

How to select a compatible life-partner
by Ananta Rupa Das

The following is a concise treatise on the most important principles of match making. Much pain and heartache arising from unhappy marriages can be avoided, if we understand these principles and pay attention in the very beginning, before we seriously commit ourselves. There are certain common mistakes people make when getting involved with partners they are not compatible with. The material presented here is designed to help you avoid making these mistakes. Applying the maxim that "a true statement should be accepted irrespective of its origin," I have incorporated information from various sources, including books on astrology and some well-researched books by modern authors.

While reading this text, keep in mind that the suggestions given hereafter are material considerations. Following them increases the likelihood of harmony and happiness in married life, but does not, in and of itself, entail spiritual progress and realisation. Nevertheless, these principles deserve careful consideration, because marrying a compatible life-partner makes married life more peaceful. If your marriage is peaceful, you can serve your spiritual master and Krishna without difficulty, but if your mind is constantly filled with frustration, depression or anger, because you and your spouse are forever quarrelling, you cannot engage in spiritual life with concentration. So, to select a compatible marriage partner is important, because a peaceful home makes for a peaceful mind and with a peaceful mind you can serve Krishna with great vigor and determination. And, of course, without peaceful homes there cannot be a peaceful society. Most of the problems in this world are caused by disturbed or insane individuals who are the product of troubled homes. If you are planning to get married and want to do your bit to establish peace in the world, you can begin by selecting a compatible life-partner. This is the first - and perhaps the most important - ingredient of a marriage which is harmonious and happy and, therefore, productive of good children. How important it is for ISKCON to somehow or other build strong families is expressed by His Holiness Jayapataka Swami in the following words:

"The batting average of ISKCON marriages is really poor. Newlyweds are fired up for their new ashram, but more often than not they are like moths flying into the fire. They are generally ill-prepared to face the challenges of their new ashrama due to many misconceptions, illusions, romantic ideas, lack of proper role models and poor fund of knowledge of married life's demands. The result is that our marriage failure rate in ISKCON seems higher than the karmis. Strong grihastha means strong families means strong society. Our weak families are a curse and future generations will suffer due to it. For ISKCON to grow through the centuries we need to establish proper grihastha ashrama standards around the world. Although I am a sannyasi, how can I stand by and see so many marriages destroyed? We all want to see strong grihastha couples. If we have to take birth again in this world, we are really going to need it. I don't want to be born in a broken family again!" (9/3/93)

Please note that this text is a first unedited draft. It is not intended to be final and needs to be approved before it can be considered of any authority. Nevertheless, I hope that you will find the presented points instructive and relevant to the topic at hand. I am circulating a few copies of this first version in order to get feedback so I can gradually improve it and, with your blessings, ultimately prepare a manual which is acceptable to all.

How useful is astrology in match making?

Being an astrologer myself, I would like to address this issue at the very beginning. Here is my personal stand: If an astrologer knows his trade, astrology can be a very useful tool for assessing the suitability of a particular match. However, astrology is not an absolute science. If two different astrologers read your horoscope you may get to hear two different interpretations (though they will generally agree on most points). And astrologers certainly make mistakes, especially in this age. According to K.N. Rao, one of India's most reputed contemporary astrologers, even the very best astrologer can only hope to achieve a correct prediction average of 8 out of 10, what to speak of astrologers who are less qualified! I personally know of several persons who did have their compatibility checked before getting married, but they ended up divorced anyway. So, having a horoscope reading done is not an absolute guarantee that your married life will be blissfully happy.

My advice is: If you are planning to get married or if you arrange the marriage of a dependent, do consult an astrologer, but do not rely on the astrological analysis alone. Over and above all, try to understand the basic principles of match making as explained hereafter; make use of your own discrimination, do not ignore your gut feeling and consult with experienced friends and well-wishers (who should, of course, know both the girl and the boy). If these three - common sense, intuition and the advice of unprejudiced well-wishers - unambiguously speak in favour of a match, chances are very good that the marriage will work out even if there was no horoscope reading done. Double checking the compatibility astrologically is particularly advisable, if the marriage candidates are very young and inexperienced or when they or others who know them have significant doubts about the match. In these cases an astrologer can help you see things more clearly and perhaps save you from ending up disappointed or heartbroken.

Carefully deciding who you want to choose as your life-partner is ultimately your own responsibility

In this day and age, most western people trust their own judgement more than that of their parents or astrologers. In India, where marriages are arranged or sanctioned by the parents, children have implicit faith in their parents' decision and the parents, for their part, fully rely on the judgement of their astrologer. Only if the astrologer approves of a particular candidate, the boy and the girl are allowed to meet. If, after meeting once or twice under the supervision of a chaperon, it turns out that the boy and the girl like each other, they are allowed to marry. In the west the procedure is different. The candidates first fall in love and then meet freely as much as they like. Then, when their lusty desires are fully aroused, they become convinced that this person is the partner of their dreams and only then they may or may not have a horoscope reading done. If the astrologer says the match is not good, they either ignore it or go to see other astrologers until they finally find someone who tells them what they want to hear.

Under the circumstances, the astrologer's job is not to tell you whether or not you should marry a particular person; his job is simply to point out potential difficulties that might manifest in your relationship. Being unbiased, he may be aware of factors which you cannot see on your own. So, carefully consider what he or she tells you, but ultimately deciding who you want to choose as your life-partner is your own responsibility (or of your guardians, if your marriage is arranged). If your marriage fails or turns out to be turbulent, do not blame the astrologer. Blame either your bad karma or yourself - for not putting in enough time and effort into deciding whether or not someone can make a good mate.

What you can and cannot expect from your astrologer

Sometimes devotees I have never met contact me via mail or E-mail and request me to do a compatibility chart for them. I understand their predicament - probably there is no local astrologer - but assessing compatibility from a distance is somewhat like a doctor in China trying to diagnose a patient in Germany. Hardly the best methodology! Of course, there is some merit in doing a compatibility analysis by mail, but it is limited. According to Indian astrological text books, the astrologer should not only scrutinise the horoscopes but must also study the physical features of the couple. Before answering a particular question he must consider the state of mind of the questioner and also the omens seen or heard at the time of query. In other words, to give really sound advice the astrologer should meet both the girl and the boy and ask questions about their life history as well as their expectations regarding marriage and their ideal marriage partner.

It is not realistic to expect your astrologer to be a psychic with mystic powers who can read your mind and exactly foresees what is going to happen in the future. The reality is: The vast majority of astrologers are not psychics. A competent astrologer does have more insight into human psychology and relations than the average mortal and, of course, has mastered certain standard astrological techniques by which he can anticipate trends and tendencies in life. In other words, by dint of his experience and qualifications, your astrologer should be able to say what could happen or what often happens in cases like yours. However, he will not always be able to come to an immediate, definitive and absolute conclusion regarding your situation. Trying to decide whether or not you should spend the rest of your days with a particular person can be tough and time consuming. Some cases are so complex that it is not possible to give one single simple answer, at least not on the spot. Then you will hear

something like "there are compelling reasons to go ahead and compelling reasons not to go ahead" which puts the burden of decision back on your own shoulders. What then are the services a good astrologer can provide for you?

- 1) He can help you see beyond the physical appearance of a person. He may be able to spot character flaws which are hidden to a casual observer.
- 2) He can tell you whether someone is divorce-prone or destined to experience difficulties in married life regardless of who he or she gets involved with.
- 3) He can examine whether a particular relationship is based on physical attraction and compatibility or whether the bond is sustained by attraction alone.
- 4) He can examine in which areas you and your partner are more compatible and in which less.
- 5) He can tell you whether you are prone to naiveté, or self-delusion and can help you to get a more deep, complete and detached understanding of the practicality of a match.

