

Who is Responsible for Fixing the Marriage?

"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said."

Peter Drucker



It's April and spring is here! The roses are blooming, the birds are out chirping and showing off to attract a mate, and even the mallards have decided to take a dip in my pool. In many cultures, spring is a symbol of renewal, rebirth, and a season of romance!

Marriage is probably the most important contract of our lives, yet partners enter into it, often without any communication about important issues such as money, child rearing, intimacy, and when there is conflict, who is supposed to *fix* it?

When the partners avoid the responsibility of figuring out what went wrong, they are often doomed to repeat their relationship patterns in their next marriages. The children of these marriages are subjected to heartbreak, and to missing out on healthy role models that know how to deal with conflict.

What makes love last? What turns the blue skies of love and romance into a stormy sea?

Moving the Goal Post

Contemporary marriages may take on varying forms: sometimes democracies, sometimes autocracies, and sometimes simply top dog/underdog combat zones where one partner's "need to win" subjects the other to the role of a perpetual loser. This dynamic of polarized extremes builds anger, resentment and emotional withdrawal instead of emotional intimacy. We need to learn how to break free of these polarized positions. Where's the reciprocity?

A case in point is the marriage of Beth and Jim. Beth was initially attracted to Jim because of what she viewed as his "quiet strength," but over time that strength began to look more like a wall that he built-up to keep her away. He needed distance; she wanted closeness. When she tried to reach the "marshmallow part" of her husband, tried to soften his heart and get him to open up and share with her, he backed off even more, reinforcing his defensive wall, refusing to let her in. From Jim's point of view, Beth was being "emotionally intrusive" and "too needy" and he didn't respect it. It created a power struggle in their marriage. When she kept drilling away, trying to change him, trying to connect with him, and *still* she got nothing back, she filed for divorce. This forced Jim into doing an about-face. He began to take the idea of better communication in their relationship seriously, and as his walls began to come tumbling down, their marriage evolved into the emotional intimacy that both really longed for down deep.

When the foundation of a relationship is built on one partner's need for power, the other feels powerless; as if they have no "weight" in the marriage. Unmet needs for autonomy,

control, and approval, often using money or sex, turn love and marriage into a battleground of dominance and submission. What started out as a perfect match turns into one of emotional slavery. In the heat of passion, each blames the other for what goes wrong. When unmet needs and *immature* warrior energy rule the roost, it results in resentment and dependency, and leaves little room for loving. Everyone loses something: self-esteem, intimacy, security, autonomy, and independence. That's when somebody starts asking: "Why did I ever get married?"



**Sometimes we can all
use a little support!**

New Possibilities

"Know thyself" means to know your own feelings and needs, learn skills to communicate them, and take action to get them met — compassionately. The signs of new possibilities begin to spring up everywhere when you redefine what marriage means for you. Can these skills be *learned*? "YES!" It takes courage to pick up the pieces, confront our differences, and use relationship challenges as an opportunity for rebirth and renewal. This journey takes us to a new place that enriches rather than depletes us. Sometimes we can use a little help.

It takes courage to look within rather than to your partner, to address the evolving needs within the relationship. Crisis can be a gift, an opportunity to grow, to learn to communicate, to "know thyself," and to take action to get everyone's needs met. The result is a win-win: **1+1=3**. That is a basis for maintaining a healthy relationship.