

ASK CONNIE
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“Mirror, Mirror ...”

Dear Connie -

My wife Beth and I had a heated argument the other day, and I accused her of being insensitive. She in turn yelled “Look in the mirror!” When we had settled down a bit we were able to talk more reasonably about our disagreement, but Beth insisted that what infuriates us most in another person is what we least want to look at in ourselves. So, according to that theory, she was holding up a mirror to me, and not one I liked. Is this true?

Thanks.

Randall

Dear Randall -

Without knowing the details of your disagreement I can't say for sure. But in theory Beth is correct. If her attitude or behavior mirrored a part of you that you thus far have been unconscious of, you would react to it more strongly than if that were not so. That is one of the often unacknowledged blessings in close relationships like marriage - if we want to grow in consciousness, we can use our level of reactivity to our partners to explore our unconscious fears, beliefs, resentments, and desires. The first step in becoming more conscious and evolved is to recognize *what is true for us*. Only when we know the truth of what is inside us can we change it. So, in your example, the question to ask yourself is, could there be a part of you that is insensitive? If so, is it a part of you that would cause you to feel ashamed if you owned it? Do you want to hide that part? Far better, from the ego's point of view, to find and criticize it in your wife than to acknowledge it in yourself. From a higher spiritual perspective, however, knowing that part of yourself and patiently working to transform it is the far wiser choice.

There are other ways to look at mirroring:

Remember Snow White and the Wicked Witch? The witch asked the mirror who was the most beautiful in the land, and the mirror told her the truth - it was Snow White. If she had asked the mirror to tell her the truth about herself, she would have seen an ugly hag.

One way to look at life in general is to see everything that happens to us as a mirror to what we are carrying inside. If we believe we are destined to live in poverty, we are likely to be poor; if a woman believes all men are brutes, brutish men will continually show up in her life; if a man believes all women are bossy shrews, guess what kind of women he will attract! So life will respond to our beliefs about life, many of which are unconscious until we have taken the time to explore them. Those beliefs are usually developed in early childhood in response to one's caretakers and life circumstances, and until examined play a decisive role throughout our lives.

A wilderness therapy mirroring tool I use in my Gathering the Soul retreats is based on the concept of inner/outer wilderness. In other words, we are all carrying unknown

(unconscious) parts of ourselves - you could call them wild, uncivilized parts. In wilderness settings, hiking or horseback riding or sitting in solitude, I suggest that each person consider the possibility that everything she encounters is a mirror to something within - animals, birds, insects, trees and flowers, the weather - everything. With heightened attention, sensory antennas tuned, it is amazing how what shows up mirrors some aspect of the person's being, which can then be consciously explored.

Mirroring can be a very positive experience when used intentionally and with compassion. In couples' work, taking turns mirroring each other's communications is one of the most powerful skills one can learn. All that's required is listening carefully and repeating back to your partner what he/she said. It is not about agreeing or disagreeing, it is about letting your partner know he/she has been heard accurately. Often, people are mentally preparing a rebuttal instead of really listening, which leaves their partner unheard. You might want to try this technique with your wife. With practice, it has the potential to vastly improve any relationship.

I hope this will be helpful, to you and your wife!

Blessings -

Connie