

CHAPTER 5

THE EIGHT RELATIONSHIPS OF MARRIAGE

“You are an aggregation of life experiences stored in your limbic body.”

— Christopher Bache

Charmed Life, Some Missing Pieces

“Men are mules,” thought Margaret O’Connell as she walked home from work in 1929. O’Connell was the grandmother of James, my forty-three-year-old counseling client. She died in 1972 when James was five, but her life and the events and people in it were still breathing in him. He remembered her line about the mules.

James was struggling at work and was becoming increasingly frustrated and confused with his marriage. It was his reactions to his wife that troubled him the most. It was also her recent behavior, especially her mean-spirited outbursts towards him and their two children.

By our third counseling session, we started moving the conversation away from the current characters and events that were creating his discomfort, instead focusing on the sensations and flashes coming up in him around these topics. The events and people in our life-story are not the issue. It is how we feel about ourselves in reaction to them.

He began to realize that most of his stress about his job and marriage came from an undercurrent of anxiousness about money, a gnawing sense of unease and lack. He said it felt like somehow, just around the corner,

WAKING UP MARRIAGE

something adverse was going to happen involving loss.

It was a latent, quiet aching lack of abundance which arose mostly when thinking of the success of friends and colleagues, or whenever his wife wistfully regretted not having something that her friends had. “There are times when I wonder how I am going to keep this ship rolling,” he said, “this whole suburban Home Inc. thing. Never ending bills, private school, f-ing cell phones that cost \$350 a month, all of it.”

“Where in your body do you feel this ache?” I had him shut his eyes, do a few deep breaths, and then go back into a recent scene where he and his wife were overreacting to each other.

“I don’t know where, probably my stomach, like a lump. My heart flutters too, like it is worried about something that I don’t even know,” he explained. He was hot on the trail, his life the best show in town, the only channel to watch and follow. As he relaxed and unfolded his body more, he started talking about his parents. There was a sense and anxiousness around loss when growing up. “I’ve never really lost much, always been pretty successful,” he explained, “but it’s like a shadow of discomfort. Probably why I liked to smoke, maybe trying to kill that angst.”

He mentioned his wife’s intuition was probably picking up his fear as well, which made her unconsciously uncomfortable. Woman take care of the nest, and if they sense a weakening in the masculine or even a small threat to their circle, their nurture-survival enzymes can animate a bio-genetic spirit of fear and frustration that alchemizes to anger. That anger can be a catalyst to waking the masculine up. At first the boy in the man kicks back and

fighters it, not seeing through it. That is a heavy bite of friction for the suburban dad, but it is the best medicine.

Archeology of an Emotion

The steady, uncomfortable current of scarcity that James felt in his stomach and chest became the locale where we focused our attention. Over two more sessions, and in his listening by himself at home, he began to sense a bodily unease around lack much older than he thought. We talked at length about his parents' lives, but more importantly and poignantly we talked about his grandparents.

What he was about to recognize was that there was a singular, historical moment that created a deep, emotional fracture in his relatives. This event some eighty years ago, and all the ensuing emotional reactions, flowed down bio-magnetically into his kitchen, into him, and into his marriage. Like in archeology, James was going to discover an ancient, original catalyst for his reactions towards his marriage. By finding and understanding it, he will be able to uproot and unwind its deleterious impact.

Did all of our parents and relatives, through the electro-magnetic storage and releasing of emotions, unsuspectingly bestow their lives across our kitchen tables and holiday meals? After all, early emotional experiences knit patterns into a brain's neural networks.

Marriage is Eight Relationships All at Once

I believe this knitting holds the answers. Each of us have deeply ingrained response habits, triggers, patterns, and behaviors from what we witnessed, inherited,

WAKING UP MARRIAGE

experienced, and bio-magnetically imbibed from four vital, core, and universal relationship patterns from our youth.

I believe there are four distinct relationship patterns knitted and living inside of me that create all my marital reactions to my wife. I call these inherited, relational patterns archetypes. These four archetypes are our relationship with and experience with other men, other women, marriage, and self.

Carl Jung, one of the first to study human archetypes, said in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, these learned and ingrained psychological and emotional response patterns are “primordial images, fundamental units of the human mind.”

Living inside of all of us are these basic reactions to men and the masculine force, women and the feminine, how we latently understand and behave in a relationship, and finally how we conceive of and perceive ourselves.

I have carried all four of these automatic reaction patterns into my marriage. My wife unwittingly brought her four as well. Marriage is the confluence of these four patterns, therefore eight relationships at once.

Who knew marriage was an algebra equation? It is the arena for these eight unconsciously sourced relationships to be exposed, wrestled with, and reconciled. I tell my couples clients that their marriage is not a simple dyad, one person interacting with another over time. It is a system of currents. Family coming over for the holidays, for instance, kicks in one or two of these inner four archetypes in your husband, as he is lightly undermined or even belittled by his mother-in-law. Or the wife, not being asked by some friends to attend a neighborhood

party, could feel that elementary school-aged sense of being left out. This old wounded perception of self, which influences how she parents, is one of four key archetypes.

