Old Habits Die Hard

Whenever we first meet him or her, we are on our best behavior. We present our best side. We primp longer, dress more sharply, and mind our manners. And we do these things for all of the right reasons.

If things go well, we may even find a partner for life. We go through the courting rituals, get engaged and begin to share everything. Every couple makes note of the mistakes of their parents. No relationship is perfect and each next generation will try to refine the model.

And so we begin the magnificent privilege of two becoming one. Fueled with high hopes and honeymooners joy, how can we go wrong? We have goals regarding the house, the careers, and the most happy and successful children. And this may go very well for many years, but a time may come when we get complacent.

In the comfort of love and security, we may get a little too relaxed. From this position, old patterns can raise their ugly head.

The vows to not be like your parents may become fodder for arguments and justification for behavior. “My daddy never blah, blah, blah.” Or, “My parents always blah, blah, blah.”

Even more insidious are the unnoticed behavior patterns that first blossomed in our families of origin. Sneakiness, belligerence, manipulation or fears are old patterns that we were able to contain and manage in the first flowering of our union. But spring has passed, summer is here and the weeds are taking over.

Can you notice and root out these stubborn problems? I’m quite sure your spouse can point them out, but can you get down to the earthiness of the issue? It’s a common problem that begins to get acted out in moodiness, avoidance and selfishness.

You might even say we get addicted to a certain emotional state. This would be a pattern of managing our emotional environment that we learned at an early age. We got used to certain feelings and patterns of behavior. Generally, we recreate this environment in an effort to either prove we are worthy or to protect ourselves. The unconscious thought goes like this, ‘prove you love me by accepting my insecurity or greed or laziness.’ Or the opposite of this is ‘I’m going to be lazy or greedy or fearful to prove you can’t control me.’

I know this is complicated stuff but it explains the mysterious motivations that undermine what we consciously want.

Diligence is required to dislodge these bad habits. I have to be able to take a hard look at myself. I have to take responsibility for what I’m getting in my life. If I’ve got a problem in my life then I’ve got a problem. Not ‘I’ve got a problem with you.’ But I’ve got a problem. Now what am I going to do about it.

Each of us has to root out these character defects or primary wounds so we can be the people we intend to be, be the integrated whole that we normally assume that we are. But suffering points the way if we will listen to her. Oops! Did I say that out loud? Yes, we have to listen to our partner and learn to become.