

Episode 002 Transcript

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Getting Back to the Honeymoon Phase - One Habit at a Time

Marina: Hi there and welcome to episode two of Simply Great Relationships podcast. We're glad you could join us today. I'm Marina Voron, and this is Meredith Silversmith, and we are excited to bring you this episode on creating rituals of connection with your partner. Make sure to stay until the very end because we've got a great bonus for you and we'll tell you how to get it at the end!

Meredith: Yup. So, one of the things we address with couples in our office every day is the break down in rituals of connection. So, what are rituals of connection? I would describe them as things you do every day or nearly everyday with your partner that feel good. So, it's things that you count on, things that you know are going to happen, they're predictable, they're consistent. So, for me and my husband, Tom, we watch certain shows together, and no matter what, neither of us would watch an episode without the other one. So, those are our protected times and a lot of our shows happen to be on Sunday nights. So, I feel like that works really well. Walking Dead, I hear that from a lot of my clients, and I think there's a lot of you out there, Walking Dead fans.

Marina: Yup, that's a big one.

Meredith: That's a big one. So, we watch all our shows. We do it on Sunday nights, and we have our little ambiance, right? We sit together on the couch. We don't sit on the opposite sides of the room. We sit together; we have a snack, we have a glass of wine. We create our experience. That's one of our rituals that we do.

Marina: George and I have even a smaller one than that. Whenever we don't see each other, and we come together, we always kiss. And that's a ritual of connection and I know that if we were apart even if he just goes to the store and he comes back, or he runs to get a coffee and he comes back, we know that we come back together, there's going to be a kiss because that's our ritual of connection, and it's really important and communicates like a love and attraction and something just really nice and positive and simple to look forward to in our relationship, and we really protect that. It's really important, and even when it's kind of harder to get in, say, we're in a big rush. That's really protected for us. We're always like, "Where's my kiss?", or he's always like, "We've got to do the kiss."

Meredith: That's good! That's a really good one. So, something that happens over time in



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relationships, the rituals create themselves in the beginning, right? So, that honeymoon phase of the relationship when you're spending a lot of time together, and you're doing a lot of fun things.

Marina: Date nights.

Meredith: Like date nights. You're more motivated to spend time with each other so you meet for coffee before work or you go running together.

Marina: Cute texts.

Meredith: Cute texts, definitely. Good morning texts, right? Good night texts if you're not living together. So, a lot of stuff creates itself, but as life moves forward, the relationship moves forward - life stress, hectic schedules. We live in New York so, you know, it's just crazy here between traffic and commuting.

Marina: Very hectic, yeah.

Meredith: Life is insane. So, it's really easy for your time and energy to get zapped and sucked into so many other things that these rituals start to break down. They start to lose their own place as a priority and it just sort of happens over time if you're not aware of how important they really are.

Marina: Yeah and I think a lot of people, when I talk about rituals of connections with them and they're so good at identifying the ones they had in the beginning like, "Oh, every night, we would go for a walk with our dog together, and it was really nice, and it was time for ourselves". They'll say, "Well, life just got in the way," and to me, what that translates into is, "This wasn't prioritized." What you prioritize is what communicates what's important. You prioritize what's important and what you prioritize is what becomes the foundation of your relationship. So, when rituals of connection breakdown, what message are you sending about your relationship?

Meredith: Yeah, right, yeah. That it's not super important and I would venture to guess that if you're watching this or if you're listening to this, you don't feel that way. Your relationship is important to you otherwise you wouldn't be here. So, we want to make sure that the messages that you're putting out are aligned with the messages that you want to be putting out.

Marina: Yeah

Meredith: Because it's not intentional. So, that's really, really key. Why are they so powerful? How do they get that power?

Marina: Well, the thing about a ritual of connection, just think about rituals culturally. What makes them so powerful? Holidays are rituals. Birthdays are rituals. All these things, why are they so powerful? Why is Christmas such a production, and Thanksgiving such a production? Because they really connect people. They connect people, and they really send this message of like, "You are so important. We are taking this time to be together and this time is sacred and protected because you are important and this time is important", and that is such a powerful, powerful message to send to your partner that this is important. So the rituals of connection are super, super important because they communicate "You're important to me." You're not just Cindy from the office. You are that



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I invest my time into.