These archetypes or energetic patterns are your dominant, mostly unconscious and automatic response impulses and imprints. Each of these is being activated at different times.

Margaret J. Wheatley writes in *Beyond Einstein*, “everything in the universe only exists because it is in relationship to everything else...acquisition of knowledge of any kind occurs only with an energy transfer, storage of information, whether in a computer disk or in our brain”. It is paramount that we examine how these four relational patterns get released into our marriage, imposing their unconscious will over our helpless logic.

Why is it so Difficult?

This is another reason why marriage is hard. You were a good student, went to a good school. You get it, have had a couple of well-paying jobs since college, took your time to meet the right person, got married, bought the house, moved to the suburbs, had kids.

But a relationship is nothing that you have ever encountered because your lower brain is storing these four, latent, ingrained patterns of responses that our rational self is so innocently unaware of. Our logic walks us through our day, but how we respond in each moment is determined by these ingrained patterns.

A relationship is a progression over and into time. It is bigger, though, than just the two of you in it. It is the vessel through which the next generation forms. The sustenance

and force that carries the successful relationship forward is the belief that tomorrow is better, that I am better heading into posterity, and that my grandkids' grandkids are better off if I am supported, loved, and challenged by my spouse in this relationship.

Mice Brains, Long Memories

Science has explored and confirmed that we really are living remnants, newer branches jutting from an old tree of our relatives' lives. We are unique, will-infused, and powerfully independent branches, but projections nonetheless.

In a longitudinal study reported in *Nature Magazine*, "Fearful Memories Passed Down to Mouse Descendants," researchers quite cruelly shocked mice every time acetophenone, a scent often compared to almonds or cherries, was introduced to them. It became apparent over time that their offspring were deeply affected by this scent, reacting the same way even though they were born long after the experiment. "A third generation of mice – the 'grandchildren' – also inherited this reaction," the study reported, "as did mice conceived through *in vitro* fertilization with sperm from males sensitized to acetophenone."

The lower brains of these mice were building up neuron receptor proteins that were hyper-sensitive to this smell. It is like a callous or the constant rain runoff of my neighbor's gutter onto my side lawn. Conditioned neurons and rainwater both carve a rutted path, making a person and a lawn more susceptible to the same actions and reactions. The fix is in, as both nature and our brains are

so obstinate in their proclivities and urges.

The complexity, power, and transformative nature of neurons are powerful. The sensitivity to that acetophenone is now inexorably ingrained in these next generation of mice because the parent mice's chemo-electrical connection sends signals across to the next generation. It is just like getting a better reception from certain channels, back when TVs had antennas. Parents created the station and program, and that specific signal they send is readily, unconsciously, and bio-magnetically received by those who come next.

Einstein alluded to the wonderful, mysterious, and animating mix of forces that we are. He wrote in his *Special Theory of Relativity* that "human beings are half biological, but the other half is energy."

Energy is an overused word, indefinite and too esoteric for those who want hard evidence why their marriage is not working. Energy just does not cut it for many, either as an explanation for their boyfriends' imbecility or for a wife's short temper. But in order to know what is driving behaviors, we need to use the same tool and resources that delivered these patterns. We need to put our adult attention in the physical stream of these old emotions and energy. This allows us to listen to them tell their story to our rational brain.

That is why a successful and mature marriage demands that we remember, reexamine, and relive old moments. When we know the root moment and can feel the charge, we can begin to biophysically, emotionally, and psychologically accept it. We then integrate the knowledge into the fabric of our life now, like Laurie did. If we can therapeutically and consciously re-feel, retell, and

WAKING UP MARRIAGE

understand our ancestors' past — not just our own — instead of letting their lives unconsciously slumber and undermine our behaviors, we can become our ancestors. We can retain their gifts and strengths, but let their uncompleted charges go.

We'll honor our ancestors and change future generations by allowing the old stories to rise, releasing their electromagnetic ghosts and dents. Then, absorb the wisdom. Exorcising and intuiting this past invite true knowledge.

James's emotional life was about to change as he not only remembers his grandfather's story, but allows it to consciously pour through his heart, then mind. This is not theory or just thoughts. Your chance of being in a relationship that lasts is based on a willingness to create space inside so that your ancestors' experiences are not unconsciously repeated, but transformed into your present by intuitive awareness.

A Deep Discontent

Over a few more counseling sessions, James continued to pour his attention into his emotional and energetic response to money and his sense of self at work. He said there was a longing in him, a faint and insistent discontent and unease around his work life. His twenty-year marketing and management career had been successful. He understood and read people well. He had a good feel for when clients and prospects were open to his input and prodding and when to back off. He knew getting clients to buy was always an exercise and dance around trust, motivation, needs, desires, and timing, and he liked the