TORAH STUDIES

Chayei Sarah

The Myth of Falling in Love

Why lasting love begins after the wedding

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Chayei Sarah

Sarah dies at age 127 and is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron, which Abraham purchases from Ephron the Hittite for 400 shekels of silver.

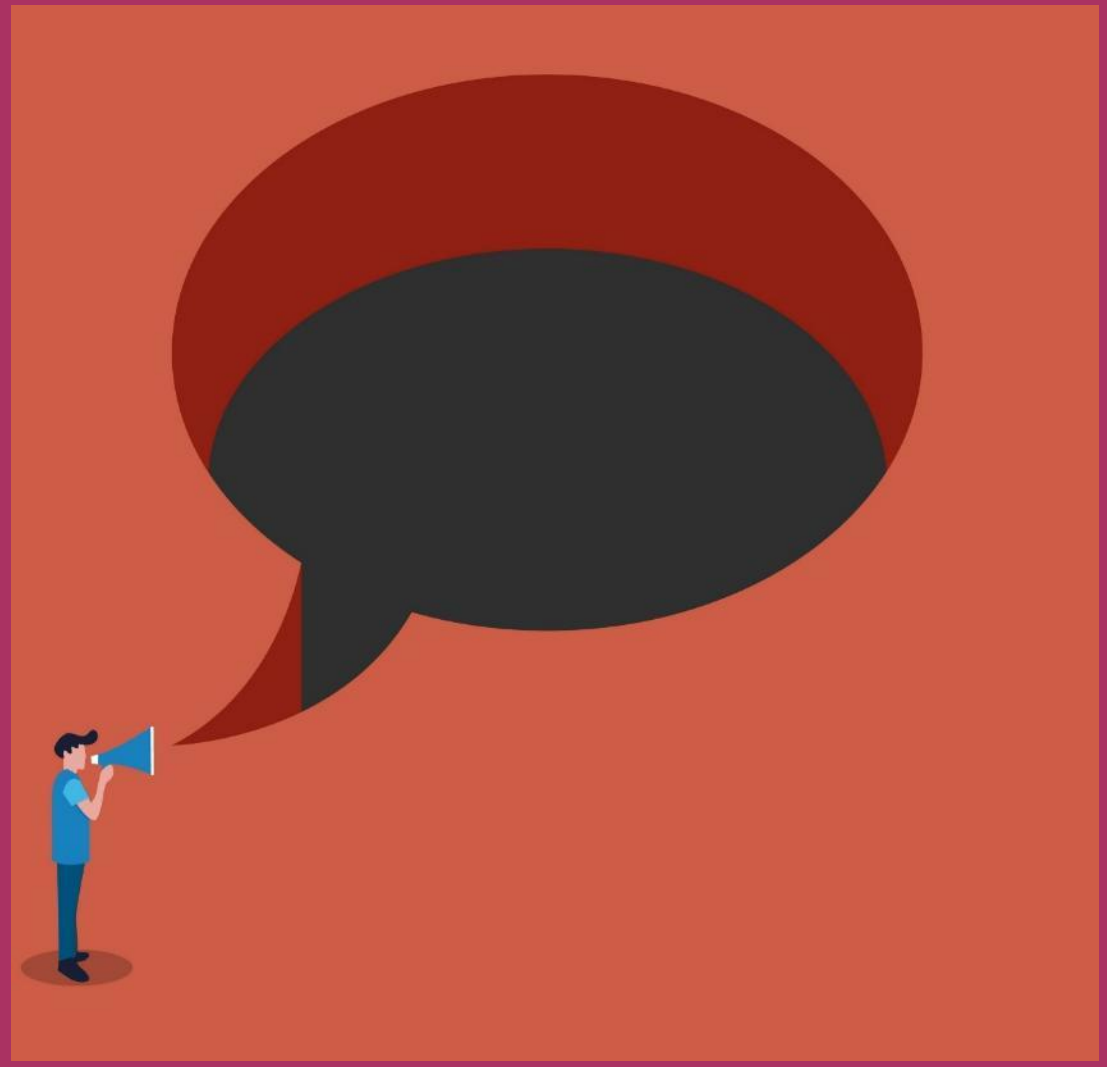
Abraham's servant Eliezer is sent to Charan with gifts, in order to find a wife for Isaac. At the village well, Eliezer asks G-d for a sign: when the maidens come to the well, he will ask for some water to drink: The woman who will offer to give his camels water to drink as well shall be the one destined for his master's son.

