



Heart to Heart
Hand in Hand
Shoulder to Shoulder

OTHER BOOKS BY MARTIN LOWENTHAL

Buddha and the Art of Intimacy

Alchemy of the Soul

Dawning of Clear Light

Embrace Yes

Opening the Heart of Compassion
(co-authored with Lar Short)



Heart to Heart
Hand in Hand
Shoulder to Shoulder

a guide to strengthening intimate relationships

Martin Lowenthal, Ph.D.

Dedicated Life Publications



Published in the United States by

Dedicated Life Publications

Printed by BookSurge LLC, an Amazon.com company

Copyright © 2009 Martin Lowenthal

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission from the authors.

ISBN: 1-4392-3159-1

Cover and book design by Grace E. Pedalino
“Peony” cover photo by Grace E. Pedalino

Acknowledgments

There are many people who directly and indirectly assisted in the development and completion of this book.

I am profoundly grateful to my wife Karen Edwards who has been my learning partner for the last twenty five years. I am also thankful for her support, encouragement, and her editorial comments.

I want to thank the couples and counseling clients I have worked with who let me into their worlds and shared with me not only their distress and issues, but their courage and their determination to connect, to love, and to grow.

Special gratitude is due Grace Pedalino for her helpful editing and her wonderful aesthetic sensibility that she brought to the design and layout of the entire book.

May this book be of benefit to all who read it and may it serve to weave a fabric of loving, sacred connections throughout our world.



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
PREFACE	1
INTRODUCTION	4
Longing for Belonging	4
1 INTIMATE BONDS	9
What is Intimacy?	9
Erotic Intimacy with Life	10
Outer and Inner Dimensions	11
Paradoxes of Intimacy	12
Intimacy of We	13
Building Relationship as Container	15
Boundaries Support Viability	16
Energy of Intimacy and Relationships	17
Relationship as Environment	18
Three Important Kinds of Intimacy	19
2 THREE TYPES OF INTIMATE BONDS	21
Heart to Heart Intimacy	22
Hand in Hand Intimacy	23
Shoulder to Shoulder Intimacy	24
3 RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT	26
Stages	27
Laurie	28
Heart Postures	29
4 A SACRED HOME FOR LOVE	33
Romantic Love	34
Courtly Love	35
Love	36
Sense of Home	38
Belonging	38
A Home for Giving	38

Gratitude	39
Gratitude Practice for Couples	41
5 CONSCIOUS RELATING AND COMMUNICATING	43
Head and Heart Communications	43
Relating Beyond Differences and Disagreements	45
Speaking and Listening	46
Strengthening Bonds Through Challenge	47
A Middle Way	48
Making Marriage the Embodiment of Love	48
Meditation for Amplifying Loving Presence	50
6 LOVE AND MARRIAGE	51
Loving and Giving	51
Love and Space	52
Risk of Being Hurt	52
Abuse	52
Healthy Risks	53
Emotion as Ways of Connecting	54
Working with Emotions	55
Marriage as Teacher	55
7 SHARING COMMUNICATIONS	58
Intimately Witnessing Each Other	58
Trust	59
Sharing Is Not The Same as “Active Listening” and “Paraphrasing”	59
Learning About Ourselves	61
Sharing Creates a Context of Home	62
Humility and Obedience	63
Relationship Grows as We Grow	64
Jesse and Leonard	64
Sharing Guidelines	64
Jeff and Carol	67
Debra and Joan	68

	Fran and Susan	69
8	EXERCISES TO STRENGTHEN	
	HEART TO HEART CONNECTION	71
	Love maps	71
	Preparation Exercise to Enhance	
	Love Maps Through Sharing	71
	Making Amends	73
	Meditation	74
	Radiating Loving Energy from the Inside Out	74
	Seeing and Being Seen with	
	Eyes of the Beloved	76
	Partner Meditations	77
	Co-Spiring	78
	Hand Dancing	79
	Practice of Praise	79
9	CREATING A HOME OF INTERACTIONS HAND IN HAND	81
	Cultivating the Qualities of Love,	
	Interest, and Beauty	81
	Teresa and Jim	82
	Some Misconceptions about Marriage	83
	Supporting Hand in Hand Friendship	84
	Stanley and Ruth	85
10	ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS	88
	Hello! How Are You? And Goodbye.	88
	Using Love Maps	90
	Reciprocity	91
	The Art of Saying No	91
	Constructing a Positive History	
	and Philosophy	91
	Hand in Hand Conversations	92
	Five Hours a Week	93
	Loving Presence Meditation (A Home	
	for Sacred Love and a Love of Home)	94

11	WORKING SHOULDER TO SHOULDER AND SIDE BY SIDE	97
	Open to Being Influenced	98
	Mutual Exploration Not Necessarily Resolution	98
	Dialogical Communication	100
	Making Requests and Giving Feedback	100
	Challenging Conversations	100
	Conversation Impasses	102
	Righteousness	103
	Randy and Desmond	103
	Joe and Jan	104
	Intense Emotions Are Difficult to Discuss	106
	Jill and Natalie	107
	Mindreading	108
	The Blame Frame	109
	The Art of Arguing and Dialoguing	109
	Share Feelings Before Having Conversation	109
	Explore More Than Explain	110
	Necessary, True and Kind	110
	Respect Other Points of View	111
	Keep Larger Context of Love in Mind	112
	Dialogue Guidelines	113
	Summary and Additional Suggestions	117
12	SEX AND SKIN TO SKIN INTIMACY	112
	Misusing Sex	120
	Skin to Skin Intimacy and Love	121
	Using the Power of the Sexual	121
	Darren and Amy	123
	Supporting Transcendent Sex	123
	Sandra and Neil	124
	Process of Discovery	124
	Joe and Tina	125
	Physical Communication	125

13	USING PERSONAL AWARENESS TO SUPPORT RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT	127
	Meditation	127
	Intimate Witnessing	129
	Applying Witnessing to Emotional Reactions	130
	Hosting	131
	Bringing Mindfulness to Sharing	131
	Mindfulness Breathing	132
14	MATURE INTIMACY	134
	Development into Mature Intimacy	134
	Virtue in Supporting Each Other	135
	Using the Jewels of Consciousness, Participation, Contribution	137
	Practicing Virtues to Become a Better Partner	138
	Building on Basic Dignity	141
	Collective Habits of the Heart	141
	Walking Our Talk	143
	Vows	144
	Ethics	144
	Encouraging Humility, Courage, and Compassion	145
	Reflection and Inquiry	146
	Self-Inquiry about Feelings	147
	Transforming Core Beliefs and Reactive Self-Images	149
	Flaming Sword Inquiry	152
	Inquiry Meditation	153
15	CARING AND CONSCIOUS WORK	157
	Conscious Relationships	157
	Conscious Speech	158
	Conscious Action	159
	Silence of Presence	159
	Being Wholehearted and Vulnerable	160

	Dancing with Life as a Couple	160
16	DEEPENING INTIMATE BONDS AS THINGS CHANGE	162
	Challenges of Mature Intimacy and Relationships	162
	Growing Stronger	163
	Fleshing Out Conflicts	164
	Growing Beyond Disenchantment	164
	We Are Not Our Problems	166
	Renewing Intimacy, Reviving Relationships	167
	Surrender	168
	Empowerment	170
	Grief and Loss	170
	Deepening Intimacy Through Mutual Celebration	171
	Working with the Three Types of Communication	171
17	ADDITIONAL INTIMACY BUILDERS AND SUGGESTIONS	173
	Dealing with Disenchantment and Wounds	174
	12 Steps of Intimacy Renewal	175
	Making Our Tail Conscious	176
	Intimacy with Ourselves	178
	Hosting	180
	Responsibility	181
	Seven Principles	182
	APPENDIX	184
	Biology of Sacred Intimacy	184
	Head and Heart	185
	Molecules of Romance	185
	Need for Connection	186
	Sexual Desire and Romantic Passion	187
	Neural Imprinting	188
	Memory	190
	Positive Attachment	190

Chemistry of Bonding	191
Mind-Body Interaction	192
The Heart	193
Addiction vs Emotional Intelligence	194
Learning	196
Basic Emotions and Higher	
Cognitive Emotions	197
Shared Resonance	199
Open and Closed Loop Systems	201
ENDNOTES	204

Preface

Intimacy as an experience and intimate bonds as a glue for relationships are the objects of many of our hopes and fears, pleasures and pains, reactions and desires, as well as profound love. When we live and love with the sense of intimacy with others and with life itself, we feel at home. We often think that the experience of intimacy and the relationships that give rise to intimate bonding should emerge naturally in families and between partners in a couple. The reality is that good intimate relationships take conscious care and sustained work.

This book explores the subject of intimacy in couple relationships. It also provides the principles and practical exercises that will strengthen intimate relationships. The book is a companion to *Buddha and the Art of Intimacy: Weaving Sacred Connections of Love*. It is a workbook, but at the same time it stands on its own, incorporating many of the perspectives and points of the other book while expanding those themes in terms of the context of marriage and including numerous examples from couples I have worked with in my counseling practice and in couple's retreats over the past thirty plus years.

For those of you who have read *Buddha and the*

Art of Intimacy, the beginning of this book will be an opportunity to review key ideas before getting into the more applied sections. You can also go directly to the chapters and exercises that interest you, if you comprehend the basic concepts and approaches that are being applied.

For those who are unfamiliar with *Buddha and the Art of Intimacy*, this book includes ample explication of the important frames and understandings that inform the practical suggestions and processes. All of the materials presented here come from my own observations and study as a pastoral counselor, relationship coach, teacher, and my experiences in my own marriage and that of the couples and families I have worked with. I use and have taught all the meditations and practices for becoming more conscious as well as the relationship building exercises that are included. My wife and I, in working to continually improve our own relationship, employ many of these tools on a regular basis, particularly those involving communication. These practices have stood the test of time over the decades that we have been together and the test of love that has deepened and grown over the course of our relationship.

May this book expand your own experience of love, strengthen your intimate connections, inform your understanding of your partner and your relationship, and contribute to the larger collective conversation on the nature, importance, and possibilities for intimacy in our society. May we all come to a sacred sense of relationship with others and with life itself.

*As spring unfolds the dream of the earth,
May you bring each other's hearts to birth.*

*As the ocean finds calm in view of land,
May you love the gaze of each other's mind.*

*As the wind arises free and wild,
May nothing negative control your lives.*

*As kindly as moonlight might search the dark,
So gently may you be when light grows scarce.*

*As surprised as the silence that music opens,
May your words for each other be touched with reverence.*

*As warmly as the air draws in the light,
May you welcome each other's every gift.*

*As elegant as dream absorbing the night,
May sleep find you clear of anger and hurt.*

*As twilight harvests all the day's color,
May love bring you home to each other.*

JOHN O'DONOHUE ¹

Introduction

Longing for Belonging

My wife, Karen, and I met at a conference of poets, artists, and other creative people on the shores of Lake Sebago in Maine in 1984. The moon was full, the month was June, and nights were pleasantly warm. The air was filled with romance and we inhaled deeply and fully. We became entranced with the full dose of Eros' honeyed arrow.

This intense and auspicious beginning to our relationship had all the qualities of a fantasy love story and we knew it. We had both been in long-term relationships before and I had been married and divorced with three children. At the conference, our feelings had the look and feel of puppy love except that we were not puppies. Yet somehow we knew this relationship had a future beyond the rapturous time of the conference.

That future included a great deal of hard work in growing a romantic love into mature intimacy between two very different personalities. Over the decades that we have been deepening and developing our marriage, we have had to learn how to speak together, to share our most troubling feelings, to listen, to be in silence together, to work through heart-wrenching issues, to live with those

conflicts that cannot be resolved, and to build and rely on a collective consciousness of *we*.

We continue to share new parts of ourselves all the time, to discover the world together, to pursue our separate interests, to argue, to laugh and cry, to host others, and to love each other. We have been happy, sad, heartbroken, disappointed, encouraged, supported, and surprised by each other. We have followed both mutual and different spiritual paths. We share some communities and participate in others individually. We have mutual friends, overlapping friends, and separate friends. We work well together on some things and with difficulty on others. We have had to find a balance between my taking significant alone time, particularly meditation retreats, and Karen's desire for company. We have made mistakes, hurt each other, and been the source joy. We can be friends, coworkers, opponents, companions and lovers all in the same day. We each continue to work through old wounds from before and after our meeting and to bring our gifts to the marriage and to the world. In all our toils, troubles and triumphs, we feel blessed and engaged in a sacred story that is vastly larger than ourselves.

While the details of our marriage may be particular, the broad outlines fit the patterns and issues of intimate bonding and relationship development that I found to be true in counseling couples, in talking with others in the field and in reviewing the ever-expanding literature on this subject. In this book, I address a series of questions and topics related to intimacy in the hopes of refining the personal, inner ways you think about intimacy, relationships and your spiritual growth and the conversation we collectively have about these subjects.

What is the nature and potential of intimacy? How can we discover and cultivate this nature personally and



collectively as a couple? How can we move from the superficial patterns in ourselves and in our relationship to the realization of the sacred qualities of our marriage? How does personal spiritual development contribute to relationship development? How does our intimate relationship contribute to spiritual development?

The collective and sacred dynamics of intimacy occur in long-term relationships, in ongoing social settings, and in spontaneous situations where people come together for a common purpose. A decade ago, far from my current home, I experienced a community of family and new and old friends in the week following my mother's passing. At the funeral, the burial, and while participating in the Jewish practice of sitting shivva, many of us became intimate in our sharing of stories, our collective weeping, and our emotional support for each other. We praised the life of my mother and reflected on the momentousness of death. We all spoke, listened, sang songs, broke bread together, and connected in the heartfelt way that authentic grief can evoke.

Intimacy arises and grows in a variety of social interactions and contexts where we are open to having our hearts touched, to experience connection, and to participate in the social dynamics of communion and relationship building. In a sense we are always connected to the social world around us in that our very presence contributes to making the social environment what it is. The qualities we manifest in our presence and the ways we choose to interact color the environment that other people experience. The questions perpetually being asked of us are “What is the nature of our contribution in this moment? Are we relating in supportive and loving ways? Are we engaged in the vitality of interaction? Are we creating the kind of home in our relationships that we

mutually desire and collectively value?” These questions and many others will guide our exploration of the subject of intimacy and its role in growing and strengthening our relationships.



Intimate Bonds

What is Intimacy?

Intimacy is what happens when we connect to other people and life in the moment. This meeting can evoke joy, pain, love, eroticism, curiosity, and a deep sense of knowing. Intimacy is direct, subtle, simple, complex, desirable, frightening, explicit, everyday and sacred.

To be intimate means to be fully present, engaged, vibrantly alive, and at home in relationships. The experience of intimacy involves three essential elements: the closeness of connection, being at home, and caring.

Closeness, a sense of familiarity and an innermost knowing arises when we sense an emotional connection. The word “intimate” derives from the Latin word “intimare,” *to make familiar with—to make known* and “intimus,” *innermost*. Intimacy emerges from the experience of communion, a sense of knowing and possibly being known, and a feeling that a deep part of our being is engaged. We are touched in some inner way. We can be intimate with a lover, a child, a friend, a partner, with ourselves, with nature and the world around us, and with the Sacred.

Each person experiences intimacy in his or her own way. All intimacy gives us a sense of belonging, of home. Intimacy is



about creating a home in a relationship.

Erotic Intimacy with Life

When we sense in our body and our being the aliveness of the moment, we are intimate with life. Our experience of connection has an erotic quality. This erotic quality is our vibrant connection to life and each other, making people and things meaningful, significant, and valuable. In this way we transform the raw material of experience into the beauty of loving relationship. This erotic intimacy moves us beyond feelings of happiness, support, and love to the embodiment of these qualities as ways of being individually and collectively in our relationships. Engaging this intimate connection, we can actively create an environment for each other that manifests love. To be erotic in this way opens our hearts, fills us with sacred passion, enlivens our soul with the radiance of love and brings joy to our very presence.

Intimacy both transports us out of ourselves and takes us into ourselves. We enter the inside of our experience, feeling loving connection, and a sense of praise and gratitude. As we open beyond the confines of our minds and bodies, we surrender and serve the loving connection and aliveness that emerges. We give our unique and personal gift as a gesture of our love.

In the most intimate moments, we enter the space and flow of something beyond the personal without the thought of beyond. We live on the edge of our lives with a sense of freedom. The experience of aliveness mobilizes and directs our energies to amplify our presence with each other in the present moment.

Intimacy is like playing improvisational jazz with another person. Working with a common melody of shared feelings and bonds, we each bring our own instrument and variations to the music. Just as a musician listens to the others in a band so we can improvise based on what we hear. Like musicians taking turns leading, we make our own riffs even as the relationship

keeps the basic container of the melody and the flow of the music. As in jazz, we bring our own personality, style, strengths and weaknesses to each piece, and the process of playing together involves learning when to contribute something personal and when to get out of the way and be supportive to the contributions of others, always maintaining the integrity of playing together.

In this playing together, we are constantly engaged in the undoing of one moment into the other, of rigidity into openness, of what has solidified into fluidity. It immerses us in the flow of life energy, and we are carried away by its insistent current.

Playing together creates a home, for whatever period it lasts, in the relationship. As we continue to work together, this home becomes more and more established by the intimate bonds that are formed and nourished. These bonds grow from the seeds of our loving nature and the experiences of intimacy taking root in the soil of our personal and collective lives. These bonds can become both emotionally strong and profoundly sacred.

Outer and Inner Dimensions

Intimacy is multidimensional, working at several different levels simultaneously. The outer dimension, its socially recognized form, includes marriage, a team, or a friendship. In this domain we create a supportive home for our family and for others to visit. The home in the multiplicity of relationships hosts a variety of activities and interactions and these play an important role in weaving the fabric of the larger community.

The inner dimension of intimacy includes the feelings and heart postures we experience as a result of being together. This dimension is nourished and sustained by the external relationships of being part of a community and by the regular attention and energy that are brought to mutual activities and connections. When these connections atrophy or are



fragmented, the inner sense of intimacy diminishes.

To tend to the garden of our intimacy, we want to bring caring, respect, and gratitude. To care means we extend ourselves in a heartfelt way. To respect suggests that we recognize the basic dignity and worth of each other. Gratitude maintains the perspective that, over time, we receive so much that contributes to the quality of our lives and that we have a context in which our love and potential can grow. When these qualities are present, we feed each other and the relationship such that we all blossom. When the bonds are strong and our participation wholehearted, we digest the ordinary nutrients of daily life transforming them into the flesh and muscle of a dynamic relationship.

These dimensions of intimacy mutually enhance one another. Each has a role to play in the full realization of intimacy. Each serves the Sacred and supports the environment in which people can live an intimate life.

Paradoxes of Intimacy

Intimacy demands that we be authentically ourselves and at the same time that we give of ourselves wholeheartedly, letting go of self-centeredness. It is challenging to face this paradox and find a way to navigate the requirements of both elements. Being genuine requires a deep intimacy with ourselves. Being connected with another person demands that we become intimate with them. We are called upon to live in the middle of these intimacies and sustain a relationship while being on the edge of the unknown, a growing edge where familiar habits can be left behind and new possibilities arise.

Intimacy does not mean agreement, validation, and equal reciprocity from another person. It does involve being ourselves as we weave the threads of connection and mutual knowing into everyday interactions, close times, and times of challenge.

When we embrace intimacy, it becomes a vehicle for

revealing the mystery of our sacred nature, our authentic selves, and our fears. Intimacy can penetrate the defenses of our presentational selves to the fearsome secrets that inhibit our full engagement with life.

In our exploration of the geography of intimacy, we will see that the act of becoming intimate transforms everyday reality into the experienced reality of a collective *we* creating a fundamental connection to life, to each other, and to the Sacred.

The intimacy we are talking about here is not essentially about sexual or physical interactions and the love is not essentially about romantic love. Sexual intimacy and romantic love are really part of a much larger and more sacred domain of intimacy. Our culture has tended to imprison our ideas about intimacy in the confines of romance and sexuality and it is time we free our personal associations and collective discussions from such narrow views. I invite you to consider that intimacy takes root whenever we experience meaningful emotional connection, bonding and communion, a sense of knowing and being known, and a sense of sacred engagement.

Intimacy of *We*

Authentic intimacy touches us in our very core in some way. Intimacy arises with lovers, children, friends, partners, ourselves, the natural world, and the Sacred. All intimacy creates a home in the relationship, giving rise to a sense of belonging. As our connection grows, so too does our sense of home. The increasing feeling of belonging strengthens the bonds that mutually embrace us. From this bonding a mutual sense of *we* emerges as a collective consciousness.

In *we*, our personal universe opens into belonging to a larger social universe. The *we* of a couple, of teams, of work groups, of churches, synagogues, and mosques, of friendships, and of many group affiliations embeds us in numerous social universes, each with its own collective consciousness. As we identify with



each larger community, its collective sensibilities are expressed through us. We become a location where the larger body of the community is manifested and acts. The culture of the whole is mutually experienced and enacted in social interactions and evolving social roles.

In the experience of *we*, there is an excitement from being more than one plus one equals two. One plus one equals an entity called “we” that is bigger and more inclusive than the energy of two separate people combined. This collective dynamic enhances each individual field of energy and generates a third field, a collective consciousness that encompasses a collective identity, attitudes, values, history, and sensitivities.

We can think of the *we* that develops as a collective being, an entity or larger body, that includes each of us and has its own life, dynamics and consciousness, not apart from us but beyond each of us individually. By participating in and nourishing this collectivity, we build a consciousness that has capacities, intelligences, qualities, creativity and powers we cannot have as an isolated, disconnected individual.

The life force of the collective consciousness of marriage is intimacy. Through intimacy we experience the vitality, the communion, and the qualitative connection that all parties identify with and feel bound to sustain. It is given form in the body and in the imagination and consciousness of each participant and exists as a sacred field.

This mutual *we* needs to be nourished. If the sense of *we* dies, the relationship becomes empty, often haunted by the ghosts of hope, disappointment, resentment, grudges, and the stench of its own decay.

We feed the sense of *we* by cultivating a heart posture of inclusion, by developing the sense that we are in this together, by caring about the impact of decisions and events on our partner and on the relationship. We create the *we* day-to-day by the way we attend to each other and create an environment

of love and home. We deepen the connection by sharing from our heart and allowing our partner to touch our innermost being. We build the relationship and make it part of the larger community by working together to welcome others, in participating in community events, in raising children, and in supporting each other bringing our gifts to the world.

One of the wonderful, paradoxical aspects of authentic intimacy is that in the creation of a durable *we*, we find a place where we personally belong and where the integrity and significance of our individuality is respected and maintained. We embrace each other for who we are, without the burden of seeking or the obligation of giving agreement. We do not depend on each other to validate our value or reality. We are supported in being full participants in the relationship as ourselves. In fact, we are called upon to give our unique gifts to the marriage that in turn supports our bringing these gifts to the larger community

Building Relationship as Container

As we come together as partners, the edge where our two worlds meet is a place of tremendous energy, like the shore where the ocean and the land meet. This meeting can vary from the powerful turbulence of crashing waves to the caress of a gentle surf. Sometimes we feel electric with excitement and at other times relaxed and comforted by the sense of home. Our mutual *we* becomes a growing relational container for the intensity of the energies of intimacy.

In this sense, intimacy has many of the qualities of a high wire act with both of us as tightrope walkers. We must deal with flux and uncertainty while trying to remain balanced. The act depends on not only maintaining our own equilibrium, but as we shift back and forth, to not make moves that will throw off our partner who is on the same thread. This requires dynamic harmony that builds an ever stronger relational context.



Over time, our marriage grows to contain, accept, and integrate even conflictual differences. Even as these differences have the potential to fragment the relationship and dissolve intimacy, we are challenged to identify what they really are and to use them to learn from each other as we build on our similarities, share feelings and mutual experiences. We set boundaries around these differences and tensions and maintain a mutual sense of the larger context of the relationship. In this way we keep issues from dominating the relationship by giving them a place where they can be seen in proportion. Holding an issue in a larger context keeps us from being stranded on an island of obsessive thinking and feeling that goes round and round upon itself and supports our confidence in the strength of the marriage.

Boundaries Support Viability

A marriage, like each of us individually, is a system of social, emotional and spiritual patterns and is a subsystem of larger systems such as extended family, community, and ethnic group. As a container, the relationship has boundaries that serve many functions. The boundaries of our marriage system contain our potential for action and connection and can mobilize, manage and direct our energy in service to our family. They provide clarity about what is internal and what is external to the *we* and define how we fit into our larger communities. Boundaries support communication between us and between us as a couple with other couples. They clarify many of the roles we play in the larger community such as when we participate in religious ceremonies or as parents in meetings with teachers of our children.

In our modern world we often do not know how to relate to boundaries since the traditional guidelines have been undermined or have even disappeared. Attempting to maintain rigid boundaries may feel more secure at times as defenses against a

variety of threatening possibilities, but over the long haul they undermine the viability of a relationship because they limit our responses to change and thus inhibit growth. This is particularly true if we want to encourage each other's development over a lifetime. Rigid exclusions and artificial defenses tend to undermine authenticity and sap the vitality from love. Allowing some permeability of boundaries supports fresh elements being introduced into our lives together and the sense that we collectively can grow.

As we forge a container that can hold the dynamic forces and feelings that arise, we want to mutually create a nurturing environment for each other that supports our gradual maturing and encourages us to bring our special gifts to the world. Building a strong container requires both commitment and discipline. For a marriage to bear fruit both personally and mutually, we must embrace it as the place within which the energies of love and relationship will cook and transform us.

Energy of Intimacy and Relationships

We all know the feeling of being energized by love and can sense the energetic bond that exists between lovers, between parents and children, and between members of a high functioning team.

There are three kinds of energy at work in intimate relationships: flows, fields, and bonds. Flows refer to what goes back and forth between us. We send energy to someone else when we give them our attention and make efforts to connect with them. We cannot measure it but we can feel it. What we experience as a sender and receiver can vary depending on the intensity and character of the energy.

Fields are the spheres of influence we generate through our presence. Our field is experienced more as a quality such as caring, disdain, welcoming, distancing, or love. Fields set a certain atmosphere and we may be attracted or repelled by the



environment of a person's field.

Bonds, or binding energy, define the boundaries and nature of the relationship. Bonds maintain the integrity of the relationship and stabilize the activities of flows and fields. At a personal level, within our self-system, binding energy is what holds our belief systems together—our identities, world views, heart postures, cosmologies. At the level of a relationship, binding energy gives coherence to our collective consciousness of shared feelings, meanings, values, and goals.

