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Better Marriages

Introduction

Marriage... It's more than just a wedding

OH! HOW WE love fairy tales! It is the stuff romance is made of.

The beautiful princess, the handsome prince, the magical palace, the fairy godmother, the wonderful, enchanting wedding.... And then... of course, the part we love the most: 'and they lived happily ever after'.

Fairy tales just stop at the wedding. Can you imagine Cinderella and the Prince making a grocery list, doing the dishes, having an anxiety attack if the maid does not turn up, squabbling over who is to cook dinner, having children and growing old? In other words, settling down to 'wholly' matrimony?

The 'happily ever after' can be called to question in the nitty-gritty of everyday life.

Did Cinderella and the Prince have a magical formula to live happily in wedded harmony or did they ride the roller coaster of marriage as nay normal couple does nowadays?

Whatever the case may be, marriage is more than just the wedding. After the confetti settles down on the 'I do' and the 'honeymoon', the hard work begins.

This little book does not give you any magical formula, not does it guarantee a fairytale ending. This book provides you with the tools to empower yourself and describes practical and simple ways to enrich your marriage.

So, here's the great journey from 'I do' to 'till death do us part'.

Read on and feel motivated.

1. The meaning of marriage

So... just what is 'Marriage' all about?

CAN WE QUITE define 'The institution of marriage'?. It dates back far into time, defining a relationship between a man and a woman, a holy union, blessed by God and society as a whole. A relationship based on a strong desire to be with one another through good times and bad, pledged together in eternal bondage.

A dinosaur institution?

DESPITE ALL THE spin about marriage being a dying institution, with today's generation infatuated with 'love triangles', 'living together', 'office affairs' and 'illusions of safe sex', there are still many men and women who care deeply about fully enjoying their marriage.

What is the promise of marriage

- To the young bride, it is the excitement of her wedding day complete with flowers, music and friends, and the indispensable handsome groom!
- To the newly weds, it is shared intimacy, friendship and adventure.
- To the couple married for 15 years, it is children, companionship... and dreams.
- To those married for 35 years, it's grandchildren, autumn years, slowing down... and nostalgia.

Is it worthwhile?

- It takes a lot of effort to make a marriage work but remember, so does everything worthwhile.
- True, we have to make sacrifices – but what we reap by way of personal dividends far outweigh the losses
- True, there are other ways to satisfy the pangs of loneliness and feeling of discontent – but these are only means of momentary gratification.
- True, that current odds against having a successful marriage are tough, but if you follow a few basic principles, the odds change dramatically.

Marriage has survived the test of time. What more can you ask for?

The truth, the whole truth...

- No marriage is perfect. No. Not one.
- There are no readymade solutions for an ideal marriage.
- Each marriage is unique: we cannot slot our marriage into categories
- We learn from experience. No formal training is given or available.
- Marriages may be made in heaven, but we have to live them on earth.

Marriage... then and now

“MARRIAGE IS A kind of Jerusalem, an archeological site on which the present is constantly building over the past, letting history’s many layers twist and tilt into today’s walls and floors.”

- E.J Graff

The good, old times

THE OLDER GENERATION seems confused by the changing parameters of marriages today. They cannot understand this overwhelming need to retain one’s identity, the absorption with careers and the quest for ‘self’ that modern couples keep talking about. They dismiss it as psychological jargon and talk about the times when marriage meant respecting one another and enduring each other’s foibles.

The turbulent times

TODAY, PEOPLE PLACE greater burdens on their marriage.

Expectations from each other are high.

If total tolerance characterized marriages of yore, a fierce desire for independence seems to be the trend of today.

The raising divorce rates are an indication of living in testing times.

Has ‘forever and ever’ lost its meaning?

The great Indian debate

TO ARRANGE A marriage... or fall in love. Does it really matter?

The debate is quite unnecessary.

How you get married is not important; it is what you invest in it which is crucial.

- It doesn't matter whether love comes before or after; it is only one of the building blocks of a happy marriage.
- It doesn't matter whether you know the person you are going to marry beforehand. It is what you know after that is more important.
- True though it may be that people who have a love marriage are motivated to try harder because the decision to get married is their responsibility, those in contemporary arranged marriages too, set a great store by working hard on their marriages.

What one needs to realize is that 'Marriage' is something you have to work at all the time. Once you are married, it doesn't matter how you got together.

You have to work – to make it work.

And the greatest investment you can put into your marriage is yourself.

The marriage mindset

"SUCCESS IN MARRIAGE is much more than finding the right person; it is being the right person..." - Anonymous

The process of getting married is, to many, a frightening prospect. Some of the common fears are:

- The fear of commitment
- The fear of dependency
- The fear of taking the wrong decisions
- The fear of bowing to parental pressures (especially in arranged marriages)
- The fear of finality – the final closing of a door to other choices
- The fear of losing one's identity
- The fear of making compromises

These fears are a natural part of that antagonizing decision that goes into the marriage process. What is even more frightening, is that you have nothing concrete to base your decisions on, except what you have seen of your parent's marriage or the glimpse you have had of other peoples'.

