

NOW that the holidays are behind us, many look with anticipation toward the promise of the new year and what it may bring. How does love play into your expectations and desires? January has the reputation for starting new resolutions to change behaviors; it also is also the month in which the most people file for divorce.

The intentions to divorce frequently begin months, or perhaps years, earlier, yet most individuals are hesitant to file before or during the festive season to avoid disrupting family traditions and holiday happiness. Many who do file in January want a fresh start rather than another year of an unfulfilling relationship holding them back. Filing after the holidays also relieves them of the strains of pretending that the marriage and family are intact.

However, you do not have to become a divorce statistic. Instead, it is possible to fill each day with loving and tender moments. This option is open to all—as long as the elements of love and caring exist in your relationship. Indeed, if they are even a little bit present, there is hope.

Whatever you yearn for in life, you must learn to give it to yourself first. When you ignore and push down your real needs and wants, you may continue being the good spouse, son, daughter, parent, or friend—for a while at least. More likely, though, you will turn into a person you loathe: impatient, fault finding, and quick to anger. When you consistently are the last to be fulfilled, you are treading a sure path to depression, anger, anxiety, and feelings of being unworthy and unprioritized.

Do not wish for your partner to change—take the first step to improve your relationship. If you wait for another person to give you more affection, pay more attention to you, listen and understand more deeply and effectively, or more actively assist you with home and family responsibilities, you risk becoming more critical and unconsciously may push your lover further away.

You can avert the downward spiral of allowing events to just happen. It is as simple as taking action to show love to yourself and others. The truth of the matter remains—you have to give love to get love. When you pursue actions that are pleasing to yourself and others, you feel happier. Your sense of happiness and fulfillment naturally spreads to your partner, who now is more likely to desire being closer to you and is more willing to demonstrate affection, cooperation, and deeper communication. Although you only can change yourself, you hold the power to affect those around you.

Examine what really is in your heart and mind. If you give to your partner based on resentment or fear, you will find little success. Making decisions out of fear or anger typically results in action that are self-defeating. Make your preference a mindset of change—not because you “should,” but because you “want” more for your life and you choose to take action.

Don't File Those Papers Just Yet

BY MAMIKO ODEGARD

“January has the reputation for starting new resolutions to change behaviors; it also is the month in which the most people file for divorce.”

Learn the art of conscious loving—a moment-to-moment awareness to view situations in multiple ways to produce the best results. It is characterized by an absence of judgment and learning to embrace imperfections within you, others, and life events.

Stop bullying yourself and others. There is no constructive result in assigning blame. When you feel angry and resentful, people further distance themselves from you. The antidote is to take responsibility for yourself and to begin to view yourself and others through “eyes of love.”

Are you stuck with demeaning thoughts of a partner who is committed to work and does not provide the attention and time you crave? “He loves his job more than me; he doesn’t give a damn about me.” Can you view your partner in a more neutral way? “He is just being himself. I’ve been attracted from the beginning that he’s so responsible and conscientious.”

A way to reframe critical thoughts is to ponder how hard your mate works to provide financial security and a better lifestyle for you and your children. Is it really about you? Is it possible he values showing you love—in the



same way that it has been traditionally passed down generations through his family beliefs and values? Can you begin to feel appreciation and warmth that your partner shows you love in the ways that he or she knows best?

When you are emotionally distressed, it is hard to be positive—and your brain knows when you are lying to yourself. However, notice how you feel when you think nurturing, supportive, and affirming thoughts of yourself—those that do not involve being overzealous. Treat yourself with gentleness and kindness—as a precious individual. Erase

such self-sabotaging thoughts as “Why should I try? My partner won’t change.” This line of thinking makes you fail before you even give your best effort; it creates a defeatist, victimized attitude and pushes you further away from where you want to be.

Do you remember the feelings you experienced when you were drawn to and first getting to know each other? You smiled, laughed, listened attentively, flirted, and had so much fun—communicating in words and actions that you were interested and eager to enjoy your time together. A common mistake with couples

in distressed or uncertain relationships is the tendency to view every opportunity to be alone as a chance to discuss how each partner feels toward the other. This behavior disrupts closeness and takes on a sense of desperation, as one—or both—feels pressured and tense, reticent to talk when not fully sure about feelings toward the other or sensing no pronounced consistent effort toward change.

Holding onto resentment and anger is like swallowing poison and dying on the inside. Your partner may sense your resentment and pull away further, compounding the hurt in-

Are You Ready for This . . . ?

BY JACQUELINE NEWMAN

“Here are some things to consider when thinking about divorce and, if you can live with them, then you may be ready.”