On the difference between the Indian and the Western method of matching horoscopes

Indian and western astrologers are quite different in their approach to astrology in general and synastry (the art of matching horoscopes) in particular. Indian astrology emphasises predestination and is much concerned with predicting external events (wealth, time of death, time and number of marriages, number and sex of children etc.). Western astrologers, on the other hand, emphasise free will and are more interested in analysing the psychology and behavioural patterns of their clients rather than trying to predict external events that could take place in their life. Indian astrologers are much more inclined to give their verdict in absolute terms than their western counterpart. Indian astrologers often make categorical statements like "this is a good match, you should marry this person" or "this is a bad match, do not marry this individual", while a western astrologer usually simply points out good points and potential difficulties, but leaves the ultimate decision up to you.

When called upon to match two horoscopes, an Indian astrologer will typically apply a three-step-methodology; he will examine:

- 1) Do the charts contain combinations for short life-span?
- 2) Do the candidates have good, bad or mixed karma (destiny) for wealth, health, children and marital happiness?
- 3) Is the juxtaposition of the Moon in the man's chart and the Moon in the woman's chart harmonious or inharmonious?

If one of the two candidates appears destined to have a short life-span, the astrologer will, of course, not recommend the match. And if planetary afflictions to certain houses in the horoscope indicate unhappy married life, loss of marriage partner or divorce-proneness, the astrologer will recommend the match only, if the second candidate has similar defects in his or her horoscope. In other words, Indian astrologers try to match a man with bad marriage karma with a woman with similarly unlucky destiny. Here is a relevant quote from Parashara Hora Shastra, India's most famous astrology book:

"A woman loses her husband, if Mars is in the houses 12,4,7, or 8 from the Ascendant unaspected by or unassociated with any benefic planet. The planetary configuration which causes a woman to lose her husband also causes a man to lose his wife. If a man and a woman possessing this planetary combination join in wedlock, it ceases to have any effect."

People's lives are powerfully affected by the karma of their relatives. For example, if your child or your spouse is lucky in terms of wealth, you will naturally be benefited, too, and if they are destined to be poor or sickly, you will share in their suffering. Indian astrology even maintains that your spouse's destiny can shorten or prolong your life-span. According to Parashara "a man with indications of short life will get his longevity prolonged by marrying a woman with auspicious marks," while living with a spouse whose chart indicates a short life for the marriage partner will negatively affect your health and vitality. This brings us to an important point: No matter how well-matched your partnership is, you can only experience as much happiness in married life as your karma allows. Or in other words, you may be destined to experience a certain measure of misery in marriage and the Indian horoscope is supposed to indicate to what extent.

In Indian astrology, whether or not you and your partner are a good match is assessed

by comparing the placement of the Moon in the man's chart with that of the woman's chart and the result is represented by points. The maximum score is 36 points and if a match scores 18 or more points, an Indian astrologer will generally say "you can go ahead with the marriage". It should be noted, that this method is somewhat crude, because it does not really provide detailed information about a particular relationship, and - above all- this method is not absolutely reliable. For instance, I know of a match which scored 28 points but the couple ended up divorced anyway, while in other cases couples with less than 18 points still had a fairly good and lasting marriage. One reason for this seems to be that the traditional Indian method of match making takes into account only the Moon, but ignores the other planets. The Moon's placement and juxtaposition are highly important, no doubt, but the relative positions of the other planets - the Sun, Venus, Mars etc. - can also make or break a relationship. And here lies the main difference between Indian and Western method: Westerners consider all the planets and try to get a detailed understanding of the psychology and behavioural patterns of the two candidates on all levels - physical, intellectual, emotional, sexual and spiritual, while Indians compare mainly the two Moons.

Here is how the western method works: If Mercury in one horoscope is not harmoniously related to Mercury in the other, the two persons involved are likely to have a different style of self-expression and communication will not flow smoothly. If Mars in one horoscope is inharmoniously related to Mars in the other, the man and the woman involved may be very different in their initiative, courage and assertiveness. If Venus in one horoscope is in difficult aspect to Venus in the other, their attitudes to love and romance may be incompatible. By comparing all the planets in this way, a western astrologer can derive a good deal of information about the strong and the weak points of a relationship on different levels, but even then it may not always be possible to clearly say whether or not a match is really good. Personally, I believe that both the Indian system and the Western method have their own merits and can complement each other. In other words, an astrologer who knows both systems is at an advantage, as he can fall back upon a set of data revealing the destiny and another set revealing the psychology of the client.

I believe that in previous times there was less of a need to apply time consuming and meticulous methods of assessing compatibility because all societies, both western and Indian had built in security valves which made marriages more stable. In India, the traditional method of comparing the two Moons was apparently quite sufficient to safeguard the stability of a match (there are still very few divorces in Hindu society) for the following reasons:

- 1) People - particularly women - were very much committed to their life-partner and the thought of divorce never crossed their mind, even if their married life was somewhat unhappy. Because girls did not have relationships before marriage, they were more faithful and attached to their husband. Statistics show that there is a correlation between change of partners before marriage and predisposition to divorce after marriage. Most modern girls engage in whimsical premarital relationships and are, therefore, quick to break the marriage tie as soon as there is a slight disturbance (apparently almost 90 % of all divorces in the western world are initiated by the female partner).
- 2) Formerly marriages were arranged by the parents who invariably matched their children with a partner of the same caste, race and religion. This in and of itself guaranteed a fairly high degree of basic compatibility because it meant that marriage partners were somewhat similar in education, religiosity and social status (both from a rich family, both from a poor family, both educated, both uneducated, both from a religious or from a materialistic family etc.).
- 3) Women were trained to be submissive and respectful towards their husband which contributed a great deal to the stability of marriages.

Today so-called permissiveness, secularisation and the women's liberation movement have completely changed the face of the world. Nowadays black people marry white people, Russians marry Americans, Catholics marry Jews, rich people marry poor people, intellectuals marry uneducated spouses etc. One out of three marriages ends in divorce. Millions of children grow up in a family different of the one of their origin. Bereft of a good example of parental love and fidelity, modern youths live by the example and standards set by different role models: At the age of 14, an average European youth has already witnessed 14 000 scenes of sex or crime in movies or tv. The modern role models are not one's religious parents but sex-ridden movie stars, stoned rock singers or money-grubbing athletes. Both men and women have

become very self-centered and are mainly interested in sexual enjoyment. Their concern is instant gratification not the fate of future generations. Men are irresponsible and rough while women are independent-minded and belligerent. Their spirit is "Why should we serve you - you serve us!" thus enflaming the proverbial battle of the sexes. Even people who join the Krishna consciousness movement are still be influenced by what they have seen and learned in materialistic society.

Under the circumstances, having a harmonious relationship has become a very difficult task indeed and the mere fact that two persons are declared compatible according to the rules of astrology does not necessarily guarantee that their union will be fruitful and long lasting. The point I am trying to make is: It is very important to check compatibility before getting married, and if it is high it is definitely a point in favour of a particular match, but selecting a compatible life-partner is only half of the process of building a stable and rewarding marriage. The other half is a life-long endeavour which requires both know-how and dedication: Men have to understand the heart of a woman and learn to act in such away that their wives feel loved and protected. Women have to learn the art of becoming devoted wives and mothers, and learn to act in such a way that their men are happy and inspired. Both sexes have to learn how to make the small sacrifices that keep a marriage alive and healthy. This is the subject matter of a separate book and cannot be dealt with in this essay. For now, we will only concentrate on what you should or should not do when selecting a lifetime mate.

