

The Turtle and the Hailstorm

Created by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D, author of "Getting The Love You Want"

Once upon a time there was a hailstorm and a turtle that fell in love.

They knew that they were very different from one another, but resolved to love one another and to help each other, they had three children. One was a turtle, one was a hailstorm, and one was a little of both.

When things were doing well, the hailstorm and the turtle were quite happy. But things didn't always go well. If there was strife, there was a strong likelihood that the turtle would withdraw into its shell, or the hailstorm would hail with fury. Whichever one acted first, the likelihood was that the other would resort to its normal defense—hail or withdraw.

After several years, the hailstorm could sometimes sense that the turtle was in the process of withdrawing. This would make the hailstorm angry and hail was immediately forthcoming. Usually, this would accelerate the withdrawal process by the turtle. Likewise, the turtle could sometimes smell hail in the air. If so, the turtle would not wait for the thunder, but would withdraw immediately.

Over time, this resulted in the hailstorm hailing and the turtle turtling on a regular basis. There were fewer days where the two could be friendly and cooperative, and more days where they found themselves in their stereotypical roles. This angered and disappointed both. Each thought that the other was at fault, and that the other should change. The Turtle said, "If only the hailstorm would hail less frequently, I would not have to withdraw so much, and I could enjoy the hailstorm's company." Similarly, the hailstorm complained "If that turtle would stop withdrawing at every raindrop, we'd both be much happier."

Just when it seemed that there was no solution to this dilemma, a Wizard appeared. The Wizard was very knowledgeable about the ways of the heart, especially in regard to turtle-and-hailstorm relationships. (It turned out that there are many such relationships, and the Wizard had seen dozens of them.) He explained that the two were in a relationship to one another for a reason and discovering that reason would unlock many blessings and opportunities for the two.

"Thank God you're here!" said the turtle. "Perhaps you can tell the hailstorm to stop hailing on me."

"That's not the problem!" said the hailstorm. "The problem is that you keep withdrawing and that hurts me."

Each turned to the Wizard for a verdict. But he smiled and remained silent for a moment. After a diplomatic pause, the Wizard spoke. "Each of you thinks that if the other will change, everything else will sort itself out. If the hailstorm will stop hailing, Or if the turtle will stop turtling, then the other will be happy. But it's not that easy – and yet it is!"

Now they were both confused. "Well, what good are you, then. I see only two options – one or the other of us must change, and neither of wants to. As a turtle, I don't see why I should become something else just because the hailstorm says so. After all, it's my hard turtle shell that protects me from all that hail."

“Well, my hail is just as much a part of me as your shell is of you. Why should I have to stop being my full, uninhibited self?”

“The solution,” responded the Wizard, “is not either/or. It is both/and. Turtle, your hailstorm is in your life to help you grow out of your limitations and withdrawing. And hailstorm, your turtle is in your life to help you learn to contain your hail from doing damage. Each of you is as you are for a reason having to do with your survival. But somehow, each of your survival actions has gotten out of hand. Instead of making you happy, they deprive you of the happiness to which you are entitled.”

“Who goes first?” they asked.

“Both go first,” responded the Wizard. Every day and in every way, Turtle has to begin finding occasions to come out and stay out of its shell. And Hailstorm must begin containing the hail. As each progress, that one helps the other to continue progressing. Turtle, by staying out of your shell, tells Hailstorm that it doesn’t require a barrage of hail to get Turtles attention. And Hailstorms holding back the hail makes it safer for Turtle to stay out of the shell for increasingly longer period of time.”

“Now no one needs to do anything. You can both go on as you have. Or you can both make the necessary move toward growth, and each will benefit from the mutual transformation that occurs.”

“So now the secret is out. I have no magic. I am not a wizard. You two have all the magic needed at your disposal. You can choose to grow by overcoming you instinctive actions, and instead choosing to cooperate. In doing so, you each grow, as does your relationship. So have it all.”

“Not so fast,” said the turtle. “You’re still saying that I must change my instinctive reaction in order to make Hailstorm happy and...”

“No!” said the Wizard, emphatically. “You don’t change to make Hailstorm happy. You change to make YOU happy. You become more fulfilled by being able to experience the world more fully. Hailstorm is simply here to help you do that. And Hailstorm, Turtle is in your life to tell you that not every situation calls for hail. You thus can conserve your energy for when it’s truly needed. It just so happens that, in the symmetry of things, you will each become happier both because you have changed and the other has changed. But neither of you will be happy if this mutual transformation does not occur.”

“So where do we begin?” asked the Hailstorm.

“By doing! There’s nothing to wait for. Turtle, you begin sticking your neck out right now, and at every opportunity, without waiting for your partner make the first move. And Hailstorm, you begin by deliberately choosing to curtain your hail, without waiting for Turtle to extend all the limbs. And both of you must resist the temptation to blame the other. You got here together.”

“Each of you – together – begins by beginning. NOW! There is no further signal that will be forthcoming. Just do it!”

Story from a metaphor by Harville Hendrix, PH.D.

Hendrix divides us up as to how we use our energy. We basically conserve it by drawing it into ourselves or we explode it outwards toward our partner and the world. These differences become even more pronounced when we feel hurt, frustrated, or angry. He names the conservers "Minimizers" and the exploders "Maximizers". Usually in any couple there will be one of each. Here are some of their characteristics. Which one are you?