

How Meditation Can Save Your Relationship

Ed and Deb Shapiro are the authors of *Be the Change, How Meditation Can Transform You and the World*.

Everyone gets in arguments—even the Dalai Lama says so!

So how do you overcome the times when you just can't take your mate anymore? Find out how meditation can bring you and your partner closer and strengthen your bond.

Ed comes from the Bronx and is the son of a postal worker; Deb comes from the English countryside and is of distant royal descent. As they say in England, we go together like chalk and cheese, meaning we couldn't be more different if we tried! Yet we have spent just about 24/7 together for the past 24 years. This often amazes us, and there is no doubt our mutual commitment to meditation has held us together; when times were tough, meditation has been our greatest ally. In fact, without it, by now we would probably be on opposite sides of the planet!

Ideally, we meditate together every day, and any difficulties that may arise simply dissolve into the shared stillness. Then, when we need to, we can discuss such issues more calmly. However, our ability to stay open and loving, our selflessness and needs, are immediately confronted by someone else's needs. Relationship may be an integral part of being alive, but it is also the most vital and challenging teacher you could ever have!

Shortly after we were married, we went on our honeymoon to India, where we had a private meeting with the Dalai Lama at his residence in the foothills of the Himalayas. As Ed recalls: "After about half an hour talking, I was feeling so moved by this kind, simple and loving man that I just wanted to stay there and learn from him. Finally I said, 'I don't want to leave! I just want to stay here with you!' I thought he would understand

and say how wonderful, I recognize your sincerity, but instead he just smiled and replied, 'If we were together all the time, we would quarrel!'"

So if the Dalai Lama, someone who meditates for many hours every day, can quarrel, then so can we. Inevitably, there are going to be times when differences collide and egos clash or needs are not met; there will be times of discord. We get upset because we want the other person to be different from how he or she is. Perhaps one of the hardest things to accept in a relationship is that you cannot change your partner into the person you want him or her to be; the only thing you can change is your attitude toward the person.

Self-reflective practices, such as meditation, enable you to see not only how you are responsible for your own feelings, but also how whatever you may be experiencing is a choice you are making in that moment. It is not because of what someone else might be saying or doing. When you can step back from the heat of conflict and explore why someone makes you react a certain way, it quickly becomes obvious it has very little to do with the other person and much more to do with a place inside yourself.

Difficulties in relationships can show you the many ways your ego-self tries to be right, and how self-centeredness takes over. In the early days of our relationship, we were sharing some of our marriage issues with our meditation teacher. He looked at us in puzzlement. "Why not just laugh?" he asked. And he was right. When we can see the absurdity of two egos knocking heads and trying to outwit each other, it is very amusing. So often a disagreement is simply about seeing the same thing in two different ways: One sees a white ceiling, the other sees a flat ceiling, but it is the same ceiling.

Too often you may cling to difficulties and make them greater than they are; you replay the irritation in your mind until you become even more upset. The ego does not want to let go! Yet what a relief when it does and you can return to a place of balance. In this way, meditation is an essential ingredient in a shared journey, not just because it allows you to be on the same wavelength, but because it gives you the spaciousness to accept and love each other's differences, to see the other just as he or she is, without any

illusions. In that shared silence, the "me versus you"—the power struggles and one-upmanship—dissolve. There is a dropping away of the separation and hostility...there is just presence. What counts in making a lasting relationship is not how compatible you are with your partner, but how well you deal with any incompatibilities and can accept each other's neuroses. Then love can blossom.

The ideal plan is to meditate together each day, so any disagreements are seen, acknowledged and resolved before they escalate into something more damaging. The second-best plan is to recognize that differences have arisen, and then to take time apart to contemplate what has happened. We learned this when we had a marriage blessing at a Buddhist monastery in Scotland. We asked the abbot, **Akong Rinpoche**, what advice he could give us.

Akong suggested if two people disagree or argue, then they should both take time out by themselves to meditate and reflect on what they were doing that might be adding to the situation. Rather than blaming and pointing fingers, complaining about what the other person is doing to you and that is why you feel so bad, or he/she just doesn't get it and probably never will, or he/she has no right to treat you like this—instead you should look at yourself.

You look at what you did or said that may have been misunderstood, how you may have added to the situation, how what you said may have triggered the anger, or how your behaviour, attitudes and hidden agendas might be affecting your partner. What are you doing to that person to make him or her act like this? How can you treat your partner more kindly? When you are done, you can come back together and put into practice what you have learned.