

# Breakthroughs<sup>Spring 2008</sup> *in healing*

with Dr. Simon Sheh

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## **HEALTHY PARTNERS, HEALTHY MARRIAGE**

Marriage – for all its challenges – is like a health insurance policy with many health features and benefits that run across age, race, education, and income groups. In general, married people live longer and are healthier throughout those extra years. Studies have linked marriage to lower rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease, and mental illness. Marriage helps both spouses cope better with stress, though men benefit more than women. Women are the mental and physical housekeeper for a marriage.

Daily stress causes the hypothalamus in a person's midbrain to tell the adrenal gland to pump out a supply of the stress hormone cortisol. If a person chronically releases stress hormones, the body starts to fall apart and the person is going to be miserable. In one Functional MRI study in which happily married women with their husbands holding their hand and faced with the threat of an electrical shock in the experiment, the women's hypothalamus activity declined sharply, as if there was a hushing of the hypothalamus or reduction of

cortisol production. Women who reported being less satisfied with their marriage got little such effect.

A healthy marriage begins with a healthy partner. After almost 28 years of marriage, I've come to realize marriage is my best place to grow up. And to grow up is the very essence of becoming healthy. The followings are a few tips on growing up to become healthy partners in marriage.

### **1. To grow up by letting go of excessive control.**

- Not every thing in life is about right and wrong, black and white; it is just different.
- Not every thing in life is about respect, fairness, justice, and all-or-nothing.
- Not every storm is called Katrina, a disastrous category 5; not every mistake is a fatal one.
- Differentiate between a backpack and a boulder. You are responsible to carry your own backpack. You don't carry others' backpack; otherwise you become an extreme caregiver. We all share the weight and burden of a boulder.
- Ask yourself: Is it illegal? Is it immoral? Is it criminal? Is it outright abusive? Is it life and death? If the answers are "no," let things go, i.e., I'm not going to change you anymore.
- There is no perfect picture; there are only paint brushes to create the picture you desire. Paint brushes for love, intimacy, connection, respect, acceptance, security, safety, trust, boundary, forgiveness, blessing, being good enough, finding who you are, etc.

### **2. To grow up by externalizing your thoughts and feelings.**

- Excessive internalization of thoughts and feelings sow seeds for depression, anxiety, anger, and emotional vulnerability.
- Name and label your thoughts and feelings (and observe clear boundary with the opposite sex)
- Use emotional language: What are you afraid of? Is it about approval? Is it about respect? Is it about power? Is it about trust? Is it about failure? Is it about rejection? Is it about abandonment?

- Speak up and stand up for yourself as if there is no fear. Be direct.
- Speaking up and standing up do not always bring answers and solutions, but they are the hallmarks of emotional courage and a healthy self identity.

### **3. To grow up by practicing love and respect on the marriage bed.**

- The marriage bed is the best place for a man and a woman to grow up; love and respect go hand-in-hand under the sheet.
- Buying real estate is about location, location, location. Sexual intimacy on the marriage bed is about talk, talk, and talk.
- Sexual intimacy is the ultimate intimacy between husband and wife. The foundation of sexual intimacy is other form of intimacy: communication intimacy, emotional intimacy, creative intimacy, recreational intimacy, crisis intimacy, and spiritual intimacy.

### **4. To grow up by developing a healthy self identity.**

- The greatest gift a spouse can bring to the marriage is a unique, healthy, and unshakeable sense of self.
- A loss of self or a devaluation of self sows seeds for depression, anxiety, anger, and emotional vulnerability
- Identify your God-given D.A.T.A.: desire, ability, temperament, and assets
- Embracing your God-given D.A.T.A. leads to healthy self esteem, confidence, and discovery of what you want, don't want, and love to do, as well as freedom of choices, power, and a passion for living.

More tips on growing up →

**5. To grow up by treating your spouse like he/she is your core account in business.**

- To give your spouse voices of blessing on his/her God-sent value in your life
- You want your core account to feel desired, to feel recognized, to feel closeness, and to feel valued. This is the essence of emotional connection.
- You want to become the right person for your spouse, just like you want to become the right supplier for your customer.
- Your spouse is your core customer. Customer is not always right, but he/she is still your customer. Find out what he/she likes and wants, and deliver, provided it is not criminal, illegal, outright abusive, excessive control, and disrespect. Otherwise, set your boundary.

**6. To grow up by helping the child within grow up.**

- Kid's behaviors: run away and hide, pout, temper tantrum, silent treatment (there is tremendous power in silence), passive aggressive, blaming, and immature/irrational beliefs.
- Face conflicts like a grown-up. Adults speak up and stand up, kids run away or fight. Otherwise you are a 10 years old in a 30 years old frame.
- Increase your emotional courage by adding more than a hammer in your emotional toolbox.
- Talk to the kid in you, make him/her feel safe and secure, and help the kid grow up with you.
- Size up and choose your battle appropriately. Not every battle requires 10,000 soldiers to fight. Three navy seals are good enough; they are knowledgeable, disciplined, and low key.

**7. To grow up by giving yourself healthy self care.**

- Your spouse is more than a wife and a mother of your children; she is a woman first.
- A message to women: self care is not equal to selfishness. It is a hallmark of a healthy marriage for you to nurture the woman within, to recapture and reclaim your identity as a woman. Ask the question: when is the last time you spend time with yourself? Give yourself permission to take good care of the woman in you.

**8. To grow up by seeking meaning and higher purpose individually and as a couple.**

- Money can buy you a house; money can never buy you a home. A house is about things, a home is about people.
- A home is simply beautiful not so much for how it first appears, but what the people who live there can become.

Therefore marriage is a commitment to grow up to do life together, till death until part, provided that there is no fatal relationship injury (see #10).

- A couple centered home is a healthy home. Kids centered and activity centered homes are not healthy homes.
- Your life is bigger than your work. Seek meaning and pleasure by doing things you love to do, and does it better every day.
- Have a Personal Mission Statement (PMS): e.g., to live a simple, focused life to allow travels around the world and make meaning in people's lives.

**9. To grow up by letting go of baggage and travelling light.**

- Tag the baggage, name the pain and injury, accept the loss, let go of the voices of curse, pick up the paint brushes, and start painting the picture that gives you blessing, meaning, pleasure, and strength.

**10. To grow up by learning from non-fatal injuries and avoiding fatal injuries in relationship.**

- Non-fatal relationship injuries, such as misunderstanding, differences, fights, and conflicts, are designed for personal growth and development. A good rule of thumb: you fight, you make up, and you make out.
- Fatal relationship injuries have the potential to destroy trust, safety, and security, the foundation of any committed, long-term relationship.
- Fatal relationship injuries include: physical abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, excessive control, excessive anger, addictions (pornography, alcohol, drug, gambling, workaholic), and extra-marital affairs, including e-affairs on the Internet.
- Fatal relationship injury is usually about the unhealthiness of a person spilling into the marriage. Recovery from a fatal relationship injury usually requires professional help and guidance.

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