To select a lifetime mate, make a list of the qualities you expect your ideal partner to possess

You can avoid a lifetime of struggling and fighting, trying to turn the wrong person into the right partner, by picking the right person in the first place. To be able to do so you need to have a clear vision of the qualities your lifetime companion should possess. There is a tested technique which has helped many people identify their needs and desires and ultimately find their soul-mate: Write down the qualities you want your lifetime mate to possess. Make a detailed list of the things you expect from your partner and your marriage. Be as specific as possible and take as much time as you need (you don't have to complete your list at one sitting). Then look for a man or woman who has most of those qualities. Try to find a partner who likes the things you like, who already has what it takes to please you and whose basic nature, natural tendencies, expectations and habits are similar to your needs and standards. If you meet a man or woman who could suit your vision of your ideal mate, have them make a similar list and then read each other's lists. Ask yourself if you can honestly agree to fulfil the majority of the needs and expectations on his or her list. If you cannot, do not marry that man or woman.

Some people say that making a list of the qualities of your dream mate will attract that person into your life. Actually, if you think about it, making a list like this is nothing but trying to visualise your ideal partner and formulating a prayer. What you are really saying is: "My dear Lord, these are the attributes I would consider ideal in a mate; if you so desire, please send me a person with these qualities."

Realise that there is no perfect dream mate who can fulfil you completely in every way

When looking for a compatible life-partner or contemplating the qualities that your dream mate should have, you should not set your standards too high. You have to be realistic and keep in mind who you are and what you have to offer. If you are an average looking person - perhaps you are somewhat short or fat or wear glasses - and you are neither very educated nor from a special family, you cannot expect that you will get a mate who is not only super-attractive and educated, but also rich and aristocratic. Or, if you are a forty five year old divorcee with two children, a receding hair line and a protruding belly, the pool of partners from which you can choose is limited.

If you are intelligent, you will realise in the very first place that there is no such thing as a perfect mate and that it is naive to wait for one to come by. Some people are so picky or set their expectations so high that no man or woman on earth can possibly live up to them. Very often the qualities we think our partner should possess are not required for having a successful relationship.

Especially members of the fair sex are prone to believe in the myth that somewhere out there in the world is the perfect soul mate and this and only this person can make them happy. First of all, there is more than one potential partner you could be reasonably happy with - each experience would simply be different. And secondly, if you suspiciously compare any potential candidate to your fantasy picture of "the one" you may deprive yourself of experiencing a fulfilling relationship with someone who may not have a perfect body or a prestigious position but has most of what it takes to please you.

It is a great mistake to think that a relationship can only work when everything is perfect, that is, when there is no conflict, no differences and nothing whatsoever about your partner you don't like. Where does this false notion come from? Perhaps from watching television and movies or from reading romantic novels. Believing in this myth is very dangerous because it can cause you to reject a perfectly good proposal or end a perfectly good relationship. The reality is that no one in this world can ever be free of all flaws, including yourself. Therefore, no one can ever fulfil all your expectations. Do not uselessly hope that you will one day find a prince or knight in shining armour who will fulfil your every need and desire, know at all times what you want, have all answers ready whenever you have a problem and will be so cheerful and entertaining that your life will be a never ending ball. A compatible partner will fulfil many of your needs but not all of them.

Are you ready for an intimate relationship?

Whoever is considering to get married should ask this important question. There are times in our lives when we are ready to become involved with another person, and times when it is better to remain alone. If you feel consistently frustrated, empty, unhappy, confused, not confident etc. before marriage, you are likely to be so after marriage. The idea that once you are married your partner will solve all of your problems and remove all misery from your life is nothing but a fantasy. If you have serious or extreme emotional problems, it is unfair to expect your mate to deal with them. Your relationship will not work out, not because the two of you are not compatible, but because you are emotionally so empty, miserable or "screwed up". You may need some time away from a relationship to heal whatever is preventing you from reciprocating love and intimacy. It may be time to go on a "relationship fast", if:

- 1) You have not recovered sufficiently from a previous relationship (you may still be attached to an ex-partner or you still carry tremendous resentment toward an ex-partner)
- 2) Your self-esteem is so low that you cannot possibly love another person (you may dislike yourself or feel no one would want to be in a relationship with you because you have very little that is valuable to offer a mate)
- 3) You feel so empty or needy inside that you find it almost impossible to feel any emotions (you may be unable or unwilling to talk about your feelings or you may be so lonely, desperate and miserable that you have nothing to offer except your extreme neediness)
- 4) You have an addiction - to drugs, alcohol, sex or gambling - that you are not dealing with.

This last point, of course, does not apply to devotees, but is the cause of many, many break ups in material society.

The girl should not be much more qualified than the boy, otherwise there will be bitterness

This is an important principle conducive to stable and happy married life: Husband and wife should be more or less equally qualified. In India this principle has been common knowledge since time immemorial and to this very day, Hindus follow it in three ways: 1) Indian parents usually sanction a match only, if the bride is younger than the bridegroom 2) Men of lower castes are not allowed to marry a woman of a higher caste. 3) Girls from wealthy families are never married to boys from a poor family. In his famous book on astrology, Hora Shastra, sage Parashara explains:

"The relationship between a master and a servant or a man and a woman will be affectionate and stable, if they possess the same attributes. If the qualities of the two parties are not on an equal level, one should make sure that the bridegroom's qualities are superior to the wife's, otherwise there will be bitterness. If the bridegroom has better attributes than the bride and the master has better attributes than the servant, there will be mutual affection, regard for each other and happiness. Even in relationships between adhama (the lowest or shudra) and

udasina (neutral or vaishya), udasina and madhyama (intermediate or kshatriya), and madhyama with uttama (excellent or brahmana) there will be mutual affection and happiness."

In other words, if a man and woman are to be happy with each other, they should be more or less equally qualified or, if this is not the case, the husband should be more intelligent, more mature, more spiritually advanced or more competent than the wife. What is the rationale behind this principle? It is well known that all men have inborn pride in their masculine strength, skills and achievements. A man always wants his wife to look up to him as capable and strong and if she does, he becomes very satisfied, inspired and proud. This pride is very sensitive. Men cannot stand it when women excel them, belittle them, ridicule them or treat them with indifference. If a woman is significantly more qualified or competent than her husband and excels him materially or spiritually, his masculine ego is hurt and he responds with harshness and irritation. Some men become increasingly insecure and dejected while others start acting cold and withdraw into their shell in order to be protected from further humiliation. In any case, neither the man nor his wife will be happy. He will be frustrated, because his male need for constant admiration is not fulfilled and the wife will not be happy because she wants her man to be superior to herself so she can depend on him for care and protection. If a wife is consistently defeating her husband on his own ground and feels that she is better or more intelligent than he, she may end up losing respect. In the extreme, a man who cannot tolerate the feeling of being inferior to his wife may try to beat her into submission, while a dissatisfied wife may develop contempt and turn to another man. Seen in this light, the vedic injunction that a higher caste woman must never marry a lower caste man turns out to be a very wise principle indeed!

The keyword here is respect. It is common and normal that a wife surpasses her husband in some ways, while the husband will excel her in other ways. A problem arises only, when the wife is so much more qualified that she cannot respect her husband at all. I know of some couples where the wife excels the husband in significant ways and is evidently the boss in the family, but because the husband has a soft and submissive nature, he does not mind to be under his wife's control. In fact, he likes it and so does the wife! In other words, this arrangement is not problematic, if both partners are comfortable with it.

For a good marriage you need mutual attraction, compatibility and commitment

This is the most important general principle of match making. If you and your partner are to build a really healthy and stable relationship, your marriage should contain these three elements. There has to be mutual attraction, there has to be a good measure of compatibility (physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually) and there has to be commitment. If any of these building-blocks are missing, your married life may be rocky or, in the extreme, may not last.

