

# **Marrying Requires Two Strong Selves**

## ***Big Egos are not helpful***

***By Don Burnard***

To make marrying a life giving experience, both partners need to have a strong self. As a result, they won't find enough time to have a big ego.

A strong self is necessary for two people to achieve mental, emotional and physical intimacy. Marriage not only needs intimacy. It also needs community.

Another challenge for people marrying is that marriage needs to be firmly rooted in a community if it is to be life giving. Sometimes a family is big enough to be a community in itself. More often today a couple needs an extended family or a network of other families going through similar life transitions.

James Masterson writes about the importance of what he prefers to call the real self which he contrasts with the phoney self. There are 10 capacities of the real self.

The first is the capacity to feel deeply a wide range of emotions. We cannot relate well if we try to avoid any negative feelings. Life is neither fair nor just. Life is unpredictable and none of us can control the way the dice rolls. We cannot live life unless we accept life together with the whole damned thing that goes with it.

The second capacity is to manage the limitations which are imposed on every life. The limitations may be poor health, a global financial crisis, job loss, limited ability, financial problems or climate change through global warming.

The third is the capacity to motivate ourselves to embrace the opportunities life brings us and accept responsibility for both the expected and unexpected outcomes of our choices.

The fourth is the capacity to give one self esteem rather than seeking fame and success or being noticed by others.

The fifth is the capacity to self soothe when we make unfortunate choices especially with unexpected outcomes. It is not possible to always make the best choice. We cannot always anticipate all the hidden factors that influence the outcomes of our choices.

The sixth is the ability to make and honour our commitment. There is no obsolescence in a strong self. Yet, the achievements of a big ego are always within coo-ee of being surpassed.

The seventh is the ability to allow the real self to emerge without surrendering our uniqueness to a dull conformity through group pressure to belong.

The eighth is the capacity to express our individuality fully and honestly in a close relationship with minimal anxiety about engulfment or fusion.

The ninth is the ability to be alone without fear of abandonment.

The tenth is the recognition that the self is more than the sum of all of its parts. To fully express our self, each person needs to integrate the many different parts within us so that they work together and not against each other.

### **Measures of a Strong Self**

- I present a balanced picture of both my strengths and my deficits, neither enforcing the former nor deceptively hiding the latter.
- I am able to communicate my beliefs, values and priorities by putting them into practice rather than moralising.
- I can stay emotionally connected to my partner or significant others even when it is difficult to resolve our differences.
- I accept me as I am even when my partner has a different viewpoint from me and I sense a disconnection.
- I accept my partner as being different from me but will attempt to bridge the difference and seek to reconnect.
- I stay connected to others in times of intense differences and conflicts by openly sharing my thoughts and feelings.
- I take responsibility for my needs and support the efforts of others to meet their own needs.
- I address difficult and painful issues while staying true to myself and appreciate the need of others to stay true to their selves.
- I recognise that others need to express their differences without fear of being judged.

### **Further Reading**

James F. Masterson – The Search for the Real Self, The Free Press, New York, 1990.