Rebecca, the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel, appears at the well and passes the "test." Eliezer is invited to their home, where he repeats the story of the day's events. Rebecca returns with Eliezer to the land of Canaan, where they encounter Isaac praying in the field. Isaac marries Rebecca, loves her, and is comforted over the loss of his mother.

Abraham takes a new wife, Keturah (Hagar), and he fathers six additional sons, but Isaac is designated as his only heir. Abraham dies at age 175, and his two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael, bury Abraham next to Sarah.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What is the one piece of advice you should give your children before their wedding?





We must educate our children with realistic expectations for marriage and the milestones that follow.

TEXT 1

Genesis 24:67

וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ, וַיִּקַּח אֶת רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֶּאֱהָבֶהָ.

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and he married Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her.

The Torah describes in great detail the courtship and loving relationship of Isaac and Rebecca. Unlike other biblical couples, their marriage had no conflict.



TEXT 2A

Genesis 29:18, 20

יח. וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל, וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבָדְךָ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים
בְּרָחֵל בִּתְּךָ הַקְּטַנָּה . . .

כ. וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים, וַיִּהְיוּ בְעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים
אֲחָדִים בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ.

18. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, “I will work for you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter.” . . .

20. So Jacob worked for Rachel seven years, but they appeared to him like a few days because of his love for her.



We are told that Isaac loved Rebecca only after marriage, unlike Jacob and Rachel’s love at first sight.

TEXT 2B

Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel, Genesis 29:20

הָיְתָה אַהֲבָתוֹ כָּל כָּךְ רַבָּה וַחֲזָקָה שֶׁלֹּא הִרְגִּישׁ בְּעָמָל וְיגִיעָה כָּל הַיָּמִים. כְּאִלּוּ הָיוּ הַשָּׁנִים . . . א' אוֹ שְׁנֵי יָמִים. כִּי מֵרוֹב חֶשְׁקוֹ בָּהּ נִרְאָה לוֹ שֶׁלְּקָחָהּ בְּזוֹל. וְהַקּוֹנֶה בְּזוֹל יִפְרַע בְּעַיִן יָפָה.

His love for her was so great and so strong that he felt no toil or effort all those days. The years felt to him as if they were . . . one or two days. Because of his intense yearning for her, seven years seemed like a bargain to him. One who acquires something for a bargain pays willingly.

QUESTIONS

1. This love at first sight is the dream everyone wants, but why did Isaac and Rebecca wait until after the wedding to develop their love?

TEXT 3

Genesis 24:3–4, 8

ג. וְאַשְׁבִּיעֲךָ בַּה' אֱלֹקֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וֵאלֹקֵי הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבּוֹ.

ד. כִּי אֶל אַרְצִי וְאֶל מוֹלַדְתִּי תֵּלֵךְ, וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי לְיִצְחָק . . .

ח. וְאִם לֹא תֹאבֶה הָאִשָּׁה לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֶיךָ וְנִקִּיתָ מִשְּׁבֻעָתִי זֹאת, רַק אֶת בְּנִי לֹא תָשֵׁב שָׁמָּה.

3. I will make you swear by G-d, G-d of Heaven and G-d of earth, that you not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell.

