

The Wrong Reasons for Staying Married

By Mel Schwartz

The fact that more than fifty percent of marriages end in divorce is, upon consideration, the lesser of two problems. The greater difficulty is that the majority of intact marriages are far from joyful. Divorce, although tumultuous and potentially scarring, at least provides the potential for better days. Remaining in the lethargy of a deadened marriage, dulled by the loss of hope or the vision of better days, is downright depressing. And yet so many people resign themselves to live in this manner. Many people in such relationships merely give up and don't work on making things better. Although I am by no means glibly promoting divorce, I am advocating that we do everything in our power to awaken our relationships and live authentically.

The Fear Factor

Fear is the great impediment to growth in our relationships and lives. So often, people are afraid of discussing their true feelings with their partners. The range of fear runs the gamut; fear of divorce and its incumbent anxieties or simply the fear of coming to terms with a relationship that may be lacking in intimacy or passion. When one stays married out of fear, the emotional paralysis that occurs further poisons the relationship. Staying married out of resignation, due to apprehension about moving forward, they find themselves in an intense dilemma. They won't contemplate divorce out of fear and they are convinced that the marriage won't improve, so they don't work on the relationship. This is the worst of all possible scenarios. It is being stuck between the proverbial rock and the hard place.

In such circumstances I encourage addressing your fears. The fear of divorce paradoxically eliminates any chance of improvement in the marriage. It produces a state of stagnation and the ensuing frustration which then makes a mediocre marriage even worse. If we can work through the fears around separation, then we are in the marriage not out of fear but from choice. In this state, there is more likelihood that the relationship therapy may begin. Processing fears about divorce are not undertaken necessarily for the purpose of divorcing, but for reasons of coming to clarity. Fear filters our perceptions and co-creates our reality. In that circumstance, the way in which you see your partner is tainted by your anger. This anger has arisen in part because you're feeling stuck and hopeless.

Getting unstuck permits you to either create a healthier relationship or to move on. Either choice may be preferable to remaining unhappy without a glimmer of hope. Fear should never be the deciding factor in your choice, unless you're considering sky diving. Ultimately, the question is what degree of happiness you deserve in your life. It's not selfish to want happiness. In fact, to forgo your own happiness is to model that self-sacrifice to your children, who will likely suffer in their self-esteem by having parents who ignored their own fulfillment. Children tend to model that which they see. To find happiness within your relationship it is essential that you move out of the fear zone and address the issues in your life.

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