Meredith: Definitely. And I think that part of what creates the ritual, right, what keeps it going, like I said before, it's predictable, you know that it's going to happen and it's consistent. You know, when where, how, you know all the details around it, and it becomes a ritual when it becomes a routine. So, it's automatic. You don't think about it. You just sort of meet on the couch on Sunday night. You go straight to your partner when you get home from the store. It's just a part of your world. So, it becomes so powerful because you're doing it without even thinking about it and that's really, really and strong, strong force.

Marina: Yeah, and another thing, borrowing again from our guru, John Gottman, is what rituals of connections do is they deposit, make positive deposits in our emotional bank accounts. So, Sunday night, you look forward to Walking Dead, right? We don't watch Walking Dead on Sunday nights. I know, we're bad.

Meredith: Someone put in the comments why she should watch Walking Dead.

Marina: Yes, and maybe we'll start. We're always looking for new shows, but Sunday night, we watch SNL because we watch it on Hulu. It creates a positive interaction, and every positive interaction is a deposit in the positive emotional bank account, and that's what protects your relationship. You want your positive emotional bank account to be in the black, not in the red because then, even when small little bad things happen when there's little tiffs or little misunderstandings, it's okay because the cushion of your relationship is largely positive, and rituals of connection help do that in a very consistent, predictable way. So, it's like, think about it, like you're automatically depositing. It's the set it and forget it type of depositing into your positive emotional bank account.

Meredith: Yeah, I love that concept. I think that that makes a lot of sense. So, it's really worth it to do, the rituals, which we will talk more about. We will give you more strategies for how to integrate them if you've fallen off a bit. So, when they do fall off, what happens? How do you know? This is something I look for a lot in clients that I'm seeing. New clients, especially. I always assess what rituals do they have. What rituals have they lost, because nine times out of ten, if they're sitting in my office, they've lost their rituals. So, what do you see? And I put this out there so that you can think of your own relationship and how you're feeling in it right now and see if this fits with you. So, lacking the benefit of the doubt, this is really, really a big one. So, your partner's running late from work, they get home maybe a half hour late, but they didn't call. So, early on in your relationship, when things are really, really positive, you're in the honeymoon phase, you may be thinking, "Oh, they're running late, he must have got caught at his desk or with a phone call, or his boss must have grabbed him before he walked out, or he must be sitting in traffic". Something very benign, right? Benefit of the doubt.

Marina: The story you tell yourself still sees you partner in the positive perspective.

Meredith: Right, you expect the best. You expect good things from them.

Marina: "It's not my partner, it's their circumstance."



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Meredith: Right, right. Versus if your rituals are broken down, and your emotional bank account is low, we lose that benefit of the doubt. So now when he's a half hour late, you're thinking, "What the hell? He knows I'm here cooking dinner and he's a half hour late because he wants to piss me off" or "because he's chatting up with someone at work" or "because he's trying to make dinner cold" or "because he doesn't care that I made dinner." We sort of put these different labels on it where we're looking at our partner through a negative light because we don't have enough of a cushion, as you've said, of those positive moments and interactions to see things positively.

Marina: Yes, so it becomes not about the circumstance, "It's not my partner stuck in a circumstance, it's my partner's being withholding or rejecting" or "It's not the circumstance, it's my partner."

Meredith: Right.

Marina: Right? It's not giving benefit of the doubt, and when that breaks down, that's really that's very impactful in our relationship. That leads into another one for me which is just like seeing your relationship more negatively.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: Right? And how I see this a lot is people re-write a bit of history.

Meredith: Oh, yeah.

Marina: So, they'll say, "Oh, yeah. We went on this great vacation to Hawaii, but we only had fun because we were drinking on the beach", right? or "Yeah, we used to be intimate all the time, but it was just because we were younger and that's what you do when you're younger." Right? It's something that makes your relationship even though it could have been really positive. It kind of puts these negative lenses looking at your whole relationship and I think that's a really hard place to get out of. When you start re-writing a bit of history, and when you start looking at everything through that negative lens, you're not giving benefit of the doubt. You're not seeing your partner as somebody who's in a circumstance but as somebody who's intentionally withholding. So, you get stuck in that negative sentiment override. It's really, really hard even when there are positive gestures made towards you to see them, and that sucks.