4. Instead, go to my land and to my birthplace and take a wife for my son Isaac. . . .

8. If the woman does not wish to follow you, you will be free of this oath; only do not bring my son back there.

QUESTIONS

2. Why did Abraham insist that Isaac's wife come specifically from Mesopotamia, instead of from Canaan?
3. After Eliezer's journey, he set a sign that the woman who gave water to him and his camels would be Isaac's wife. Rebecca did so, but how did this act prove she was the right match?



Hollywood shows love as a spark or checklist, but this love doesn’t last as people change.

TEXT 4

Mishnah, Avot 5:16

כָּל אַהֲבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָה בְדָבָר, בָּטֵל דָּבָר בְּטֵלָה אַהֲבָה. וְשֶׁאֵינָהּ תְּלוּיָה בְדָבָר, אֵינָהּ בְּטֵלָה לְעוֹלָם.

אֵיזוֹ הִיא אַהֲבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָה בְדָבָר? זוֹ אַהֲבַת אַמְנוֹן וְתָמָר, וְשֶׁאֵינָהּ תְּלוּיָה בְדָבָר? זוֹ אַהֲבַת דָּוִד וְיהוֹנָתָן.

Any love that is dependent on something, when the thing ceases, the love also ceases. But a love that is not dependent on anything never ceases.

What is [an example of] a love that is dependent on something? The love of Amnon for Tamar. And one that is not dependent on anything? The love of David and Jonathan.

Checkbox love:
love based on how someone fits your list and what you gain, changing with your needs.

Real Love:
love based on who the person is, not what you gain; a steady bond that grows over time.

Love at first sight is rare: most love starts as **“checkbox”** love and grows into a lasting bond like Isaac and Rebecca’s.



TEXT 5

Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, Baal Haturim, Genesis 24:67

וַיֶּאֱהָבֶהָ. ב' בַּמָּסוֹרָה, הָכָא, וְאִידָךְ: וַיֶּאֱהָבֶהָ אַמְנוֹן.

הָתָם הָיְתָה אַהֲבָה הַתְּלוּיָה בְּדָבָר עַל כֵּן בָּטְלָה. אֲבָל הָכָא אֵינָהּ תְּלוּיָה בְּדָבָר עַל כֵּן לֹא בָּטְלָה.

The words “and he loved her” appear twice in the Torah: in this instance [of Isaac and Rebecca] and in the instance of Amnon [and Tamar].

That was a love that depended on something, which is why it expired. This love was not dependent on anything; therefore, it prevailed.

ANSWER 1

Isaac and Rebecca waited until after the wedding because they didn't base their relationship on “love at first sight.” Instead, they built a deep, lasting bond that grew over time, becoming selfless and forgiving.

OPTIONAL

TEXT 6

Deuteronomy 24:5

כִּי יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה חֲדָשָׁה לֹא יֵצֵא בַּצָּבָא וְלֹא יַעֲבֹר עָלָיו לְכָל דָּבָר, נָקִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵיתוֹ שָׁנָה אֶחָת וְשִׂמַּח אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר לָקָח.

When a man takes a new wife, he should not go out in the army, nor be subjected to anything associated with it. He should remain free for his home for one year, and he should delight, his wife, whom he has taken.

OPTIONAL



The Torah describes the first year of marriage as a year of focus and joy, spent building a life together at home without outside distractions.

OPTIONAL

TEXT 7A

Yonatan ben Uziel, *Targum Yonatan*, ad loc.

וְיִחְדֵּי עִם אִנְתְּתֵיהּ דְּנָסִיב.

And he should rejoice with the woman he married.

OPTIONAL

TEXT 7B

Targum Unkelos, ad loc.

וְיַחֲדֵי יָת אִתְּתֵיהּ דְּנָסֵיב.

And he should make his wife happy.

OPTIONAL

RABBI YONATAN

- Focus on your happiness.
- Notice what you love in your spouse.
- The first year isn't full selfless love.
- Build personal joy in the relationship.

UNKELOS

- Focus on your wife's happiness.
- Bring her joy and provide her needs.
- Begin selfless love from day one.
- Focus on giving, not receiving.