We want to cultivate the qualities that enhance binding energy as part of a growthful relationship—love, trust, respect, caring, admiration, willingness to share, willingness to be cared for, sense of sacred, clarity, authenticity, playfulness, and devotion. Being conscious in our personal growth, psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually supports us individually bringing these qualities to our relationships. We also need to mutually work to bring these qualities to our marriage so that we strengthen not only the heart to heart connection but also the environment of the relationship as whole, day-to-day, hand in hand. Bonding transforms our heart posture from the desire to get or create connection to the felt reality of having connection. The connection becomes a given, a familiar home, and our task becomes consciously growing and caretaking the intimacy that holds us in its embrace.

Relationship as Environment

Living and working alone can often mean that our habitual patterns of thinking and behaving go unobserved and unchallenged. Living and working in relationships tend to confront us with our disagreeable habits at the same time that connecting with others can stir up our worst fears and excite us with possibilities for satisfying deep emotional hopes and longings. As we develop intimacy, we also become more conscious of our cycling between peaks and valleys and how our

rough edges affect other people. A strong loving relationship can support us in outgrowing the stuck places and internal conflicts so that we can be more present with our connections of caring.

If we commit ourselves to becoming more conscious and to opening our hearts, we quickly see that we need to work through psychological and emotional barriers that were erected at earlier times to keep us safe from pain and ignorant of our underlying fears and grief. We see all the ways we exiled ourselves from life out of reaction, spite, or fatigue. Our goal becomes one of tapping the energy contained in our physical, emotional and spiritual contractions that inhibit our hearts and preoccupy our minds and placing all that in service to our relationship and our work in the world.

A marriage that is able to create a space for us to share the entire range of feelings and provide a loving container into which we can place long-ignored pains can launch us on the important journey of transcending our self-centeredness and seeing beyond our personal history. We forgive pains and reconcile with our past. We grieve what was of value that has passed on in ways that we take the value into our hearts as inspiration. When we grieve fully, the remnants of past pain bring forth a confidence and gratitude. We replace ancient sufferings made up of fears, frustration, sadness, and confusion with aliveness, compassion, and a heartfelt tenderness.

Three Important Kinds of Intimacy

Ongoing relationships that involve love, bonding and a sense of home are built on three kinds of intimacy. In Heart to Heart intimacy we share a passion about each other and want to reveal our innermost feelings and to know those of our partner. In this form of intimacy we embrace each other and the object of our attention is each other. Hand in Hand intimacy builds and maintains the environment of a relationship through the



everyday interactions and responses to bids for attention. This form of intimacy gives us a sense of home in the relationship through the way we greet each other, move to be close to each other, look at each other, ask for, receive, and give attention, and express everyday caring. In Shoulder to Shoulder intimacy we are engaged in mutual activities that focus our attention on accomplishing something—playing games, building a house, raising children, performing community service, solving problems, singing together, having adventures, and worshipping, praying and meditating together.

THREE TYPES OF INTIMATE BONDS

Intimacy involves love, connection, and a sense of home. Yet the dynamic and experience of intimacy arises and grows in terms of three aspects of a relationship. Heart to heart intimacy arises from our sense of “being,” engages through love and passion, prefers face-to-face interactions, and is refined through transformation. Hand in hand intimacy relates primarily to “having” a relationship, creating an environment of love, has the sense of being circular, and is supported by virtues that build the character of each of us and of the relationship as a whole. Shoulder to shoulder intimacy, through our “doing,” creates our legacy, individually and collectively, that contributes to the larger community and the future, tends to be linear in that it is more functional and goal-oriented, and often reflects our sense of mission/calling in life.

Heart to Heart	Being	Engagement through love	Face to Face	Transformation
Hand in Hand	Having	Environment of Love	Circular	Character
Shoulder to Shoulder	Doing	Creating Legacy	Linear	Mission/Calling

Heart to Heart Intimacy

Heart to heart intimacy flowers when some innermost core of our being is touched by another and we touch their heart in a similar way. We share deep longings, feelings, and caring.

In heart to heart connections we become real to each other as we share the erotic aliveness of sharing with each other verbally, physically, sexually, and spiritually. We focus on both the similarities and differences that make for mutual endearment. The heart to heart brings out the depth of feelings and our potential for intense focused relating. Great pleasure, pain, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction flow from the vibrancy of the feelings and the concentration of attention in heart to heart intimacy.

Heart to heart intimacy, at the beginning of a relationship, focuses on the deliciousness of the experience of connection in the moment. The concentration on each other creates a small circle of *we*, now. Other people, things, demands, and considerations are treated as external to the relationship. They feel like distractions. We are fully immersed in the river of our heart connection. We are alive and reborn moment to moment in the rapture of communion, of feeling at one with our partner.

Beyond the initial flush of love, heart to heart intimacy plays a critical role in the special moments that couples and friends have together and at times when the relationship is facing a challenge. The challenge can center around an important event or changes in the circumstances our lives.

Heart to heart intimacy both unsettles us and supports us. It can lead to tears, joy, grief, laughter, wounding, tenderness, healing, and the warmest hearth. This aspect of intimacy contains sweetness, hazard, wholehearted engagement, and the possibility of ecstasy.

Heart to heart intimacy always involves self-reflection, which can be a kind of self-confrontation, and the sharing of

insights and inner dynamics with our partner. In heart to heart intimacy, we encounter the paradox that as we let someone into the innermost parts of ourselves, we open the door for ourselves as well.

Hand in Hand Intimacy

Sustaining connection requires creating an ongoing way of relating that includes all parts of life—our daily routines, caring for our living space, hosting, being entertained, having friendships, work, navigating life cycles, change, learning, and growing. This daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally, and yearly connection challenges us to create the environment of home, an environment of the marriage we want that reflects the qualities, meanings, and values that we hold dear. The process of creating and maintaining this environment of love and connection establishes further bonds and deepens those that are there.

Mutual engagement in this process gives rise to hand in hand intimacy. We co-create the sense of home together in the way we greet each other, the way we move in a room to be near each other, the way we stand when we are with other people, the way we say goodbye, the way we ask our partner to pass the salt, the way we look at each other, the way we share about our day, the way we respond to bids for attention, and the way we say good night. In other words, hand in hand intimacy is the home we experience in our marriage over time more than in the intensity of our feeling.

The exquisite beauty of the heart to heart connection needs to be framed in the simple beauty of mundane, day-to-day, hand in hand intimacy. Without that frame, the energies of the heart lack a home, a context, and so have a tendency to wander.

John Gottman, along with many family therapists, argues that the most important predictor of satisfaction and durability in a relationship centers around how people handle hand



in hand intimacy, the day-to-day bidding and responding in relationships. The hand in hand relies for its durability on supportive routines and rituals, on an attitude of freshness—doing something again for the first time—and the capacity for delightfully surprising variation. While unremitting change leaves a fragmented house for the relationship, skillfully introducing variations in routines and new activities periodically maintains enough of the edge of the unknown to keep the marriage alert and exciting.

Hand in hand maintains an ecology of all the factors of life in ways that support each of us and encourage a heart posture of love as a defining characteristic of our marriage in all of its dynamics and manifestations. Hand in hand intimacy builds confidence in the marriage itself that can hold all the cycles and variations of our feelings. The daily deposits of attention, kindness, caring, and respect grow a connective savings account that is needed during times of stress and emotional lows and for investing in the work that we individually and collectively do in the larger community and world.

Shoulder to Shoulder Intimacy

Mutually creating a home, raising children, working together, teaming up, making decisions, resolving conflicts, and taking on projects—all these bring us together to accomplish something. Working together to achieve an outcome, whether for one of us, for the relationship, for our family, for our friendship, for the larger community, for our company, for our team, or for the causes we support develops shoulder to shoulder intimacy. We experience this most obviously as members of a team, as co-workers in an organization, and as parents raising children. We also have experienced it as siblings and friends playing together as children.

Shoulder to shoulder is more activity based. We are comrades, brothers, sisters, and companions. The intimacy is

New Types of Intimate Bonds

deepened as we share activities and experiences at the same time. Meeting challenges and solving problems together strengthens the bonds, like soldiers who have served together to fight a common enemy, or neighbors who build a playground, or classmates who study together to prepare for an exam.

In the film *Nowhere in Africa*, the couple reclaims their relationship through the intimacy of fighting shoulder to shoulder against locusts that attacked their crops and threatened their harvest.

Shoulder to shoulder intimacy results from playing, traveling, making and listening to music, dancing, and having adventures together. Celebration also binds us in this kind of intimacy and brings forth a collective joy, grief, and praise.

Working together brings out the part of us that wants to make a contribution to life and to create a legacy that will be carried on in the world. The relationships we form around offering our gifts to the world bring both inspiration and satisfaction and play a vital role in creating a home in the world and a home for those in need.



Relationship Development

Our difficulties with intimacy and irritations at the challenges of relationships arise partly from our assumption that relating is a natural process and that we *should* already know how to make relationships work. Yet intimate relationships take skills that are only developed over time and with experience. We are misled by the simplicity of intimate connections of our early years of infancy and early childhood. While these years are important in setting a foundation for our later sense of relatedness and love, they are only a beginning preparation for the complexities and paradoxes of adolescent and adult relationships.

Relationships are multifaceted mirrors that always reflect back at us something about ourselves that we might not otherwise see. Intimate relationships bring all the core issues of our existence to the surface from our underlying fears and longings, to our reactive habits of feeling and thinking, to our interaction dynamics, to how we love and are loved, to how we handle pain, pleasure, disappointment, success, and loss, to our deepest sense of who we are and what our lives are about. If this all seems challenging, it is. Life and relationships are challenging. At the same time, to not meet these challenges is to relegate ourselves to numbness, denial and alienated lives. Working with the full texture of intimacy brings us to life and taps our

greatest potential for aliveness and making a difference.

In intimate relationships, particularly those that involve romance and parenting, we feel the rawness of fundamental questions of being human—how to be in our bodies, how to be authentic, how to be fully alive, how we affect others, how we connect to people and to the larger world around us, how we become more conscious and compassionate, and how we sanctify life and our relationships.

Intimate relationships are paradoxical in that they provide a home where we can relax and feel profound belonging and, as we and they grow, many unknowns and wild energies and dynamics must be integrated that can make us feel unsafe. Intimacy unmask and exposes us to ourselves and to others and puts us in the middle of some of the most powerful and mysterious forces of life. We come to realize that relationships are always a living process that involve change, growth, and challenges and that they are never a finished edifice that we simply live in and do periodic maintenance. Problem solving is important but does not address the deeper nature of relationships and the ways we need to grow into mature connection. Embracing intimacy as a path commits us to becoming more conscious, more open, more connected, more intentional, and more able to use each difficulty as an opportunity for personal and mutual growth.

Stages

Each of these forms of intimacy and their integration creates and sustains a collective entity of *we*. In the context of a marriage relationship, which is the primary focus of this book, these three general forms of intimacy—heart to heart, hand in hand, and shoulder to shoulder—along with skin to skin/sexual intimacy play vital roles in growing the relationship through the stages that lead to relationship maturity.

In a simplified way of describing these stages, we could say that a love relationship begins with mutual attraction, desire,



and infatuation. As we get to know each other we seek to bring the loving feelings into everyday life and the complex dynamics of our existing relationships with friends and family and co-workers. We work to establish bonds with each other given the demands of the other contexts of our lives and become more realistic in our perceptions of our partner.

A participant in one of my relationship retreats expressed this very well.

LAURIE

During the first six months of my relationship with David, we both felt incredible and got along so well. We both said to each other that we had found the perfect partner, the person who matched our dreams. Gradually, after we had started to live together, little habits of his began to annoy me. I suppose the same was true for him, because we started to get into fights about all kinds of little things. We reached a point of doubting whether we should be together. One day we had this heart to heart talk about what was happening and realized neither of us matched exactly our dreams of a partner, and yet, we still loved each other. We were finally seeing each other for who we are and knew the bond we felt was worth the work that it would take to make our relationship a lasting one. Looking back at that time eleven years ago, that day was the birth of our marriage and what had happened before was our act of conception.

There is usually disillusionment on both parts as we attempt to weave bonds together and create a home in the relationship. This is a period of discovery, inner adjustments and outer adaptations, and the sustained effort of making the details of life together work for each person and the relationship as a whole. We create a container of mutual caring and support for the relationship and even for family and friends. We learn how to process the tensions and conflicts that inevitably arise and deal with disenchantment in relation to our hopes and dreams

Relationship Development

that we naively and naturally bring to marriage. Sometimes this stage is called *companionate love*. This kind of love is dedicated to nurturing the relationship through time and in the face of the challenges that naturally arise.

Continuing to work on building the relationship engenders confidence in each other and the relationship itself. Over time the doubts that may have arisen during times of conflict, disillusionment and disenchantment dissolve, the bonds grow stronger, and the experience of love deepens into sweetness. The couple relationship has become not only a context for each partner but also a part of the larger social fabric of extended family, neighborhoods, friendship networks, religious groups and various other communities.

These stages of relationship call upon each partner to grow and mature emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Our personal capacity to grow both supports and is supported by the relationship and its challenges. The marital environment is shaped by and shapes the evolution of the personal attitudes, ways of perceiving, and underlying beliefs of each person—what can be called *heart postures*.

Heart Postures

What we experience is very much determined by what we attend to and what heart postures we bring to each situation and relationship. Our heart posture is our sense of the nature of reality as we have come to know it and experience it. It includes our attitudes about ourselves and the world and determines much of our perceptions and ways of relating.

If our heart posture is governed by anger and the idea that we are a victim of the world, we will look for insults and threats, behave defensively, and may be hostile in our relationships. When we operate from a conscious or unconscious heart posture that intense caring will lead to pain, we will maintain a vigilant eye for signs of betrayal withholding some inner



commitment out of caution. On the other hand, a confident heart posture, with the belief that love is worth the risk of pain and we are able to work through personal challenges, enables us to engage fully and to explore the greater possibilities of our intimate connections. If our heart posture is governed by love, we see ourselves as a lover of life, seeking opportunities for relationships and engaging intimately in the world with all of its challenges.

When we operate from a belief that we are too damaged to learn and attend to our fear of making a mistake, we will avoid difficult conversations with others and simply add evidence to our indictment of our own inadequacy. Yet when we are able to assume a heart posture of being able to learn new skills throughout our life and attend to improving our communications, we will find that our interactions with others are more enjoyable and connective.

Whenever we feel imprisoned in a limiting and isolating heart posture, one of the most difficult tasks we face in breaking out of our confinement is having to realize how much of what we think we know about ourselves, human nature, emotions, love, and intimacy “isn’t necessarily so.” All of us come face-to-face with the realization that what we thought we understood is fundamentally colored by our reactive feelings of fear, anger, sadness and hope.

When we take on a new heart posture, it is like living in a different culture with its own codification of reality, its own guidelines for maturity, and its own possibilities for transformation. A new heart posture takes work and is based on opening to the direct experience of reality as it is. It requires that our relationship with life become fresh, allowing our deeper nature to emerge.

We are all pioneers in the wilderness of intimacy. We are challenged to mature beyond the superficial images of relating that pervade our media and the simplistic rules of public moralists.

Relationship Development

It takes skill and conscious dedication to forge the bonds of enduring relationships that, in the past, were an integral part of normal social and family development in traditional societies. Our lives are so impacted by the fragmenting changes in the work we do, in our mobility patterns, within even residential communities, in extended family structures, and gender roles, as well as the great number of personal opportunities and choices, that we seek a deeper kind of relatedness. If we are to find authentic belonging, love, and sacred connection, personally and collectively, we must explore and cultivate new levels of intimacy.

Fundamental to our nature is the sense of connectedness. Even when we feel that the sense of connection has been lost or wounded, the yearning for union with others and larger realities is itself an expression of this nature. This dynamic of yearning and connection underlies the intimacy to be found in romantic relationships, teams, art, and religion. When connection is not experienced, we feel alienation and loneliness, a sense that something is not quite right. We feel separate from others, torn apart internally, and disjointed in life.

We see intimacy as a way to heal those fractures and bring us into a sense of fitting with each other, the world, life, and the Sacred. We want to unite head and heart, body and mind, self and other. By accepting and including all of who we are individually and collectively, we recognize that at root we include many feelings and thoughts but are essentially indivisible.

While this book uses marriage as a prototype of intimate bonds, as you read, it is useful to think about and apply the principles and exercises to friendships, work relationships, partnerships and many other forms of close relationships. In marriage we forge a living, growing collective container for intimacy. It can become a vessel that holds the dynamic forces and feelings that arise between two people over time and provides a nurturing environment so that each can grow,



ripen and bring forth fruit. This container can only be made strong by commitment and discipline. For a marriage to bear fruit both personally and mutually, we must embrace it as the place within which the energies of love and relationship will cook and transform us.

This book invites you to create your own experiential tapestry. By absorbing each section, image-by-image and feeling by feeling, you enter the wondrous world of the heart that integrates the personal with the collective, mind and heart, the ordinary and the Sacred.



A Sacred Home for Love

*O Love is the crooked thing,
There is nobody wise enough
To find out all that is in it
For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away
And the shadows eaten the moon.*

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS, BROWN PENNY

Intimacy has sacred power, not because we sometimes get glimpses of bliss when we are high on romantic love, but because we relax into a connection that bridges self and other and we take on a more inclusive and self-transcendent heart posture. Intimacy is sacred because it moves us to grow beyond our superficial habits of mind and feeling into our great possibilities. An intimate relationship offers us the opportunity to use the materials of our reactions as fertile ground from which to grow awareness, love, compassion and dedication to the larger stories of life.

Our attention to the details of making our relationship work and our basic attitude of respect brings forth a sense of



the Sacred in everyday life. The Sacred, in all its greatness and glory, is enacted in the cycles and actions of ordinary life. With sacred vision we honor the rich quality of ordinary things and participate wholeheartedly in ordinary actions, such as greeting our partner, taking walks together, cooking, and decorating our home.

By enacting the steps of the sacred dance of intimacy, we are not simply lovers, friends and coworkers. We are spiritual consorts who play an energizing and encouraging role in each other's relational and spiritual development. We awaken and initiate each other into the deeper nature and full magnificence of our sacred relating to produce value, benefit and beauty in the world.

Romantic Love

Passion, particularly the passion of love, has inspired people into action and connection since the dawn of our species. A beautiful moment with another person can penetrate to our core and evoke a body-wrenching ache that awakens our desire to connect. At the time, we have little idea where this intensity of feeling comes from or where it will lead or where it fits into the life we have known until the moment before. We become infatuated as much with the aliveness and energy of this passion as we do with the person who stirred those feelings in us.

Sometimes our passion produces moments of divine grace and other times it sweeps us up in torrents of fears and longings that confuse and disorient us. In times of infatuation, we are absorbed with our lover and with the desire for him or her. At other times, the trials of disappointment and frustration can leave us out of touch with the other person and prompt us to behave in hurtful ways.

*Romantic love is a delicious art form but not a durable one.
In the end, its most persistent practitioners confess that they*

would like to escape from its patterned illusion into the next more realistically satisfying stage of an enduring relationship.

ERICH FROMM²

Courtly Love

Our cultural fantasies about romantic love have their roots in distortions of the courtly love tradition that emerged in twelfth-century France with the poetry of the troubadours. This poetry saw the romantic feelings as a vehicle for connecting with the Divine even as it shifted the sense of sacred connection from the domain of religion and placed it in the mundane world. Courtly love maintained its spiritual emphasis in its attention to the idealized connection between a man and a woman. This ideal was often given voice in stories of a knight and a lady who would fall in love although she was already married. Their love would not be consummated in sexual union but their passion and eroticism would be channeled into accomplishing tasks on behalf of their love that would spiritually purify them and lead to their transformation.

By foregoing the sexual relationship in the mundane world, the knight and the lady would focus their attention on the pure intensity of the feeling and the quality of love within each of them. They would unite the two dimensions of the secular and the Sacred. Through his devotion to a woman and her devotion to virtue, they would tap a powerful transformative energy that would be used for their own spiritual development and in service to the greater good of the community as represented by the king's court. The court of the king also represented the court of the King in Heaven and the service was both a secular and a sacred service.

This spiritual practice of romantic love took the human desire to connect with another and the insistent sexual urge for union and directed them into a deep devotion. This erotic



devotion provided the juice for accomplishing tasks that simultaneously refined the character of the devotee into a spiritual being, served to benefit the kingdom on earth, and brought the kingdom of Heaven to earth through the example of spiritual virtue.

Over the centuries since the time of the troubadour tradition, the spiritual practice aspect of this romantic love has been dropped and the sense of sacred service has been lost. What has remained is the sense that romantic love can somehow save us. We often mistake our beloved for the Beloved—God as transcendent and immanent love. Since we do not know how to relate to God, we make our lover our god instead seeing our love itself as a manifestation of sacred love, realizing the fullness and depth of love when that sacred dimension is present.

When we realize that love does not reside outside of us in the person of our lover and that possessing a lover is not the salvation from the storms within ourselves, we can begin to transform our neediness and our grasping, and realize the richness of love that flows naturally from the well of our own heart. Having discovered the treasure of our own being, we no longer depend on a lover to evoke love and learn to share with them more fully from the source of love that was always there.

Love

A perspective that I want to suggest here is more encompassing and vibrant than that of courtly love or popular fantasy. We can treat all our growth, service and connection as emerging from some kind of love—love for ourselves, for other people, for life itself, and for the process of loving and relating. Love is an energy and a sense of connection that engages us in everything we touch with our attention. Love is our way of participating in the interconnectedness of all being.

The heart posture of love can penetrate the superficial and reveal the inner beauty and sacredness in other people. When

we are the recipient of that kind of seeing, we, if we are paying attention, will feel seen. Seen, not in terms of how we feel and our likes and dislikes, but seen in relation to our core nature, and our deepest beauty.

When we are intimately seen through the eyes of open and unconditional love, we experience being blessed. When we see in this way, we also experience being blessed. In this very act of seeing with the eyes of love, there is simultaneous blessing and the distinction between giving and receiving dissolves as they merge in the blessing of love.

Marc Gafni points out that the quote from Leviticus to “Love your neighbor as yourself...” leaves out three words of the passage. The “...complete verse is: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself—I AM GOD.’ To love your neighbor is to reveal, to disclose, their ultimate divinity.”³ When we see with the eyes of love, we are not only perceiving the divine nature of the other person, we can also relate to them as being the Beloved. As Gafni concludes, we identify their goodness, their sacredness, as the “true core of who” the person is.

The sacred Beloved is clearly revealed in the marriage of two lovers. I have had the privilege to attend and perform a number of weddings and I am always struck with wonder at the sacred beauty of each event. A very special dynamic is happening in the wedding ceremony as the bride and groom stand together with the community present. A sacred force enters the gathering at that time and our hearts are touched. It is not only the wedding couple who stand in awe. All of us who participate in and witness the ceremony weep at the beauty of the Presence of the Beloved being enacted by the lovers who are being joined in a holy way.

The Beloved Presence in each of us is released from the secret chambers of our heart to join the sacred circle of celebration of the marriage. The tears dissolve the veils of habit so the lover in our soul can shine through our eyes and radiate from



our very being. In that moment we can also get a glimpse of the oneness of all being and the interconnectedness that flows from the collective experience of wonder.

Sense of Home

The longing to feel and be an intimate in a love relationship and to experience belonging, is a desire to be simply “who we are, without reservation and condition.” This sense of belonging is often called “home.” Relaxing into the sacred nature of our own being, into the flow of life unfolding, and into the embrace of mutual love brings us home. We sense being at home not only in ourselves but in the world in a profoundly spiritual way. This is not a personal abode but a shared home that encompasses both inner and outer worlds in a beautiful landscape that nourishes us and that we, in turn, support through our loving participation and contributions.

Belonging

“Belonging” brings together two fundamental qualities of human experience: being and longing. In a sense we live with the longing of our being and we face the challenge of being with our longing. The experience of home is characterized by the felt environment of belonging. Belonging is at the heart of marriage and provides the warmth of intimacy. Belonging is the glue that binds each of us to each other as well as to the Sacred, to life, and to a community. With a sense of belonging, we are drawn beyond our self-centered feeling of exile, dislocation and fragmentation into a larger context and set of significant relationships.

A Home for Giving

A strong marriage is a place where we are supported in giving our gifts, we feel at home and are nourished by our giving. When this does not happen, we feel disempowered, cut off, and empty, leaving us with the ghost of our giving impulse which

is an insatiable hunger. We then become susceptible to addictions and consuming rather than creating. When we hold back our contributions feeling that we have nowhere to have them received, we can experience both the void and the blockage of our natural flow, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We feel spiritually impoverished and homeless.

Intimacy involves a *mutuality* of giving and receiving. In a relationship informed by love, we experience receiving through giving and giving through receiving. Our sense of connection and contribution are enhanced by giving, and we enhance these qualities in others by opening to receive from them. This giving and receiving principle applies to everything from love, to sharing stories and inner truths, to the gifts of our presence and hard work.

This principle of the mutuality of giving and receiving is at the heart of marriage, family, work groups, teams, friendships, support groups such as A.A., and community. Mutuality forms the basis of the heart posture and practice of compassion and addresses a basic question of our belonging by placing us within a community of fellow human beings.

Gratitude

We experience a sense of home partly by relaxing into a mutual acceptance. We find a place to fit where we accept ourselves, each other, and the reality that ideals for our marriage are more an inspiration than a measure of evaluation. The sense of home in relationship engenders a sense of *gratitude*: being thankful for what we *do* have instead of what we *do not* have. We relate to life and each other more with a sense of *praise*. We come to value difference, let go of resentment, release regrets, to forgive transgressions and wounds, to care, and to place another ahead of ourselves.

Gratitude is not simply some warm and fuzzy feeling that passes quickly. It is a heart posture that allows us to see and



experience how gifted we each are by the blessings of life and even its painful challenges.

The practice of appreciation and gratitude happens in the details of your everyday lives together, hand in hand. Notice something each day about your partner that is endearing, that you value, or you find interesting. It can be something they say, or do, or the scent of their body, or a gesture, or the way they hug, or many other things that you particularly find connective, wonderful, or simply enjoyable. Each small appreciation helps to build the overall heart posture of gratitude and the home in the sense of *we*.

Expressing appreciation and gratitude further enhances the collective bonds. When we say “Thank you for making dinner,” or “That was a nice note you wrote to my family,” or “I liked the way you handled that awkward conversation at the dinner party last night.” or in simply saying “I love you,” we affirm the relationship in big and small ways.

Taking turns at doing everything from chores to supporting each other in pursuing individual interests supports the feeling for each person of having a home in the relationship. This is not about keeping score or viewing everything in terms of quid-pro-quo but having the sense of give and take in a dynamic process of responding to individual and collective needs and in fulfilling the loving impulse to gift each other.

It is our hand in hand intimacy that transforms the physical structure and decorations of a house into a home. How we treat each other and host guests creates the psychological, emotional, and spiritual environment that we live in day-to-day. We can be awkward and constricted or open, warm and comfortable depending on the interpersonal climate that interpenetrates the living space. The way we build our relationship with our partner will create the environment of our home. We want to create a sacred space that radiates peace, warmth, and a welcoming spirit.

