

Closeness and Separateness

By Mirjam Busch & Rudolf Jarosewitsch

There are two basic human needs that feature in intimate relationships: the need for belonging and connectedness and the need for individual freedom and separateness. Sometimes we seem to have to sacrifice one for the sake of the other. Yet in a relationship that thrives both needs can be fulfilled.

How can we stay close yet not become enmeshed, lost, trapped, or destructive? How can we stay separate without becoming isolated?

The relationship with our partner mirrors the relationship we have with ourselves. Yehuda Tagar, an Israeli counsellor, used in his recent talk in Christchurch an interesting analogy. He likened humans to pin cushions. As we get close to another our pins get pushed. We blame the other, as we don't know that they are our pins that hurt. Close relationships throw us back onto ourselves. Facing ourselves is hard when we have no map, few tools, and a lot of fear of getting lost when we dive deeper into our experience. Will we ever come out? What may we find?

Our fear of looking at ourselves more closely is reflected in our fear of intimacy. Intimacy requires both, closeness and separateness. Finding a natural balance between both often involves a challenging path, where we can meet misunderstanding, frustration and disappointment.

We may experience our partner's separateness as against us. We may fear being abandoned or neglected. Out of fear, we may become clingy, which in return may reinforce our partner's need for separateness, or we may become defensive in order to not be rejected.

On the other hand, we also may experience our partner's need for closeness as threatening. We may fear being smothered and pull away further. The tension that arises can draw both into a self-perpetuating cycle of conflict.

How can we get out of that?

We need to stop viewing each other as the opposition. Then we can acknowledge that we have basic needs and fears in common, and yet may have learned different ways to deal with them. In communication, where the intention is to understand and be open for each other's feedback and vulnerability, we learn to recognize our patterns and can begin to grow towards a natural flow of separateness and connectedness. What seemed like an obstacle can become a stepping stone.

We seek to be ourselves, enjoy personal freedom and at the same time feel connected with each other in a shared sense of being understood and cared for.

We appreciate harmony and a comfortable flow with each other. Courage is discovered through experience and asks us to continue to experience and express how precious life is and how all life is profoundly connected. As partners encourage each other to discover what is - what is open and free and what is murky in them - to face uncomfortable truths about

themselves and open themselves for new learning, they cultivate trust, honesty, flexibility, and commitment. As we strengthen each other's independence we allow for more closeness. As we become more connected to ourselves, we can allow for more separateness.

In conscious partnership, we work on ourselves together in a mindful and heartfelt collaboration. We stay in touch with our truth without trying to change the other. We take responsibility for what our needs are. We watch the consequences of our behaviour in order to change whatever behaviour needs to be changed. We view triggers as learning opportunities and help each other to recognize and release old patterns instead of reinforcing them. We care about our partner's and our own well-being equally and simultaneously. We face and live directly our pains and limitations, our joys and possibilities. As we take time to know ourselves and each other more deeply, we learn to communicate and negotiate and most of all to persevere, so that we may pick the roses that have grown on our home-made relationship compost.

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