OPTIONAL

TEXT 7C

Rashi, ad loc.

וְשִׂמַּח, יְשַׂמַּח אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ.

וְתַרְגּוּמוֹ, "וְיַחְדֵּי יָת אִתְּתֵיהּ". וְהַמְתַרְגֵּם "וְיֶחְדֵּי עִם אִתְּתֵיהּ" טוֹעֶה הוּא, שֶׁאֵין זֶה תַּרְגּוּם שֶׁל "וְשִׂמַּח", אֶלָּא שֶׁל "וְשָׂמַח".

The Hebrew word *vesimach* means "he should delight" his wife.

The correct rendering is as it appears in the *Targum* [*Unkelos*]: "*And he should make his wife happy*." One who renders it "he should rejoice with his wife" is mistaken, for this is not the translation of *vesimach* [in the causative conjugation—"make his wife happy"] but of *vesamach* [in the intransitive conjugation—"rejoice with his wife"].

OPTIONAL

וְשִׂמַּח—and he will bring joy

vesimach

וְשָׂמַח—he should rejoice

vesamach

Rashi, like Unkelos, explains it as “to bring joy,” meaning he should make his wife happy. From the start, marriage should be built on giving so it lasts.

TEXT 8

Mrs. Chana Sharfstein, "The Rebbe Taught a Young Woman the Meaning of Love," www.chabad.org

The Rebbe said to me, "I know you like to read."

I said, "Oh, yes, I do."

He said, "And what kind of books do you like to read?"

I said, "I like to read novels."

He said, "Novels are in the category of fiction, and fiction is not real. It is make-believe. What you read in a novel is just make-believe. It is not what happens in real life. It's not like two people meet and there is this big blinding storm of passion. That is not what real love or real life is all about.

"When two people meet, there can be a thread of understanding, like a tiny flame. And then, as these two people merge their lives, decide to build a home together, and raise a family, through the everyday activities of life, caring and sharing, committing to each other, and going through the daily tribulations of life, this little flame grows ever brighter. It grows into a much bigger flame until these two people, who started as virtual strangers, their lives become intertwined to such a point that neither one of them can think of life without the other one.

"That is what true love is all about. It's the small acts that you do daily that transform you from you and me to us."



Enduring love is built slowly through daily acts of care, commitment, and shared life, until two people become deeply intertwined as one.

TEXT 9

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aharon of Luntshitz, *Keli Yakar*, Genesis 24:3

שֶׁטֶבַע הָאָבוֹת נִמְשָׁךְ גַּם לַבָּנִים. וְזֶה דָּווקָא בְּאוֹתָן עֲבֵירוֹת הַבָּאִים מִפְּאַת הַחוֹמֶר כַּאֲכִילָה, וְזִמָּה, וְכִילוּת, וְקִנְאָה, וְכָל הַמִּדּוֹת הָרָעוֹת הַנִּתְלִין בְּחוֹמֶר. נְגָעִים אֵלּוּ מִתְפַּשְׁטִים מֵהָאָבוֹת לַבָּנִים, וְתוֹלְדוֹתֵיהֶן כַּיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶם.

A parent's genetic nature is passed down to their children. But this is only regarding genetic inclinations such as excessive eating, carnal indulgence, greed, jealousy, and other negative traits bound to the body. These blemishes spread from parents to their offspring, who resemble them.

אֲבָל הָעֲבוֹדַת גִּילּוּלִים דָּבָר הַתָּלוּי בְּשִׂכְלוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם אֵינוֹ מִתְפַּשֵּׁט מֵאָבוֹת לְבָנִים . . . הָאֱמוּנָה הִיא תְּלוּיָה בְּשִׂכְלוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם . . . לָמָּה יִתְפַּשֵּׁט זֶה מֵאָבוֹת לַבָּנִים?

Paganism, however, which depends on a person's intellect, does not spread from parent to child. . . . Faith is rooted in the mind. . . . So why should paganism pass genetically from parents to children?