These fears need to be addresses. At the very beginning –

- No relationship can evolve if you are not ready to make the initial commitment, mainly, the emotional commitment
- The decision to many should not be based on superficial wants, parental pressures or with the attitude that if it does not work out, once can always get a divorce
- To truly give your marriage a chance, you need to make a strong commitment not so much to your partner but to yourself... to stay happily married.
- Contemporary women place a high premium on emotional and financial independence. The fear of handing control to someone else, of being dependant, of feeling accountable, are considered signs of weakness.

But the bottom line is:

- Like it or not, we are all dependent on each other most of the time.
- Marriage is not about independence or dependence. It is about interdependence.
- This interdependence is not depleting or demeaning; it is refreshing and enhancing.
- Marriage is about sharing; it is about “two heads is better than one”.
- There is no such thing as fundamental incompatibility
- Marriage is about making combines efforts and accepting and understanding each other’s difference. It is about putting equal efforts and time into building the marriage. It is about adjustment.

And so...

- Look at marriage, not as the final closure of a door, but as the opening of several new doors.
- Marriage need never be about losing one’s identity. It can be a pathway for enhancing it.
- Marriage is about meeting each other halfway, about accommodating each other’s interests. To concede in order to grow. To work towards a middle ground in order to walk till the end. In short, to make small compromises without losing sight of the larger vision that is the essence of your self.
- You need to remember that it is all in your own hands.
- You need to give yourself up completely to the process. No half measures.
- Above all, you need to ‘involve in order evolve’.

Remember, without involvement, there can be no commitment.

Here is a motto for marriage...

Gift yourself to your marriage – give it your best shot.

Marriage makeover

THE INCREASING RATES of divorce, the sordid separations, the extra-marital liaisons – are all indicative of the fact that marriage, to some extent, has taken a beating.

The stress and strife of modern life is re-defining the way we look at marriage.

- We need to look at marriage in a new light.
- We need to remember that what worked earlier need not necessarily work today
- To get most out of your marriage, we need to make it more meaningful.
- We must make our marriage the focus of our lives.

The only way to grow in a marriage is to grow together.

The long and winding road

- A marriage is a long journey
- Every marriage has problems
- We need to accept the roses as well as the thorns.

We need to be together for better or worse.

Remember, “A thousand mile journey begins with the first step.” One right step at a time and you are on your way.

2. The basis of marriage

Built on rock, not built to rock

“ALL THINGS ARE created twice. There’s a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation of all things. You have to make sure that the blueprint, the first creation, is really what you want, that you have thought everything through. Then you put it into bricks and mortar. You begin with the end in mind. “

- Stephen R. Covey

Marriage is a building process. It is like constructing a house. You need to first lay a strong foundation, and then proceed to build – block by block, brick by brick. Slowly, the house starts to take shape, acquires a uniqueness of its own and starts to reflect the personalities, the idiosyncrasies and the character of the people who live in that house. It becomes a home. Similarly, ‘a wedding’ becomes ‘a marriage’.

Constructing a house is a slow process; so too is building a marriage. Both are a labour of love requiring time and patience.

The difference?

Building a house requires different people to do different jobs.

A meaningful marriage requires just two. Only two.

The building blocks

The quality and sturdiness of any building depends on the the foundation.

So too in marriage. A strong marriage is based on

- The power of love
 - The trust factor
 - Mutual respect
- Enriching intimacy

These are the big rocks that you need to place in your marriage jar. If you don’t place these in first, at the bottom of your jar, it is difficult to get them in later. You will find the jar full of pebbles and gravel, trivial things, small things, which make for a shaky foundation.

3. The Power of love

“WHAT A PITY is, that marrying spoils courting.”

- T.C Halaiburton

There are many that believe that marriage spells the end of romance.

Others believe that the honeymoon is over in more ways than one in the drudgery of domesticity.

It is to withstand these kinds of thoughts that a marriage must have ‘love’ – unconditional love – as one of its major building blocks.

The power of love

- Love has been a subject of intense discussion since time immortal.
- There can be no definite definition of love nor should one even attempt to define it.
- Love is something that is felt and enjoyed rather than described.
- “Love makes the world go round”, is a much-used cliché but it happens to be true: it definitely makes a marriage go round.
- It is love that sustains a marriage, nourishes it, vitalizes it, and gives it form and expression.
- The power of marriage, to a large extent, depends on the power of love. Not only the kind of love that brings two people together, but the love that holds them in a relationship together
- Love has to be the sheet anchor in a marriage. It is a vital need especially if things turn rocky or stormy.
- Love should not be confused with passion. For a marriage to grow, one needs to move beyond that.

