

A HUSBAND'S PROMISES

By Jerry Lob

Illustration by Albert Hakakian

I will remember that I am your husband and that I love you.

I will be kind to you. I will keep in mind all the stories about the incredible gentleness our *gedolim*, Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zt"l*, and Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, *zt"l*, had toward their wives. And they will be my teachers in gentleness.

I will appreciate you more and express it more often. I will model appreciation of you for our children to see.

I will not belittle you in any way, nor will I attack people who are dear to you.

I will remember that while it is you who lights the Shabbat candles, that wonderful symbol of *shalom bayit*, our harmony is not your responsibility alone. It is our responsibility; in fact, it is I who prepares the candles for your flame.

I will remember that you are not “one of the boys,” and that I need to speak and act differently to you.

I will apologize more often, even if the hurt was unintentional. I know that since we are different people, it will be impossible to not hurt you at times. I will take responsibility, say, “I am sorry,” and not accuse you of being overly sensitive.

I will focus more on your positives and try not to nitpick. I've got my own nits. I will concentrate on your strengths, and not try to hold you to some inner image of what I think you should be. I will be more accepting of all of you, and remember that you, all of you, are the gift that Hashem sent, just for me.

I will not try to control you or dictate to you. I will remember at all times that you are an adult, and I will not be paternalistic. You are not my child.

I will not tell you what your feelings are; they belong to you. I will trust you with my feelings. I will allow myself to be vulnerable at times, even when this is difficult.

I will put the “*hav*” (give) back in *ahavah* and remember the beautiful words of Rav Eliyahu Dessler, *zt"l*: the secret to a joyous marriage is for each of us to focus on giving. The more we give, the more our *ahavah* will grow.

I will not underestimate the power of small gestures, the special smile, the note, the small gift, the loving word.

I will *daven* for our marriage, asking Hashem to give us the wisdom to help each other grow.

I will treat you with respect at all times. My actions, tone of voice, facial gestures and words will all reflect this solemn commitment.

I will never, ever hit you. Ever.

I will not try to intimidate you by shouting, stamping my feet, blocking your way, violating your space or breaking things. I will control my anger and express it in non-threatening, non-destructive ways. If this proves too difficult, I will seek help.

I will try to not be so rigid in general, or so serious, be a little lighter.

I will make our marriage a priority. I will find some time every day to spend with you alone, for at least a few moments. I will make every effort to go out with you, when possible, several times a month. I know that all relationships need talking and time together. I know that the stronger the marriage, the more stable the family. Because while the children may act unaware, they see it all, they know it all, and the closer we are, the happier, more secure they are. I will remember that my efforts are an investment in eternity, and a source of joy for the *Shechinah*, the third partner in the triad of our *Mishkan*.

I will take you seriously. Your opinions, your feelings, your decisions will all be treated with seriousness. I will not poke fun at you. And when I disagree with you, I will do so clearly and assertively, and in a fashion that in no way compromises your dignity. Your dignity is sacred.

I will remember the fragility of the human soul and the power of words—words that can comfort, and support, and strengthen, and build, words can bring closeness and beauty. And words that are like knives, words that cut, and damage, and destroy.

I will not use silence as a weapon.

I will remember that I don't need to win every argument. Is winning so important that I ignore your hurt? I will actively seek a spirit of compromise.

I will smile more and laugh more with you. Even when I'm tired, so tired, and overwhelmed by work and pressure, I will look to laugh with you. And I know this will be healing for me as well. I will remember my father's special smile for my mother.

I will encourage and support you when you need me, and will give you space if you ask for it.

I will try to ask for what I need from you, directly, and will not expect you to read my mind. I hope for the same from you.

I will fight fairly. I will not get personal. And I will always keep in mind that it's not okay to hurt you even when you have hurt me. There is no justification for meanness. Period. I will try to stay calm, count to ten, and sometimes leave the room to find that calm inside myself, and try to remember, even during this angry time, what you mean to me. Do I want to jeopardize what we've built?

I will tell you when you have hurt me. I will not bury it, making believe it's okay, even for the sake of *shalom bayit*, because I know it will fester and surface in other ways. I will take my courage in my hands and talk to you. I will not counterattack and escalate our hurt. I may say “ouch,” and will ask, at times, for an apology.

I will try to be home more during the “hectic times,” homework, bedtime, etc., and will be more help to you in general. I will arrange my work and even my learning schedule with this in mind.

I will be accepting of your friends. I understand that it is important for you to have relationships outside of ours.

I will do my part to bring more *kedushah* into our home, to make it a place of respect, love, joy and holiness.

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