

# SOULMATES

JEWISH SECRETS TO MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS



**MARRIAGE** is the most powerful relationship there is. Not just because marriage is a universal human ideal. Not just because it is the foundation of the family unit. But also because marriage is a union of two as-yet-incomplete souls. The love between husband and wife is not just the product of mutual attraction, but an expression of an intrinsic bond that unites them in heart and mind, body and soul. Indeed, marriage is much deeper, much more meaningful, and much more important than most of us understand.

*SoulMates*, a new seven-session course for women, draws upon millennia of Jewish wisdom, from the mystical to the down-to-earth, allowing women of all ages

and walks of life to explore the intricacies of love and marriage from a Jewish perspective. The course will delve into a diverse array of Jewish sources—biblical, Talmudic, halachic, Kabbalistic, and Chasidic—seamlessly weaving together the philosophical, the spiritual, and the practical. Students will leave every lesson having experienced an “aha” moment and with tangible, concrete tools to enhance their relationship.

Whether students are currently married, considering someday tying the knot, or simply seeking to better understand the spiritual root of love and marriage, *SoulMates* will forever change how they think about the most important relationship in life, in all its beauty and complexity.



KISLEV

## LESSON 1

### Two Halves, One Whole: The Cosmic Root of Love

Is marriage really necessary, if we can reap its social and economic benefits without getting married? Is the institution of marriage becoming obsolete?

According to a 2010 Pew research poll, 40 percent of Americans believe that the answer to the latter question is “yes.” Yet the same poll indicated that 75 percent of unmarried Americans want to get married, and 80 percent of married people say their marriage relationship is as close, or even closer, than their parents’ was!

Our generation’s lack of clarity about marriage—its purpose, its benefits, and its future—appears in stark contrast to millennia of Jewish teachings on the subject. Judaism has always seen marriage as a vital and desired institution, a relationship that surpasses all others in its significance. An in-depth look at the two-step marriage ceremony—and at the mystique of man and woman’s creation as well—will reveal Judaism’s eye-opening answer to the questions of why we marry and what the true meaning of a “soul mate” is according to our sacred tradition.



TEVET

## LESSON 2

### Behind Closed Doors: Judaism’s View of Intimacy

Is G-d comfortable in the bedroom? Rather than eschew or scoff at this question, Jewish sages throughout history have embraced it. Not only is physical intimacy *not* an obstacle to our relationship with G-d, according to our sages, but in the right context, it is a means of connecting with G-d. Far from the philosophies of religions that view sexual relations as a hindrance to living a holy life, Judaism views intimacy as the “holy of holies,” and not only because of its procreative value. It unites husband and wife in the ultimate unity, a oneness in which G-d’s presence is expressed.

How can we ensure that sexual relations are not routine and bereft of meaning, but an experience that is deeply fulfilling, meaningful, and holy? It all depends on the degree of intimacy—in soul, mind, heart, and body—between husband and wife. This lesson taps into Judaism’s vast reservoir of wisdom, both practical and Kabbalistic, on how to understand, deepen, and enhance the experience of intimacy.



SHEVAT

## LESSON 3

### Beloved Friends: Synergizing and Sanctifying Love and Desire

We start out starry-eyed, but is “passionate marriage” realistic in the long term? How can one relationship give us the comforting security we crave from commitment as well as the spark of novelty and mystique that fuels desire?

The mitzvah of *taharat hamishpachah*, or “family purity,” has long been shrouded in mystery. Yet these laws may just hold the secret to synchronizing—and sanctifying—these paradoxical aspects of marriage, while also revealing an unparalleled connection between us and G-d.

This lesson clears up myths and misconceptions and uncovers the wisdom and beauty of *taharat hamishpachah*, allowing students to gain a deeper appreciation for the profound impact that it can have on the life of a Jewish couple—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.



ADAR

## LESSON 4

### Respecting Your Other Half: Navigating Gender Differences

What is the single most important ingredient to a happy marriage? Ask one hundred people this question, and you will likely get one hundred different answers. Judaism has an answer of its own as to the most fundamental ingredient necessary to assure a happy and harmonious marriage. It is an ingredient so powerful, in fact, that when employed, even just one spouse’s commitment to improving the marriage can be transformational.

This lesson explores this question in the context of one of the biggest challenges marriage presents: the differences between men and women, especially with regard to their needs in a relationship. These differences are all too often the cause of friction, commonly leading one to lament: “Will he (or she) ever change?!” Yet understanding and respecting these differences is the key to a happy and healthy relationship. This lesson explores Judaism’s timeless advice for valuing one’s spouse for who he is and for what is important to him.



NISAN

## LESSON 5

### Becoming a Better Half: Jewish Insights into Preserving Marital Harmony

Marriage can bring out the best in us. But sometimes it can also bring out the worst. In the heat of the moment, rational thinking often seems to go out the window. Yet, the very essence of being human is the ability to inhibit an impulsive response in favor of a reasoned one; this is what separates us from animals and empowers us to take the high road in any situation.

By mentally preparing ourselves for marital conflicts and challenges before they occur, our minds can “rule over” our hearts and have a significant and lasting effect on our behavior.

This lesson explores insights, tools and meditations both for dissipating feelings of anger and resentment that fuel conflict, as well as for reorienting our perspectives to help prevent them in the first place. In so doing, it helps us turn the rough patches of our marriage into catalysts for becoming a better half.



IYAR

## LESSON 6

### Reservations for Two: Defining Marriage's Boundaries

Approximately 20 percent of married men and 15 percent of married women in the United States under 35 admit to having been unfaithful. Yet, at the same time, about 95 percent of Americans believe that infidelity is wrong. This leads to a startling and dismaying conclusion: Even those with expectations of eternal faithfulness, even those in happy marriages, are not immune to crossing a line into a place they never dreamed they would go. The Talmud, in fact, states that no one, even a righteous individual, is immune to the temptation of infidelity.

Judaism shows us not only how to thwart temptations that threaten our marriage from the outside, but how to enhance it from within to ensure that the walls of exclusivity and privacy of our marriage remain fortified and strong.



SIVAN

## LESSON 7

### Happily Ever After? The Challenge of Divorce and What it Teaches Us About Marriage

Sadly, “happily ever after” is not the case for many marriages today. Yet, while Judaism on one hand allows ample room for divorce, it also considers it to be a monumental tragedy; because we are “soul mates,” truly one with our spouse, severing this union is akin to an amputation.

To many, these two facts seem contradictory, and the often euphemistic manner in which the Talmudic sages spoke about divorce only adds to the confusion and misconception about Judaism’s real view of divorce.

What indeed constitutes grounds for divorce according to Jewish law? How far must one go, and how much must one tolerate, to make a marriage work? And when and how is it appropriate to meddle in another’s marital conflict? This lesson gives us insight into the sensitive issue of divorce and what it teaches us about the unparalleled value that Judaism places on *shalom bayit*, peace in the home.