The Dance, Not the Dancers

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR NEGATIVE CYCLE

> *It was never you against your partner.*
> *It was both of you against the pattern.*

Couples in trouble almost always get caught in a loop that seems to have a life of its own. One person pushes for contact with questions, criticism, or intensity. The other feels attacked and pulls back, going flat, logical, or silent. The pulling back scares the pusher, who pushes harder. The pushing overwhelms the withdrawer, who backs off further. Round and round, a little faster every year.

The way out starts with one idea: the cycle is the enemy, not either of you. Neither of you designed this dance. You both got pulled in by understandable fear, and now it runs on its own and takes over evenings that started out fine. Blaming each other for the cycle is like two people caught in a riptide blaming each other for the ocean.

Naming the cycle together, out loud, even giving it a nickname, is the first real act of teamwork. The Spiral. The Tornado. Our Thing. The moment you can say "it's happening again" instead of "you're doing it again," you have stepped far enough out of the dance to see it. What two people can see together, they can start to change together.

MAP YOUR DANCE

1. Together, on paper, sketch the loop: "When I feel ___, I tend to ___."
2. Then: "When you do that, I feel ___, so I ___." Keep going until it circles back.
3. Give the whole loop a name you can both say without blame.
4. Agree on the new language: "The cycle's got us," not "you're doing it again."
5. Shake on it. The two of you, against the dance.

WHEN IT'S HARD

Mapping the cycle usually stalls when it turns into figuring out whose fault it is. It is a loop. It has no starting point worth finding. Every "you started it" is just the cycle talking. The only useful question is how you get out of it together.

TO SIT WITH

What has the cycle already taken from you? How many evenings, trips, holidays?

What would it be like to hear your partner say, "The cycle got us tonight. That wasn't really us"?

OUR INTENTION THIS WEEK

Something small you can both actually do this week.

WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY,

Dr. Mark Gregory Karris