



# This Wonderful Marriage-Body

Two halves – One Whole

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Two halves, one whole

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# Introduction

Two halves - one whole: that's the way it is when a man and a woman live together in marriage. We can picture this one whole like a human body, which has many parts and yet it is one organism. When a man and woman get married we can imagine that they have formed one invisible body with two visible wonderful parts: He and She.

This picture of marriage as a "body" will be used throughout this book. The idea is that God joins two halves that belong together, the man and the woman into one whole – together they make up one body.

This book is for those who want to make more out of their marriage. It is also for those who still have their marriage ahead of them and want to prepare themselves well. From time to time, we will also talk about God in this book because I believe that marriage is a gift from God to mankind. It is his invention and when it is properly handled and used it is a great invention. The book should help us better understand this invention. What is this mysterious link between man and woman? What is the meaning or significance of this relationship? This book is also a sort of instruction manual for marriage: we discover how to treat a marriage, to make sure it really works well and is not damaged or even destroyed.

Many people around the world no longer believe in marriage. They live together for a while with someone of the opposite sex without ever getting married. Or they give up and get divorced and remarry. Fidelity is neither learned nor practiced, because many are convinced that marriage is not worth it – the price seems too high. As a result many people will end up lonely. In old age, they will lack someone who has become their best friend by sharing the ups and downs and battles of life. Furthermore, more and more children are growing up with multiple mothers and fathers – and so we are seeing more and more children with psychological problems. No child wants his mother or father swapped for a new one every couple of years!

The problem lies not in marriage itself. Marriage is an extremely valuable product of our Creator that cannot be improved on. The problem lies in the fact that

we do not understand the nature of true marriage and we do not treat it correctly. We use this gift at our discretion. We exploit it because we just want the benefits, but we do not want to make the investment it requires. So we destroy marriage. That is rarely what we intend. We just do not know better. We often make the same mistakes as our parents, especially if they led a corrupted, broken marriage and failed to be positive examples. But we can learn! We can do better!

My goal was to write a readable book about marriage, that anyone and everyone will be able to understand. As mentioned above, I am using a comparison or analogy: I describe marriage as a body with two parts. It is this invisible but very real organism.

Many people helped to write this short book. First and foremost, I want to thank my wife Katharina, who has put up with me for almost 40 years now. She is my best friend and a wonderful companion. It is nice growing old with her.

I also want to thank my friends who encouraged me to write this book: I have travelled to many countries with some of them and it was often my job to teach about marriage and family-life. Actually I learned a lot about marriage through my contacts with people from other countries. So I need to thank quite a number of couples and singles in Western Europe, Russia, India and Kyrgyzstan: you welcomed me as a teacher and your positive comments contributed to me writing this book. I have tried to avoid writing a book on marriage from a Western perspective. It should be a globally relevant book. I believe that these recommendations apply to all marriages all over the world. Of course when it comes to marriage, there are some differences of style and approach that depend on your culture. That is okay. Yet the fact is that fundamentally, marriage works in the same way everywhere. In other words there are basic rules and laws that we need to consider because they are true for all cultures.

Finally, Dear Reader, do not expect every question to be answered: to do that I would have to write a very thick book, yet thick books are usually read by very few people. This book is a simple plea for you to exert yourself to make the most of your own marriage, because it really is worth doing so.

So are we ready to discover the secrets of the Marriage-Body?

# Chapter 1

## One marriage – one body

### 1. What is the Marriage-Body?

In the second chapter of the Holy Scriptures, in the Book of Genesis, which is found in the Old Testament, we read how God created man. After he had created the man Adam, God planted a garden for him, a paradise that he should cultivate and protect. But the plan was not for Adam to do it all alone. God made him a wonderful helper, the woman. He led her to Adam, who received her gratefully and gladly from the hand of God. Then we read a very important statement: indeed we cannot overestimate the significance of it: "Therefore shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife and they shall become **one flesh**." One flesh!

If a man joins with a woman in marriage, obviously something like a new organism is born. Obviously it is not visible, yet it is still very real and it is what I am calling the Marriage-Body. Everything one partner does has an immediate or delayed effect on the other. We are connected and need each other. This new organism has invisible blood vessels, nerve connections, a digestive system, a heart, and much more. The blood vessels can become clogged, but they are there. The nerve endings may become raw and over-sensitive or even traumatised, but they are there!

Many people, although they are married, live as if they were alone. They are very inconsiderate towards their spouses, because they do not realize that they are both members of **one body**. They behave like a hand that forgets it is hanging on the end of an arm. The arm is wounded, and but the hand says to itself, what do I care about this arm? I am only responsible for myself. The hand's task would in fact be obvious: for example, it could put money on the counter in the pharmacy, take the tube of ointment, and then smear some ointment onto the wound so the arm can recover. But the hand does not do this: instead, it waits for the bad arm to finally start working again. But the arm is not able to do that on its own. It needs the help of the hand. So the arm just gets worse and worse. Soon it is unable to move. Finally the hand realises that it is also affected, because it is hanging on the

end of a wounded arm and the hand begins to suffer. But the hand is annoyed with the arm and thinks: „That stupid arm is to blame – it is not my fault!"

At the breakfast table, a man yells at his wife because he is in a bad mood and his wife forgot to put the salt or sugar on the table. And worse than that the tea is lukewarm. His anger makes her sad and she goes quiet. As he is leaving home, he says to her: "What's the matter? Why are you in such a bad mood – you are always looking so depressed?" When he comes home in the evening, she is still down. "What's the matter now?" he says resentfully. After dinner, he wants to caress and kiss her, but she is cold and unresponsive. He goes to his friend's house and complains: "My wife is always in a bad mood, what should I do?" The friend says: "Ah, you should not put up with that kind of behaviour. Perhaps she needs a good beating!"

Unfortunately, there are millions of people in the world who think like this man and his friend. He has not yet understood that marriage is actually one body. He has not yet realized that everything he says and does will have a direct impact on his wife. He does not accept any responsibility and does not see that he is to blame for at least half the problem.

As members of one body, we have to consider our responsibility towards each other! Each member contributes to the health of the whole body. Therefore one of the most important questions we should frequently ask ourselves is: What can I do to promote the health of our Marriage-Body? But instead, we are too busy asking why our spouse is so dysfunctional and complicated!

One of my friends completes a 100 km run every year. He is thoroughly trained and knows his body well. The last time he ran this race, he completed it without even suffering any muscle pains. I dream of running that race, but my body is far too weak. I would do myself serious damage. I need and want to take care of my body, because if my body suffers, then all of me suffers. After all my body and I are one. And the same is true in my marriage: my spouse and I are one. If I treat her well, I treat myself well. A happy, healthy Marriage-Body consists of members who know that they belong together in one body and who are therefore considerate towards one another and take utmost care of one another.

Why is this so difficult for many to understand?

Because the Marriage-Body is invisible!

I can see and feel my own body. If I inflict pain on myself, I feel it immediately. If I inflict pain on my spouse, I do not notice it so clearly or so quickly. Nonetheless our **relationship** is suffering. We could say the Marriage-Body has caught a cold. Hopefully, it will not lead to pneumonia! A severe illness of the marriage can actually lead to the death of the Marriage-Body; and it can begin with something as small as a cold – a little hurtful comment or insult. Perhaps the wife spoke with contempt or made derogatory remarks and the husband began to withdraw. Please remember: don't just think the husband has a cold. The fact is that the Marriage-Body has caught a cold. If your **nose** is running, **you** have a cold.

On 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1998, I was riding my bicycle when I collided with a tram. I broke my back and spent several months in a rehabilitation centre where I learnt a lot about paraplegics. A paraplegic cannot feel anything in his legs and feet. But they are still part of his body. They are his legs and his feet and not someone else's. If a paraplegic does not want to get severely ill or even die, he must take care of his legs, even though he cannot feel them at all. For example, if he sits in a wheelchair for several hours and develops a small pressure wound on his buttocks, the wound can become infected. At first, he won't feel anything. Then the infection spreads through his entire body and his upper body will begin to feel a little ill. By this stage it is often too late. A severe blood poisoning is hard to cure. Therefore, a prudent paraplegic will closely examine his legs, feet and buttocks daily with the help of a small mirror. Are there any small wounds? Are there red spots? If so, immediate treatment can be arranged. Measures are taken so that the whole body does not get sick. This is not easy, because **at first you do not feel anything**. But it is necessary. The same is true for your Marriage-Body and for your spouse!

You are one body. Do not hurt your body. Do not overstretch your body. People often die while climbing mountains because they overestimate the abilities of their bodies. By demanding too much of their bodies they end up dead. There are many husbands and wives who expect too much from their partners and put them under so much pressure that the relationship is totally exhausted. Then, serious accidents happen more easily (fights, violence or adultery). Just like a mountaineer falling from a cliff, a marriage-body can become exhausted and stumble and fall to a horrible death.

## 2. What is the purpose of the Marriage-Body?

What should the Marriage-Body do? What was it created for? God has entrusted the Marriage-Body with wonderful tasks. But they can only be accomplished when the body is really one and the two members are there for each other. The Marriage-Body:

- Should bear fruit, by giving life to new individuals and providing an atmosphere of love for them.
- Has a mandate to govern or administer some part of God's world.
- Should be a place of deep community or fellowship.
- Is created to mirror God himself and reflects his nature and his love.
- Should facilitate change of more or less corrupted personality so that we become more beautiful in character.

### Fertility

In the very first chapter of the Old Testament, we already find that God created man and woman for each other and for a purpose:

Then God said, "Now let us make man in our image, in our likeness! That they may rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, over the cattle and all animals on Earth and everything that creeps on the ground." So God created man in His own image, as the image of God he created them and created them as man and wife. And God blessed them and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth!" (Gen 1,26-28)

"Be fruitful and multiply!" This is the first record of a statement made by God to mankind. First of all, it means to conceive children and give birth. It also means to love these children and care for them, raising them so that they will be good fruit. What good is a fruitful tree if the fruits fall to the ground and rot? What good is a fruitful tree, if the fruit is not allowed to ripen? It takes both a man and a woman to bring children into the world. The man is needed for conception and the woman is needed for the pregnancy and birth. Similarly, both are needed if the child is to

going to grow up to reach healthy maturity in a carefree manner. The child needs both the father and the mother. Initially, the mother is more important but then later the father's role becomes more significant: But both are essential. That does not mean a mother cannot raise her children alone. A father can also raise children alone, although this is probably more difficult. But these situations are always stopgaps that will never completely satisfy the deep needs of a child. Many scientific studies have shown that a child is stronger and more robust with father and mother present. Such a child will be less susceptible to drugs, alcohol and addiction and of course less likely to divorce.

If the father and mother live together and get along well with each other creating a deep sense of heartfelt unity, then a child will grow up feeling safe and secure. This in turn will have a enormous impact on the child's whole soulful (emotional and intellectual) development. Just as the fruit of a tree needs water and sunlight to ripen, a child needs the love of two parents, to reach healthy maturity. Why do I mention all this? To make it clear that real fertility requires:

- Father
- Mother and
- Unity between them

If the relationship of the parents is sick, the child is seriously threatened. It feels like a little bird, sitting in a nest having noticed that the nest has a large hole through which it could fall at any moment. A child naturally thinks: "My parents take care of me." In other words the child sees the parents as one body that takes care of them. If the child perceives that the body is damaged, it feels great fear, like the little bird on the edge of the hole in the nest.

So when God says to a man and woman, be fruitful and fill the earth, then he is also saying that you can only do this properly if you keep your Marriage-Body healthy.

### **Government and Administration**

When we hear the words "Government" and "Administration", we may think of political rulers or powerful managers. But every man and in particular every marriage is called to govern and to manage. We have already heard how God made

both the man and the woman in His image and gave both of them a job to do together. The first part of the commission to the first human marriage was: Be fruitful and multiply. Now comes the second part "... *subdue the earth and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth!*"

This command was not just meant for the first humans. Every marriage, every Marriage-Body has been commissioned by God and set to rule over a kingdom however small or large it is. The realm is composed of the children, the work of the husband and wife, the home and garden and various functions in the community and much more.

We should note that at the beginning of human history, both men and women were **standing together** before God and received this mandate to **rule together** from the hand of God. Together as **one body**, indeed as **a Marriage-Body**, they were to govern and manage together complementing each other in this process.

This government is not meant to be a dictatorship with oppression, exploitation and tyranny. On the contrary it is one of loving, careful leadership and provision. Isa once told his disciples: "If someone wants to be first, they need to be the lowest and be the servant of all." His disciples had argued about who among them was the greatest. Now Isa made it clear to them that with God, true sovereignty and true greatness are when we serve for the good of all. With God, government equals service. Therefore, the marriage should serve people and actually improve the whole environment and the community. Of course a woman or a man can do that on their own too, but together they can do it in a way that is impossible for an individual working alone.

There are two great tasks that God has given to the marriage union or to the body of the marriage.

- The Marriage-Body should be fertile, bringing forth children, and these children should be given good loving care, and a good education and upbringing so that they will be healthy fruits.
- The Marriage-Body should rule over, or manage part of the world so that this part of the world will flourish instead of degenerating.

What dignity lies in this task! What an honour! When a man and a woman are at odds with one another and injure or wound one another, then the Marriage-Body will fall seriously ill, and will be unable to be this vessel of honour and dignity.

Isa was once accused by the religious leaders of his time that he was casting out demons by the prince of demons, and not through the power of God. Isa disproved this serious accusation with a very interesting argument:

“...But since he knew their thoughts, he said unto them: Every kingdom that is divided against itself is laid waste, and every city or house divided against itself, will not stand. And if Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How will his kingdom stand? ” (Matt 12,25-27)

A marriage that is divided within itself will not be able to stand. It will not be able to fulfil its mission except perhaps very badly. That is why we find in the second chapter in the Bible, a third major responsibility given to the Marriage-Body: the two members of the Marriage-Body should share deep fellowship or community with one another.

### **Loving fellowship**

In the second chapter of the Bible, the creation story is repeated, but this time from a different angle.

The first chapter tells us how God created the world, including people. The second chapter focuses on how God created people in detail.

First he made Adam, by taking some earth and shaping it into the form of a body. Then he breathed life into him. Then he planted a beautiful garden – a paradise for Adam. It is hard to imagine more glorious surroundings. Then God brought all the animals to Adam and told him to give them names according to their nature. At this time there was no pain, no death, no hunger and no disease. Everything was perfect and God, the Creator, was very close to his creation. God looked at everything carefully: the world that he had made, the garden, which he had planted, the man whom he had created. Everything was wonderful. But there was something missing! God said to himself: *"It's not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him."*

"Fit for him" what does this mean? It means that the person should have a living creature at his side that suits him. A creature with whom he can talk, laugh, play, work, a being who understood him and that he would understand. This type of relationship was not possible with animals; they were too different from him. So in his love, God created a woman for the man and brought her to the man who rejoiced when he saw her. Wow! She's perfect for me! The next verses of the Holy Scriptures contain one of the most important statements ever made about the marriage. *"Therefore a man will leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*

The word "therefore" needs to be emphasised: the man should not be alone, *therefore* he goes to the woman that God has brought to him and joins with her. In the original language of the Scriptures, the word used is to "stick" or to be "glued" to her. The man sticks to the woman! Having become glued to one another, a further step in this process follows: the two shall become one flesh. That is, they start to grow together to form a new organism.

All the words used here speak of deep community or fellowship. Just as the members of our body live together in close community, so the husband and wife should live together in deep fellowship. They will be two inseparable companions – two true friends.

Again let us compare this marital union with part of the human body: with an arm and the hand on that arm. The hand and arm are two different members of the body. But they belong together. They have grown together. The hand serves the arm, the arm serves the hand and together they accomplish much. The hand needs his arm and the arm needs his hand. But this only works because the hand and the arm maintain a very strong connection together. They are joined at the wrist. They are connected by a multitude of small blood vessels and the blood flows from the arm into the hand and from the hand into the arm. The constant flow of blood between the arm and hand, ensure that both remain alive. There are also many nerves connecting the hand and arm. A large number of signals and invisible words flow back and forth between the arm and hand. In addition to the wrist, the blood vessels and nerves, there are quite a number of tendons that further strengthen the connection and the community of the arm and the hand. Blood vessels, nerves, tendons, bones - what a strong connection and relationship!

