Are You Related?

When an individual or couple goes to therapy, it is crucial for the therapist to establish the foundational therapeutic alliance between himself or herself and the client**.** What is fascinating to me is when couples, married or single, come for counseling for the first time and to hear their response to a simple question: "Are you related?" That question is intentional. For those who are not married, I would ask, "Are you in a relationship?"

The response to my question, "Are you related?" reveals the couple's understanding of a married relationship and their understanding of what their own relationship is all about. Almost always, the responses from married couples to the question "Are you related?" is "No." Then I would respond, "Then why are you here?" Often it brings a little chuckle and breaks the ice.

Truly, most of the couples are a little confused because they have never thought about themselves in the context of being related. They thought that only if they were in the same biological family would they be truly related. They did not realize that they are legally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually related through marriage. More importantly, this kind of relationship (marital) is closer than any other kind—mom, dad, brother, sister, etc. Unfortunately, many moms, dads, brothers, and sisters, do not know that. They still try to hold on to their children/siblings as though they are still being breastfed and diapers being changed.

A fascinating study published in the "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences" (PNAS), shows that" married couples tend to share a higher degree of genetic and ancestral similarity than two randomly chosen individuals from the same population."

It goes on to explain why. The study first states that there is the "Neurochemistry of Intimacy." This is developed through physical touch and sexual intimacy that trigger the release of neurochemicals that build a strong biological bond. Second, there is Oxytocin and Vasopressin: Oxytocin (often called the "cuddle hormone"). These chemical fosters emotional attachment and trust—particularly reinforced by estrogen in women—while vasopressin in men is linked to protective instincts and long-term bonding. Thirdly, there is Dopamine. This reward chemical reinforces emotional and physical closeness between partners.

In addition, the study revealed what is called "Physiological Synchronization." Over long periods of shared living, couples often develop "couple concordance in health," where daily routines, shared diets, and emotional stress cause heart rates, sleep patterns, and even immune responses or gut microbiomes to align."

For those of us who believe in inspiration through the Holy Scriptures, these findings are a most fascinating description of the Bible texts in Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:8, Matthew 19:5, Ephesians 5:31, which state: ". . . . And the two shall become one flesh." Hence, it is a scriptural pronouncement and a biological fact.

Here's what I noticed in my therapy practice. At least fifty percent of the couples who do not understand that they are truly "related" to their spouses are part of families who interfere with their relationships. Or one spouse has an overly connected relationship with his or her mom, dad, or siblings. There is deep enmeshment or a codependent relationship.

The dictionary states, "Enmeshment is a psychological dynamic where personal and emotional boundaries blur so deeply that individuals lose their sense of autonomous identity." It further explains that "A codependency relationship is an unhealthy dynamic where one person excessively prioritizes another's needs, often enabling self-destructive behavior at the cost of their own identity, boundaries, and well-being." Now we can understand why there are so many dysfunctional families and homes in our country. Individuals cannot leave their moms, dads, sisters, and brothers, and truly bond with their partners. Then, is it really true when it comes to relationships that blood is thicker than water?

In one of my articles titled "Blood Is Thicker Than Water " I explain the point this way: "Yes, blood is thicker than water; however, marriage is thicker than blood. The relationship between a husband and a wife is by the Creator's design and very nature, closer than any other kind of relationship, even between a parent and child. Marriage is indeed "thicker than blood." The nine months of pregnancy and the long, painful hours in the delivery room cannot match the intense, passionate closeness between a husband and a wife. Many Bahamians have not grown to understand and respect this. Too many Bahamians, especially mothers and grandmothers, have not respected the sacred union of their children's marriages. They have made it their duty to challenge the true meaning and practice of loyalty to one's spouse. The truth is that they have actually ruined countless marriages because of their interference and misguided notions."

It is also true that too many husbands and wives do not understand that they are closer to each other than their own mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers, etc. Are you related to your husband/wife? The answer is YES.

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