

## **Pain and Surrender in Romantic Relationships**

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In many ways, pain teaches us to surrender. If you sprain your ankle, you have to slow down, attend to it, and adapt to it. It will not allow you to continue walking or running as you were! Until it heals, you must surrender to the healing process. The people who talk about cancer being a gift are those who surrendered to the reality of the disease and met it on its terms. Even the common cold allows a person to practice the art of surrender!

When it comes to romantic relationships, one type in particular sets a couple up to learn surrender from pain. That would be the sadomasochistic relationship. Humiliation and pain leading to surrender is the basis of that kind of relationship.

However, in most romantic relationships, pain doesn't necessarily teach us to surrender. For many people, pain in their relationships causes them to go to war, to dominate, or to conquer their partner or the situation. Why is that? When your partner dismisses you, why do you want to take her head off? When he looks at another woman, why do you want to clobber them both? When he or she treats you like a child, why do you want to rebel?

The answer may be found in that last question. Surely, the reason the pain of our relationships leads to war instead of surrender is that our romantic relationships are the number one place we work out our issues with our parents.

When we are born, our parents (or primary caretakers) are everything to us. Truly, we love them passionately, jealously. They are extensions of us. They answer all our needs, sometimes without our even asking. They are also the first to put boundaries on us. The first ones with whom we experience power struggles, with us usually on the losing end of those power struggles! Furthermore, parents are not perfect. Knowing which buttons to push in order to control us with the least amount of effort expended, they will use rudeness, put-downs, dismissals, and disappointment to keep us under their control.

There is the rub. In whatever way your romantic partner, husband or wife, treats you rudely, puts you down, dismisses you, and shows disappointment in you, whether purposefully or by accident, mom and dad did it first. They did it first and you could not fight back. Now you can. Not only can you dish it out as good as you get it, the impulse to stop the pain by any means necessary rises involuntarily, making dominating and conquering your partner seem absolutely necessary for survival.

What would surrender in the face of the pain found in romantic relationships look like, anyway? Becoming a doormat? Turning into a masochist? No. Surrender would look like taking stock and taking responsibility. That is what happens when a person surrenders to the process of the pain of suffering, from the common cold to cancer. He or she takes stock of reality and takes responsibility for what lies ahead. How do we do that in a relationship?

The first thing to do, if you haven't already, is to take 100% responsibility for everything that shows up in your relationship. Your relationship, your partner, is a mirror of you. Wherever there is pain, your mirror is showing you something in yourself that wants to heal.

Let us use dismissal as an example. Being dismissed hurts. Those who practice it seem to be oblivious to its effects. Those who suffer from it are painfully aware when they themselves happen to inflict it on someone else. Being dismissed by someone you love makes you feel small and worthless.

Debra found her feelings hurt too many times by David's dismissals. The way she would shrink inside when he would cut her off mid-sentence, tell her how to fix whatever she was talking about, then turn his attention elsewhere made her shrink inside. She was beginning to be nasty in return, which really surprised him and even hurt his feelings. He thought his advice was helpful!

If David and Debra decided to take 100% responsibility for this tension showing up in their relationship, each of them would look deeply inside to see what motivated their behavior. Debra would realize that most of the people nearest to her throughout her life had been dismissive, beginning with her mother. Chances are, she attracted others like her mother because it was familiar, even comforting in a strange way. In addition, her self-esteem may not have been strong enough for her to believe she deserved better.

David would realize that by dismissing Debra, he was mimicking his father, who had been dismissive of David's mother. In fact, his father's father had been the same way! All of the men in his family had married women who talked a lot about what worried them. The women could talk for hours to each other about their worries but the men just could not handle it. As David would get in touch with the deep sense of inadequacy he felt handling his wife's worries and concerns, he would realize his paternal ancestors had faced the same hurdles in their marriages. David and Debra live far from their relatives and that kind of support. Oftentimes, Debra only has David to lean on. That terrifies him.

Taking 100% responsibility for the relationship requires this depth of taking stock through self-examination. The resulting surrender means Debra and David can talk about this particular painful aspect of their relationship in ways that cause neither of them to have to defend themselves, in ways that allow them to grow as individuals and as a couple, and in ways that take the "If only he or she would change" stuff out of the equation!

It is surrender to what each of them created in the relationship, allowing space for deeper love and connection.

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There is a secret to relationship success that is direct, simple, and effective. We and others have used it to transform marriages that felt burdensome and hurtful into marriages filled with love and satisfaction.

You can discover this secret for yourself in the e-workbook called *Creating the Love You Want: Five Unique Steps to Improve Your Marriage*. Go to <http://www.CreateTheLoveYouWant.com> and order your copy right now. With it, you can begin making a difference for yourself tonight!