Couples should develop and maintain this kind of strong connection. Unfortunately this is not that obvious. Many couples are only very loosely connected to each other. Their connection consists if anything, of only a few nerves and blood vessels! The hand does what she wants and the arm does what he wants. They hardly listen to each other. In this way, they can no longer fulfil their commission. Furthermore, neither the hand nor the arm is very happy in this situation, for the hand is created for communion with the arm and the arm is created for communion with the hand.

On the following pages of this book, we will explain the community of the Marriage-Body in greater depth, especially in the chapter, which explains how the marriage body grows and flourishes. But for now here are some keys to that loving community in the Marriage-Body:

- Spending time together
- Listening carefully to one other
- Communicating honestly
- Healing cracks and injuries quickly through forgiveness and reconciliation
- Being respectful and considerate towards one another
- Showing affection to each other, with loving hands and words.

The Marriage-Body community exists on three levels:

- Spirit
- Soul
- and Body.

The men and the woman should cultivate community at all three levels. At the level of the spirit, community means to pray together and pray for each other, bless each other and read and listen to the Word of God together. At the level of the soul, community means to share good, deep conversations, to laugh and cry together, to play or do something interesting together. At the level of the body, community means to exchange physical affection and to enjoy each other's body and give each other tangible pleasure.

So far, we have discussed three beautiful, though not necessarily easy jobs given by God to the Marriage-Body: fertility, government, and community. Now, we will look at a further mandate or job that God has given to the Marriage-Body. God's nature and God's love should be expressed through the marriage and in the Marriage-Body!

### **Marriage as God's Window**

God is invisible, inscrutable, incalculable, infinite and holy. But he loves us so much that he wants to be close to us and to show us his love. Of course, he cannot reveal all his glory in us. We are much too small and limited for that. You cannot pour an ocean into a water glass. You cannot light a candle with a flame-thrower. The entire candle would melt. Nonetheless, he still wants to reveal something of himself to us, to show us his love and draw us to Himself. Thus, in the account of the creation of man it says:

"...And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: ...And God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.'" (Gen 1,26-27)

Together, man and woman are an image or reflection of God. We could even say they are a window to God himself! He wants to show something of himself through the community of marriage. Marriage should be something like a window with two parts that will allow the light of God's love to fall into the dark room of our lives.

One window pane is the man, the other window pane is the woman. A window has two functions: it keeps out the cold and lets the light in so the room is warm and bright. In the same way, marriage should protect against cold – loneliness, warming not only our body, but also our hearts and souls. Too many people have souls that have frozen. Thus marriage should make our lives brighter. For a child to be raised by parents who are really one body, means they grow up in an environment where the weather is usually good and the sun shining. Conversely, there are children who grow up in a dark environment, because the window of the parent's lives is filthy or boarded up. This results in children growing with dark and damaged hearts and souls.

What is necessary for a window to work well?

- The window needs to be fitted in a **frame**.
- Each of the two window panes has to have its own **two hinges**.
- You need a **bolt** across both panes so that the window can be locked.
- Finally, the glass has to be kept **clean** so the light can shine through.

The **frame is the marriage covenant** or the marriage vows that you make before God and the representatives of the community or government. Before God, the partners promise each other to be faithful, to care for one another and love one another unto death. Without this framework the windows will fall out easily because they lack support.

The **two hinges refer to God**. The two window panes are hung independently on the hinges. The hinges give the panes support but also allow the panes to move. If a man is hanging on God and God is the axis around which he turns, then he has stability that will allow him to turn towards his wife on the opposite side of the window. The same goes for the woman.

The **bolt speaks of the communion** between man and woman. It closes the two windows tightly. Without this latch, the window can be pushed open easily, and it will slam and break in strong winds.

Finally, we are left with the task of **regularly cleaning the windows** to keep them clean. This implies that husband and wife honestly confess their guilt and then forgive each other. They need to be **regularly reconciled** before God. Otherwise, the window will become more and more opaque. And once a window has become completely opaque, you might as well remove it and fill up the opening in the wall with bricks. Sadly, this often happens today.

Now we have discussed four major tasks of the Marriage-Body: fertility, government, community and relationship with God. What a great set of tasks! But there is one more – a fifth task. Marriage is the best fitness trainer in the world!

### **Marriage is character training**

Marriage is a school – of course I am not talking about maths, physics and chemistry. It is a fitness centre – but I am not talking about weightlifting. Marriage is where we learn love, patience, reconciliation, humility, dedication and sacrifice. If we stay in the marriage and do not neglect it, we find that it is not only good for

our marriage; it is also good for us. The tough daily training that we experience in a marriage changes us on the inside. The muscles of love grow in our hearts. We train to increase the endurance of our soul. We practice patience - and our patience grows. We practice restraint - and the ability to restrain our self grows.

Living closely together with another person is a test that brings our true identity and character to light. In a marriage and especially in a family, you cannot hide for any length of time. All my weaknesses, both the good and bad qualities of my personality begin to emerge from the shadows. Of course, I could blame my spouse for everything. I could say: "It's your fault that I lost my patience" or "If you were better looking, I could be easily be faithful to you." Those attitudes are like a student who has a place at an excellent school, but has stopped attending because he does not like the teacher or the material being taught. "It's the teacher's fault he says!" In reality, the student is simply too lazy to learn. People like that will learn nothing.

We need to train our brains. The mind needs study material and a teacher. We also need to train our bodies. Similarly, our inner man – our soul – our character needs meaningful strenuous exercises. Anyone who avoids all forms of bodily effort will end up fat, lazy, soft and weak. Those who never exercise the soul end up selfish and impatient. They are consumers who only take and never give. That is why the daily workout exercises that we face in a normal marriage are so good for us. Marriage is therefore one of the best teachers provided we stick it out in the classroom and do not despise the teacher. We have to also make sure that we do not impair our ability to learn through disobedience, rebellion or laziness.

Let me put it another way: my spouse is a tool in the hands of God to mould me and change me. My spouse is the sandpaper that will smooth the rough surfaces, the saw to cut off the inappropriate protrusions, the chisel that carves away everything that impairs the beauty of the sculpture. Of course that process is not pleasant. There is no such thing as a marriage which is enjoyable at any time.

In the next chapter we will ask the question of how the Marriage-Body is born. Moreover, how must it be born so that it will be healthy and strong and not be constantly ailing.

## Chapter 2.

# The birth of the Marriage-Body

Just as a human being is born, so a marriage and the Marriage-Body need to be born. God calls every individual life into existence and he also calls the marriage into being. It is his invention and his creation. But people's unwise or wrong behaviour before or during the birth process can damage the delicate little being. So you often encounter marriage bodies with birth defects. Ideally a strong and healthy marriage is born, and the marriage can grow and develop normally. Unfortunately this is often not the case and the marriage that is born is far from healthy. It is weak, ill or handicapped. That does not mean that a healthy development is impossible, but it does mean that some extra special care and curative measures will be necessary. Unfortunately, in many countries around the world it is hard to find a good Marriage-Body doctor. But without help, the marriage will remain ill and sooner or later it will probably die.

So let us do everything in our power to ensure the best possible pregnancy and birth circumstances – in our own lives and for our children when they reach marriageable age.

What then are good conditions for a healthy birth? By now we have become familiar with the verse from the Holy Scriptures which says “therefore shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh.” This is a good starting point for understanding what it takes for a healthy marriage to be born. We also find good answers by thinking about the process of preparation: for God **prepared** the man for the woman and he **prepared** the woman for the man.

## 1. Cutting the umbilical cord: leaving father and mother

“Leave Father and Mother”: This statement is remarkable. For it appears in this account of the creation and the marriage of the very first man and first woman: two

people who have no father and mother! This makes it clear that this message is fundamental to all peoples, times and cultures. It is vitally important for all marriages. We are supposed to understand that we will never be able to really join with a woman or a man in marriage and bond to them unless we first leave our father and mother. We have to let go of one bond in order to enter the new bond.

We can compare leaving the father and mother to the act of cutting the umbilical cord of a newly born baby. The organism of the child needs to know that it is no longer attached to the mother. Up until this moment the baby has drawn oxygen from the mother's bloodstream. But now the little lungs begin to breathe for themselves and supply the blood with oxygen. Only then is the birth complete and the child is fully-born.

There are many marriages where the umbilical cord was not properly cut. There is still too much dependence on the parents or the parents do not want to let the child go. They want to hold onto them and have them around them. Woe betide you if you are too independent! Thus a man is torn between his parents tugging in one direction and his wife pulling him in the other direction. The same can be true for a wife: she can be torn between her parents and her husband. That is not good for the marriage. It makes it very difficult for them to develop their own independent existence. The possessive love of the parents stifles the young marriage. They mean well - and yet they cause damage. They treat their children as if they were still living in the parents apartment. They claim the first place in the lives of their children and want to be loved and honoured as much as the child's spouse. This is understandable because the children were the greatest treasure in their lives. But if they really want to see their children develop a healthy marriage, they must release the children and be content with second place in their lives. Later when the grandchildren arrive they will actually need to take the third place. This is difficult, but necessary.

The healthy birth of a marriage requires that a child leaves his parents and that the parents let the children go.

Often a man's mother competes with his wife for the greater share of his time, love and loyalty. The wife finds herself caught in a competition she was never meant to fight: *"Therefore shall a man leave father and mother ..."* He has to leave both father and mother. Sometimes a man only leaves his father. The father

no longer has an influence on him but the mother certainly does. Or vice versa. When the umbilical cord is not cut, the Marriage-Body will not grow and flourish and it can actually lead to dangerous infections.

Taking another analogy: In order to grow, a marriage needs a large enough piece of land with a fence around it. If a young tree is planted too close to the trunk of the parent tree it will not be able to grow properly and it may even wither for lack of light and water: the parent tree takes all the sunlight leaving only shadows and the strong deep roots of the parent tree take most of the water.

Whether we take this picture of a tree needing space to grow or a baby needing to be cut off the umbilical cord we see the same end result. Healthy growth depends on healthy independence.

To leave father and mother does not always mean living somewhere else in one's own house or apartment. That can often be very helpful, but in the oriental culture of the first biblical stories, it was common to find the son having property near the family home. Here he built a house and received his wife to live with him. Indeed she often became involved with helping the husband's parents. To leave one's parents therefore means to develop sufficient **inner independence**. A man must be able to say no to his parents when they want something that disrupts the communion between him and his wife. He must be able to resist anything that would prevent him being able to meet an important need of his wife.

If a wife always finds herself losing out while the man's parents are the priority, then her husband is effectively being unfaithful. Her husband is cheating her with his parents. It is a form of adultery. Of course, parents should be important. But the spouse is even more important. Of course a man should take care of his parents. But it sickens a marriage if the parents are constantly involved in the marriage and the young Marriage-Body is not defended or sufficiently protected.

Unfortunately, many men do not have the courage or strength to protect their wives from their own parents. They allow their wives to come under the dominion of their parents. They allow their parents to take advantage of the young wife as if she were a servant girl. Perhaps they think that this is how things have been for many generations. Why bother to try and change it now?

Therefore here is a word to you parents:

Dear Parents,

If you love your children, let them go! Thank you for raising them, thank you very much for all the time and effort and all the money that you invested in them. You have done a good job. But now it is time to take second place and let your child's spouse take the first place. That way you will be doing your child a great service and showing him or her your love in the deepest possible way.

Do you remember how hard it was for you when your parents exercised so much control over you? Do you remember the interference and all the demands they made on you when you were first married? Do you want to behave the same way now? What were you crying out for back then? Give your children the freedom that you so longed for.

Dear Mother,

What was it like for you when you were taken into the house of your husband's parents? How did you feel? Remember all they did that was good, consoling and encouraging for you and remember what was good for your marriage - do the same for your daughter or daughter-in-law! And remember all that was difficult for you, disheartening, embarrassing, humiliating and make sure you do not do such things to your daughter or daughter-in-law!

## 2. Attach - Bond

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and *cleave to his wife* ...

After the leaving comes the bonding. The actual word used originally means to **stick together**. To stick things together we use glue: we use glue because we want the objects to stick together forever and not fall apart. Nobody uses glue if he intends to tear the objects apart again.

Before gluing we need to prepare the two parts. Each of the two components must have a surface that fits well with the surface area of the other part. The surfaces that are going to be joined – the common areas must be large enough! Then we smear glue on the two surfaces and move them closer and closer together until they touch. Then we press them tightly together. After sometime, we can let

go and we see that they are glued firmly and stick together. This is a picture of how a man and a woman need to be joined together irreversibly.

In practice they actually grow together. Here we can learn from fruit trees. If one wants to improve a fruit tree, you take a branch of a better tree and graft it into the lower quality tree. How does it work? You make a cut into a branch of the old tree. You take the new branch sharpen it and press it firmly into the cut that was prepared. But that is not enough: you firmly fix it with tape or string. Now they will grow together and become one. The process is similar in marriage. Two people have to be prepared so that they will fit together and then grafted into one another.

### **What does this all involve?**

They have to fit together

When two people are glued together who hardly fit with one another because they are too different, the glue will have to be extraordinarily strong to maintain the adhesive bond. Unfortunately, such glue is rather rare. When people are very much in love they think that their love is stronger than any other glue. Unfortunately they are often mistaken.

A marriage is in jeopardy from the start when you don't have a suitable match – when the surfaces that are supposed to stick together are partly or totally lacking. A strong and growing Marriage-Body will be born when we have two well-prepared and similar-shaped surfaces. That is why the marriage decision should be carefully considered. Is she a suitable match for me? Am I a suitable match for her? Because of the weight of this decision it is important not to make it alone. It is good to ask your parents and to ask friends. You need to ask wise and experienced men and women for advice. This question has to be faced and answered honestly: do these two people really fit together?

What areas should be reasonably consistent?

#### **a) Faith**

If a man and woman have different religious beliefs there will be problems. Even if they can overcome their differences as a pair, things will explode when it comes to raising the children. The father will want his children educated according to his

beliefs and the mother will want her faith to be the guide. Religious beliefs are very strong forces. Faith is like a set of plans for a building. Imagine a man and woman meet on the construction site to begin building their marriage: but each of them has invited their own architect! That's not going to work. The two architects have two sets of very different plans. The best thing is if you have one single architect and one set of plans. If either partner believes in and loves God and the other is convinced that God does not exist or does not want to have anything to do with the things of God, then you have a situation where the adhesive surfaces will be very small. It will be just as difficult if someone who believes in Islam marries someone who believes in Christianity. In the first phase of being in love we can smooth over the problems. But once the pair is living together both will realize how painful the differences really are.

### **b) Character traits and habits**

If the spouses are too different in certain personality traits and habits then sticking together will be difficult. A certain amount of difference enriches a marriage – we need to have some differences in order to complement one another. But the differences should not be too large. If one person is always neat and organised and the other is a little messy, small adjustments will be required. But if one partner is very neat to the point of perfectionism and the other is a total hippy who lives in a permanent state of chaos, that will certainly lead to regular fights.

A 35-year old woman is wondering if she should marry a certain man. He is roughly the same age as her and they share the same religious beliefs. That is a great start! Now they have met several times and talked to one another. They have discovered that she loves trips into the country. She loves to take long walks in the fresh air. But he hates leaving the city: he likes to take the bus or catch a ride – he gets irritated if he has to walk more than the shortest distance and actually his figure shows that he prefers the couch to the countryside. She likes to meet friends and feels restless if she gets stuck at home for any length of time. He says that people are too noisy – he likes to stay home and study sports results. After thinking it all through she decides not to marry him. She feels that the adhesive surfaces are simply too small. She realises that her future marriage could easily fall apart if she does not expend a lot of energy to stick together.

Another woman dreamt of finding a husband who would come home and at 5:00 pm promptly – every day of the week. Her father was like that and she had enjoyed his constant presence around the house. She thought it would be best to marry a state employee with regular working hours. Then one day she fell in love with a man whose dream was to become a journalist. Her feelings were so strong that she became convinced that the marriage would work out fine. So they went ahead and got married. But soon his journalistic travels began to take him away from home more and more. He was often out late into the night and that meant he would sleep long into the morning. She complained, reproached him, swore at him and tried to persuade him to quit journalism and get an office job with regular working hours. While he loved his wife, he also loved his profession. While he was wondering what to do, she filed for divorce. It was very painful. Natural emotional love was not enough to glue the tiny adhesive surfaces together.