Meredith: Yeah. That's really, really hard. It's a really bad feeling to be in that place, and I think the other way it filters through is through communication. We talked a lot about communication in our last episode, episode 001. So, go check it out if you haven't already. But to not just view actions more negatively and to view the relationship more negatively, but to hear your partner's words more negatively, so if your partner says something neutral, we may read more into it, right? We may read between the lines and hear negativity or criticism or an underlying passive-aggressive meaning that isn't there. It filters through every piece of the relationship.

Marina: Yeah, and it frankly just makes the relationship not the positive, connected place that you want it to be and again, we're in relationships because we like our partners, we like the way they make us feel, we like making them feel good, and when you're in that negative state, when the rituals of connection aren't happening, and you're not internalizing that reward, you're like, "Well, why am I even here?"



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Meredith: Yeah. You start to feel really unimportant.

Marina: Yeah.

Meredith and Marina: So...

Marina: Sorry.

Meredith: No, that's okay. So, why do they fall off? We touched on this before. I know, I could say for myself, I've noticed like if we get really busy, so if I get really busy at work or Tom's an accountant, so he has certain months where he gets super, super busy, definitely things can fall off then, like just your schedules take over and you don't have the time or you're not carving out the time mindfully to protect those rituals. That's a really common way that things break down whether you're having kids or there's a life transition, you're buying a house, you're re-doing your house. All of these things that we do through time can really interfere with that.

Marina: Yeah and I think sometimes we can use being withholding with rituals of connection to communicate something, right? Unfortunately, when we're feeling upset, and I know this about myself, guilty over here. Well, I used to be. I'm now reformed. We don't always have the most mature way of communicating when we're hurting, when we're feeling unimportant, when we're feeling stressed, when we're feeling unsupported. So a really good thing, a really easy "go to" for us is to be withholding of those rituals of connection in order to communicate our frustration. Earlier on in our relationship, I remember when a time I got really upset with George because, I believe it was my birthday and you know, he was really busy. He was in the middle of writing his licensure exams and I, being an only child, always want this big production for my birthday. He was in the middle of these intense exams, and he didn't get a chance to plan as much as I would have liked at the time and I remember he came back and I was like, "No, I don't want to kiss you." Right? What I was really communicating in that moment is I'm really upset that I wasn't made to feel important on a day where I was expecting a ritual of connection, but instead, I was withholding. Now I can see how redundant and how poorly that actually communicated my feeling and how bad that made George feel and how my message didn't translate at all. All George got out of it is that I was being mean and withholding. It didn't make him want to do something really nice for my birthday anymore, but I think sometimes that's how we communicate our frustrations because we just don't have better tools. Right? Which is why, again, episode one, really important, teaches you some of those tools to access that really good communication.

Meredith: That would have been a great moment to use your "I" statements.

Marina: Exactly!

Meredith: Great moment. And if you don't know what "I" statements are, definitely go back and check it out. I think this is something that you enjoy talking about. This idea that rituals of connection, they sort of touch on three different areas of the relationship. So you have to be mindful of creating them not just in one area but touching on each of these three. So, I'll let you kind of speak to that.

Marina: Yeah, I mean I think these three are the three core ones, and I'll touch on some other ones, but I think in any relationship, there are three really, really core pillars almost. There is friendship,



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emotional intimacy, and physical intimacy, and I think it's really important to create rituals of connection around all three because I think all three are equally as important but people are good at what they're good at and don't necessarily want to challenge themselves in areas they're not good at. So, sometimes, I have couples that really need to work on their intimacy but they are really good friendship rituals of connection and if I just say, "Pick a ritual of connection that really works for you", they're going to do a game night that's not going to lead to a whole lot of intimacy because that's what's easy for them. But, I think when you're able to say, "We need a ritual of connection in friendship, we need a ritual of connection emotionally, and we need a ritual of connection that focuses on physical intimacy," you're covering all your core bases. So, a friendship-based ritual of connection would be something like taking your dog to the park or a games night?

Meredith: Yeah, Totally.

Marina: Or doing some love maps questions or the New York Times 36 questions which I love, and everybody should do. Something that really touches at the core of your friendships. Something that makes you feel known. Something that allows you to get to know your partner in a deeper way which is really, really important. An emotional ritual of connection, my favorite one, and you can say if you like this one, is the stress reducing conversation. I think it's again, such a small investment, such a huge payoff. And it's just like a 15-minute check in to talk about all the stressors that exist in your life that are outside of your relationship. Your boss, your friend, you mom, your...

Meredith: Commute.

