

ARTICLE ON IMAGO THERAPY

11/1/05

GETTING THE LOVE YOU NEED

Are you single, married or in a relationship? Do you feel that you are loved, listened to, appreciated and understood? Are you getting the love you want? The answer is rarely, “Yes!” even for people who have been together for twenty years or more. But you can get the love you want, or even better—the love you need. How? This is the question that is at the core of Imago Relationship Therapy.

This past week, Atlanta was host to the annual Imago International Conference at the Colony Square Hotel. It featured keynote addresses by founder Harville Hendrix, his wife Helen Hunt, and a few superstars of relationship therapy like Pat Love and Joyce Buckner. One of the things that makes Imago therapy unique is that it is constantly being “tweaked” by the best minds in therapy and science in the world.

What attracted me to become an Imago therapist is that, although it was not created by Jews, its basic principles are so Jewish. In fact, I was first told about Imago Therapy by a Kabbalist from Jerusalem! Imago therapy, for example, is based on the assumption that it is not by accident that we wind up with the partners we do in life. Something outside of our conscious choice plays a strong part in attracting us to each other. Scientist might call it the subconscious while Judaism would call it Gd (or both)—very much like the Jewish concept of *bashert*. If you find your *bashert*, “your destiny,” you have found your soul mate. But you’ll probably ask at times, “If my marriage is in trouble, how could my mate really be a soul mate?”

I won’t bore you with a lot of psychological theory, but a few words are in order. Imago is the Latin for “image.” In our early childhood years, an impression of the images of our parents’ character traits are implanted in our brains. Even though we may have had the best of all possible parents, each of us has experienced some wounding in the early developmental stages of life. It doesn’t mean our parents were not good people or good parents. It just happens.

A composite of the dominant traits of our parents is what we call our “Imago.” We seek (and Gd helps us find) partners that have many of the dominant traits of our parents—the good and especially the bad. In this way we subconsciously try to recreate the wounding of our childhood in order to find healing. When we meet our Imago or our *bashert*, we experience a sense of euphoria accompanied by—science tells us—the release of endorphins and amphetamines into our blood stream. This is the beginning of romantic love.

But romantic love can’t last forever. The subconscious is expecting healing while our partner doesn’t know that it’s his/her job to help us heal our wounds. It’s even possible that our partner doesn’t have a clue what those wounds really are. That’s when romantic love ends and the “struggle phase” begins. Many couples get stuck in this struggle and never resolve it. If it gets too hard or painful to stay together, a couple may then get divorced. The problem is, that after divorce, you will look again for your Imago match and the whole things starts all over.

The only way to brake the cycle is for each partner in a relationship to understand his/her partner’s wounding and give him/her the gift of healing. Once you do this, your love will rise to a level you never dreamed possible—much deeper and more exciting than even in the romantic phase.

How does Imago Therapy accomplish this? Too many of our interactions are really reactive behaviors that result from anger, power, the need to control or to be one up on each other. We need to raise our interactions to be supportive, loving and healing. When you are aware of your lover’s pain, you can make a conscious decision to avoid pouring salt on his/her wounds and instead get what you need by doing things in a way that will make your partner feel loved.

Imago Therapy is not long-term therapy. In as little as twelve sessions you can learn the necessary tools. Some of the tools that are used are “Conscious Dialogue,” in which each partner is able to say what they need to say in a safe and caring environment and feel that their partner is really listening, “Behavior Change Requests,” and “Caring Behaviors.” These skills, once learned, will improve your relationships with your children, siblings, friends and even co-workers. It is the only couples therapy that I have found in my thirty years as a rabbi that

really works! It even help singles in their quest to find and keep their *bashert*. Imago Therapy is, therefore, not just for couples in crisis, but also for singles and couples with good relationships who want to deepen their love and love experience...who want to get the love they need.

The Baal Shem Tov taught: “From every man and woman there emerges a light that reaches directly to heaven. And when two souls, destined to be together, find each other, their individual lights join as one, as a single shining beacon issuing forth from their united soul.”

Judaism and Imago Therapy maintain that you can have such a relationship; your soul can shine as well.

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