We are the environment for each other in our marriage. Our relationship is also an environment that our children, family, friends and strangers experience. The qualities that we bring to our marriage, that our relationship brings to others, and that get passed on by others to the world shape the collective environment that we all live and work in.

As lovers we are continually giving and receiving gifts from each other and from other people. While we are usually clear about the value of *giving*, we may not appreciate the importance of receiving well. To receive a gift well makes us a giver to those who give to us. Gratitude opens the heart of love and radiates the power of that love to the giver.

Gratitude itself can become a heart posture so that we relate to everything as a blessing. Rather than wait for some final satisfaction in order to feel grateful, we hold the sense of being blessed by all the little things we are given.

GRATITUDE PRACTICE FOR COUPLES

1. Bring to mind times when your partner has touched your heart through their support, caring, actions, attention, and/or love.
2. Feel the gratitude in your heart and throughout your body and being.
3. Express that gratitude heart to heart with your partner. Treat this sharing of heartfelt gratitude as if this will be your last opportunity.
4. Experience the warmth and love that is generated in your feeling and sharing of gratitude.
5. Expand your sharing of gratitude to all the people, things and times that you are grateful for as a couple. This



Heart to Heart, Hand in Hand, Shoulder to Shoulder
can include children, friends, parents, your home, nature,
etc.

Conscious Relating and Communicating

When we are loving and conscious in our relationships, we make manifest an inner sacredness, a holy spark or flame. This in turn creates a sacred environment for our partner and others to share their holy flames creating a blessed warmth for everyone, a sacred hearth. Just as we are the environment that others experience, so our marriage is an environment for other people and other relationships. As we create an environment of love through our presence and behaviors, we implicitly call on others to organize themselves as if they are in the very presence of love itself.

All relationships can support us remaining conscious and can encourage a collective consciousness. We need to intentionally act to create a collective ecology where everyone takes responsibility for building a home where we all bring our full presence, a willingness to deeply listen, an open heart, and an unconditional sense of connection and support.

Head and Heart Communications

Communication is the way we give voice to our love, as well as all our other feelings and thoughts. The threads of communication weave the fabric of intimate connection. Communication is more than the exchange of information.



To communicate is “to reveal clearly,” “manifest,” “to receive communion,” and “to be connected, one with another.” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*)

According to Jewish mystical traditions, words are angels that are sent out into the world. Once they are created by us, they have a life of their own that is beyond our control. No matter what we intended to say, others may hear and repeat them in forms and for purposes that we do not like. Once said, they move beyond our control. Clearly, there are many kinds of these angels, many of them beautiful and sweet and many that are ugly and bitter. We want to be conscious of the angels we are releasing into a relationship and the world, for these become part of the environment that we and other people live in.

Communication includes more than our verbal expressions. It includes our body postures and gestures, our facial expressions, our silences, our actions, and the quality of our presence. It may seem daunting to be mindful of all these dimensions. The key is really quite simple. The quality of our communications is determined by the way we combine our head and our heart.

When we communicate strictly from our head, our communications are totally dependent on the clarity of our thinking and even the clearest message will lack the depth and soul that can come only from the heart. This may suffice in certain types of functional communications such as the impersonal contexts of presenting a business report or a financial evaluation. In personal relationships, including those in business contexts, head communications can become deadening if they dominate the way we talk to each other.

When we communicate strictly from our heart, our communications are totally dependent on the purity of our feelings and the quality of our intentions. In this case, even the clearest emotion stated with the best intention may lack the care of articulation and the intelligence that comes from the

head. Unmodified heart communications are good for certain expressive purposes and in moving through psychological barriers and mental censors. Yet these types of communication often become overwhelming for the listener and can trap us in a form of self-preoccupation. Focusing too much on emotional expressions lacks the larger vision of the contexts and sensibilities of other people and the quality of the environment we are creating through our choice of words and expressions. Communications that leave the mind out tend to be reactive and are often shaped by the power of our fears, longings, and anxieties about overwhelm.

The integration of head and heart can result in communications that authentically connect us and create an atmosphere that is aligned with our intentions. When we communicate to create and sustain intimacy, our words, silences, stances, gestures, and deeds reflect our basic heart posture of love.

Relating Beyond Differences and Disagreements

The quality of our communications and the ways we listen to each other support the deepening of our mutual sense of connection. Good communication is not agreement, understanding or even liking the messages we receive. A partner can understand us perfectly and still say things that we do not like and don't want to hear.

We may think that if only our partner understood our feelings, situation, thinking, or life story, then agreement would prevail. This is often a way of saying: How dare you try to be my lover, my friend, my partner and not see things my way!

All couples have differences. Relationships that maintain intimacy find ways to incorporate those differences into the relationship and give them a place. We turn perpetual issues into annoyances that we live with and work around, not making the marriage hostage to them as a perceived problem. This



presumes, of course, that the issue is benign. Physical and sexual abuse raise other kinds of questions, for these are serious problems that need to be confronted.

We all spend years trying to change each other's mind and rarely does that ever occur. Many significant disagreements cannot be resolved and we must find ways of living with that and not letting the marriage get hijacked by it. These disagreements are often rooted in basic differences of personality, values, and lifestyle sensibilities. We must learn to accept and even appreciate these differences and center our attention on what builds positive regard and feelings.

Speaking and Listening

Communication involves being fully and intimately present with each other. In the verbal process of sharing feelings, we speak from the heart asking only that our partner witness with their full attention. In listening we open to what is shared even if we have our own feelings, judgments, or do not understand how it is they came to feel that way.

We can reliably speak our own truth. Except under circumstance of the most intimate communion, we are not in a position to speak for each other about what the other feels and how those feelings arose. When we think we know what is really going on with each other, we are often projecting something from within us. Even if some of it is accurate, it lacks our partner's voice.

Even though we always have theories about why our partner behaves the way they do or says what they say, these are our ideas about them filtered through our own hopes, fears, experience, and agendas. This is why it is important to avoid stereotypical, psychological, moral, and prejudicial labeling. These only lead to misunderstanding, depersonalizing conflict, denial of real issues, and escalation of alienation.

One goal of effective communications in marriage is to

be able to contain and explore differences without criticizing, psychologizing, or blaming. Through good communication we find similarities within our differences and further explore the differences in those similarities. We continually support the relationship containing the differences, connecting through similarities, and growing through our ability to include them all.

Over time we accumulate a critical mass of mutual meanings, purposes, experiences, challenges and successes to sustain our relationship. Building on a basic love, we create a home in the relationship in which we are responsive to each other's bids for connection with our attention and presence. We consciously create the environment of the relationship we mutually want through the ways we welcome each other, the ways we say goodbye, the ways we share about our day, and the ways our respect and love are reflected in what we say to and about our partner. We also intentionally encourage each other to grow and share what they have to offer with the larger community.

Strengthening Bonds Through Challenge

Challenges to a relationship arise periodically and unpredictably as circumstances change. Confronting an impactful event, we will often reactively try to pretend it did not happen or is unimportant by distracting ourselves. Or we may constrict our feelings and attention through repression or suppression thereby experiencing a kind of trauma. Or we act out and project our unprocessed and undigested feelings onto others. Then our decisions are reactions to the tension of conflicting feelings and difficult choices and do not reflect real clarity about the situation or our real intentions. Other times we may fall into ambivalence where we vacillate between choosing sides in our inner struggle moving one way one moment and the other way the next.



A Middle Way

In all these various reactions, we lose the opportunity to learn how to be fully present and even energized by the tension. By consciously living in the middle, we can intensify our sense of presence by drawing energy from the sense of uncertainty and from each of our conflicting possibilities.

In this middle place we can experience every feeling and choice openly and fully and explore their meaning, implications, and dynamics. The middle way leads to both personal and mutual growth.

Choosing to grow rather than simply react is not easy yet is critical to the long-term well-being of a relationship and our confidence in its potential to endure. When we openly and mutually respond to changed circumstances, such as the loss of a job, a family member, or physical health, we find that learning and new forms of integration are possible. Depending on how we frame the challenges in our imaginations, we can even make such challenges opportunities for transformation and deepening of our intimacy.

If we turn to other lovers when things get difficult, or complain to friends about problems without dealing with our partner, or seek escape in work or substances, we make the container of our marriage leaky and the energies that could support our growth will drain away.

Making Marriage the Embodiment of Love

By practicing conscious communication, we not only become more skilled in talking and listening with our partner, we also gain confidence in the relationship itself. Through practice we master not only the techniques but also ourselves. Just as a musician may master the piano to the point of surrendering to the flow of music and be able to create an ever wider range of artistic expression, so we can master our emotional and interactive life, making our marriage an embodiment of love.

Relaxing into the home of the marriage, we realize new-found energy that had been imprisoned by our reactive fears and agendas. We can then cultivate the deeper qualities of our being and of intimacy. We create new possibilities for each other and for our work in the world, engaging in a sacred endeavor of making the relationship a beneficial presence in the world. We experience an inner freedom and sense of larger contribution as together we provide a nurturing and loving environment for others.

The sense of a sacred context for marriage, supporting each other's spiritual journey, serving our children, contributing to our community, and celebrating the sacred dimensions of life—all these enable us to meet the uncertainties and challenges of intimacy. As we act with this sense of the Sacred, we emphasize connection, wisdom and growth, making love, consciousness and learning operating principles. We then weave these sacred threads of our relationship into the fabric of the whole story of our lives together. This expanded story further bonds us to each other and creates connection with others who are inspired by or learn from our story.

Creating a lasting good relationship is like baking bread. In baking, first we take the ingredients of flour, salt, yeast, etc, and add water so that the dry ingredients blend and bind into a mixed up new form that can be molded and baked—dough. Then we apply heat and time to make the dough into a delicious loaf of bread. In our relationship, we use our feelings, dreams, values, history, body, and presence and mix them with love to bond to each other and create a sense of *we*. Then we bake our relationship in the oven of life and with time we personally and collectively mature into wholeness and wisdom as an expression of sacred love. In this experience, love is always present, even in the difficult times. We mutually develop the capacity to be with things, just as they are, and we feel more connected, in fact inseparable at some level from each other.



Meditation for Amplifying Loving Presence

Feel whatever presence and love you can in this moment, however small and weak it may be. Attend to it, feed it your life energy, and grow it. Practice with whatever tiny amount of loving presence and sense of the Sacred you have and breathe into it. With your breath, draw it in from the sources of love beyond you. Inhale from all sources of the Sacred in the world, in other people, and the mysterious beyond, amplifying and enhancing the speck of loving presence you sense within yourself. Do the same with the relationship, amplifying the love with your partner by breathing into it and drawing from the entire world of the Sacred.

Have a sense that you, individually and collectively, are offering the world whatever love you have and that the world is offering you whatever love it has. Breathe into this symbiotic, reciprocal relationship sensing that all love is thereby strengthened and expanded.

6

Love and Marriage

Loving and Giving

Intimacy in marriage involves mutually participating in ways that we naturally give of ourselves. Whether we are giving sexual pleasure, giving from our heart in sharing, giving our gifts to the community or giving of our loving nature in creating a welcoming, supportive environment for our family, the desire and pleasure of giving flows from our heart posture of love.

Being a lover means that we invest our attention, caring, and energy in our relationship. To have love as a ground of being does not always involve the feeling of love in every situation. It is more like the background atmosphere of our being that hosts all the other feelings that arise, including our upsets, disappointments, frustrations and dislikes. Our heart posture of love is not conditional upon the passing feelings of the moment and yet it does affect how those feelings are experienced and expressed. When we are able to relate from a conscious ground of love, we are less likely to get hijacked by reactive feelings. If we do, we rapidly recover our deeper sense of love and our fundamental connection to those with whom we may be upset.

Love and Space

Intimacy takes us beyond space and time. The sense of connection can be present whether our lover sits next to us or is traveling in another country. One of the wonders of intimacy is that we may, at times, feel closer to someone when we are not physically present with them. Our thoughts, feelings, and love give them a central place in our heart and we sense the degree to which they are an integral part of our being. We experience the aliveness of our connection to them.

Risk of Being Hurt

Love opens us to both the outer world of another and their unpredictable behaviors and feelings and the inner world of our tender wounds, fears, longings, and sensitivities. There is no protection from being hurt in a fully intimate relationship. Wounds will happen, most of the time inadvertently and unintentionally. These wounds challenge us to grow, to incorporate their healing into the relationship, and to find ways to deepen the bonds when they occur.

It is said that our heart must break for it to open and when it opens, we grow. When our heart “breaks open,” the bands and shells around the core of our being crack and expose the part of our nature that is profoundly affected by experience. When we are open in this receptive way, we sense the living presence of the world and each other.

Abuse

This does not mean we should subject ourselves to patterns of physical, verbal, or sexual abuse. Dealing with these challenges involves confronting such behavior and removing ourselves from harm’s way if patterns are not changed.

It is important to make a distinction between a generally healthy and supportive relationship and one that is basically unhealthy and unworkable. In an unworkable relationship,

your home environment is extremely unpredictable, unsupportive, ravages your sense of well-being and stifles spontaneity and expression of loving and joyful feelings. The relationship deadens rather than enlivens you and/or your partner.

The reasons for unworkable relationships are usually complex and, even where fighting and addiction are involved, often include a distressing dynamic between both people. It is not a matter of assigning fault so much as seeing that whatever you are doing does not work and is hurtful. You may be simply mismatched and need to end the relationship rather than remain locked in an unwinnable struggle.

The key perspective here involves never seeing ourselves as a victim. Rather we come from the desire to maintain the integrity of the well-being of ourselves, others, and the path of growth. We do not placate destructive situations in the hope that others will love us. We remain committed to what is going to create benefit, beauty, and love on a foundation of basic sanity and wisdom.

Healthy Risks

Even opening to the possibility of a healthy relationship involves taking risks. While we may not see it so clearly, withholding love is also risky. By not allowing ourselves to experience and communicate love, we often leave that part of our being that has been awakened restless, dissatisfied, and disappointed. If by choice or circumstance, we do not pursue the intimacy of love, it is vital to be conscious of the wound of unengaged love and to experience and channel the energy of those feelings into loving life and the world in all its joyful and painful aspects.

In marriage, vitality is maintained by periodically sharing our vulnerabilities with real honesty, taking an inventory, asking for help, being willing to be dependent, allowing ourselves to be shaped by the course the relationship takes, and being



willing to serve our partner and our family. The sense of hazard plays an enlivening role in the growth of each of us personally and the development of our marriages through the stages of maturing.

There is no shelter in a marriage unless there are doors and windows through which fresh and unknown forces can enter. These edgy, sometimes chilly, and often refreshing winds of change keep us more fully alive. Otherwise, without the openness, the relationship becomes a death chamber slowly depleting the oxygen as we struggle to live on the remaining air until finally there is no more. Something inside us becomes dormant, as if dead.

Emotion as Ways of Connecting

Romantic love is not the only emotion that connects us to each other and the world around us. The range of emotions represents our relational capacity as well as a fire of life. The emotions are the activity of relating, involving perception, recognition, meaning, expression and connection. The activity of the emotional is how we sense that something is true, how we connect to our own physical and psychological states, how we relate to others, how we relate to the world, to life and to the Sacred.

I am using the term emotion in the broadest sense to include all basic feeling states. These include more than the standard list of emotions such as anger, fear, love, sadness, joy, and anxiety. Feelings such as pleasure, pain, desire, longing, wonder, inspiration, and determination are all part of the sensory system that not only perceives but establishes how we relate to what we perceive. Emotions move not only energy within us but move us as beings into relationship, sometimes toward and close, other times away and distant.

Emotions also reveal a sense of value through our caring. Caring not only creates significance in our world, it energizes

us around those significant meanings. Some meanings evoke a great response and others elicit a hardly noticeable excitement.

The challenge we face with emotions is that much of the time we are swept away by them. They arise as if automatically in response to events, what somebody says, or something we see that affects us. When we are reactive, we not only experience the pain of our reactivity but we may develop fear about the way feelings take over and hijack our sense of ourselves and our well-being.

Working with Emotions

When we are emotionally reactive, we are often conflicted and confused. We wait anxiously for our husband who is late returning home from a night out with “the guys.” Upon his arrival, our relief at his presence can explode in a release of tension in the form of anger. At root even that anger is an expression of our connection and caring.

In times of loss we may be torn between going numb and extreme indulgence in intense feelings. We are challenged to learn how to be and live in the middle of strong feelings and pain without shutting down or being overwhelmed.

It is our emotions that open us to the possibilities of deeper connection and meaningful action even as they threaten to sweep us away with their power. When emotions are in service to our family and our emotional development, not to habitual reaction, self-preoccupation and expression, then they enliven us and develop the capacity of our relationship for love and growth. To be present with our emotions without indulging or deifying them and to penetrate through the surface feelings down to the wisdom underneath involves witnessing, sharing and working with them to create loving value.

Marriage as Teacher

Marriage is one of the most profound and refined learning



environments we will ever have. This learning opportunity demands more than mechanical knowledge such as driving a car or playing an instrument. We are dealing with our own nature and complexity and that of another human being with all of their complexities, paradoxes and changeability.

To engage the path of marriage well requires more than a commitment to the relationship. It demands a commitment to personal growth, to the growth of the relationship, to the sacred nature of life and particularly to our lives together.

A marriage never lives outside the context of time, space and other people. It has its roots in the past that can be traced back to the lives of those long gone and it moves forward creating the destinies of its offspring. The offspring include flesh and blood people, stories, the way we serve as examples for others, and the impact of our actions in the world.

A good relationship is a platform for each of us to grow, to tap the sacred nature of love and meaning, and to cultivate our own sacred, loving nature for the benefit of all.

At a certain point in a marriage, or any intimate relationship, it may occur to us to stop trying to get what we originally thought we wanted and what we thought would make us happy and decide to make the relationship we have our teacher. We become a disciple of the relationship.

The demands of full force relating require us to reverse our habits and patterns of self-concern. In the course of marriage, our partner will provoke every possible issue, every reactive pattern, all our insecurities, and the sense of helplessness in relation to the unknown.

Our relationship generates a great deal of heat and requires that we learn about surrender and develop the capacity to hold complexity, intensity, paradox and not knowing. In dynamic relationships we are always living on the edge between the known and the unknown. We are pushed and pulled into developing skill and capacity for intimacy. For the life force of a

Love and Marriage

marriage is sustained by intimacy. This is the profound crucible of a deep partner relationship in which we can grow and our love can mature.

When intimacy flows from the heart posture of love, we openly offer ourselves to the wonders and challenges of our marriage without the fear that we are being or could be diminished. The very vitality of the moment nourishes and enhances our soul. Love both binds and frees. It releases us from the straightjacket of reaction, free to follow the calling of an authentic bond.

Marriage provides a home base for each of us to pursue our particular journey. As partners, we also want to grow so that we let go of our agendas for our partner. We work to open and fully support their growth in bringing their unique gifts to the world, not simply to us.

Intimate relationships also provide a home in another, more profound way. As we bond and come to know each other, we create the conditions for being inside each other's world, knowing what it is like to inhabit that way of being, and sensing the deeper levels of wisdom nature that can be revealed and realized. From this communion, we experience and come to embody a deep sense of our essential unity, beyond identities, issues, support, and ideas.



SHARING COMMUNICATIONS

In marriage, as well as other relationships, there are three supportive types of communication that are useful to distinguish—sharing, environmental, and dialogical.

Sharing involves both speaking and listening. In authentic sharing we speak about what is true for us from our heart, our innermost core. Speaking about the things we want our partner to know about us, we open ourselves to being heard and seen in ever deeper ways.

Intimately Witnessing Each Other

We listen with our full presence. To really listen means that we do not get caught up in understanding or judgment. We become intimate witnesses for each other. We take in the presence of the person speaking, as well as the content of what they are saying without becoming preoccupied with the implications about us. As a listener, our job is presencing in an open and interested way.

Becoming mindful and simply witnessing each topic as it arises cuts through the internal narrative of our mind in its endless process of constructing our own “story.” Rather we become present and intimate with “what is” for our partner. In this opening from the “yamma yamma yamma” of mind chatter, we directly experience our partner and can know the beauty of

dynamic interconnectedness and interbeing.

Trust

Sharing enhances heart to heart intimacy. It leads to increasing trust in being able to safely share feelings and speak our truth. We learn how to stay present with each other and hold that innermost truth. Regular sharing communications free us from having to carry around the baggage of unspoken issues that could accumulate an intense destructive charge.

It is important in sharing that we authentically disclose our truths rather than get into doing a “presentation” of the self we want the other person to hear or of a point of view that we are trying to convince our partner to agree with. During sharing, it is vital that we maintain a clear sense of ourselves, even when we know that our partner may not like nor agree with what we are saying and that we not try to manipulate them into seeing things our way. Authentic sharing is not about having power over each others thoughts, feelings and behavior. It allows us to discover both similarities and differences without an agenda of getting agreement. Sharing offers a gift that invites each of us to enter the world and heart of our partner.

Sharing is simple to do and difficult to do well. When we speak, we learn to share openly without blame, without requiring mutual understanding, without seeking a response and without trying to change the listener’s behavior.

Sharing Is Not the Same as “Active Listening” and “Paraphrasing”

Sharing is not what some popular literature calls “active listening and paraphrasing,” although it involves both open listening, having a sense of actively sharing and being present. Good forms of active listening mean that each partner is actively communicating that he or she is both listening to and genuinely interested in what their partner is saying.



Some versions of active listening have the speaker say whatever they want as long as they make “I” statements such as “I think you were a ... when you did ...” or “I think you are being abusive when you ...” Then these methods have the listener *paraphrase* back to the speaker what the listener understands was meant and gets feedback on whether that understanding is correct or not and what adjustments need to be made in that understanding to more accurately reflect what is meant by the speaker.

While this method has value in certain circumstances and may be incorporated in some form in dialogical conversations, active listening frequently fails for many reasons. Bill can try to listen to Lynn list a number of grievances but he cannot help but feel attacked. Even when Lynn is using “I” statements, she is still dumping on him. When people use “I” statements they are often disguising complaints by prefacing the statements with “I think” and “I feel” without really talking about what is going on for themselves. The process becomes an occasion to talk about our partner and not really share in a self-reflective way things about ourselves. In supporting communication in your marriage, being present and listening are critical.

Understanding is not as important because it depends on so many variables. While trying to see things from the point of view of our partner is a part of our caring and interest, having to get it just right is both frustrating and inhibiting. The practice of paraphrasing what our partner has shared can lead to inadvertent psychologizing and unconscious power dynamics between partners. Paraphrasing can be a tool in decision-making dialogue but it is often problematic in talking about feelings.

Another difficulty that I have noticed with “paraphrasing” is that it can turn into a hidden power struggle. With its emphasis on understanding, Lynn is placed in a position to determine when she feels that Bill has understood her as he tries to paraphrase what she has said in a way that satisfies her. If she

does not sense that he has gotten it quite right, which often means in ways that he appears to agree with her point, then she is given the power to invalidate his way of understanding what she said. This can leave Bill feeling attacked and misunderstood himself and drive even greater wedges in the relationship.

As I said, there are times, particularly in certain conversations where decision-making is the outcome, where seeking understanding can be useful. Further it can help to clarify some points of view in conflict resolution. However, this process of active listening and validation does not necessarily help the relationship as a whole.

Learning about Ourselves

One of the effects of the sharing process is an increasingly intimate relationship with ourselves as we discover more of what is actually true about us. We develop our capacity for self-awareness, self-reflection, and a facility to use language that owns our particular feelings and responses and does not dump on the other person. We learn to accept the feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, shame and shyness as simply thresholds that must be crossed in uncovering the authentic self and in authentic communication and connection with another person. We also observe our feelings about having another person witness both the content of what we say and our struggles to share.

In our listening we become aware of our tendency to interrupt, become defensive, react, solve our partner's issues, and desire to make it all better. When we are out of touch with each other's emotional needs, it is usually the result of not paying attention or assumptions about how we would handle a situation, rather than the desire to hurt. In sharing, we learn how to become really present without the need to always understand or take care of things. We feel the fullness of being present without having to fix, defend, or do anything. In heart to heart sharing, we want to be totally present and to give our most open



and engaged listening. We let the passions, loves, fears, angers, pains, and joys of others touch our heart and we are alive with the poignancy and wonder of the experience.

The sharing process, like all witnessing, enlarges the frame of reference beyond our inner critic, which in its imperial greed would occupy all our inner space. In a setting of sharing inner stories and truths, we form a community of witnesses. The sense of mutuality grows not simply from what is said and heard but also from having shared the experience of the process.

Sharing Creates a Context of Home

One of the lessons in the sharing process is that love is embodied and it is clearly embodied in the silence of listening as well as in the words of our speech. The sharing process is an opportunity individually and mutually to experience and embody connection through both speaking and listening.

By listening and sharing and being together, we fashion a mutual story of home. The relationship becomes the context where our ambivalences of thoughts and feelings, our missteps in behavior, and our ambiguities fit in and bridge the personal with the shared, the individual with the collective, and the known with the unknown. The shared story supports a relationship that can hold the disagreements and challenges that inevitably exist.

There is the famous story of a woman who brings her dead child to the Buddha and insists that he bring the child back to life. He sees her grief and distress and agrees that he will do this, if she would first go to every family in her village and find one that has not had a death. She faithfully goes to each house and listens to each family recount their tale of loss and grief. She not only cannot find one household untouched by death, but is transformed in the process. She returns to Buddha with her new wisdom and matured heart to perform the appropriate ceremonies for her child and to become a disciple.

Authentic sharing moves the energy in a relationship away from blame, fear, anger, withdrawal, and retaliation and toward continually weaving the fabric of the relationship using the thread of current experience and connection. We move away from patterns of avoidance and distraction and toward embracing and affirming what is true for each person, for the relationship, and for the large contexts of which the relationship is a part.

Humility and Obedience

In sharing we also learn two additional lessons—*humility* and *obedience*. *Humility* means being of the earth, *humus*, and thus grounded in relation to others rather than controlling. It means we take a learning stance rather than a problem solving position. It engages our heart more than our mind. It respects the truth of our partner rather than insisting on our ideas about them. In this process we see that our discomfort and pain often arises not from what our partner did but from our interpretation of their behavior. We treat our partner as a real person not an object of observation and reaction. *Obedience* means simply to subject our views of our partner to their truth by thoroughly listening with an open heart.

Support your partner's efforts to communicate. Many of us feel awkward and vulnerable in sharing feelings and so it is vital that we create a safe, non-judgmental environment for receiving whatever is offered. This allows each of us to find our voice and participate more fully in the relationship.