Of course, the point of these stories is not that such differences justify a divorce. On the contrary they are not acceptable grounds at all! But when we are in the process of finding a spouse we need to consider such questions and honestly ask ourselves: do we have enough things in common to make sticking together easier rather than more difficult? If we do not fit maybe we can avoid proper divorce with much forbearance but unfortunately there will often be an inner divorce, a divorce in our hearts. Both feel like strangers to each other. So actually divorce has taken place – inwardly.

### **c) Intelligence and education**

A man and woman, who want to stay together for life, should be able to talk easily with each other and understand one another. It is important that the woman be able to understand a little bit about the man's world and vice versa. This will be difficult if the intelligence differences and education are too great. If a very educated man marries a very simple woman because he is attracted to her beauty alone, then while he may enjoy life with this lady for a short while problems will come when the physical attraction fades. If he feels that she is inferior to him he may begin to despise her. They will be able to maintain the communion of the body, but not the communion of the mind. As a result the man will often be lonely and despair. He will feel their conversation is limited and superficial. The situation is even harder when a smart woman marries a less intelligent man with few

intellectual interests. At first being very much in love she will appreciate his practical skills and his good looking body. But later she will begin to see things differently. She will long for a man who is as intelligent as she is.

We must not underestimate the intelligence and education factor. To put it another way: if the intelligence and education levels are very different, then the pair will have very different interests. If the interests are very different, the spouses will live their own life in their own world and there will be very little in common. The danger is then that the relationship will dry up and the love will grow cold.

#### **d) Social relations, culture**

Many of us know the tale of Cinderella. The beautiful and wealthy prince marries the poor servant girl and they live happily ever after. The reality is unfortunately rather different. We must not forget: you don't just marry the partner you marry into a whole family system. If a relatively poor and simple man marries into a very wealthy family with a completely different lifestyle, he will often feel inferior. It's hard for a woman to be proud of her spouse when her own relatives despise him – even if they don't always let it show. It is particularly difficult when a woman from a relatively affluent background marries a man who earns very little. This is because a woman often tends to expect her husband to provide to the same standard as her father did when she was a child. Under these circumstances, dissatisfaction with the low pay and low occupational status of her husband will grow easily. The wife will begin to put pressure on him: "You should ... You have to ... Do something with your life ... Why do you earn so little?" It is very difficult for a man to put up with these criticisms. That is why it has proved advantageous when both partners come from roughly similar social and cultural classes.

The same goes for different cultures. Uyghur and Chinese, Kazakhs and Uzbeks, Europeans and Africans, Northerners and Southerners - there are so many differences in our patterns of thinking, feeling, needs, traditions, lifestyles and eating habits. These differences can produce many small tensions between the spouses. These many small voltages can add up to produce a high-voltage discharge, which threatens the Marriage-Body and can lead to surface or inner wounds, damage or destruction.

We have seen that for a solid bond, we need sufficiently large and suitably shaped adhesive surfaces. But for the bond to really become stable, we also need something else: the necessary **pressure**. If the parts are held together only loosely or even move during the gluing, then they will not really glue and the slightest knock will make them fall apart again. What creates the necessary pressure? It takes two strong hands to bring the parts together and press hard.

- One hand is an honest decision taken freely from the heart of the man **and** the wife.
- The other hand is God's that operates in our lives by our decision to make him the Lord of our marriage.
- Together these two hands are what the Holy Scriptures call a holy marriage covenant.

I'll explain that in some detail now.

### **3. The marriage: a decision with the blessing of God**

The marriage covenant is a great thing. It presses a man and a woman together and provides for much better adhesion. Actually, it also holds them together. It is like a tight band that is wrapped around the Marriage-Body, protecting it and holding it together. But what does a marriage covenant consist of?

Firstly a marriage covenant is made up of both partners making a real, genuinely, free choice. People should never be forced into marriage. Otherwise they will only be married on the outside. But in their heart – in their inner person they will be unmarried. A man and a woman want to get married must be able to say the following:

- I have thought carefully about whether this person is right for me and I have concluded: Yes
- I want to marry this person – that is my own free decision
- I want to bind myself to him or her for the rest of my life
- My YES is not just based on my feeling – my mind says YES as well.

- I am willing to bear the consequences of my decision

Let us now think about an extreme example: if a woman is kidnapped and forced into marriage then you will usually find that **the man will appear to have a wife – but at the same time he will not really have one.**

While he may have access to the wife's body, her heart will be far from him. In such cases you will rarely find the wife making a decision of the heart at a later date. Sometimes a miracle does happen and the wife decides to give her heart to this man and the marriage. But you cannot base your life plans on the hope of a miracle. Usually, the inherent gap in such marriages will remain and cause great unhappiness.

Sometimes a man is compelled by his parents to marry a particular woman. He may fear being hated and losing his inheritance if he does not marry her. Such a marriage will be burdened from the start. There is no real deep connection between the two spouses. It is an incomplete marriage and it is like a house on marshy ground. It's like when you try to glue together two pieces of wood, but before you apply the glue you smear one surface with grease! How can that work? Compulsion or economic necessity can play a role in holding together such a marriage but ultimately, it is not marriage, but a form of slavery.

The second element of the covenant that builds on the free decision of the heart is abiding, commitment. It is a solemn promise. I swear to be faithful to the person that I marry. I promise to stay with them, through good and difficult times and take care of them until death separates us. A commitment means to make a choice which excludes all other options and this choice has to be made freely and not under pressure. The marriage commitment also needs to be made both under the law and before God. I recognise that God is the witness of my commitment and he has heard what I said. He will take me at my word. One day, he will actually demand accountability – to know if I have kept my promise. On the day of judgement, all men will have to answer God when he asks: Did you keep your promises?

So the sincere and free choice plus commitment form one hand. If this hand exists another hand will join it. It is the hand of God, the one who invented marriage. A marriage that is formed in this manner will be under His blessing and

can count on his help. God is on board! Now you have both man and God pushing the two parts together so that they will really stick and hold.

Finally part of the pressing together, involves the couple starting a life together. They need to share a apartment: a kitchen – they need to eat together and a bedroom – they need to sleep together. This is the beginning of the unity – the new life has been born.

## **Review**

We have now looked closely at what it takes for a healthy birth of the Marriage-Body. We began by basing our study on the important motto: *“Therefore shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

By leaving father and mother, the umbilical cord of the Marriage-Body is cut at birth and the marriage is able to develop a life of its own. The parents let go of the child and allow for sufficient autonomy. They choose to avoid all competition between themselves and their child’s partner. The spouses do not cease to honour their parents, but they are also able to draw the line and say no when necessary. Their first commitment is to their partner and the parents take only second place.

Then we looked at how the couple must be glued together so that a firm and lasting connection can be guaranteed. After careful consideration of whether the partner is really a suitable fit, a deep heartfelt decision for the partner needs to be reached. They make a commitment to one another under the law and before God. Now God grafts the two together. They begin to live together sharing a home, a dining table and a bed. The Marriage-Body is born now. It is still quite small, but at least it can grow.

Many who read these lines may say: my marriage was not like that. One of those parts is completely missing in our marriage. Or perhaps everything happened in a different order. Is my marriage really valid? The answer is probably yes. A sick man is still a human being. An amputated man is still a person. We would never think of killing a sick person and we should not despise someone who is an amputee. Don’t despise or discard your marriage because you think or realise that it is sick! It can recover and even be totally healed. It is never too late to catch up with things that were missing.

- The forced marriage decision can be transformed into a heartfelt free choice.
- A marriage covenant vow can be spoken today.
- If the bond to the parents is still too strong, it can be broken with small steps made in the spirit of love and respect.

In particular, it is important that we understand the original intentions of our Creator. Like every father, God deeply desires his children to be born healthy and strong. And marriage, the divine Marriage-Body is one of God's favourite children!

### **The role of parents**

In some countries of the world, especially in Western industrialized nations, the parents have little involvement in the choice of marriage partner. They are not really consulted, either for advice or permission. Choosing a marriage partner without the involvement of the parents is not good. Why?

When we get married, we are not just marrying a single person. We marry into a whole family. The more different the two families are, the stronger will be the conflicts in the marriage. Beyond the need for the couple to fit together, there should also be a minimal fit between the families and they should be able to have a say in the choice of the partner.

Most parents want the best for their children. Their intentions are usually good. Not always, but mostly. They want to see their children in good, happy marriages. And they are sometimes in a position to judge better than their adult child whether a potential spouse is a good fit. The couple is in love and their desire to marry makes them blind to important points. They get married too quickly, without enough time to consider and end up making a mistake that they later regret.

One of the famous Ten Commandments of God, which the prophet Moses received from God is: “ *Thou shalt honour thy father and mother.*” To honour parents means to take into account their views in such an important matter as marriage.

One approach that has proven successful is when parents carefully choose or propose a partner for their child. This is a model that has worked for millennia.

However, one should never impose the choice of spouse upon the child. It is degrading to force someone to marry a certain person. When this happens, the result is often that the marriage will be seriously ill from the beginning and the man and woman do not really stick together inwardly. Parents can take the initiative, of looking for a husband or wife for their child - but then they should also take into account the wishes and needs of the child. The reverse is also true. Children can take the initiative in trying to find someone but then they should involve the parents in the final decision-making process.

In the ideal or best case, the parents and their children will agree. Having listened to each other and taking all points seriously, they will make an informed decision together. However, the final decision has to be made by the children. After all the children are the ones getting married and not the parents!

# Chapter 3

## How does the Marriage-Body grow and flourish?

The child is now born. The Marriage-Body has come into the world, more or less healthy. However strong or weak it is, the main thing is, that it is alive. It is a precious creature that will have great influence. It will powerfully determine the next generation. Blessings or curses will come forth from this body. This body can be very fruitful. It can be an expression of God's glory. Therefore, it will now be important to care for this wonderful creature at all times, so it does not fall ill or even die. We need to take care of our marriage just as we care for our own body. The relationship between the husband and wife is tender and vulnerable. It needs care, it can become hungry or thirsty and it will often be the target of evil forces. Therefore, it needs special protection.

Unfortunately, the marriage relationship is often treated like an unwanted stepchild, or orphan. One gets annoyed when it has needs or desires. We want it to cost us as little time and money as possible. We want it to be a well-behaved, obedient, industrious, and healthy child without having anything to do with it. Many men maintain their cars better than their relationship with their wife. We care about our profession, our garden, our children and our friends, but not our marriage relationship – our Marriage-Body.

Why is this? For some reason, we think that the Marriage-Body will grow and be healthy without us doing anything. During the period of courtship and love, everything was so easy, and it all seemed to just flow without any particular effort on our part. We think that things will just continue like that. But they don't. A car cannot run without gasoline. A man cannot survive more than several days without food and water, and certainly not without oxygen. In Siberia, no one can survive without warm clothes and a fire. Similarly, the Marriage-Body cannot survive or function for any length of time unless it has oxygen to breathe, food to eat and heat to warm itself.

We will now look closely at how we need to take care of the marital relationship. It's worth it. Because if we supply the Marriage-Body with what it needs, we will in fact find that while the physical bodies of husband and wife are getting older and weaker, the Marriage-Body will be getting stronger and healthier!

## **1. Food for the Marriage-Body**

The Marriage-Body, the relationship between husband and wife can severely suffer from malnutrition through lack of the wrong type of food. Conversely, it can grow well through a balanced, adequate and healthy diet and develop good defences against the many dangerous germs and viruses that make so many marriages chronically ill. A well-nourished Marriage-Body functions and fulfils its purpose better. What then makes a good diet? The two most important foods are undivided time and attention, and good words. Just as our body needs carbohydrates, protein and fats, the marriage needs time, attention and kind words.

### **Time and attention**

It depends on exactly this combination. Time, coupled with attention and vice versa. Time AND attention means being completely attentive to one's spouse, not only 10 - 20 %, but 80 - 100%. Nothing else holds my attention. I let go of my work, my newspaper, my children, my computer, my book, all my other duties. I decide to focus on a different task that is much more important than most people think: attending to one's spouse. I have time for them, undivided time. Many men and women, but more women than men, are treated like dogs. They get the crumbs that fall from the table and should be satisfied. They get the left-overs: the left-over time and the left-over attention – assuming there is any! Many couples need to increase their daily ration, or at least the weekly ration of this type of food.

Every couple should sit down together on a regular basis and talk about their needs for time and attention. The woman may say, I need two hours a day with you. The man replies: "I am satisfied with 10 minutes - watching television together". Of course a good compromise will be needed. Many people have hard lives and cannot sit together for hours every day. Few people have that much time. And yet we take time to prepare and eat our physical food several times every day

– because we are hungry, and because our body needs food! Similarly, the Marriage-Body needs food too! Not huge portions once a month, but small daily portions of undivided time and attention.

This period of undivided attention can vary, just as our physical food can be prepared differently from day to day. Sometimes we can sit and talk together. Sometimes we need to walk together or play together. We can read aloud to one another or listen to music together. Perhaps we should go out to a restaurant, or combine some of these things together. The main thing is that each spouse feels the other is completely there for them. That's love.

If both partners have jobs or several small children are crawling around in the apartment and there are so many other important things to be done, it often seems impossible to find such times together. It takes too much effort to make the time and so it is neglected. The fellowship of love is exchanged for a fellowship of work. Slowly the relationship begins to starve, so slowly that you do not notice it at first. The Marriage-Body begins to become weaker. Soon however one notices the feelings have subsided and disputes flare up stronger and more frequently. And then it happens. Something one never thought possible. The woman meets a man, perhaps a work colleague who has, or rather, who makes time for her. He invites her to dinner during the lunch break. He looks at her. He does not read the newspaper. He listens to her. Oh that feels so good...

During the time of friendship and engagement, it was so obvious that such times of undivided attention are vital. But later in marriage, they are more necessary than ever. At this stage a common lie creeps in. Unfortunately, many couples believe it and countless movies and television programmes spread it: "We have stopped spending time together and no longer talk to each other because we no longer love each other. It's no fun anymore!"

Actually, in reality the opposite is true!

Because you have stopped spending time together, your love has grown cold. And because your love has grown cold, one spends less and less time together. This causes the love temperature to fall even further.

There was a man who said to himself: I have such a nice car, it's so wonderful to drive. But I don't think I need to refuel. The man drives 100 km. No problem. Then

he drives a further 100 km. Still all is well. Then he drives another 100 km. "I knew this car didn't need petrol." A few kilometres further along the road the engine begins to stutter. The next village is still far away. The man begins to curse. "I'll kill the mechanic who sold me this car. The car comes to a standstill. The man gets out, kicks the car and shouts – "I knew I could not rely on you!" Then another car approaches on the lonely road. It stops and the driver winds down the window: "Can I help you? Do you need some gasoline? I have some in the trunk. The first driver responds sullenly: "No, thank you, there's no point. The engine is broken."

What stupid behaviour! But it is exactly how many men and women treat their marriage! Marriage comes to a standstill when it is not regularly refuelled with undivided attention. As beautiful as the wedding was and no matter how good everything started, the Marriage-Body will not be able to keep functioning without the nourishment that comes from a regular intake of intensive time spent together.

## Good words

The importance and the healing power of good words are often underestimated. People have actually shown that even plants grow better when they are regularly exposed to positive words. In the famous sayings of King Solomon it says:

„There is one who speaks rashly like the piercing of a sword, But the tongue of the wise heals. Death and life are in the power of the tongue; Those who love it will eat its fruit.” (Proverbs 12.18 & 18,21).

Our words can bring pain and death, but also healing and life. This also applies to the Marriage-Body! When two people are in love, good words flow almost automatically. But later on in marriage you have to make an effort and choose to speak good words. They no longer come to mind automatically, they need to be sought for, practiced and learned.

