



Marriage Rules[©]

“BASIC UNIT OF REFERENCE”

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If we start from the premise that the basic unit of reference is the individual and that all communication is a form of projection, then verbal behavior can be interpreted at three levels.

Consider the statement:

“I can’t tell you what is troubling me because you couldn’t possibly understand me”.

At the first level of projection, the message is fairly clear. It is as though the communicator is saying I’ve got a secret that you are unable to really make sense out of, so I will just have to keep it to myself to protect you from being overwhelmed and burdened by what I know.

At the second level of projection, the message is much less obvious. It is as though the statement now means “you can’t tell me what is troubling you because you don’t think I could possibly understand you”.

Or in other words, you’ve got a secret that I am unable to make sense out of, so you will just have to keep it to yourself to protect me from being overwhelmed and burdened by what you know about me.

At the third level of projection, however, the ‘real’ message is “I can’t acknowledge or reveal to myself what is troubling me because the experience of doing so would threaten my safety or security and force me to address and possibly have to understand that which I am not yet ready to deal with now”.

Thus, it is I who has a secret that I am unable to make sense out of at this time and so I will keep it to myself to protect me from being overwhelmed and burdened by what I know about me, but must deny that I know by projecting my lack of understanding and lack of readiness onto you which, of course, makes it less difficult for me to handle.

The implication of this psychological adaptation is that by interacting with others, couples come to represent the mirrored aspects and appraisals which we experience at some level about ourselves, as individuals, but feeling anxious or uncertain about that experience, project onto those others who reflect aspects of our image back onto us.

Then we can reinforce our sense of OK-ness by proclaiming that it is not we who do not understand, but “...they...out there...” who do not understand.

Hence, we justify our reluctance to disclose of ourselves because to do so would be tantamount to speaking with a brick wall!

Of course, the real ‘brick’ is the obstacle of emotional defense which, in the guise of projection, appears to serve our needs at the first and second levels, but severely misleads us at the third.

And unless we are prepared to accurately perceive the reflection of our image in the ‘mirror’ of the other, we will only see what we want to see and fail to see what is really there in the “basic unit of reference”, which is always in the person of our self!

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