

# MAKING LOVE LAST

by Rev. Rod Kochtitzky

Sue falls in love. Sue is thirty-two years old. She is grateful to find a partner. Sue believes she has a "real catch" in Tom. Sue sees Tom as strong and dependable. Tom is grateful to have found Sue. Tom sees Sue as much kinder and understanding than his first wife with whom he divorced four years ago. Tom has confidence in their maturity to handle problems. Tom and Sue have fallen in love.

It is a natural **unconscious** process for people to "fall in love." It is not our conscious, rational minds that pick our partners, but instead a mechanism rooted and projected out of our unconscious minds. These unconscious projections stem from how our needs were met in our childhood years, or even more importantly, how our needs were not met. It is a natural mechanism for human beings to "fall in love" and enter a stage of Romantic Love that is blind to the negatives and to the real agenda of the couple. This stage of relationships is built on illusions.

Tom and Sue have been married for six months now. Sue is beginning to see Tom not as strong and dependable, but as stubborn and opinionated. Tom wonders what happened to his kind wife, now she seems so angry.

It is inevitable then that the second stage of all relationships is a "Power Struggle" in which the couple's differences and unconscious needs start to clash. Fifty-five per cent of all first marriages end in divorce. The vast majority of those who do stay married move into a parallel relationship in which partners distance from each other in order to quell the conflict. Those that do not divorce often use children, jobs, hobbies, alcohol, work, etc. as buffers to the unconscious conflict.

Sue notices that she does not want to be at home as much. Sue joins an evening aerobics class. Sue wonders what has happened to her marriage. Sue reflects on her parents' marriage. Sue remembers that her father stayed late at work, and that her mother would start drinking even before her father came home.

There is a great conspiracy of silence to the pain in marriages and to the lack of satisfaction, mutual joy, and real intimacy. Couples come to believe that they expect too much from relationships, and they either choose to divorce or to lower their expectations. They learn to expect something less than real intimacy and mutual joy. The power of the unconscious in our intimate relationships is seen in the statistics of how the divorce rate increases in second and third marriages. We do not naturally learn; instead, our unconscious minds continue to re-create the same unconscious power struggle --- just with a different person.

How can we make love last? I believe that the answer is in understanding the purpose of marriage which is to heal and be healed. The destructive fight or flight conflict in marriage rises out of unconscious needs. When this conflict becomes conscious and understood, it points to what is broken, and provides opportunities for healing. There is a movement today that is aimed at educating and helping couples understand that what makes love last is understanding the unconscious causes of marital conflict.

Real intimacy does not happen naturally; it is something that has to be learned. The hope for lasting marriages is that we can move away from a natural and unconscious process that bogs down in the power struggle and in distant relationships. We can then enter into the process of learning to be conscious in our relationships. Real intimacy is obtained by becoming conscious of the unmet needs that underlie our relationship conflicts.

Tom and Sue decide to go for counseling. Sue feels that Tom does not respect her. Sue feels that it is as if she does not matter. Sue feels that Tom is condescending. Sue feels that Tom doesn't listen to her. Sometimes, Sue feels as if she is invisible. Tom says that this is just like his first marriage. He wonders why Sue gets so angry and yells at him. Tom feels that Sue is very critical.

The most prevalent pattern that I witness in the relationships of couples I counsel is a hopeless shame/blame cycle in which one partner feels "invisible" and the other partner feels blamed for not being enough or for not "doing it right." Real love is built on understanding that these negative cycles are triggered by present events that happen between the two partners, but the resulting conflict has more to do with the past than the present. Until the unconscious agenda is brought to light the couple will stay stuck. Issues may change but the pattern stays the same until the unconscious relational agenda is understood. Then individuals are empowered to change the behaviors that are so hurtful to their partners.

Sue thinks she understands Tom more. Tom is beginning to see Sue's anger as being about her hurt. Tom is taking things less personally. They both feel that they have a very difficult road ahead, but they also have a sense of direction and hope.

Romantic love arises out of our unconscious needs. Real love and intimate relations are built out of understanding, respect, and acceptance that happen when partners see that their role is to help and heal. Conflict becomes an opportunity to heal, and marriage partners empower each other on their individual and mutual journeys toward love and meaning. This is what makes love last!