

MAKING MARRIAGE MAGIC

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MARGARET: Not long ago my aunt and uncle had their 50th wedding anniversary and someone who came to the reception asked her: "Have you ever thought of divorce in all those years?" and she said "Never; murder, but never divorce!" Imagine a rose bud; its petals are tight and it's wound against itself. You can't see the full beauty of this rose because it is only a bud. If we keep it in a cold, dark atmosphere it will never really open up. But if we expose it to warmth and light then the petals will naturally open up, if we try to force it to open the petals will break and it will never look the same. **Love in marriage is much like a rose. I feel that it's our responsibility in our marriage to help our partner blossom.** Our partner is like that rose and we want to have the atmosphere at home to be warm so that our partner will blossom. What is the atmosphere like in your home? Are things a little bit chilly sometimes with criticism or is it toasty warm where your spouse feels safe to express their opinions without being ridiculed.

Isn't it interesting that when we look for the worst in others it becomes glaring, but if we look for the best it sparkles brightly? I feel that each of us can help the atmosphere in our homes by turning up the thermostat and help each other blossom.

Men and women are different and have different natures. We can legislate for equality so that we have equal rights for both men and women, but men and women will never be the same and that's a good thing. But we can use the similarities to bond and become closer and the differences we have to compliment each other. It's very important for children to grow up in an atmosphere where they have the role models from a husband and a wife because we both react so differently, and it's that complementarity that brings balance into our lives. I have a couple of quotes on communication that I would like to share with you. I think communication is one of the ways that we can turn up the thermostat and warm things up. *'The real art of communication is not only to say the right thing in the right place but also to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment'*. Each of us has experiences like that probably every day. *'When you talk, don't offend, when you listen, don't be defensive'*. How important it is to know how to disagree with another's point of view without being disagreeable yourself. *'When you think about it, love is not blind. It sees more not less, but because it sees more it is willing to see less'* is a quote by Rabbi Julius Gordon.

I feel very strongly that each of us here should defend and strengthen our own marriages, those of our extended family, neighbors, friends, communities and do everything that we can do to strengthen marriages because it is the foundation of a happy life.

BRENT: I was thinking today about an incident I read not long ago that took place in the state of Illinois in the mid 1840s. There was a young man 11 years old by the name of Joe Smith and his Dad had just been shot and killed in a shootout. One day young Joe was invited to go over to his dying neighbour and read to him. He was a man that they called Deafman Hibbard and he had been deaf for about 12 years. Young Joseph would go over and read the book, moving his lips slowly and in an exaggerated way so Mr Hibbard could

follow the story. One day Mrs Hibbard had to go to the store, as soon as she left the house, Mr Hibbard said: "Joe come over and sit on the edge of the bed. I want to tell you a secret, but you have to promise me you'll keep this secret for the rest of my life." Young Joseph looked at him and knew that he was going to be dead before too long (and he did die that summer). He said OK. So Joseph went over and sat on the edge of the bed and Mr Hibbard said: "Joseph, you don't have to move your lips in that way; I can hear just as good as you can hear. About 12 years ago I was going to get a divorce but I decided it was easier to go deaf than to get a divorce and this has been the happiest 12 years of my marriage."

Today I'd like to talk about things that keep the romance and the fires alive in a marriage relationship and to do it I would like to talk about the flip side - how to eliminate the flip side. When we are married long enough, we can build up a case for divorce. Someone said that divorce is spelled - 'S E L F I S H N E S S'. I really believe that's the truth but listen to these 11 words. I'm going to say them twice. If your marriage is in danger or you need a new vitality, think of these words. **The past means what it means until it means something different.** That may sound trite and maybe a little bit cute, but let me say it once more. The past means what it means until it means something different. I was thinking of a poem that goes along with this - *There once was an oyster whose story I'll tell, Who found that some sand had got under her shell, Just one little grain but it gave her great pain, For female oysters have feelings that are very plain. Now did she berate this working of fate, That left her in such a deplorable state, Did she curse the government, call for an election or gripe that the sea should have given protection, No, she said to herself as she sat in her shell, "If I cannot remove it I'll think I'll improve it". Well years past by as years always do, Till she came to her destiny, oyster stew, But the small grain of sand that had bothered her so was a beautiful pearl all richly aglow. Now this tale has a moral, for isn't it grand what a female oyster can do with a small grain of sand, And what could you do if you only begin with the small things that seem to get under your skin?*

