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What's the secret of a happy marriage?

"It's like dancing, not holding each other with a heavy hand, but lightly," said Dr. Janet Newman, minister at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

"Recognize each other's different interests and abilities, and respect them in each other," said Heather Simmons, a marriage counselor and clinical social worker.

"Don't just let your lips touch; let your souls touch," said Rabbi Jay R. Davis of Temple Beth Shalom.

"Some religions require premarital counseling," said Thomas Murray, a marriage counselor. "I'd like to see it as a requirement for all marriage licenses."

If all four experts had a single common recommendation for happy marriage, it would be compromise. And the earlier in the marriage the necessary compromises are reached, the better.

"Often we are so enthralled by the idea of getting married and living happily ever after that we forget marriage comes down to something like a business," said Murray.

"The participants must have an equal voice in all important decisions. They should decide together questions about priorities: whether they want to have children early in the marriage, save first for a house or concentrate on careers. And when there is disagreement, they must be willing to negotiate."

After the honeymoon phase, said Mrs. Simmons, all too often each partner in the marriage goes back to following his individual path, seeking his own goals. Instead, they must bring their individual



The wedding is the fun part, but then comes years after when a couple must cope with families and the day-to-day business of life.

Experts: Compromise vital to nurture happy marriage

goals together.

A marriage should leave space for each partner's own individual growth and own interests, said Newman. The partners need not share all interests, but they should keep in touch with each other's interests. And they should encourage each other's personal growth.

Often families become involved. Newman, because she is a minister of the liberal Unitarian Universalist Church, frequently is called upon to marry couples of differing faiths.

"I do it as a community service, recognizing that the couple may not become members of my church," she said.

"But with interfaith marriages, it is important to talk with the couple about how their families are taking it. There can be



Davis

pretty awkward dynamics if the families are against it."

In a case like this, Newman tries to get the couple and their families together before the marriage to try to talk out the difficulties.

In any case of differing goals, said Murray, it is best to talk out the problem before the marriage. If the marriage has already taken place, then the sooner they are discussed, the better.

"In Judaism, the couple



Murray



Newman

getting married make a contract," said Davis.

"The form of the contract itself is well over 2,000 years old. The contract outlines the respect for each other that the couple must show, and the fairness with which they must treat each other.

"But the contract hints at much more than that. It hints that they must be three things to each other — partners, friends and lovers."

As partners, the couple will be handling such re-



Simmons

sponsibilities as operating a household and raising a family. They need agreements on how they will meet these responsibilities; they must work them out. They must decide who will do which tasks, both inside and outside the household. Then they must handle those jobs.

And they must be willing to change those assignments, too, if conditions change. In other words, they have to be free to grow together.

But the couple also needs to be friends, or else they will miss out on much of the magic of life. Friends are loyal, which does not mean going along with everything the partner does, but it does mean always being there to help.

Friendship involves being open, sharing, giving each other space

and helping each other with individual growth, said Davis.

Then there is the job of being lovers.

"That's the tough one," said Davis.

"It doesn't just mean being sexual partners," he said. "You can be sexual partners without being lovers. But in addition to touching each other physically, you must touch each other spiritually."

It means thinking of the other party first, he said. It means being willing to give.

If a couple reaches a point of disagreement, said Murray, it is negotiation and compromise time. If they settle the differences, they learn about loving.

"Look for a win-win situation," said Murray. "It will set the tone for the rest of your marriage."

He gave the example of a marriage in which the wife likes to adhere to a schedule; she makes lists of jobs to be done; she keeps everything neat. The husband, on the other hand, is kind of a slob. Instead of edging the lawn, he wants to go fishing. He always has friends around messing up the house.

If the husband can learn to appreciate and praise his wife's neatness and if the wife can learn to realize life might be pretty dull without her husband's spontaneity, the two can sink their differences into common interests.

They can get along. They can accept each other as they are. They can love each other.

If, on the other hand, they resent and begrudge each other's characteristics, they will only make themselves unhappy.

"Don't marry somebody to reform him," cautioned Mrs. Simmons.

Press Journal