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TO SEPARATE OR DIVORCE? THAT IS THE QUESTION

The 2012 newspaper headlines read: **79% Of Couples Who Separate Will Get A Divorce.** "Separation is very common and is more common than immediate divorce," says researcher Diminty Tumin of Ohio State University. The research was based on 7,272 people. The researchers concluded, "Three years is the point of no return. After three years of separation, the only outcomes that were observed are ongoing separation or divorce." After three years separation, there is no going back together!

There are two types of separation. The one the research was done on was where a couple separate to live in different houses. The second is where you continue to live in the same home but stop talking to each other. This may go on for hours, days, months or even years. I would like to consider both types of separation.

So, you are thinking of getting a separation. What do you want to accomplish with your separation? Since all behavior has purpose, what is your purpose in separating instead getting divorced? Do you have hope that in some way the separation will lead to the repair of your relationship? Someone said, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Is that what you are hoping for?

Or, is this a means of punishing the other person so they will do or stop doing something you don't like. In all cases, separation is a form of manipulation; it is you attempt to change the other person. (However, it might be easier to change yourself.) There is nothing wrong with manipulation if it is clear what you are trying to achieve. "I'm not talking to you until you stop leaving your cloths all over the house for me to pick up." It is not fair and nonproductive to stop talking without telling the other person what they are being "punished" for.

When couples talk about "the need to separate," the picture that comes to my mind is two people holding hands around a flagpole and fighting all the time. Finally, they both see the futility of what they are

doing. “We love each other, BUT we just can’t live together (because you will not live up to my expectations).” It is at this point that they agree to separate.

When it comes to separating the important issue to agree on is what are you and I going to do during this time of separation. What things need to change for us to live together? What is the plan for change? If you keep doing what you have always done and I keep doing what I have always done, we will keep getting what we have always gotten.

When you do not have a plan for change, it is like one person decides to climb the flagpole to put distance between the two of you in order to stop the conflict. That can work because it is hard to have a conflict with someone you are not in contact with. The problem begins when you come down the flagpole and nothing has changed. When we have no plans to change then we might as well get the divorce now and get on with our lives!

So, what does change mean to you? If you need to change to make a relationship work, does that mean that you were wrong? For some people being wrong is equated to being punished and/or the threat of being rejected.

Many people with issues of abandonment believe, “If I am perfect then you cannot be angry at me or reject me.” In fact, I believe that if Jesus had gotten married, his wife would have divorced him! Who could live with someone who is that perfect?

The problem with “wrong” is that it is a judgment! We are told not to judge, for in judging another you condemn yourself. If you are judging others what do you assume they are doing to you? That is problem of one finger pointing at the other person and three pointing back at you.

A better way is to ask yourself, “Is what I’m doing getting me what I want?” Is what you are doing with your husband/wife getting you what you want? Not is it right or wrong. If what you are doing is not getting you what you want, you can do it harder (and you know how that will turn out) or you can do something different. I personally am into doing it different.

*The problem is not finding the right person to love
it is loving the person you have found.*

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