Good thoughts are not enough, even though they are important and valuable. Good thoughts have to be expressed as words. Only then will they have any effect and give life and healing, comfort and love to the partner. Good words are like vehicles loaded with wonderful love-food, which we despatch to drive in to the heart of our husband or wife. Yes it is tiring to load up a vehicle, but it is well worth the effort – for both parties: the person who loads the vehicle and the person

who unloads it. Why? Because the Marriage-Body to which they both belong needs to be strengthened with good, vitamin-rich food.

The best approach is with regular little comments that express love, appreciation and gratitude to your partner. These little comments are like bite-sized portions of delicious food that tastes good while also being very healthy. It is true that the preparation of these type of dishes can be hard-work and inconvenient. Yes, it takes effort, but it is worth it.

Isa once said to his disciples: every man will have to give account to God for every careless word spoken. (Matt. 12:36) This is serious. But I believe we will also be held accountable for every good word that we have not said because of laziness or minimalism.

Let us learn to speak positive words to our partners both in good times and in bad times. We need to say nice things even when we do not feel like it, even if we have to first think for a moment to come up with something positive. You can say things like:

- I like your new dress.
- Thank you for repairing that.
- You're a good man.
- I like you.
- It is nice that you're here.
- Thank you for this food.
- You are so strong.
- You are so beautiful.
- I still like the way you look.
- I love you.
- Thank you for keeping the apartment in such good condition.
- I'm proud of you.

Gratitude is very important. Even if we have already been married for many years, it is still important to say a heartfelt thank you even for the little things. In

fact it is vital! When we express words of gratitude they are like vitamins in the food, salt in the soup, oil in the gears or sugar in our tea. “Thank you for the time you have given me. Thank you for this evening. Thanks for the food. Thank you for your diligence. Thanks for your patience.”

There is a little phrase that wives love to hear and men do not like to say: “I love you”. The wife likes to hear this or similar phrases over and over again while the man thinks: “I said that once 10 years ago – that’s enough.” Unfortunately, the Marriage-Body, just like the natural body cannot live on food that was eaten years ago. Just think how great it would be if we were invited to a meal and we could eat enough to last for an entire week. Unfortunately it does not work like that! But that’s probably a good thing, because otherwise our hosts would have a rather big problem!

Normally, my body should eat something every day and the Marriage-Body is no different. Nutritious and healing words are more than just compliments, thanks, and declarations of love. They include expressions of the thoughts, feelings and desires of the heart. In the later chapter entitled “Conversation: the heart of Marriage-Body”, I will go into more details about conversation – about sharing myself honestly, telling my partner what is going on in my heart, about explaining who I really am. This way I express my feelings. I take off my mask and I make it easy for my partner to do the same, because I am really listening to them and not condemning or criticizing them for what they say.

What we hide in our hearts and do not share with our partner can easily upset the Marriage-Body. It is as if a hand would say: I am interrupting the neural connection between me and the arm. I don not want the arm to know how I really feel. It can sometimes hurt to talk honestly about our feelings but afterwards we find it has helped. This type of food varies in taste: sometimes it is sweet and sometimes bitter, so sometimes it is mild and sometimes very spicy. Whatever the taste, the important thing is that the Marriage-Body is being nourished!

In the account of the creation of the first people we read: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed." (Gen. 2:25). That is how it should be with us, at least that should be the case more and more. Not only in terms of our outer man – our bodies, but also in terms of our inner man – our heart. We need to learn to expose our hearts and not just our body to one other, without

fear or shame. Even though we might blush and feel a little ashamed of ourselves at first, it is worthwhile, because honestly opening our hearts to one another, being naked, hiding nothing, is food of our Marriage-Body.

Words of reconciliation are especially healthy food for the Marriage-Body. They are unbelievably powerful, but incredibly difficult for many people, especially in cultures where people learn to try and avoid shame at all costs. "I forgive you" . "Please forgive me." "That was wrong what I did, I'm sorry." "You're right, I was wrong." These words bring so much life and healing. They deliver love. But unfortunately, we prefer to die or let the marriage die than to pronounce these words. We will hear more about this in the Chapter "For the detoxification of the Marriage-Body."

**To summarize this section:**

The Marriage-Body urgently needs good, regular food. This food does not consist of carbohydrates, proteins and fats, but it is times of undivided attention, as well as words. Loving and appreciative words but also honest and very personal words.

## **2. Warmth for the Marriage-Body**

The Marriage-Body needs warmth as well as food. Countless people in human history have frozen to death. Countless people suffer because their clothing is not warm enough to protect them from the cold. Many complain that they cannot heat their homes enough or at all. Many people fall sick of cold. The Marriage-Body suffers the same problems. Many marriages have very bad colds and they long for a little more heat.

In the Scriptures we read: „Two people are better than one, because they can reap more benefit from their labour. For if they fall, one will help his companion up, but pity the person who falls down and has no one to help him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together, they can keep each other warm, but how can one person keep warm by himself?“ Ecclesiastes 4, 9-12 (NET)

*“If two lie down together, they can keep each other warm.”* This is talking about physical affection. It is what gives the Marriage-Body heat. A marriage without

physical affection cools off in the long run and depending on the climate it suffers chilblains and frostbite. Chilblains in a marriage are bitterness, disappointment, unfulfilled longing, anger and rage. Many wives are bitterly disappointed with the way their husband's understand physical affection, and many men are equally disappointed about their wives' view of physical affection. Both sides want their needs to be satisfied. Both need to learn to understand the "warmth needs" of the other, and how to satisfy them as far as possible. But it's hard to talk about it. Shame comes between us. So instead of talking to their parents when they are young or their partner in marriage, people try to inform themselves or understand these physical needs through coarse jokes or dirty books and movies. But that does not give them real answers. Therefore, I will talk about physical affection very openly in this section. I'm going to use some illustrations that make it easier to explain more about how we meet each other's needs for warmth, without having to be embarrassed by the words we use.

The body of a man has something that a woman does not have. We will call this thing the *ship*. And we will call what the woman has but the man lacks the *port*. The husband has a ship and the wife has a port or harbour. So far so good! In addition, near to the port there are *two big hills* and a little farther still, a small mountain range, which also consists of *two small hills*. There are also a number of roads, meadows and fields.

The husband and wife also have much in common. Both have two hands. I will call their hands *messengers*. Both the man and the woman have a mouth with which they can speak. We will call the mouth the *radio operator*. The ship and the port thus have two messengers and a radio operator, which allow them to communicate.

The man is the captain of the ship and the woman is the director of the harbour. There is nothing wrong or inappropriate in this situation. Everything was made by God: the harbour, the scenery, the two mountain ranges, the ship, the messengers, and the radio operator. When God had finished these beautiful masterpieces he looked at them and said: Very good!

We shall use the word *Shipping* for what happens when the husband and wife share their bodies – something that should happen regularly in a marriage.

Now, imagine the captain of a big ship wants to enter the harbour and unload his cargo. He has the right to do this, after all, he is married to the director of the port, so there should not be a problem. He approaches the harbour at great speed. The hatches of the ship are already open. But there is no radio contact. He does not announce his coming. He does not send out messengers in advance to carefully prepare for the arrival of the vessel. The director of the port is busy with a lot of problems in the interior, which she is trying to take care of. The ship comes in far too quickly. She feels that it must be a warship with hostile intent. Surely it wants to conquer the harbour and occupy the country. So she closes the harbour gates. The ship cannot dock and has to return to sea fully-laden with cargo. The captain is furious. But it is his own fault.

But it is not always the captain who is at fault. Sometimes the director of the port goes too far with her claims and demands. The captain is told to enter the harbour at a snail's pace. She will only decide at the very last moment if she will allow him to unload. He is expected to register three days in advance. She wants the weather to be perfect – no wind and no rain. The sun needs to be shining and the waters perfectly calm. If the captain and the director of the port take each other's expectations into account and behave selflessly, if they never work together to establish fair rules, if they never negotiate sensibly then the captain may start to wish he could visit another port. If the situation persists, the danger will be that he is tempted and he sets sail towards another port. If that happens the port owner may lock her port or enter a new contract with a more caring captain. Often however both parties simply feel angry, lonely and disappointed. The temperature of the marriage decreases and the danger of frost damage rises. The Marriage-Body needs warmth!

Now I'll make some suggestions that have proven successful with many men and women, and often contribute to a beautiful warming of the Marriage-Body.

### **Advice for husbands**

- Do not behave like a battleship, be more like a ferry that goes slowly and uses a timetable.
- Make radio contact and notify the port of your expectations.

- Enquire to find out what times are favourable and what times are generally unfavourable.
- Remember that the director of the port does not want to refuse or reject you. She simply has different needs than you. Do not think that she is closing the port because she does not love you. She is simply more sensitive than you are to the circumstances, the weather and the operation in the port.
- Send out messengers and patiently and lovingly explore the countryside behind the port. Before entering the port with your big ship, send out small boats with the messengers. They should calmly explore the fields and meadows and not be in a big hurry to climb the mountains. Take your time! Be patient!
- The port is very closely linked to the interior of the country and the landscape around the port. The director of the port can do very little about this. If the streets around the port are filled with traffic or if there has been an accident the port will often be closed or hardly accessible.
- If your cargo is loaded or even overloaded never sail to another port and never try to force entry into your home port. In these circumstances, if your patience has failed and you cannot cope, the best solution may be to unload your ship on the open sea.
- DANGER! The use of manipulation, force or violence is life-threatening for the Marriage-Body. Never install any guns on your ship. Do not try to shoot your way into the port! If you do that while you may succeed in unloading your cargo, you will at the same time have badly damaged the harbour.
- If you have unloaded the cargo at sea as a last resort, do not stay out there offended. Go ashore to visit the director of the port in her home, roam the landscape and express your love and tenderness to the director of the port with words and with your hands.
- Your wife does not want your ship only. She wants you, especially your words and your hands and your time. She loves it when you are interested in the inland regions and the land around the port. Most of all she loves radio contact with you – conversation.

## **Advice for wives**

- It is important to you to make radio contact and inform the captain of the ship, about the conditions in the port. It's hard for him to steer his big ship, once he is already close to the port.
- A man needs to be informed. You need to tell him what you like and what do not like. Perhaps it is easier if you use the same illustrations as used in this chapter. Or find your own ones.
- Don't just open your port when the weather is perfect and you are in high spirits. And don't expect the captain to steer his sheep perfectly every time. There are situations where you also need the courage to say no firmly, yet kindly and close the port - but do not do that at the very last moment.
- Under certain circumstances you might want to consider sending out your messengers to meet the ship on the high seas. It is of course best if the ship is unloaded in the port, but it is not always possible. So you can help him to discharge his vessel outside the port.
- Never close your port as a way of getting revenge.
- Find a good balance: don't open the port too much and don't keep it shut too often.

## **Advice for both husband and wife**

Many couples in many cultures find it difficult if not impossible to talk about the issue of shipping. The result is that there are many misunderstandings and many disappointments. I want to encourage you to here to at least try to talk something about it. Try to understand each other better.

If you feel you cannot talk together about these things why not try writing to each other? Both partners can reply in writing to some questions given below and give their answers to the spouse on a sheet of paper.

- How much shipping do I feel is necessary in one month? Write the number of times that you think will be ideal.
- How much is too much for me?
- How much is too little for me?

- How much time do I think is needed for docking? Specify a time period between .....and .....minutes for the whole process from sending messengers to explore the countryside until the ship is finally docked.
- What is uncomfortable for me before or during our shipping?
- What do I find pleasant and beautiful during shipping?

In the chapter "Man and woman - two different parts of the Marriage-Body" we will learn more about the differences between men and women, especially with regard to their feelings and needs in terms of physical affection.

So far, we have already learned a lot about the Marriage-Body. It is formed by both husband and wife. Although it is invisible, it is a real body. Ideally it is born strong and healthy. This happens, if there is a reasonable fit between the two partners, if they have chosen each other with all their heart before God and finally when the young marriage is sufficiently independent of the parents.

After the birth – after marriage, the Marriage-Body needs to be cared for: it needs food. A good diet consists of undivided attention and kind words. But warmth is also needed. This warmth is supplied by the right kind of physical affection. But an organism needs even more to function properly. It must be able to get rid of toxic substances. We will discuss this in the next chapter.

### **3. Detoxification of the Marriage-Body**

Every organism has a digestive system. Human beings have a particularly complicated and efficient digestive system that allows us to absorb the healthy components of the food and eliminate the waste products of metabolism. This happens constantly in the intestine, liver, kidneys and other parts of the body. If this does not happen, toxins build up in the organs and the body dies within a few days.

The Marriage-Body must be regularly detoxified. If this does not happen, it will also die. Not the spouses will die, but their relationship will pass away. However, this usually takes a matter of years rather than days. But in serious cases, a marriage can die within weeks. However, because the Marriage-Body does not usually die within days or weeks we are often very careless. We take marriage for

granted and avoid the tedious work of detoxification. At first we get by, everything is going reasonably well. But the toxins act slowly. Disappointment turns into bitterness. Affection turns into disapproval. The need for intimacy becomes a need for distance. Instead of declarations of love there are accusations. The Marriage-Body is beginning to rot. It is high time to activate the kidneys and liver, the toxins have to be excreted, even if a bad smell will inevitably result at first

### **How do we detoxify the Marriage-Body?**

Detoxification for the Marriage-Body means being reconciled to one another again and again. It means clearing up the things that stand between us. When there is rubbish in our apartment we don't just shove it in the linen closet, but we put it in a waste bin or a trash can, which we then carry out of the apartment. We have all learned how we deal with the rubbish that builds up in our homes. Unfortunately, we have not learned how to dispose of the rubbish that builds up in our marriage. So I will now explain exactly how we can do that.

### **Identifying the toxins**

If we eat something, which contains substances that are not good for our body, we notice that pretty quickly: we feel sick or we get a stomach-ache. Sometimes we even need to vomit. In this case we stick our finger down our throat or take some medicine that will make us throw up. Having emptied our stomachs of the bad food we feel relieved. The Marriage-Body has a stomach too. And this stomach also reacts when bad things enter the marriage.

How can I tell? The answer is that my heart tells me. When I feel wounded and my heart hurts with anger, sadness, loneliness or similar negative feelings. This may be an indication that I have swallowed poison or that something has happened between my spouse and I, which is harmful to the Marriage-Body.

Perhaps my spouse has done something wrong and poisoned me.

Or perhaps I myself am the problem, not my spouse.

Maybe it's a misunderstanding, or perhaps I feel something is toxic when in fact it is simply something that I find distasteful. For example I eat one tablespoon of fish oil everyday. I know that this is very healthy. I have gotten used to the taste – I don't like it much but it is okay. But my wife can't stand it. She feels sick at the

very thought of the stuff! Now she could easily make the mistake of saying that fish oil is toxic, simply because she thinks it is horrible.

The point is therefore that we should not assume that our partner was trying to poison us just because something tastes bad to us! Perhaps they meant well and wanted to give us some medicine!

### **The toxins examined**

The first thing we need to do is ask ourselves, what exactly happened. What did my spouse do? What have I done? What am I so annoyed about? Is it really my partner's fault? Could it possibly be my fault? It can be very helpful to understand the difference between:

- \* Sins
- \* Mistakes and
- \* Misunderstandings

Has someone really sinned, or was there a misunderstanding? Did someone do something deliberately wrong or did they make an unintended mistake?

### **What are sins?**

A sin is when I consider myself as more important than my partner, if I put myself first and put my wife or my husband second. Sin has to do with egoism or selfishness. It is when I put my happiness and satisfaction above that of my partner.

#### An example – a toxic husband

A man tells his wife that he is always very hungry when he finishes work: he asks her to have the food ready on the table each night at 7.00 pm when he comes home. This works well for four days. On the fifth day, however there is nothing on the table at 7:00 pm. The man curses loudly, "You are totally unreliable, you stupid woman!" The woman feels humiliated. She feels the poison that has entered the Marriage-Body – the poison of anger and bitterness.