When we communicate authentically heart to heart, as well as in dialogue, shoulder to shoulder, we are always taking a risk—a risk of identity, of not knowing, of opening to the unknown of the response of the next moment. The fundamental risk is letting our heart be touched and broken open through our listening and our engagement. From this openness both profound and daily levels of intimacy can arise and embrace



Heart to Heart, Hand in Hand, Shoulder to Shoulder
each of us and our relationship.

Relationship Grows as We Grow

When both partners grow in a relationship, it often calls upon the relationship itself to grow and to not let love diminish in the process.

JESSE AND LEONARD

Jesse and Leonard both had demanding legal careers and they both felt that they were growing personally and professionally. Over time, however, they were finding it increasingly difficult to have time together because of their busy and non-synchronized schedules. Even what time they had together felt more like they were acquaintances than lovers. Unhappy with the situation, they decided to set aside one evening a week to share their thoughts and feelings and then go out on a date. They also joined a group that went dancing twice a month. These steps helped them to renew the bonds of the marriage and to realize that they needed to grow the relationship even as they personally grew.

SHARING GUIDELINES

1. Sit facing each other.
2. Sense your body presence by noticing your body sensations and establish a sense of hosting sensations, sounds, silence, thoughts and feelings and everything that arises.
3. Sense yourself embodying the sky-like spaciousness of the heavens, the rich nourishing powers of the earth, and the capacity in your heart to open and reach out to your partner.
4. Sense the physical presence of each other.

5. Agree on who will go first.

6. As the speaker during sharing, share the thoughts and feelings you want the listener to know.

a. Share as much or as little as you choose. You are in charge of what and how much you say as long as you follow the guidelines.

b. Share only what is true for you. (This means that sentences will tend to have "I" as the subject. It is not appropriate to talk about your partner except to make reference to how you feel or to an event. No dumping, describing what kind of person you think they are, or mind-reading what you think they are thinking and feeling.) The sharing can be about the relationship, work, inner sense of yourself, and significant things you are thinking and feeling that affect your life. Do not judge your feelings, simply share them.

c. Do not try to make the listener understand, validate, or agree with what you are sharing. Simply open to their being present with you and all the truth that you share with them.

7. As the listener, simply be present with the person speaking.

a. Listen without reaction as much as possible. Stay present and open to your partner.

b. Do not comment or ask questions. (A question of clarification about what event the speaker is referring to is



OK but no other type.)

c. Do not comfort your partner or express understanding. Do not try to understand. Simply listen, stay present with gratitude for the authentic sharing.

8. After each person has had their turn to share and listen, you can decide to do another round.

9. Do not discuss what is brought up. If something needs to be discussed, agree upon a time when that conversation will take place.

10. After the sharing process, thank each other. Then do something fun and enjoyable together.

I generally recommend that couples do sharing at least once a week. After this has become routine and both of you feel somewhat skilled with the process, sharing can be done in many different situations. For example, when my wife and I have a heated argument, we will often pause, sometimes by taking a few minutes apart while we cool down. Then we approach each other. One part of us wants to reach out, feeling that our relationship is too precious to be hijacked by a particular grievance. At the same time, another part of each of us wants to argue on as if it is right and to let the other person know how enraged we are.

We do not try to simply reach out and pretend the feelings are not there nor do we re-enter the arena of battle of feelings. Usually we reach out in a loving way and try to share separately what is going on inside us. We share, listen, and stay present with each other. This brings us into the living moment of being together sharing in all our rawness. The authenticity of our sharing and feeling the undivided presence of each other

deepens our connection and strengthens the bond between us even as we live with the issue that divides us.

JEFF AND CAROL

When Jeff and Carol came to me for counseling, they had spent months arguing about whether to have children. They had been married for five years and both had careers. Jeff, a very successful software engineer and self-proclaimed workaholic, had always assumed that they would have a family. Carol thought so as well, except that whenever the subject arose, she felt anxious and uncertain about interrupting her career and becoming financially dependent on Jeff. They lived an ordered life that centered around work, regular outings to see the latest movies and occasional hiking trips.

The romance of the early relationship had worn off sometime during the second year after they married but they continued to “get along fine,” until the subject of children arose in earnest. In the recent angry encounters, they had both said things to each other that were painful, contemptuous and extreme.

At first they wanted me to “fix” their relationship by giving some advice or homework that would retrieve the way they felt and were together in the early days of their relationship. They did not want to face that, while the desire was understandable, the reality was that their relationship needed to grow into something new. They needed to move beyond their individual fears, patterns of avoidance, and hurtful ways of communicating. They needed to become more wholeheartedly present with each other and respectful of the inner worlds and processes that they each had.

As Jeff and Carol shared their inner feelings, associations, and memories in their own ways, without interruption from the other, and listened to each other, their caring and sense of connection returned. Jeff talked about growing up in a caring but distant family in which his father, who was a sales representative, was on the road all week and did house projects

and watched football on the weekends. Everyone got along by not being involved in family life and by putting attention into sports, friends, and jobs. Carol spoke of her fears of abandonment mixed with the desire to be independent and financially secure. Her mother had left her father when she was seven and they had moved out of state and from place to place as her mother struggled with the financial burden of being a single mother. She had lost contact with her father for many years because her mother kept their location and contact information secret from him.

DEBRA AND JOAN

Debra and Joan were having constant fights about spending time together. Debra complained that Joan seemed committed to her work 24/7 and that they had very little quality time together to play and grow their relationship. Joan, a pediatrician, loved Debra and did not want to lose her. She repeatedly explained the demanding challenges of being a doctor and would try to schedule a movie or some nights out at least once a week.

Debra: You seem more concerned about keeping me in your life while continuing to basically live at work than with deepening our connection. I feel like we are stuck and you are not willing to find out what the next stage of our relationship is. You're trying to placate me, but you're not authentic and not in touch with your feelings.

Joan: Well, if you really want to know my feelings, I am sick and tired of your whining. I am around needy people all day and then I come home to another needy person.

Debra: How would you know how needy I am? You are never around. I have a life that is filled with interesting things that I cannot share with you. You are always too busy, too tired, or too distant.

Joan: You always put me in a bind, like I have to choose you or my patients. This is simply hopeless.

At this point, I had them pause for a few minutes to cool

down. Then they did a sharing process with me as a coach.

Often it is at this hopeless, uncertain, and unknown place that we can come alive again. We come face-to-face with our fears, our disappointments, and our hopes at a point where we have given up the struggle for solutions and getting what we think we want. Now there is an opening where something fresh and authentic can arise.

FRAN AND SUSAN

The unwillingness and inability to share openly and non-judgmentally with emotions often undermines the quality and health of our relationships. Fran had been laid off for six months from his managerial job at a software company before he was able to find part time work. He and his wife Susan have three children ranging in age from 5 to 13. Susan had been a designer before they had children but had concentrated on the home and the children after becoming a mother. They were rapidly exhausting their savings. It was clear to both of them that Susan needed to return to the workforce and yet there was tension around this mutual perception. While they had agreement on a course of action, they had not discussed the many feelings that they were having. They treated their financial situation as a matter of fact problem to be solved, no matter what they were feeling.

In fact, both had very strong emotions going on. Fran was dealing with feelings of inadequacy in not being able to be a better provider. He also was afraid that Susan would lose respect for him like his mother appeared to have done when his father's clothing business remained small and was never able to grow into a chain. He had heard her accuse his father of not having what it takes to build a really successful company. In addition, the financial stress had affected his sexual performance and he worried that he was declining in his capacities as a man.

Susan's feelings were very different. She was disappointed that their dreams of increasing financial viability were clearly



not coming true at the time. She also enjoyed being a stay at home mother and dreaded the pressures that come with a job. She was concerned that Fran tried to take so much on himself and wanted to relieve some of the pressure on him. She admired the fact that he worked hard at finding a job and was highly self-motivated. She was uncertain how to best use her skills and background, whether to search for any job or one in her field, and whether to try to start her own business with some other mothers who had similar interests and use their extensive networks to find customers.

When they finally shared all these feelings and thoughts with each other in my office, they experienced the depth of love and support they each had for the other, they felt even more connected by having shared and listened, and they realized that their difficult feelings, by being openly expressed in sharing, could actually bond them rather than separate them.

Their sharing made dialogical conversations between Fran and Susan much more productive when they got to the point of having to make some decisions and started to chart a longer term vision for the future. While we cannot know all the emotions that will arise in the course of a dialogue, we can at least help to make difficult conversations productive by having regular sharing sessions so that what does arise does not carry the baggage of unexpressed feelings and an accumulation of unshared thoughts. Unexpressed feelings make it difficult to listen and be present with our spouse.

8

Exercises to Strengthen Heart to Heart Connection

There are many exercises that can be used to strengthen the feelings of heart to heart bonding. What follows are a few suggestions that many couples have found impactful and useful.

Love Maps

I generally recommend to couples learning and initially using this sharing process that they take time at least once a week to doing this kind of sharing. It is important that the time be uninterrupted and free of distractions. As couples share over time, a great many dimensions of our inner lives become revealed. This helps to build and enhance the maps of each other's inner terrain, what Gottman calls "love maps."

Preparation Exercise To Enhance Love Maps Through Sharing

Write down the things you want your partner to know about you as preparation for sharing.

- ◆ What is important to you in life?
- ◆ What are the trials and tribulations that you have gone through in striving for what you care about?
- ◆ What have been your successes? Your failures?



- ◆ What are you proud of?
- ◆ What was your family life like growing up? Did your parents show you that they loved you? Each other? Your brothers and sisters?
- ◆ Was your family supportive of each person's strivings? How did they express pride in your accomplishments?
- ◆ What were the difficult events and periods you have gone through?
- ◆ What wounds, losses, and disappointments have you experienced?
- ◆ What traumas have you experienced? How have you survived them and healed from them? Which are you still working on?
- ◆ How do you get and receive support and help in healing?
- ◆ What do you celebrate in your life? How do you like to celebrate?
- ◆ How do you express love, anger, sadness, fear, affection, grief, frustration, interest in someone, and satisfaction?
- ◆ What is your philosophy about expressing feelings, both difficult ones and enjoyable ones?
- ◆ How do you like others to express feelings with you?
- ◆ What is important to you in love? In a home? In a family? In friendship?
- ◆ What is the epitaph that you would like to have on your grave?
- ◆ What would you like to see in your obituary?
- ◆ What legacy would you like to leave?
- ◆ Describe the person you want to become?
- ◆ What is your plan for becoming that person?
- ◆ How far along are you in becoming that person?
- ◆ How can others support your becoming that person?

Making Amends

Another powerful sharing that strengthens a relationship once there is confidence in the process and trust in each other involves making amends. Begin by making an inventory of your behaviors that you believe have caused harm to your partner and the relationship. In this inventory, look beyond your intentions to the impact of your actions on others and deal with those impacts. Include failures or shortcomings in responding to your partner, in accepting and appreciating him or her, and in giving affection and support. Admit these to your partner and make amends. Resolve to become more conscious in your communications and behaviors. Close with appreciation.

Radiating Loving Energy from the Inside Out

This meditation can be done alone or with a partner. Choose a place where you can create a sacred environment. You can sanctify a space with candles, pictures, sacred objects, incense, or other objects and activities that have meaning for you. When traveling, you may want to bring along small sacred objects and pictures and create a sacred space where you sit in your imagination.

Purpose:

1. To move attention through the body
2. To relax and open the body with your awareness using your attention



3. To establish a harmonious relationship with the body as your temple
4. To cultivate the heart posture of love and gratitude, to perceive the world from that view, and to radiate that wisdom energy to the world

Meditation

Sit in a posture of basic dignity with the crown of your head aligned over your perineum so that you are relaxed, alert, and can breathe easily. Place your hands in your lap or on your legs with your thumbs and index fingers connected or clasp them together, right hand on top and place them in your lap.

Radiating Through the Body and Beyond

1. Begin by establishing the sense of being a hosting presence. Notice the sensations in your hands. As you experience some tingling or pulsing sensations in your hands, also place some of your attention on the sensation of your breathing. Hear sounds. Listen not only with your ears but also with your whole body. Listen particularly from the back of the head. Have a sense of listening to not only the sounds but also to the silence in which the sounds arise. Notice thoughts coming and going and feelings as they arise, pass on through, and disappear. Experience yourself hosting sensations, sounds, silence, thoughts, and feelings. Host everything that arises. In this hosting, sense yourself manifesting the sky-like openness of the heavens, the rich nourishing powers of the earth,

Exercises to Strengthen Heart to Heart Connection

and the capacity in your heart to reach out in all directions to all beings.

2. With this sense of being a hosting presence, also experience being a grateful and loving presence. Sense this grateful and loving presence as an inner smile in your heart center. Fill your heart with this radiant loving smiling energy.

3. Radiate this loving inner smile from the heart center throughout your chest, filling your entire chest cavity with the loving smiling energy, much like a warm sun.

4. Radiate this loving smiling energy across your shoulders and down through your arms into your hands and all the way out to your finger tips.

5. Experience this loving smiling energy flowing through your neck, up the back of your head, across the top of your head and into your forehead. Sense this loving smiling energy in your eyes, particularly at the edges of your eyes. Sense it radiating out to your ears and into your mouth and jaw. Fill your entire cranial cavity with this loving smiling energy.

6. Radiate this loving smiling energy into your abdomen, filling all your organs and the entire abdominal cavity with this loving smiling energy.

7. Radiate this loving smiling energy into your pelvic cavity and fill your pelvic cavity with the radiance of this loving smiling energy.



8. Experience this loving smiling energy flowing down into your legs and through your legs into your feet. Sense this loving smiling energy flowing into and from the earth.

9. Experience your entire body being filled with and radiating your loving smiling energy. Feel this energy in your bones, in your muscles, in every organ, in your nervous system, in every cell in your body, pumping through your circulatory system with every beat of your heart, and radiating from your skin in all directions.

10. Sense your entire being and way of perceiving the world now embodying your loving smiling energy, dedicating the benefits to the happiness, growth and freedom of all living beings by radiating out in all directions beyond yourself, throughout your surroundings, throughout the known universe, and beyond that.

Seeing and Being Seen with the Eyes of the Beloved

Sit approximately an arms length apart with your eyes closed. Bring images of your partner to mind and notice any feelings that may be there as the images appear in your mind. Sense the presence of your partner. Experience being present with the sense of your partner's presence.

Now open your eyes, gazing into the eyes of your partner.

Host and be present with each other. Moving beyond your thoughts about yourself and your partner, remain

present. Let yourself be seen, letting go of whatever might prevent your partner from seeing you and sensing your sacred nature.

See your partner and sense being inside their being. Sense what it is like being in their world, their feelings, hopes, fears, and longings. Sense being inside their heart. Sense moving beyond layers of contraction into their sacred nature.

See your partner as the Beloved seeing you as the Beloved. Sense both of you being embraced by the Beloved. Sense the vast openness of shared being.

Sense a bond of energy connecting your heart to the heart of your partner. Sense your heart opening as you receive the energy of your partner as Beloved and sense yourself radiating from your heart to their heart the energy of love.

Sense yourself being love, the connection as love, your partner as love, and the sacred space that holds you both as love itself. Be love and be loved.

Abide in the space of being love, the Divine embrace of the Beloved.

Partner Meditations

When we wish to give our spiritual partner something to let them know 'how much we really love them,' the most appropriate gift is always to dissolve the separation across which gifts are offered.

Co-Spiring

One partner lies down facing upward. Simply relax and let your breathing settle into a natural rhythm.

The other partner sits beside the person on the floor or ground. Sense your connection to your partner. Simply watch your partner's breathing. As your partner inhales, softly say "open." As your partner exhales, softly say "radiate." Stay alert to your partner's breath, matching even the subtlest changes in their respiration so what you say corresponds to the rhythm of their breath. Breathe their breath in your body without concern about having your breathing rate match theirs.

Continue for five minutes or some predetermined time. Then switch roles. The relaxing atmosphere can be enhanced by playing quiet meditative music in the background.

In a variation of this process, the person seated simply makes the sound AHHH with each exhalation. AHHH is a way of sighing, of the kind of letting go you might experience and express getting into a warm, soothing bath at the end of a strenuous day of work. You allow the AHHH to arise from deeper and deeper in your body so that you sense it originating from your core. Make your AHHH clearly audible to your partner. The mutual inhalations are silent. The person lying on the ground can make the sound of AHHH or not depending on what feels natural at the moment. In this co-spiring we experience being on the inside of our mutual breathing, intimate with

Exercises to Strengthen Heart to Heart Connection
ourselves, each other, and our mutual respiration.

You can continue this practice for extended periods of time moving through whatever feeling states arise as you maintain the breath connection. In open-ended sessions, generally let the person lying down be in charge of how long they wish to continue.

Hand Dancing

Sit facing each other. Be present with each other, hosting and being hosted. Sit together with your eyes open. Then sit with your eyes closed, sensing the presence of each other.

Place your open hands up with your palms facing the palms of your partner. Sense the energy of your partner through your hands. With your eyes closed, touch hands palm to palm, then separate them and sense the energy between you. Finding a distance where you can each experience the energy of the other through your hands, with your eyes closed, begin to move your hands together in a dance, staying synchronized as much as possible. You will find that you spontaneously change who leads and follows, going back and forth.

When your hand dancing comes to a natural conclusion, sit and host each other and have the sense of being hosted by the Divine.

Practice of Praise

Praise is the active celebration of value. It is the honoring



of what is. It is the heart posture of applause. It is appreciation, gratitude, embracing, with a large dose of joy and celebration. Praise is an act of connection. Praise is an act of reaching out and opening to being touched in our core. Praise is our aliveness expressing value and radiating love. Praise holds both knowing and not knowing with a sense of glorious wonder.

1. Begin with something that feels praiseworthy about your partner.

Take an attitude of praise toward it.

Notice how you feel, perceive, and relate to each other when in that attitude.

Experience the energy, its configuration, and its radiance in this heart posture. Maintain this heart posture while moving your attention to something else in relation to your partner. Then move on to another thing.

Experience the aliveness of presence in each.

Experience holding a heart posture of praise in general.

2. What would it be like to relate to your partner and your relationship with a heart posture of praise?

3. How does it change your relationship to your partner?

9

Creating a Home of Interactions Hand in Hand

Cultivating The Qualities of Love, Interest, and Beauty

For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is mere preparation.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Love prepares the ground and plants the seed for intimacy to grow. After it sprouts, we intentionally nurture it through actions, caring, consciousness, and loving communication so that intimacy will grow, flower, and bear its wonderfully delicious fruit.

Unlike most of the past when marriage was supported, and to some extent sustained, by religious, social, family and legal institutions, sustaining a marriage today requires deliberate efforts at preservation that often include strong friendship, more conscious communication, sharing of household tasks, and working to provide a nurturing home for children.

In studies of happily married couples, the most frequently named reason for satisfaction and sustainability in marriage is



being best friends. The important qualities that are indicated as contributing to the loving friendship are caring, giving, integrity, and a sense of humor. For most of us, it does not mean we are unaware of the shortcomings of our partner but that their likable qualities are more important. In addition, many couples continue to believe that marriage is a long-term commitment and sacred institution. When asked about the significance of their sexual relationship, fewer than 10% thought that a good sexual relationship is what kept them together.⁵

TERESA AND JIM

The reasons my feelings of love and commitment toward Jim continue to grow may seem small but to me they are very large. They include the way he gives me a hug when I get home from work, the fact that our hands join together when we are walking down the street, the ways he makes efforts to be helpful when I am struggling with something, the way our bodies fit together as we sleep, and the gratitude he expresses when I do something nice for him such as rubbing his back at the end of a hard day of work.

Integrity in marriage means being true to the relationship, to its spirit, to its energy, to its agreements, to its process and evolution, to the reality of the relationship as it is now and as we mutually envision it becoming. We want to develop the heart posture of a caretaker of our marriage, not as a proprietor or owner. We are stewards of love not possessors or creators of it. Love is a gift, a blessing that we want to open and it is meant to be shared.

There are no short cuts to real intimacy. It must be cultivated moment to moment, action by action, and at the same time we must open to receiving its blessing. Each blessing is a seed that must be nurtured to live and grow. This requires work and practical skills in building and sustaining the intimacy in our marriage as we become close friends. John Gottman makes the simple point that happy marriages, for example, are “based

on a deep friendship.” This friendship involves mutual respect and enjoyment of each other and taking the time to support those qualities.

Some Misconceptions about Marriage

Gottman, through his long-term research on couples and marriage and reviewing the studies of others, found that there are many misconceptions about what makes for happy marriages. The following list gives common misconceptions and then what the research actually reveals.

1. Personality problems ruin marriages. We all have our ordinary neuroses and these are not necessarily obstacles to a happy marriage. It is more important that two people fit together.

2. Common interests keep people together. What is more important is how we interact in the course of pursuing our mutual interests. Couples who have more positive moments than negative moments have a better chance of lasting together.

3. Equality of doing for each other cements a relationship. Keeping a tally is much more an indicator of a difficult marriage than one where each person helps out because of their positive feeling about their spouse and the relationship.

4. Avoiding conflict will ruin marriage. Couples have different styles of dealing with conflict. Some avoid arguments and others fight frequently and some talk things out and work out a compromise or understanding. Even couples that have heated arguments and passionate reconciliations can last. The key seems to be that a number of styles will work as long as it works for both people.

5. Affairs are the root cause of divorce. Problems in the marriage that usually lead to divorce are what send people looking for affairs. Most extramarital affairs arise, not for sex, but for friendship, understanding, respect, attention, caring and support, namely the kinds of things that a good marriage provides.



6. Men are not biologically “built for marriage.” This is related to the misconception about affairs. However the frequency of affairs is much more related to opportunity. As women have increasingly worked outside the household, the rate of extramarital affairs by women is found to be the same as men.

7. Men and women are from different planets. “The determining factor in whether wives feel satisfied with the sex, romance, and passion in their marriage is, by 70 percent, the quality of the couple’s friendship. For men, the determining factor is, by 70 percent, the quality of the couple’s friendship.” Further, in happy relationships, there is no discernible difference between how women and men express themselves emotionally.⁶

8. Relationships can be long lasting and satisfying even when there is little emotional expression, if most of what is shared is predominately positive and the lack of emotional expression is mutually accepted.

9. It helps to confront complaints and differences early in the relationship.

Supporting Hand in Hand Friendship

In loving hand in hand intimacy we keep moving the overall state of our relationship in an increasingly positive direction. With a high state of caring and loving, the threshold for unbalancing the relationship in a negative direction is set very high. In marriage, we have the sense that we are mutually responsible for creating the relationship we both want to call home, a home for both the romance and sharing of heart to heart intimacy and for mutual endeavors of raising children and participating in larger communities.

The solid foundation of friendship often arises after the initial period of passion and falling in love. It is also true that for many couples, they were friends before they were lovers.

STANLEY AND RUTH

My friendship with Ruth goes way back, for many, many years. For a long time I did not even think of her in terms of a lover. We were the kind of friends that could talk about anything and did, including whatever romantic relationships we were in at the time. Then, about six years ago, at a time when we each had broken up with the person we were seeing, we each complained that we wished our lovers could be the kind of friends that Ruth and I were for each other. Like a flash, we suddenly looked at each other in a new way and decided to explore becoming lovers. I was afraid of losing her as a friend if the relationship did not work out and I know she shared that fear. We went ahead anyway and quickly realized that we had fallen in love with each other even before we had made the decision to become lovers.

It has remained the most wonderful and intimate relationship we have ever had. Even though neither of us looked like the type of person that the other one would typically be attracted to, when we made love, it was incredible. We seem to fit together so well. We can talk about anything and tell each other what we like and don't like in sex. I think our marriage is so strong now because we were best friends and then became lovers. It's like we already had a foundation of intimacy before we became sexually involved and added romance.

Among the dynamics that can most undermine hand in hand intimacy and usually the other two as well, are constant criticism, contempt, withdrawal, feeling at war, closing off to overtures of connection and regular overwhelm. When we have passed over a negative threshold, almost everything is interpreted and felt more negatively and feeds our distress with the relationship. Simple feedback is taken as an attack. Judgment and righteousness prevail over friendship and love as we engage in an ongoing undeclared war, turning our partner into an opponent.



Hand in hand intimacy that builds a home of friendship fuels the flames of romance because it provides a loving, positive environment that protects us from feeling adversarial. Our heart posture is one of caring and friendship rather than that of living in a war zone. The caring atmosphere of home creates a container within which disagreements and annoyances can come and go or even have their own small space within the whole of our marriage. They are like a squeaky door in a beautiful house. The squeak is annoying but the overall beauty is what gets most of our attention and what we enjoy.

The practical suggestions in this book are not a cookbook for relationships. We must remember to listen deeply to the authentic voices of the Sacred that are trying to speak and create benefit through our marriage and the situations we face. At the same time, there are specific things we can do, guidelines we can follow, and qualities we can cultivate.

Life and relationships all require consciousness, communication, sharing, vision, groundedness, capacity to nurture one another, peace, reflection, wisdom, reconciliation, purpose, humor, magic, and integrity. To realize the potential of intimacy also requires stamina, tenacity, dedication to a purpose and commitment. Consciousness and communication form the foundation for building an intimate marriage that works.

Kurtz and Ketcham tell a wonderful story.

“An old Jewish woman was dying of rectal cancer. Her husband sat by her bedside, holding her hand, talking to her, crying with her.

“A nurse came into the room. ‘Excuse me, sir,’ she said, gently touching his shoulder. ‘It’s time to change the bandages. If you’ll leave the room, I’ll be done in just a few minutes.’

“‘Excuse *me,*’ the man replied with a gentle but determined smile, ‘but I’ll stay right here. This *tush* and I have

Creating a Home of Interactions Hand in Hand

had a lot of good times together. I'm not going to turn my back on it now.' ”7



Environmental Communications

Hello! How Are You? And Goodbye.

Environmental communications establish and maintain the qualities in a marriage that are the atmosphere each of us lives in. The environment may look and feel like a desert, without much growing in it, or a dump filled with discarded feelings and the rotting waste of resentment and regret, or a garden in which beauty is cultivated, new growth is incorporated, a wildness is included within boundaries, and we feel inspired, nourished, and supported in both mundane and sacred ways. If we want a loving relationship, our communications express support and do not diminish the environment of love. We actively grow the environment of the relationship we want, deepening and widening the reach of hand in hand intimacy between us.

The key principle here is that *we are the environment that other people experience*. The question is always, *what kind of environment are we creating?* Are we polluting or creating beauty and benefit? This principle applies not simply in our marriage, but in all of the contexts in which we are participants. From a spiritual point of view, even in solitude, each of us contributes to the atmosphere of consciousness that we all live in.

Environmental communications range from the way we

greet each other in the morning and on coming home from work, to the way we talk when preparing a meal, driving someplace, or relaxing together. These include the qualities of our day-to-day presence with each other, our facial expressions, our body postures, and our gestures toward or away from each other.

Very importantly, the ways we respond to bids for attention play a vital role in our experience of the marriage environment. Do we listen when our partner wants to share experiences from the day? Do we give them a hug when they are feeling down? Do we encourage them when they struggle with difficulties in their work?

We want to approach intimacy much like an artist approaches creating a work of true art—with clarity, feeling, openness, inspiration, and heart-felt engagement. Hand in hand we infuse our interactions with affection and caring and weave respect and admiration into the ways we respond to and talk about each other. In the active engagement of hand in hand relationships, we each address the deep wishes we have to be heard, to be seen, to connect, to contribute, to receive, and to be regarded in a worthwhile and unique way.

We want to move beyond our attitudes that treat most things as ordinary, unexceptional, flat, routine, of little value, or even boring. We cultivate a sacred view, a spiritual heart posture, that sees the extraordinary beauty and significance of *what is*, of all reality, of the Divine manifesting in everything, including in each other and in the marriage. To develop this way of seeing, this heart posture, requires great effort and often a model and a mentor.

Conscious hand in hand intimacy requires that we turn down the static of judgments, blame and concerns that are so distracting and distressing. We do not want to overwhelm, control, or stalk our partner with our fears, hopes, dissatisfactions and comparisons. Rather, we scan our feelings and our connections for the beautiful music at the heart of our relationships.



We nurture affection and admiration. Often this comes forth when we host other people and mutually create a sense of home for others.

We also create mutual names and rituals for things, activities, and special occasions that are unique for our marriage. We give special meaning to something we share such as a pair of wine glasses that we use to toast each other every evening at dinner or a ritual lighting of candles to greet the Sabbath or a family meal we have after church every Sunday. These are the materials and activities of connection that sustain and grow hand in hand intimacy.

Using Love Maps

In the course of creating love maps, we bring curiosity about each other and get to know each other in both sacred and mundane ways. We learn about personal preferences, pleasures, what's important, stories, habits, and important friends. We use our knowledge of each other to do little things that please, support, delight, and touch their heart. We act on our love maps to nurture affection, friendship, admiration, and mutual affinity. Nurturance includes not only functional activities but also symbolic gestures that are invested with relationship meaning.

For example, you decorate the home of your relationship by responding to everyday things that your partner needs, wants, and would find helpful and enjoyable. Picking up groceries that they like, responding to questions about how to do something even when the solution seems obvious, giving encouragement when they tackle a difficult task, giving them a shoulder massage when they are tense, laughing with them at something humorous, taking obvious delight in the little things that make them happy, comforting them when they are distressed, and listening to them when they need to vent about something.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity also plays an important role in hand in hand intimacy. Reciprocity involves a mutual responsiveness to the needs of each other. It differs from exchange in that exchange implies that what is given creates an expectation of receiving something that is of equivalent value. Reciprocity is based more on a mutual understanding that what is given is more in proportion to what is needed and a sense of shared responsibility to make the relationship work, even during periods when one partner is more dependent than the other.

The Art of Saying No

We are often in situations where our partner wants to do something together that we do not want to do. Sometimes we decide to join them anyway because we want to please them or our objection is very mild. Yet there are times when we feel strongly or simply decide to not join him or her. Saying no is often difficult because we do not want to hurt our partner or to have them feel alone. This can lead to awkward reactions rather than clear responses.

Finding supportive and comfortable ways to say no takes some experimentation and will depend on the situation. What may help is to acknowledge the invitation and express appreciation, to be clear about your no and, if applicable, offer an alternative.

Another difficulty that we may encounter is that we have conflicting feelings and need to explore our own ambivalences before making a decision. When we are not clear about our dilemma we run the danger of sending mixed messages and confusing the expectations of our partner.

Constructing a Positive History and Philosophy

We mutually articulate a story of our relationship, a history that sees the relationship deepening and growing. This history



does not deny challenges and irresolvable conflicts but focuses on successes and mutuality. Based on this history of success in connection, nurturing each other, resolving conflicts, and holding irresolvable differences, we evolve a sensibility about what makes our relationship work.

“What can make a marriage work is surprisingly simple. Happily married couples ... have hit upon a dynamic that keeps their negative thoughts and feelings about each other (which all couples have) from overwhelming their positive ones.”

JOHN GOTTMAN⁸

Hand in Hand Conversations

Hand in hand conversations include whatever we want to talk about *that is outside the relationship*. While heart to heart sharing supports hand in hand intimacy, the everyday conversations are not the time to talk about relationship issues. Reviewing your day and catching up are times to emotionally support each other around the other domains and relationships of your lives.

Guidelines for conversations where the relationship or your spouse is not the issue:

1. Take turns.
2. Listen for both content and feelings and show real interest.
3. Let your partner know you empathize with the feelings and have listened to the content.
4. Do not give unasked for advice. Ask how you can be helpful.
5. Express affection.

Five Hours a Week

In the follow-up research of couples that have taken workshops with Gottman and his colleagues, the relationships that continued to improve tended to devote an average of five hours extra a week to their marriage. Among the interactions that can make a difference are the following:

1. Make sure that when you part in the morning you learn at least one thing about your spouse's plans for the day.
2. Engage in supportive and relaxing conversation at the end of workdays, making sure to give each other the time and space to transition back home.
3. Express appreciation to your partner in some way during the course of each day. You will find it useful to make a list of what you find endearing and what you appreciate about your partner. Add to this list over the course of a month and then from time to time to update the list.
4. Show affection by kissing, hugging, holding, and touching during your time together. It is helpful to reflect on the ways you like to show affection and the ways you would like your partner to demonstrate affection for you. Give particular attention to ways you express affection and love, both physically and sexually, and explore ways of enhancing these expressions. Share these with each other and, in the sharing, open to giving and receiving in the ways that your partner likes.
5. Try to include a shared activity such as a walk or



preparing a meal as a part of your regular daily schedule.

6. Do a sharing process so you keep each other updated on your inner lives and continue to build your love maps.

7. Have regular weekly activities that are shared. For example, have a date sometime during the week where you can be relaxed. Take time to meditate or pray together. Over time, explore goals you want to work on together. List what you have accomplished together and what you would like to accomplish as a team.

Loving Presence Meditation (A Home for Sacred Love and a Love of Home)

Sit in a posture of basic dignity with the crown of your head aligned over your perineum so that you are relaxed, alert, and can breathe easily. Place your hands in your lap or on your legs with your thumbs and index fingers connected or clasp them together, right hand on top and place them in your lap.

1. Begin by establishing the sense of being a hosting presence. Notice the sensations in your hands. As you experience some tingling or pulsing sensations in your hands, also place some of your attention on the sensation of your breathing. Hear sounds. Listen not only with your ears but also with your whole body. Listen particularly from the back of the head. Have a sense of listening to not only the sounds but also to the silence within which the sounds arise. Notice thoughts coming and going and feelings as they arise, pass on through, and disappear.

Experience yourself hosting sensations, sounds, silence, thoughts, and feelings. Host everything that arises. In this hosting, sense yourself manifesting the sky-like openness of the heavens, the rich nourishing powers of the earth, and the capacity in your heart to reach out in all directions to all beings.

2. Imagine that someone who loves you very much is standing behind you.

3. Sense his or her gaze upon you and that this person is about to speak to you or touch you in a loving way.

4. Allow yourself to be physically organized—adjusting your posture, energy and feelings—in their loving presence and feel the sensations that arise as you allow yourself to relax into this love.

5. Allow your mind to relax imagining that you are in a vast, open, and beautiful space.

6. Consider that this loving presence is simply an agent of love itself.

7. Continue to relax your mind and body even further, feeling surrounded by love itself.

8. Allow yourself to be physically organized in the presence of love itself and feel the sensations that arise in your body.

9. Consider that love itself is an aspect of the Divine.

10. Allow yourself to be physically organized in the



presence of the Divine as Beloved and feel the sensations that arise.

11. Allow your mind to relax even further, realizing that—whether you remember it or not—you are always in the presence of the Divine.

12. As you arise from this meditation, consider that all forms that you perceive are the body of the Beloved, that all vibrations, sounds, and sensations that you feel are the voice of the Beloved, and that all thoughts, emotions, and mental activities arise as clouds that come and go. Dedicate yourself to being a conscious agent of Divine Love through your presence.

Working Shoulder to Shoulder and Side by Side

Living and working together that leads to shoulder to shoulder bonding always supports a greater sense of meaning and purpose that we want in our lives. In marriage this involves being willing to accept that each of us has a point of view and values that we believe to be right and that we are willing to invest our time and energy in them. Respect in this case is not agreement but an acceptance that our partner's beliefs are true for them. Support means that we will encourage our partner in bringing the gifts that they have to the relationship and the larger world. In a marriage, as on teams and in work situations, we respect and encourage each other to contribute ourselves and our skills to the larger purpose that we are all serving.

Whether in raising children, buying a house and making it a home, working together to support a religious community, volunteering for charitable or political causes, or simply hosting friends and family, we want to discover workable divisions of labor, to experience being responsible together for creating good outcomes, and to appreciate the participation and contributions of each other. Being teammates in some sport, buddies on adventures, protectors and defenders of each other in the face of threats from outside, and colleagues in learning,



all involve mutually participating in activities that convey the sense of *we*. In this process we create not only shared meaning but also shared experience that strengthens the shoulder to shoulder bonds between us and affirms the entity of *we*. In creating this inner life together, we evolve a culture that has a sense of the purposes that transcend the relationship itself.

OPEN TO BEING INFLUENCED

As our relationships grow, we must do more than support each other. We must also let our partners, teammates, and co-workers influence us. While this is more obvious in team and work situations, although often ignored, it is frequently difficult in marriage when we have strong ideas of what, why, and how things should be done. Accepting influence is both an attitude and a skill, especially because we want to convey honor and respect.

Accepting influence requires that you stay open to possibilities suggested by your partner. It does not mean placating him or her or resentfully going along with them. It does involve being willing to compromise and mobilize yourself to make the compromise work.

In addition to being willing to accept your partner's influence, you want to find ways that you can meet some of your partner's requests. An attitude of support and mutual contribution is important. Relationships work better when each person avoids turning requests into power struggles.

Mutual Exploration Not Necessarily Resolution

As was discussed earlier, there are many differences between people that lead to issues that are not resolvable that we must live with and there are those conflicts that can reach some accommodations or solution. Happily married couples have loud arguments, even screaming matches, and these do not necessarily harm the marriage. These couples have a confidence in their

bond that provides a generally friendly and loving context for the fights that do arise.

In working with couples and families, I have found that it is essential to build the hand in hand bonds of intimacy before, or at least along with, working on the issues that families have. Without the reserve of good feelings and positive experiences engendered by day-to-day support, it is difficult for couples to face and contain their deeper issues. As Gottman found in his extensive research on successful marriage, “Successful conflict resolution isn’t what makes marriages succeed.”⁹ In terms of marriage therapy, Gottman points out that conflict resolution as such does not work to make marriages more viable and lasting. Finding ways to successfully deal with conflict will vary from couple to couple, but the important piece is that it needs to work for all the people involved.

In befriending the ambiguity of our difficult situations, we simply learn how to hold the conflicting feelings we have and the dilemmas we face in our hearts and minds and trust that we can be spacious enough to embrace it all. We can then let go of imposing an either/or frame. This frees us somewhat from the need to control and the fear of regret. It moves us out of the paradox of no right choice and into a context beyond choice.

Dialogical Communication

One of the most important tools in working on issues, whether for resolution or fuller exploration is what I call “dialogical communication.” Dialogue includes those conversations and interactions in which we make decisions, explore ideas and points of view, work together on some issue or task, and engage each other in an exchange of thoughts, energies and activities. Dialogue builds shoulder to shoulder intimacy.

There are many styles of engaging in dialogical conversations, and it is useful to develop a repertoire of approaches to add flexibility to these conversations. For example, some people



like to articulate their position and have their partner respond in kind and then to explore areas of similarity and difference. Others like to begin by asking questions. It is important to realize that asking questions both invites answers and has the power to direct attention to the content of what is being asked about.

Making Requests and Giving Feedback

While mutual caring connects us, getting our needs met does not automatically follow. There are often needs that cannot be met even when they are understood. At other times our partner may not feel he or she can or should meet a particular need. Many times we find that it is best if we speak up and communicate our desires and not assume that they are obvious to our partner. While many of us know this principle, it does require that we get clear ourselves about our requests and overcome our reluctance concerning topics that we find awkward to talk about, such as sexual requests.

Another type of conversation that is often awkward and difficult centers on giving feedback to each other. As your relationship develops and there is strong trust, having feedback conversations about each other's behavior can be useful even if difficult. Giving feedback to your partner requires that you are aware of your motivation and that you are not trying to score points in some kind of competition, or blaming your partner for the breakdown in your feelings of connection. When we feel wounded, wrong and unhappy, we must be particularly careful about our impulses to hurt, humiliate, blame, ridicule and get even.

Challenging Conversations

Dialogical conversations often involve topics and situations where we feel vulnerable and awkward, where we feel the stakes are high and the outcome uncertain, and where we care deeply about the issue and about the people with whom we are

in conversation.

We hesitate to broach potentially conflictual topics because, on the one hand we fear confronting the issue could make matters worse or get explosive, and, on the other, if we ignore the issue, it will fester and we will have to carry it like a ball and chain without having the opportunity to find something more workable. We fear being misunderstood, attacked or even rejected at the same time we fear hurting our partner in ways that we don't intend.

Disagreements and conflicts are part of life and definitely part of any intimate relationship. How we relate to these differences of opinion and points of view and how we discuss them can enhance or break a relationship. Approaching conversation and dialogue as adversaries rather than as collaborators can erode the base of the relationship. Even when we get a result we want in the short term, we could be setting the stage for a breakdown in the relationship.

In a famous Zen story, the monks of the eastern and western halls in a monastery were quarrelling about a cat. Zen Master Nansen, hearing the heated argument, walked into the midst of the monks, held up the cat and said, "If one of you can say a word, I will spare the cat. If you cannot say anything, I will put it to the sword." No one could answer, so Nansen cut the cat in two and handed half to each side.

As brutal a teaching as this story seems to be, it reveals that when we get so caught up in our own point of view, we lose sight of what is real and living. Life is lost in the rigid arguing and we are lost when we remain stuck in right and wrong without listening and by losing sight of the beauty and vitality of the cat. We kill the subject, which in many conversations with a partner may be the relationship itself. If we get into a habit of fighting about who is right and who is wrong in trying to resolve our conflicts, the sense of *we* is damaged and the intimate bonding is diminished. The way we discuss disagreements is more



important in most cases than whether there is resolution. It is also important to keep in mind that many differences may not get resolved and the challenge is to grow the relationship so that it is large enough and sufficiently vital to contain and even grow from the continuing disagreements. We want to make the relationship itself develop the capacity to hold paradox and complexity of divergent viewpoints.

People have many different styles of responding to conflict. Some want to keep the peace and will placate their partner. Others try to dominate the situation and insist on their way. Still others seek mutuality in inputs and are committed to process disagreements. And some look for ways to compromise. In a conflict some will be primarily concerned with being right and others with maintaining the relationship. In all these responses, we want to bring consciousness of our own style and that of our partner and move our relationship into a more communicative and inclusive style.

In broaching difficult subjects with our partner, no matter how strong the relationship and deep the intimacy and skilled we are in talking with each other, it will always be challenging. The goal is not to make us completely comfortable with hard conversations but to reduce the level of discomfort and anxiety to the point that issues can be discussed.

Conversation Impasses

Before proceeding to a fuller discussion of dialogical communication, recognizing some of the common stumbling blocks to supportive and intimate dialogue grounds our examination in the realities of everyday life and experiences.

Some of the impasses that occur in couple communications include a criticism/ dread dynamic in which one partner avoids dealing with emotional issues out of fear that they will be overwhelmed by complaints and criticisms. This often leads to withdrawal and resentment. This withdrawal in turn makes

the partner who wants to confront emotions feel abandoned and angry.

Another impasse arises when one person is anxious to work toward an outcome or solve a problem and the other values the process of exploring options and the various attitudes about the situation. One is outcome oriented and the other cares more about the mutual process.

A third impasse arises when there is a power battle for control. Whether motivated by fear or need or a simple desire for power in the relationship, we compound an issue, intensify the charge of a conflict and rigidify positions when we seek power over a partner

Righteousness

Going into conversations about issues we get caught into assuming that I am right and you are wrong. This sense of rightness, even righteousness, is natural and causes enormous grief. We must realize that each of us thinks we are right, that we may simply have differing perspectives, interpretations, and values on the subject, and that disagreements are generally not about truth but about personal meaning.

Our need to be right often comes from our fear of loss of approval or worth. Our need to be right may come out in the rejection of criticism, blame of others, justifying our behaviors, repeatedly explaining our positions, and the insistence that our partner apologize and thus validate our feelings. Often people act as if it is more important to be right than to support the connection in their marriage.

RANDY AND DESMOND

Randy would often come home to find that Desmond had made what he called "a mess." Desmond worked much of the time at home which enabled him to care for their adopted son Tim, who was now five years old. Desmond would do art projects with Tim and they would often leave some things



unfinished or not put things away when they moved onto other activities together. Randy liked a neat, clean house and thought he had a right to come home after work to a home that appeared ordered rather than “chaotic.”

Randy’s reaction to the state of the house was to get upset and yell at Desmond. His anger would carry over into dinner and sometimes last the entire evening. When Desmond tried to talk about the anger, Randy would explain at length about how important it was to set a good example of neatness and how his reaction was justified given that “Desmond never listened.” He refused to examine his own role in their arguments and insisted that Desmond apologize for creating disharmonies in their family.

This kind of situation requires that each person engage in self-reflection and personal examination. Each needs to acknowledge their contribution to the collective dynamic. In this case they needed to work to change the tone of their points of view, to not take the attitude of “my way or the highway,” to avoid making their desires and behaviors power issues, and to respect each other. Upon reflection, Desmond realized that he often allowed himself to fall into a child position in relation to Randy and some of his behaviors were acts of rebellion to the parental role that Randy assumed with him. Randy was very reluctant to examine his behaviors and attitudes, feeling that his very identity was being challenged. Eventually he did come to see that there were other points of view and that he did not have “to be right” to be accepted and loved. In fact he found he could be more relaxed when he did not expend so much energy trying to control everything and then defending his positions.

JOE AND JAN

Joe has agreed to clean his home office for when Jan’s parents come to visit. He places all the papers that are scattered on his desk in neat piles organized by order of importance. He places Post-its on the front of a file holder

Working Shoulder to Shoulder and Side by Side

next to his computer to remind him of the correspondence that he will answer soon. After he has finished and moves on to other preparations for the visit, Jan gets upset with the way his office looks. Her idea of a clean room includes the surfaces being clear and everything put away, out of sight.

Jan: I thought you agreed to clean your office.

Joe: I did. I spent hours organizing the mess and straightening things out.

Jan: But you didn't finish the job. There are still papers and piles all over and the Post-its in plain view are unsightly.

Joe: My office is not a display case. I try to keep it pleasant and still functional as an office.

Jan: Everybody else can function better when their desktop is clear, why can't you?

Joe: I am not everybody else and I need to keep things workable for me.

Jan: I get so embarrassed by your mess. I want my parents to feel comfortable here.

Joe: They will be comfortable. I am sure that the way I keep my office is not that important to them and they will not be spending any time in there anyway.

This argument can go on and on. If there are other festering issues, it could escalate into a major fight with statements like: "You never complete anything," or "You care more about your work than about me or my family" or "You are so concerned about how things look and care nothing about how I feel and what's important."

Both Jan and Joe are locked into thinking they are right. What does not work is a battle of proclamations. These usually center around the idea that our partner is the problem and that our partner thinks we are the problem. Our position always makes sense to us in our own story of what has happened in the past and our priorities for the present and the future.

Before we have these kinds of conversations, it is useful to become more conscious of our own inner feelings and issues



and to do a sharing process of our feelings and inner experience. Personal reflection makes us aware of the deeper layers of our feelings, associations, and concerns. We inquire about what self-images and stories are tied up in an issue and what is triggering and amplifying our reactions now.

For Joe, the issue of his office may be tied to his assertion of a measure of control of his own life, work, and outside responsibilities in the face of a demanding boss who wants everything done in a certain way. It may also bring up memories of his father being badgered by his mother about his manners and deciding that he was not going to be the kind of husband who was treated badly. He may feel that he is a supportive husband and does a great deal to make his wife feel comfortable and yet not have everything governed by her comfort.

For Jan, the same issue may bring up deeper desires to prove herself as a competent housekeeper in the eyes of her picky mother and demanding father. She may think that they think Joe, who she loves, was a questionable choice for a husband and want to get their approval of him. She likes to think of herself as independent of her family yet still wants them to think highly of her.

In approaching dialogical conversations, we must examine our unstated but inwardly held agendas. These often include wanting to prove a point, getting our partner to do what we want, or to tell them off about something they did that annoyed us. In cases where the relationship is deteriorating toward a separation, the agenda is often to fire warning shots of blame across the bow of our partner to let them know that we intend to fight or to demonstrate how much evidence there is supporting our victimization in the relationship and all the ways our partner is destroying the relationship.

Intense Emotions Are Difficult To Discuss

Feelings and emotions are difficult subjects to discuss.

Working Shoulder to Shoulder and Side by Side

Besides their obvious charge and sometimes confusing nature, they are not really open for discussion so much as sharing. By this I mean that we each are the authority on our feelings and our feelings simply are true for us at the time. It is not a question of whether we should or should not have them. It is not a subject of mutual decision. It is about what is true for us right now and our sharing that with our partner and having him or her listen.

Since the way we feel constitutes a major ingredient in any issue, it is important that we communicate our feelings if we want to work on the issue. In most cases, I have found that couples have great difficulty handling the feelings at the same time they are trying to make a decision or explore the non-emotional content of an issue. The emotions simply overwhelm everything else or get ignored entirely.

What I have found works best is to have people share, face-to-face and heart to heart, the feelings that they have before they try to engage in dialogue (which I call shoulder to shoulder intimacy in a side by side activity) that is intended to produce a decision or even a simple exploration for learning. From this we may begin to understand that each one of us has a particular, possibly even reasonable, way of looking at things and holds different values.

JILL AND NATALIE

Jill tried to understand Natalie's periodic withdrawal into herself and her angry responses to attempts to verbally process issues as they arose in the relationship. She knew that Natalie had grown up in a violent home where both her parents were alcoholics and would have nasty fights many nights that kept the children up and in fear that something disastrous was about to happen. Part of her kept trying to repair what she saw as her wounded partner. At the same time Jill would get frustrated in her attempts to make things "all better" and resented having to accommodate Natalie's issues and felt that her own needs were not being addressed



or even talked about. She became critical of Natalie and complained that she needed a more equal and mature partner. The times when the two of them did talk about what was happening, the conversations degenerated into a fight where each blamed the other.

When they came to see me, I had them simply share and listen and suggested that they not try to discuss or resolve any issues for the first month of our work together. Through the sharing, Natalie began to feel safer to say what she was feeling and thinking and to make her own associations with her old patterns. Jill learned to simply be present and not have to fix Natalie and to talk about her own issues with wanting to be needed and to feel like she was being helpful. She also realized that her helpfulness arose from both her caring and her desire to be in some control.

Only after weeks of working with the sharing process, were Jill and Natalie ready to explore their issues in conversation without being defensive and making judgments.

Mindreading

Another common error in discussing issues is mindreading. Mindreading is where we project our own thoughts and feelings onto our partner. If we feel hurt, we attribute meanness to their intentions. We may see their comments as attempts to control us. We assume we know what the other person is thinking and know more about that than what they are saying or willing to admit. Yet we cannot really know the complexity of thought and the feelings of others, and even when they hurt us, it is usually unintentional. We cannot be the authority about the inner workings of other people, just as they cannot know exactly how things work for us. Each of us is the authority on our own views and inner worlds.

The Blame Frame

Using the blame frame, talking about fault, is often another dialogue stopper. Blame usually results in disagreement, denial,

opposition, and little or no exploration and learning. Focusing on blame and our associated righteous judgments sidetracks us from finding out what is true for each other, what roles we each played in contributing to a difficult situation or issue, and how we can work together to make things better.

The Art of Arguing and Dialoguing

Arguments are a natural part of many relationships and are not necessarily failures in the marriage. Working with couples, I have found that arguing is more comfortable for some people than others. As long as both partners are reasonably OK with disagreement and emotional expression of opposition and they are skilled in the art of argument and repair, these kinds of interaction do not result in damage to the relationship. In the art of argument, it is vital that certain thresholds are not crossed such as threatening your partner or the relationship, acting contemptuously, or physically acting out. Arguments can serve to release tensions, focus attention on each other, energize each person, and create response potential for connection.

What does not flow from arguments that degenerate into shouting matches is listening and understanding. In dialogue we appreciate that each of us has our own way of looking at things that gets us to notice different information. We know ourselves and our feelings better than anyone else, we bring different experiential background to issues, we hold different values and often care about different things, we have different standards for feeling satisfied, for behavior, raising children, and hosting guests, and we are bound to operate from a great deal of self-interest even when we are not aware of it.

Share Feelings Before Having Conversation

To be successful in dialogical conversations, it is important to have shared the relevant feelings and truths as much as possible prior to the conversation so that we are less concerned



about revealing what we feel and can focus on the topic we are mutually engaged in. Even sharing feelings and truths that are not directly related to a particular issue helps to clear the deck of feelings related to other issues and makes a cleaner and more supportive space for connective dialogue on hard topics. It is also useful to have reflected on what the issues mean about us in terms of our fears, longings, self-images, sense of worth, competence, significance and lovability. All of this helps us get clear about our purpose for raising an issue and the kind of outcome we are working toward.

Explore More Than Explain

In dialogical conversation our communications are low on explanation and high on exploration. We place high emphasis on discovery and less on interpretation. We try to avoid blaming in order to move into real discovery and problem solving. The point of dialogue is not to have a forum for making pronouncements but to create a way to have conversations from which we learn, make decisions, and work together, shoulder to shoulder, on even difficult topics.

Exploration means that our focus is on learning and not reacting and taking everything personally. When we do not take actions and words personally and can simply perceive information from our partner about what is going on for him or her, we do not get caught in feeling insulted, affronted, and denigrated and thus will not tend to become defensive or retaliative. Instead, we look for ways to create an environment of witnessing, caring, exploration and reconciliation.

Necessary, True and Kind

A good rule of thumb in deciding what and how to say things in dialogue applies the criteria that statements be necessary, true for us, and kind. These criteria bring consciousness in what we say, avoid a tendency toward exaggeration and generalization,

Working Shoulder to Shoulder and Side by Side

and support the loving nature of the relationship. We want to engender the sense of being a team together, working shoulder to shoulder to make decisions, accomplish tasks, identify conflicts and resolve those that can be resolved and find ways to live with those that are perpetual.

Some of the attributes we want to bring to dialogical conversations are: open listening, genuine consideration of different points of view and ideas, making contributions without attachment, staying on target in working toward our mutually desired outcomes, respect for each other, self-questioning, questioning each other in ways that maintain our connection as well as move us toward our goal, providing loving reality checks for each other, being clear about outcomes as they change, and staying grounded in ourselves and in the relationship so that we do not take disagreement personally.

For example, in our heterogeneous society with its diversity of backgrounds, opinions, and opportunities, even couples that participate together in some religious community will usually have differing points of view. It is the things we do together shoulder to shoulder by sharing rituals such as grace before meals, participating in holiday gatherings, attending services or spiritual retreats and having shared symbols that all support the structure of intimate bonding as a context that can hold and even encourage our personal differences.

Respect Other Points of View

In all conversations about relationship issues, whether solvable or perpetual, it is critical to convey a basic acceptance of each other's views as being true for them and of who they are. Listen for areas of similarity and try to learn from differences. Contempt and rejection make it nearly impossible to have a conversation. People become increasingly willing to listen to you if you communicate understanding and respect for them.

Clearly one of the tools for bridging the sense of distance



between people in a conversation involves each of us trying to put ourselves in the position of the other and looking from that point of view. This ability to walk in the shoes of the other and to see from their position enables us to understand some of the reasonableness of their positions even though we do not share their assumptions or agree with their conclusions. We can, however, agree to keep conversations respectful.

Keep Larger Context of Love in Mind

In problem solving conversations, keep in mind the larger context of love in your marriage, lead with understanding and caring, make and receive repair attempts when needed, sooth yourself and each other, accept each other's limitations, and compromise when possible. Leading with understanding and caring means that we avoid the blame frame, begin with ourselves, describe the situation as objectively as we know how as clearly as we can, be appreciative if possible, and recall times when we were both resourceful.

What Gottman calls "repair attempts" are statements and actions that keep an interaction from escalating out of control. Some basic phrases that can be used to repair a downward spiral to a conversation or interaction are "I feel," "I need a break" or "Let's take a break," "I need to calm down," "Sorry," "What I can agree with," "Let's agree to disagree," "I appreciate," "We can work this out," and "I think I understand." In situations where we become flooded with emotion that feels overwhelming or that we are being overwhelmed, the act of withdrawing for a period of time to take a pause can be a repair attempt. Be sensitive to flooding, because overwhelm does not produce results and usually makes us feel wounded.

Even in conflicts, try to be supportive and not inflict damage. A powerful exercise to do in preparation or as part of a conversation is to look at yourself from the other person's point of view and see what kind of environment you are creating.

You can also examine the dynamics from the vantage point of a neutral, nonjudgmental witness.

As we engage in dialogue and discover all the relevant feelings and points of view on an issue, we find that both positions on an issue contain elements and kinds of truth and that things are more complex than our simple understanding up to that point. We need to personally hold all these conflicting and competing concerns and factors and to mutually embrace the position that multiple truths and feelings are relevant. It is not a matter of simply one side or the other but of creating the space to include both. We learn to live and relate in a shared world of paradox and complexity.

When we are working with impasses on issues, the emphasis is not on solving the issue but moving into sharing and dialogue that explores differences and makes these kinds of conversations strengths in the relationship. I have found, from my own experience and that of my clients and students, that the more practiced couples become is dialoguing about hard subjects, the easier such conversations are to have and the more effective we are getting results that strengthen the relationship.

Often when we struggle with intractable issues over a period of time, we reach a point where we feel a shift. Even though the conflict is not resolved, there is a sense that the relationship is bigger than the issue. We mutually have learned how to live with the lack resolution. Some couples even integrate “our issue” into the mutual story of the marriage and its development over time. The larger frame of mutuality becomes the important point and the conflict is another shared experience that is woven into the fabric of the relationship.

Dialogue Guidelines

1. Sit facing each other.
2. Sense your body presence by noticing your body



sensations and establish a sense of hosting sensations, sounds, silence, thoughts and feelings and everything that arises.

3. Sense yourself embodying the sky-like spaciousness of the heavens, the rich nourishing powers of the earth, and the capacity in your heart to open and reach out to your partner. Sense the larger purposes and contexts for your conversation.

4. Sense the physical presence of your partner.

5. Agree on the topic. If there are unshared emotions associated with the topic, wait until after you have done a sharing process. This increases the likelihood that you can stay on the topic and not have the feelings become the topic. When feelings have not been shared and witnessed, conversations often get diverted and tend to degenerate into angry arguments. Open a dialogue with a description of the topic that you think both of you would agree on. This means taking the perspective of an outside witness who gets inside the thinking of each of you. Describe things as differences not judgments about right and wrong.

6. During conversation, it is useful to do the following:

a. Listen to your partner, not simply your inner voices. When your inner voices become particularly loud or insistent, you may not be able to shut them up but you can give them only a portion of the space of your attention, giving the bulk of your attention to

listening to your partner.

b. Consider what your partner has to say. Ask yourself, "What would have to be true for my partner to think and feel the way they do?" It is often useful to check out what you find. In dialogical conversations, unlike straight sharing, you can check out your understanding by paraphrasing or sharing a similar experience.

c. Contribute without attachment, remembering that you cannot change your partner. Do not proclaim your ideas or conclusions as truth. When appropriate share how you came to your conclusions. It is very important to not play guessing games about what you mean. This is a kind of power play that usually leads to frustration and breakdowns of connection. In making your contributions, avoid exaggerations such as "always" and "never."

d. Stay on target of the purpose of the conversation and maintain the flow by acknowledgements, humor, building on what has been said, summarizing and clarifying areas of agreement and disagreement.

e. Respect your partner as well as yourself

f. Question yourself, reflecting on the complexity of your own thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Also reflect on the role you have played in situations and issues.

g. Question your partner in ways that maintain



the relationship and reflect the real outcome. When asking questions to learn, do not make statements and judgments disguised as questions, such as “Why do you have to be so messy?” Use invitational questions as much as possible, such as “Would you please explain your point of view to me in a way that you think I am most likely to understand?” “How do you see things differently?” “What impact is what I am saying or doing having on you?” “How do you feel about all of this?” “Explain why this is important to you.” Be sure that you make it safe for your partner not to answer or to share as much or as little as he or she decides. Feeling free to speak your truth, also means being free not to say anything. You want to be inviting and encouraging to your partner and accept when they choose not to share.

- h. Have a sense of teamwork.
- i. Be clear about outcomes as they change.
- j. Stay grounded in not taking the thoughts and feelings of others personally and separate the impact of what they say and do from their intentions. In this, it is often useful to share the effects on you and inquire about their intentions.
- k. Reserve feelings that arise for a sharing process as much as possible at the same time as you listen to the feeling tone of what your partner is saying.
- l. Stay non-judgmental of your partner, accepting

Working Shoulder to Shoulder and Side by Side

that they will have opinions and feelings that are different than your own. Do not analyze your partner by offering theories of what they are thinking, what is motivating them, how they are damaged in some way, or the psychological reasons for their feelings and statements.

m. Listen with interest and stay present as you converse. Develop stamina.

n. Remember that taking responsibility is not about blame. It involves creating benefit from what is now, however it got that way.

8. Each person should have an opportunity to participate and lead the conversation as well as follow when the other is leading.

9. Do not require that you both see things the same way.

10. In decision-making, work together as much as possible and agree on the areas that you will continue to disagree, honoring the differences of opinion.

11. After the conversation, thank each other.

Summary and Additional Suggestions

Good communication, like any other skill and particularly those that involve more than one person, takes deliberate effort and practice. Some other suggestions for feedback and other types of conversations:

- ◆ Mutually choose a good time and place
- ◆ An attitude of warmth, caring and respect



- ◆ Be authentic
- ◆ Share praise as well as critical feedback
- ◆ Avoid “why” questions
- ◆ Avoid jumping to conclusions
- ◆ Avoid generalizations in the form of “always” and “never”
 - ◆ See grey areas in issues rather than simple black and white, good and bad dichotomies
 - ◆ Own your anger and do not blame it on your partner
 - ◆ Take small steps toward change and nurture each step
 - ◆ Listen to what your partner has to say
 - ◆ Respect disagreement and do not take it personally
 - ◆ Ask for clarification, use clarifying questions, and if you still do not understand, check out possible interpretations
 - ◆ Relax when silence naturally arises and be present
 - ◆ Join around similarities and explore differences
 - ◆ Practice, Practice, and Practice

Sex and Skin to Skin Intimacy

“Sex stands as the ultimate symbol because it both signifies and models the erotic experience in all areas of life. The goal of life is to live erotically in all facets of being, and sex is the model par excellence for erotic love.”

MARC GAFNI¹⁰

A good marriage is also strengthened and enriched by times of passion, of intense engagement and effort and of spontaneous creativity that brings each of us to immediate, intimate attention. In deep communion, as a lover we open each other into a singular, shared experience revealing that we are simply two facets of the same jewel.

Mature intimacy is intensely personal. We experience our presence meeting the actual presence of our partner. This can readily occur in sexual love-making. The bed is both a place of comforting rest and, in the words of Roberto Calasso, “... the playpen of erotic devotion.” In a marriage, sex becomes a dance of mutual trance states. The intoxication of sexual intimacy does not as such promote growth but the energies can be channeled into the growth of the relationship, into the inner alchemical growth of the individuals, and both these kinds of growth can sustain the intensity and duration of the sexual intoxication.



Yet sex without the personal love denies the sacredness of our loving nature and diminishes the possibility of using the powerful capacity for sexual engagement for cultivating our aliveness, our real love, and our connection to the Beloved.

Sex, as one of the great mysteries in life, has the fiery power to generate bliss and pain, love and obsession, creativity and contraction. When sex flows from authentic intimacy, expressing sacred connection, the experience is ecstatic and enlivens the rest of our lives. In a happy and supportive marriage, love-making is an expression of intimacy and we engage sexually to support that bonding without taking differences in needs and desires personally. When sex flows from desperation, loneliness, neediness and addiction, the experience quickly loses its glow and leaves an emotional and spiritual hangover.

Misusing Sex

Misusing sex is symptomatic of a larger confusion about love, intimacy and relationships. Many of us only sense being fully alive and connected in sexual encounters. We live in a culture that suggests that romantic love is the only place where we can readily access intimacy and that romantic love is primarily associated with the sexual. Thus we imprison intimacy in the domain of the sexual and entangle intimacy in all our complicated attitudes about sex and the tendency to be unconsciously indulgent or reactively moralistic and puritanical. Intimacy then is caught up in issues of boundaries, safety, and legality.

This confusion is compounded by the ways our consumer culture distorts and manipulates our longing for love and intimacy and by the impact of certain religious dogmas on public and private attitudes concerning sex and sexuality.

When we mistake a sexual relationship for intimacy we completely miss the fact that authentic and mature intimacy creates a sacred connection. It involves respect and loving en-

gagement with each other. It creates the conditions for communion. And it is a foundation for serving the larger community.

Skin to Skin Intimacy and Love

Love relationships are sustained by mutual understanding, feelings of being supported, the bond of hand in hand intimacy, and the shared purposes that arise in shoulder to shoulder intimacy. Yet the full power of the heart to heart communion blossoms and bears fruit from whole-hearted passion, expressed sexually as the give and take of pleasure, emotionally as the give and take of love, and spiritually as the give and take of sacred celebration and service.

This deep intimacy of the heart is based not simply on satisfying our desire for skin to skin intimacy but on giving the sacred gifts of our presence, openness, joy, love, and clarity. When we make love physically, passionately, and spiritually, our partner is the embodiment of the Divine, of the Sacred. Through him or her we are making love to the universe and generating a field of powerful, blissful energy.

Using the Power of the Sexual

“For Freud everything is a metaphor for sex. For the Kabbalists, sex is a metaphor for everything.”

MARC GAFNI¹¹

Sexual energy is used at a psychological level to create relationship and, at a spiritual level, can be consciously channeled into the transformation of our being into a radiant expression of the Beloved. Sex can be a kind of meditative practice in that it is one activity in life that transports us beyond ourselves. This potential is incorporated into nearly all mystical traditions. In the West this is called Kabbalah and alchemy and in much of the East “tantra.”

From a sacred point of view, sex is not so much an instinctive drive as an expression of the creative force and subtle life



energy that has the power to generate new life and transform the material world into something new. In the sacred view of many Eastern spiritual traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, we are made up of subtle, vital energy that takes many different forms. The most obvious form is the physical body which itself is a play of many kinds of energy, some gross and others finer. The body itself contains, produces and refines flows of energy that circulate within it. One of these more subtle energies is sexual energy.

This subtle sexual energy magnetizes our bodies and mobilizes our mental and emotional energies to create connection and emotional exchange. It can be used for ordinary purposes such as releasing tensions, for recreation to engage us in play, or as an escape into stimulation from boredom and numbness. But it is most powerful when it awakens us, plumbs a depth of loving feeling, and carries us beyond ourselves into an unknown with another person. Sex can cut through our normal defenses and facades to bring us face-to-face with a lover, removing us from our separate worlds. It opens us to each other in a dance of back and forth, in and out, up and down, pushing and pulling, thrusting and receiving, and receiving and giving. In profound moments, all forces and polarities and feelings are joined making everything one in the intimacy of communion.

While the open awareness and ecstasy of orgasm is not spiritual realization, it is a glimpse of that profound experience and of its vast possibility. It can be both an inspiration for sacred work and, under the right conditions, a spark that carries our spiritual practice to another level.

Sexual communion arises when we practice the most profound love and full attention in the moment as we participate with each other in the most delicious pleasure, completely surrendering to the union, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Our heart posture of YES radiates presence and love, opens with wonder, serves the union with unrestrained joy, and dedicates

Sex and Skin to Skin Intimacy

our entire being to the transcendence and transformation that arises moment to moment. Our affirmation is boundless and our intimacy with God as Beloved transports us beyond distinctions, bodies, and feelings into the state of bliss.

In this spiritualization of our bodymind, we transform sexual and emotional desires into the desire for sacred beauty. We consciously use our senses in the act of physical intimacy as a vehicle to transport us to the domain of wisdom. We love the Sacred and are guided by its teachings. We are led into the heart of the Beloved, giving rise to the experience of supreme Rapture.

When totally engaged in an intimate activity such as sex, playing music, creating art, dancing, and singing, we lose ourselves inside the act and enter the boundless eternal moment. Afterward, there is also a deep relaxation and pleasant aftertaste. On some occasions we may even feel born anew, renewed by the experience of immersed intimacy.

DARREN AND AMY

Darren and Amy met at the wedding of a mutual friend. There was instantaneous sexual attraction and a sense of connection. Each had been married previously and were not in a relationship with anyone. Darren was a doctor and Amy a book editor for a major publisher. Each had experienced being in love before and were somewhat cautious. As they talked at the reception, they found that they shared a love of poetry and music and were both interested in spiritual growth. Darren had studied with Taoist teachers and Amy was part of a Zen community.

They danced together until near the end of the reception and then decided to take a ride out to the ocean. They walked and talked on the beach until sunrise.

Supporting Transcendent Sex

Transcendent sex is supported by companionate love and



the sensuality and sexuality that is incorporated into marriage. Sexual interactions can become haunted by the need for ever increasing ecstasy. Freed of that burden of expectation, we can engage each other sensually and sexually with the desire to please each other, to connect through the giving of all degrees of pleasure, to integrate the interaction into our repertoire of play, and to reaffirm the intimate bonds we feel. We develop a variety of mutual models for our skin to skin intimacy that include the passionately transcendent, the relaxation of belonging, the gentleness of mutual comfort, the richness of experimentation and play, the communion of subtle body to body communication, and the profound connection of wholehearted mutual embrace.

SANDRA AND NEIL

The passion in my first marriage quickly gave way to constant frustration with Ted who did not seem that interested in sex. I am not sure if that is simply the way he is or if that is the result of his drinking or both. After we split, I realized how much I had shut down in that relationship when I began to date and have exciting sexual experiences and connections. When I met Neil, we not only clicked sexually from the beginning but it has endured. It is not always filled with excitement but it is filled with pleasure, a kind of comfort, and a real depth of loving sexual intimacy. We have been married for sixteen years now and I am so satisfied.

Process of Discovery

The evolution of our sexual relationship involves the process of discovery. Much of our initial exploration is based in previous experience, intuition, and conscious and unconsciously reading the subtle cues of our partner. When a degree of trust has been established and the process of sharing is incorporated into marriage, sharing about hopes, fears, and desires in terms of our sexual relationship can open up deeper levels of sexual

JOE AND TINA

Joe and Tina had been together for nearly two years before they came to counseling more to improve their relationship than solve a particular problem. In coaching them on doing the sharing process, Joe mentioned that he had been avoiding exploring new possibilities in their sexual life because he was feeling awkward and did not know what Tina thought about their sexual interactions. At the end of the sharing Tina suggested, with my full concurrence, that they do a sharing process on their own about sex.

The following week they reported that they discovered that Joe had felt inhibited about oral sex but also wanted to try it. Tina shared that she would welcome many kinds of exploration and particularly oral sex but until then had not known how to bring it up without implying that there was something wrong with the sexual relationship they had. They also shared their sexual fantasies. They reported that they were so delighted to finally talk about sex and to learn that they had similar feelings. That weekend, they "made love in so many wonderful ways that we took our relationship to a new level."

In the development of your sexual relationship, positive reinforcement is preferable to reactive criticism as you learn about what pleasures each of you and how to deepen the sensual connection. Even when some action displeases you, try making a positive suggestion for a change rather than a negative injunction.

Physical Communication

Sexual intimacy obviously involves a great deal of physical communication. We can tell when our partner is in the mood for love-making by the facial expressions, the tone of voice, the suggestive touches, and the way the entire body is presented.



Heart to Heart, Hand in Hand, Shoulder to Shoulder

Sometimes we can tell by the fragrance we often give off when we are feeling sexual. Another clue is physical closeness where we might lean into each other or enfold each other in our arms.

Using Personal Awareness to Support Relationship Development

Becoming more conscious supports our personal growth, enables us to be more fully intimate, and can strengthen our marriage. Intimate relationships in turn also serve to make us more conscious. When we are consciously relating to our partner, we appreciate the fragility of feelings and the strength of bonds in our interactions. Our awareness of the sensitive areas of the relationship makes our marriage more resilient.

The presence, intentionality and awareness that flow from being more conscious can interrupt patterns of reactive feelings and behaviors. We want to develop a variety of techniques and practices to help us remain conscious, some of which are traditional and others that are creative and uniquely our own. Mindfulness meditation stands out as one of the most useful practices.

Meditation

The purpose of meditation is to make us consciously aware and to bring us home to our authentic nature—being totally open, boundlessly radiant, and always presencing. The basis of meditation is experience, recognition and cultivation.

Meditation is a path of personal growth that initially



involves relaxing the body and the mind, training the mind to stabilize attention, training the will, witnessing and hosting whatever arises, cultivating wisdom qualities, and training the bodymind to manifest those qualities in our intimate engagement with life.

When we meditate, we begin by consciously placing and maintaining our attention. The capacity for intentionally using attention is one of the precious gifts of life. Attention directs the mind and focuses the range of energies of our being. Attention is a beacon that reveals the nearest and farthest reaches of the inner world and brings the outer world into intimate relationship with us.

We can attend to things, thoughts, feelings, witnessing, and/or the sense of our own being. Our attention can be captive to the content of our mental commentary on what we think of this book, namely the surface dimension of awareness. Or we can intentionally place our attention in other dimensions of awareness such as the sensations in our hands, or sounds in the room, or the value of the suggestions, or the feelings we are having as we read, or in witnessing all those sensations, sounds, thoughts, and feelings.

In the experience of mindfulness we are consciously aware and present in the moment. Mindfulness keeps us present and allows us to see clearly things as they are. Mindfulness is the simultaneous practice of concentration, the ability to stabilize the mind in a state without distraction, and decentration, the ability to open attention to whatever is arising.

As our skill develops with mindfulness, we move from the sense of working hard at it to having it arise more naturally and finally it becomes a stable part of our lives. Initially we apply effort to attend consciously. With practice, our natural awake quality begins to emerge, but it tends to come and go and we move back and forth between effortful and natural mindfulness. Eventually, being naturally awake becomes stable and we can

Using Personal Awareness to Support Relationship Development
abide and operate from within that state.

In this progression we begin by intentionally placing our attention in a witness dimension of awareness, becoming aware of the surface thoughts, feelings and reactions. Since we normally become hijacked by these surface phenomena, it takes real effort to stay alert and notice what is happening. In time we develop a capacity for multiple attention so that we can both experience and witness, thereby remaining consciously present.

Intimate Witnessing

Intimate witnessing is the direct, immediate quality of being present in the moment. It is intimate and involved but unattached, making no judgments and bringing no commentary or agenda. Like a mirror that reflects all images without having the qualities of any image, so the intimate witness remains open without being disturbed by changes in our lives.

The witness we are discussing here is not the “numb observer” that is disassociated, remote, and experiences events as though they are happening to someone else. The numb observer is distant and unfeeling and withdraws the energy of aliveness from situations. Everything is reduced to information rather than energetic engagement and reciprocal flow.

This witness is also not to be confused with the reactive observer that judges, feels needy, is haunted by longing, feels diminished or defeated by painful experience, and/or wants to merge with pleasurable experiences.

To the intimate witness, all phenomena simply are and we experience both a connection with and detachment from all this. The attention of witnessing brings a sense of inclusion, of hosting, to our sense of presence. This intimate sense of presence and hosting in the moment is both transcending and transformative.

Applying Witnessing to Emotional Reactions

Our reactive stories about our partners are like the tar baby that Br'er Rabbit encounters in the Uncle Remus tale where the more our mind strikes out and struggles with it, the more stuck in our reactions we are. For example, I remember earlier in my marriage that after feeling disrespected during a fight, I would feel hurt and angry.

My mind would swim with predator thoughts and painful associations. Each thought of how misunderstood I felt bred more thoughts of times I had felt that way with my wife. Each replay of a contemptuous statement from the argument enlisted an army of examples that deepened my distress and pushed me toward wondering about the very essence of our relationship. This vortex of thoughts and images amplified a small incident into a tornado and I would lose touch with the actual state of our marriage, which was fundamentally good, and the reality of what was happening.

Learning to intentionally take a break from this potential cyclone inside my head and the whirling feelings in my body, I now witness what I am doing and become more present with what actually is occurring. With practice, I can now notice all the commotion that was triggered and the fact that what is happening in the now is simply what is happening now, not all those other memories, fears, and pains. I simply experience the pain of the feeling at the time, become present with it, and witness it, not denying or amplifying it. Instead of being hijacked by it, I use it to become more conscious and deal with the issues that need to be addressed.

In this way I regain my balance and confidence and move beyond the sense of battle into a stance of learning. Having greater clarity, I am free to become more actively engaged rather than reactively attacking or withdrawn.

Hosting

The mindfulness practice I recommend involves sitting in a posture of basic dignity, hosting everything that arises with a sense of presence (an affirmation of what is, an embodied “Yes”), attending to the breath, witnessing whatever arises, particularly thoughts and feelings, and always returning to simple presence. This practice allows everything to be hosted in the space of our awareness as we continue to embrace it all with our presence. We intimately witness the way our stories about who we are, what has happened, what we are doing, and what will happen next and how our feelings about all these capture our attention. We are simultaneously engaged in the experience of each moment and witnessing the content and process of what arises. Over time we will experience a more settled sense of our own being, a clear, open, flowing, and abiding sense of presence that hosts all our various experiences and states of mind.

Bringing Mindfulness to Sharing

Through this kind of practice you can learn to be more present, affirming, and intimate with whatever is happening in your life. You can be with each moment just as it is without adding the baggage of beliefs, fears, hopes, judgments, and fantasies. This helps you connect with your basic sense of aliveness and well-being and develops a fundamental confidence in your own sacred nature, realizing that your partner shares that same sacred nature. This has particular application to becoming skilled in the sharing process discussed earlier. As a listener, we can convey the sense of unconditional support through our intimate witnessing and affirming presence.

We may not like what we hear from our partner, what we see in our witnessing about ourselves, or what is happening in our marriage. As we examine failures, wounds, and frustrations, we may doubt that we or our marriage can handle all of this and may be tempted to withdraw into denial or to flee. This



is where we must have courage and determination to confront each piece, feel it, and work with it both personally and mutually. We experience our own rawness and share this rawness with our partner.

In this way we become *intimate* with our experience and cultivate our ability to be *present*. This also gives us an authentic ground from which to share with and connect to our partner. Now we are coming from our heart. The word *courage* derives from the French word *coeur* which means “heart.” This sharing takes courage for it is indeed a heart to heart connection in which we are willing to open, to touch and be touched in the core of our being.

Integrating meditation into our lives contributes to the well-being and durability of our marriage. Beyond making us more present, the witnessing also gives us practical feedback on the conditions of our situation. We become clearer and can gain insight into our own patterns as well as the dynamics operating in the relationship. These insights open opportunities for change and improvement. We must not be satisfied with the comfort of insight alone. Insight is not enough. To see a bicycle is not the same as riding it. This takes skill and effort. In the case of intimate relationships, the skills and efforts around interaction and communication are essential.

Mindfulness Breathing

Beyond being a physical necessity for the body, the breath serves many functions in spiritual work. It is the most obvious activity of living and thus is a means for making us conscious of the living nature of each moment. It can be used for simple observation leading to the integrated sense of witnessing and direct experience of the body as a whole.

Conscious breathing can still the mind and body through attending to the simple rhythms of our inhalations and exhalations. With extended practice a quality of equilibrium

Using Personal Awareness to Support Relationship Development is stabilized and can result in a sense of harmony, serenity, and happiness throughout our being.

As we do breath work, we are learning how to sense ourselves more completely—to consciously occupy and use our bodies. Witnessing our breathing is a quick way of training our attention to notice the rhythms and cycles of our physical, emotional and spiritual lives. It is through conscious embodiment of where we are now that we create the foundation of emotional and spiritual maturity.

Even as we work to remain mindful, a veil descends in the course of daily life. The quality of consciousness and presence needs to be repeatedly rediscovered. Rather than getting upset about this fact, we come to realize that the very veiling itself is part of the process of life, that it is also an aspect of the Sacred. Then we include veiling and unveiling in our clarity and release any distress at the constant flow of one moment into the next, the glory of change.



MATURE INTIMACY

Development into Mature Intimacy

While we are surrounded by romanticized images of intimacy and marriage, successfully maturing the relationship requires that we stay grounded in sustained, day-to-day efforts. Doing family relationships well is the work of a lifetime, 24/7. To mature our relationships involves our willingness to engage in self-exposure, mutual exploration, insight, tension, healing, conflict, paradox, healing, and growth. We can only do the best we can, there is no way of doing it perfectly or “right.” Intimacy happens and grows in the moments when we make ourselves available to each other with whatever clarity, care and love we have.

