

# Jerry Seinfeld's Advice for Marital Happiness

Sensing the strain COVID-19 lockdowns have brought to marriages, many are [eager to offer advice](#).

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld didn't get married until he was 45 years old. In his Netflix special [23 Hours to Kill](#), (filmed before COVID-19) he wonders how he went from a "regular bachelor guy" to happily married with children.

Seinfeld advises, "A man in marriage will not survive if he does not have a strong brain-to-speech guard-gate control filtration system." A happily married man recognizes the "I know I can't say that" thoughts as they enter his head.

Seinfeld is exaggerating the human condition, but beneath the humor is wisdom.

At a time when expressing our fleeting feelings has been elevated to the sacred, some might think Seinfeld's advice is a recipe for repressing emotions and suppressing our true selves.

But is the griping narrator in our head, with its endless comments on everything, who we really are? In his book [Hoist on My Own Petard](#), journalist Dan Harris observes, "Most of us are so entranced by the nonstop conversation we're having with ourselves that we aren't even aware we have a voice in our head."

Like Harris, do a bit of investigation. Tune in to the chatter in your head. When you are in a low mood, this voice speaks first, offering its lousy advice. Perhaps it is spinning a story about what you are entitled to and aren't receiving?

Are you addicted to making little jibes at your spouse? Notice

when your mental griping is about petty transitory irritations. When you're upset, are you obsessed with thoughts of who or what to blame for why you're not feeling happy? Our minds are grievance machines making life difficult for us and others. Holding tight to our grievances, we create a sense of separation from those we care about.

The life-changing news is that we don't have to honor the chatter in our head. Harris writes:

"Many of us labor under the delusion that we're permanently stuck with all of the difficult parts of our personalities—that we are 'hot-tempered,' or 'shy,' or 'sad'—and that these are fixed, immutable traits. We now know that many of the attributes we value most are, in fact, *skills*, which can be trained the same way you build your body in the gym."

Have you ever seen photos of [El Capitan](#) in Yosemite National Park? Accomplishing one of the most amazing athletic feats in history, [Alex Honnold climbed its 3,200 feet of sheer rock face](#) "free solo" without ropes. Less than "perfect execution" meant "certain death."

You might think Alex Honnold is fearless, but he has a different story to tell.

[Honnold wants us to understand](#) that climbing El Capitan without fear is "impossible." The crucial question is what you do with fearful feelings. In the documentary about his climb, [Free Solo](#), Honnold explained he didn't try to control or suppress fear. Instead, through practice, he expanded his comfort zone until he could "step outside" his fear.

Honnold's advice applies to the mixed bag of feelings we experience in marriage. Petty annoyances may always flit through your mind, but there can come a day when your commitment to strengthening your marital bonds is so strong that you don't allow yourself to wallow in those grievances.

In contrast, if every time you are upset, you go to the narrator in your head for guidance, your marriage will deteriorate. That narrator will give you a compelling story about whose fault it is that you are upset.

How crazy are we? We say we want a loving relationship and then act to drive love away. When we understand that fleeting thoughts fuel our feelings, we take our feelings less seriously.

Since ruminating on our negative thoughts gives us seemingly logical reasons for why we are upset, learning not to be enamored by our thoughts is daily work. Those reasons cast blame on other people and circumstances in the world. We'll search for validation anywhere we can find it.

We have all heard variations on the "Is there anyone else up there?" joke. I offer my own about a man praying to God.

Man: My spouse is terrible. What should I do?

God: Be kind to her.

Man: No, you don't understand. I'm fed up.

God: I gave you the ability to be kind. Be kind to her.

Man: Is there anyone else up there?

No amount of evidence will convince someone, who is not ready, to give up grievances. They will continue to do the mental equivalent of banging their head against the wall and wondering why they have a headache.

When you gripe about your spouse, you are showing that you value the noise in your head over love. Is the chatter in your head so compelling that you place it above the opportunity for a present-moment connection with your spouse?

Reflect for a moment on [St. Thomas Aquinas' wisdom](#): "To love

is to will the good of the other.” Are you on your spouse’s side? If you were, wouldn’t you, like Honnold, work to train your mind every day?

[A study of long-lasting marriages](#) found that “humor, enthusiasm, and validation (actively listening to and understanding your partner)” increased over time. Importantly, “Criticisms dropped off, as did the truly toxic, divorce-courting habits like stonewalling. Men demonstrated less anger, and women less contempt.”

Practice relaxing your grip on your petty grievances and notice how much better you feel. You won’t be giving up anything of importance, and you will come to rest in the comfort of your true self.

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