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Did I Marry the Right Person?

This is Episode number 71 of Stay Happily Married, "Did I Marry the Right Person?"

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I am here by phone with Rabbi Stephen Baars who is joining us from Washington, D.C. Rabbi Baars is an educator and an author who has been counseling couples for more than 20 years. He conducts a very popular seminar series called Bliss and he is the author of the book *Bliss: The Marriage and Parenting Book*.

Rabbi Baars did an episode with us of Stay Happily Married last year some time about balancing the roles of spouse and parent and we are thrilled to have him back on the show again.

Welcome back to the show, Rabbi Baars. I'm glad you could join us. How are you doing today?

Stephen Baars: Oh, great. Lovely day. Great to be on the show. Good talking to you.

Lee Rosen: Well, I really enjoyed our last talk and I think you have a great deal of wisdom and a lot of practical experience and this question -- this whole idea of did I marry the right person, which I guess is the sort of positive way to put it. I think I hear a lot of people saying, "I think I married the wrong person," question mark. But do you see a lot of people that are asking themselves that question?

Stephen Baars: I think it's easier to say it's hard to find somebody who hasn't asked that question.

Lee Rosen: Universal -- well, I do think that that's probably true. In my office, in my practice, I just hear so often people just think, "Well, there was nothing we could do because we were doomed from the start because this just wasn't a match that would have ever worked at all." But what are you -- I don't know. Are there really questions of compatibility where people do just go in the wrong direction and pick the wrong kind of person?

Stephen Baars: Well, I like to -- in my seminar I tell people like this. First of all, when we talk about the question what is the right person, the wrong person, it's only -- it only works in marriage. In marriage there's only a contract. You know, if you go buy a car and you say to your friends, "I just bought a car." Whatever, a GM, a Toyota, whatever it happens to be. So no one says to you, "Did you buy the right car?" What are you talking about? I really wanted a Maserati but what can I do? So I have this much money and these are the things I like. I had to compromise. I got the best I can.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Stephen Baars: When it comes to marriage, no one says, "You know, really, if I was younger or better looking, more brilliant, made more money I could have got a better wife. I got married when I was 42. I'm broke. I don't look so great and, you know, this is the best I could manage; the best model I could get." That's not what anybody says. Everybody understands that who you are in the world, that there's such a thing as the right person.

And the Talmud says just like -- everyone in the world knows this Talmud. The Talmud goes like this: Forty days before a child is formed in its mother's womb a voice comes down from Heaven and says, "This one's for this one." And everybody knows that. You meet the person. You go, "That's the one."

So you see, today it's like -- because I was in Israel a while back and I brought back something for my kids and they had a funny reaction. They looked at the back of it and they go, "Wow. Thank goodness finally found something not made in China." So today it's hard to find anything not made in China. So if it's made in China it tells you the certain -- the quality of the product.

I'm from England. If it's made in England, unfortunately you probably will be better off buying it from China. If it's made in Japan, wow, that's cool, right? Understand? The label on the back, where it's made, tells you a little bit about what it's going -- it's not always, obviously, accurate.

So a marriage is made in Heaven. Made in Heaven. So what does that mean?

So you see, in the same way that if you say to your son or your daughter -- you say, "Son, I picked out a great school for you. We've done the homework. We searched. We've done educational testing. And we've picked out the school." What does the son say? "Oh, no." Because he knows you picked out the school that's going to challenge him the best. It's going to make him or her the best they could be. They don't want that. They want easy street. They want to just show up, get great grades and just look good.

So the same thing with the Almighty. The Almighty says, "This girl, this guy, perfect match. Why? Because you're going to bring out the best in each other." People don't want to marry someone who's going to bring out the best in them. They get married and they want life to be easy.

Lee Rosen: Right. Sure.

Stephen Baars: You know, when I buy a stereo or a computer I don't want one so I can perfect my electronic skills or my computer programming skills. I want one I'll turn it on and I'll do my e-mail. I don't want to know how e-mail works.

Lee Rosen: You just want it to be easy. Right.