In the development of intimate bonding, we experience personal connection, personal differentiation, and personal integration as well as mutual connection, mutual differentiation, and mutual integration. We call forth a thread of basic sanity to consciously grow the relationship from a simple connection to a complex home that includes joys, sorrows, shared meaning, differences, conflicts, mutual investment and communion.

Part of this basic sanity means that we must not confuse support and love with placating whatever our partner wants and does. Having unconditional love does not preclude

Mature Intimacy

setting conditions for interactions and living situations. Unconditionally tolerating the destructive and painful behaviors of a spouse can have devastating consequences. The sacred *yes* we may have in our heart for the being of our partner is part of the sacred dimension and must *not* mean saying “yes” to however they show up or whatever they do.

To personally mature on a path of sacred intimacy we need to first abandon wishful thinking and overbearing self-concern, working for the benefit of the marriage. As we grow emotionally and relationally, we become increasingly willing to show the signature lines of our failings, wounds, and our griefs as well as our passions and joys. We also realize that our marriage supports each of us to bring our gifts to the world. Finally we experience the relationship as a gateway to self-transcendent rapture and communion.

Virtue in Supporting Each Other

We are social animals and what we do affects others, even our simple presence. Knowing that we are the environment that our partner experiences can help us to act more consciously and responsibly. The qualities of virtue, such as consciousness, courage, kindness, patience, generosity, humor, and gratitude, enable us to be more fully present and intimate with each other. Consciousness, for instance, keeps us aware and intentional as we open to what is within and around us. Kindness and generosity extend the reach of our caring impulse to each other, while humor helps us play with our situation and keeps us from making everything heavy and burdensome. Each quality of virtue helps to train us in working with an aspect of the reality of our marriage. The more proficient we become with these qualities, the more we can embrace the whole of our life together in an intimate way.

Our actions and attitudes and the degree to which we are conscious play a primary role in shaping our relationship. Being



conscious in our communications and present in our interactions brings our caring and love into everyday life.

Virtue can guide, promote and sustain a conscious life, including a life of intimacy. Virtue can be defined as living within the guidance of spiritual principles. These spiritual principles all support transcending our limiting self-concerns to enter the realm of a larger caring. The basic principles of virtue are to be a beneficial presence and create benefit in the world. Virtue preserves or enhances what is good. It begins by not polluting or contaminating our lives, our relationships, and our environment—being a presence that is not harmful. Beyond that, it has to do with making the world better. The practice of certain qualities of virtue serves to retrain our body of habits so that our lives are increasingly an expression of our authentic and wisdom nature. Virtues ground us in the way we live life and interact with each other.

Virtues guide a relationship in creating a supportive environment within which intimacy can deepen its roots, strengthen its trunk and branches, blossom in beauty, and bear nourishing fruit. The virtues in a marriage are not some abstract, detached concept of approval or condemnation. They are guides toward excellences, qualities that are developed through practice.

Virtue supports the environment of intimacy and love and the heart posture of love. The experience of intimacy makes the practice of virtue possible. Our inspiration toward virtue is a kind of love. Our desire to mature and improve the conditions of our marriage flows from intimacy with each other and with life itself.

A natural ethics arises when we are intimate with our own true nature, with life, with each other, with our communities, and with God. The ethics that flow from intimacy guide us with the principle of being supportive of our partner in his or her efforts to bring their unique gifts to the world and to live their lives in alignment with the story that surrounds those gifts. To

violate this principle is to hinder or diminish their capacity to live out their lives of contribution and the sharing of the blessing of presence. Violations break our connections to their innermost sacred nature and their uniqueness, ripping at the fabric of bonding that holds our relationship together. Ethically, we want to affirm the integrity of who they are and the sacred nature of their mission in life.

To fully support another person in their sacred nature and mission, it helps to know what that means from having discovered that within ourselves. To be intimate with another requires that we be intimate with ourselves, at least in terms of the experience of being wholehearted.

Using the Jewels of Consciousness, Participation, Contribution

The foundation for the virtues of wisdom rests on three impulses that we have as human beings. These impulses of aliveness are consciousness, participation, and contribution. From the point of view of the impulses, our impulse to make meaning, grant significance, to be aware and give direction to life is consciousness. Participation is the impulse to “show up,” to exist and express aliveness, to “participate” in life. Contribution is the impulse to relate to our surroundings, to belong, and to make a difference. Participation and contribution are given shape and purpose by our consciousness as it defines context, meaning and caring.

When we live in and from our limiting beliefs, distressing feelings, and reactions, we turn consciousness, participation and contribution into fixations of attention that become crystallized and result in reactive patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. When our consciousness is reactive, we go numb, deny reality or try to fit everything into what we already understand and conceptually know. Our fixated reactive forms of participation are fear, struggle and avoidance. Our



reactive forms of contribution and relating are neediness and attachment. We call these three patterns of fixation the “three poisons.” Not realizing that these poisons are contracted forms of natural impulses, we treat the sense of ignoring, fear, and need, as if *they* are the basic impulses. When we live in a conscious, open way, the three impulses can be seen as the jewels of wisdom of consciousness, presence of participation, and radiance of contribution. Our challenge then is to take a path of virtue, namely to use these three jewels to consciously access our wisdom qualities, to become present in ways that manifest these qualities and to enact them by creating benefit and beauty in the world.

Practicing Virtues to Become a Better Partner

In building a relationship, we shift our attention beyond what Phillip Moffitt calls “being the star” of our own movie. Often we see everything from our own point of view and take the conditions of the world personally. We feel constant competition from others in satisfying our own needs and blame failures on an uncaring world. Whether we are feeling joyful or depressed, we need to notice the ways, great and small, that we have placed ourselves at the center of life. By consciously moving our attention beyond our personal self-concerns to include the larger context of what we are collectively creating, we can act more appropriately in the daily interactions that create a home in *we*.

The second step is to practice non-pollution. We work to refrain from habitually reacting in ways that damage or diminish ourselves or our partner or the environment of love in the relationship. We don’t dump our uncomfortable feelings inappropriately. We resist speaking in ways that are intended to hurt our partner. We avoid meaningless gossip, habitual criticism, trivial talk and disconnecting communication. Basically we examine our motivations and behaviors in order

Mature Intimacy

to get beyond those that derive from reactive fears, insatiable neediness and insensitivity.

As part of non-pollution, we give up our self-righteousness, our attachment to being right. This includes the impulse to automatically defend our opinions, judge others, and see our interpretations as the only correct view. This practice calls attention to our need for agreement, our tendency toward indignation, our feelings of defensiveness, our desire for authority, habits of criticism, and our feeling like a victim. This practice applies not only to our interactions with our partner, colleagues, and family members, but also to the personal story we have constructed about our own life. Many of our stories of neglect, abuse, and betrayal carry an attachment to an identity of being a victim. Renouncing our insistence on the implications of our past, does not mean forgetting anything that happened, only releasing ourselves and others from the dehumanizing labels and judgments we have rigidly brought into the present and project into the future.

In this practice we do not pretend to feel something other than what we feel. Rather, we acknowledge the feelings and the memories and are willing to state them as our own. We still stand up for what we care about and fight for justice in our own lives and for others. However, we realize that this is simply our truth and our perspective and that there are other points of view. We can only live based on our own beliefs but we fore-swear placing ourselves on the throne of righteousness where we allow only agreement and condemnation or merely tolerate those who hold different truths.

In this practice we also let go of our desire to change our partner to make them more of what we want. We become aware of all the little annoying habits they have that we wish were different. We also notice the ways we attempt to manipulate them to make them more acceptable in our eyes. This does not mean we tolerate destructive behavior and addictions, but when we



intervene, we do so not to control them for our benefit but to work for their own benefit.

This practice seeks to keep us open even as we stand for our truth and to separate our sense of worth and well-being from having to be right. Our confidence stems instead from our commitment to improving the relationship and conditions we live in. We become more willing to see other points of view and to make personal changes when appropriate.

In bringing our best self to the relationship, we also refrain from making constant comparisons with others and measuring our worth by how well we are achieving success. This does not mean giving up our physical, emotional and spiritual goals. Rather we simply do not measure our sense of worth by our success in reaching particular goals. Our sense of well-being comes instead from experiencing the aliveness and presence in the moment and being a beneficial presence in the world. We also reflect on our alignment around our core intentions for how we want to show up in the world and the contributions we want to be and make.

In the third step we consciously seek to know what contributes to the environment we want to create in our home and the qualities of character and skill in behavior that will be effective in creating value, benefit, and evoking these qualities in our partner.

The fourth step involves bringing virtue to life by regularly attending to qualities of praise, kindness, generosity, and respect. In this way we access and cultivate that within ourselves and in our partner. We use everyday life as a gym for developing the muscles of connection and caring. The arena of everyday life provides a great and constant opportunity to practice, exercise and cultivate the qualities that we value. In this way we increase and strengthen our capacity and the character of the relationship itself.

In our world where we are so busy and caught up with

Mature Intimacy

our reactive habits, we need to be reminded of what is really important. As we practice virtue, over time we become more conscious in creating a loving and beneficial environment for others, not to mention ourselves. We bring out the best in our own nature as our presence radiates a field of loving energy, our actions are a skillful expression of clarity and purpose, and we show up as an enlivening, harmonizing, encouraging, supportive, and loving presence. By being and acting virtuously, we make it more accessible and possible for those we love.

Building on Basic Dignity

Virtue further develops our heart posture of basic dignity. Our dignity is our intrinsic nobleness of character as a manifestation of the Sacred. As we train to develop beneficial habits, our sense of presence and intimacy with each other are transformed into the majesty that was always our potential. Just as in mythologies where the hero or heroine begins as a lowly peasant, makes a journey of challenges that confront their greatest fears, and arrives finally to a position of sovereignty as king or queen, so we must find our own path of dignity. In the traditional stories certain qualities are generally highlighted: loving connection, serving a great cause that serves all of life, humility, honoring, gratitude, courage, compassion, and stamina. These are considered to be the requirements for a successful navigation of the path.

Collective Habits of the Heart

Just as individuals develop qualities, so do intimate relationships. As a couple, certain qualities manifest more than others and some collective actions happen more frequently than others. These qualities that we personally and collectively embody and that show up in our behavior represent our character, what Alexis de Tocqueville called “habits of the heart.” The term “ethics” derives from the Greek *ethikos*, that which



pertains to *ethos* or character.

Character refers to that core, interior part of ourselves and our relationship that holds our values, our conscience, our convictions, and the virtues we operate from day-to-day as well as in crisis. It is not the same as personality and is not developed suddenly. It is character that reflects our capacity to live according to wisdom, values and maturity. The real strength of character is built on having the courage to sustain intimacy in the face of challenges and not withdraw into personal worlds of comfort.

As is true for us individually, the character of an intimate relationship reflects our experiences, the choices we have made, the lessons we have learned, and the challenges we have faced. The character we have developed in a relationship determines how we engage each other, how we make decisions, and the strength with which we mutually confront adversity, injustice, and chaos. It is value living through us in our presence and our actions.

Conscience, a key aspect of character, is a guidance system that operates internally in each of us personally and within the heart of the relationship. Our conscience senses when we act or even contemplate acting in ways that are contrary to integrity and a basic sense of what is beneficial. Conscience requires listening to deeper callings, particularly in lives that are busy, noisy, and saturated with stimulation and distraction.

All relationships develop patterns of reaction. These habits must be outgrown and reformulated if we are to mature and realize the full potential of intimacy. Virtues as wisdom give us the directions and the tools for changing our reactive habits and developing the qualities of character that are increasingly beneficial for the relationship.

Walking Our Talk

It is difficult to be a saint in the midst of one's family

ANATOLE FRANCE

In retraining ourselves to be able to walk our noble talk, we initially practice those virtues that do not pollute and limit our restimulation of reactions. We are like infants who cannot digest many foods until we have developed a greater capacity. As we learn to discipline ourselves, our capacity for practicing new habits expands. Gradually we use all challenges as part of a conscious growth process.

The word “discipline” has its root in the word “disciple,” one who is committed to learning and growing out of love. Discipline, derived from love and sense of value, is a critical ingredient in retraining our body of impulsive and reactive habits to embody the qualities of wisdom. “Will” gives us the juice to start our work. It is discipline that keeps us going and makes conscious intimacy a part of our lives. Discipline is like a muscle in that the more we exercise it, the stronger it gets.

Without discipline, habits and addictions that are so prevalent in our consumer society will continue to keep us wrapped in a cocoon of self-concern governing our behaviors and our heart postures. The rich potential of our nature will go untapped and we remain trapped in the clutches of comfort, reaction, and fear.

Guided by our sense of value, our discipline can grow in the soil of love, community, and the larger contexts that we are dedicated to serve. We align our inner resources with the efforts of others and the sense of serving and being encouraged by the Sacred. Discipline is not a punishment for our habits but a vehicle for realizing our deeper nature and a greater joy. Discipline makes us conscious and intimate with each other as we seek to manifest love and wisdom moment to moment.

Vows

Vows between people are a living commitment to creating a home in the relationship that manifests the environment we mutually want to live in. Vows articulate the core of shared values and the outlines of a mutual path. They reflect a willingness to integrate and grow with the circumstances that flow from sharing a home in the relationship. In marriage vows, we mutually agree to honor the bonds between us, to continually explore the nature, depth, and expanse of love and intimacy, to celebrate each other, the relationship, and the larger contexts of community and the Sacred, and to navigate the tides of grief and joy that regularly touch the shore of our connection.

Vows align us mentally, emotionally and spiritually with the core of the relationship and our intimacy with each other. They remind us of the path we have chosen, calling us to remember not only ourselves but each other in the dynamic flow of life together.

Ethics

When we engage life wholeheartedly with the heart posture of a lover and the attention of a nurturing caretaker, we are moved by the impulse to encourage the wellbeing and growth of those we love. It is from this caring that appropriate and ethical actions flow.

Without the core of love and caring, ethics degenerates into rules that polarize rather than connect, that inhibit growth rather than open us to maturity, and that can lead to unquestioning extremism rather than the clarity needed to respect each other and all life. Ethics based on absolutist moral rules cannot take into account the subtleties and variety of human situations and the full complexity of our humanity. The concern about being “right” according to some formula dehumanizes oneself and other people. The polarization into right and wrong loses the sense of the Sacred and reduces society and religion to a system

Mature Intimacy

of managed and judged activities rather than a community of relationships.

The result is always failure, alienation and the creation of a spiritual wasteland. The reaction to this wasteland is to regressively long for the sense of connection we had as very young children rather than the mature relationships of a lover.

Part of our challenge, personally and collectively, in our polarizing society is to release ethics from the prison cell of rigid morality and to reclaim the role of sacred intimacy as a guide for ethical behavior. An authentic ethics which builds and reflects our personal and collective character will only emerge when we are rooted in a sacred, yet humanizing, fundamental love and respect and approach each other with humility, courage, and compassion.

Encouraging Humility, Courage, and Compassion

Humility, courage and compassion are key qualities in a mature intimate relationship. “Humility” comes from the word *humus* meaning of the earth or ground. Coming from the earth and sensing our connection to and rootedness in it, in our humility we realize that we are agents, vehicles, and vessels of larger forces and principles of life and in service to something greater than ourselves. Humility opens us to learning from everything in our relationship.

The word *courage* has its roots in French and means “large heart.” Strengthening and deepening the heart is what a relationship can do. Courage takes us into the face of reality as it is and gets us to affirm that reality even when it scares us and makes us uncomfortable. Courage allows us to show up, participate, and care.

Compassion draws upon our capacity to take seriously and get inside the reality of our partner—their pains and inner lives, their emotions, and the pressures of their circumstances. It is our impulse to open our hearts and to help and support our



partner in what they need. In compassion we engage each other in our mutual humanity and divinity. It reflects our ability to invest mental, physical, emotional and spiritual energy in what happens to him or her and to manifest our caring in action. One of the keys to great intimacy is not big gestures or grand deeds or spectacular feats but small deeds done with great love. It is the heart of moral awareness.

Using the power of awareness and imagination, compassion not only places us in the position of another, it also accesses our own best intentions, caring, and wisdom. We radiate these qualities from our hearts into the relationship, contributing love and wisdom to the environment we share. These encouraging and embracing qualities can be sensed even if they cannot be seen, creating an intimate home.

Reflection and Inquiry

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms or books that are written in a foreign tongue. The point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live your way some distant day into the answers.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Our ability to reflect on our own actions, feelings, thoughts, and nature plays a critical role in the development of conscious relationships and deepening our capacity for intimate bonding. One of the most ancient ways of becoming more conscious and intimate with ourselves is the use of questions as part of conscious inquiry into the nature of our habits, identities, sensory reality, and all existence. We want to penetrate to our very soul, uniting the head and the heart by going beyond ordinary curiosity and intellectual speculation to the very core of our being and the heart of wisdom.

Inquiry not only takes us “home” to our deeper self, it can

cultivate who and what we are as human beings. It draws on the ancient traditions of wisdom and fearlessness, which transform the compelling fears of human reaction into unconditional aliveness, intimacy and presence. Then this way of being and sense of presence becomes a hosting presence within which events, activities, and feelings take place.

We want to cultivate three qualities in approaching the soul. Silence opens us to both inner and outer realities of what is. Conscious attention attends to both the world and the sense of what is beyond our concepts of the world. The third quality is dedication, the sense that life is asking us about the meaning we are creating for our life, moment to moment.

In our habitual ways of being and doing, we often experience life as a prison in which we are doing time trying to avoid fears, satisfy longings, and struggle with confusion and boredom.

Inquiry involves learning how to ask fundamental questions in ways that are fresh and alive. There are many types of inquiry ranging from those that reflect on the dynamics of our feelings and reactions, to those that penetrate to our fundamental fears and longings to find a core of basic wisdom. The inquiry meditations that follow represent examples of two types of inquiry.

Self-Inquiry about Feelings

Self-inquiry into our own feelings helps us explore the full territory of our emotional landscape. Often when we have one emotion that seems prominent, we discover that it is really a family of feelings that appear under one name. So our anger about a messy kitchen may include frustration with having asked for help in keeping it clean, disappointment that our partner and the children do not see the aesthetics of the kitchen as important, sadness that we feel alone in this, fear of appearing like a constant nag, and longing to feel more at peace and relaxed. In our reflections on ourselves, we readily come to see that we are complex in our thinking and feeling



and capable of thinking and feeling two contradictory things at the same time. When we ignore the complex nature of our feelings, we will often express one surface emotion and turn all other feelings into accusations and judgments.

We are not the same emotional person in every relationship. As complex beings, we have different emotional configurations with different people. So we may be one way with our spouse, another with a friend, another with one of our children, and still another with a different child. We want to explore and understand our emotional configurations across a range of relationships and to see how each contributes to our emotional repertoire and skills that we can use in contexts where we would not usually access them.

Accept that feelings are normal and natural and that having destructive feelings does not make you “bad.” You are not your feelings, you have feelings. Who you are is more than your feelings, your thoughts, and your body. Who you are is a sacred being that cannot be defined by the attributes of the material, mental or emotional worlds.

In doing inquiries about your feelings, particularly around difficult and emotionally charged situations, you can discover the extent that you have made them your deity. The purpose here is to become clear that you are not your feelings and are not defined by your emotions.

- ◆ Find out what they are trying to tell you at a deep level.
- ◆ Explore what other feelings are also there..
- ◆ What is the story you are telling yourself?
- ◆ What are other perspectives on this story that might get you to feel differently?
- ◆ Realize that feelings are relative to how you look at what is going on.
- ◆ Imagine a variety of intentions that your partner might have behind his or her actions that were painful to you.

Mature Intimacy

How does each possible intention affect how you feel?

- ◆ How would you feel if you assume they had a positive intent?

- ◆ How does your feeling change if you considered that you have played a role in creating the emotionally charged situation?

- ◆ Notice how your feelings shift and that your feelings are dependent on how you view things.

Transforming Core Beliefs and Reactive Self-Images

It is our beliefs that limit our relationship to each other and what is sacred. If our self-image is that we are not good enough, not worthy, or somehow damaged, we will compensate and not show up authentically and openly. If we look deeply at our everyday habits, we will see fear and longing lurking in much of what we do, haunting how we move, what we say, our posture, our tone of voice, our actions, our drives, our accomplishments, our failures, our boredom, our relief and our joys. Every distressing emotion is a call to attend to something that matters. Each is a reflected and distorted image of some core concern that holds the keys to a more authentic way of being and relating.

When we let our deepest fears guide our actions, our relationships, and our way of being, we are hostage to those fears. Our soul cries out for intimacy rather than safety and emotional survival. At heart, we do not want our grave stone to read “Here lies _____ who succeeded for his or her whole life in avoiding what he or she feared would happen and shrank from finding out what he or she most feared to know.”

Our uncomfortable emotions are often where the juice of our aliveness is happening. By addressing fears, we are working where the energy is. The charge tied up in our fears is an important part of our vitality. We want to free it and use it. We want



to become aware of what issue or belief is so important that we will hold our lives hostage to protect it. We want to discover those deepest, most dreaded self-images to uncover what our soul really wants for us in the world, what it wants our lives to be about and the legacy we want to leave.

Inquiry into behavior and feelings can uncover the interdependent nature of our inner world. As we penetrate the surface responses to the underlying structure of fears and longings, we expose the entire system of beliefs in the context of hosting. We pursue this until we arrive at the deeper nature of our being, our wisdom nature which is not conditional and not a reaction. This wisdom nature resonates as a core truth about what our life really wants to express and manifest. It is the qualities of aliveness that we think are worth cultivating and are the gifts we want to bring to the world.

For example, when a friend says to me, “I am disappointed by your behavior,” my first reaction may be to become angry and try to explain and justify what I have done. This is my reactive habit body.

If I examine my response more closely, I see that my anger, which seemed so real and appropriate, is a defensive reaction based on a chain of fears. These may range from the fear of being judged as stupid, to feeling alone, to feeling that I am not good enough, and to feeling that I could die without any support and cut off from everyone who matters. As I look at these fears, I realize that they may not make intellectual sense but they feel true and thus I attribute “reality” to them as threats.

In my efforts to explain my actions, I may come to see that I have a longing to be understood and the hope that if others understand me we will be connected. I come to realize that my longing for connection and belonging has seemed like the solution to the problem of my fears.

Continuing my inquiry, I can see that these fears and longings are projections and assumptions I bring to situations and

are not inherently there. I can understand that they arise out of reactive impulses rather than true perceptions of reality. From this space of not knowing, I can pursue the inquiry to find a ground that would allow me to encounter the world more openly and honestly. This requires continuing to strip away the layers of conceptual identities, emotions and reactive ideas that all depend on whether I like or dislike the events of my life. Finally a state is arrived at that is open, unconditional, and can host all the ideas, feelings, and events, but is not caused by them. This way of being and sense of presence may be peaceful, or generous, or even openly creative. Whatever the particulars, the experience involves the sense of resting in a sacred and wise dimension of my deeper nature.

Being grounded in this nature, I can listen to the statement of disappointment with a sense of being connected to my friends and of caring for them. Now there is aliveness, energy, and the possibility of deepening our intimate connection. I can relate to my friend not simply through my reactive emotions but with the sense of being fully present. My way of relating becomes free rather than defensive, open rather than needy, and authentic rather than pretentious.

Part of the point is not to get rid of our fears but to show up with all that we are, including all our long forgotten parts that seek expression through our fears. It is as if the fears were distress flares sent hopefully into a dark sky over and over again waiting for a truly attentive mind to make its way through the dark sea to the shipwrecked beings whose vibrant presence finally brings daylight to what had been an endless night. Through the inquiry process of discovering our wisdom presence, we come to know where to find the realm of joy, peace and freedom. Then our task is to bring these treasures to our everyday life.

Flaming Sword Inquiry

In this transformational inquiry that I call “flaming sword inquiry” we access and maintain a container of hosting presence while we uncover core fears, cutting through the levels of constructs that hide our natural aliveness. This inquiry takes us to the deepest roots of our agitation and discomfort with work, relationships and life and then leads to our most profound sense of dignity, mission, and the divine.

The inquiry begins with identifying a distressing event. We then ask the part of us that generated the distress: What is this part trying to protect us from? Our inquiry proceeds by continuing to ask ourselves “What are we afraid could happen to us?” When we identify a core fear, we can see how our distress is the surface reaction of a whole system of beliefs and feelings. We see how current events engage deeply-rooted fears that were formed in our past lending seriousness and intensity to an emotional charge in the present. As we reveal the chain of distressing fears, the hold they have on us begins to dissolve in the light of our awareness.

We do not want to stop with the identification of the net of fears. We continue our inquiry by asking, “If I knew that I was completely protected from those fears, what does that part of me that held them want for me that is positive?” Here we are using questioning to uncover our longings and the layers of conditions we place on our simply being who we are. It is as if we unconsciously have said to ourselves, “I cannot be peaceful and relax into being a loving presence until I am secure, have a good relationship, important work, and feel good about myself. Then I can ‘be’ the way that I really want and can do what is really important.”

In our inquiry, when we arrive at what resonates as a core way of being that embodies a fully positive quality of wisdom, we allow ourselves to experience the energy of this way of being

Mature Intimacy

through our body and our entire sense of self. We then bring the qualities of this wisdom energy to the original distressing event, experiencing the ways that situation would be different as we bring our wisdom way of being to it. We then sense how this way of being and sense of presence will be manifest in our breathing, in the way we carry ourselves, in the way we talk and interact with others. We experience what it will be like to go through today, tomorrow and the coming weeks and months as we increasingly manifest this wisdom way of being. We dedicate the benefits of this way of being to the happiness, growth and freedom of all beings, reinforcing our dedication to being a beneficial presence in life.

The structure of the process, the spiritual ground of hosting, and the use of the reality of everyday life are the lifelines that allows us to venture into the depths of fear, loss and anger without being swept away by the subterranean current of terror, self-pity and rage. These lifelines keep us connected to the sacred world as we mine the unseen inner realms using the light of our attentive presence and our simple courage to lead us to the precious ore of wisdom energy.

Inquiry Meditation

1. Begin by establishing the sense of being a hosting presence. Notice the sensations in your hands. As you experience some tingling or pulsing sensations in your hands, also place some of your attention on the sensation of your breathing. Hear sounds. Listen not only with your ears but with your whole body. Listen particularly from the back of the head. Have a sense of listening to not only the sounds but also to the silence in which the sounds arise. Notice that thoughts come and go and the feelings as they arise, pass on through, and disappear. Experience yourself



hosting the sensations, the listening, the thoughts, and the feelings. Host everything that arises. In this hosting, sense yourself as the connection between heaven and earth and as convergence of the three treasures of the sky-like spaciousness of generative openness, of the earth power for rich, nourishing manifestation, and of the relational power of our heart reaching out and including all humanity and living beings connecting us to all life.

