



*Lesson Three:
Exercises on Becoming a
Wife or Husband from
“The Conscious Bride’s
Wedding Planner”*

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*Exercises on Becoming a Wife or Husband:
Collage and Interviews*

Many of my clients feel bereft of role-models that will help them define what the wife or husband identity means to them. They feel as if they are standing on the frontier without a roadmap or compass. While in some ways the self-definition of an identity can only come within, it can also be helpful to find real people who represent the kind of wife/husband that you would like to be. Two exercises have been helpful in defining and finding these role-models: making a collage and conducting interviews.

Collage

Creation a visual image is the first step in being able to step into a new role. Use the following blank page to create a collage of positive images that you associate with being a wife or husband. Cut out images from magazines, use photographs, and/or draw your own role-model until you can look at your collage and feel a sense of inspiration about your new identity. If you feel restricted by the limited space, you may choose to work with a larger sheet of paper.

Interviews

Another way to crystallize your vision is to conduct spontaneous or planned interviews with married women or men who you respect. Set your intention to encounter people who are willing to talk about how they define themselves as wives or husbands and what the role means to them. Ask people you know – aunts, uncles, mothers, father, cousins, friends, teachers; ask people you don't know – professors, doctors, flight attendants, the person sitting next to you on the subway. Soon you will have a verbal collage to complement your visual one. Their words will help you develop a sense of who you want to be in your marriage and what the word wife or husband means to you.

Use the following space to transcribe the answers:

Interview #1 – Name:

Length of Marriage:

Interview #2 – Name:

Length of Marriage:

Interview #3 – Name:

Length of Marriage:

Marriage as a Spiritual Path

I hold the perspective that marriage is one of the most challenging and rewarding spiritual paths on this planet. I share the viewpoints of such spiritual thinkers and psychologists as Gary Zukav, John Welwood, Harville Hendrix and Terrence Real who maintain that marriage is designed to push every single one of your buttons *for the purpose of spiritual growth*. Marriage is hard, just as being a monk or a priestess is hard – but it's hard for a reason. No where else are we so challenged to work through our deepest fears and false beliefs and learn the most important lesson where we can learn: how to give and receive love. Joanne expressed it beautifully in [The Conscious Bride](#):

The journey of getting married and being married has been so different than I ever would have imagined. Peter and I both hold the view that marriage is not just to have fun or to have kids, but it's something that helps us evolve on a spiritual level. It is as important a vocation as it is to be a religious person.

Supposedly, in the ideal sense, the married couple is evidence of God's love in the world. Someone said that being married is a crucible, and I think that is very true. We feel like in being married each of us is helping the other to strip of the ego, we are like gold being refined. All of our issues are coming up and we are learning, in some fundamental way, how to be less

selfish and more loving. We very much see a spiritual purpose behind this whole thing and believe that is why we are together.

There is no doubt that several issues will surface in the course of a marriage. These issues could be psychological and emotional – confronting the ways in which we attempt to control or feel controlled, coming to terms with our fears of abandonment and suffocation – and they could be ways that the external world creates obstacles - issues around money, work, living environment, illness, death. If we enter marriage with the belief that we will “live happily ever after”, each time a challenge arises we will view it as a problem that we must get rid of. If, on the other hand, we accept that part of the function of marriage is to learn more about ourselves and others, to become more loving and fulfilled people in the world, then each difficult situation becomes an opportunity for growth.

It is frightfully easy to fall into the illusion that marriage is supposed to be effortless. Despite the fact that most of us grew up in families where conflict was alive and well, we still harbor the belief that it will be different for us. The belief that conflict is a sign of disease is actually part of the cause of a diseased marriage. The more you can break down your fantasies and create a realistic view of what marriage entails, the easier it will be for you to stomach it when the inevitable conflicts arise.

One effective way to foster a realistic vision is to ask other married couples about their experience of marriage. Our fantasies of effortless marriage are partially fed because we live in cloistered situations, removed from witnessing the day to day interactions of real life couples. Our role-models largely stem from the media where, if a married couple has problems, they are either tidily resolved in half an hour or the relationship suffers an affair or a divorce. As adults, we have no idea what other couples are dealing with, so we assume that Jen and Jake, the lovely couple who lives next door, must be having an easier time. Asking couples who have been married longer than five years about their marriage will help dispel your unhelpful fantasies. Approaching marriage from a realistic perspective will go a long way toward the health of your relationship.

Interview: The Reality of Marriage

These two questions come from Victoria and Miles. At their pre-rehearsal dinner (a family dinner that preceded the rehearsal dinner), they interviewed couples by asking two specific questions: What is the best part about being married? What is the hardest part of being married? They wrote down their answers in what would prove to be quite an unusual guest book.

Just as you did with your “What is a wife/husband?” interviews, set an intention to encounter at least five couples – parents, friends, relatives, parents of friends – who are willing to speak honestly about their relationship. Compile your answers to create a realistic tapestry about the beauty and challenges of marriage (I’ve created the first template for you below). I encourage you to refer to it when you find yourself stuck in the darkness wondering, “Are we the only ones who are struggling?”

Couple #1:

Married _____ years.

Best:

Hardest:

Other thoughts on marriage: