

Dating & Shalom Bayis

Tips and Tidbits

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The Whole Truth

If you were to ask someone if they have a good relationship or friendship with someone, many times the answer will be yes. They will then go on to explain that they get together often, share in each other's milestones and successes, comfort each other during times of difficulty and stress and so on. Overall, their relationship is one of love and care and they think about each other often. This can be true between parent and child, friends or spouses.

However, what isn't always readily apparent or agreed upon is that the foundation of a good relationship is not merely the above factors of love and time spent together. Love doesn't cure all and neither does engaging in activities together. What though truly makes a relationship thrive is *truth*. By truth, we are not referring to the simply the lack of dishonesty and lying. It far surpasses that.

Truth refers to not walking on eggshells. Before going further, if you can think right now about the relationships in your life, ask yourself the following: Do I walk on eggshells with them or do I provide and receive honest feedback? That is a superb barometer in gauging the healthiness of your relationship.

Walking on eggshells produces a nauseous feeling, where you refrain from voicing your opinions, dislikes or even positive comments. It is when you say to yourself, "I don't want to say anything because I don't want to start a fight or be made fun of." When such thoughts cross your mind before interacting with someone, you know you are walking on eggshells. You are keeping the peace at the expense of causing ruffles in the relationship. When that occurs, what is actually taking place is that you do not feel emotionally safe in the relationship and are therefore not telling the truth.

As it relates to dating and marriage, this is an extremely important topic to check in with yourself. Before marriage, it is understood that you must be ready for it,

or mature. But what does maturity look like? *One central characteristic of maturity is being able to give and receive honest feedback with an open mind with people you trust.* People who are defensive will immediately deflect the feedback and construe it as criticism. They will sometimes vehemently disagree until they are blue in the face and ensure that their point "wins" you over.

Such a person is not someone you want to marry. And that is because you will not be able to feel emotionally safe in the relationship. If an individual is not self-aware and does not even agree to their blindspots when they are pointed out to them, you are looking at a very defensive person with whom it will be difficult to form a deep relationship. By the same token, that person will just about always be conflict-averse and avoid pointing out to others with whom he believes to have a close relationship what he dislikes or disagrees with.

As you can begin to see, the type of person to consider as a spouse is someone who lives with a culture of truth. They are individuals who view feedback not as criticism, but as a helpful and valuable life gift. In short, they are self-aware and appreciate being guided to even more self-insight and self-awareness. They as well view giving honest emotional feedback as an act of deep love. They are happy to provide such a gift to someone.

Now what does this look like in words? Here are a few examples:

A parent may say to his/her child: *"Wow! I never knew I sounded sarcastic. Now I understand why you don't like talking to me."* One friend may say to another, *"You're still angry at me from last night. You're not ready to let it go."* Or a spouse may say, *"You want to be alone tonight rather than change your attitude and join the family."*

If these phrases can be said by you or to you in your given relationship, then you are in good shape. You are living with a culture of truth. This is, however, granting that these expressions carry a tone of admiration, respect and humility. It is not about "I caught you," or "I proved

you wrong!" As Dr. Haim Ginott, a master teacher who revolutionized parent-child communication, said, "*When attitudes are hostile, facts are unconvincing.*" Feedback must be delivered properly to be effective. However, barring this, if your feedback is still rejected after said with sincere respect, you know that more *trust* must be developed in your relationship.

This leads to an important caveat to all the above, in that these relationships which you experience a culture of truth with will always be characterized by trust. Trust needs to be intact and at the foundation for any truth to rest upon. Otherwise, the scenario looks like a stranger pointing out something to you or someone disrespectfully telling you facts. In both cases, trust will not be felt, so you understandably question if they are telling the truth and you should believe them.

However, granting that trust is in place and the feedback is being provided respectfully and without exaggeration, then the real test begins and you should ask yourself: *what does the relationship look like as it relates the truth?* Again, the truth we are referring to here is not the absence of lies, but the whole truth and nothing less. As the Yiddish proverb goes, "A half-truth is still a whole lie."

As this relates to someone you are dating, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I feel emotionally safe? Do I feel calm, peaceful and relaxed when I talk to him/her or concerned that I may say something which will upset them?
- Can I fully be myself and express the full truth with him/her?
- Does he/she talk *up* to me or talk *down* to me? Are their comments and feedback given (if at all) with respect and humility or a one-up stance with arrogance?
- Do I find myself thinking, "I better not say that... I don't want him/her to laugh at me or get angry..."

The bottom line: *If either you or your dating partner are afraid to express your feelings and opinions openly, there is a problem with the relationship.*

As an important corollary, oftentimes one individual in a relationship will hold back from speaking the truth because the other, sometimes subconsciously, yields control over the relationship. This induced fear creates unspoken tension and does not bode well for any couple. Having the strength to face the truth is essential to

remaining emotionally healthy, for otherwise, we slowly begin to doubt ourselves and become numb to our own feelings. We will become a ghost in the relationship who acquiesces and agrees to everything that goes on and avoid speaking our mind. Turning away from what we deep-down feel in our gut will lead us to later regret that we continued on in the relationship. It is not unheard of for a man or woman to continue dating, become engaged and even get married because they feared hurting or disappointing the other person. Looking at it from one angle, one individual controlled the relationship and the other, out of fear, shame or guilt, turned away from facing the truth and gaining the courage to end it (which itself is part of the problem), so the relationship progressed, all the while walking on eggshells. It often does not take much time before the relationship escalates into crisis and the couple resents each other and can no longer relate to each other respectfully.

The antidote: *Truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.* Make that your motto, and certainly one of the top characteristics you look for in a spouse. It is generally more common to view other qualities, such as kindness, sensitivity or graciousness as being top priority and most important when dating. But, being able to provide emotional truth and demonstrate honesty and vulnerability in a relationship free of control and full of trust is far more of an indicator of a future successful relationship. That is something which contains the building blocks to last for a lifetime.

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