

Ten Zen Things to Save Your Marriage

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Zen is not magic, so I am not about to tell you that you have all the power when it comes to your relationship. Even when you are in total peace with yourself or have accepted full responsibility for your baggage, your partner may remain at total war with himself or continue to blame and batter you for his baggage. Some marriages can only be saved with 100 Zen things; some with 1,000; and some cannot be saved at all. However, a lot of marriages can be saved with initiating ridiculously few and easy changes.

Zen is noticing the flow of life, which can be quite magical. As a Zen psychologist, I look at any particular aspect of us – any experience, action, characteristic, or event – as connected to all other aspects inside and outside of ourselves. Everything belongs to an interconnected whole that many refer to as the constantly changing stream of life. When we start ripples on our side of the embankment, they may just reach the other side, softly and without too much effort. Psychologically speaking this means that changing but a few areas of our inner lives and our behaviors can trigger a great chain reaction that may touch our life partner deeply.

So we don't have to change every neurotic or unhealthy little aspect of ourselves to make a profound difference in our marriage. First, let's focus on undoing some damaging behavior and reduce the discomfort we or our partner experiences as of now. For more suggestions and the science behind it, please refer to my book www.AUnifiedTheoryofHappiness.com.

Five Zen things to not do

1. Stop cold turkey nagging. (When you feel like complaining about little things, bite your tongue; snap a rubber band on your wrist; give him/her a \$1 if you fail and do nag. Whatever it takes.)
2. Stop watching TV, texting, phoning when you want to spend quality time. (Technology kills erotic love.)
3. Stop using negative rhetoric, such as sarcasm or name calling. (It just adds fuel to the fire.)

4. Stop a pattern your partner dislikes. (Surprise your partner. Pick one behavior and drop it to demonstrate your love.)

5. Stop talking negatively about your partner for entertainment. (No jokes about your marriage or marriage in general. It's destructive.)

Five Zen things to do

1. Pay extra attention to your partner in the first 10 minutes after you wake up and the first 10 minutes you first see each other when you reunite later in the day. (Smile at your partner for a few seconds longer. Ask how s/he is. Tell her/him how much you love her/him. Listen carefully. Kiss and embrace her/him. You might be surprised, but this is a scientifically proven way to turn things around dramatically.)

2. Pay attention to your partner's argument and inner conflict. Validate your partner's point of view. (Science supports, when partners are able to tell the problem from the other's perspective, they are more likely to remain a couple and avoid divorce.)

3. Pay attention to the mundane your partner is saying. (When couples show an interest in the ordinary, they also suffer fewer divorces. It is amazing how important it is to be heard. It is easy to love the extraordinary. However, love thrives on the ordinary.)

4. Focus on the bigger picture; gain perspective. (When you forget how much you love the other, think of how you will not be able to enjoy her/him once s/he's passed. Picture her/his death if you have difficulties switching your perspective. Your spirituality may help you remember what your relationship means to you.)

5. Say, "Yes" to your partner, to each part, and to the whole that all parts combined make up. Love is all about saying "Yes." (Kiss her/his every inch of her/his body and say, "Yes." Remember how nobody is perfect, but that love means to love the imperfect perfectly. Disappointments are natural. Moles are natural. Bad breath is natural. Acceptance is natural too. Dare to love.)

Of course, these ten Zen things work best when both partners look at them together. So share this list with your partner. Discuss it. Change it. Improve it. But in the end, don't let a good thing go bad because you look for an easy way out. Many, many marriages can be saved by committing yourself to working on them with the utmost devotion. Don't let yourselves down. Notice the magic in the energetic flow of life between you and your partner. It's been there all along.

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