Couples who stay married for a while, need to experience an enhancement of their love.

Where has all the love gone?

A TIME COMES in every marriage when we ask ourselves the question “Where has all the love gone?” The first feeling of disquiet strikes us. It may even begin as early as the honeymoon.

The darker side of closeness

IT IS IRONICAL that the closer we get together in a marriage, the more feelings of agitation and disquiet we experience. It may start as a suspicion, a shadow that might already have been cast on the edge of our thinking or emotions.

'A little smudge on our halos: a little tarnish on our suits of shining armor.'

We try to ignore but it keeps coming back. The doubts appear, the clouds keep forming and the recriminations begin on both sides.

The good(?) news is that every marriage goes through stage of disillusionment.

This arises because of unrealized and unrealistic expectations owing to

- The inability to explicitly communicate our deepest thoughts and fears to each other causes conflict.
- Some emotional baggage from our past that we bring to our present relationship. A deep sense of our own inadequacy, nothing exposes the flaws of human nature like marriage.

Common refrains

"OH MY! HOW much you have changed!"

"You are not the gentleman / lady that I thought you were."

"If I knew that this would happen, I would have stayed single all my life."

"You expect too much from me: I am not superman / superwoman."

"Nothing ever pleases you. I give up!"

The list of complaints becomes endless, storm clouds begin to gather. With understanding and love waning, you are now treading on thin ice.

You attempt to adjust, you try to make compromises, try to get absorbed in other marital tasks, try to turn a blind eye, but these problems keep persisting.

Sweeping the debris of a deteriorating marriage under a carpet does not help.

The grass was greener syndrome

PREOCCUPIED BY EACH other's shortcomings, you remember how good it was to be single.

How good it was to make your own decisions, to spend your own money on whatever you want and how wise you always were until you made that one fatal mistake – the choice of a soul mate!

Is this the end of the road?

BESET BY DOUBTS, you believe you have fallen out of love... that you have created an insurmountable barrier that cannot be breached. You ask yourself the question – “Where do we go from here?”

The building of the bridge

MOST MARRIED COUPLE will tell us that these problems are small hiccups and if one waits, they will recede. But, the longer you postpone dealing with these issues, the bigger they will become. Get the repair work going. Start building bridges, not burning boats.

The root of the problem

PARADOXICAL AS IT may seem, the feelings of disquiet and distance are indications that the partners are getting closer together. It can be seen as an unconscious response to be loved unconditionally. As a basic need to be loved, cherished and nurtured. To be accepted the way one is and not the way one's partner wants one to be. So, then, we ask ourselves, where does the problem lie?

It love is the answer, then why didn' it sustain the relationship?

Understanding love

WE NEED TO remember that for any marriage to grow, love too must grow.

Just being in love is not enough. Love comes with conditions and expectations and if these conditions and expectations are not understood or fulfilled, it can lead to conflict. Since most of the expectations are unconscious and unspoken, they tend to creep into marriage at some point in time to confront us.

Recognise the symptoms when love goes awry

- Going off the deep end when we can't have our own way.
- Sulking at the mildest provocation.
- Insensitive and demanding for no rhythm or reason.
- Drifting apart – sexually.
- Holding back thoughts and feelings from each other.

Accusing each other constantly

We need to watch out for these symptoms, because they are an unconscious cry of unfulfilled expectations. The beginning of disillusionment...

It's all about expression

FEW OF US realize how out of shape we are when it comes to intimate communication, and therefore, our ability to love. Communication, both silent and verbal, is the strongest expression of love. When communication in a marriage begins to sour, bigger problems are not far off.

In order to experience the power of a higher kind of love, we need to keep our communication lines wide open. We need to be aware of each other's expectations. We need to verbalize and articulate our needs and desires. We must not live under the impression that if we love each other, we are automatically privy to each other's deepest thoughts.

The best way to do that, even if we feel it's highly unromantic, is to make a checklist of our expectations, compare notes, sift through what is rational, and discuss what is irrational. We need to be completely honest with each other about this.

We need to communicate even our most trivial expectations, as we need to be keenly aware of what we want from each other,

Great expectations?

I WISH HE would:

- Put the cap back on the toothpaste after he uses it.
 - Talk to me about his work after he comes from office.
 - Cook me dinner or take me out occasionally
- Hang up his clothes neatly and not leave them bundled on the bed.

And so on.....

It also pays to make a list of what you do for your spouse. It can read something like:

- When we get dressed to go to a party, I always tell him how handsome he looks.
 - I always pick up some surprise gifts to show him how much I care about him.
- When we fight, I refuse to go to sleep till I have made up with him.

