses. I can't find a baby sitter... I don't know where to go. .. It costs too much money... If we don't feel like doing something, we will come up with all of the excuses in the world.

Here's an example we can all relate to: Exercise. I can't stand exercising. More than likely neither do you. While it's true I enjoy exercising once I do it, I have no motivation to get started... I don't have the time... too many other things to do... and the list goes on and on.

The times in my life when I was most successful with exercise was when I had a personal trainer. Knowing that I had a standing appointment where someone was waiting for me to show up, removed all of the other impediments that were getting in the way. Making a time was a way for me to commit to my health and show that it was important.

Similarly, date night shows that your marriage is a priority. Perhaps just as important as the fun you will have with your spouse on the date is the fact that you have set a time to be together on a regular basis. This alone sends a message to your spouse that you care about the relationship.



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**Rivka:** In our case, I remember when I used to always tell you that we never go anywhere together. While we may have spent a lot of time together, it didn't always feel like fun. But, when we hired a babysitter to go out every Tuesday night, it made a huge difference. Even if we didn't do anything too exciting, it was a big deal for me that you made a time that was solely devoted for us on a weekly basis.

And even when we occasionally had scheduling conflicts, it didn't feel like the end of the world because I got the message that our relationship is a priority. It may sound boring to schedule in "fun", but in our busy lives, it is critical.

**Rabbi:** A marriage needs to have fun for it to be vibrant; otherwise it becomes a business relationship. Try to do new activities together, whether it be taking a cooking class, playing racquetball, or something else you would not typically do.

Studies show that sharing new experiences together actually helps to increase feelings of love in a relationship. When you begin to date each other weekly you can fall in love again. If you feel like you never were in love, it is an opportunity to fall in love for the very first time. One final point about date night is that you should do your best to make it a time where you can connect.

**Rivka:** We enjoy going food shopping together but it is probably not the best activity to do for date night. Don't use date night as an opportunity to check off items on your to-do list. Make it a time where you can really focus on each other.





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And if money is an issue, go for a walk, get a cup of coffee. You don't need to go out to a fancy restaurant or enroll in an expensive activity to spend quality time with each other.

**Rabbi:** A third love infusion is caring behaviors.

You need to see real change in your relationship. Actual behavioral changes in a relationship can speak louder

than words and can be more powerful for some than even being heard, understood, and validated. Many couples who learn how to acknowledge the other in Step 4 want to see how sharing their feelings will translate in the world of action.

While the impact of the dialogue process is often behavioral change, there are times when couples are found wanting more. This is where caring behaviors kick in. Sometimes we must say a little and do a lot.

Commit to doing a few actions every day that show your spouse how much you care. It is ideal to have your spouse make a list of behaviors that would make them feel cared for. That way you will be giving them what they want as opposed to what you think they want.

**Rivka:** If you are not listening to this program with your spouse, you can still practice caring behaviors by thinking as best as you can about what your spouse would like. This may be a challenge as the things you think would make your spouse feel cared for are not necessarily what they need. This is the advantage of seeing their list. That way you know what they really want.

This explains why you may feel like you are a caring spouse but no matter what you do, your spouse does not respond favorably. This is usually because you are not speaking the same language.



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**Rabbi:** Dr. Gary Chapman in his book The Five Love Languages posits that each one of us has our own unique love language, our way of communicating and expressing love for another.

The five love languages are:

- 1) Words of affirmation
- 2) Quality time
- 3) Gifts
- 4) Acts of service
- 5) Physical touch

The power of this concept first became clear to me when working with a couple where both spouses did not feel cared for. The husband was mushy, showing his love through words of affirmation. How could it be, he wondered, that you don't love me when I tell you all the time?

His wife, who was emotionally less expressive and would rarely say I love you, replied that words don't do it for her. She felt loved when he bought her chocolates or other gifts. She also expressed that she shows him love by doing acts of service such as cleaning the house and caring for the children.

I was amazed! Both people felt they are clearly demonstrating love for each other yet neither one of them felt loved.

**Rivka:** To make your spouse feel loved and cared for, you need to learn how to speak their language.

**Rabbi:** I have found that we often marry someone with the opposite love language. Although this may seem maddening at first, it is an opportunity to grow and stretch beyond your nature so you can give your spouse what they need to feel cared for. Once you do these behaviors regularly you will be surprised how the love and appreciation will increase in your relationship.





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**Rivka:** When your spouse feels truly cared for, many of the seemingly pressing issues are no longer as urgent as they ultimately stem from an overall feeling of disconnect.

**Rabbi:** I do want to make one final point about love languages and that is specifically about physical touch and intimacy. Intimacy is often the unspoken issue in a relationship. If you are struggling in your relationship

and feeling disconnected, chances are you are not connecting intimately either. Intimacy in a marriage is an opportunity to get close with your spouse physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

It is important to realize that men and women have different needs in this area. While this is not the place to elaborate on these differences, it is important to realize that by becoming more aware of these differences you can see improvement.

**Rivka:** In many relationships, intimacy can keep the marriage alive until the couple can learn how to connect in other ways. And for some the relationship has to be improved before it feels safe enough to be intimate.

**Rabbi:** I have seen many couples who refrained from being intimate with their spouse. It was not until they worked on their marriage, were they able to be intimate again. Even without directly working on that issue, when their general connection improved, they were ready to connect in this way as well. Your intimate life can often be a barometer for your relationship. While you may be too tired or busy, don't ignore this important opportunity for closeness.

Finally, don't use intimacy as a weapon. Some couples like to punish their spouse by withholding intimacy if they are upset or angry. This is not a good idea and is usually not helpful. While there may be times



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when you do not feel emotionally safe to be intimate and you may decide that you can't be, do not be malicious about it.

**Rivka:** If you are in crisis, the last thing you may be thinking about is being positive towards your spouse. You will be surprised how taking a few small steps to infuse love into your relationship will make a huge difference in how you will

feel.

**Rabbi:** Although love infusions is Step 5, it alone could be what you need to bring about the other four steps.

There are many ways to create change in relationship. For some it is attacking the negative. For others it is accentuating the positive. Most importantly, do what works for you and produces results. But always remember, you can never lose out with love infusions.