The marriage double cross is when things that are qualities that we see in our partner before marriage, begin to be things that irritate us after marriage. We began with what Dr Andreas from Harvard University calls '*the development of the left hand column*'. The left hand column is the negative list and a negative list ultimately leads to a divorce. We develop so many insights of things that we do not enjoy in our partner and it leaves us wanting. I'm going to share a story that happened to us 10 years into our marriage. It points out who I was and who I wasn't.

One night when I was in the middle of my doctoral program, I decided to accept an assignment from one of our professors. She invited me to go home, get our kids into bed and sit down with our partner and have a sharing session where we just shared feelings. Most men don't know how to share feelings, we know how to say 'I love you' and things of that nature but we don't really share feelings well. Women do, as the emotional managers. On this occasion, we got the kids off to bed, fluffed up the pillows, got a fire going and sat down and looked at each other. We weren't supposed to touch each other just to look at each from a safe distance. I started it out, I know she had no idea what I was going to ask and I said "*Margaret, what do you feel about our marriage, not what you think, but what you feel?*" I couldn't believe it because immediately her eyes watered up and she began to cry, not just a little bit either, I just couldn't believe I was that good of a husband! She said when she regained her composure "*I'm so lonely in our relationship. You have time for everybody else, all I talk to are the children. Can't you please begin to give me some of your emotional space?*" I can't even tell you how I felt.

Well, we began to talk. My professor had given us the assignment and this was what was hard for me, 10 minutes a night for 7 nights! I knew what to say for about 45 seconds on the first night and I had said it. We'd used up the full 10 minutes and half a box of tissues but finally I said "*I think I know the problem*". I didn't use these exact words but since then I've become very articulate. I said "*I think we have both had the same person as our theme*". **The first secret, the first key, to making romance keep alive in our marriage is to have our partner as our theme.** Margaret had me as her theme and I had me as my theme, so one of us was really happy. I feel embarrassed to tell you that, but I can tell you that that was the night I decided she would never touch another vacuum cleaner. I wasn't being a hero, I just knew all of the things she did for me on a daily basis, on an hourly basis and how little I did for her.

They are the first two ideas that I'd like to leave with you. The first one being to change and eliminate our perception of the past, to have the past begin to mean something different. The second idea is to have our partner as our theme. The third key is to live what Dr Tony Alessandra taught us about in his book *The Platinum Rule*, to live the **Platinum Rule**. I was surprised not long ago to find where the Golden Rule was. It is found in the New Testament in Matthew, for those of you who are Christians, in the Saviour's Sermon on the Mount. After learning about the Platinum Rule, I wondered why it was not presented in the New Testament when the Golden Rule was. The Platinum Rule is this, you'll never forget it, **'Do unto others as you think others would like to have done unto them'**. It incorporates the principle of empathy. During the 4 years of my Doctoral program, there wasn't one principle that I learned that had more power and more meaning for me than to learn how to put myself into someone else's shoes and if we can do that in a marriage relationship as well as with our children and other people, then we are well on our way to being happy. So I invite you to live the Platinum Rule in your marriage relationship and see what happens. Don't treat your partner as you want to be treated, treat your partner as you think they would like to be treated.

There are 3 different false loves that I think about when I think of the love that we share in our relationships. The first of these is falling in love with love. The second is falling in love with being loved. The third is the famous infatuation. There is another different type of love that I would like to invite each of you to keep alive in your marriage. This is not a false love, some people think it is a false love, but I don't, and that's romantic love. Romantic love I believe is a prelude to a lasting love and that's why no matter where Margaret and I are, we try to keep the romance alive in our relationship. This isn't a novel idea, but it's something that we do, we date at least once a week. Friday night to us is sacred. Nothing gets in the way of our date time and so we seldom double date. We always eat somewhere and look across at each other and communicate. Sharing feelings became much easier because of that assignment in sharing feelings that I was talking about before. By the end of that week we had spent about an hour and a half sharing feelings and that made something change in our relationship. I had broken through a barrier that I didn't think I would ever break. I invite each of you to do the same.

