

Where Does Intimacy Go?

by Clinton Callahan

You may remember the magic of first love, the attractive glow that transports all your circuits into a dimension beyond the limitations of time, energy, or reason. It seems as if it could never go away – and yet, in time, it does. You remember past moments of intimacy rather than experiencing new moments now. The walls have built themselves back up. Where does the intimacy go? And how can you get it back again?

The answer often has to do with resentment. Resentment is what remains from an incomplete communication. A communication consists of both facts and feelings. If either facts or feelings are not heard the unfinished business festers as resentment. When you come together the resentment stands between you like a glass wall. You can see them but you can't have them.

What is astonishing is how seemingly insignificant are the things we have resentments about. "You made a degrading comment about the way I parallel parked last week." "I said I wanted to talk to your mother also and you hung up the phone instead." "I was feeling tired and angry about the children and you only wanted to have sex." "You threw away my old shirt." "When we were on holiday in Turkey two years ago you were laughing with the other men but not with me." "You bought those DVD's and didn't even ask me about it." "You spoke with such a mean tone in your voice." "You overcooked my eggs." The list is endless. The shocking news is that even one resentment is enough to block intimacy.

The way out of resentment is to complete your unfinished communications. It takes time and vulnerable effort to do this work, but what else are you together for? Relationships do not die from a lack of love. Relationships die from a lack of intimacy. Some couples confronting their mountain of resentments refuse to dismantle them. For these couples, their relationship may already be over.

To disintegrate resentments, arrange a series of one hour appointments with each other. Make it a time of sanctuary where the kids are handled and handys are turned off. Let the woman go first. The man's job is to listen and to repeat back what he heard her say. He should repeat back both the facts *and* the feelings. He should ask no questions, and make no explanations. He should not react. If he does not get it, repeat the story again and fill in the missing details. You should have a pack of tissues and use them. Feel the feelings. Say what happened and how you felt about it until your experience has been completely shared. Do not judge yourself about this. It is what it is. We can't control where our resentments come from, but we can share our experience so it does not become resentment. It is senseless to plan a future or create solutions until you have gotten through your resentment. Sharing is the solution for resentment.

As soon as he has understood fully how it was for you, then reverse roles and it is his turn. Do not try to rush. You will know you have succeeded when natural, heart-melting, intimacy returns and sweet love flows between you again.



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