Stephen Baars: I just want it to be easy. You get married people think they get married so that it's easy street. I like to tell people, nothing is better than being single. You can't perfect that model. That's the best it can be. You can't do better than single.

Lee Rosen: It's all downhill from there.

Stephen Baars: Like I tell my -- I've got seven kids, thank God. I tell every one of my kids, none of them listen to me, every single one of them. There's a certain point when they have that zippy pajama thing -- you know, the whole thing zips up the front -- and they're in their diaper and they're in their crib and they can hold their own bottle. And I say to every one of my kids at that point, "Life doesn't get any better than this." It's downhill from now on. You can't beat that, right?

The same thing -- you can't beat being single. So people get married [inaudible] single's good. Singles' good. I've got money. I've got the food I want, dry cleaning, house taken care of. This is the life. I'll get married; it'll be even better. Huh-uh-uh-uh-uh. There's your big

mistake. It does get richer, it does get more meaningful, it does get more fulfilling, but it isn't going to be more comfortable.

Lee Rosen: I feel like you should do standup in addition to helping people with their marriages. Absolutely. Well you're right. It does get more meaningful but it does not get easier. I can't argue with you there.

Stephen Baars: I say -- when people get married they go, you know what -- and one of -- there are consistent arguments that when I was single I picked out my own clothes. I haven't picked out a tie for myself in 25 years.

I've got to tell you a funny story. My mother-in-law bought me a tie and I really liked it and my wife didn't, so she wouldn't let me wear it. So one time I got up really early and I got dressed and I got my -- "Oh, she's asleep. I'm going to put on the tie." And as I closed the door to go out she said, "Steve, you're not wearing that tie, are you?" She kind of knew when I sneak out. And I only need to just wear that tie. But when I was single I picked out my own ties.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, this whole idea of there being the perfect person for you and things being easier, I guess, it does make it hard. You have expectations, I think -- we all do -- that have got to make it awfully difficult to make a marriage work.

Stephen Baars: You do marry the perfect person; it's just not easy.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Stephen Baars: It's sort of like -- I tell people in my classes in the seminars that if you married somebody and you come home, you tell her, "Honey, I'll be home at 6:00 for dinner," you show up at 7:30 and she's fine with that; if you have a job that's so underperforming of your talents and isn't financially very rewarding and she's fine with that; if you hardly lift a finger to do any housework and take care of the kids or anything like that and she's fine with that, then you know you married the wrong person. In other words -- you get it? If your wife is on you to be a better person, then you married the right person.

There's only one person in the -- I like to tell people there's -- you can sit in a room of 20 of the people you know the best in life, like everyone you've -- make a list of the 20 people you've traveled through life the longest, you know and you're closest with the most. And you're sitting in the room and you could go around each person and tell them what they were doing wrong in life, it's as obvious as day -- "you're lazy," "you're always critical," "you never finish your job," you could tell each person. Why don't you tell any of them? It's

the reason they've been with you 20-odd or 30 years is because you don't tell them. They don't want to hear it and you're embarrassed to tell them.

There's only one person in this world who's going to put their head in the lion's mouth and tell you what you're doing wrong in life. And that's your spouse.

Lee Rosen: That's true.

Stephen Baars: And you want to get rid of them.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, but people do -- I mean, I just hear it all the time. People do use this as an excuse. They want to tell you, "I married the wrong person. There's no way it's going to work." And I hear you that maybe that means that they married exactly the right person, that this person is pushing them and it isn't easy and they're having to work and all that. But what do you do with that person that really is stuck in the idea that this really was not meant to be, that they blew it, they just picked wrong?

Stephen Baars: Well, that's the trick. That's not an easy thing because you can become obsessed. It depends on whether you're obsessed with it or you're really open to be open-minded. It's sort of like -- it was the same way when you were going to school. "Why are you so convinced this is the wrong school?" "Well, because they're constantly pushing me and telling me I could do better."

So when you're focused on the ends, that you want to be the best person you can be, then you see that marriage is great. You can't beat her. The job definition -- every relationship has a job. So the job definition for the spouse is make your partner great.

