

10.2 The Second State of Mind- Conflict

As long as a husband and wife are happy, the state of intimacy hums right along. But no one is happy all the time, especially when making sacrifices to make someone else happy. And when unhappiness is experienced by either spouse, the slumbering Taker is immediately alerted to the pain.

"What's going on? Who's upsetting you?" the slumbering Taker wants to know.

It can be a temporary lapse if your spouse is still in a giving mood and apologizes for the error (whether or not it's his or her fault). Your spouse may promise to be more thoughtful in the future or make a greater effort to meet an unmet need. The Taker is satisfied that all is well, and goes back to sleep, leaving the Giver in charge, and keeping you in the state of intimacy.

But what happens if there are no apologies? What if the damage is not repaired quickly? What if one spouse continues to be thoughtless or unwilling to meet an emotional need?

When that occurs, the Taker, mindful of all your sacrifices in the state of Intimacy, comes to your defense.

I think it's time for a new rule, the Taker advises. You've done enough giving for a while, now it's time to get something in return. Instinctively, you adapt the Taker's rule: **Do whatever you can to make yourself happy, and avoid anything that makes yourself unhappy, even if it makes your spouse unhappy.** When that happens, you've entered the second state of mind in marriage -- Conflict.

When one spouse follows this new rule, it isn't long before the other spouse's Taker pushes the Giver aside and is ready for battle. In this state of Conflict, spouses are no longer willing to be thoughtful or to meet each other's needs. Instead, they demand that the other spouse become more thoughtful and that their own needs be met first. They no longer guarantee protection, but instead, threaten each other unless their demands are met. When demands are not met, the Taker resorts to disrespectful judgments, and when that doesn't work, out come the armaments. Angry outbursts are the Taker's last-ditch effort to solve the problem.

In the state of Conflict, conversation tends to be disrespectful, resentful and even hateful. Mutual care and concern have been replaced by mutual self-centeredness. Your Taker no longer trusts your spouse to look after your interests, but pulls out all the stops to see to it that you are treated fairly. The problem, of course, is that your Taker does not know how to treat your spouse with that same fairness. Fairness is viewed by the Taker as getting its way at all costs.

In the state of Conflict, couples are still emotionally bonded and that makes the pain of thoughtlessness even worse. Love units are withdrawn at a very fast rate. They may still hope that the hurting will stop and there will be a return to the state of Intimacy, but they don't trust each other to stop the madness. Occasionally, one spouse may revert to the state of Intimacy, but

if peace is to return, they must both do it simultaneously. The only way to calm down both spouse's Takers is for both of them to be protected at the same time.

Couples can return to the state of Intimacy from Conflict, if, and only if, they stop hurting each other and return to meeting each other's emotional needs again.

But it's very difficult to be thoughtful in the state of Conflict, because your Taker urges you to return pain whenever you receive it. So for most couples, the state of Conflict inspires them to think with short-sightedness. Instead of wanting to meet each other's needs, they want their own needs met before they'll do anything. That makes resolving the conflict seem almost impossible, because our Takers would rather fight than try to make the other spouse happy.

Negotiations in the state of Intimacy really don't work, because each spouse is trying to out-give each other. Sooner or later, one spouse feels used by the arrangement. It's not what I consider bargaining -- it's like giving away the store!

However, negotiations in the state of Conflict don't work either. Each spouse is trying to out-take each other. There is no effort to make the other spouse happy, only the self-centered effort of pleasing yourself at the other person's expense -- it's like robbing the bank.

When a husband and wife are in the state of Conflict long enough, the resentment and disillusionment they experience eventually convinces their Takers that fighting doesn't work. A new approach is warranted, and that approach ushers in the the third state of mind in marriage, Withdrawal.