Being in love is not enough. You and your mate may be very much attracted to each other, but if you are incompatible in the majority of areas, you will not be able to create a consistently harmonious and enjoyable partnership. In fact, ultimately you will cause each other more misery than happiness and this misery will visit you in the form of quarrelling and constant tension. If husband and wife are too different, they cannot agree on anything. Whenever he wants something, she does not want and whenever she wants something, he does not want. In this way there is no peace and no harmony, and if there is, it can never last long. If a relationship does not work, it is usually not because the husband or the wife do not love each other; it does not work because one of the two has serious character flaws or because they are too different. Some people believe that the fact that they are intensely attracted to their partner will enable them to overcome all external difficulties and personality differences. They think: "I love my partner and therefore the differences will not matter. If I try extra hard and love him (or her) enough, he will become the person I want him to be. The differences or the harmful behaviour (e.g. is undependable, has a terrible temper, is constantly nagging, is emotionally cold etc.) will disappear and he (or she) will become the affectionate person I want him to be. However, this is a great myth. You will not be able to change your partner's basic nature and so-called love is not enough to make a relationship work. Mutual love is the foundation for a good marriage, but if a relationship is going to survive and grow, it needs compatibility and it needs commitment. Differences do matter - sometimes just enough to make your relationship spicy, but often enough to make it unfulfilling and miserable.

If there is no love whatsoever, you will have a problem, too. Husband and wife may have many things in common, but if they are not attracted to each other at all, their marriage may not last. One day they may meet someone who they are really attracted to, fall in love and leave their marriage partner. And as far as commitment is concerned: If your partner is incapable of being committed, he or she may whimsically break the marital bond even though the match is perfectly good. Of these three components, commitment is most essential for keeping the marital ties intact. By commitment, a marriage relationship can be maintained even if there is neither attraction nor compatibility. This is the type of marriage where husband and wife remain together out of duty - for the sake of the children or for fear of social stigma. Such a relationship, of course, is less satisfying. If you are considering to get married and you do not want a marriage which can only be kept from falling apart by developing a high degree of tolerance for pain, you or your guardians have to carefully examine the following questions:

- 1) Are we mutually attracted to each other?
- 2) Are we compatible in the majority of areas?
- 3) Are we both capable of commitment and free of serious character flaws?

Finding clear answers to these questions is sometimes tricky and may take considerable time - sometimes months. In fact, you may realise that you are unable to arrive at a definitive conclusion on your own and this is when astrology can be helpful.

If there is no attraction whatsoever, your marriage may not work out

Mutual attraction ("love", "chemistry") is an essential element of a compatible relationship. This is really a common sense point, but one that is sometimes forgotten in societies where marriages are arranged. Indian sages were aware of this principle even centuries ago; they stated: manonukulam prathamam prashastam - the first consideration in assessing marriage compatibility is whether the boy and the girl like each other. If the attraction between a man and a woman is only one sided, the relationship is out of balance and does not work. The partner who is much more attached will end up miserable, for you cannot be happy, if you constantly reach out for your partner's affection, but he or she never reciprocates. And people who get involved with someone in spite of complete lack of attraction make themselves prone to marital infidelity. After hurting their partners for weeks, months or years by constantly neglecting or rejecting them, they may one day find themselves intensely attracted to someone else and get involved in an affair. Unfortunately, we have seen examples of this in the Krishna consciousness movement. So, it is generally not wise to marry someone you are not at all attracted to. This point is not emphasised in a spiritual society like ISKCON, because the attachment between marriage partners tends to act as a distraction from spiritual life. Materially speaking, however, sincere attachment between husband and wife is very good, because this love will act as a strong glue to keep them together even when the times are harder.

Attraction which develops gradually can be more genuine than instant attraction

It is a great mistake to judge a person to hastily as "not right for you", simply because you are not wildly attracted to them at first sight. As you get to know someone more intimately, deep mental and emotional resonance with one another may gradually reveal itself and this may spark physical attraction as well. Most people think that a relationship can only be good, if it starts off with an exciting love-at-first-sight-experience. They believe that the first meeting with their dream mate has to be so intense that they will be "swept off their feet and knocked down again". Only then can it be "true love". Especially women secretly dream about the enchanted moment when they look into someone's eyes and know instantly and without a doubt that this is their lifelong soul mate. They equate love with intense emotions, drama, fear of loss and abandonment and extreme highs and lows and if a relationship does not contain these elements they think it is too peaceful to be good.

However, when you experience powerful chemistry with someone at first sight, you are experiencing physical passion, not love, and you may be about to get involved with someone you are not compatible with. To recognise and build true love takes time. A first impression of someone is not enough to determine whether he or she will be a healthy and compatible partner. You need time to discover their real character, not just their exterior. So, do not categorically

reject a proposal just because you do not feel lust-at-first-sight. Be a little patient, as you may discover true mental and emotional harmony between you and a person, even if she or he does not look gorgeous to you in the beginning.

But giving attraction some time to develop does not mean that you should get married to someone whose looks you absolutely dislike. If you and your partner don't feel any attraction whatsoever even after associating repeatedly, you are unlikely to develop such feelings over time. I know of several marriages which broke because there was either no attraction at all or attraction was only one-sided. For instance, a particular husband was neither interested nor able to beget a child because he was not attracted to his wife at all and even after eight years of marriage his feelings did not change. When his wife finally found out that her husband never even liked her, she took shelter of some other man. This marriage had been arranged by the temple president even though both candidates voiced doubts and unwillingness. The conclusion is that temple presidents or parents should never arrange a marriage, if one or both of the parties display unwillingness or aversion. This may be possible in rare cases in a culture where children are highly disciplined, dutiful and dedicated to their parents, but the general rule is: For a marriage to be satisfying there has to be at least some degree of "chemistry".

Beware of lust-blindness: Intense physical attraction can cause you to assign much more depth to a relationship than there actually is

To get involved with someone based on physical attraction alone can be just as dangerous: If you choose a spouse simply because you are powerfully attracted by his or her good looks, you may one day wake up to the fact that you have chosen a partner who you have nothing in common with, cannot respect or do not even like. Intoxicated by the intense (sexual) chemistry between you and another person you may assign more depth to the bond than there actually is. You may build a fantasy relationship in your head, dreaming about how nice life with this person would be, all the while ignoring reality. Someone who seemed to be so perfect and wonderful in terms of looks may have certain character flaws that make living with them peacefully almost impossible (more details about this later). The first few days may be wonderful, but after a little while you may discover that you argue about everything or dislike so many things about each other. And what is the use of being wildly attracted by someone's good looks, if you can never feel peaceful or comfortable in their company? A man and a woman may be head over heels in love, but if they are totally different in temperament, attitudes and life-style, they cannot agree on anything and irritate each other constantly. So, beware of lust-blindness.

If you meet someone, fall madly in love and marry just weeks later, you are taking a big risk, because you don't know what you are getting into. Sometimes marriages that start out that way last, but only if the lovers are compatible in other areas as well. For a good marriage you need total compatibility, that is you need not only physical attraction, but also mental, emotional and spiritual resonance. You need both attraction and compatibility. The vast majority of married couples who end up divorced did "love" their spouse initially, but later on the differences in outlook, interests and habits or a particular character flaw created so much tension, frustration and bitterness that the so-called love vanished and the two parties agreed to separate.

To be compatible means to be similar in the majority of areas

A love relationship can only be harmonious and healthy and stand the test of time, if the man and the woman who are in love are compatible. To be compatible means to share a good measure of interests, beliefs, tastes and values. In other words, to be compatible means to be similar or alike in most ways. This does not mean that two partners have to agree on everything or have to have gone through all the same experiences, but there is a point beyond which too many differences create too much tension, and make a harmonious relationship impossible. No two people are completely alike and therefore no couple is 100 per cent compatible, but the more you are alike physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually, the better you will get along and the more fulfilled you will feel. Even in a partnership with 80 % or more compatibility there will be one or two problem areas where you and your partner think or act very differently and these will be the issues, you will fight about the most. These differences can add spice to the relationship and provide opportunities for growth (someone who is highly active may learn from his more slow, quiet and introspective spouse how to be

more thoughtful and sensitive; the cautious partner, on the other hand, may need to learn how to be more expressive, act decisively and take more risks). But with three or four major areas of conflict in a relationship, you will not be learning from each other any more - you will be fighting constantly!