These are a part of unvoiced expectations that usually clog up a marriage. These need to be stated and resolved in an open manner in order for love to grow.

These are a few of my favorite things

TRY TO MAKE your checklist as comprehensive as possible. Try to cover all domains in your relationship:

- Your day to day activities.
- Your interaction with each other.
- Your relationship with your own relatives and his.
- Your financial deals and considerations.
- Your patterns of making up.

Your inclination towards love, romance and sex.

Love will find the way

AFTER YOU HAVE read each other's checklists, you will have a better idea of each other's wants and desires. You will begin communicating better with each other in a way indicative of a special, higher love.

Just keep it flowing smoothly...

Don't mishandle or mix up communication. The core of interaction in a marriage, is thoughts and words – spoken and unspoken – it can draw you together or drive you apart.

- Maintain a healthy relationship by managing differences and disagreements without blaming, complaining, accusing, resenting, demanding, and doubting.
- Understand that no matter what problems we face together, we each naturally have different points of view, and those points of view must, at all times, be respected rather than ignored or invalidated.
- Understand that there are differences between the way a woman thinks and behaves and the way a man thinks and behaves.
- To men, simply spending time together, eating at the same table, running errands or watching television is part of being intimate, while having a conversation isn't. Whereas for a woman, talking about and sharing what's happening is an important part of love.
- Understand the most important and powerful investment we can ever bring to our marriage is ourselves.

Though it seems easier to act as though differences don't exist and to hope that things will work out. Understand that we need to have the courage to clarify expectations always.

Put love first to make love last

“THOSE WHO HAVE not known the deep intimacy and the intense companionship of happy mutual love have missed the best thing that life has to give.”

- Bertrand Russell

Love is an emotional process that takes ‘time’ and ‘care’.

The way you love defines the way you live.

Love emerges from the self but is based, first of all, in caring for another person as you care for yourself.

Take at least 10-15 minutes at day’s end to get ‘in sync’ with your partner. Today, most of us rush home, hurry to prepare dinner, flip through the newspaper, eat quickly and collapse for the evening in front of the television or plunge into preparations for the next day.

What’s missing is the transition period, to recover from the day’s space, to tune into each other’s energy levels.

We need to:

- Slow down the pace of meal times and enjoy each other’s dining companionship.
- To listen to each other, to relate to each other.
- Go for a shared early-morning or evening stroll.
- Spend time together fixing meals, pottering around the garden.
- Sit together quietly, listening to music, sipping cups of tea.
- Relate eye to eye. Saying, “I love you” in words pales in contrast to the potential power of expressing “I love you” just by gazing into each other’s eyes.
- Learn to do things together.
- Avoid staying up late watching television, while your partner is in bed.
- Never make firm important plans without consulting each other.
- Enjoy humor breaks; make each other laugh, share private jokes, relate funny experiences... be a loving person with a sense of fun and play.
- Grow closer by expressing love and appreciation.
- Get close, not necessarily passionate, at least once a day.

Use “I love you” as a heartfelt phrase – neither as a casual nor a formal remark strewn at random.

The rewards of love

LOVE, IF UNDERSTOOD and not taken for granted, becomes an invigorating force that reaches into the future and sets a foundation for trust, respect and intimacy, the other ‘big rocks’ of marriage. But for love to sustain itself, another important factor must accompany it – trust.

4. The trust factor

“IF I MAKE deposits into an emotional bank account with you through courtesy, kindness, honesty and keeping my commitments to you, I build up a reserve. Your trust towards me becomes higher, and I can call upon that trust many times if I need do. I can even make mistakes, and the trust level, that emotional reserve will compensate for it. My communication may not be clear, but you’ll get my meaning anyway. When the trust account is high, communication is easy, effective and instant.”

- Stephen R Covey

Trust is a binding factor in any relationship and in a marriage it assumes even greater significance. This is the ‘big rock’ that keeps us steady, that inspires faith through ‘the best of times and the worst of times.’

Trust is the highest kind of motivation in a marriage.

Trust in a marriage is a feeling of confidence and belief that you have in the other. It is based on the deep faith that whatever happens, your spouse will be there for you. It is a wonderful feeling of belonging that enables you to be yourself – to bare your soul to the other without fear or hesitation.

It’s easy to fall in love with a man you don’t trust, but it’s hard to live with him.

Real, lasting relationships are built on trust. Trust is the foundation because it creates a safe environment for intimacy to grow. If your relationship is going to work, you need to be able to trust your partner with your past, your present and your future.

We need to realize that trust is not only a tool for the growth of our marriage, but it is also a tool for our own growth as human beings.

An important process of this growth is to reinforce and refine our respective identities. How do we do this?