As soon as you get married -- you could be living with someone for 15 years and it's just great, you accept each other and something happens. When you put those rings on your fingers your blood streams meld and all of a sudden the little indiscretions of your -- idiosyncrasies of your spouse drive you bananas. And that's very meaningful because you want them -- you need them -- to be the best person they can be. Second best just doesn't cut it.

Unfortunately, we don't have necessarily the same desire for ourselves as we do for our spouse but we see our spouse's indiscretions and we want them to be better. We want them to grow.

So the realization -- most people will tell you, "If my spouse would only listen to me we'd have a great relationship," right? And you say to them, "It's very easy to do, to get your spouse to listen to you." "How do you do that?" "Listen to them." They're as committed and convinced about your indiscretions as you are about their indiscretions. It's universal.

You never met a case where a couple comes in and the one says, "My wife or my husband, she just doesn't listen to me," and the other one says, "I listen to them all the time." It's never one-sided. It's always they're both not listening to each other.

Lee Rosen: Right. What about a strategy of not being that person who is always trying to improve your spouse? What about figuring out a way to restrain yourself from doing that? Would you advise against that?

Stephen Baars: Oh, 100 percent. That's the beginning of it. You know, I have a friend in Los Angeles, Rabbi Braidman. He says, "You walk into a restaurant. How can you tell the people who are married the longest?"

Lee Rosen: How?

Stephen Baars: The ones that are talking the least.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Stephen Baars: The death knell of a marriage is agreeing to disagree. This should be engraved on every sermon under the *chuppah* or at the aisle. Never agree to disagree. Agreeing to disagree means for the sake of peace we won't talk about this.

Now, what happens in a marriage is you're in love, the birds are chirping, the violins are playing, everything looks great, the skies are blue, right? And then you have some little disagreement -- you want this, I want that, she thinks this, I think that, my mother -- "You know what, honey? Things are going great. Let's not talk about -- we'll segment that issue off and we just won't bring it up ever again so we can stay happily married." And if that were the case you could probably be happily married.

The problem is, the second issue comes along and then some time down the road you've got so many issues you don't talk about there's nothing to talk about.

Lee Rosen: Right.

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Stephen Baars: And the marriage becomes a landmine. Agreeing to disagree is this is really, really important to me and it's really, really important to you so we can't seem to agree on it. So what we're going to do is the things that are really important to us we're going to talk with somebody else. And we're only going to talk in the marriage about things that aren't that important.

Lee Rosen: Right. That is a fascinating twist on that because I don't think most people -- I think most people would think they were taking the safer course to just drop it, you know, and move on to something else.

Stephen Baars: A hundred percent. Right. At first it seems very innocuous, just like, "Okay. Fine. It's one issue." But it doesn't end with that one. You avoided figuring it out. Now, if you actually try and tackle every single issue it's not comfortable, it's not easy, and most of the time you will solve them. There will be some things you just -- "This one we're going to have to table and we'll bring it up again." But you'll cover a lot of ground.

Now, I'd like to compare marriage to sea water. You can get these fancy bottled water, Evian and all kinds of pure waters and everything. So you take that bottled water and you compare it to sea water, there really isn't a tremendous amount of difference. It's just a question of how much sediment is in the water. You can clean that water up; you can get the pure water. And the difference between the pure water and tap water is also not that different.

But if you take a bottle of that pure water and every day you just put one little grain of sand in there, after a week you could probably still drink it but eventually it's going to become sea water.

And that's what happens in marriage. It's not one thing that breaks the marriage; it's just bad habits that you just instilled at the beginning that just carried on and just eventually just -- it's horrendous.

Lee Rosen: Right. It's --

Stephen Baars: You've got nothing in common.

Lee Rosen: -- all those little decisions you make along the way.

Stephen Baars: All those little decision along the way. Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Well, that does make it hard, when people realize that they've reached a breaking point, to go back and fix things because it isn't

really a recent problem; it's been a problem for years. It does make it tough to kind of turn the boat in a different direction.

