

ASK ERICA

Erica J. Burns, M.A.

New Year's Review

You may know that I'm a couple's coach and I practice a form of couple's coaching called Imago Relationship Therapy. There's an Imago tool for couples to use at New Year's time called the Annual Review. Because it is such a great relationship building tool, I wanted to share it with you. As I reviewed it I realized that it could be useful for anyone. So I thought I'd present it to you here with the original format and also with ways you might adapt it if you are single or a parent.

The way the Annual Review is configured is there are a series of five sets of double questions. The first question asks about something you experienced with your partner in 2009 and the second question asks what you would like with or from your partner in 2010. The way to use the questions is to sit down with your significant other around January 1st and ask each other these questions, taking turns answering each one. If you'd like you can repeat back to your partner what you hear them say so that you are both sure that you are hearing accurately.

The first pair of questions are "How did I add to your life in 2009?" and "How would you like me to add to your life in 2010?" Wow, if that doesn't make you think, I'm not sure what would. You can give some serious consideration to how you contribute to your partner, in emotional, material, intellectual and spiritual ways. These questions can be asked of yourself as well. "How did I add to my own life this year and how would I like to add to my life in the coming year?"

"What helped you to feel loved and safe in 2009?" and "What would help you to feel loved and safe in 2010?" is the second pair of questions. If you are struggling in your relationship, you may not have felt terribly loved and/or safe with your partner. If you take the time to seriously consider this question you can probably find some ways at some times when you did feel at ease and connected to one another. Of course, if you are doing well in your relationship you may have a very long list for an answer. For single people it is very valuable to ask yourself these same questions. If you were not feeling loved and safe during the past year, you may need to deeply consider what you need to do to take better care of yourself in the coming year.

In this dialogue, you then move on to "What precious memories do you have from 2009?" and "What precious memories would you like to create in 2010?" This is a wonderful question to ask your partner, yourself, a close friend and even your children. It will give you much information about what the person who is responding finds delightful. If you are answering it yourself, it will get you thinking about the joyful things you might begin to plan for yourself in the year ahead.

Next you inquire "How did you see me grow in 2009?" and "How would you like me to grow in 2010?" This is an especially good question to ask yourself as well as your partner. Growth also comes in many forms. You might look at your partner's and your own struggles, triumphs and lessons from the past year and then look ahead to the ways you want to improve. Perhaps you want to learn a new skill, or be more patient, or change your eating habits.

Finally, you ask “What did you learn from me in 2009?” and “What would you like us to learn in 2010?” You will notice that these two are worded slightly differently. The reason for this is that in the first question you are being asked about your own individual experience, what did you, the individual, learn from your partner. You cannot answer what your partner may have learned because you do not live in their head (despite what you often think!). But you can answer what you would like for the two of you to learn in the coming year, maybe it's a foreign language, or how to be less reactive to one another or how to rock climb.

I hope you will have fun with this process. You can write down your answers and save them for future years. They will give you a record of your progress as a couple and your growth as individuals. Wishing you all a happy, conscious, healthy new year.

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If you would like to submit questions for her to answer in this column, please submit them to ericajburns@silverstar.com. Feel free to submit them anonymously.