In a truly compatible relationship the partners think, feel and act similarly in the majority of areas while still maintaining a certain degree of individuality. For couples who remain together a lifetime their two spheres of individuality will, over the years, merge more and more into one. Compatible partners tend to become more and more similar in outlook, interests and life-style as age advances. Many of them even begin to look similar!

Some revealing statistical facts about compatibility

Long-term studies show that human beings feel most comfortable with a life-partner of the same race and religion who is more or less their equal in terms of attractiveness and education. In other words, in your dreams you may fantasise about getting married to a man or woman of ravishing beauty, but in actual life you will be happier with someone who is more or less as good-looking as yourself. Statistically, the risk of divorce increases in direct proportion to differences in age, ethnic background, religious and political conviction, intelligence quotient, social status, vocation and hobbies. The most frequently divorced marriages are those of inter-religious couples. The divorce rate of teenage couples (younger than 20) is twice as high as that of other couples.

On physical compatibility

There is a simple, but fairly reliable rule of thumb how to tell whether two people are a good match: If a man and a woman look similar both in terms of attractiveness and physical stature, there is a good chance that they are compatible. This may sound somewhat simplistic, but actually it is not. Ayurvedic wisdom teaches that individuals of like constitution make better mates because they have similar feelings and attitudes as well as the same inherent sexual proclivities. Two constitutionally similar individuals intuitively understand the likes and dislikes of their partner, because the same forces motivate them. This goes as far as liking the same foodstuffs!

So the first way of assessing compatibility is to compare the physical build: Ideally a lean and fragile person (vata or airy constitution) should marry another lean person. Someone who is hot-blooded and of medium build (pitta or fiery constitution) should marry another fiery person and people of heavy build and robust constitution (kapha or earthy constitution) should marry someone who is similarly bulky. Unfortunately, people do not always fall in such clear cut categories, and judging compatibility is, therefore, not that simple (many people are a mixtures - of pitta and vata, of kapha and vata or of kapha, pitta and vata). In any case, the principle is: Slight differences can act complementary, but, on the whole, the rule is that the more similar two individuals are the better it is.

There is a certain drawback with marrying an individual of the same physical constitution: People of like disposition have like defects and tend to reinforce each other's constitutional weaknesses. Vatas are prone to be fearful, nervous and spaced-out, Pittas can be overbearing and short-tempered and Kaphas can be dull and lethargic. If two spaced-out and chaotic Vatas live together, they can turn their household into a big mess; two hot-headed Pittas will be prone to tear out each others hair and two slow Kaphas may live together for years with little or no interaction. In other words, marrying a constitutionally similar individual can create another set of problems, however, this is easier to endure than the stress and strain inherent in a pairing of two people whose constitutions differ radically. In other words, "opposites attract", as the saying goes, but when it comes to long-term compatibility we should give more importance to "birds of a feather flock together".

On sexual compatibility

This aspect of married life is not given much attention in Krishna consciousness, because devotees strive to overcome sex desire and, as far as possible, avoid talks about sexual subject matters. Nevertheless, it is an indisputable fact that sexual incompatibility can trigger

quarrels and tension and sometimes leads to divorce even in devotee marriages. Repeated physical and emotional frustration causes resentment, and can escalate in depression or neurotic behaviour - sometimes to the point of violence! No matter how much you initially liked your spouse, it will be hard to ignore the problems caused by sexual incompatibility (unless, of course, you do not want children and are genuinely detached from sex desire). In the Indian system of astrology, yoni-kuta or sexual compatibility, is one of ten standard categories to be examined. Western astrologers also have their own techniques for trying to assess this aspect of married life. Experience shows that there are four kinds of sexual incompatibility:

- 1) Some people's bodies do not fit together at all. Their genital organs may be so mismatched that intercourse becomes painful and frustrating.
- 2) Some people are so different in their sexual urges that their desire for sexual contact never coincides.
- 3) Marriage partners who are completely different in their "emotional temperament" may be incompatible in their "sexual temperament" or style as well (e.g. one partner may be romantic and sensitive while the other may be passionate or even aggressive).
- 4) Your partner may be sexually dysfunctional (impotent or frigid).

Here again the principle is: Someone with a strong sexual urge should be matched with a partner who is similarly inclined, while someone who is naturally dispassionate should marry a spouse who is also detached.

On mental or intellectual compatibility

If husband and wife are intellectually incompatible they will have a hard time communicating. Their talks may be boring or they may not understand each other. Every man wants his wife to share in his problems and worries and perhaps hear her advice, but if she is uneducated and knows nothing about his affairs, she cannot be an equal partner. In the extreme, the husband may feel ashamed of his wife or begin to hold her in contempt. Or, he will neglect her and seek satisfaction and mental stimulation in the association of friends and peers. The wife, for her part, may develop an inferiority complex and reproach herself for being unintelligent and having nothing to offer.

A few years ago, a frustrated husband revealed to me how weary he was of his marriage because his wife was impossible to talk to. He said: "Me and my wife, we can only talk on a very superficial level - 'how was your day' or 'how much money do you need'. Once I mentioned Ronald Reagan, but she did not even know who he was. This is her level of education. During 14 years of marriage, we have not talked once as intimately as you and I are talking now. The only time when our conversations get a little deeper is when we have a big fight. Lately I have had too many problems and my wife simply does not understand, when I tell her about them. In fact, it simply makes her nervous. Talking with her drains me of my energy." He then imitated her mechanical way of talking and how she was asking one question after another as if she were "hooked to a computer chip".

Some time later this man left his wife for another woman. In this relationship, intellectual incompatibility was a serious problem, though not the only one. In addition, the wife had severe emotional problems caused by traumatic childhood experiences and was, therefore, unable to give her husband the intimacy and mental exchange he wanted. In any case, different educational backgrounds can create serious problems. If you are well educated and well bred and your partner is from a simple family and never graduated from any higher school, you may have a hard time finding anything to talk about. You may be embarrassed by his or her lack of education and poor habits or your less educated partner may feel inferior and not accepted by you.

Make sure your potential mate does not dislike the things you are passionate about

Perhaps you are not a great scholar and, therefore, intellectual compatibility is less important to you. Or maybe you are really renounced and do not care much about whether or not you and your mate are physically compatible. Each one of us has certain values, interests, desires or goals in life which he considers more important than others. If there is incompatibility in one particular area which is highly important to you, the longevity of your relationship is in danger, even if your partnership is otherwise well-matched.

Example: Your mate may be near to ideal for you in all respects but your partnership could still be sabotaged if you are a musician (pujari, book distributor etc.) and your partner takes no interest in music (puja, book distribution etc.) whatsoever. So if you are passionate about something, you have to figure out whether or not your partner will be supportive of your passion or will want you to give up the thing that means a great deal to you.

Don't be deceived by partial compatibility

The fact that two people share a common interest or service can be the basis for a lasting relationship, but it can also be deceiving. Two people who feel exactly the same way about a shared passion or activity may have completely different values and beliefs when it comes to other areas. If this is the case, you and your partner are partially compatible. So, if you are attracted to someone and both of you love music or cooking or both of you work on the same project, you have to ask yourself: How much do I really know about this person aside from his or her area of partial compatibility. Does this person really meet my needs and requirements for a partner or do we simply both love music, deity worship, distributing books etc. and that is it?