There are different ways of talking about marriage relationships. Dr John Gottman talks about 3 different types of marriage relationships and one of these is the validating, one is the volatile and one is the conflict-avoiding relationship. The validating relationship is the one that you would expect is the desirable type of marriage to be in.

I would like to separate these into 5 types of marriage relationships. The first of these is the conflict-habituated relationship. That's the one where a couple is constantly at each other's throats. Many couple decide to live like that and it goes on and on and they are

miserable, but they stay together. The second type is the devitalised relationship. That's the one where all of the air has gone out and you can tell those couples, you see them in the grocery store, church or any place and they're just there, they've lost whatever edge they had to their relationship. The third type of relationship is the passive congenial. It's really hard to detect who those couples are because they usually have a smile on their face. Sometimes it might be circumstance, but those people are pleasant to each other, there's just not a lot of depth to their relationship. The kind of relationship that most happy couples have is a vital relationship. The last one of course is the total relationship. I don't know what a total relationship is. But I know a lot of older people who just seem to be in marital bliss. I invite each of you to do something to make your marriage vital and to put some spice into it.

There are some common mistakes to avoid. The first one is one that a lot of couples get into. They begin to rewrite history, they begin to say they didn't really love that person when they got married or that they didn't understand what love was. They literally begin to rewrite history and justify leaving a marriage in that way. The second problem that people get into is they begin to problem solve when they are in a flooded state. By that I mean that their blood pressure is up! A man's blood pressure can go up 15 degrees if he's really hot under the collar. A woman's on the other hand, might only go up 5 to 10 degrees. It takes one minute to remove each degree of extra blood pressure from us and so it takes a man 15 minutes to 20 minutes to settle down and to relax so that a problem can be worked through. Usually it takes a woman 5 to 10 minutes. I think that's because a woman has a lot more need for greater patience with children. She doesn't get flooded quite as easily or to the extent that men do.

I've already mentioned the left hand column that couples get into, developing the negative list towards their partner. In all relationships it signals the ultimate end of the relationship but in marriage it's truly fatal. There is one other and that's something called the fundamental attribution error. This is the error that we make every day of our lives of attributing other people's motives. We say *'This is why they said that'* or *'This is why they didn't say that'*, when we don't really know. We don't ask them, we just build a case and we build all kinds of negative thoughts in our minds and make that error which is also deadly to a relationship.

Today what I'd like to do is share with you a principle and a law. This principle and law I'd ask you never to forget. The principle is called *'Benevolent Blindness'*. When my wife and I were living in Arizona many years ago, I was asked to help save a marriage. I sat down with Barbara and Ambrose and found that Barbara didn't have one good thing to say about her husband. Then I had an idea. I decided to paint them a picture. I painted them a big picture of the chapel in Arizona where they had got married. They had been married 28 years, and Barbara wanted a divorce. They had 2 grown-up children and she wanted to leave the relationship. I painted it and framed it and took it to their house and put it up on the wall. Barbara looked at that and said *"What's that in the foreground?"* I had painted one of those giant cactus and I had painted a glazed donut on one of the quills. They asked what it was for. I said *"Barbara, that's for you because whenever you think of Ambrose you only think of what he's not. You just think about his hole. He's never committed adultery, he's delivered mail now for 27 years....."* and I started talking about different parts of the texture that was her husband. Well, they were gracious enough to leave the painting up on the wall while I was still there and I gave them both a big hug.