Cutting the apron strings

- We need to flee the nest in more ways than one. In other words, it's time to let go the apron strings.
- We need to see ourselves as mature, independent adults, no longer just our parent's children.
- This does not imply cutting one's parents out of one's life.
- It is best to handle one's conflicts with one's spouse, instead of running to one's parents and crying on their shoulders.
- It is not fair to expect one's husband / wife to be cut in the same mould as one's father/mother.

It is uncivil and irrelevant to idealize one's parents and undermine one's in-laws – most marriages centre around mother-in-law, son-in-law, father-in-law conflicts because one cannot take a balanced view of one's parents.

An important ingredient of trust in a marriage, is the essential, intrinsic knowledge that you are for your spouse and your spouse is for you, in both good times and bad.

This is but part of growing up and a reflection of the changing priorities in life.

The process of growing away from the parental shadow starts with trust...trusting the spouse. The new friend, mentor and guide.

Trust takes time and effort, is easily broken and hard to restore; but if you are willing to work at it, the reward is the relationship you have always dreamed of.

Revealing your true self

TRUST ALLOWS YOU to reveal who you really are. Impressions can be made based on courtships rituals and charades; intimacy is founded on knowing and being known. Your partner has to get to know the real you – what you really are like when you're tired, angry, frustrated, elated. He has to love you as you are, not as he hopes you might be. Anything less won't last.

Honest communication

TRUST OPENS THE door to honest communication. You cannot communicate honestly if you are always second-guessing how your partner will react and rephrasing your thoughts to fit in with his agenda. You need to:

- Ask questions. Don't assume you understand what a person means. Listen. To become a better communicator, you must be willing to listen.
- See another's perspective. rve and be willing to verify the information you receive.

- Let your partner know what you are thinking by sharing it.
- By disclosing information about yourself, the other person understands who you are.
- Remember that love covers a multitude of sins.

From conflict to closeness

Differences are natural

THERE CAN BE no marriage without differences. Differences are an expression of conflict and confusion. They arise out of the pressures of living with a person whom we love dearly, but who sometimes appears so unfathomable and unreasonable.

Arguments are not a sign of troubles times in a relationship. It's perfectly understandable if we lose our cool occasionally, throw a few tantrums, rave and rant as long as that does not become our only source of communication.

Remember the more dependence and trust we have in each other, the harder we fight.

Voicing differences is a wonderful way of understanding our partner and ourselves and the process of making up can even be a good fun.

If we understand and resolve our differences and not pussyfoot our way around them, we can move our relationship to a higher level of comfort and trust.

Fair fights

ONCE YOU'VE CLEARED up your communication, trusting your partner will help you to fight when disagreements occur. Face it, if you're involved with a living breathing human being, you are going to fight. Whether the fights tear you apart or actually resolve conflicts and bring you closer together, depends on whether or not you fight fair.

What is a fair fight? Most experts agree that in a fair fight, you need to:

- Stay specific to the topic – Now is not the time to bring out a list of past wrongs. Deal with the issue at hand.
- Refuse to resort to name-calling and insults. Remember that the point of the argument is to solve something, not to tear the other person to bits or badger them so they will quit and you will win.
- Avoid generalizations and stick to facts. “You always” or “You never” statements do not reflect reality and will only put your partner on the defensive.
- Stay with what actually happened and how it made you feel.

- Define the issue – truthfully express what is disturbing you in as much detail as possible.
- Resolve your fights, even if it means the odd late night.
- Apologize for your role in the fight. Do this as soon as you feel the first signs of thawing. Try not to wait for your spouse to initiate the making-up process.
- Feel your feelings. Experience and communicate your feelings as honestly and openly as you can in the moment you are feeling them.
- Remember that you care. Do keep in mind that ongoing relationships are a mosaic made up of many facets, and there is more to your partner and your relationship than any one issue.
- Change your mind. To open yourself to the fact that any issue can be understood and interpreted in a variety of ways, otherwise you will continue to stay in a rut and progressively dig the hole deeper with every conflict.
- Take personal responsibility. Ask yourself in what way or ways do you contribute to the situation that upsets you. Rarely if ever in an ongoing relationship does a difficulty arise that has not been contributed to by both partners.
- Remember that your partner is not you. Learn to internalize and understand this fact. Empathize with the other's point of view. Guard against the very dangerous belief that if you are having difficulty with your partner, that means your relationship is in trouble. More than likely it means your relationship needs a tune-up and a change of attitude.

Only in romantic fantasy does everything go smoothly without attention, care and change.

5. Mutual Respect

The heart of every successful marriage

RESPECT IS THE quality that transcends romance and admiration. It becomes the bedrock of a lasting partnership.

‘Respect’ is not mentioned in the marriage vows. No illustrated books show you how to achieve it. And yet it is central to a lasting, satisfying marriage.

Yes, respect. It seems a quaint, almost formal, word today. But it’s a feeling that successfully married couples mention with impressive consistency.

