

Choosing Conscious Love

Janice L. Lundy

As Valentine's Day approaches, our thoughts naturally turn to love and to the nature of our intimate relationships. It seems, however, that the institution of partnership/marriage is changing. We find ourselves living in a complex, fast-paced world that is not always helpful or supportive in the creation and maintenance of love partnerships. When we move so quickly, when things seem transient and temporary, it's not surprising to find so many people partner-less, lovers engaged in heated battles, and marriages culminating in divorce. It seems appropriate to ask ourselves if we are doing all we possibly can to create deep, loving and meaningful relationships.

It is easy to succumb to the pressures and demands of everyday life and often that means we neglect the partnerships that are the most important to us. To find and hold onto a lasting love relationship requires tremendous dedication, time and energy. Sort of takes the romance out of it, doesn't it, knowing that love might require hard work? I believe this is exactly what we are being called to do today: to examine and recreate how we are living with and loving each other, to give it all we've got and put our intimate relationships high on our priority list. If we desire true love, we must give it true effort.

The Blueprint of Relationship

When I have spoken with couples experiencing deeply loving relationships, one success factor always seems to jump to the forefront: they talk to each other. As the pace of our lives escalates, along with its daily demands and pressures, communication between loved ones falls by the wayside. There is no time to talk. No energy to hammer out the details. The couples who put their intimate communication on high priority status seem to understand the blueprint of relationship.

What do I mean by the blueprint of relationship? I refer to the foundation upon which the structure of relationship is built, as well as the step-by-step plan that's needed to create the relationship of our heart's desire. Just like that ideal house one hopes for, our intimate partnerships are built on strong foundations and remain that way through open and honest communication with one another. As the walls of a house go up, they can be walls that support floors and upper levels, providing a strong and dependable dwelling. Or they can form walls that divide and separate. It is up to us to determine what kind of "relationship house" we want, then, follow the blueprint to the letter.

The key here is honesty. Most of us who have been in intimate relationships may find ourselves in a "game playing" mode. We dance around each other, hiding less attractive parts of ourselves and, quite often, engage in less-than-honest behavior. And why is that? Because, put very simply, if we show ourselves to be exactly who

we are, "flawed" human beings with deep fears, pains and vulnerabilities, the other person might leave. Who in the world would want to stay in a relationship with someone who is so humanly marred? We seek perfection in ourselves and expect it in others.

Now admit it, aren't we constantly seeking the "perfect" partner? This search for perfection in each of us does not allow us to be real, genuine, weak, afraid, insecure, and so on. In order to find or maintain the ideal relationship, we hide all of our little flaws under a big bushel basket, certain no one could love us for who we truly are.

The Conscious Relationship

A new model of intimate partnership is emerging called "conscious relationship." Many books have been written on the topic, exploring how we might form highly evolved relationships rooted in personal and spiritual growth. Conscious relationship is based on "living your truth," owning your feelings and joining in together to process them. A model such as this invites each partner to be true, authentic, and open to all the feelings and experiences that come.

As situations arise, the couple bands together to explore, with gentle listening and open hearts, what the other is going through. When an issue comes up, one partner helps the other see that there are no unlovable parts of one's self; that we can be truthful, and honestly address speak what is going on inside of us with no fear that we will be rejected or judged.

In this way, conscious partnership takes dedicated work. It involves creating a new agenda of how the couple will be together and what actions will be taken moment-by-moment to achieve optimum communication and growth. The following principles are some of the most commonly used techniques that two people can use to enhance communication, growing and changing together individually, and as a team.

1. *Check in with each other regularly.* When a situation triggers emotional reactions, talk about it as soon as possible. Processing emotions together in a timely fashion allows it to be addressed now, so emotional "build up" does not occur. Taking care of things as they come up allows us to continue to move forward, and we are not repeatedly rehashing things from the past. Ask your partner, "How are you doing?" or, "Is there anything you would like to talk about?" Do this daily. My husband and I check in with each other often throughout the day. It keeps our communication clean and caring.

2. *Express yourself and release your emotions.* Many of us are used to "stuffing" our emotions down inside of us. We have been told throughout our lives to not feel something or to ignore it and the feeling will go away. "Don't cry," "Get over it," "You can't feel that way," are phrases we might have heard throughout our childhood or in the context of other less functional relationships. A conscious

partnership encourages each person to fully acknowledge the emotion. The partner gently holds a healing space for the person to work through the feeling completely.

3. *Provide your partner with a soft place to fall.* Dr. Phil McGraw, author of *Relationship Rescue*, and a frequent guest on the "Oprah" show, coined this phrase and I love it, "We all need a soft place to fall." A place of safety and security where we can fall apart and come back together. Doing so in someone else's arms, the arms of a trusted, loved one is characteristic of conscious relationship. When partners share open and honest communication, trust is built. The integrity of that trust, and the unconditional love that flows through the relationship, supports each person's emotional journey. When one of the partners "falls apart," trust and love join hands and hearts, enabling healing, instead of distance, to occur. In conscious partnership, love heals us to become the whole and healthy people we are intended to be.

Love relationships, carefully tended and grown, can become the vehicle for our greatest personal and spiritual growth. It is through conscious partnership that we come to a greater understanding of ourselves, of the light and the dark found within each one of us. The healing power of true love can bring us to the pinnacle of our own self-discovery. In doing so, we unite ourselves body, mind and soul with our partner, each raising the other to new heights of spiritual understanding about who we are, and why we are here in the world as a couple and as individuals.

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