Who has sinned in this case, the man or the woman? Or both? The man has certainly sinned. Firstly his anger and disappointment could have been expressed differently. He could have said, for example, in a normal voice: "My love, I am so

hungry, it was difficult to wait so long for that meal. You know I asked you to be punctual with the food." Secondly, the man has sinned, because he has convicted his wife without a fair trial. He has not even stopped to ask what happened: "Why were you late to day?" The fact is that something did happen: at 6:30 her little daughter Sonja fell while she was playing outside. Her knee was bleeding and her mother had to comfort her, wash and disinfect the wound and then put a bandage on it. So it was impossible for her to prepare the meal on time. Actually the man has ruthlessly put himself and his needs – his hunger – before any other consideration. This is sin: what I want and what I need, that is all that matters. Of course there are far worse sins. But the big sins very often start with small sins. Major disputes, conflicts and violence within marriage often start very small!

### **What are mistakes?**

Mistakes are not sins, they are not evil: they are the results of the imperfection of human beings and this world. We make many mistakes, because we do not know better, because so much in life is simply difficult, and because we are not God.

There are small and big mistakes. She is washing the dishes too quickly, a glass slips in her fingers and breaks. Of all the glasses in the house it just happens to be one that her mother-in-law gave her. He forgets to pay the electricity bill, and suddenly the electricity is turned off. Evening falls and guests have been invited on this very evening! Some mistakes cause major damage, some mistakes are fairly inconsequential. The Marriage-Body would feel much better if we could differentiate between sins and mistakes. Apart from the mistakes and sins there are also the misunderstandings.

### **What are misunderstandings?**

We already introduced an example: the mother and her little Sonja with the cut on her knee. She had planned enough time to cook, but something unexpected happened. The man misunderstood the whole situation. His interpretation was that his wife is unreliable and that she does not care about his needs.

A misunderstanding, therefore, is when I have a wrong perception, or focus on the wrong facts in a situation and then I interpret them incorrectly. Every marriage is full of misunderstandings. They cannot possibly be avoided. But we can learn to cope with them more effectively.

Because misconceptions are so common and cause so much damage to the Marriage-Body we need to look more closely at them. I want to introduce “the Cycle of Misunderstandings” with an example. The cycle of misunderstanding is a cycle of interactions that lead to more and more misunderstanding and increasing damage.

### An example – dramatic escalation

- HE: comes home and goes into the kitchen to greet his wife.
- SHE: stands at the stove with pain written on her face, one hand is on her forehead. Obviously, she has a bad headache.
- HE THINKS: When my mother had a headache, everyone had to leave her alone, that helped her the most. So I had better leave my wife alone now.
- HE: walks out of the kitchen, goes into the bedroom and closes the door behind him.
- SHE THINKS: He doesn't love me anymore. He just ignores me. He doesn't even comfort me. My father always gave my mother a hug when she had a headache.
- SHE FEELS: loneliness, disappointment, anger.
- SHE: does not say a word to him during dinner and goes to bed at 20:00. When he tries to give her a kiss, she pushes him away and says: "leave me alone!"
- HE THINKS: Just like my mother, but she was much friendlier than my wife. Why is she so angry with me?
- SHE FEELS: Hurt and cries herself to sleep. Her headache is not so bad now, the resentment towards her husband is much stronger.
- The next morning, he gets up a little later and comes into the kitchen. She sits at the table, drinking her coffee alone. He asks her: "Is there no breakfast today?"
- SHE: "You make your own breakfast. I'm not your slave!"
- HE: very irritated, "Hey, why are you so grumpy?"
- HE REALLY THINKS: This woman only thinks about herself!

- SHE shouts: "Bad mood? You of all people say I am in a bad mood! You egoist!"
- HE SHOUTS: "Now I've had enough of you, you stupid cow!"
- She bursts into tears and runs out of the room. He goes to work furious. In the evening he comes home and finds a note on the table: "I have gone to my mother for a few days."

Most couples experience similar situations. My spouse does something that hurts me. I misunderstand it. I assume they have acted with bad intentions and condemn them. Bad feelings towards them immediately come up. Because I have bad feelings towards them I react wrongly and do or say something that hurts them.

And so the cycle repeats...

We have to break this cycle: if it is allowed to keep repeating it will cause significant damage to the Marriage-Body – a severe poisoning of the relationship that may someday even lead to the death of marriage.

It is therefore advisable to distinguish between sins, mistakes and misunderstandings, because ridding the body of waste depends on what kind of waste or toxin it is. This is what we will study in the next section

### **Eliminating toxins**

The question in this section is how do we excrete the poison of sin, how do we excrete the poison of misunderstanding and how the poison of error from the body.

#### **a) The poison of sin**

The poison of sin can usually be eliminated reliably by three activities:

- repentance
- honest confession
- and forgiveness

What does this mean? There are two stories in the Scriptures of the New Testament that help us.

Then Peter came to him and said, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times!"

*"For this reason, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. As he began settling his accounts, a man who owed ten thousand talents was brought to him. Because he was not able to repay it, the lord ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, children, and whatever he possessed, and repayment to be made. Then the slave threw himself to the ground before him, saying, 'Be patient with me, and I will repay you everything.' The lord had compassion on that slave and released him, and forgave him the debt. After he went out, that same slave found one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred silver coins. So he grabbed him by the throat and started to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe me!' Then his fellow slave threw himself down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will repay you.' But he refused. Instead, he went out and threw him in prison until he repaid the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were very upset and went and told their lord everything that had taken place. Then his lord called the first slave and said to him, 'Evil slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me! Should you not have shown mercy to your fellow slave, just as I showed it to you?' And in anger his lord turned him over to the prison guards to torture him until he repaid all he owed. So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18,21-35)*

This story has great significance when a man and woman live together. It begins with a question: "Lord, when my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive them? Seven times?" Let me adapt this question to say: "Lord, if my husband or my wife sins against me, how often should I forgive them? Seven times?" The story concludes with a impressive warning: And in anger his lord turned him over to the prison guards to torture him until he repaid all he owed. So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart." We will also customize this to say "This is how your Father in heaven will also treat you, if you do not forgive your husband or your wife from the heart."

In marriage, the husband and wife always owe each other something –sometimes more, sometimes less. It could be very large sums of money as in our story, or it could be debts that are not material, but immaterial. For example they could be debts of love, attention, patience, tenderness, good words, recognition and honour, timeliness, reliability. And one cannot repay everything.

At first the king wanted to put the servant in jail and collect the debt forcefully. But the servant begged for mercy and patience. Then the king's heart softened. He saw that this servant would never be able to repay the debt; it was much too large for him. So the king cancelled the debt and he did not throw the servant out either.

In this story Isa is presenting a wonderful picture of God as a role model. The king is in fact God himself. And we are meant to be as merciful as God is himself. We have to forgive each other! We have to make the decision not to punish our spouse for their debt and not to try and put pressure on them to pay back the debt. We refrain from revenge and retaliation.

That does not mean that we should never settle up! The merciful king also settled debts with his servants. There are times, we can and we should say what we lack and what the other person owes us. We cannot name the amount of the outstanding debt. A debt can only be forgiven if the amount of the debt has been defined.

A marriage without debts does not exist. This is an illusion. So let us be merciful like this king, then he will be merciful to us. As we forgive our partner, as we waive the repayment, God will bless our marriage and will comfort us through our loss. We can choose to be healthy through mercy or we can be poisoned by hard heartedness and lack of reconciliation.

Of course, there are many times that a guilty spouse is not willing to ask for mercy because they do not see their guilt. They stoutly maintain that have no debts. They deny all their guilt. Or they get mad if we draw attention to something that has hurt us or that we lack.

What then should we do? This makes it much harder to eliminate the poison from the Marriage-Body. However we can still partially detoxify the Marriage-Body so that it does not die, even though it may suffer from the remnants of the poison. Something the only thing we can do is to not repay evil with evil –

refrain from acts of revenge, retaliation and avoided continual accusations. A complete detox is not always possible because both spouses are required. Both need to repent and admit their guilt, and forgive one another from the heart.

It can really help to have a conversation with God – we call it prayer. Here are two examples:

MAN: "Father in heaven, the behaviour of my wife makes me so unhappy. She was always scolding and nagging at me and is never satisfied. I do not know what I should do. Sometimes I just want to hit her or simply get a divorce. But now, before thy face and with your help, I now forgive my wife. I do not want to punish her any more, I do not want to yell at her or hit her anymore. Help me to love her anyway, to honour her and take every opportunity to show her love."

WOMAN: "God, my husband came home today drunk again. I had to do all the work alone and I had so much to discuss with him, but he just lay down in bed and slept. God, I am so lonely, I feel like a widow. And I feel like I despise my husband more often and I show him that too often. I want to stop. Give me your patience and your compassion! I now decide before you, God, to forgive my husband and not to take revenge."

Let us think back to the beginning of our story of the good king again. It begins with a question: how often? The response of Isaiah was: seventy times seven. That simply means constantly, again and again or regularly. Just as men and women go to the toilet regularly throughout life in order to eliminate the things that cannot be digested, so it is with the Marriage-Body: we need to regularly eliminate the poison through forgiveness of sin, the sin of both partners.

There is a second story in the Scriptures, which has become famous all over the world, the story of the prodigal son. Isa told this story to explain how much God loves people and that he is willing to forgive even the worst offenses. He compares God to a father in this story, whose son leaves him.

“A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that will belong to me.’ So he divided his assets between them. After a few days, the younger son gathered together all he had and left on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth in a wild lifestyle. Then after he had spent everything, a severe famine hit the country, and he began

to suffer. So he went and worked for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He was longing to eat the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. But when he came to his senses he said, *'How many of my father's hired workers have food enough to spare, but here I am dying from hunger! I will get up and go to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way from home his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran and hugged his son and kissed him. Then his son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Hurry! Bring the best robe, and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Bring the fattened calf and kill it! Let us eat and celebrate, because this son of mine was dead, and is alive again—he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.* (Luke 15,11-24)

From this story we can learn a lot about the detoxification of Marriage-Body! We see a wonderful picture of detoxifying reconciliation. This father and son are role models for husbands and wives, living together as a family. Sometimes marriage is like what the father experienced. Your spouse challenges you. Then they leave you, perhaps not outwardly but inwardly. They collect the inheritance: that means they take much, but give nothing. They just want to profit without investing. They hurt you very much. They do not respect you. It creates a painful distance between you. Maybe they are still living in your house, but inside they are so far away from you – it is as if you are living in two different countries, just like the Father and the Son in the story. There is a huge crack right through the middle of the Marriage-Body. It is as if the spouse has cut themselves off – moving far away from us.

Sometimes, however we are like the son. We are the ones who are selfish, acting without love towards our partner, we are reckless and divisive in our behaviour. Our unloving behaviour has created terrible distance between us and our partners: it is as if we have gone to a far-off country. The poison of sin is disastrous; it makes the members of Marriage-Body begin to fall apart. Imagine one of our legs beginning to rot and fall off!

What can we do? Fortunately, the story Isa told us has a happy end. What happened? Let us look at the behaviour of the son closely.

"He came to himself". This means that he began to think about the situation. He began to ask himself questions: "Perhaps I am not to blame? Was my behaviour wrong? How did I actually land in this place here with the pigs? I suppose I am the one who left." While he was thinking, he came to the realization that he had sinned. He had made a grave mistake! In marriage we need to do this too. Let us learn to examine ourselves and take responsibility for our behaviour: it was me! I sinned! I made a mistake I behaved wrongly. This is the crucial step for detoxification of the Marriage-Body.

"I will go to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned before God and before you." The son made the decision to seek the Father, and clearly acknowledge his own guilt – without excuses, without euphemisms. Why don't we do the same? Why don't we go to our wives or our husbands and confess our guilt?

- It was not good that I beat you yesterday evening. I have sinned, forgive me.
- Forgive me that I cheated you with Olga. That was a terrible sin. I will break off all contact to her immediately.
- Lately, I have not had a good word to say to you, I've always only criticised. Please forgive me.
- Last night, I left you alone, although you needed me so badly. The television was more important to me than you.

To honestly express your own guilt is an ancient, tried and tested method of detoxification. It says in the old holy Scriptures: "He who confesses his sins and leaves them, will obtain mercy."

Many readers may say: that it is too difficult, it is not part of our culture. My parents never did that either. Why should I humiliate myself now? There is no way I can do that! My answer is: no one is forcing you – you are a free man and can do what you want. You have the freedom to choose between two options.

**A.** You can follow your culture, not confess your faults to your spouse and live in a poisoned Marriage-Body.

**B.** You can choose not to follow your culture at this point, and endure the pain of humiliation, tell your spouse that you have sinned and you have the chance for your relationship to heal.

Being loyal to your tradition has its benefits, but there is a high price to pay. Do you want to pay the price? Do you want to sacrifice your Marriage-Body to your culture?

Now let us look at the father. He took his son back. Embracing him, he accepted his confession and did not punish him. He did not even require him to pay back the wasted inheritance. And he did not place any conditions on him. He did not say: "First you have to work as a labourer for one year. Then if you are a good worker, then I will let you be my son on a trial basis again." The behaviour of the father was unheard for that culture and time. How can he be so generous? But that is how God is! If we take God's example, if we choose to accept our spouse back, even if they have sinned, then our Marriage-Body will be able to heal.

### **b) The poison of mistakes**

We have now discussed how to remove the poison of sin. We have done this in some detail, because this kind of poison is very strong. But besides sins, there are many mistakes that a husband and a wife make, and these errors have nothing or little to do with sin. They are not evil, they just happen. But the consequences of mistakes can still be very painful and very costly. They can also harm the relationship between the husband and the wife and they can even poison it. This poison has to be eliminated from the Marriage-Body.

#### How does it work?

The one who made the mistake and has caused damage, should take responsibility for the mistake and not shirk from it. He should not make excuses himself, but admit the mistake honestly. This will include reparation wherever possible. It is not always possible. Sometimes the damage is too great. But there is almost always something we can do.

An example: The husband was asked by the wife to have a very important phone conversation with the teacher of their children because she has to go to work. So she tells the teacher that her husband will call at 11:00 clock. The man, however,

forgets completely. Detox means not only that the husband needs to apologise, but he has to call the teacher on the phone until he reaches her.

It also helps greatly if we do not simply remain silent, but we also need to express our regret for our mistakes. Every language has its own way of doing this.

The spouse who was harmed by the mistake or who has been witness to the mistake does not exercise any kind of punishment. They refrain from anger, shouting, cursing, beating or contemptuous remarks. They endure the error or mistake with patience. If they do not refrain, all they will do is to add further damage to the Marriage-Body. Impatience and anger over the failure of the spouse increase the damage rather than reduce it. We are constantly faced with the choice to either increase the damage done or reduce it or even eliminate it. Once again, I want to stress here that we are one body. Your mistake is my mistake. My mistake is your mistake. If the hand has made a mistake, the arm should not simply say: "That hand is stupid, it needs to be punished. It had better work out how to rectify the damage on its own." It's much better to say: "My hand has broken something. But because we belong together, arm and hand, I will try to help my hand to repair the damage.

### **c) The poison of misunderstanding**

Misunderstandings can be eliminated by asking questions and giving explanations. The cycle of misunderstanding has to be broken as early as possible. The sooner the better! There are two things we can do that are particularly effective at stopping the cycle of misunderstanding.

First, do not jump to conclusions.

Second, enquire affectionately.

Let's go back to our example of the woman with the headache. The husband has left the kitchen and retired to the bedroom. This is a moment when she could do something to prevent the escalation.

- Instead of judging his actions she could think to herself: I do not know exactly why my husband has left me alone, at this moment. I need to find out.

- She goes after him into the bedroom and asks him why he disappeared instead of comforting her. She tells him that she would have wanted his comfort so much.
- He replies that he did not know she wanted him to do anything: his mother always preferred it if they left her alone.
- Now she feels much better. Although she still has a headache, she is no longer angry with her husband.

Ask! Enquire! Be sure to talk to each other in good time and do not simply cast suspicion on your partner. The explanation can be so very different from what we thought.

Another way to eliminate the poison would be if the man asked a question. At dinner, he could ask her what is wrong – whether he has done something wrong? This is usually helpful. If we notice that our spouse has something against us, or that he or she is angry with us, it can help them to tell us everything honestly, if we ask them what we have done wrong? Did I hurt you, without realizing it?

Unfortunately, we are often very slow to ask good questions or to make healing comments. But even then: better late than never! His wife could have said in the morning: “You probably noticed that I was feeling really bad last night. I was very disappointed that you simply left me alone. I do not understand why you did that. Please tell me what you were thinking.”