Marina: Anything. It's like you get that time to vent and your partner just goes "I hear you. It's just me and you against the world. They're wrong, you're right."

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: You know, it's like that time when you really, really support each other around those external stressors, and it creates that sense of emotional depths and emotional connections, so that's one of my favorite ones. And then physical intimacy and pleasure-based rituals, they can be as small and innocent as like George and I do our kiss. Some people like I really am pro scheduled sex. I'm really pro scheduling massage. I'm really pro scheduling all kinds of physical interactions because sometimes when you don't especially if you're a new parent or something like that, they can really slip to the wee side but physical expressions of love are so, so, so important. When you think about it, that physical intimacy is something so sacred and something you only share with your partner. Having a ritual of connection around that whether it's super PG or it's "We try out a new toy every month." It's so, so valuable and communicates this is something that's sacred and important to cherish in our relationship.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. I think those are really key and the importance of the rituals is there's almost an idea of obviously creating them consistently in terms of a schedule, whether it's daily, weekly, monthly, but also I almost think of it as "When I need this, we do this." That's a bit of a ritual too, right? So, when I feel stressed, we hug, or when I'm crying, my partner comes to me. Those are rituals too. Those are rituals within your relationship of how we interact. So, being mindful of those three areas and trying to make sure that you're hitting each one is very important.



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Marina: Yeah, and just to add, there are other ones, couples that are really devoured or religious. Rituals of connection centered around that like around how you celebrate the holidays not just with your family but what makes it special to the two of you. If a sense of adventure is really important in your relationship, rituals of connection around adventure. Rituals of connection around intellectual connection, but think of those as the bonuses. Think of those as the stuff that's gonna be so, so, so enriching, but these three are the real core.

Meredith: Yeah, for sure. So, I think what's super important is that we share with you how to do this, how to put all of this into practice, how to reinstate rituals that maybe you've lost or how to start new ones and that's not that complicated which is great, I love simple. Simple is great. So, that first step is to really pick activities. "Activities," right? So, things that we're talking about. It could be some sort of thing that you do together that goes well. So that's the key, right? If you know that right now, you two are in a space where if you go food shopping together, there's going to be conflict, right?

Marina: Don't go food shopping together.

Meredith: There's going to be "I don't want to go here" or "Why do you always make me pack," "Why do you always make me blah, blah, blah I'm not buying that". Don't do that. Don't pick that. Pick something that's going to go well. Going for a walk, going to a movie, going out to dinner, greeting your partner with a kiss when they return. Pick things that are going to go well, and I would even suggest sitting down together and make your own lists, right? Friendship-based, jot down some examples. What's really exciting is we have something that's going to help you with this so, just wait. Make a list of everything that you think would be fun to do with your partner in those areas and pick the ones that you both are into.

Marina: Yeah and I always tell my couples, "Go in with the frame of mind of low stakes, high rewards. Small things that feel really good. Nothing complicated. Nothing that's a production. Nothing that is too involved or that has a lot of potential for impasses or failures. The smaller, the better.

Meredith: It can literally be as simple as we wake up in the morning and we sit together and have coffee. It can be that simple.

Marina: That's such a fantastic ritual of connection. I'm really happy you said that one because that's one that George and I have been doing since he's been working from home and it's just such a positive note to start our day on is to share a coffee together.

Meredith: Definitely.

Marina: And again super simple. Low stakes, high rewards.

Meredith: It's a funny story. I have to share it because it's about coffee and rituals. So, my husband and I always go to Starbucks together in the morning and get coffee because we like Starbucks, and one morning we went there and it had been a couple of days since we hadn't been able to do it so we lost our ritual for a bit of time and he went in and the girl behind the counter, there was an interchange, and she knew that I was related to him, that I was his wife. She saw me in the car, "Oh, that's her. I know what she gets," and they just had a funny conversation about the fact that we're



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always in there together and that it would be strange, it was strange to her that he was in there without me and it would have been strange if I had been in there without him. So I thought that was really cute. That really validated our ritual that we're really pretty good at it.

Marina: Yeah! And I mean the barista even noticed that the ritual of connection between the three of you was disrupted.

