

Is there a lump in your potatoes?

When was the last time you made your own mashed potatoes? Somehow, you found it had a lump or two in it? What did you do with the lump? Eat it anyway? Set it aside? Throw out all the mashed potatoes?

When there are some lumps in your marriage what do you do with the lumps?

One wife in marriage counseling with us commented, "We almost had a perfect anniversary day. Then when evening came, my husband blew it and got upset with me because I hadn't as yet done his shirts for his appointments tomorrow. How can I live with a man who is so insensitive? He seems to have a knack for spoiling everything."

"Hmm." I wisely hummed. "Sounds like the mashed potatoes were pretty good. You concentrated on the one lump and lost the flavor of those potatoes you loved so well." For a moment, she looked startled - she hesitated. Then a big smile came across her face. "I guess I am the one who really blew it. I forgot how good the day was and how nice my husband was to me all day - I just focused on the lump!" Once again, with great pontificating sagacity, I said, "Hmm."

It's the perennial optimist/pessimist story - is your glass of water half empty or still half filled? How do you see your lumps? Your perception determines how you receive and enjoy or "disenjoy" life!

Counseling has as one of its goals to assist the client to focus on what he/she has that is good rather than on what is distressful. Yes, we all have legitimate gripes and would like things to be better in our marriage, but how many of these complaints are so severe as to be worth risking the relationship? So he leaves the toothpaste uncapped? He forgets to put away his hairbrush in the morning? And you? What are your peccadilloes, your idiosyncracies you don't see that he tolerates in you? You don't like to do the dishes at night and so they stay on the counter until morning? You seem to be constantly late for appointments and you know it irritates him? Ah, so you too have some lumps in your mashed potatoes?

We are told we need to make allowances for one another, to allow for differences. In theory, most of us would agree with that. In fact, how often have I heard in my privied counseling halls, "Well, I know we all have faults, and certainly I know I have mine, too, but . . ."



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How gracious of us to academically state we have faults, but . . . Do you really understand that indeed you, too, have shortcomings? Do you truly know what they are and how it might be irritating your partner? Remember the old adage. "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."

We are all potentially vulnerable! Each of us can readily have our window panes shattered!

Here are some ways to keep your mashed potato lumps few in number:

- Love yourself! Learn to do it. When you love yourself, you are less likely to find fault in others.
- Ask yourself, "If I were in the other person's situation, would I be doing it any differently or better?"
- When I err, when I fall short, when I have my fastidious need, do I allow my partner theirs?
- Is it possible my complaint regarding my mate is an aspect of myself I am seeing and I don't like it?
- Is being picky-picky at my partner my way of feeling better about myself at my partner's expense?
- Am I unhappy with who I am?
- Is my compulsive need to do things my way worth putting the relationship at risk over trivia?
- Do I have the active listening and "I" message skills to negotiate with my mate my needs, desires or complaints so that neither of us feels we are losing?
- Do I need professional help to work through my mish-mash? Am I willing to drop my pride to do what is best for the marriage? There is another old saying. "If you don't like it, you can lump it." So, what choose ye? Lump it and like it, or smooth out the lumps?