What is respect?

- An important ingredient to happiness in a marriage is the feeling of being cherished and respected.
- Respect does not mean just an acknowledgement of each other’s skills and talents. It is a feeling of being well cared for, of feeling safe, of feeling central to the parent’s world.
- Respect is based on integrity. A partner is admired and loved for his or her honesty, compassion, generosity of spirit, decency, loyalty to the family and fairness.
- An important aspect of respect is admiration of the partner as a sensitive, conscientious parent.
- Respect is a feeling that is nourished by emotional and physical intimacy, appreciation and fond memories.

Utmost value must be placed on the partner’s moral values. One of the main reasons for divorce is when a partner loses respect for the other.

The respect that people feel in a good marriage goes with the conviction that the person is ‘worthy of being loved’.

Respect is not to be confused with admiration. When you fall in love, you admire the other. You look up to someone – much the way a child idealizes a parent.

Such romantic admiration thrives and even depends on the illusion that he or she is ‘perfect for you’. That is why it does not last. You come to see that the person you married is quite different from your ‘dream’ man! There are differences of personality, of approaches to life and different ways of doing things.

The ego trap

“WHEN TWO PEOPLE in a marriage are more concerned about getting the golden eggs, the benefits, than they are in preserving the relationship that makes them possible, they often become insensitive and inconsiderate, neglecting the little kindnesses and courtesies so important to a deep relationship... The love, the richness, the softness and spontaneity begin to deteriorate. The goose gets sicker day by day.”

- Stephen R Covey

Gaining and giving respect in a marriage is no mean feat. All marriages go through a lot of teething problems. The question, “Who is the boss?” resounds in most homes.

In any marriage there will be conflict. And when there is conflict, one partner has to concede. Trouble starts brewing in paradise when both partners refuse to give way and stick to their point of view. It is this unwillingness to concede authority that results in a tug of war for control where both partners start playing subtle and not so subtle ego games with each other.

Never fear: this can happen in the best of relationships and the ensuing conflicts need not signify that there is something wrong with the relationship. Successful resolutions of these ego conflicts usher genuine respect in to the relationship.

I lead, you follow

ONE OF THE biggest challenges in a relationship is to ‘see it from the other point of view’. There is an overwhelming need in us to expect our partner to follow our patterns of thought and living: a need in us to make all the crucial decisions in a marriage. This results in a power struggle.

The big boss

A DOMINANT PARTNER in a marriage will expect respect from the other and take that respect for granted.

Expect the other to play peace maker in ll the quarrels and disagreements that may occur.

Will give the other partner no choice in picking friends: “My friends are your friends. Whether you like them or not.”

Will take complete control of the money and keep the other in the dark about it.

Will be highly critical of the other in public, with regard to dress and behavior. Will have a tendency to interfere in everything, making no allowances for the other’s need for privacy.

The great martyr

SOMETIMES, IN A relationship, there will be one who, on the surface, appears to be the suffering martyr dominated by an aggressive partner.

Wringing one's hands and playing helpless when confronted with a problem, so that the other takes on the responsibility.

But this person in indulging in a subtle and devious game of non co-operation by:

Playing the 'sentimental card' in order to get what is required.

Projecting an aura of innocence and ignorance for the whole world to see , using it to advantage.

Hiding thoughts from the other just for the satisfaction of keeping the partner in the dark.

Procrastinating if the other asks for something to be done.

And so on...

Most of us are a mixture of both the big boss and the great martyr in the tug of war relationship of marriage.

Many times we are not consciously aware that we are playing ego or control games with each other. Recognizing the fact is the first step to an honest evaluation of oneself and one's marriage.

Remember that it takes two to tango. If you feel that your spouse is playing a control game with you, it is quite possible that you too are playing a part, at some level.

The obstacles to respect

Overlapping of roles and loss of identity

ROLES IN TODAY'S marriages have become blurred with contemporary women donning the mantle of both homemaker and provider. The balancing act becomes even more of a problem when a child enters the relationship. The discharge of homemaking becomes a bone of contention and ego tussles become a major part of the marriage.

A relationship between two people succeeds when they realize how important they are as individuals and how together, as one, they can contribute to a more significant growth in

One up-man ship

“Anything you can do I can do better” is a line from a famous song. In many marriages, a partner seems focused on outsmarting or outdoing his/her spouse. “I love you more than you love me”, “ I do more that you do for me” are some of the refrains that are common to situations where the competitive element reigns supreme.

Road to respect

WE NEED TO take the responsibility of marriage seriously. We also need to grow internally and together, to give credence to our principles and beliefs in order to steer a steady course.

We must understand each others’ limits. We need to understand how far we can go without treading on each other’s toes. Respect in marriage comes in not overstepping certain lines.

