



Relationships require trust

What marital therapy can teach us about peaceful coexistence

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I study relationships and, in my practice, often see couples – husband and wife, parent and child, or two siblings. The dynamics are always interesting and each dyad is always so unique, yet there are remarkable similarities.

Now, as life in Israel has heated up, I find myself once again looking at a different dyadic relationship – that of two peoples sharing one space.

As dissimilar as these relationships may seem, there is much more in common than one might initially think.

A good relationship involves trust. Often, it is something not valued enough until it becomes violated through lies, deception, violence and an overwhelming sense of betrayal. After violation of trust and betrayal, one's assumptive world changes, one can no longer see the world as one once did. Innocence is gone.

In the case of a couple where there has been infidelity, for example, the unspoken, or perhaps spoken, agreement has been violated, basic trust is no longer unconditionally assumed, and as such its lack may result in a permanent fracture within the relationship. Deep wounds are created and permanent scars are left behind.

How can you be with someone whom you no longer trust and with whom you don't feel safe and secure – be it to share your life, to share your most intimate thoughts or, as in our story at the moment with our neighbors, to coexist in

shared space? Those on both sides feel violated and betrayed, emotionally and perhaps physically injured.

Once this happens, the goodwill needed to attempt to fix things is enormous. For a marriage to work, both people have to want to make it work and both have to be committed to working very hard.

It is not easy. One can easily misinterpret one's partner's actions, one is always vigilant and on guard, and there is a sense of dis-ease that permeates the relationship while one waits yet again for the "other shoe to drop." Fearful, one is always waiting to see what lurks behind the corner. One may try to move on, but one does not forget.

Humans have a strong need for connection and connectedness with others, and will go out of their way to attempt to achieve this, often giving up or making sacrifices within a relationship in order to make this happen.

Part of feeling connected involves a shared sense of safety. You will not hurt me through your actions or your words, I can believe in you, and you in turn are there for me and believe in me. I, too, will not hurt you, and we can be together and will work things out even when things are difficult.

While the depth of the relationship between two peoples may be one of tolerance rather than love, people still must feel they can be heard and, with mutual respect, must be available to hear the other.

When the values of others differ so

dramatically from ours, our ability to listen and feel their pain, and they ours, can diminish drastically. After all, in order to have a conversation, you must first feel safe. When two people are not able to speak "the same language," or even speak at all, there is no room for peaceful coexistence. When actions differ from words, then lying and deceit can destroy any sense of connectedness.

How can one rebuild trust?

After an affair, when there has been such a tremendous breach of trust, both parties have to begin an honest discussion about the pain that has been incurred. This requires awareness of both the depth of pain and the level of anguish.

Pain and trauma are cumulative, and the effect of years of historical betrayal leads to one not being quick to forget or at all willing to forgive. The pain is simply too great. After years of frustration, sadness and anger, it is hard not to let your pain hold you back from moving forward.

Of course, it goes without saying that "the other" must understand the level of your pain and anguish and take responsibility, acknowledge the intensity of your feelings and show some sign of remorse, and compassion commensurate with your pain.

Lack of sensitivity to, or celebration of, the other person's pain just does not work; it merely deepens the pain. Without an "I get it" response, there can be no beginning or basis for trust. The pain is simply too raw and too great, and the longer it goes on, or the worse the sense of betrayal, the harder it is to establish even a rudimentary element of trust.

Actions speak louder than words, and signs of restraint are far more conducive

IN RELATIONSHIPS, whether romantic or political, broken trust hinders chances of reconciliation. (TNS)

to trust-building than a string of empty promises. Realistically, the anger, resentment, jealousy, fear, sadness and host of other feelings must also be addressed – one by one. The goal is to move forward but with an honest acknowledgment of past hurts and present concerns, which, if left unresolved, can stand in the way of future rebuilding.

What can we learn from this? What are our options?

Given that we have no choice but to live side by side with our neighbors, we must be aware of past violations of trust, and work toward finding a solution that enables both sides to coexist in peace. Our sense of safety must be restored immediately.

This is not a one-sided effort but, rather, one that requires two to tango, if indeed there is to be any sign of reconciliation and growth.

Until we can be certain that no matter what arises, we will feel consistently safe and secure, acknowledged and respected, and until actions and words match, it is impossible to trust the relationship and move forward into the future.

Trust is a choice we make, and after so many boundaries have been violated, it will take considerable energy and time to begin a dialog involving open communication and the willingness to listen, in order to make even the smallest of repairs.

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