Many couples need a long time to learn this kind of healthy communication. It is not easy and requires an effort. But it's worth it. Sins, mistakes and misunderstandings, are like snakebites. Suddenly the Marriage-Body is bitten and the venom is spreading. If both partners take curative measures, then it will be easy to get rid of the poison fastest. One will ask forgiveness for their sin and the other will forgive them. One partner will sincerely acknowledge their mistake and the other partner will not hold it against them. When there are misunderstandings, both partners will try to find out the truth and avoid jumping to conclusions. Thank you for reading this book this far. This shows that you clearly appreciate your Marriage-Body. So far we have already learned that:

- The relationship between husband and wife, is like a wonderful invisible Marriage-Body that needs food, warmth and detoxification.

- The diet consists of periods of undivided attention and good, grateful, loving words.
- The warmth the body needs is given by physical affection.
- The detoxification and excretion is forgiveness and reconciliation.

Now let us ask the question of how the muscles of the Marriage-Body can grow so that it can run, fight, and climb better. For often the trail is steep and the terrain rough, very often the Marriage-Body has to fight attacks from outside.

## 4. Strength for the Marriage-Body

There are too many Marriage-bodies with completely wasted muscles. The body has never exercised and the muscles have never been trained. If a person has well-trained and well-developed muscles, it will affect the health of the whole body. The blood circulation in the whole body will be better and the immune system will function better.

Muscle strength is enhanced by regular weight training. What are the rules of successful weight training?

- It has to be challenging, but not too strenuous
- The effort needs to be sustained – it must require endurance
- It must be repeated often enough

Because I sit much of the time, there is a risk that my back muscles and abdominal muscles will weaken. Then the vertebrae in the lower back will lack support and become over-loaded. After some time the result will be pain that occurs more and more frequently. I used to have a very uncomfortable back pain on a regular basis. So one day I began to regularly train my back and my abdominal muscles. I still do that today and I almost never experience pain in my back. But training is tiring. Twice a week I lie down on the floor and I follow a pattern of contracting and relaxing specific muscles repeatedly. Sometimes I will be dripping with sweat. Often I have absolutely no desire to train, because it is so tiring. I do not like it! But I do it anyway, because I know that it is good for my body and good for my back.

Our Marriage-Body also needs weight training. We can call it a love workout. Love is trained by strenuous and regular acts of love – love sacrifices. These sacrifices are something we do voluntarily and unconditionally. We do not ask or demand that our partner does the same. The best result, the best muscle growth, occurs when we make a voluntary sacrifice. We have to each ask ourselves, what personal training programme we need to follow. Is there a justified need of my spouse, which I could meet but which I find too stressful? Perhaps this is the perfect exercise of love that I need to practice to grow the muscles of my love and strengthen my Marriage-Body.

*First example:* The man would like to sail his ship into his wife's harbour at least three times a week. His wife feels that is far too much, she would prefer it to be just twice a month. This is a difference of one to six! The love training for the man might therefore be that he will tolerate enjoying his wife's body only once a week. In the meantime, he agrees not to reproach her. He does not attempt to force her and caresses and kisses her tenderly, without expecting an opportunity to unload his ship every time. The woman also accepted a strenuous exercise. She opens herself to him once a week, which is twice as much as she ideally wants. But she does this, even if she finds it rather difficult at first. Through this their love grows. It is very important to remember that neither partner should force the other in any way.

*Second example:* The man comes home after a long day's work. He longs to relax, hear a little music, read his favourite newspaper. He wants some time to himself. The woman longs to talk with him and discuss the coming weekend. She also really wants him to repair the washing machine, help his son with his homework and go to the pharmacy to fetch some cough mixture.

Who will win in this situation and who will lose? Who will get their own way? Will a power struggle break out marked by a lot of noise and strife? Or is it perhaps a useful training opportunity for the muscles of the Marriage-Body?

Are both partners willing to make a compromise and die to some of their needs? This is like lifting a 20 kg weight ten times – it will be hard work but it will do the Marriage-Body a lot of good. Alternatively one partner could die to all their personal desires and become a world champion weight lifter. This will not earn them any medals on earth but before God and the holy angels. Did you know there

is also a celestial Olympics, not just an earthly one? Medals will be distributed in heaven. The angels watch and are very happy when they see such a great sacrifice of love.

However, we have to be a little careful here. We must not try to lift more than we can handle. The effort may be too large, especially if it goes on day after day. The muscles of love will be damaged and will end up torn and weaker rather than stronger. Compared to the West, wives in Eastern Europe and Asia, are more likely to be in danger of making too great a sacrifice. Over time, they become exhausted or even ill. Over time their love for the husband will change to indifference or even hatred and disgust.

Therefore I ask you, oh husband, do you really want that to happen? Do you want to exploit your wife like a slave? Should she always be making the greater effort for your Marriage-Body while you're too lazy to lift a finger at home?

Or you wives: Are you expecting too much from your husband? Is it time to bury your fantasy of a superman husband? Should you perhaps, decrease the amount of weight you loaded on the bar?

## **5. Oxygen for Marriage-Body**

We know that our body needs to absorb oxygen through the lungs day and night. The blood carries this vital oxygen around the body. If the supply of oxygen is interrupted we will die. The Marriage-Body must also breathe! The Marriage-Body has lungs, which represent the ability to relate to God. The Creator of life himself has made this possible. Breathing means to be in a relationship of love and trust for God, worshipping him, talking to him, asking his help, his strength, his wisdom and his love and so to receive - even for our marriage.

Belief in God is a source of life for a marriage. It is hard enough to lead a happy marriage filled with love. It is even more difficult to do this without God. You end up with two people all alone. Just as there are lonely men and lonely women, you will find there are lonely Marriage-Bodies. They have no protection. They have no one to help them. Their own little reservoir of love is quickly exhausted and the flow stops.

Many marriages are like closed vessels. With no lid, you cannot refill them. They only have a small opening for pouring out. At the beginning of the marriage the vessel is filled with feelings of love and good will. Soon the feelings are poured out and the goodwill consumed. The vessel is almost empty. The rest of the liquid becomes stagnant and mould grows in the vessel. Sometimes, if the container is large enough, the content is sufficient for several years. Sometimes it is very small and will only last for a few days, and you wish, that you never got married.

But God, who invented marriage, can bless the Marriage-Body: indeed he wants to bless it, heal it, protect and strengthen it. If we trust God for our marriage and are willing to listen to him and live with him in our lives, he opens the top of our marriage vessel. Through this opening, God can pour in fresh liquid at anytime. Or put another way, the Marriage-Body gets a pair of lungs through which it can breathe in new life and new love. Some people have only one lung: they lost the other one in an accident or illness. But they can still breathe. The Marriage-Body can be like that. It may only have one lung. Either the husband or the wife are connected with God while the other partner is not. But even with only one lung to breathe, the whole Marriage-Body can still survive.

How exactly does the Marriage-Body breathe?

### **I receive my spouse from God's hand**

I receive my spouse from God's hand - this is a very deep breath, which pumps a lot of oxygen into the Marriage-Body. I look at my marriage in a special way, namely as a marriage made by God and not just by human decisions. I see God as the one who gave me my spouse. What was it like for the first people? God made Eve and brought her to Adam. Adam was delighted when he saw her. He knew that this woman had been given to him by God.

If God gives me something that he has created, then he wants me to treat it carefully and not damage or even destroy it. I am not the owner of the person whom God has entrusted to me in marriage. I am just taking care of it. It is a loan, I am a trustee. My Creator will ask me someday what I've done with this entrusted property.

A friend asks you to lend him your car, because he desperately needs it for a trip. You love your friend and so you agree to his request. But he drives too fast and

causes an accident that badly damages your car. You ask him to pay for the repairs, but he says: "You gave me the car so I thought I can do with it what I wanted!" What would you say to that? How would you feel? Probably cheated, sad, disillusioned and angry.

Our spouse is worth much more than a car. They are much more precious and a much greater blessing. To receive this spouse from God's hand means to make a very important decision: "The Almighty God of heaven and earth has put this person at my side. What a gift! I want to respect this gift, honour it, protect it and look after it, because one day I will have to give it back to God. He will evaluate how I treated the precious gift he gave me. Have I deliberately broken it? Did I despise it? Did it let it rot?"

If the man receives his wife and the wife receives her husband as from the Lord then God makes a decision to help these people in their marriage and to be there for them.

### Conversation with God

My spouse is not my only conversation partner, but God is too. I speak to him about my sorrows and joys, and also about my marriage. I ask him for help in the problems of the marriage. I beg him to give me new love when my love is gone. I ask him for forgiveness when I have sinned against my partner. I also ask him to help me to forgive when my partner has sinned against me. I experience that God is not someone who lives far away somewhere in heaven, rather he is someone who is close by. He lives, and he lives in our family. That is why I pray regularly, and I pray for my spouse. It is especially important that a man prays for his wife, because as the head of the family, he has special authority from God. Blessed is the woman who is blessed daily by her husband. This is how the marriage breathes! The man gets oxygen for himself and his wife. If he does not, then God calls out to the woman. Both of us should pray for one another. But God will still give oxygen to the marriage even if only one partner is breathing.

However it is natural and most effective for both lungs to breathe together; that is when a man and woman both speak to God and ask Him for help for themselves and their marriage and the whole family.

## **God at the centre**

It often happens that I expect too much of my spouse. They are supposed to make me immeasurably happy. This will create an overload. It is also a kind of idolatry – worship of an idol. I make my spouse my God: I worship them and expect them to meet all my needs. This makes me much too dependent on my spouse. But if God is first and foremost in my marriage then I will be better able to bear the character flaws, sins and mistakes of my partner. Why? Because I don't rely on them alone, I have God as well. My spouse is imperfect. But God is perfect.

If I lean on my spouse like a man on crutches then if they fall, then I will fall too. Marriage with God at the centre is like climbing a steep mountainside. The mountain guide is above me: he is very knowledgeable and very smart. The rope secures me to him. My spouse is further down the rope. If they lose their footing, or if they stumble and fall, then I can support them because I know that I too am being held. Even if we both slip and fall together, the mountain guide is so strong that he will be able to hold onto both of us, if we have tied ourselves to him.

That does not mean that I will not fall against the cliff face and get hurt or that there will be no injuries and pain. Living in a marriage means there will be times when we get hurt, again and again. But there is a big difference in whether a Marriage-Body plunges in to the abyss and is fatally injured or whether it just tumbles a little way down the rugged cliff and suffers mere bruises because someone was holding their rope. The guide is not only a guide; he is also a doctor. He can bind up the wounds and set the broken bones in a cast so they will heal.

Hopefully we now understand better why breathing is so important for the Marriage-Body. In Greek, Arabic and many other languages, the words "spirit" and "breath" are the same word. If the Marriage-Body breathes, it breathes in the Spirit of God. This is how the Spirit of God works in the marriage, so metimes imperceptibly, sometimes noticeably.

### **The Spirit of God is love.**

- The Spirit of God leads two people together and helps them to get reconciled.
- The Spirit of God comforts and encourages.

- The Spirit of God shows us our sins and helps us distinguish between sins, mistakes and misunderstandings.

So I challenge every reader of this book, do not live your marriage limited by your own power, but in the power of the Spirit of God. This Spirit of God works if:

- We make a conscious decision to accept our spouses as a precious gift from the hand of God.
- We accept God as the boss and a roommate in our marriage, and we remain in conversation with him.
- We keep him in the centre – that means we depend on him and not our partner.

This has been a long chapter and we have covered a lot about the growth and prosperity of the Marriage-Body. Everything that has been said here has proved itself in the lives of countless couples all over the world. It really works. The Marriage-Body will actually become much healthier and stay that way. Indeed it will become stronger and stronger:

- if it is nourished by attention and kind words
- when it is warmed by considerate physical affection
- if it is detoxified by continual reconciliation
- if it is strengthened by the training of love
- if he breathes through a real relationship with God

Here I want to reiterate that such a marriage is not only a blessing for the man and woman, but it also blesses every one around, especially the children. Throughout their entire childhood, they are confronted with a beautiful picture which is very good for them. Their future marriages will have much better chances of succeeding, because they have seen an example of the good marriage of their parents for so long. They know how a marriage works. They have seen their parents live it every day.

Maybe you are thinking after having worked through these first three chapters, that your marriage situation is hopeless. You compare your relationship with your spouse with the principles of this book and realize that you are thousands of miles

away from them . You feel discouraged and demotivated. But a Chinese saying goes: Even the longest journey starts with one step. It is always worthwhile to start, to do little steps, to improve a little bit, to reduce the pain a little bit, to repent a little bit...

# Chapter 4

## The heart of the Marriage-Body: Conversation

In this chapter, I will explore in detail some of the statements I made in the Section entitled "Food for the Marriage-Body". There, I said that attention and kind words are power food for the marriage. I'm going to explain this further and will use the image of the bloodstream.

Every body needs a blood circulation system. In our circulation system, the blood is pumped by the heart. The blood brings nutrients and fluids to all parts of the body. It also collects toxins and brings them to the kidneys and liver, where they can be separated and excreted. The circulation system powered by the heart is a huge miracle.

The Marriage-Body also has heart. This is conversation between the husband and wife. This heart can be trained, so that the circulation of the Marriage-Body will work well even when the stress levels are very high. This heart pumps love, understanding, comfort, forgiveness, and much more into the marriage. The heart may also be ill or suffer a severe heart attack. In that case it will pump very little and this is very dangerous for the Marriage-Body. The importance of conversation between the husband and wife is often underestimated; especially by the husband. I was once injured in a serious accident. I was lying in hospital paralysed with a broken spine and my wife was sitting beside my bed. Neither of us knew whether I would ever be able to walk again. And we did not know if I would ever be able to sail my ship into her harbour again. But she said to me: "We can still talk together, that's the most important thing!"

Sometimes the woman does not talk enough, but usually it is the man who does not like to talk much with his wife. He will probably not be able to talk enough to keep his wife happy. Experts say she needs to speak 2,000 words per day and to hear 2000 words – preferably from her husband. Unfortunately, the husband has only about 100 words in his repertoire. When he has uttered them he is tired to

death and needs three weeks to recover. I exaggerate, of course, but I hope my point is clear: the man should practice speaking and listening, while the woman should not expect too much. Be happy if after some training he has increased from 100 to 200 words.

There are two forms of conversation that need to be practiced in marriage, because they provide a particularly powerful bloodstream. I am going to introduce these two types of conversation and suggest some rules that will help you to develop them.

## 1. The conversation of the heart

In the conversation of the heart we open our innermost hearts to one another. We say in all honesty what is going on in our hearts and what one really thinks, feels and desires. Men and women take off their masks. We are not undressing our outer body, but our inner body. They show themselves to each other. They let each other see into their own heart. This does not mean that one throws open every secret chamber of the heart, and displays all the rubbish indiscriminately. We should reserve this total honesty for God. But my spouse deserves a high degree of honesty. The honest sharing of one's own thoughts and feelings is a wonderful declaration of love. I show the other person that I trust them. They are worth the time and effort it takes. The conversation of the heart is a form of love. Here are a few recommendations.

### Show Interest

Make it easy for your partner to open their heart, by looking into their eyes and asking them interested and loving questions.

- How are you?
- How do you feel today?
- What have you experienced today?
- What was it like at work?
- How was it with the kids?
- You visited your mother today: Did it go well or it was difficult?

It feels good when someone asks you questions. It helps one to be able to express oneself honestly.

### **Let your partner talk**

Don't interrupt your spouse. Do not give them quick advice. They do not want to be patronized or treated like a little child. They simply want you to be interested in listening to them. Even if they say things that hurt you, please let them finish speaking.

### **Listen carefully**

It's exhausting, it's true. But do not give up trying. Be fully there for your spouse. Remember, if you do that, they feel loved. And whenever one of the spouses feels loved by the other, the marriage relationship – the Marriage-Body will be strengthened. It is true, there are so many seemingly important things that you should be doing. But can anything be more important than strengthening the Marriage-Body?

