

Know When To Hold ,Em : When falling out of love can be good for your relationship .

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THE ROMANTIC STAGE OF LOVE

In the world of poker playing and five card draw, the temptation to draw 3 and go for the inside straight or full house is a lingering seductress waiting for the fool hardy to bet large and invite fate to bless or curse. So many of us know that sinking, somewhat airsick feeling of watching whatever fortune we risk slide smoothly across the table into the waiting grasp of the one upon whom fortune smiled so sweetly.

Falling in love and devoting our time, money, energy to capture the object of our desire is a bit like drawing those three cards. Even as we dream, plot, scheme, pursue, wait, distance or even become depressed, this special relationship can have us staring at our cards, with a lot on the table, contemplating the best draw and hoping we've played the best odds.

The book, Getting the Love You Want by Drs. Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt was a break through for thousands of couples, giving hope and proven tools to help manage what seems to be a natural process of falling out of love. This approach identified what is known as the "Im ago M atch". Im ago is Latin for the word "im age" and the theory proposes that within each of us is an unconscious map that drives the choices we make when selecting a mate or any significant relationship. The Imago approach outlines a predictable maturation of the long-term committed relationship that identifies separate stages that a couple will experience. In this article, we will present the first two stages; Romantic Love and The Power Struggle. Our intent

is to help couples understand what is really occurring in the world of attraction and the selection process and to explain why the romantic love experience is not supposed to last. We are supposed to fall out of love.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR PARTNER?

For most of us our relationship didn't begin with a hard cognitive assessment of strengths and weaknesses, or life skills or family and religious compatibility. We chose our beloved because of a convergence of factors, some conscious, some biological, some unconscious that all came together to produce the experience of romantic love that propels us to make deep a commitment to this person. All of these important motivations and interests i.e.: availability, attractiveness, life stage, and the inevitable neurotransmitter releases brought you to the table. For most of us the business of compatibility was, at best, a nice addition to the composite of romance, nurturance and lust that helped pull the trigger of commitment and bet on the potential "full house". Nowhere else would we make a life decision based primarily on the emotional high of romantic love. In fact, most of the world, even in this day and time, believes that making the choice of a life partner should not be left to the whims and emotional undertow of romantic love. They might even say: "Can you imagine choosing your life mate based on the fact that he has nice eyes or her legs are magnificent or he is funny or brave or generous or a very bad boy." Of course these kinds of choices do take place but one would be hard pressed to find our leading relationship experts embracing physical attraction as the most important aspect of the selection process.

And yet for some of us, here we are. We've made a commitment either because we were attracted, infatuated or just plain head over heels in love with our beloved, while we were under

the influence of nature's most potent chemical cocktails. Nature's agenda has the house odds and is calling the bets while we're just starting to figure out how to play the hand we're dealt.

ENTER INTO THE POWER STRUGGLE

For some of us, love shows up as an irresistible passion and desire. So whether love shows up as a super sonic jet, a touring sedan or a pick up truck, we know that the experience of romantic love has the same destination. The vehicle doesn't seem to matter. The destination is the second stage of the committed relationship and what we call the Power Struggle. It is the first major stop along the highway of the committed relationship. And, how well you play the cards you're dealt along the way can make a huge difference in your enjoyment of the game and your personal growth as a spiritual being.

Although we may find it difficult to navigate this journey of Romantic Love when we are in it, we can often see the phenomenon taking place in our friends, relatives or, worst case, our children. It's almost a cosmic joke, that the one who drives us crazy with passion or the promise of a better life, will later, just plain drive us crazy. It is a trick of nature that what attracts us in romantic love drives us nuts later. We are, perhaps, too familiar with the trick. He was brave when they first met and now she complains about his recklessness. She was beautiful and now she's vain. She was nurturing and now she's invasive. He was discerning and now he's critical. He was direct and now he's rude. These once positive traits that turn negative will surface in the relationship once the commitment is strong enough to handle the differences and incompatibility of the partnership. That's right, incompatibility is the natural state of committed couples. Learn to accept that fundamental reality and you are ready for the adventure and personal growth that will come from the most important relationship most of us will ever have.

You know you have entered the Power Struggle when your beloved goes from being the one who lights up your life to being the one who raises the red cape in front of the bull's eyes.

The red cape is there to get your attention – focus your energy AND – wake you up. The very experience of „being driven crazy“ forces change because loving someone who infuriates and confounds us is intolerable. Over fifty per cent of the time our discomfort leads to relationship break-up, but we often don't stop loving that person. Some of our heart is still connected. The good news is that learning how to manage different realities is the essential next step to relationship happiness.

This step is a relatively new and unshaped idea, that continuing to love and grow with the one who pushes our crazy buttons is a right and good thing. But thousands of couples around the world are discovering that the difficulties accompanying the Power Struggle phase of relationship can be used to grow, stretch, wake up and allow more aliveness than ever before.