Like childbirth, I feel that no one tells women the real truth about the divorce process. Here are some things to consider when thinking about divorce and, if you can live with them, then you may be ready.

- His affair will not shock the judge. The fact that he violated the sacred rule of marriage by having an affair will not make a judge blink his or her eye. A court typically will not agree that, because he was a bad husband, he now is a bad father. Therefore, the effect of an affair—even an affair with your best friend—will not have an impact on the determinations a court makes in terms of custody.

- Be prepared to do everything yourself. While you already may feel that you do everything yourself anyway and his absence will not be noticed . . . until it is freezing outside and now it is you who has to take out the garbage. Moreover, he may not have been home most of the time, but there were a few Sundays when he was in the house watching football, so you at least could run an errand or two and leave the kids at home. Those days of the simple escape may be gone.

- Understand and accept that he will have time alone with your children. Many moms do not think about the fact that, except in rare situations, the fathers will have alone time with the kids, which will include, more often than not, overnight stays. This means that you will have little to no control over what he serves them for dinner (fast food anyone?) and what time they go to bed (okay, you can watch one more movie). I have seen many clients stay in marriages for this reason alone.

- The divorce process can take a long time. While those TV breakups are wrapped up within the hour show, it takes much longer in real life. If you litigate, it can take years. Even if you settle quickly, it can be at least three to six months before you actually are divorced.

- You do not have to go to court to get di-



vided. Many people are under the mistaken presumption that the only way to get divorced is to go to court and see a judge. That idea is so scary that many people stay in marriages just to avoid it. However, there are other amicable ways that are much more constructive and less frightening, such as mediation and the collaborative law process. Both result in divorce as well.

- Do not bad mouth your spouse on social media. He claims to be working late, but then you were looking at the credit card bill and see that his just incurred a charge at a wine bar. You are furious, so who do you turn to?—your best friends on Facebook or Twitter. If you are thinking about divorce or going through one, put on mittens and stay away from your smartphone.

- Divorce mourning is a real thing. Some people feel that divorce can be worse than death. In divorce, you are reminded of the failed relationship in so many ways, and the anger re-

mains (and perhaps even grows) each time your ex picks up the children for his weekend. It is okay—and even expected—to go through a mourning process.

- The social divorce. While everyone knows about the legal divorce that ends the marriage, few people think about the social divorce. Friends may feel the need to choose sides. His best friend's wife from high school now is one of your best friends, but she may not be comfortable being your confidant anymore, or you may not be comfortable having her as your confidant, either. Your phone contacts may change.

- Hobbies. While the last thing you want to think about is piling something else onto your to-do list when you now have to add taking out the garbage, I still suggest you find a hobby. There is going to be downtime after a divorce that you did not have before (every other weekend may be free when your children are with your ex); you do not want to spend that time staring out the window thinking about the “could have beens” or the “I should have just done that.” You ought to start creating an enjoyable distraction before the divorce process begins so it can be a comfort to you during and after.

- You are not a bad mother or person for ending the marriage. Studies show that children fare better when they have two parents who are happy in separate households than when there are two parents who are unhappy in the same household. Your kids want you to be happy and, if you feel that in ending the marriage you are, it will open up healthier relationships that your offspring can role model. When that happens, you know you have made the right decision for you and your family.

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side. Yes, recognize that, when you have resentment and anger, there is pain inside of you. Communicating the hurt and fear—that lie beneath your anger—helps you create true intimacy between the two of you. It expands the ability for each of you to be more authentic and share how you truly feel and think.

Sincerely apologize and ask for forgiveness. In a successful relationship, the most-impactful apologies must be specific and heartfelt. To acknowledge the hurt, fears, and sadness—which contribute to the angry outbursts or silence and distancing—it is crucial to accept personal responsibility for your own actions and how these contribute to the conflict or disharmony.

To recognize and express your own responsibility does not mean to blame either partner. Instead, it is putting into practice conscious loving—to embrace that you and all others are “perfectly imperfect.”

The ability to forgive is one of the greatest gestures of love. It takes two people to form a relationship and, like dancing, requires give and take to maintain. Show love in various ways throughout the day—start with yourself first. Like the seasons, love has a variety of flavors. It is natural to have favorite ways to show and receive love.

When you are capable of being so comfortable with your beloved that you can be transparent in revealing your deepest thoughts,

feelings, and desires—and when you mutually can listen and communicate understanding in such a way that you both accurately can describe the feelings and experiences of each other—you have arrived. You feel emotionally, mentally, and physically connected and know that you and your special person “get each other.” ★

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