If you are just partially compatible, you will find yourself in a dilemma. Being very compatible in one area and very incompatible in others will leave you confused and torn whether your relationship is right for you. Sometimes you will focus on the one good thing you share together and at other times you may contemplate ending the relationship because there is so much conflict and discomfort. You get some of the things you want, but at the same time you do not feel fulfilled. This is probably not what you have been looking for. So, don't be deceived by partial compatibility into choosing a partner who is not good for you.

Character flaws that can destroy a relationship

Certain shortcomings in a person can destroy a relationship or marriage, even if the two partners are compatible. If someone has one or more of the destructive traits listed below it does not necessarily mean that he is incapable of having a relationship, but there will be serious problems that can make living with them very difficult. The character flaws mentioned below often stem from painful events or traumas experienced in childhood. If someone is aware of these shortcomings and is actively working to repair them, there is a chance that he will ultimately overcome them. If not, they can be fatal to the longevity of his relationship. Here is a list of the most important "fatal flaws". Your partner may be "divorce-prone" or incapable of having a normal and healthy relationship, if he or she is

- 1) Undependable (cannot commit himself) or financially irresponsible (runs up debts).
- 2) Emotionally damaged from childhood (was abused or abandoned as a child).
- 3) Emotionally dead (incapable of communicating or of giving and receiving affection).
- 4) Consistently depressed or in bad moods (neurotic, complains a lot, always blames others).
- 5) Tyrannical or has a terrible temper (may be physically violent).
- 6) Sexually dysfunctional (impotent, frigid) or sexually infidel (flirts, ogles).
- 7) Addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex or gambling.
- 8) Is still emotionally traumatised from a past relationship.

No doubt, these flaws are not usually found in the character of a spiritually healthy devotee, but many of us come from disturbed or fallen backgrounds and it has been seen that the above mentioned defects can harm devotee marriages as well. Actually, there is probably hardly anyone who does not have at least some traces of the above traits inside them. They become destructive to a relationship only, if they dominate our personality. If you meet someone who has one of the above problems, you don't have to be paranoid and run off. But you have to be alert and cautious and decide whether or not you are willing to deal with the particular shortcoming this person displays.

Realise that a person's basic nature never changes

It is entirely up to you to decide what you consider acceptable in a mate. If you feel you can be happy with a scatter-brained scholar, a dispassionate ascetic or a short-tempered controller - fine. You can accept whatever you want to accept and others should not talk you

out of your convictions, if your inner voice and knowledge about yourself tell you otherwise. But you cannot accept a man or a woman for the moment and expect to change them at a later date, for this never works. Your partner will have some qualities that are wonderful and some that are not so wonderful. This is just the way he or she is and you cannot change that. So, you better make sure that you can live with the qualities your partner displays now before making an unconditional commitment.

Sometimes people do recognize certain shortcomings before marriage, but they foolishly persuade themselves that they will correct them or mold the partner's character to agree with their ideal concept. However, this is pure delusion. It is not possible to transform another individual's personality to conform to one's dreams. The other person may even agree to cooperate, but the result will generally be a perpetual strain that cannot be tolerated for long. A person just cannot be what he is not and in no time he will relapse to adopt behavior which is more consistent with his own nature. For example, a woman who is complaining about her husband's shyness may be trying all kinds of things to pull him out of his shell, but this is what she may get to hear:

"This is the way I am. I want to make you happy, but I feel you are asking me to be someone I am not. I have always been low-key, and I really cannot change."

One cannot transform a person who is constitutionally introspective and low-key into a go-getter brimming with confidence and initiative. You cannot turn a simple person into a sophisticated intellectual and you cannot correct the nature of a chronic faultfinder or a habitual flirt. In short - one cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear! And there is empirical evidence to corroborate this fact: According to a long-term study of the American Institute of Aging, the basic outlook and personality of a person does not change after the age of 30. In other words, if you are an optimist when you are 30, you are likely to remain so even at the age of 60 and if you are morose and miserly, you will not turn friendly and generous in old age. This does not mean that human beings are incapable of learning and transformation. After all we do have intelligence and a free will and, consequently, can make up our mind to change. However, "change" usually means painstaking endeavour over long periods of time which results in small increments of learned behaviour. But even then "change" does not mean that one radically changes one's basic nature, rather one learns to minimise one's natural faults and maximises one's natural good qualities.

If you marry a partner in spite of who he or she is today, because you hope they will improve in the future or that you will "fix" them, you are likely to end up let down and bitter. They will probably not become what you expect them to be. So, make sure you begin a relationship with someone only, if you can accept, respect and love that person as he or she is today.

Do not ignore warning signs of potential problems

Once you get to know someone's attitudes and behaviour very well (which usually takes several months) you may discover things about them that you do not like or approve of. Are these just little problems, quirks and habits that you can tolerate or laugh off? Or are the disturbing qualities and behaviours too numerous and add up to a fundamental difference in temperament, outlook or life-style? Be realistic and honest when you answer this question as the future of your relationship depends on it. It is better to face the reality now than being hit with it some years down the line.

If you notice something about your partner that is disturbing, do not ignore it, for it can be a warning sign of a characteristic or behaviour that will eventually develop into a serious problem. All problems that a couple will experience in their relationship can be spotted in seed form in the very beginning. When you see a flaw in a potential partner you don't have to be paranoid, because you won't meet anyone who is free from all flaws. The question you have to ask yourself is: Is this disturbing quality something that I am willing to deal with or is this warning me about something that I cannot tolerate (the person is a cheater, is violent, emotionally screwed up etc.)? If you are really disturbed by something about your partner or do not trust his or her integrity, honesty and reliability, you should not get married anyway. It is a great misconception to think that when you finally get married, things will get better, because they won't. Whatever problems you had before marriage will be even more disturbing afterward. If your relationship was wonderful, it may remain so after marriage, but if it was turbulent, marriage will make it even rockier.

Do not commit yourself unconditionally until you know a person very well

To understand a person's real inside beyond their outer shell takes considerable time - usually several months. This is why you should not commit yourself unconditionally to marrying someone before you know him or her very well. You cannot possibly see the more hidden aspects of someone's personality, if you have only talked to them once, twice or even five times. It is easy to be on one's best behaviour during the first few conversations, but how will he or she act when they are tired, angry, frustrated or grumpy? Is your partner a person of integrity and character? Is your potential life-partner capable of being faithful and dependable or is he or she afflicted by destructive flaws? Do not get seriously involved with someone unless and until you have found out as much as you can about that person's basic nature, interests, attitudes and expectations. Can you give this person what he or she wants without having to change your own nature or violating your own standards? Remember, you are about to make one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Take as much time as you need to decide whether or not a man or a woman can fit into your vision of a committed marriage relationship without changing his or her basic nature.

Ask enough questions and carefully observe your potential partner's behaviour

To understand who a person really is beyond his or her physique, carefully observe their behaviour and ask many questions. The more information you have about your potential spouse the better you will be able to judge whether or not this person's outlook and temperament fit yours. If the person is a divorcee or has had relationships before meeting you, ask questions about past relationships, reasons for break ups and lessons learned from these experiences. Ask about their attitudes about marriage, children, sex and love, about their attitudes about spiritual life and about their personal goals. If it turns out that your attitudes and theirs are completely different, you are probably not compatible. Also ask about their family and the quality of their family relationships. Many of the qualities and behaviours we display - good or bad - are adopted from our parents. If you see that someone's parents are honest and emotionally healthy people, it is a point in his or her favour. But if the mother was a loose woman with several marriages or the father was an alcoholic who regularly beat up the mother and the kids, that person may not naturally make a good mate.

