

## **Coming Out of the Coma What Happens When Women “Wake Up?”**

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If you've seen the film “The Stepford Wives,” you know the kind of woman I'm talking about. She's going through the motions of her life in a robotic way. True, the film was meant to be science fiction, but there are too many real-life women who go through the motions of their lives in that automatic “asleep at the wheel” kind of mode. You know the ones - they are the women whose intention, almost from the moment they are born female, is to find a man to marry and be an at-home mother with the 2.5 kids and the dog and the white picket fence and the minivan with the soccer ball sticker on the back.

I have nothing against this lifestyle if that's truly what a woman wants and when she gets it she is truly, honestly happy and fulfilled and satisfied. Too often, though, I meet and work with women for whom this lifestyle is what they thought they were “supposed to” do, and all through their teens and twenties they thought this was the only and ultimate plan for life. Then these women celebrate their 30<sup>th</sup> birthdays. And somehow that 30<sup>th</sup> birthday is like a clap of thunder and suddenly they “wake up” out of that “coma” into which they had been lulled. It's not always about turning 30, but there is usually some defining moment in the lives of these women when they “wake up” from their comas, and once awakened, there's no going back!

After that, those same women will spend a few years being surprised at what their lives have become. And they realize that there's just not that much satisfaction in keeping a clean house and having dinner on the table every night and making sure that everyone's homework is done and everyone's laundry is done and everyone else's needs are met without ever stopping to consider their own. And of course that's assuming that they even knew what their needs were, or that they ever had needs at all.

Once the initial surprise wears off, the next emotion is depression, which turns into resentment, which turns into anger. At this moment a woman has several choices. The first one, which happens far too often, is to divorce her husband, because she assumes her feelings are his fault for neglecting her. A second and emotionally healthier choice is to take a look at herself and what part she plays in this “Stepford Wives” movie that is her life. After all, nobody held a gun to her head and forced her to make the choices she did, right? But if I had a nickel for every time a woman has blamed her husband for her own feelings.....enough said.

If a woman is self-actualized enough to “wake up” then she's hopefully insightful enough to take responsibility for her own needs, and first among them is the need for change. If a woman has spent her lifetime tending to the needs of others, there is no way she is taking the time to replenish her own “well.” This is the change that must occur first - a woman needs to understand and embrace the concept that she must come first in her own life. Once she has truly learned to live this concept, then she has so much more to give to the others in her world, because now she is taking to time to renew and rejuvenate and nurture herself every day. Think of the way a tree grows - it alone is responsible for its

own continued life. So it stretches its roots deep into the ground so it will be anchored in the earth. And it stretches its limbs to the heavens as it reaches for the light.

We humans need to do the same as that tree. We are responsible for our own growth. When we begin that journey of self-responsibility, at first the others in our lives who are used to us putting ourselves in last place to care for them will balk a bit. They will work hard to get us to go back to the way things were before - when we didn't choose to make our needs known and they were used to the "take, take, take" approach to getting their needs met. If we don't waver from the "I need to do for me first" mantra, eventually the others whom we care for will see how much more of us they actually get, and now it's from a willing place instead of an angry resentful one.

Think of patients in comas who are blessed with the opportunity to wake up and return to life. It's as if the person is given a "second chance." Well, the concept of women coming out of their "comas" is the same thing. But there is no need to toss the old life away like so much useless garbage. And besides, without doing the work of learning self-responsibility, a woman who replaces an "old" life with a "new" one (i.e. divorcing and perhaps remarrying) will repeat the same patterns as before.

Instead, women can learn while remaining in their already established lives. All they have to do is alter the priority list and make the most important change of being at the head of the list. I know this isn't easy to do though it's easy to say. So many times I hear women say things like, "That is too selfish," or "I could never put anyone ahead of my children," or "Every time I try to take care of my needs, someone else tells me I'm wrong for doing that."

Here's another key concept about women - we're really good at putting ourselves down, beating ourselves up, and worrying too much about what others will say about us for whatever choices we make. So part of the coming out of the "coma" work has to do with tuning in to our own heads and hearts and tuning out the world of critics who will judge and censure us no matter which directions we take.

Ultimately, we have no choice but to go forward, and it's up to us to make that journey as efficient and enjoyable as possible. I'm all for people being happy and fulfilled in their lives, and I'm all for people taking responsibility for that happiness and fulfillment. Sometimes I think we want to believe in the old myths about having that one perfect romantic partner who meets our every need and understands us every day and remembers to consistently appreciate us and do little things for us. Those myths are part of the "hypnosis" that puts us in that "coma" in the first place!

In reality, no one person can always "get" us, always "complete" us, always be there for us. And while we're at it, let's talk about how at the end of the day, we're still responsible for ourselves! We know our needs - and many times we can meet our needs ourselves! We can be self-reliant, we can take care of ourselves, we can choose our own directions even while maintaining household, husband, family. And we can choose several people for ourselves who will fulfill needs we have instead of expecting

everything from one person. Not only is that unrealistic, but it's unreasonable as well, and it's a guaranteed set-up for disappointment when the one person fails at this expectation, which they inevitably will!

Let's remember how incredible women are, for reasons too numerous to list here. When women come out of their "comas" and begin to believe in their own "incredible-ness" there's no stopping them from doing whatever it is they know they want to do. And what about the people whom these women love, the ones who are already part of the lives of these incredible "awake" women? They benefit even more because these "awake" women are more giving, more loving, more patient, more available, more energized by succeeding in their own endeavors and pursuits.

As stated before, once we come out of the "coma," there's no going back. And why would we even want to, when what lies ahead is so much more interesting and exciting and worth waking up for?