עַל כֵּן הָיָה מַרְחִיק הַכְּנַעֲנִים שֶׁהָיוּ שְׁטוּפֵי זִמָּה וְכַמָּה מִינֵי עֲבֵירוֹת הַנִּתְלִים בְּחוֹמֶר הָאָדָם זוּלַת עֲבוֹדַת גִּילּוּלִים, וְלֹא הִרְחִיק לָבָן וּבְתוּאֵל שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה בָּהֶם כִּי אִם פְּחִיתַת הָעֲבוֹדַת גִּילּוּלִים לְבַד.

This is why Abraham distanced himself from the Canaanites, who were steeped in sexual immorality and many kinds of bodily transgressions except for idolatry. By contrast, he did not distance himself from Laban and Bethuel since their failings were limited to idolatry.

ANSWER 2

Abraham insisted that Isaac's wife come from Mesopotamia since the people there were upstanding and shared his values, unlike the residents of Canaan. Although they served idols, he knew that idolatry could be unlearned: not so a predisposition to negative character.

TEXT 10

The Pentateuch, Translated and Explained by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Gateshead, England: Judaica Press Ltd., 1982), Genesis 24:67

The more she became his wife, the more he loved her. Like this marriage of the first Jewish son, most Jewish marriages are contracted not by passion but by reason and judgment. Parents, relatives, and friends consider which young people are really suited to each other, bring them together, and then love grows more and more as they get to know each other.

But most non-Jewish marriages are made by what they *call* "love." One has only to glance at the novels depicting life to notice what a gulf usually yawns between the "love" before marriage and after—how rapid and insipid everything then seems, how different from all the glamour one had imagined, etc., etc. Such "love" is blind; every step into the future brings disappointment.

But of Jewish marriage it says, "And he married Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her." There, the wedding is not the culmination but the seed, the root of love.

Marriage requires shared values and goals.

Couples first interview to see if they can build a shared Jewish home, then consider emotional compatibility.



TEXT 11

John Gottman, "Making Marriage Work", www.youtube.com

We were very surprised to find out that we could predict which couples would stay together and which ones would get a divorce with over 90 percent accuracy. . . . In fact, in just fifteen minutes of a couple talking about an area of continuing disagreement, we could predict with 85 percent accuracy whether they'd get divorced. And not only that, after following couples for fourteen years, we could predict not only if they would get divorced but when they would get divorced. . . .

Look at the ratio of positive elements during conflict, things like interest, asking questions, being nice to one another, being kind, being affectionate, being empathetic. Then look at all the negative elements like criticism, hostility, anger, and hurt feelings. Then take the ratio of positive to negative. In relationships that stay together, the ratio is five to one. There are five times as many positive things in relationships that work as there are negative ones. . . .

It suggests that if you do something negative to hurt your partner's feelings, you have to make up for it with five positive feelings. So, the equation is not balanced with positive and negative. Negative has a lot more ability to inflict pain and damage than positive things have to heal and bring closeness.

