Soul Mates: Found or Chosen?

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A few weeks ago, two of my old college roommates stopped by for some girl talk. With a new semester starting, they were excited to find friends and meet new dating prospects. However, along with their excitement came some uncertainty and anxiety. They had come to ask me a compelling question: How did I know my husband was “the one”?

With soul-mate culture saturating our world today, it’s no surprise that so many young adults are waiting for a romantic kindred spirit to appear in their lives. Popular movies, music, and books promote the notion of the right person appearing at just the right time, but the notion of humans finding their “other half” hearkens back to Greek mythology with Zeus splitting humans in two, destining them to search for their divided halves to find wholeness.

Believing in soul mates mysteriously gained traction in the late twentieth century and not only inspires harmless Hollywood-style storylines but also creates some relational hazards for those who buy into the soul-mate ethos. Waiting for “the one” to magically appear absolves young adults of making arduous and difficult choices, delays marriage and commitment, and even fosters marital instability after the wedding. Perhaps this romantic notion needs a realistic come-uppance—if not in popular culture, then at least in individual consciousness.

Soul Mates and Dating Delays

Being single with hopes of getting married may not feel urgent if you believe you are destined to find your soul mate when the time is right. In fact, some studies are finding that “more than half of marriages will occur after age 30.”1 While this increase in age can be attributed to a variety of variables, one explanation could be that people are waiting longer for “the one” to appear.

In another study, one interviewee confessed that she had “a little more confidence” about being single because she believed that “the person I am meant to get into a relationship with” was out there somewhere.2 While this attitude of waiting for fate may give comfort to some, it can also lead to delays in dating as some may think, “Why put effort into dating when I can just wait for a soulmate?”

And They Lived Happily Ever After . . .

Can believing in soul mates affect a marriage? One family science researcher compared spouses who believed they were soul mates to spouses who did not. Couples who intentionally chose each other without the notion of being soul mates were found to “believe and behave in ways consistent with an ethic of unconditional love and marital permanency,” and they were “more likely to be happy in their marriages and more likely to avoid divorce.”3 In contrast, the marriages where couples believed they were soul mates were more likely to “become optional and more brittle.”4

In short, simply believing your spouse is your soul mate is not always enough to keep you together. Couples must learn how to intentionally choose to love each other and then put in the effort to stay together rather than expect the universe to do it for them.5

This responsibility to choose can bring in its wake a complex paradox of emotions, especially in the case of marriage. With marriage being such a large life decision, a certain kind of “deciding paralysis” can occur if we think too much about the long-term ripple effects. We see this today in the rising number of cohabitating couples; these couples attempt to “test drive” their relationship before committing, as if living together will reveal one’s soul mate and provide an easier way out if the partner is not to one’s liking.

How Did You Know?

Prior to my marriage, I often found myself frightened by the weight of my choices—fearing a misstep, blunder, or ripple effect from moving forward with the wrong one—all of which felt overwhelming when thinking about choosing

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a husband. I could resonate with my friends' question during that recent visit.

A moment of important insight came to me that day on the doorstep when my friends asked me how I knew my husband was “the one.” I had to honestly and simply tell them that I didn’t. I didn’t know he was “the one.” In fact, I spent weeks worrying and feeling like I was missing an obvious green light.

But then it hit me. I had put myself through months of anxiety while dating, questioning, and doubting a man I knew was good. I knew he was kind, funny, and a hard worker. He was everything I wanted. If I wanted to be happy with him, I could do my best in putting every effort into creating that happiness.

Now that my husband and I are married, I can confidently say that he is “the one.” He isn’t “the one” because the universe put us together; he is “the one” because I chose him and continue to choose him every day.

Ashley Brooksby is an undergraduate student in the School of Family Life at BYU. She hopes to become a Family Life Educator and help others strengthen their relationships.

**Endnotes**