We then moved out of town and 4 years later the doorbell rang, (Margaret did not tell me that they had rung and she made sure I answered the door). I had not heard from Barbara

and Ambrose in all that time and I presumed that they had gotten a divorce. I opened up the door and Ambrose planted his lips on Barbara lips in a full frontal attack. I stood there for a while and finally he let her up for air, he had red lipstick all over his face, (it was for exaggerated emphasis) and I said: *"What are you guys doing, I thought you'd gotten a divorce?"* Barbara said: *'Oh no, we're on our second honeymoon. Could we come in and spend the night?'* Now we have 7 sons and 2 daughters and I couldn't imagine where they'd sleep because we weren't going to let them use our bed. All we had were bunk beds, but I invited them in. We were visiting with them and I said: *'Why are you here, what happened?'* Barbara said: *'It was the glazed donut. Thank you for the glazed donut. I have the neatest husband. I can't even tell you how happy I am in our marriage'*. Ambrose never did have much to say but he stood there and smiled and he was just appreciative that he was appreciated.

The years went by and then a couple of years later we were going down to Arizona and decided we'd drop in on Barbara and Ambrose. We found the house after all those years and pulled in and they answered the door. Margaret gave them a hug but I went straight in over to the wall and I couldn't believe what I saw. There was my painting still on the wall.

The principle of Benevolent Blindness is a marvellous principle. It's all about being blind to each other's weaknesses and each other's tendency to be weak. I'd like to share with you a law that goes with that principle. This law was made up by a man named Morton Deutsch, so this is called Deutsch's law. I've memorised it **'The more we act in a certain way, the more others around us act in the very same way'**. There are 2 parts to this law; there is the ripple part, we act in a certain way and our behaviour ripples out to our partner or our children or to whomever, and then they begin to act in a way that we started out acting and then it is restored back to us. So there is the ripple effect and then the restoration effect. If you want to know how to make a marriage work, you incorporate Deutsch's law. It is the law of relationships. I've tried to understand relationships all my life and I can't find a more complete law than that. If you want to change the spirit that is in your home, then perhaps you could change the ripples that you send out. Pretty soon you don't know who's sent them and who's receiving them and it's a wonderful way to live a marriage relationship.

A marriage relationship is the most difficult. I believe it's either the greatest hell or the greatest heaven that we can experience here on the Earth. I really do. I don't know of an experience that can create greater pain or greater joy based upon what we're investing into the relationship. Most people that get into trouble begin what's called the distance and isolation cascade. They go through four different stages, very quick stages. Dr John Gottman talks about these as the "Four Horses of the Apocalypse." Stage number one is where a person begins to criticise their partner, instead of lodging a complaint or having a short wish list of things that they would like their partner to change, they begin to point fingers and use 'you' statements and say 'you make me so upset' and they begin to criticise and get very, very personal. It leads them to the next stage which is where they develop contempt. That's where all of a sudden, that person that they married and promised that they would love, honour etc they now begin to lose their respect for. Contempt is a lack of respect for. What happens to these partners is that they start out in a bilateral relationship and they move into a vertical relationship and one partner begins to really put the screws on the other one because they don't respect what the other one is contributing to the relationship. That leads to the third stage which is they begin to be defensive. So everything the partner says, the person begins to defend themselves. They can't have normal conversations, which leads to the last and fatal blow. When a person gets here, it's almost impossible to retrieve a marriage relationship. That's when they

begin to stonewall. They build a wall around themselves because a partner is firing these darts of unkindness right into their heart and they can't accommodate the pain of those unkind expressions and so they build a wall around themselves and then the marriage really has ended.

A very wise man and former neighbour of mine, Spencer W. Kimball, once said: *'If two people are in love when they get married and if they both make correct choices and are true to their values, there will never be a divorce'*. Sometimes divorce is necessary, but very rarely is it the solution. It's the world's solution. That's why the average marriage in America lasts about 5 years, the average remarriage lasts about 2 years. One in 2 marriages in America ends in divorce. In Australia, the divorce rate is 35%. But it doesn't have to be like that. It's all about being benevolently blind to each other's weaknesses and living Deutsch's law and sending out kind, thoughtful, gentle expressions, tender expressions and then receiving them back in return.