TEXT 11

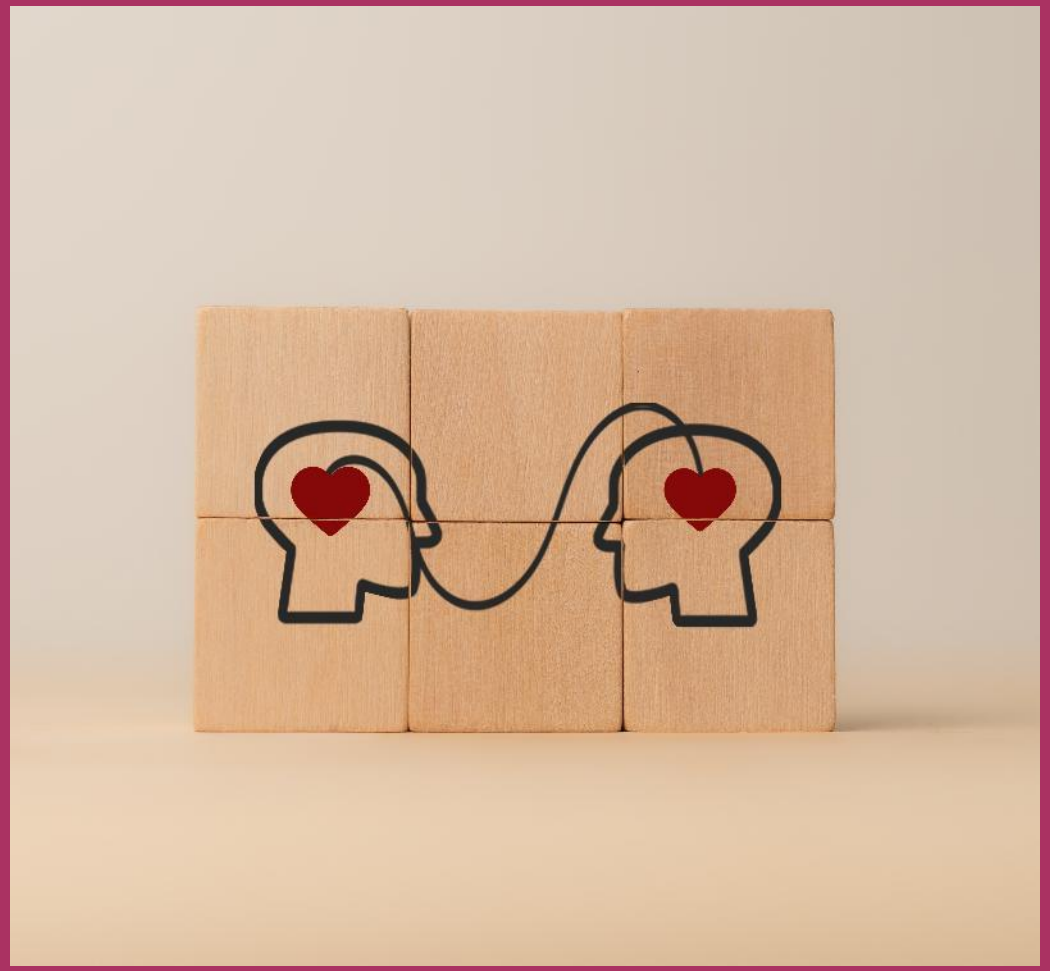
John Gottman, “Making Marriage Work”, www.youtube.com

For the couples who ended up divorced, the ratio was eight negatives to one positive, so there was a little more negativity than positivity among couples heading toward divorce.

For a relationship to feel right, it has to be a very rich climate of affection, humor, fun, intimacy, and empathy.

Marriage requires empathy and selfless love.

