



kort's korner

Rapture or Rupture? You Choose!

IN THIS ISSUE, I'd like to say more about the Turtle and the Hailstorm in terms of why and how these two types meet up, and how they need each other to form a relationship.

Turtles are the partner who uses minimizing as a defense to protect themselves from emotions that feel unsafe or extremely uncomfortable. Their goal is not to hurt others with their Turtling, but rather to stay connected to themselves and to the Hailstorm—and this imploding and going inward is the best way they know. Uncomfortable with long conversations, they prefer to keep things short and sweet. That's how they stay attached to themselves and to their partners. This doesn't necessarily mean they are meek, shy or introverted. That's more of a social style that either the Turtle or the Hailstorm might adopt.

Hailstorms are the maximizers. Although they too are uncomfortable with their feelings, their defense is to express them—immediately! Maximizers fear that their partners, usually Turtles, will reject and abandon them. As a means of protest, and sometimes to get the Turtle's attention, they become louder, more verbal and bigger than life. The Hailstorm's way of protesting

overwhelming feelings of rejection and hurt is to explode with emotions and talk incessantly, threaten to leave the relationship, and/or use their moods in an effort to make contact with their Turtle partners. Being maximizers doesn't mean they are extroverts who socialize with ease. Being the life of a party is a social style, not an emotional style.

RAPTURE

At first, the two fall through the doorway of romantic love with each other. Turtle tells Hailstorm, "You are so alive, passionate, vibrant and compassionate," referring to the outward emotions he observes in the Hailstorm. Hailstorm tells Turtle, "You're so calming, thoughtful, introspective and relaxing to be around," referring to the inward way the Turtle handles his emotions. To begin with, this is seen in a positive context. Over time, however, once romantic love ends and the power struggle—the second stage of relationships—begins, neither the Tur-

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tle nor the Hailstorm finds these traits likeable or attractive.

The fact is, both Turtle and Hailstorm have met in each other the parts of themselves they have lost and buried. Most Turtles want to emote more and become more verbal. Most Hailstorms would like to calm down and handle situations without exploding. But, neither is conscious of this, nor do they know how to do it. The Turtle lost his ability to be more emotional during childhood, when strong emotions weren't blessed or honored, and the family message was, "Don't feel." Hailstorms often lost their ability to be calm and emotionally contained in families and cultures that valued the display of strong emotions and discouraged passive behavior. So each enters the other's life to bring online his own lost parts and buried self.

RUPTURE

Turtles-and-Hailstorm couples come to my office or my workshops, believing they are mismatched.

Each arrives feeling superior and desiring to shine a spotlight on the other's shortcomings. Turtles often strut in, enjoying the knowledge that their Hailstorm will eventually show up and start hailing. Then they can point and say, "See what an abusive, mean, angry person I'm with?" Meanwhile, the Hailstorms' best hope is for their partner to sit there quietly and be passive-aggressive, so that I can see what an abusive, mean and angry Turtle they're with.

Until they begin their couples work, they do not realize that each of them is a different side of the same coin.

Both desire contact and connection with each other.

Both are trying to preserve and defend their emotional selves.

Both are trying to recapture their lost selves.

And yet, each is scaring the other to death! Turtle is scaring Hailstorm by appearing to be disinterested. Hailstorm is showering Turtle with too much emotion, more than he can handle.

The reason why all of this causes rupture for the couple is that neither Turtle nor Hailstorm knows what to do. After the romantic love period, nature leaves them both on their own to figure out the rest. I often say that's why Imago Therapists were created! As in the Turtle and Hailstorm scenario, each feels that to change and make the other happy is humiliating and will only confirm that they themselves are the "bad guy." The truth is, both need to stretch and needn't wholly change their stripes.

Here, adapted from Imago Relationship Therapy, are 10 Smart Things for maintaining rapture, and not rupture, in your relationships.

1. Ask your partner for an appointment to talk about conflictual conversations.

Never start talking about frustrations or angry matters unless you and your partner have both agreed

on the right time to do it. Typically, Hailstorms force a conversation about "issues" without the consent of their Turtle partners. But few Turtles are eager to ask for appointments, since they are typically stifling their own feelings.

2. Informed Consent

Even if your partner has consented, never start talking about a frustration with without first telling him what that frustration is. Both of you should be on the same page, knowing what the topic is and when it will be discussed.

3. Don't wait more than 24 hours to discuss a frustration.

Turtles are seldom ready to talk about whatever their Hailstorms want to address. Thus, Hailstorms often feel they're being rejected or pushed away, and they take it personally. It's not personal at all. Rather, it's just the Turtles trying to manage strong feelings and emotions with his protective shell. But often the Turtle could take days or weeks, if ever, to discuss the conflict. So the rule is never to not wait more than 24 hours. It is a good stretch for the hailstorm to wait and not have impulsive conflict-ridden discussion immediately. A time out can be a good thing for Hailstorm.

4. If you're the one who declined the appointment, you be the one to suggest when would be a good time.

This is something I recommend to couples. Both personally and professionally, I've found that whether

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the Turtle or the Hailstorm initiates an appointment and their partner says no, the partner told no feels rejected. It's painful to keep coming back, asking, "Is this a good time?" or "How about now?." It's like begging! If you've declined, maybe just to avoid the topic or for whatever reason, then you should be the one to return and say, "Okay, I'm ready now" or, "I still don't feel ready—can we do it tomorrow?."

5. Both individuals should do some stretching.

This is different from changing. By stretching, you become willing to give more of what your partner wants. In so doing, you're giving something to yourself as well. Hailstorms learn to contain their bigger, stronger emotions and don't need to become loud and volatile over every conflict. They can learn to "chill out," trusting that a calm approach will be effective since Turtles need less reactivity. And for their part, Turtles need to learn that they needn't protect themselves by always staying inward and detached. Their Hailstorm is teaching them about connectedness, in which emotions are a natural part of the conflict and that they can feel perfectly safe.

6. Use safe and effective dialogue.

Particularly when a conflict is emotionally charged, Imago Relationship Therapy offers several effective ways to dialogue with a partner. And I recommend you pick up Harville Hendrix's book, *Getting*

the Love You Want to see how you can use the Intentional Dialogue.

7. Reduce reactivity.

Most conflicts don't go well because of both partner's reactivity. It's important that you both wait until the reactivity subsides considerably. Not that the frustration or conflict has to be gone, but if either of you is defensive and over-reactive, you're not going to be able to hear each other.

8. Avoid criticizing.

We all tend to think that if we point out our partner's shortcomings, we'll get what we need. When you're angry at your partner, it's easy to be critical. But we teach in Imago that "Criticism kills love." In fact, this sets it up so that you will not get what you need and want.

9. Stick to one topic.

Most couples usually start to argue over one topic. Then—either out of weakness, because he fears he's losing; or out of overconfidence on the assumption that he's winning—one will change the field of battle. It's imperative to stay on one frustration for your entire dialogue. If you have another topic to discuss, fine! But save that one for another appointment, at another time.

10. Stay away from judgment.

It's so easy to sit in judgment over your partner and tell him who and what you think he is. The problem is, 90 percent of that judgment is about you, and only 10 percent is really about him! Judgment of anyone else is really not relevant, much

less helpful in achieving rapture. It's so much more effective to work on—and change—yourself, so stay in judgment about yourself.