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**Unraveling the Mysteries of Relationships:
An Introduction to Imago Relationship Therapy
Part III: A Valentine's Gift--Reromanticizing Your Relationship**

By Kenneth A. Sprang

*The best portion of a good man's life, his little, nameless,
unremembered acts, of kindness and of love.*

--William Wordsworth

Last June *Newsweek's* cover story was entitled "No Sex, Please, We're Married." The article observed that in many relationships sex has taken a back seat to all of the other demands on people's lives. "Sure, passion ebbs and flows in even the healthiest of relationships," the journalist observed, "but judging from the conversation of the young moms at the next table at Starbucks, it sounds like we're in the midst of a long dry spell." The experience is common to people in domestic partnerships as well.

The article's focus was couples' sexual relationships. However, lack of physical intimacy is quite often a symptom of a lack of emotional intimacy. There are many factors that can threaten emotional intimacy in a relationship. One of the most significant, however, is simple neglect.

We all face innumerable stressors in our lives. Among those are work and the demands of parenthood. Unless we consciously take steps to maintain the romance and passion in our relationships, they will become moribund and simply die, withering from neglect.

One of the fundamental tenets of Imago Theory is that we must consciously nurture the romance in our lives. One way to do that is to simply commit time to one another. Put the time on your calendar, if you must, but let no day pass without setting aside at least 30 minutes just to check in with your partner and to be in touch with your partner's feelings.

Another tool we use in Imago work is "reromanticizing." It is a process whereby we seek to help couples capture the uninhibited fun and magic of their early courtship period. I would like to invite you to set this Valentine's Day aside to reromanticize your relationship.

First, schedule an hour together with your partner when you won't be disturbed. Find a comfortable setting.

- Write down all of the things your partner does to please you. The range is endless, from bringing you coffee in bed in the morning to making love to you. The thought is that you "feel loved and cared for by your partner when he/she . . ."

- Now, think back to those earlier romantic and passionate days of your relationship. On a separate sheet of paper list the things that your partner *used to do* to make you feel loved and cared about.

- Next, think about some caring and loving behaviors that you *have always wanted* from your partner, but never asked for. The list is limited only by your imagination (but do not include anything that is a present source of conflict). What would you like your partner to do, e.g., buy you jewelry as a surprise, blindfold you and take you to a secret getaway, make love to you more often?

- Combine your three lists. Then mark each item with a number from 1 to 5. One means the caring behavior is very important and 5 means it is least important among the caring behaviors.

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- Exchange lists with your partner. Go through and check any item on your partner's list you are *not* willing or able to do at this time.
- Beginning the next day, do at least two of the caring behaviors for your partner each day for the next thirty days. If you need a reminder, use your PDA, put a note on your mirror, or do whatever you must to remember.

Remember these caring behaviors are gifts to your partner, not bargained for commodities. Give with no expectation of getting anything in return. Do not worry about the behaviors you cannot do now (and do not criticize your partner for any that he or she strikes from the list for now.) (Part of the work we do with couples in our practice is to help them to do these harder tasks, and even to enjoy them.) The goal is to be certain that every single day you give your partner at least two caring behaviors—behaviors which you now know will make your partner feel loved and cared for. And when you receive such behaviors, however big or small, be certain that you clearly express your appreciation for this gift of love.

The research shows that in successful relationships partners exchange 100 or more caring behaviors a day. The science is not complex. We all need and want to feel loved, valued, and affirmed—or as a former therapist friend says, the “Three C’s”—to be cared for, to count, and to feel competent. Our relationships often feel vibrant and alive in the early days because we do those things. As time passes, they too often end up on the shelf of our memories.

There are other steps to reromanticizing and I will write about them in weeks to come. In the meantime, I invite you to try beginning to *consciously* give one another the gift of caring behaviors—even on the days when you don't feel like doing so. Try it for a month. Then write and tell me about it. I would love to hear from you.

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