

## **Keeping Marriages Energized: Marriage as an open system**

### **By Mel Schwartz**

Marriages are not closed systems that operate in a vacuum, but are open and natural systems that are part of much larger systems that greatly impact the health of the marriage. When we speak of a marriage we are talking about so much more than the simple relationship of two people. The relationship of the couple is enormously impacted by infinite factors that would appear to be somewhat outside of the domain of the marriage, but are nevertheless essential influences upon the marriage.

Many of the factors that drain the marriage come from environmental and social stressors to the marriage system. For example, raising children, caring for elderly parents, work, financial concerns and other myriad influences greatly impact the vitality of the marriage. Potentially, they may all serve to deplete the energy of the marriage as the couple turns away from the partnering energy and addresses the necessary challenges that life brings. As such, it is essential that we focus on importing the relationship ingredients necessary for the health of the marriage. When partners in a marriage disregard the sanctity of their relationship, we can predict with some certainty, the eventual depletion and withering of the marriage system

An open system is subject to change and requires a replenishment of renewable energy to maintain its stability. Examples of open systems would be the ecology, a country, a house or a marriage. They are all affected by outside sources. The environment is much affected by greenhouse gases and carbon based emissions, while a nation is impacted by its economy or matters of war and peace, while a house requires proper maintenance to manage itself efficiently and is dependent upon some source of fuel for heating. They are all impacted by events and influences from outside of their particular domain. The system of marriage may move either toward a state of entropy and decay or toward growth and evolution. Based upon the prevailing divorce rate and to a further extent the rate of unhappiness in intact marriages, we might initially conclude that the system of marriage inclines toward to the condition of decay. But as we'll come to see this is for a reason.

In order to maintain a steady state of equilibrium a system requires an importing of energy to maintain its balance. Without this new energy to fuel its homeostasis the marriage inclines toward a condition of depletion. I would offer that in most cases the energy necessary was abundantly available at the inception of the relationship. The key ingredients for this energy were typically, romance, intimacy, passion and friendship. Given time; the state of marriage moves toward entropy due to a diminishment of these energy sources. The routinization of the relational roles tends to move the marriage toward decay. As one becomes familiar and habitual in both their thoughts and behaviors, the ingredients previously cited become quite scant. Routine and predictability become antithetical to the renewable energy required to sustain a healthy marriage.

The good news is that the energy required to permit marriage to thrive is renewable. Unlike the fossil fuels that we consume and deplete to power our lifestyle, which have a limited availability, the romantic and loving components necessary to keep the "steady state" of marriage are inexhaustible and available from within. They need not be imported and are not subject to the

vagaries of the marketplace. All that is required is the clear intention and motivation to fuel the healthy system of marriage. The ingredients are typically those that were experienced during the period of falling in love earlier in the relationship. Try recalling them and bring them back into the relationship.

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