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I’ve said that opposites attract, and it’s in the dance of these opposites that a beautiful relationship may be created. It can be messy, confusing, complicated work, but the goal is nothing less than a sacred, refining fire.

Christian scripture suggests that the purpose of marriage is that the “two shall become one.” How can this be? Is there some hidden magic occurring behind closed doors?

The idea I’d like to suggest is that the journey of life is a journey of growth, a journey of becoming a better person. You might even say a journey towards perfection. Jesus said, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Alright, you’re thinking I’m reaching a bit, but stay with me.

In this crucible that is marriage, we have a great opportunity to identify our faults and work on bettering ourselves. Our spouse who is that other, opposite person and sees the world in their unique way, can be our greatest teacher, if we love and respect our partner. I’ll have to assume that you do.

We don’t have to be like them. That wouldn’t do. I need to be myself. I don’t sacrifice my uniqueness on the altar of devotion. Instead I just need to move toward her. And, hopefully she will move toward me. My growth would be to move toward appreciating the skills that she has, and developing them for myself. In working toward building a healthy relationship I need to understand her position, why she thinks or does life the way she does.

I grow as I can understand life from her perspective. It’s the great lesson of To Kill A Mockingbird; we need to be able to put ourselves in the other person’s shoes, have some understanding, and even appreciate what they can teach us.

Two becoming one is some funny math. It seems that two is more than one. But the lesson is that we become more as one because we attain wholeness or completion that we didn’t know without the other half.

A friend tells me that she has a critical tendency that is just like her mother’s. When her husband feels this and points it out and even worse says, “You sound like your mother,” she feels the pain. But she knows it’s good for him to tell her this because she didn’t like that side of her mother and certainly doesn’t want to visit it on her family.

Even more difficult is the story of the husband who was unfaithful with every girl he knew until he met his wife. He was completely true to her and was shocked and wounded when she stepped out on him. Here was a truly challenging life lesson. Could he do the work of forgiving her and forgiving himself? They would both grow to be better people and closer to each other if they could move through this difficult passage in life.

Will you allow your partner to be your teacher? Joy is the byproduct of this journey toward oneness. It’s the evidence that we are closer to that seemingly unreachable “perfection.” Oneness can be both exciting and serene; challenging and perfectly accepting.