

Loving energy in couple relationships



By Susan Prosser, The Adlerian Team

Love is an energetic force that moves between two people in a dance that can be fun, life-giving, challenging, confusing and sometimes frightening. Imagine that love is pure, powerful, positive and life-giving energy. If it is not blocked in any way it will have full range of power and perfect pitch – like the best possible sound system for the most beautiful music.

The problem with we humans is that we enter into a love relationship with our humanness and history. This means we have fears, expectations, rules, insecurities and a great deal of false information about relationships that we bring along with us. All of these things block the energy flow of love. Each person brings hundreds of little energy blockers with him or her into a relationship. When we can recognize and minimize these blockers then our relationships can improve. We often talk about this as our suitcases that are full of learned information and behaviours. When we look into our suitcases and begin to unpack them we discover the blockers and we discover the parts that are helpful to promote a strong flow.

A simple example of a relationship block follows: A woman may have learned that in an intimate relationship the man takes charge of all the “man jobs” in the domestic scene. In this case she married a man who did not learn those distinctions and in fact was not required to do chores as he was growing up. This scenario is a breeding ground for fights, misunderstandings and hurts. The woman may feel unsupported and angry and the man may feel misunderstood, judged and controlled. He may get defensive, angry and resistant. All of these thoughts and feelings are blocks to the flow of energy between these two people. As the flow is disrupted, the behaviour changes. They begin to feel justified in withholding affection, criticizing, stonewalling, avoiding and defending. These are behaviours that not only block loving energy, but can actively destroy it. Once this couple starts to unpack their suitcases, they begin to realize that they have a responsibility

to create new systems that work in their current life that will promote clear communication and the flow of loving energy.

I often tell clients they can either be right or they can have a healthy relationship. What you think is 'right' is only right from your perspective based on your learning and experience (your suitcase of material). Your partner has a completely different and equally significant experience and suitcase. When you have two people trying to convince each other about their "rightness" then not only do you not have a loving or meaningful connection, but you can damage what you do have.

As a couple, it is important to rid yourself of blocks. To do this you will need to learn about:

a) Yourself, your personality, fears, expectations and assumed rules about relationships and life. The references below will help you to do this. You will want to take a look at the messages you have learned in your family of origin and from cultural influences about family life, gender roles, intimacy, sex, communication, love and so on. Some of these messages may have been empowering while others quite debilitating. One of the most common debilitating messages that women often carry is "if he really loved me he would know what I want and need and he would want to do that for me." One that men often carry is "if she is unhappy it must mean that I am a failure."

b) All the same things about your partner's interior world. You may think you know your partner inside out but you may not realize that some of his or her basic assumptions about life and relationships are very different from yours. Find out and talk about these. Dr. Robin Smith's book *Lies at the Altar* offers hundreds of questions that can spark conversation and deeper understanding of what is in the suitcases.

As you learn to: a) take responsibility for yourself, care for yourself and, b) have understanding and compassion for your partner, the connection can grow stronger.

The more you work on this, the stronger the connection becomes and the stronger the connection, the safer and more secure you can feel with one another. The other benefit is that when we start behaving better, we feel better about who we are. Plus, as our partners begin to feel more known and understood, they tend to behave better as well. This works best when both people are engaged in the process rather than having one person assume all of the responsibility. However, one person can make a significant difference in the dynamics.

The above process can take years of practice and learning. One thing that I see is that whatever problems or patterns you do not fix in one relationship will show up in the next one so while it takes courage and persistence to challenge ourselves to keep learning, growing and improving, it is certainly a worthwhile and fulfilling process.

References: *Hold Me Tight*, Dr. Sue Johnson, *How To Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It*, Steven Stosny and Patricia Love, *The Relationship Cure*, John Gottman *Lies At the Altar*, Robin Smith.

Susan offers counselling to individuals, families, and couples, and conducts workshops and courses on parenting, relationship issues, self esteem and communication at the Adlerian Counselling and Consulting Group, Inc. The holistic approach of the Centre is congruent with Susan's approach to working with people.

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