So asking many questions is very important, but even more important than asking verbally may be carefully observing the things he or she does. Why? Because some persons do not reveal their innermost thoughts and feelings. Actions speak louder than words. So watch a person's actions to get an accurate picture of their general make up. How do they treat you under various circumstances? How do they treat others? If your prospective spouse hates to see his own parents and does not want to talk to them, he may have a hard time being intimate. If your potential life-partner avoids discussing his past, he might be hiding something serious (perhaps he was molested as a child or had a problem with addiction). Frequent flirting or staring at others can indicate a potential cheater with whom you may never feel secure. Anger at past partners can indicate that you will be the next who gets the blame for all problems. Someone who is always very strong and in charge may turn out to be a veritable dictator etc.

These are extreme examples, no doubt, but they illustrate my point: Judge a person by how they act, not just by what they say! When observing your potential life-partner you may discover good or disturbing qualities, but when it comes to judging marriage suitability, ignorance is not bliss. It is better to face reality in the first place, because what you don't know will become obvious later on and it will definitely hurt you. It takes just a moment to become infatuated with someone's external appearance, but you need time to discover their character. Is he or she really your perfect partner? Maybe there is someone you are more compatible with?

If you are a woman, there are two questions you can ask to find out whether or not a man will make a good mate for you:

- 1) Does this man have qualities I want my children to inherit?
- 2) Do I trust this man enough to hand my life over to him and let him control me?

Take as much time as you need to answer these questions and remember: It is better to put in enough effort now, or you may one day lament: How could I have been so blind and why did I not see how he or she was really like? Why did I make the wrong choice?

Listen to your gut feeling and take the advice of friends and well-wishers

You should not get married unless you can believe with all your heart that you have made the right choice. If you consider getting married but are still afraid that you might change your mind later on, do not get married to that person anyway. Consult your friends and well-wishers and get married with their sanction only. Time and again, I have seen that the good or bad feeling of unbiased friends and relatives can be a reliable indicator of the suitability of a match. Especially women have very fine antennas when it comes to judging who makes a good mate for who. An acquaintance of mine (the mother of a devotee) who has been through two divorces told me once that her mother had warned her against marrying her first husband, but she went ahead anyway, because "they loved each other". Unfortunately the intuition of the mother turned out to be correct and the marriage failed.

Sometimes people instinctively recognise their soul mate. They immediately know: I like this person, I can respect him and I want to spend the rest of my life with him. They feel a connection that is more powerful than their doubts or fears and do not have to intellectually question or analyse whether or not this person's true nature and personality fits theirs. Their intuition tells them that this is the one and they trust their inner voice even if other people tell them otherwise. Because they already feel that oneness in their hearts, the state of marriage already exists between the two of them even before the wedding ceremony formalises and consecrates the connection.

External obstacles which can make having a lasting relationship difficult or impossible

We have talked about character flaws, internal shortcomings of a person which can negatively affect or destroy a marriage. There is also a set of external circumstances that can make having a lasting relationship difficult. The problems caused by these external obstacles can be even harder to deal with than character flaws which are internal and can be worked on. Barbara De Angelis, a well-known American therapist, calls these external obstacles "Compatibility Time Bombs". Compatibility time bombs are obstacles in the external world that, in most cases, cannot be changed or removed. The problems presented by a compatibility time bomb usually emerge over time rather than in the beginning of a relationship. Often two people who are attracted to each other are aware of the uncomfortable issue which could potentially be an insoluble problem but they don't pay attention to the matter or simply hope that their love will overcome the problem and make their relationship last. Unfortunately, ignoring reality does not solve the problem and the relationship may fail when the adverse circumstances "explode". If you recognize a potential problem in your relationship better pay close attention to the issue in the very beginning rather than ignoring it and hoping it just goes away. There is a general rule which applies to all compatibility time bombs: The more extreme the differences, the worse the explosion. Here is a list of the most important compatibility time bombs:

- 1) Significant age difference
- 2) Different religious background or beliefs
- 3) Different ethnic background
- 4) Different educational or social background
- 5) One partner is not accepted by the family or the children of the other
- 6) Long-distance relationships
- 7) You are still attached to an Ex-partner or an Ex-partner is still attached to you

Significant age difference

Significant age difference between partners can cause serious problems in relationships. Significant means ten or more years older or younger. The more dissimilar the maturity and experience level of two partners the greater the likelihood of conflicts. Sometimes relationships between people of very different ages work and both learn a lot from each other; in other cases there is so much consistent tension and unhappiness that ultimately staying together becomes impossible. Couples with this compatibility time bomb may not be aware of any potential problems in the beginning of the relationship, but once it settles into a routine they may discover that the age gap is posing a lot more problems than they ever expected it to.

If you are the older partner you may become impatient with your mate's level of immaturity and lack of experience. You've learned to take charge of your life; you've realized it is not the end of the world when you go through a crisis and you have learned from your mistakes and know how to do things right. Watching your partner stumble through these life lessons can be quite exasperating when you are glad to have left them behind. As the older partner you have so many more years of life experience and you cannot help but advise, correct or give directions to your spouse. You may begin acting like a parent and treat your partner like a child. This can be destructive to the relationship. The younger partner may feel that you do not trust or respect him or her and may respond like a rebellious teenager: He or she may become resentful and pull away. In other cases the older partner may unwillingly find himself or herself playing the role of the parental figure and may desperately long to get out of it. If you are the younger partner you will expect your spouse to keep up with your youthful vigour, but your older mate may feel that your pace is too fast and may prefer a more mellow life-style. I have also heard that older partners can develop a problem with extreme jealousy, because they are constantly afraid that their younger mate could be attracted to peers (who is much younger and therefore more attractive).

Different religious background or beliefs

This is generally not a problem in Krishna conscious marriages, because devotees usually do not marry non-devotees. However, I know of some cases where an initiated devotee fell in love with and got married to someone who is not a Vaishnava. This can lead to a very difficult and muddled situation, because religious convictions hardly ever change over time. Spiritual beliefs and values may not have been the primary topic of discussion in the early stages of the relationship. You begin to notice the problems only when the relationship becomes more serious. Unfortunately, by then the feelings for one another may be so strong that it is very difficult to separate, even if you know it is inevitable. If you do get involved with someone who is not a Vaishnava, everything may be fine until the first holiday or special occasion comes and then suddenly the issues you've been unconsciously ignoring may be thrust into the limelight. Your partner may feel uncomfortable with your Vaishnava vows, traditions and attitudes, while you will not be able and willing to give up what you believe in.

It is very tempting to downplay spiritual convictions when you suspect that standing by them might alienate your partner. However, don't give in to the temptation to be dishonest. It is better not to get involved with someone of a different faith. If you do, make a point of discussing how you want to bring up your children, celebrate holidays, and integrate spirituality into your life with your partner early in the relationship. The longer you wait, the more painful a possible realization of incompatibility will be.

Different ethnic background

Depending on our ethnic background, upbringing and education, we all have a different set of values. Our values are our beliefs about what is good and bad, right and wrong. Your values determine your attitudes towards money, sex, gender roles, religion and also your habits and your life-style. For instance, if you were born in some eastern culture which is traditionally conservative, you may take it for granted that the husband is the man of the house and that his desires are more important than the wife's. You will expect women to work full-time, do all the housework and shop and cook, too. In western culture, however, women are brought up in a very different way and have a very different understanding of themselves. If a western woman marries a man from such a conservative culture, she is likely to end up very unhappy, because her husband is going to demand things from her that she cannot and does not want to do. So, if your background is radically different from your partner's, your married life can turn into a battleground. Whenever people from very different cultures or backgrounds get married, they are usually too far apart in their thinking and life-styles to live together harmoniously.

