

# Ask Connie!... “Bridge Over Troubled Water”

Dear Connie:

*I've been married to Charles for fifteen years. He's honest, hardworking, dependable, and helps with our two kids. The problem is, I started therapy two years ago because of job stress, and now I feel like a different person. I'm going to workshops, reading a lot—like Carolyn Myss and Pema Chodron—and my perspective on life has changed. My husband has no interest in any of this, and he seems narrow and rigid to me. I don't feel close to him, and sometimes I don't even like him. It scares me. P.S. I'm forty-three.*

—Annie

Dear Annie:

The problem you describe is not an unusual one. People grow emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually at different rates, just as they do physically. Often in a long-term relationship one person will have an emotional growth spurt triggered by a crisis, and it will seem for a while as if her/his partner has been left behind. There's a gap between them and an uncomfortable feeling of separation instead of the closeness they once shared. The one who is growing may become judgmental and impatient with the partner who is on a relative plateau.

But that plateau may be exactly where the other needs to be for now because the desire, time, and energy for self-exploration are not available. Or there may be fear of what will be discovered through self-exploration.

There is a natural impetus toward growth and change that occurs for many people around midlife. Sometimes the first sign is restlessness and a vague feeling of discontent, or a feeling that things that have been allowed to simmer need to be addressed. Maybe it's the marital relationship, maybe the job, maybe old family issues. Dreams are often clues to an internal shift. The questions: What's next? Is this all there

is? often arise. People begin to think about what they have and have not accomplished, what was shelved because of higher priorities, what they long for in life and want to move toward NOW. A sense of urgency is common. Women with high-powered careers may decide to slow down if they can and spend more time with their children, or have their first child. Women who've been primarily homemakers may decide to go back to school or return to a career that was interrupted or postponed in favor of mothering. Men may change careers, start their own business after working for others for many years, take up yoga, or suddenly want a red Mustang convertible. This is all part of normal development.

Your discomfort with the gap that has appeared in your relationship is also normal, and it can be a stimulus for healthy growth and change in the relationship. Most marriages need to be reinvented at least once, twice if they last long enough! Roles, expectations, assumptions, routines that have been long accepted need to be reexamined, and new ways of relating found. Or, if problems have been swept under the rug for years, the partner who is becoming more conscious may suddenly find them intolerable and want them resolved.

## Connie Myslik-McFadden,

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leads workshops, retreats and teaches Dreamwork and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabbalistic school of healing. She is the author of *Gathering the Soul, a True Story of Spiritual Healing*. Pathwork (Pathwork.org) and Imago Relationship Therapy (Gettingtheloveyouwant.org) are two easily accessible sources for the theories upon which much of this column is based.



Remember that in every relationship there are four aspects: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (which in my view encompasses the others). Compatibility in all four areas all of the time is impossible, but we are most comfortable when we are in energetic alignment with our partner. When one partner changes, the relationship will probably be “out of sync” for a while.

Annie, your concern about the distance that has developed between you and Charles is a healthy sign that your marriage and Charles matter to you. Talking with Charles about what you have noticed and how you feel about it is important. Doing that from a place of honesty and compassion is essential, because Charles might be frightened by the changes he has noticed in you. Telling him all the reasons you were attracted to him when you first met, and all the positive qualities you have valued in him over the years, will probably reassure him. Then, if there is something specific you want, ask for it! If you’ve read something compelling to you, invite him to read a portion of it and tell you what he thinks. Don’t push, invite! If physical intimacy has become ho hum, ask for something specific that would enliven that part of your relationship.

Can you plan a quiet weekend away together? It would be a wonderful opportunity to have a conversation with Charles in which you take turns (without interrupting the other) sharing what you would like your lives to be like over the next five or ten years. Be patient, and remember to express gratitude for the good in your relationship. Charles may begin to open up. And if he doesn’t, work on accepting him the way he is and continue to follow your own path of awakening. Couples counseling would be a good idea, but it may initially be a hard sell. If Charles feels the distance between you growing, however, and he is uncomfortable enough, he may be motivated to go with you. That could be the beginning of his own movement towards positive growth and change, and the transformation of your relationship, or not.

—Good luck, Annie!

## Do you have a relationship question?

Write to Connie at [conniem@mcn.net](mailto:conniem@mcn.net)—and ask!

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