### **Pay attention to the sound of your voice**

If you yourself are speaking pay attention to how you say things. If you listen, listen attentively. If you are talking about how you feel then pay attention to the sound or tone of your voice. Is it as sharp as a knife, corrosive as acid or toxic as cyanide? Are you hitting your spouse with your words or are you caressing them gently? When you speak, what is your main motive? Are you desperate to be right, to win the argument or to punish your partner? Or is the objective to share your heart and share in the feelings your partner carries in their heart? Honesty is good, and it is very important, but there is bad honesty and good honesty. The fact is that not everything in your heart is always good, nice, lovely or pleasant. Much of it is bitter, pungent and foul smelling. Everyone is like that. However, we have the choice of how to deal with our rubbish:

- We can throw it against our partner with great violence
- We can pour all our garbage over our partner's head.
- We can overwhelm our partner with a flood of negative feelings and drown him

- or we can gently expose our thoughts in a considerate manner, like a man placing cautiously potentially dangerous items on a table to investigate them

Do you understand the difference?

Imagine that you have two bags inside. In one bag are beautiful things: wonderful experiences, good memories, gratitude and happiness. In the other bag are bad memories: anger, aggression and pain. There is also a lot of pain from things that your partner did wrong – intentionally or unintentionally. These things have been there for a long time and have begun to mould, rot and stink. Now you have three options.

### **First: Keep it in the bag**

You can try to leave this bag in your heart and avoid opening it at all costs. You try this, because you are ashamed or afraid of the reaction of your spouse. Or perhaps you want to be a good, nice person who is never angry and who endures everything with patience. This is not a good solution because in the long run, you will be poisoned. The pressure will build up in the bag and it will begin to leak or it will suddenly explode one day. And an explosion almost always causes serious damage. Remember the chapter on the detoxification of the Marriage-Body.

### **Second: Throw it all out carelessly**

You can pick up the bag, tear it open and run to your partner and empty everything over their head. Or you take the contents and throw them one by one with full force at your partner. In their hurt they will either become silent or they will get out their own bag and throw things back at you. Do you want that? Is it worth it? Not at all!

### **Third: Respectful sharing**

You can set up a big table between you and your partner. This means to ensure that you have sufficient time and a calm atmosphere.

Choose a favourable situation and a favourable location. Announce the conversation in advance. Do not take your spouse by surprise. You can say: "I would like to discuss something with you, do you have an hour for me tonight?"

You both sit down at the table.

Then slowly, you bring one item after another out of the bag, lay it on the table and show it to your partner. That means that you explain and describe your feelings and hurts in a calm and gentle, rather than an angry voice.

Then you wait to hear what your partner says and allow them to speak.

Then you both need to think how you can't throw these things away together properly so that the bag can be cleaned out.

This third method is definitely the best. It detoxifies the Marriage-Body best and stimulates the blood circulation. Probably you will initially use a mix of the three possibilities. That's still better than just using options one or two. Using option three takes practice. It takes years to learn to use method three consistently but why not start today? Many of us went to school for 8, 9 or 10 years and we all so survived that. Marriage is an ongoing character school. It will not work without trying, making mistakes, learning and trying again.

## 2. The dispute

The dispute is a variation of the previously described mode of conversation. The dispute may be chosen, for example when:

- You have differences of opinion with respect to important issues.
- There is a danger of ending up with a winner and a loser and not two winners. Neither the man nor woman should win: the Marriage-Body needs to come out as the winner!
- Either of the two spouses appears overwhelmed or disadvantaged.
- One or both fear that the other is making decisions or plans that could cause damage.
- One of them feel very hurt and unloved

Certain PRACTICES have proven to work well in resolving disputes. The goal is to negotiate a good peaceful outcome and end the state of war by a greeting a compromise for the good of the marriage.

a) Announce the dispute: "I need a clarification ..."

The affected partner asks the other to prepare for a discussion: "I need us to talk about this ...". You are not demanding immediate clarification, but you are merely announcing that there is a problem so that you can both work together to find a good time to talk about. (Beware: do not talk in bed at night when you are both tired or shortly before someone has to leave the house).

b) Limit the topics that will be covered

Don't talk about too many conflicts or disagreements at the same time. Less is more! One point is enough or two at the most! When a patient needs much surgery, a good surgeon will insert a recovery period between the individual operations so as not to overstress the body by trying to fix everything all at once.

c) Exchanging arguments

Our bodies are constantly exchanging materials between the various organs and cells. A good, thorough exchange is like good, thorough circulation! Exchange means that both must speak in turn and each person gets a chance to finish. Both listen. Everything is laid out on the table. Together you study the points closely and compare the viewpoints. It is not necessary to come to a definite conclusion immediately. The important thing is to understand one another. There is only one goal for this part of the clarification. I want to listen so that I understand my spouse and I want to talk so that they understand me. Only then can we proceed to the next step of negotiation:

d) Negotiation

Together, the partners seek a mutually acceptable solution. This could, mean for example: an apology, a compromise or simply to acknowledge that I was listened to and understood. This alone is good and heals the Marriage-Body: I was really understood and I have really understood.

e) Talking to God

Sometimes we get stuck. Sometimes it is so exhausting and so depressing that you just want to quit. Often the following also happens: one of the two parties starts shouting or walks out of the room or simply ends the conversation. Why not pray together? If the couple believes in God, they can turn to him and ask him for

help. You can also try to listen to what HE says. God can pour new thoughts into our hearts that show us new direction. Here's a suggestion:

"God, our Creator and Lord of our marriage, we turn to you. Please help us in this argument. Please help us to understand each other and to love. Give us ideas for a good solution."

Then take a minute or two to be quiet, breathe deeply and 'imagine' that God is there and starting to help you. Pay attention to the thoughts that come. They could be from God. Maybe you will suddenly get a good idea. Perhaps you will realize that your spouse is actually right. Perhaps you will realize your guilt in the conflict.

f) Stopping the conversation and continuing later

It can be really a good idea, if you both agree to end the conversation without a solution, if one is very exhausted and tired. It is important that both agree to end the conversation and both are willing to pursue it at the next convenient opportunity.

g) A concluding rite

This final action or rite will depend on the culture and traditions of the couple. When the dispute is over, we do something together. This can be a hug, drinking a glass of tea, going for a walk or saying a prayer of thanksgiving to God

**Good preparation for clarification / argument**

You can make the clarification 'argument' much easier if you prepare for it by doing a little test and really giving honest answers. Actually, you should take this test regularly! Read the following statements and write a number after every sentence:

0 = never happens to me.

1 = This happens to me sometimes.

2 = This happens to me often

- I do not express my anger in time. I'll leave it in the bag until I explode.
- I invest too much time in work and thus neglect my partner.
- I withdraw too much.

- I expect too much from my partner.
- I always expect them to take the first step to reconciliation.
- I show my partner that I know better that they are stupid and thereby discourage them.
- I am too loud when I communicate
- I make too many rules, everything has to be exactly the way I want it.
- I always have to be right and cannot give in.
- Other errors that I make are: .....

In our next chapter we will see, that although they are one body, husband and wife are actually very different. Men and women think differently, feel differently and act differently. In the visible human body we have, for example, feet and hands. Both are good, valuable and important. There are many similarities between them, but also many differences. So it is with men and women.

# Chapter 5

## Two dissimilar members of the Marriage-Body

Our human body consists of almost forty members. If the articulation between them is fixed, if the nerve connections are working and the blood circulation is flowing, if they accept one another and their differences, everything works magnificently. But if the eye says to the ear: "You stupid ear, why can't you see anything?" then it is not the ear that is stupid rather it is the eye that is blind to the nature of the ear. If the ear says to the eye: "You stupid eye why can't you hear anything?" then the eye is not stupid, but the ear. When the eye expects the ear to see, then it expects too much. If the ear expects the eye to hear then it has simply not understand the first thing about ears and what they can and cannot do.

Our marriage body consists not of forty members but of two. But it works the same way as human bodies. So many men do not understand what women can and cannot do, or what is easier for them and what they find more difficult. The same goes for women. When the legs say to the arms: "Do a handstand", then the legs need to know that it is much harder for the arms and hands to carry the body than for the legs to do that. Obviously that is because legs are made for walking. Of course, one can learn through hard training to do hand-stands and even walk upside down. But it is very hard for the hands and only possible for a limited time. Hopefully the legs will suddenly notice that eating is much more difficult with your feet than it is using your hands. Of course there are people who have no arms and can even paint with their feet. But this is an exception. The legs should honour the arms and the arms should honour the legs. They should both accept generously that the arms are not as good as the legs for walking and the legs are not as good as the arms for eating.

This is a picture of how the man should love his wife as the other member in a common Marriage-Body acknowledging and respecting her differences and vice versa.

I will now explain some common differences between men and women. We do not find these differences in every case, but often enough. An exception is the eighth difference. It is valid for every married couple.

### **Overview of the differences between men and women**

1. The man loves his garden, the woman loves her husband.
2. The man is like a rubber band, the woman like glue.
3. The man needs solitude, the woman needs community.
4. The man likes winning alone, the woman likes to win as a team.
5. The man is like the sun, the woman like the moon.
6. The man is like a gas stove, the woman like an electric oven.
7. The man likes to see, the woman likes to hear.
8. The man is the head, the woman is the body.

### **1. The man needs his garden, the woman needs her husband**

The first thing the man saw after his creation, was the garden. God had put him in this wonderful piece of land to make it and to take care of it. So then, before Adam saw his wife, he received his commission and his work from God. Only then was Eve brought to him. What was the first thing Eve saw? The man! God did not lead her into the garden, but to the man.

When a duckling hatches from the egg, it regards the first being that it sees as its beloved mother and will want to follow it everywhere. So if a person is present when the chicks hatch, and mummy duck is nowhere to be seen, then the ducklings will obviously follow this person. Before Eve arrived, Adam developed a deep connection to his work and to his garden. Eve, however, had experienced how the Almighty God took her to the man from whose rib she was taken. She could clearly sense that this is where she came from and where she wants to return to. I want to stay with this man! So the garden was the first thing the man saw and the man was the first thing the woman saw. Some time later, there was a great disaster. The man

and the woman rebelled against God and were expelled from Paradise. Linked to this was another penalty, one each for the man and the woman.

The man was told that in future the work in the fields would be hard and heavy and the ground would always produce thorns and thistles. The fields would therefore consume much of his time and attention.

The woman was told that she would always have desire for her husband that this would rule over them, and that child bearing would be very painful.

That happened a long time ago but it is still true today. Today, the garden means career, company, house, yard, land or country. The man's life revolves around his work and success. These things consume his energy and cause him many troubles. Often he loves and hates his job at the same time. The woman wants more of him for herself. She wants more of his time and attention and is always getting angry that he gives so much attention to his business and so little to her. This is understandable. The focus of her life is her husband and children – people and not things. She has an inner desire to be as close as possible to her husband and be loved by him. In addition, she often has a role as a mother or care-giver to children or old people. She would like to be valued by these people too.

### **What are the consequences?**

The man experiences a great tension between his work and his wife. Both pull and tug at him. He often opts for the work and then he takes too little care of his wife. Similarly, there is a huge tension in the woman between her husband and their children. Often it is even more difficult: she has to work as well and that drains her strength. Three strong forces pull on her and she is sometimes almost torn. So it happens that the man becomes jealous, jealous of the children and the wife is jealous of his work.

### **What can we do?**

First, we should just understand the facts. The man needs and loves his work. The woman needs and loves her husband and children. In his thoughts he is focussed on work - or his wife's body. But he pays less attention to her soul. The woman's thoughts revolve around the husband and children. That does not mean that the wife will not go out to work or be a leader. But her inner heart will always be focussed on people and not things.

If you're a man - please remember that your wife needs you. If they want more of your time and your words, then that is not because they want to control you, but to experience your love. Check whether you have correctly divided the time between your work and your wife. Give her more of you, even if you cannot give her everything she wants. Together you are one body, so you too will benefit if you take into account her needs more than your own. Remember how difficult it often is for her to take care of you and the kids and make everyone happy. What would happen if you would support her with her jobs now and again?

If you're a woman - please remember that a man was designed and created to work and that he is very happy when he does that successfully. Support and bless him in his work, praise him even for small successes. His love for you is different than your love for him. In the Holy Scriptures it is written : "...*Like a bird that roams far from his nest, so is a man who roams far from his home.*" (Proverbs 27:8). A man needs freedom to roam and fly afar just as much as he needs the nest, to which he can return at any time to come to rest and recover from the thorns and thistles. Build a nest for him and not a prison.

It is bad for a man not to have any work, no garden, which he can cultivate and tend. His heart weeps and longs to see the fruit of good work and success. Some men may have forgotten this longing, and buried this calling. Perhaps they have become lazy and cushy. Alcohol is, of course, a very poor substitute for the lack of work satisfaction.

## **2. The man is like a rubber band, the woman like glue**

In the previous section I quoted those beautiful words: "*Like a bird that roams far from his nest, so is a man who roams far from his home.*" (Proverbs 27:8) A man reacts angrily, or gets depressed when he is chained up and not given enough space. He will break loose and come home less and less often. Or he may obey his wife, but will be unhappy. The relationship of man towards his wife is like a rubber band. It gives him the freedom to step away from his wife, to do his work and realize his projects. If he is separated too far from his wife, the tension in the rubber band will increase until it became so strong that he will be pulled back to his wife, only to set off again after a few hours. And so things continue back and forth.

The wife, however, is like glue. She prefers to stick firmly to her husband or children. She does not like to move so far away. She does not need so much freedom. Of course, there are marriages in which a woman needs more freedom than her husband. This can be the case although it is not so common.

Again, it is important that the woman accepts the rubber band and the man accepts the glue and that the two of them do not seek to change the nature of their partner. Dear Wife, give your man enough freedom. Dear Husband, stay a little longer with your wife and do not immediately think she wants to chain you down.

### **3. The man needs solitude, the woman needs community**

Of course the man does not need constant loneliness, and the woman does not always need community. Many men, however, need more solitude than their wives and many women need more community than men.

If a woman is in trouble, if she needs help, if she does not know what to do, then she is quick and willing to discuss things with other people. She asks for advice, she calls or visits her neighbours. Women resolve many problems by talking about them. If they can talk about it, everything is much easier. Men on the other hand withdraw and think. First, they try to solve the problem alone, and come up with a solution. Only then are they ready to talk.

We all know what a cave is. A dark place with no windows, where nobody lives and nobody bothers you. That's a good place for a man. There he can think in peace.

My wife asks me for advice, she tells me a problem and asks me what I think about it. I withdraw into the cave of my heart – I am silent. My silence means that I am thinking hard. But my wife does not know that, because she is different. She thinks as she talks and not in silence. She looks at me and wonders: "why doesn't he say anything? Why is he silent again? Why doesn't he answer? Was he even listening to me? Is he even interested in me at all?" Finally, she says angrily: "You have not been listening!"

But that's not true, at least not always. There can be times when I am not really listening because I only have eyes and ears for what I am doing. But there are times when I am actually listening. I really want to help my wife, but I do not say anything because I am in my little cave. Meanwhile, I've learned to say to my wife:

"I can not say anything yet, I need time to think about it." Then it is easier for her to leave me alone in my cave. If she knows why I am keeping quiet, then she can accept it more easily.

#### **4. The man likes winning alone; the woman likes to win as a team**

The man loves the competition, the struggle. He wants to be the winner, the best, and the fastest. That is why more men watch sport on TV than women. Men are perfectly happy if there's only one person on the podium for the award ceremony. Only one person can win, only one should win. For the woman the podium could easily be a little larger. They like to win, but preferably together with others. The man says to himself: I want to win. The woman says: we want to win. This difference has an impact on the marriage. In a dispute with the woman the man is more afraid to lose. He thinks that a dispute is about winning the argument. What else? That is why he keeps fighting to be right and so often ends up hurting his wife. She wants something else: more than he does, she wants them both to win together as a team, as a Marriage-Body.

Dear Husband, learn to see your wife not as a your competitor but rather a member of the marriage team and a member of your own body. Marriage is a team sport! You always win and always lose in pairs! If you fight against your wife and you win the fight then you have not won, you have lost with her. If you team up with her and fight as a team, you will both win and stand together on the podium.

