

Rekha did not come for counselling

Rekha (name changed) did not come to me for counselling. Nor did she have any problem. She was engaged in counselling people after getting trained in an institute. She wanted to get some idea about my way of counselling since she had heard that I conduct training in counselling. While speaking about my model of counselling, I gave some examples without of course disclosing the names. At one point she said that the example I cited reminded her of an incident in her family life. I told her that she was welcome to speak about it. She said that it was a forgotten incident it had no bearing on her marital relationship. She began to narrate the incident with a smile. It had happened nine years ago, two months after her marriage. As she was narrating, her smile vanished and her face darkened. She stopped talking. Her eyes were downcast, lips began to tremble and tears began to flow.

After a month she phoned and thanked me profusely saying that it had become like having a new life. She had become much more cordial with her husband and he too was responding. They were certainly experiencing a new life after nine years!

Immediately I got into a counselling mode and let her bring out the feelings. I helped her to work out the whole thing and she got over it. A smile appeared on her face and she thanked me.

Then she laughed and said that when she came to me she had no intention of having a counselling session with me. I told her

that I was happy to have helped her. She added that she did not ever think that this incident had any bearing on their relationship. "We were rather cold towards each other and we thought that it was part of the boredom due to our busy life. But now I realise that after that incident I could not look at my husband in the same way as before." I told her to think of how her husband would have felt when he was not getting the same kind of spontaneous response from her as he used to do. "He must have felt disheartened; but he never said anything and we went on as if nothing happened. Now I understand that he too became cold because of me," she said.

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I made her understand that every incident leaves a mark on our mind and if there are negative feelings, they remain buried deep within as 'unfinished business' unless we work them out. I quoted the words of John Irving, "*Your memory is a monster; you forget - it doesn't. It simply files things away. It keeps things for you, or hides things from you - and summons them to your recall with a will of its own. You think you have a memory; but it has you!*"

Our mind actually forgets nothing. What we forget remains in our subconscious mind together with feelings we had at that time. If these feelings are negligible they may get wiped out over time. But if they are strong, they keep snowballing. These buried emotions guide our thoughts, attitudes and actions without our knowledge. But we always find some justifications for our behaviour as Rekha did. She blamed their busy life for their coldness towards each other. This is what all of us do. Our busy life is an excuse for our inability to relate to one another.

If something happens now, we overreact because the suppressed feelings of the forgotten event comes up and adds up to the feelings of the present event. Thus our reaction

becomes disproportionate to the present incident. Actually we are unconsciously reacting to the past event in the context of the present event. Later we regret for our reaction. But the harm is already done as our partner got put off by our exaggerated reaction.

Rekha was happy to undergo a counselling session with me as it helped her to see what happens in counselling. Though we were strangers when she came in and it was not intended to be a counselling session, my experience in counselling helped me to create an atmosphere of confidence and she felt free to speak about herself. Once she was able to release her emotions and became mentally free, she was able to look at the event in a new perspective and see how she was contributing to the problem. As she said, she was not able to look at her husband in the same way as before; but she was not aware of that. She was also not aware of the husband's feelings and his reaction. Now she understood that the source of the problem was not their busy schedule, but her feelings which she was willing to change now.

I asked Rekha one more question, "You lived like this for the last nine years without any major problem and perhaps you may go on like this for many more years; but since you are not too warm towards each other, suppose either of you found someone warm and understanding, could that trigger a new relationship, I mean an extra-marital relationship?" Rekha was taken aback. "I am sorry if my question upset you," I said. "No, No," she said. "I can't allow such a thing to happen. No, I will not. I will see that we come closer," she insisted.

After a month Rekha phoned and thanked me profusely saying that it had become like having a new life. She had become much more cordial with her husband and he too was responding. They were certainly experiencing a new life after nine years! My response to her was, "Yes ! Counselling can do wonders and you are the proof!"



One question is, if her husband could have helped Rekha to work out the feelings as I did. The answer is, yes and no. It is possible if the husband can put aside his feelings and function like an impartial counsellor to help her with her feelings. This is extremely difficult for any husband. Usually the husband will have his own feelings about the incident and so his reaction to her feelings may not be helpful to her. Instead, it may evoke counter reaction from her and thus the conflict can escalate. So it is advisable to have a third person to mediate. Here again there can be difficulty. If the third person is not impartial he or she can do more harm than good. That is what happens when parents or relatives intervene. They poison the mind of the person against the other and instead of helping to work out the feelings, they can reinforce feelings. Organisations which go by one-sided thinking also can do similar harm. Hence third person need to be carefully chosen. I would recommend persons specialised in marriage counselling to help with marital problems. It is also good to remember that small, forgotten incidents like the one of Rekha can diminish the peace and joy of married life. You can have a very beautiful life if you can free yourself from the hidden feelings of those forgotten events. That will also serve as a preventive measure to insulate your marriage against any catastrophe.