Different social or educational background

We have already discussed how different educational backgrounds can pose a serious problem in a relationship. Here is an example how differences in social background can negatively affect harmony in married life: A young woman from a poor family gets married to the son of a rich businessman. The woman has been brought up by a single mother who worked in two jobs to maintain her four kids. Conditioned by her hard working mother, the woman believes that it is important to save money for the future and so she spends money only on practical things and things

which are absolutely necessary. Her husband's upbringing has been completely different. His family is fairly rich and his motto is to enjoy the good things in life. He is financially somewhat reckless and likes to buy whatever he is attracted to. The result: Husband and wife do not understand each other's fiscal habits and constantly fight about money.

Your partner is not accepted by your family or your children

Parents do not always approve of their child's choice of marriage partner. To express their disapproval or to punish the unwanted spouse for "taking away their child" parents sometimes ignore their son's or daughter's marriage partner or treat them with great disrespect. Especially in countries like India where children are traditionally controlled by their parents, in-laws sometimes manage to create dissension in their child's marriage by complaining about the unwanted spouse or running them down as a bad person. Children of "vitriolic" in-laws can try to communicate to their parents that they expect them to treat their spouse with respect, courtesy and warmth and that criticizing or hurting their partner is the same as hurting them. This may or may not work. If your parents are dear to you and you intend to remain on friendly terms with them, it may be wise to marry a partner only if your parents approve of them.

Sometimes stepchildren can make their new parent's life so miserable that the future of their father's or mother's second marriage is jeopardized. Already over half of all American children grow up in a step family, that is in a family different from their one of origin. And, as yet, the divorce rate is not going down - neither in America, nor in ISKCON. If you are a divorcee with children from your first marriage, you and your new partner may argue about your children. Your partner may feel that you are taking the children's side and not theirs. The children may display obnoxious behavior in order to scare the stepparent off so they can have their mother or father all to themselves, and maybe preserve the slim chance that their parents would get back together. Nasty stepchildren act rebellious because they feel let down by their parents, possibly rejected by the one who left and frightened of being hurt again.

Your ex-spouse is unable to let go of you or you are unable to let go of your ex-spouse

Getting involved with someone who is still attached to his or her ex-spouse can cause you a lot of frustration. Until your partner makes a complete commitment to you, you will be miserable. Your partner is not emotionally available because he is still involved with his ex-spouse and he will be more concerned about his ex's feelings than about yours. If you are in an "emotional triangle", you should either leave or give your partner an ultimatum: Either he lets go and relinquishes his responsibility for his ex-spouse or else you will leave.

If you are involved with someone whose ex-spouse has never let go of them, you should know that a hysterical or depressed ex-spouse can destroy your new relationship. They can make your life miserable by barraging you and your partner with phone calls or constant visits, or making you feel guilty for abandoning them. They may also try to seduce your partner in an attempt to get him back, try to turn the children against him or threaten him with financial or other measures as a punishment. This may sound amusing and you may feel that these things happen only in movies, but actually they do happen in real life, too. If you are constantly harassed by your partner's ex-spouse, either your partner has not really broken off the relationship and has a hard time doing anything that would hurt them or their ex is really disturbed and obsessed with getting them back.

Long-distance relationships

A long-distance relationship is a relationship of a couple who are in love but cannot spend consistent time together, because their places of residence are too far apart. What is the problem with this arrangement (which is quite common in the age of globalisation and busy international exchange)? A long-distance romance can cause you to think a relationship is much better than it is because you don't get to know each other intimately. Here is an example: During the yearly festival at Sridham Mayapur, a young devotee from Australia meets a gurukula girl from Europe. They are intensely attracted to each other and for the next ten days they go on walks, spend as much time together as possible and talk about everything under the sun, including getting married. Two weeks later both of them have to return to their respective countries and, for the time being, the relationship is continued by mail. Once a year the boy comes to Europe for a few days or the girl flies to

Australia for 2 weeks or they meet again at next year's Mayapur festival. After going on for two or three years in this way, they finally decide to get married. What is the danger in this arrangement? You don't get to see your mate under pressure, in a crisis, when he is tired and cranky, when he is faced with fear or opposition, or when he is ill. All of these situations reveal a lot about someone's character. There are dimensions of people you experience only when you are with them on a consistent basis.

Long-distance lovers often have an unrealistic view of their compatibility. They may have very little in common, but because they only have a few days with their partner, they treat it like a party or a vacation. However, when they finally move together, life is not a twenty-four-hour-a-day party anymore. It is a full-time relationship and if you and your partner are not truly compatible, you will soon discover many things about your partner that annoy you, you will argue more and you will not be infatuated with your partner any longer. For a long-distance romance to evolve into a healthy, lasting relationship, both partners will eventually have to live in the same place. This is the only way to know if you are compatible.

Do not marry someone only because of external reasons (status, good looks or money) - see their internal qualities!

Some people start a relationship with someone only because they are infatuated with something external about their partner which has little to do with their true character: Their beautiful eyes, their smile, their broad shoulders, their gorgeous bosom etc. But beware: One special attractive quality a person has can cause you to imagine that he or she has all the qualities you desire in your ideal mate. Simply being fascinated by one element of someone's personality does not mean that he or she is your perfect life-partner. In this way you may get stuck with someone you really do not want to be with. If the blue eyes, the great voice or the prestigious position is the only quality which makes you think you are meant for each other, your relationship may not last long. After all, how much satisfaction can you derive from staring at your mate's blue eyes or how long can you be infatuated with his image as - say - the temple president, before you realise that you want and need more? Another point: If you are fascinated by someone's status, prestige, money or good looks, do not forget that all these things may and will change. If your husband loses his position or has a protruding belly some years down the line, will you still love and accept him?

So, if you want to find a compatible partner, do not judge them only by their status, image or looks! Try to see who people really are, beyond their physique, and ask yourself whether you like this person's internal character, not just their material assets. A person who you consider "not for you" because he is not powerful, rich or reputed may be a potentially wonderful mate, while a "beauty queen" or a "good catch" with a fat purse or a prestigious position may make you very unhappy. Do not fall prey to material seduction. Do not place exaggerated value on the material benefits and prestige a man or woman can offer you. See their internal qualities.

Do not marry someone just because you feel sorry for them

You may get into an unhealthy relationship with someone you are not compatible with, if your partner has serious physical, financial or emotional problems and you feel compelled to help. If this is the case, you may mistake sympathy for love. You may not really get involved with this person because you love them or because the two of you are a good match, rather you do not want to feel guilty of abandoning them as they might end up helpless, unloved or alone. But this type of relationship is probably not going to make you happy. You may feel powerful and in control for the time being, but ultimately you may end up feeling overburdened or resentful. Again, it is entirely up to you what you consider acceptable in a mate, but people whose mates completely depend on their help sometimes end up resenting them. The key word here is respect. If you do not feel respect for your partner and cannot be proud of who he or she is, do not get involved with them. This type of relationship is unbalanced. A time may come when you want to be taken care of and your dependent mate cannot do that. Then you may resent them.

Do not choose a lifetime mate just because he or she will have you or because you are desperate to finally get married

If you have low self-esteem or are desperate to find a mate you may consider anyone who is interested in you a candidate for a lifetime mate. Because you worry only about whether

that person likes you, you do not worry about whether he or she is right for you. In this way you may end up with someone who is not even close to the man or woman of your dreams.

Sometimes people who are desperate to be loved and accepted by a potential lifetime mate are afraid of discovering that this is not the right person for them. So they create the illusion that the two of them are more compatible than they actually are. One way of doing this is to give up one's own values, interests or activities or by becoming involved in interests or activities that one really does not care about. But this type of relationship is usually short-lived. Trying to make it look like you are perfect for one another if you are not is useless. If your partner is so different in important ways that you can only make the relationship work by doing things you normally dislike or by not speaking up about something your partner is doing you feel is wrong, you are simply postponing the problem. Your relationship will probably break anyway, but it will be more painful later on.