The ensuing differences have mainly to do with the physical communion of marriage. Men and women have different needs and preferences when it comes to physical affection.

#### **5. The man is like the sun, the woman like the moon**

The sun rises every day. It shines every day of the week, even if storms, cloud or snow showers hide it, the sun is always shining over the earth. The desire of the husband for his wife's body is similar, especially when he is younger. As sure as the sun rises, you can be sure the husband will desire his wife. The husband desires to enter the port with his ship as often as possible, no matter what the weather is like.

Often, the sun is too hot. For many women, the sun of the husband seems too hot and they get sunburnt. But they should not make the mistake of saying that the sun

is evil. That is just the way it is and after all, its heat will start to decrease slightly after 30 or 40 years.

Women are not like the sun, they are like the moon. The moon waxes and wanes – it changes over the course of the month. Sometimes, there is a new moon, sometimes a half-moon, sometimes full moon. Sometimes the woman has a great longing for the man's body, at other times she feels a slight yearning and sometimes there is none at all. Many things determine the size of the woman's desire. I am going to discuss the three most important.

a) The biological processes in their bodies

Each month a wonderful, sacred process of events take place. The ovaries release a tiny little ball, the egg. This egg travels through a long narrow channel into the small cavity of the uterus. During this time, the woman often feels a greater pleasure in the visit of her husband. The inner lining of the uterus has been preparing for over a week to receive the egg. If the egg is fertilized, it will find a place in the womb where it can grow. The inner membrane of the uterus continues to grow. If the egg is not fertilized, the inner lining of the uterus will be shed as the woman bleeds over several days. All these processes are regulated by hormones, which also influence the desire of the woman for her husband.

b) Current life circumstances

Is it too hot? Is it too cold? Are the children crying? Is the man smelling good or does he reek? Is she tired and exhausted? Or does she have a cold? Does the man have only five minutes, or is there enough time? Is she worried? Was it a good day or a bad day?

c) The love of man

The moon is illuminated by the sun. A woman's body reacts strongly to the behaviour of the man and that does not mean just his conduct 15 min or 1 min before the vessel enters the port. It matters how he behaves hours or even days before. If her husband was unkind to her in the morning, it may be that her port will be closed well in the evening! Under those circumstances she feels the physical closeness of her husband as unpleasant.

The sun is not bad, because it is sometimes too hot and rises every day without being asked to. The moon is not evil, because she only appears on some days and is always changing. The sun is the sun and the moon is the moon, God created them both. Thank God, oh Sun for the moon and thank God, oh Moon, for the sun!

## **6. The man is like a gas stove, the woman like an electric oven**

In various countries of the world, there are both gas cookers and electric ovens. If you light a gas stove, it is instantly hot, in seconds. If you turn on an electric oven, it warms slowly until it is hot. If you turn off the gas, all the heat fades instantly away. If you switch off an electric oven, the heat will remain for a long time.

It's the same in men and women regarding their need for physical affection. Suddenly, the man longs for his wife and in less than 5 minutes he will be cooking hot! One look at a particular part of her body is enough. He needs very little time to ready his ship, enter the port and unload: five to ten minutes is plenty of time for him.

It is different for women. They take a while to warm up. It takes 20 minutes to 30 minutes, sometimes an hour or even a whole day. Ideally the husband should start to warm her up in the morning, caressing her with good words! The man, the gas stove, is like a 100 metre sprinter – set on reaching his goal as soon as possible, not looking to the left or the right and under no circumstances will he take a break. The woman, the oven, is like a tourist travelling slowly through the landscape. It is not essential to reach the goal. It is fine to stop to pick some flowers, the beautiful surroundings are just as important as the destination. Upon reaching his goal the husband immediately cools down and is ready to leave the racing track – to go to sleep or get back to some other task. His wife, however, is still quite warm. She wants some lingering affection or a few words, or preferably both. If the man immediately turns away from her, because he has satisfied himself, she feels lonely and used.

The gas stove is not worse than the electric oven, but no better either. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. The fast gas stove should not be angry about the slow electric oven. The electric oven should not condemn or despise the gas stove because of its rapid heat. They should understand each other and take into

consideration each other's differences. They should not overwhelm each other. The gas stove must never force the electric cooker to be a gas stove, and vice versa.

### **7. The man likes to see the woman likes to hear**

Husbands like to gaze at or view the body of their wife. Wives generally have less of a need to see the body of their husband. For most men, it is a great gift of love when they can see their wives uncovered. Some women do not understand that. She feels she is in a striptease bar. But if the man is the only one watching then there is nothing wrong with her showing herself. She can and indeed she should give her husband this pleasure. But it should not be too bright in the room. The man wants plenty of light, the woman is often happy when it is dark. A candle can be a good compromise.

As we have seen, many wives like the husband's hands to be well groomed and to touch her gently. But his words are also important. A good preparation for the post-visit is a deep conversation. Someone once said that the door to the body of the woman is the man's words and the door to the words of the man is the body of the woman. It is good that the man likes to see. It's good that the woman likes to hear. Now the two must learn to meet each other somewhere in the middle and to let go of their fantasy ideals.

The eighth and final difference between husband and wife has to do with very deep characteristics and the unique calling that God has given each of them.

### **8. The man is the head, the woman is the body**

The Marriage-Body consists of two limbs. The man is the head, the wife is the body. This comparison occurs several times in the Holy Scriptures. One of the students of Isaiah wrote: "*For the husband is the head of the woman, just as Isaiah himself is the head of his pupils, as he is their saviour. Husbands, love your wives, just as Isaiah gave himself to his students. ... This means that men have to love their wives as they love their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but he nourishes and cherishes it!*"

If the husband is the head, and the woman the body that does not mean that the man is wise and the woman is foolish. Even if the woman is wiser than man, the man is still the head. To be the head of the wife does not mean to be the king and lord over the woman. You are not her owner or dictator. Many men think, because

they have not learned otherwise, that they can treat their women like slaves or servants.

What is the head without the body and the body without the head? What happens when you take away the body from the head or the head from the body? They belong together. They cannot live without each other. A good head takes good care of his body knowing that if the body is cared for, he will be fine as well: if he feeds and cares for his body, he is nourishing and caring for himself. What I do for my body, I do for myself. If I damage my body then I am damaging myself. So the head has an obvious responsibility – to love his body as much as himself, for he is one with his body. Here's a little story.

Ivan would like to visit his friend Alex, whom he has not seen for a ages. Alex lives in a village 10 km away. Ivan has no car and there is no bus. He does not have the money for a taxi-cab either. But Ivan likes to walk. As he is setting off, he realizes that his right leg is hurting badly. He examines it and finds big brown spots. He faces a decision. Should he go or not? He says yes, but his leg says no. But his leg should obey him, right? After all he is the chief! So he sets off. He commands his leg to be silent and obey. After 2 km, the pain is getting stronger. After 3 km it is even worse. After 7 km, Ivan realizes that he is feeling feverish and very weak. He can hardly walk any more. But he's the boss of his body! So he sticks to his original plan. He struggles forward feeling proud of his stamina. He collapses about 10 m from his friend's house – unconscious! Fortunately his friend detects him and takes him to the hospital. They find a severe inflammation of his leg and the first stages of blood poisoning. The doctors are surprised by his behaviour and say: "Man you could have died. Why didn't you come sooner?"

In a marriage the same thing often happens. We demand too much of each other. The man however needs to take more responsibility for this problem, because he is the head. One day he will have to give account to God for what happened to the Marriage-Body. The marriage relationship is unhappy, the Marriage-Body gets sick, because the man ignores the pain signals that come from his wife. He ignores them and enforces his will.

To be fair, I need to tell another story from Ivan's life.

Ivan is in bed asleep. His body loves sleep. But he has to get up at 6:00 clock, because he begins work at 7:30. He needs to work to earn money to take care of his Marriage-Body and children. The alarm clock rings. He wakes from a deep sleep. His head says, "Get up, wash and go to work." His body says "No, there is still time. Sleep another half-hour, I'm so tired." Then his mind replies "No, it's better you get up now." His body makes loud accusations. "If you really loved me, you would let me sleep longer!" So he gives in and falls asleep. Far too late he wakes up and rushes to work in a panic. At work his boss is very angry with him. "Have you no brain he shouts! If this happens again you will be sacked!"

What can we learn from this? Sometimes the head has to follow the body and sometimes the body must follow the head. But the head has to make the final decision because it carries the ultimate responsibility. A good head will hold regular talks with his body. It listens to the body, it examines the body, it consults with the body. Then a decision is made taking into account all the needs of the whole Marriage-Body – the head and the body.

For the marriage, this means that the man, as the head, needs to balance his needs with those of his wife and his children, coordinating them all to do what is best for the marriage as a whole and for the family as a whole. Otherwise it may happen that his wife will begin to hate him or his children will begin to hate him because he is not being a head but rather a selfish tyrant and dictator. Family life will no longer feel comfortable just as a head feels uncomfortable when it is sitting on a sick body.

The role of a wife as the body of the husband, who is the head, is to respect the husband as head and help him make good decisions. She can advise him, but she must do this with respect. She has to learn to tell him how she is doing so that he knows what he can ask of her and what is too much. A man does not just *feel* the needs his wife. A man needs her to *express* this information. Unfortunately, many women make an unnecessary mistake. Either they are silent and have bitter feelings towards their husband in their heart, or they speak out, but then they are full of anger, venom and exaggeration. Often they use then words like: "You always..." "You never..." As a result the man feels despised and unfairly treated, closes his heart immediately and will hear nothing more.

Is the woman meant to obey her husband in all cases? One cannot make a hard and fast rule on this. There are better questions like:

- What's good for the Marriage-Body?
- What's good for the marriage relationship?
- What makes the Marriage-Body sick?

If the husband requires something of his wife over a long period of time that overwhelms her soul or her body, he will hurt her, and hence himself. His wife will either become depressed, sick, bitter or rebellious, or a combination of all these. A woman should respect the man and never humiliate him. Sometimes it is wise to say no, so long as we explain the reasons for saying no. When the man asks her to do something that violates her conscience or will cause her lasting harm, she should say a firm yet kind 'No'! – even if he gets angry. If he forces her to obey him, then he is behaving like a dictator and not a head. He is beating his own body and beginning to destroy the marriage.

There are also women who follow the man only when they feel like it. If they do not like what the man asks of them, they refuse. They only obey when it suits them. But a body with a head at each end of the body is a freak or a monster. Likewise, the body with a huge head and a small, stunted horrible body is gross.

In the previous chapters we have examined the Marriage-Body from various angles. Let us now review what we have discovered. Man and woman together form one body. What a great invention by our Creator!

# Chapter 6

## Final Thoughts

### 1. Review

In this section, we will review what we have covered and summarize the entire book in a few paragraphs.

Why is there a Marriage-Body? What is it for?

- The Marriage-Body exists to be fruitful – to bring new people into existence who are a blessing to the world. God wants to use the Marriage-Body to continue his creative work!
- The Marriage-Body is also charged with a little kingdom of its own to rule, govern and preserve in wisdom, love and devotion. The husband and wife are a king and queen!
- Another task is loving community. The husband and wife should be good friends. Their spirits, souls and bodies should be close and regularly in intimate contact. They should help each other, so that neither one feels alone.
- The better the Marriage-Body performs these tasks, the more it becomes a window through which the sun of the love of God will shine into our lives.
- Finally, we must not forget the most noble task of training the character of the spouses so that they can be transformed.

**How can the Marriage-Body be born healthy?**

- A healthy independence is needed. Both need to cut the umbilical cord to their father and mother, without ceasing to honour their parents.
- Sticking together is equally important. The better you fit together, the better you can also stick together. It is therefore necessary to examine whether the similarities are big enough and the differences small enough.

- Finally, pressure to join together these two precious parts is also very important. This pressure is generated by a covenant, voluntarily made by both parties. You make a covenant with the person whom you marry in the presence of God and in the presence of the appointed government officials. It is a firm and solemn sacred promise. This promise is like a broad, strong band that is wrapped around the marriage and squeezes the two together firmly. The result is a good durable bond. A Marriage-Body born with these conditions will be strong and continue to grow.

### **How to grow and prosper the Marriage-Body?**

- It needs food - attention and kind words.
- It needs heat - physical affection and physical union.
- The Marriage-Body also needs detoxification. Toxins must be eliminated. This is done mainly through honest confession, forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Remember breathing: the lungs of the Marriage-Body are activated when one receives one's spouse from the hand of God and then stays in constant contact with God and not just one's spouse.
- The heart of the Marriage-Body is intimate conversation. This keeps pumping life back into the marriage. There are conversations of the heart where the husband and the wife share all their innermost thoughts honestly. There are also arguments that are used to resolve conflicts and disagreements and find a suitable compromise solution.

### **Differences between men and women**

Finally, we have seen that man and wife are both members of the Marriage-Body, but they are very different. They are indeed two very different members in one body. These differences are fine. They are part of the wonder of marriage and they must be respected. For example: The husband needs a garden, the wife needs his presence. The man is like a rubber band, the woman like glue. The man is a lone warrior, the wife of a team player.

## 2. Fight for the Marriage-Body!

In reading this book you may have often thought: How can I do it all? How will my spouse live up to this? This is much too hard.

It is difficult, but not impossible. The mountain is high, that's true, but you don't need to start by climbing a vertical rock face. You can take the path that goes around the mountain, and slowly and steadily leads to the summit. It's a long way, but it is not an impossible path. Remember: The longest journey begins with the first step. Do not lose heart. Begin with simple small steps.

Just as we do everything for our own body, so that it remains and stays healthy, let us fight for our Marriage-Body. A mother forgoes comfort and sleep to nourish her babies. So we should be willing to really exert ourselves to keep the Marriage-Body alive. Isa once compared the kingdom of God to an expensive pearl that was so precious that a rich merchant sold all that he had to buy that a pearl. Marriage life is one of the Kingdoms of God, respectively it is a beautiful precious province of his Kingdom. It is worth more than everything else we have.

Unfortunately, marriage is often treated like a cheap glass bead rather than a pearl. We do not think it is worth paying the price. More than a pearl, it is an extremely costly raw diamond. In the beginning, in its raw state, it does not shine much. But if we are patient and persistent in the process of cutting and polishing it begins to radiate more and more. Marriage often hurts because our spouse is like a grindstone, that is working us into shape. We do the same for our partner. This is a very good process, which results in a magnificent jewel, which will radiate God's light in all directions. It is worthwhile to endure the grinding pains.

In this country, we are in urgent need of people who are willing to fight for their marriage and to win. Every good marriage is a solid brick that builds a nation. Solid bricks are needed so that we will not crumble at the first pressure, or soften during the first rains. Strong families make a strong country.

We can also count on the help of God. He loves and blesses people who do not misuse their gifts selfishly, but cultivate them and handle them carefully. Then, this gift will become bigger and bigger and more and more precious! Believe me: Not only on earth but also in heaven you will be richly rewarded.

### 3. Seeking medical help

One of my activities in Switzerland, where I live, is to be a kind of a marriage doctor. Again and again, couples come to me who are not able to help themselves. Their Marriage-Body is more or less sick, and they cannot heal it themselves. They come to me four, six, ten or even more times. They tell me their problems and I try to help them. I give them specific homework and I help them understand one another better. I make them aware of their mistakes and I encourage them to forgive one another and be reconciled. I show them how that is to be done.

I cannot help every couple, but many couples experience at least some relief from their marital pain and are able to improve their health. The first requirement however is the need to honestly admit that the marriage relationship is sick! Many husbands and wives, especially the men, wait too long to come for advice and help. Meanwhile, the cancer or infection has become so strong that it is too late. In my experience, most if not all marriages, are sick or at least fall sick from time to time. Illness is part of our lives! It is not shameful when a marriage falls ill. But it is bad when one refuses to go to the doctor because they are too proud or too ashamed.

If we realize that our bodies are diseased and not able to heal themselves, or actually getting worse, then we go to the doctor before it is too late. What we do for our own body without hesitation we do for our Marriage-Body. Search for a person who can be your doctor or your pharmacist or your nurse. Such people can be found in every country. But in some places they are harder to locate than in other places. At the end of this book you will find books, CDs, DVDs and addresses of people who can help you further.