Trespassing on each other’s personal space is a strict no-no. We all need to have an inviolable part of our minds separate from the marital domain that we share with our spouse, children and others.

There is a need to define boundaries, both physical and emotional. This can be arrive at only by listening to and understanding each other, in terms of division of responsibility in these areas –

- Taking care of children
- Looking after household tasks
- Sorting out money matters
- Managing common assets such as the home, car and family.

Other aspects unique to every family unit

Territory rules

TERRITORY LIMITS WILL keep changing.

Try to keep your partner’s requirements in mind when you draw your boundaries.

Learn not to overstep each others’ boundaries.

There is no place for competition in a marriage. No place for win/lose thinking. If both partners aren’t winning then both are definitely losing.

Don’t be judgmental of each other’s attitudes and values. Learn to respect each other’s differences.

A lethal weapon

'THE PUT-DOWN' is the chief symptom and weapon of lack of respect. Or contempt.

Contempt is the worst kind of emotion. You feel the other person has no worth.

We've all seen marriages in which one to both partners attack the other quite savagely in the guise of "It's for your own good." Any 'good' is undone by the hostile tone. A wife nags her husband to be more ambitious and makes him feel like a failure, because he prefers craftsmanship or community projects to the competitive business world. Or, a husband accuses his wife of wasting time whenever she gets together with a friend: "Why isn't she doing something productive?"

In good marriages, partners nurture each other's self esteem. They may express humorous incomprehension of one another's preferences, but they never make the other person feel like an idiot.

But there is fondness in the gibes and firm support for the other's right to be himself. Respect is expressed in words like, "I don't want to go to the concert, but you have a great time." And occasionally, "Sure, I'll come with you. Just don't be mad if I fall asleep."

Respect, then, is appreciation of the separateness of the other person, of the ways in which he or she is unique. These things take time to discover and accept. That's why respect is a quality of maturity in a marriage, not the first heat of romance.

But this doesn't mean that married couples who respect each other are simply saying, "You go your way, and I'll go mine." On the contrary, respect draws the couple close together. Often it helps you to learn from each other, to accept the other's outlook and make it part of yourself.

That's the paradox of a good marriage; only by respecting each other as you are, do you open the door to change. The root meaning of the word is respect is 'to look at'.

Respect is a clear yet loving eye. It sees what is really there, but it also sees what is potentially there and helps it to fruition. Respect is the art of love, by which married couples honor what is unique and best in each other.

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6. Enriching intimacy

“SYNERGY IS EVERYWHERE in nature. If you plant two plants close together, the roots commingle and improve the quality of the soil so that both plants will grow better than if they were separated. If you put two pieces of wood together, they will hold much more than the total weight held by each separately. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. One plus one equals three or more.”

-Stephen R. Covey

Intimacy is the most unique aspect of a marriage. It symbolizes the perfect synergy of love, trust and respect, the other binding factors in a relationship.

Intimacy reflects the height of closeness between two people. It is the capacity to be completely honest, open and expressive with another human being, without fear or favor.

It is an expression of harmony with oneself and with each other. It is wonderful sharing of love, trust and respect resulting in a feeling of companionship, sustained and nurtured through the ups and downs of married life.

Emotional Intimacy: Into-me-see

THE KEY TO a successful and happy relationship is the willingness of the couple to see each other for what they really are and love and respect each other for it... unconditionally.

The ability to reveal yourself fully, honestly and directly to another human being, is the life blood of intimacy. Intimacy thrives only when partners know what is happening in each other's lives – the trivial as well as the important.

Don't attempt to be strong and silent in a crisis: turn to your spouse, indulge in your emotions, have a good cry and luxuriate in your partner's effort at pampering you through the crisis. Don't be afraid of revealing your vulnerability.

Intimacy and self esteem

NOTHING IS MORE important to intimacy than your sense of self worth. How you feel about yourself in relation to your partner is a major factor in the quality of your intimate relationship. Trouble in a relationship almost always involves a problem with self-esteem.

Improving self-esteem and becoming non-defensive:

- There's no easy trick or exercise that will raise your self-esteem.
- Taking risks – doing something that feels unnatural or uncomfortable at first and allowing

- In relationships, the biggest risk for those of us with low esteem, is confiding our needs and fears.
- You may have become accustomed to always putting your best face on or your partner, but without taking the risk of revealing yourself fully, you will never find the intimacy and trust that enriches the relationship and helps to keep it growing. Such self-revelation can also allow partners to support each other during periods of low self-esteem.

The make or break factors to achieving intimacy: Time, Sex and money

INTIMACY REQUIRES TIME. We need to remember that loving relationships are not found, but built with time and patience. Many a times a relationship loses its focus, as other factors like careers, children and parents start taking precedence over spending time with one another. This can lead to a feeling of dissatisfaction and a sense of alienation from one another.

