

Like Two Crabs in a Pot

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I recently heard an analogy used to describe a person or group that does everything in its power to destroy the ambitions of those among them who wish to improve themselves. It goes something like this:

When you catch a crab and place him in a pot, the first thing he'll try to do is escape. Now, if you put two crabs in a pot and place them in there together, as soon as one tries to climb up out of the pot the other will grab the escaping crab by the legs and try to escape itself, to which the process gets repeated to the point where NO crabs end up escaping.

Funnily (or not so funny), I realized this analogy could also be applied to the dynamic in many love relationships.

How we got in this mess

Many of us jump into the exciting “pot” of relationship because it sounds like it will be fun and fulfilling. However, as the relationship progresses, we discover that as the heat is turned up and we fear getting “cooked”, our partner starts to feel more like an evil crab pulling us to our demise than the uplifting angel we fell in love with.

Initially we do feel wonderful as our heart opens and we focus on appreciating each other's essence qualities and ignore the qualities we don't like so much. As a result, at this stage, the relationship feels buoyant and uplifting. This open-hearted focus on the other person's positive qualities elates us and we are filled with the love we extend to the other person as well as the love we receive from them.

During the honeymoon phase there can be a good feedback loop where we feel safe and loved and as a result we open our hearts and extend more love back. And as the other feels that love, they too open and extend more love back to us. There is an abundance of love flowing through us to the other person and vice versa. You might call this the falling in love stage or blissful high that often occurs early in the relationship where we witness and evoke the divine essence shining within each other. Our essence is attracted to the other person from a fullness of love and a desire to share and extend that love.

However, at the same time, often lurking in the background, the Wounded Self (ego) often has its own agenda for wanting to be in the relationship, which is related to a feeling of lack from childhood and wanting to fill that emptiness through our partner. In my work with clients I have found it to be true that *both* essence and wounded self motivations underlie most relationships.

As a relationship progresses, we become more comfortable airing our dirty laundry and at the same time we also begin to focus more on the things we don't like (not a great combination). We begin to see the other person's Wounded Self and unleash our own in self defense. The Wounded Self begins to emerge more strongly because we tend to cope with the problems arising in the relationship by reverting to old, protecting strategies to control and fix the things we don't like. *We often don't realize that a very big part of the problem in the relationship arises precisely because we have stopped extending love and instead are trying to have control over getting something.*

Reverting to these control strategies not only stops the flow of love towards our partner, but also cuts us off from our lovingness, from our essence and from Spirit.

The choice to try and control in the face of the relationship problems sets in motion a shift in the relationship system from one that was mostly positive, uplifting and mutually giving to one where we are pulling on and dragging each other back down into the “pot” of relationship hell. When we feel threatened, we panic, and like the crab, we grab the thing closest to us (our partner) and pull for dear life! It results in a vicious power struggle where each person is feeling increasingly crappy and then focuses on the other person as the problem which needs to be controlled, which only makes everyone feel crappier and more out of control. So how do we get out of this mess and help each other?

How we get out of the pot

Inner Bonding will sometimes talk about this dynamic as handing our inner kid over to the other person to love and take care of. When our partner stops giving our Inner Child what he/she needs, our Wounded Self goes into control strategies to get the other person to take better care of our Inner Child. The other person’s Wounded Self resists that pulling/pushing and also engages in their own control strategies to get us to pick up their Inner Child and take care of it for them. Inner Bonding encourages us to learn how to take 100% responsibility for the happiness and wellbeing of our Inner Child, to take the focus off the other person and address our own end of the system so that we feel loved and whole and can then also respond more skillfully to the other person’s Wounded Self.

How we leap out together

In addition to doing Inner Bonding to take care of ourselves in the face of relationship problems there is another practice that can be very helpful. This practice is so simple and obvious that you might say “of course”! However, I have found that we all need reminding of this one, so here you go...

A mistake we can sometimes make is that in “taking care of myself” in the relationship I might remove the general focus from the other person and bring it back on taking care of myself but then when I do think about my partner or interact with them I still continue to focus on their negative problems and qualities. In other words, I might no longer be trying to take from my partner energetically or resist their pull but I am also not extending love to them and uplifting them. I may no longer be pulling my partner back into the pot and am learning to climb out myself but we are not working together as a team to buoy each other.

The practice I would like to suggest is to *choose to focus on the positive essence qualities again, like we did in the beginning of the relationship*. This must be done not as a strategy to control or fix, but rather because it feels so good to feel that love arising within again. So when you find yourself thinking negative thoughts about the relationship or about your partner, take a breath, turn those thoughts over to Spirit and make a practice of focusing on what you genuinely appreciate and love about your partner. You are not denying the negative, you are acknowledging and letting go to Spirit--whatever form Spirit takes for you.

You might need to start small like “I appreciate how she always balances the checkbook” or “I appreciate how he maintains our cars”. Try saying silently “I love you” whenever you think of your partner or whenever you interact with them. Again, this is not coming from an intent to control, it is coming from a desire to feel

the fullness of love in one's own heart. You are doing it to feel good. It may or may not be appropriate to voice any of this to your partner. Check with your spiritual guidance about what is truly loving to do. You might feel guided to make this a silent practice for a while.

So as part of your Inner Bonding work, I would suggest you experiment with an active "practice" of acknowledging but then letting go of focusing on the problems and instead focus on what you genuinely appreciate and love about your partner and the relationship. The beauty of this practice is that not only will you and your partner benefit directly from that flow of love but also that you will find that this habit begins to spread into the other areas of your life as well, including the relationship you have with yourself.

I believe we can all get out of the pot faster...if we do it together. Seafood anyone?