Meredith: Yeah, you're right! So that was just a funny story. I liked that. So, once you've picked your rituals, in the beginning, to make them happen, you'll want to schedule them. So you're going to schedule them until they become a habit. And when we say schedule, we literally mean schedule. Put it on the counter at a certain time. Know where you're doing it, how you're doing it. If there's any setup involved or any travel involved, make sure that you know what's going on and how you're going to accomplish that. And the other thing I made, I don't know how you feel. I tend to tell couples especially if it's something at home where they're meeting at the end of the day to do the stress-reducing conversation or something else, rather than set a time especially if they have kids, pick a situational trigger. Right, so when the kids go to bed, we meet in the living room. Right after we have dinner, we do the dishes together. Pick something, an action that's going to happen every night rather than a time.

Marina: Yeah. Couple it with something you already do. Like couple stress-reducing conversation with dinner, couple hugging 'til relaxed with after reading in bed or after your favorite T.V. show that you watch nightly together. Something like that. Yeah, I think that's a really great idea because I think some people are a little thrown off because again, I know New York life. I never know what's going to happen at 7:30 on a Tuesday. I could literally be anywhere and if I was committed to doing something with George at 7:30 on Tuesday, the chance of that not happening is actually pretty high whereas like, if, like I know my dog needs to get walked everyday, if I have a ritual of connection that's coupled with walking my dog, I know that that happens whatever time that happens at whenever we're both available and that's so much more doable. That's a really, really great piece of advice.

Meredith: Yeah. That's good. So pick that. And it could be as simple as "I know I'm going to brush my teeth every night so after I brush my teeth, we do this" or even, like Marina said, coupling it together, right? A ritual I recommend to a lot of couples is even showering together.

Marina: Yup! So great. It's like a very intimate ritual, but you gotta shower, so it's like killing two birds with one stone. Again, simple, low stakes, high reward. I love that one. I recommend that one a lot too.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: And again, I think the mentality that you go into this with is super important. This is a "feel good" activity. This is not you going on some sort of elimination restrictive diet where you're tortured. This is about building a really positive habit in your relationship, and you need to look at it as such. You need to look at this as like, "this is fun," "this is rewarding," "this is enriching," "this is what makes my relationship feel awesome," "this is what makes my relationship feel great."



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Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. Super, super good. So, those are our tips, and as always, we don't want you to just listen to this or watch it and then move on with your day and forget about what we shared with you. We want you to integrate it into your relationship. So, what we've done for you is create a long list of sample rituals and each of those areas that you can choose from. So if you don't feel like making your own list, download ours. Circle the ones that apply to you, that you'd like to do. Share them with your partner, get them setup and get them going. So if you want to get access to that list, you can reach it on our website at www.simplygreatrelationships.com/002. Pretty good.

Marina: Great, yeah! I think there's a really, really good list there. A lot of great ideas on there. A lot of stuff that we've taken away from couples we've seen that's really worked and that's been really easy to integrate. So, let's talk about our takeaways. What was your biggest takeaway?

Meredith: Oh, boy. My biggest takeaway is probably the importance of not staying in one area with your rituals, of touching different areas of your relationship. The friendship, the emotional intimacy and the physical intimacy and making sure that you have consistent rituals in each area to have a fully healthy, integrated relationship. I think that's really, really important because that's not always something that crosses my mind. I know when Marina and I were even just talking about what we're going to share with you today, that was something that she brought up and I was like, "Hmm, that's a good one!".

Marina: Thanks! I think my biggest takeaway is to couple your rituals of connection with something you already do. How simple does it make to create an awesome ritual of connection if you're coupling it with something you're doing anyway.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. It can't get easier than that.

Marina: Take a shower together.

Meredith: Yeah. Number one takeaway.

Marina: Number one takeaway, shower together.

Meredith: Oh my gosh. So I mean, that's all for today. I think there were some really, really good stuff in there. Be sure to download that list so you can get going even sooner. We hope you take these tips and use them. We'd love for you, love... for you to continue the conversation with us in our Facebook group. So, here's where you'll find extra tips, tricks, and live streams. We're going to jump in there and do live streams periodically, exclusively for our members. So you can get into the group at www.facebook.com/groups/simplygreatrelationships, or you can just go to our website www.simplygreatrelationships.com and click the link. We will add you to the group, and you'll be part of that conversation which is pretty fun.

Marina: Yup and we'll be happy to answer any questions you have.

Meredith: Definitely! So, let us know in the comments and in the group what rituals you pick, what you're doing, how it's going we look forward to hearing from you! So until next time! We'll see you soon! Bye!



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