

When words resonate

Over the recent High Holidays in the Jewish calendar, we are told that from the 1st day of Rosh Hashana (new year) the book of life is opened and ten days later, on the Day of Atonement the book is closed, and our fate is sealed for the coming year. During this period, it is a time for self-reflection and a time to ask for forgiveness and repair our relationships. The late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once said that the most important lesson of the High Holy Days is nothing is broken beyond repair.

In his New Year address to the community our Rabbi read *The Dash* by Linda Ellis. I had never heard this read before and it had a profound effect on me as I sat listening and reflecting on how these positive words give us so much to think about our life and how we choose to live it.

*I read of a man who stood to speak
At the funeral of a friend
He referred to the dates on the tombstone
From the beginning - to the end*

*He noted that first came the date of birth
And spoke the following dates with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all
Was the dash between those years*

*For that dash represents all the time
That they spent alive on earth
And now only those who loved them
Know what that little line is worth*

*For it matters not, how much we own,
The cars...the house...the cash.
What matters is how we live and love
And how we spend our dash*

*So think about this long and hard.
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left
That can still be rearranged*

*If we could just slow down enough
To consider what's true and real
And always try to understand
The way other people feel.*

*And be less quick to anger
And show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives
Lie we've never loved before.*

*If we treat each other with respect
And more often wear a smile
Remembering this special dash
Might only last a little while*

*So, when your eulogy is being read
With your life's actions to rehash
Would you be proud of the things they say
About how you spent YOUR dash?*

The dash represents life and the way we choose to live it. The dash represents the good times and not so good times, the hellos and goodbyes. Most importantly the dash represents the impact we have had on the people around us.

I introduced this poem in session to a couple this week who were in real crisis. They were caught up in a very negative destructive cycle of anger, criticism and blame. They were both spiralling down a path towards ending their relationship and felt it was time to call it a day. I was struggling to find ways to comfort them both.

The poem appeared to stir up different emotions in them both. It brought them some calm and slowed us all down. They both cried as they understood the meaning of the words and as they looked at each other and held each other they both acknowledged they have one life and they both need to find a better way of making the best out of the dash. It was a very emotional moment witnessing their softening and moving towards a closer connection.

As couple therapists we all need to have different tools in our tool- boxes to help our clients show up to each other in the way that is needed and to feel they are living a relationship where they feel loved, cared for and understood.

Here are some other tools I use:

a) Seeing couples individually

Often couples have let their problems and familiar patterns of behaviour go on for far too long. Seeing partners on their own for sessions is often helpful in unsticking stuck thinking patterns as they move towards shifting their own behaviours instead of constantly looking at the others.

b) Understanding cycles

Helping couples to understand their negative cycles and how that shows up in their behaviour with each other is not always easy to understand. Using drawings to illustrate and label behaviour and emotion can be useful

c) Looking after self

Seeing yourself in a more holistic way as a partner. Recognising the importance of looking after self in order to be fully present in your loving relationship. A partner cannot be responsible for being the provider of everything.

d) Additional help to regular sessions

I often suggest chapters in books as a reference

Pod casts to listen to and sometimes exercises to help rebuild connection and to establish better communication skills.

As we are confronting some of our most difficult challenges of our times, I believe nothing is broken beyond repair and its never too late to change and to be better. REMEMBER TO LOOK OUT FOR THE DASH.

If you would like to discuss things further or to make an appointment, you can call me on either: 07976 403741 or 020) 8959 9528.

Alternatively you can contact me by email info@couplescounselling.com

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