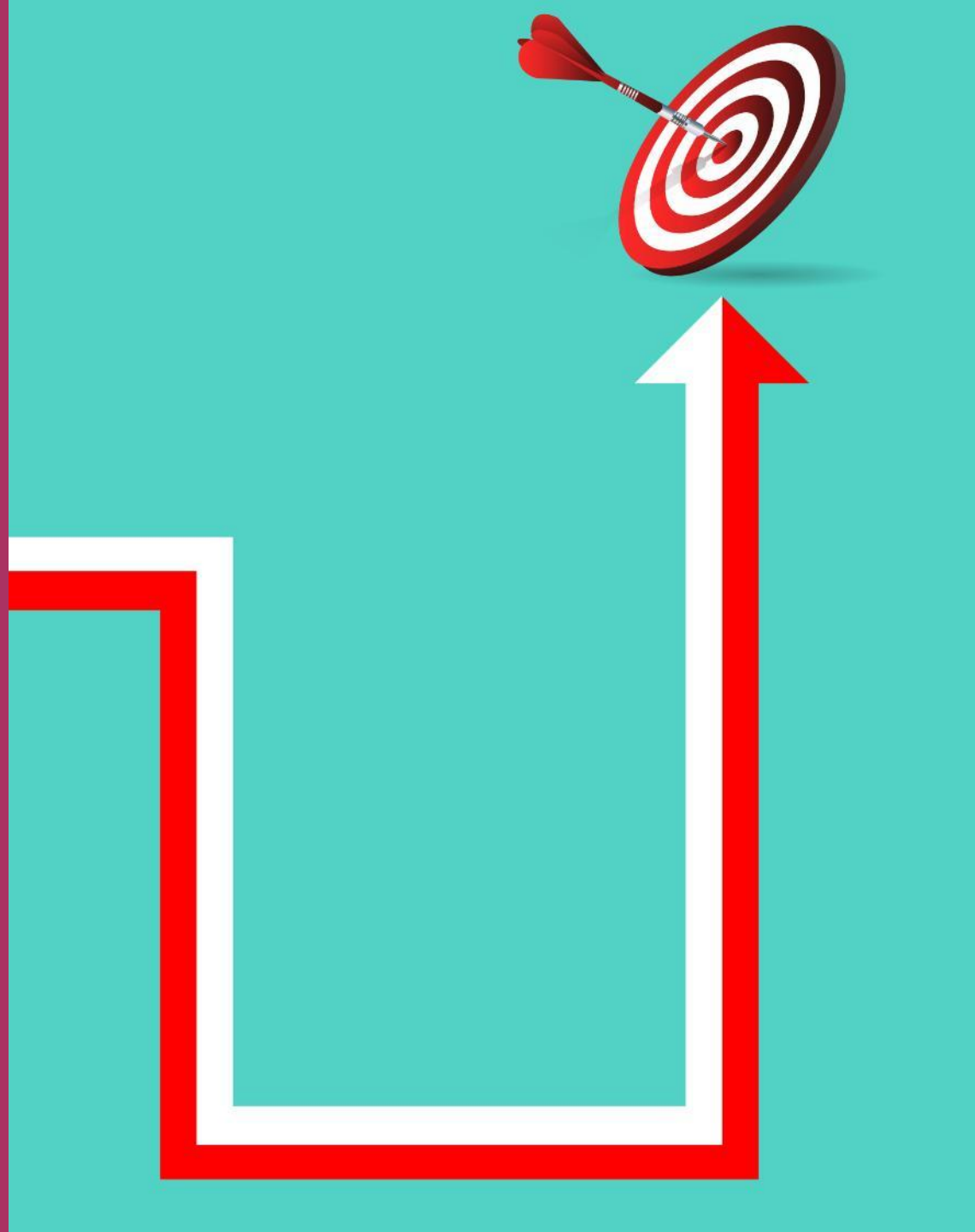
Lasting love is built when couples learn to see from each other’s perspective and remain committed through challenges.



ANSWER 3

Eliezer tested Rebecca for kindness and empathy. Her care in drawing water for him and his camels showed she had the qualities to build a strong Jewish home and a lasting bond where small flaws don’t matter.

Give your child the best gift: a match based on shared values, goals, and empathy, with guidance to stay committed. Over time, shared experiences build lasting love.



KEY POINTS

1. Despite the common perception, it is very rare for couples to experience love at first sight that lasts a lifetime. Immediate infatuation often fades with time.
2. Before marriage, most couples love each other, but it is a love based on a reason. Your spouse checks off your boxes. You don't love your spouse. You love how your spouse makes you feel. This is a selfish love.
3. Self-oriented love is not lasting. When deep-seated needs are unmet, selfish love falls apart.
4. Years of shared living build a more profound, selfless love that is enduring. The couple becomes entwined like one and can no more part from each other than from themselves. This is the secret of marriage.
5. To achieve this, at least two critical ingredients are necessary. They must share values and life goals. They must also be empathetic: able to see things from the other's perspective.


JLI