The Imago Theory provides a pathway for moving through the stages of relationship that we think are predictable. The theory holds that it is possible to take a turn at this junction and move into Conscious Relationship accompanied by skills and discipline that can help couples achieve an extraordinary relationship.

STEPS TO TAKE THAT WILL HELP

Here are 3 Food For Thought Tips and 3 Action Steps that can help.

Food For Thought Tip #1. The Good News and Bad News of your childhood shows up in your committed relationship.

The Good News:

Your unconscious mind had or will have a significant role in your choice of a committed partner. When it comes to attraction, we go to the past to recreate all those good and wonderful feelings of connection and love. Later, our highest and most creative talents are designed to get us into relationship, and hopelessly committed to each other and the family. It is exactly these unique tensions that can evolve from the Romantic Love attraction to a particularly „creative partnering that will allow us to get on to the business we have next to complete, successfully growing and nourishing the relationship.

The Bad News:

We want it all. The repetitive or intense frustrations that we experienced growing up are also asleep in us, waiting to be reborn, this time in connection with our beloved. This is not a cruel trick of nature or as perverse as it might seem. These early frustrations that were unresolved just got buried because that was the best we could do at the time. We put ourselves partially to sleep while growing up in order to fit into our world, the world we saw from our child eyes. But we are not required to live in that drowsy state forever. In adult life we need the differences provided by another person in order to learn to be fully awake. This means that frustration can now become part of a growth strategy to ultimately replace the Power Struggle.

Action Step:

Patience and acceptance can go a long way. With very few exceptions, your partner is not trying to hurt you. More often than not, it is the unconscious relationship agenda that has disrupted the connection between you and your partner. This will happen all the time. So try not to throw in your hand by the loss of this connection. Just know that the disruption will occur from time to time and when it does, it s tim e to go to w ork .

OWN UP TO YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROBLEM

First, own up to your part of the problem. Start the conversations with how you know you have contributed to the problem. This will allow your partner to focus on the issue without feeling so defensive. This will at least get a tough conversation off to a stable start.

Food For Thought Tip #2: What worked in the past, may not be working for you now.

Part of the waking up process is realizing that your habitual responses to frustration with your partner ARE the problem. An example might help here. Bob sometimes has the experience that Wendy gets so busy that she starts unloading various tasks on Bob. Well of course Bob thinks he has his own list to complete, (thank you very much) and if he is not careful he can get captured by the experience of being „told what to do“. As a youngest child he goes right back to childhood and his older brother and emotionally he is churning the same feelings. Resentment builds and he is going himself all ready to „show her and that she can't „push him around“, ready to defend his integrity. Wendy will say something innocuous like, “Dear, did you follow up on that request about the next workshop?” By this time Bob has himself so fueled with hostility and defensiveness that he will respond sarcastically with “since when is it my job to be your secretary?” or “you're not the boss of me” or some other statement that generates that palpable chill we all know. Bob is doing the adult version of what he did growing up to protect himself. Instead, if he changes his childhood defensive behavior and opens a dialog about how he feels and what he needs from Wendy, then connection can be restored.

Action Step.

WHO IS REALLY GETTING IT?

If you think your partner is “not getting it” (not respecting you, not listening etc.), please remember that YOU may be “not getting it”. Consider what you are putting in to the mix because of your own frustrations. Check in with yourself about your own perceptions of your partner and ask yourself, “Am I getting any benefit from continuing to see her/him as selfish or distant or depressed?” This helps break the attachment we can have of seeing our partner in a negative light.

CONFLICT IS NATURAL

Food For Thought Tip #3. Conflict is natural.

The well used metaphor of “getting upstream ” to help manage conflict is apt here. To focus on down-river clean up without upstream prevention, will not solve the problem. Conflict is inevitable whenever creative, ambitious and motivated people are in the mix, so planning for conflict will reduce feelings of personal failure and negative evaluation that can lead to emotional injury. Once we have gone down that road, it is difficult to stay focused on resolution, rather than defending our ideas or actions.

Action Step:

Consider having your fights in advance. Most of us know the struggles we will have with our partners already. Having your fights in advance, when you are not in the middle of the fight, may help keep strong emotions from taking over and beginning the repetitive nightmare all over again. Start now, having conversations with your partner that are positive and genuine.

Appreciate, in a genuine way, your partner everyday. Assume competence in your partner and look for ways to express respect everyday. When you do this, it is like stacking the deck in your

favor, and you'll probably need those cards someday when the rupture in the relationship occurs again.

For most of us, the ruptures continue because we are still waking up, so let's treat each other authentically, yet gently, practicing patience and acceptance along the way. The House will always have the odds, but we can play the game knowing how to increase our odds of walking into the future, as winners.