

How You and Your Partner Can Be Wonderfully Happy Again

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Time after time, books about relationships tell us to communicate better with our spouses or partners. In my experience as a couples workshop leader and counselor, however, I've seen that talking often fails to solve relationship problems and may even make things worse.

What does work: Taking a completely different, *action-oriented* approach -- something I call *spiritual partnership*.

BECOME A SPIRITUAL PARTNER

Spiritual partnership is a relationship that is guided by the universal principles of connection, authenticity and love...

- **Connection.** Anything that moves you away from isolation and separation moves you toward connection.

- **Authenticity.** We all have layers of behaviors that hide our true selves. Authenticity is anything that moves you toward who you really are.

- **Love.** We all have fears that stop us. By getting past our fears, we let love move freely through our lives.

Talking doesn't accomplish these things. Action does. *What to do:* Ask yourself, repeatedly throughout the day, "If I were to *behave* in accord with my highest spiritual values right now, what would I do?"

When you decide to become a spiritual partner, the focus is no longer on your relationship's problems or on "fixing" your partner, it's on your own actions, which, in turn, will also make an impact on your relationship.

TAKE LOVING ACTIONS

To be a spiritual partner and improve your relationship, you need to take loving actions. *A loving action is...*

- **Motivated** by a desire for spiritual growth, not for personal gain or "scoring points."

- **Unilateral.** You take it on your own, not because someone wants you to or forces you to.

- **Disciplined.** It's an act of will, not just a response to your emotions.

- **Experimental.** You're willing to try a new behavior or action even though you don't know what the result will be.

What happens when you take loving actions instead of just talking? Your focal point shifts from your partner and your relationship to your own spiritual path. Instead of trying to change your partner, you work to become a more spiritually developed person who can accept and honor your partner for who he/she is as an individual.

GOODWILL

When I interviewed happy couples for my book [*The 8 Essential Traits of Couples Who Thrive*](#) (Dell), I discovered one outstanding thing they all have in common -- a spirit of goodwill. Goodwill is an overall feeling of generosity toward your partner. It's the attitude, "I am on your side. I am your ally, not your adversary."

Having a spirit of goodwill is the first and most important loving action you can take. It will help you focus on the good parts of your relationship and let you make a genuine effort to diminish the amount of time and energy you devote to the things that are bothering you. It's amazing how many problems in a relationship simply disappear when you bring the characteristics of goodwill -- acceptance, thoughtfulness, tolerance, generosity -- to them.

OTHER LOVING ACTIONS

By taking other loving actions, you can develop your spirit of goodwill and help it grow stronger...

● **Give up problem solving.** Problems are like goldfish -- the more you feed them, the bigger they get. In most cases, it's an illusion to think that you "work on," or solve, a relationship problem. So-called problem solving will simply make you focus on the problem and not on what you love about the other person or what's good in your relationship.

Experiment: Make a pact with yourself that for a few days you won't focus on or do anything to try to solve a relationship problem you are having. In fact, don't even think of it as a "problem" -- think of it as a fact of life, because this lets you learn how to accept it and adapt and live with it.

● **Act "as if."** You can feel angry inside, and admit this to yourself, but still act as if you're not angry. You can choose to behave in a loving way. If you deliberately behave in a way that you know is going to create more harmony, more connection and more love, then you're acting on your spiritual values. It's not a deception or denial, but a deliberate spiritual choice to behave in a way that might bring more positive results than if you behave in exactly the way you feel. You can't control your emotions or order your feelings around, but you have a great deal of choice in the way you behave.

● **Practice restraint.** Make an agreement with yourself that for a given period of time -- a day, a week -- you will not say anything negative, demanding or critical to your partner.

When you refrain from making such a comment, you open the possibility in yourself that you are going to become more accepting, more compassionate and more forgiving of your partner. You'll probably see the impact of your behavior immediately as the atmosphere around your house becomes much calmer.

Restraint is probably the single most effective loving action.

● **Balance giving and taking.** The old way of looking at the give and take of a relationship is when we disagree about something, "we both have to give 50%" to keep things fair. That doesn't work very well, because you have no control over what your partner gives. What you do have control over is how much you give and how much you take in a relationship.

If you think you're giving too much and not taking care of your own needs, you can find ways to help yourself without depending on your partner. If you're taking too much, find ways to give to your partner. Never again can you say to yourself, *This relationship is unbalanced and my partner isn't giving enough* -- because you now have the control over that.

Example: You feel that you get stuck with all the housework, and endless discussion about it is getting you nowhere except angry with each other. Accept that talking won't change the situation -- but don't stop giving. Instead, take one evening a week for yourself. See a movie, have dinner with friends, enjoy a bubble bath. Let the housework wait, and let your partner accept your decision -- or not.

● **Acting on your own.** To make a spiritual partnership work, you have to be willing to recognize that some relationship problems are the result of your own issues and that you need to handle those issues on your own. Be open but firm with your partner, making it clear that this is something you need to do for yourself.

Example: If control of money is a source of conflict, suggest a way to handle some of your money independently, perhaps with a separate account.

● **Practice acceptance and compassion.** They are the ultimate goal of what you're seeking to do with loving actions and spiritual partnership. People change, not in an atmosphere of criticism, complaining or demanding, but in one of love and support.

Once you start viewing your relationship as a spiritual partnership and begin consciously taking loving actions, it's easy to stay on the new track. Loving actions are so effective that once you see how well they work, you won't want to go back.