

Are you present in the bedroom?

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April 2012

Our family lost a loved one to breast cancer this week, leaving 2 young children and a grieving husband, now a single Dad. A tragic loss with an enormous ripple effect on so many lives. Once over the shock I realize that this is one of those precious moments in life when I stop to really think. I think about her and her family, of course, but I also think about me and mine. About society in general and our collective expectations that life be perfect all the time. About how we focus on the place we want to be without realizing that this moment is all we truly have. We have some unnamed vision; a conglomerate of possessions, accomplishments, achievements; life's "ticks in the boxes", that if only we had them, we would finally be complete. We'd be able to relax and revel in those precious moments that we see passing us by. We see them, alright. We might even acknowledge that they are worth more than a passing glance, if only we had the other pieces in place we could pause to enjoy. But we're not there yet. Maybe next time.

Relationships in general and sex, specifically, are like that too. When I see people who want their sex to be better, I break it down trying to understand what it is like for that individual couple. When was the last time they truly looked at each other, made eye contact for more than a quick glance? When did they last hold hands and walk outside, smell the spring, observe nature, talk freely and easily to, and about, each other? We expect too much of ourselves; to re-connect quickly after a stressful day at work. To carry financial burdens, disagree about how to raise the kids, survive in a state of absolute exhaustion and then, spontaneously, randomly, without forethought or foreplay undress and make love with passion, energy and presence. And not just to have sex because sometimes we can manage that part okay, but to WANT to from somewhere deep within our anatomy. We expect perfection.

I have yet to meet anyone who wants sex to last hours (no doubt those people are out there), but the connection we seek, especially women, involves more than a sharing of orgasms (usually). Our physical connection needs to involve an element that goes deeper than the sexual, a bond that transcends all the responsibilities of our lives. We seek to be valued, cherished, sought after, played with, challenged, stimulated, equalled. Not all at once but regularly over the course of our life together, we need those things from our partners and they, from us.

My goal is not to trivialize our loss by talking about sex, in fact, my intent is to honor those we have lost, especially so young, by learning from the truncation of their life. In their memory, it behooves us to move slower, act consciously and reflect often on the fragility of life and the legacy we want to leave.

I could write about the exciting topics of testosterone replacement, bio-identical hormones, the prominent use of SSRIs and blunted sexual response, (and maybe I will in future), but the place to start improving "performance" in the bedroom is with ourselves. The most important medicine is understanding how we view ourselves and the world around us before we actually cross the threshold. If we only had today, would we see each other differently? Would we connect more deeply? Would we forgive more completely? Would we share our bodies more openly and with more creativity without looking at the clock or worrying about the chores? Would we allow, even encourage, ourselves to try new things? Would we be present for our partner in a new way? I think that we would.

Although some on-line pharmacies want you to believe it exists, you will not find a magic remedy for all your ailments, least of all your libido. No pill in the world will help you connect to a partner in a relationship that is emotionally distant, harboring resentment or even just a little stale. A long-term relationship cannot be made new with a medication (herbal or otherwise). The cure comes from being open to the possibility that you will need to work harder. Sadly, all relationships default to non-existence if we don't work on them; marital, parent-child, friendships, collegial, it is just human nature. Our relationships need upkeep and it doesn't have to be expensive, overly time consuming or involve a new drug, we just need to set aside the rest of the world regularly and really focus on each other.

If we are absent from tomorrow would the people in our lives know, without question, that we truly saw them? I hope so.