

Sacrifice

How many of us believe we can't have a life of our own and be in a relationship? We would say most of us because in any relationship we have to work through a mountain of sacrifice – in other words, feeling as if we are shouldering a burden. When we started in this work we looked forward to getting over our 'sacrifice' and then we would be free of feeling like marriage was a ball and chain. It certainly surprised us to realise that the extent to which one of us felt we had given up on our life, so did the other to the same degree.

No such luck for we have layer upon layer to heal. Turning and running away - "I will just do it my way" or "I will talk a good line but basically do what I want when I want" - will not work. Oh, it will work for a while but over time there will develop this feeling that life, or more specifically this relationship, has something missing.

So now being in a relationship appears to have only two possibilities. Either you get to do what you want and the other goes into sacrifice and tags along, or you go into sacrifice and tag along while your partner gets the "freedom". These are actually two very poor choices. If they really were the only options then the only relationships that would last would be for people who were too frightened of having a life and were using each other to hide.


There is another way. We could learn to heal the sacrifice step by step because it is not what anyone really wants except for those who lack the courage to face their feelings. Sacrifice is painful, and we do need courage to face it so that we can get back to being true to ourselves. Most of us deal with the pain of sacrifice by indulging ourselves. We indulge ourselves with food, or drugs, or booze, or attacking our partner or just plain being angry. Then when we have acted like this we often feel bad and try to pay it off by going back into sacrifice. Thus we get caught in this most vicious of circles. Some relationships will polarise and one partner will do the indulgence and the other the sacrifice.



Where does all this sacrifice come from? Well, it comes from our experience in the family we grew up in. And we can't run away from it. It is not necessary to go back and deal with it but it is important to understand that no one can put us into sacrifice, we choose it ourselves.



How can you tell that sacrifice was around in your family? One example familiar to many of us is the



annual Christmas visit. You live this independent life and you're really looking forward to a loving, happy celebration with your family, filled with the Christmas spirit. But soon after you arrive the distancing starts or the fights start and all these feelings and memories come up that remind you why you left the family in the first place. Now all you can think about is how soon you can get out of there!

We need to recognise that any sacrifice in the present is an echo of the past. You can deal with this in one moment of choosing to do what comes up for you. You make up your mind to either do this thing or not do this thing.

A friend of ours was recently in the situation where her elderly mother needed to be cared for at home full-time. She felt responsible for her mother, but equally she dreaded losing her freedom and giving up her life to look after her mother's life. We coached her to recognise that she could choose to care for her mother, or not choose to do it. The point is you can choose to change any sacrifice into true giving by just choosing to give. Though our friend did call up for support a number of times during the last year of her mother's life, each time she chose again to give to her family. Her reward was a deep satisfaction and a feeling that she had closed this chapter in the best way possible, and could fully take her next step without resentment or feelings of loss.

Take a moment and think of any area of your life that feels like a burden, that feels like you're in sacrifice. Now recognise that you do have the power to choose what it is that you are willing to give or not give.

Choosing turns sacrifice into giving, and through our giving we will know ourselves.

With love, Sue and Jeff