Stephen Baars: Well, it's true and it isn't true. It's true that you've got a lot of bad habits, but the point is that it's sort of like anything. It's sort of like a business. It's sort of like health. It's like anything in life. If you engage in something that's innately unhealthy, you'll hit a point where it doesn't work anymore. The car will break down. And that's not a point to necessarily throw the car out or to close the business down; that's a point to say, okay, we made a bad inflection move some time back. Let's figure out what that is and redirect it. And you'll find that the relationship will be far more meaningful than actually if you got it right in the first place.

Lee Rosen: Uh-huh. Very interesting. Sort of analogous to that situation where I guess things go maybe badly in a restaurant and they do something nice to make it up and you become more of a loyal customer of that restaurant. Once you've been through that difficulty, you do feel more connected. That's very interesting.

Stephen Baars: Exactly. A hundred percent. Same thing with children. You know, unfortunately most people are not perfect parents when they have kids, me included; right? One of the reasons I had seven kids is by the seventh I think I got an idea.

Eddie Cantor once said, "Before I had children I had six theories or raising children. And after I had six kids, I've got none."

Lee Rosen: Exactly.

Stephen Baars: So same with children. You raise your children according to how you think is the right thing to do and then some time down the road, invariably you realize you didn't know what you were talking about. It doesn't mean you put them up for adoption. It means you sit down with your son or your daughter and say, "Listen, I used to think this is the way to go," or however you deal with that.

But if you're willing to -- the worst mistake -- this a very key idea. What's the worst mistake you could possibly do in your marriage?

Lee Rosen: What?

Stephen Baars: Not learning from it.

Lee Rosen: Right.

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Stephen Baars: You can repair anything. Anything. It doesn't matter how -- it's a very deep Jewish idea. You can repair anything if you're willing to learn from it.

Lee Rosen: And I see that over and over again. I do see that in my life and in the life of the people that I talk to that listen to the show. Those that are willing to work at it and learn from it really will -- they do make it work.

You know, we started off with this question of did I marry the right person. And I thought it was very interesting; you meet so many people that are working on their marriages and your response to that question was that everybody asks themselves that question. And I do think that's reassuring to all of the people that are asking themselves that question because I don't think we know that everybody else wonders about that. That really is very helpful.

Tell me about -- every time I listen to you and we talk I feel like I learn so much. And I know you have the book, the *Bliss: The Marriage and Parenting Book* and you also do seminars. Fill us in on -- if somebody's listening and they want to come learn more from you, what are you doing to make that possible?

Stephen Baars: Well, as you mentioned, the book, the seminar. You can look online, getbliss.com. The best way is the seminar. It sounds like a lot; it's 16 hours but you come through it. It's the A to Z of every issue -- we've taken every single issue that people have in their relationships and distilled it out. And you just come through and it just -- you come through with just a clean idea of how to make this work.

Lee Rosen: Right. You say 16 hours sounds like a lot. I think 16 hours with you of listening to your stories and listening to your insights and -- you take things that we all see in our own way and you help us to see them in a different way. And I suspect that would be a very interesting 16 hours that would make an awful big difference in a lot of marriages.

Stephen Baars: Thank you. I hope so.

Lee Rosen: Well, I really appreciate you joining us today. Thank you so much for being here and for taking the time to share some of your ideas. I appreciate it.

Stephen Baars: Oh, thanks, Lee. It's been a real pleasure. It's great talking to you. You run a great show. Keep up the great work you're doing.

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Lee Rosen: Well, thank you. And let me encourage all of you to go and take a look at Rabbi Baars website, getbliss.com. Lots of great articles, blog posts about marriage and parenting; and you can find out more about the bliss seminars there, as well as private coaching. And the book is available in book stores all over. You can find out more about it at the website, getbliss.com.

Thank you for listening this week. I hope that you will join us again next week. I would love to hear your comments about this episode or any episode. You can leave a comment on the site at StayHappilyMarried.com or feel free to call us at our comment line, (919) 256-3083.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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