- Give some quality time to your relationship.
- Take some time off, take a well-deserved holiday, just the two of you.
- Make sure that stay tuned in to each other's lives. Discuss your day with each other before you turn in for the night.
- Give each other some breathing space. Take some exclusive time-out.
- Friendship is the key. Share your deepest secrets with your partner. Don't shut each other out.

Go out with your partner on a regular basis. Have dinner, listen to music or do something together that you both enjoy. Listen to each other. Seek to understand. See life through each other's eyes.

Sex: The cornerstone of a relationship

“JOY IN SEX is experienced only when physical intimacy is at the same time the intimacy of loving.”

- Erich Fromm

Physical intimacy is a very important aspect of the marital relationship. In the absence of a mutually satisfying sex life, relationships become dull.

With my body I thee worship

- Sex emphasizes pleasure, closeness and self partner enhancement.
- Sex makes your relationship more vibrant and aware.
- Few of life's experiences yield greater rewards than love making.

The act of lovemaking is not only an act of procreation. It is also an intimately sublime act.

Great sex is not something that just happens. It has to be learned – in a shared, sensitive, open manner.

Sexual Stress

- A common reason for separation in a marriage is lack of sexual passion. It is also the result of some misconceptions about sex. This can be due to the fact that many people, especially in India are woefully ignorant about sexual matters.
- A reduction in the frequency of lovemaking does not necessarily mean that your relationship is on the rocks. It is natural for lovemaking to wane: you don't need to go rushing off to the doctor or feel that you are stuck in a loveless relationship. There is more to marriage than just 'good sex'. You should not centre your marriage, work at getting close to your partner emotionally.

Money matters

ONE OF THE causes of serious marital troubles is money. The upset that so many couples experience over finances is rooted in confusion about their 'money emotions'.

Blurring of roles

NOT SO LONG AGO, it was the man who earned the money and wielded the power in a relationship. As women entered the workforce, the roles became less clear.

Men, today, are faced with conflicting messages about their responsibility as providers and women have to still come to terms with both the provider and the home maker roles.

'Your money, my money' – the power struggle starts and the marriage becomes a minefield.

Resolving money matters

- Money talks, no doubt. But for money problems to be sorted, you and your spouse must talk, openly and freely.
- You need to be sensitive to each other's feelings because money represents core issues like independence, caring, control, commitment and security.
- Planning together is the key. You must sit together and plan budgets, make provisions for the children, save for the rainy day, make retirement plans.
- Do not keep secrets from each other. Finances must be above board.

The most important issue is to gain an understanding of how much money means to both of

The moot point

REMEMBER, ALTHOUGH ‘MONEY’ and ‘sex’ are important, you can never have enough of them. A marriage ‘shored up’ with only the underpinnings of ‘sex’ and ‘money’, will over a period of time, come apart.

A marriage that works is a direct result of two exceptional individuals who have come together to honestly share their lives. It is a basic belief in each other.

Conclusion

Marriage: An equal partnership

‘WORKING TOGETHER’ is what provides the staying power in a marriage.

Approaching everything as a team, never competing, having one common interest and doing what is best for the two of you.

Building a peer relationship

A PEER RELATIONSHIP is a collaboration of love and labor that produces profound intimacy and mutual respect. Above all, peer couples live the same life. The idea of ‘peer’ is important because it incorporates the notion of friendship and equality. This helps in:

- Building the sense of marital identity – a sense of ‘we’-ness in addition to and different from themselves as individuals.
- Establishing the sexual life of the couple. This involves finding the appropriate customs, frequency and rhythms that satisfy both the partners physically and emotionally.
- Establishing the relationships as a zone of safety, a place that is safe for love, hate, conflict, dependency, play, etc...
- Expanding the marital relationship to make room for children while maintaining the private sphere of the couple.

Building a relationship that is fun and interesting for the couple.

What does it take?

- Co-ordination and co-operation
- Not letting the workplace environment set the emotional and task agenda of the home.
- The desire of both parents to take full responsibility in raising the children.

Parents may have a particular need for good negotiation and communication skills, so that they can resolve their differences without threatening the basis of their relationship.

What enables a couple to maintain a peer relationship?

- Forget a plan! Directions and goals, yes. Hopes and dreams, yes. But a plan? No way! There will be far too many factors at play to ever have a ‘fully foolproof’ plan.
- ‘Unexpected things’ and ‘little surprises’ will seem to come from nowhere. But isn’t this what makes life exciting – the unexpected?
- Being flexible and innovative, along with improvisation, will be required to ‘head the general direction’ you were looking at.

Once you come to understand that, then the two of you – as one – will be able to handle ‘life’.

So... get set. Go. Marriage isn’t just a way of life. It is Life!

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