2. Notice a frequent uncomfortable emotion that you experience or a behavior pattern you have. Recall a recent event in your life in which you experienced this emotion or behavior. Locate where you feel the effects of this emotion or behavior.

3. Ask deeply inside yourself: What is this emotion or behavior trying to protect you from? Continue to inquire deeper by asking what are you afraid would happen then if your fear came true? Keep asking until you elicit your worst fears. Ask: What is the worst thing that could happen to you?

4. Now ask: If these fears were realized, what would that mean about you (the kind of person you would be)? Notice how and where this fear is experienced in your body?

5. Let one or more metaphorical self images come to mind associated with that core fear identity: "I would be like a (fill in the image) if that fear is true." Elaborate the metaphor which feels truest until it feels complete but not to the point of distraction. Feel the emotions associated

with that image.

6. Take a deep sigh and let the fear image and those feelings go as you shift your attention into the feeling of the hosting presence, now ask: If you knew that you were fully protected from all those fears, what do you want that is positive? Continue to inquire deeper into your longings by imagining getting what you want and asking repeatedly "What will you get to experience then as a result of having your previous desire?" Keep asking until you elicit a core way of being, like "beingness," "peace," "radiant," "connected to all," "grace," "wholeness," "a part of the divine." (A core way of being is not an emotion but an awareness state that can host each moment in time and every experience.)

7. When you embody this way of being, what is the quality of your presence that others would experience? Let a metaphorical image come to mind that is associated with this way of being and sense of presence: "I am like a (fill in the image)" Elaborate this metaphor for wisdom presence until it feels complete but not to the point of distraction.

8. Experience this wisdom way of being and sense of presence throughout your body and radiate it from your entire being.

9. Experiencing the wisdom presence ever more completely and fully, now let the radiance that flows through you and from you transform your longings. Now let the radiance of your wisdom presence transform the



recent event you started with. Then bring your wisdom image to bear on the metaphoric image of your worst fears. Let these be transformed in whatever way happens as they are bathed in the luminous radiance of wisdom energy. Sense how the body of fears are transformed by the radiance of the wisdom energy. This transformation further intensifies the energy of the wisdom presence and roots this even more deeply in your entire being.

10. Experience how this wisdom presence will be manifest in your life. Sense how the energy radiates throughout your entire body and sense of being. Notice how this will be manifest in your breathing, your posture, the way you carry yourself, the way you walk, the way you speak and interact with others, and in the way you look at the world. Experience yourself going through the coming week and the following weeks. Sense your dedication to manifesting this wisdom presence now and in the future for the benefit of yourself, of others, and the world.

11. Select an object(s) that will symbolize this for you. Create a hand gesture (*mudra*) that reminds you of this wisdom presence.

12. Close your meditation by dedicating your practice to the happiness, growth and freedom of all living beings, radiating the benefits in all directions.

CARING AND CONSCIOUS WORK

Caring connects us to others and brings the sense of others into us, as a parent with an infant or a lover with a loved one. Caring and the ability to include the perspectives, pains, passions, and positions of others are the bases for ethical action and for both personal and collective development.

Conscious Relationships

Being conscious with each other is a challenge that both breaks us down and opens us up to the larger sense of connection and to being shaped by our relationship. In marriage we are called upon to bridge our world and the world of our partner and to create meaning and beauty in the middle.

By being more conscious, we seek to hold both our personal and mutual good and thereby strengthen beneficial behaviors and weaken those that diminish ourselves and our partner. We work to release the grip of our need to control and to shape our partner to our values, our way of thinking, and our way of living. As we lose the innocence of our righteousness and are matured by the forces of vulnerability, difference, mystery, unpredictability and the unknown, we enter an endless conversation and dance.



Intimate relationships break the heart open, hopefully so we can hold more and not fall apart with the feeling of being a helpless victim. This opening is facilitated by the forces of love, beauty, disappointment, grief, and being fiercely challenged. All of these call upon us to connect intimately, directly, and wholeheartedly rather than contracting and withdrawing.

Conscious marriage involves maintaining the sense of caring, love, respect, and honoring each other as we mutually work to build and maintain a supportive home. It requires insight into our own reactive patterns and being able to share what is true for us from our heart with trust and without pretension or reservation. In conscious relating we realize that each of us is a mirror for the other in which we can see elements of ourselves and the consequences of our behaviors are reflected back to us. Conversations and interactions also hold a sense of larger purpose, of dedication, and of teamwork.

Conscious Speech

What we say matters. Conscious speech brings attention to what is said, both verbally and non-verbally. Our communications gather and direct the attention of others playing a role in creating our shared environment. What we say is always contributing to the environment that we mutually live in.

- ◆ Is this the environment you want to be making?
- ◆ Does what you say and the way you say it really reflect the world you want to live in and share?
- ◆ Does your communication contribute to the wisdom, caring, beauty, and better working of your family?
- ◆ Are you being conscious or simply reactive?
- ◆ Does your speech embody and carry a basic caring within which all other virtues of speech such as honesty, fidelity, love, and gentleness can operate?

Conscious speech includes conscious listening. When we

speak, we are closing our attention around the words we want to say. When we listen, we open to the unknown of what is coming in. Conscious conversation is a dance of opening and receiving through listening and closing and sending through speaking as we articulate what we want to share. In time it is possible to train ourselves to remain open as we are speaking and to transmit even as we are listening.

Conscious Action

Conscious action makes a difference in ways that are aligned with our deepest purposes and our sense of what is needed. Conscious action cultivates benefit, beauty, and harmony. It is generous in giving our attention, our caring, our time and our energy.

Conscious action is always informed by clarity and intention. As an active, creative participant in marriage, we are always making a contribution and our contributions are guided by our conscious intentions.

A consciously intimate marriage is also dedicated to creating benefit in the world by supporting the work we each do in the world, by having and raising children, by mutually supporting networks of friends, by participating in the larger community and by contributing through service activities. These become our shared legacy. In creating our collective legacy, we have a faith that what we do will flower and bear fruit.

Silence of Presence

We can tell a lot about a relationship from the way we are silent together. When we are disconnected, bored, self-preoccupied, and/or unengaged, the silence is one of absence. We are not showing up together and the silence expresses the distance. The silence of intimacy is a silence of presence, a silence filled with aliveness, connection, and sharing. It is satisfying and there is no need to fill it with words. The words that are spoken



simply arise within the silence to elaborate its beauty. They do not disturb it. In fact, in the deep levels of love and intimacy, sounds and silence are there simultaneously, with sound simply arising in the space of silence as we might dance in the space of a room.

Being Wholehearted and Vulnerable

As we open consciously to each other, in this intimacy we experience the raw, unfinished edges of life and become freer—freer to experience, freer to love, freer to grieve, freer to dance wholeheartedly, freer to unconditionally be ourselves, and freer to be completely at home in our relationship.

We may experience becoming more vulnerable and it is vulnerability that further cements our relationship. Our vulnerability provides an opening for the supportive presence of our partner. This support can take many forms, such as witnessing and caring, active concern, actions of assistance, and advice in solving some problem. Vulnerability and willingness to be present with and share our distress can magically transform a feeling of lonely pain into an experience of bonding and presence.

Dancing with Life as a Couple

Sharing our painful feelings works best when done at an appropriate time and place such as during a sharing process. During the day-to-day flow of life, we also want to learn to experience and contain our feelings and reactions sufficiently enough so that we are able to be fully present with our partner and open to insights. When we cannot hold all the energy of our feelings, it is useful to find healthy ways to release some of the excess. The ongoing goal is to build our capacity to experience the fullness of our emotions with a sense of presence and to connect in an open way to the presence of our partner.

The passions of our relationship can be set aflame by desire or pain or even reflection. We want to remember that a sacred

force is at work. We want to become mindful of the presence of this force and learn how to dance with it rather than be swept away by it.

When we are distracted and preoccupied by concerns that are outside the context of *now* in the relationship, we cannot really show up consciously in the moment. For example, concerns about what someone thinks about us can make us awkward rather than authentic. Recalling the distressing feelings about past wounds can blind us to what is actually happening now. Even mundane concerns about future events, yet to be done items on a “to do” list, and past memories of issues can be barriers to sharing a simple meal together.

The challenge of remaining in the present is met by mobilizing and directing our aliveness to staying present with the sense of connection between us. We want to avoid disappearing into our thoughts and feelings about other concerns unless these are a current topic of conversation. Otherwise, these thoughts and feelings trap us in an unreal world of fantasy, memories and projections. By recognizing our patterns of fears and preoccupations, we learn how to become more present in the experience of *now*.

To dance with presence in the course of the ups and downs of a relationship is made easier by the sense of play and humor. Humor takes the edge off our seriousness. Play carries us beyond the oppressive frames of success and failure and the tendency to focus simply on the practical solutions to often insolvable situations and disagreements.

DEEPENING INTIMATE BONDS AS THINGS CHANGE

Challenges of Mature Intimacy and Relationships

In life there is no fixed reality. When we are face-to-face with the process of change as well as the continuity of patterns, we want to experience the freshness that radiates from the moment. Both the patterns and the changes pose many challenges for us.

We are not a fixed entity and neither is our partner or our relationship. When we create a fixed idea about them in our minds, we make them an object that is not quite fully alive instead of being a vital subject of our heart. We are not simply a mental concept. We are more like an ongoing process of emerging.

Family relationships challenge us to be supportive of our lovers and children as they grow, have their feelings, react, and make choices, many of which may feel threatening or seem misguided. Striking the appropriate balance of engagement, boundaries, feedback, and support often seems to require the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Gandhi, the compassion of Buddha, the dedication of Mohammed, and the love of Jesus. We may not always be able to do that, yet holding that intention and working from our basic heart posture of love will bring

Deepening Intimate Bonds as Things Change
us a long way in that direction.

Growing Stronger

As counter-intuitive as it seems, heart to heart intimacy can grow through conflict, grief, openness to having our heart broken, and unilateral sharing as well as mutual love. While the foundation of a relationship is built upon shared love, good feelings and caring, the structure of our home with each other needs authentic conflicts that naturally arise for they are the only forces that can test the relationship and make it stronger.

Working with issues and conflicts can strengthen a relationship in two ways. The first and more obvious way relates to mutual problem-solving, such as dividing up household chores or making a family budget. We treat the issue as a mutual topic for discussion that we figure out a solution to or for which we negotiate a compromise. Working shoulder to shoulder we find and implement an agreeable resolution. Success builds confidence in our collective ability to create a way out of difficulty.

The second way involves those issues that do not have resolutions. Issues in themselves are rarely beyond resolution, but our deeply held values and desires may make an issue beyond the scope of problem solving at the present time. For example, we may have a home in one place but an important job in another, or one person likes to always have many people around and the other prefers to be alone, or one person connects through doing activities together and the other through hanging out, talking and sharing, or one partner wants constant change and the other is only comfortable when things are the same and familiar.

Adopting a heroic attitude toward irresolvable issues helps us to eventually realize that each monstrous issue possesses a treasure for us. Each demon protects something valuable or is itself a great treasure. The path for engaging a persistent difficulty involves being present with it, feeling its energy, and extracting



its raw power into the heart of our presence. We incorporate the energy of the issue into ourselves, and transform it into the fabric of our relationship. We operate from the need to not resolve the issue or release the energy of its tension. Rather we work with the energy and make that energy a quality of aliveness. This fullness of presence, this incorporation, this embodying of the tension in a conscious way, can intensify the field of our presence and become a bond in the relationship at the same time as it retains an edge of its divisive nature.

Fleshing Out Conflicts

Our tendency to become blinded by our stories about and understanding of issues makes us hostage to an adversarial point of view. As a prisoner of our way of thinking, we tend to reactively go numb or feel like victims. Conflicts need to be fleshed out more than resolved. They need to be felt in the physical body of each of us and in the body of the relationship itself. Then when the relationship incorporates differences over time, they become strengths in future conflicts.

When conflicts are not fleshed out and incorporated, they become ghosts that haunt us and reappear over and over again in threatening ways whenever the relationship is challenged. We need to be willing to get our hands dirty in all the sordid aspects of our feelings and behaviors and yet not dwell there or make that our world. We must not get defined by our conflicts, only become present with them.

Growing Beyond Disenchantment

All love relationships go through periods of disillusionment with the way we hoped our partners would be and the way we thought we would behave once love was realized. Not only do we project our hopes onto him or her, but the early, honeymoon stage of a love relationship tends to bring out the best in us. As we relax into the relationship and the relationship must

be integrated into not only our personal lives but also the larger community, many fractures appear in the ideal pictures we have painted in our minds.

The points of friction that most threaten us and we want to avoid often hold the greatest promise for bonding in the process of mutually exploring and holding these challenging issues. In the course of this work together we clarify “what is so” in the relationship. We move beyond our fantasy misconceptions, unconscious projections, fears, and hopes, to the reality of what is actually true in the relationship now. We discover more of our similarities and face the actuality of our differences.

The cohesive threads in the fabric of a relationship need to be strong enough to hold the noncohesive forces that naturally arise in the disappointments, conflicts, and disenchantments over time. During disenchantment it is vital to maintain a perspective that includes all the cohesive elements in our relationship. This is particularly true during the initial building phases of the relationship until each of us is confident about its endurance. We must internally distinguish between our own sense of disenchantment with a particular aspect of our partner or of the relationship on the one hand and the value our partner brings to our life and the viability of the relationship as a whole on the other.

When the cohesive threads are overwhelmed or cut, the challenge becomes finding ways to successfully be apart. Divorce involves changing the agreements and structure of the relationship even as we try to stay in touch with the bond that does exist and the connections that must be maintained, particularly when we have children.

A divorce is not necessarily a personal or even collective failure. We must realize that longevity is not the only measure of success in relationships. In many marriages, we may experience profound connectedness, sense of *we*, and personal transcendence for extended periods. The fact that we part ways



at a later time does not invalidate the value that the relationship had at the times when it was intimate.

Often, if there is enough connection and solid reasons for being together, going through challenging phases can lead to the rediscovery of love as our caring clarifies and reveals our essential bond. A bond is reinforced and elaborated by celebration and praise, but it is in the challenges that we get at the essential core.

With the passage of time and the successful navigation of formidable challenges to our intimacy, an openness and ease becomes evident in a marriage that has matured and softened through renewal and sacrifices. We experience grace when that which seems unconquerable opens itself to us, whether this be the heart of a partner, the fortress of irresolvable issues, or the sacred sense of home that we long for and seek to build but seems to come on its own.

We Are Not Our Problems

When one of us is going through a difficult time, the other needs to simply be present as an intimate witness as much as possible. Difficulty is not necessarily a problem to be solved. What is needed is connection and for that connection to be fully human. We must not be reduced to our problems and our partner to a problem-solver. We need to be seen and to see ourselves as a voyager across the challenging ocean of life, not as something broken and in need of repair.

Of course there are times we want and need problem solving assistance or ongoing help with such things as chronic health conditions. This can be very connective. In these challenging situations, we are called upon to continue to see the magnificence of our partner, to not diminish our images of our partner to the terms of their condition, such as diabetes or recovery from an addiction. We want to experience the full aliveness, caring and love of each other as human beings

who are traversing the turbulent ocean of life. This creates the conditions for communion in that our consciousness includes the experience and world of our partner. We experience what it is like to be inside their being, sensing not only their feelings, but also their heart postures, their deep fears, longings and deep wisdom nature. This communion is the ground for profound compassion and the experience of essential unity.

Renewing Intimacy, Reviving Relationships

Intimacy is kept alive by mutually having the sense of approaching a new horizon and fashioning the outlines of a vision of our future together. Such visions are not blueprints but guides that change with feedback and are reshaped just as we are shaped. They give us a reference point from which to be conscious of where we are and a sense of direction.

All such visions need to be re-visioned from time to time to keep them real and relevant. Re-visioning supports the ongoing freshness in a marriage as well as encouraging the personal re-visioning that we each must make about our lives and our contributions to the world.

One of the driving spirits for a lasting marriage is our curiosity, a wondering about each other, about ourselves in the dynamics of relating and about how this will unfold and transform into something never before seen. When our marriage gets into an uncomfortable and divisive rut, we are challenged to remember the authentic, sacred and beneficial reasons that gave rise to the relationship in the first place as well as those that have emerged as the intimacy evolved. To move the relationship forward and get beyond whatever destructive patterns have developed, we need to take a vacation from our routines that are not working. In vacating our habitual life, we can shed our skins of accumulated habits. This molting makes us open, newly raw, and re-sensitized to each other.

Part of the wonder and mystery in relationships is in not



quite knowing what the other person is about and what it is that they are doing in bringing their unique gifts to us and the world. We want to keep some of their uniqueness free of our understanding and expectations in order to protect against the tendency to limit or even smother them. We also do not want to make who they are and what they offer either too small or too cosmic.

As the relationship matures, we approach each other with both the sense of knowing their world from the inside and not knowing, of being open to who we each are in this very moment. Our openness allows us to know each other in this moment, free of what we thought we knew from the past.

Surrender

Surrender in intimacy, rather than being about defeat and weakness, requires that we offer ourselves to experience and each other with our full resourcefulness and power. We release pretensions, fears, agendas, and blockages to giving ourselves openly and fully. We want to feel into each other's sense of being in deep and loving ways. For this to happen we each need to trust, to open, to penetrate, to feel the other as ourself, and to engage fully in the intensity of that love, celebrating the intimacy with our rapture. We learn how to do this and to elaborate on its richness by actively and consciously relating heart to heart and by creating the environment of love hand in hand.

To love is to surrender. When we experience the depths of love, we willingly offer ourselves to our beloved. We want them to know that we openly serve them and have them witness our giving of ourselves. To greater or lesser degrees, we entrust ourselves to their care and are willing to be exposed and vulnerable. We surrender to the force of love and tap into the energy and quality of something sacred and divine. In a sense, we entrust ourselves to the divine loving force of our partner.

In the mutuality of love, we witness the surrender of our

Deepening Intimate Bonds as Things Change

partner and our love compels us to treat them with kindness and to wholeheartedly support them and give them a home in our heart. At the same time we find a home in their heart, beyond our own identities. In this home we come to know all the contours of their being and the hidden places of their heart, some of which have been locked away by fear and others that are wellsprings of wisdom and beauty that lay beneath the flooring of everyday consciousness.

The river that flows in you also flows in me.

KABIR

In modern society, we have great difficulty, psychologically and emotionally, really surrendering in a marriage. We often are concerned about issues of power, wanting control over our own lives and even our partner. We hate to feel helpless and powerless.

Our culture plays on our fears and needs and encourages taking control of our bodies, our feelings, our thoughts, our lives and maximizing our “personal power.” Many of the people and couples that I counsel struggle with the feelings of being imprisoned by their fears, longings, and overwhelm. They want to break free. At the same time they often think that having more power to control their situations and themselves is the solution. They know they want change and they want to control the change. There is a basic mistrust of themselves and of life. They are so frightened of disappointment and of not being good enough that they do not see how they will survive or be able to deal with opening to deep intimacy and the flow of life. They are hostage to their own horror movies created by their fears, anxieties, and frustrated desires even as they long for rich aliveness, beauty and love.

Empowerment

We often do not realize that our true power is the confidence in our own wisdom nature and in our affirming relationship to life by creating meaning and experiencing deep connection. Empowerment is the strength of clarity that derives from knowing our true nature. The radiance of our being is strongest when we are lovers, fully alive, open, and surrendering to the moment in a totally engaged and responsive way.

As lovers, we give ourselves over to being shaped by life, in part because our love gives us a clarity. We see that the very act of loving makes us fully alive, connects profoundly, and brings us home. At heart, this is what we have been seeking all along and it arises from the ground of our surrender.

The lover has no need to become a monarch because he or she is already an expression of sacred monarchy. Our reign as lover is invisible yet palpable through our presence. We commingle the sensory and the Sacred in a natural and affirming way.

Grief and Loss

Sharing grief also can strengthen the sense of intimacy. When we have lost a parent, friend, or a child, our grief contains a core element of praise for the value of what we have lost. Our pain honors this caring and value. In the process of grieving, we extract the essential value of a person's life and presence and take into our freshly opened heart that essence. This remembering leaves an imprint on our soul as we carry on aspects of their contributions in our own lives, integrating these with our own unique gifts to the world.

By sharing our mutual pain, as a couple, we share memories heart to heart. Hand in hand we main an atmosphere of sorrow around our loss, of celebration for the departed, and of gratitude for life and the support of each other. Shoulder to shoulder we work to create a loving memorial through creating benefit on

behalf of those who have passed and of our children and our children's children.

We realize that grieving is more than a personal process. It is a collective one as well. Recall the extraordinary fellowship that people experience during abnormal times of crisis. Crisis challenges us to come from our core of what is truly important and we sense that others are affected in a similar way. Crisis, grief and celebration reveal our need for each other—our fundamental interdependence. We sense the bond we have to what is beyond the ordinary, to the Sacred and to each other. We know how vital it is that we play our part and make our particular contributions.

Deepening Intimacy through Mutual Celebration

Regularly celebrating our marriage manifests the awe, gratitude, and praise we feel in our relationship and for each other. Our hearts open with gratitude, love, and praise enriching the environment of our marriage with meaning and value. The shared intimacy of celebration enriches our way of being, seeing, and relating such that colors are brighter, lines sharper, energy more intense, and the sense of connection stronger and more profound. Our hearts, minds, bodies, homes, and family are filled with the affirmation of life and love.

Authentic mutual celebration aligns intentions, participation, and energies such that our dedication is deepened, our actions become wholehearted and the aliveness and love of each other are embodied. We give to each other and are given to. We sit, stand, sing, dance, pray and meditate side by side and become a sacred witness to each other bringing forth the Sacred. Celebration heals our loneliness and self-concern and mobilizes our energies in service to each other.

Working with the Three Types of Communication

Getting clear about the purposes and utility of each of the



three types of communication can be a powerful tool in removing common stumbling blocks to intimacy. When we dump our accumulated feelings as our partner walks through the door after a long day of work overwhelms the simple reconnection at the end of the day. The same is true when our home conversations are colored by our distress from work. In these examples, we are polluting the everyday environment of the relationship with feelings that our partner may be unprepared to witness and receive.

I have found that many relationship issues clear up and people feel enhanced intimacy having separated the times and places for the three communications. Setting up a regular time, say once a week, to do sharing means that we do not let feelings accumulate and actually get support from each other in speaking our truth.

Separating sharing from dialogical conversations leads to fewer arguments. We still have to live with disagreement, but we do not need to make our conversations an opportunity to repeat our rants of disappointment and frustration. Each of us learns to distinguish between subject matter and feeling matter. Having already articulated our feelings and had them openly witnessed, we can enter a dialogue on concrete topics without the urgency to have our emotions addressed or resolved. This permits each of us to get into a problem-solving mode more readily and to have less charge around those issues that cannot be resolved at the time.

Knowing that there are times when feelings will be heard and issues worked with, frees us to engage in building the hand in hand bonds that sustain intimacy over time and that create a loving environment for ourselves and others.

ADDITIONAL INTIMACY BUILDERS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Even as we work to create the conditions for intimacy, we need to also surrender. We make the effort and surrender the results, We open to what actually happens, working as though everything depends on us, surrendering the results as if they are a gift of Grace.
2. It is also important to get out into nature and share a landscape together, to share being silently present and listening among the trees, the rocks, and the birds. They will speak to us. We then can have a different and open conversation with each other.
3. We can learn a great deal from reflecting on our parents and their relationship. Particularly we can explore ways we are similar to our parents that we like and that we do not like. The ways we are different than our parents that we like and that we dislike. How do the roles we play in our current relationship enhance and diminish the relationship and the sense of intimacy?



4. When we experience being hurt by the words or actions of each other, we want to contain our retaliatory impulse so that we can cognitively explore what happened and experientially explore the feelings. Rather than react, we want to use the energy from our feelings to create something of value.

5. Continually explore how what we do affects each other and the relationship. We hold the intention to improve each other's lives and our intimacy together. In this process we include each other in our background attention. The ways we behave toward each other shapes how we are held by our partner, whether as a constructive and supportive presence or as a distraction and threat.

6. Going through a period of mutually intentional, sexual abstinence can often reclaim passion in marriage and renews the vitality of physical intimacy after a period of having become routine or boring.

7. Bring humor, play, and genuine interest to everyday interactions. This helps to support the atmosphere of delight and the sense of freshness.

Dealing with Disenchantment and Wounds

During times of disenchantment, it helps to have at least one person who holds great trust in the vitality of the relationship. When we are mutually disenchanting and feeling overwhelmed by dread, a third party such as a therapist, friend or pastoral counselor can often hold the trust in the relationship while we find our way.

How do we create intimacy where we have sown distance

in the past through our disrespect and wounding of each other? The key is our desire to make a relationship whole again and take the steps to make amends. We take responsibility for our behaviors and the situations we participated in by creating benefit from what is so now.

In this process of taking responsibility, we become alchemists turning mistakes into merits, problems into opportunities, and the lead of the past into the gold of the future. We are also transforming ourselves by making our presence and our actions a dedicated force for the good.

12 Steps of Intimacy Renewal

1. Admit addiction to reactive patterns and rigid attitudes about our partner that create division and distance in the relationship.
2. Inventory the cohesive threads and the divisive forces.
3. Revision the purpose of the relationship and surrender to this mutual vision.
4. Reflect on personal as well as collective behavior patterns and initiate positive changes in our behaviors.
5. Commit to be flexible and open to each other so that we and the relationship can continue to grow.
6. Maintain an attitude of humility and avoid the danger of manipulation and control.
7. Assume responsibility for our new vision and commit to have that guide us in all aspects of our lives together.
8. Guided by our new vision, work on creating the day-to-day environment that reflects that vision in our



communications, body language, and ways we respond to bids for attention.

9. Cultivate a heart posture of love in all matters, great and small.

10. Dedicate ourselves to bringing our individual and collective gifts to the larger community.

11. Practice spiritual communion, individually and collectively, that connects us to the Sacred.

12. Open to the miraculous possibilities of spiritual awakening and connection in which intimacy deepens, we are made whole, and we experience ecstasy.

The temple of intimacy is built with love, shared experiences, words, rituals, gestures, space, objects, and meanings. As we share more experiences with each other and create a mutual story together, we become increasingly invested in each other's unfolding. We care about the gift that our partner offers to the world. We carry pieces of each other's past, caring, vision, and responsibilities. In this process we make contributions to each other's development that we are uniquely able to offer, enhancing the richness and completeness of the other person's life and work.

Making Our Tail Conscious

When we unconsciously play out a mood, try to avoid conflict by not taking a stand, or assert ourselves from an insecure place, we may notice that people we care about frequently feel bruised, confused, or battered. Our seemingly innocent actions, inactions, feelings, and fears impact others both materially and energetically, and we are often surprised and astounded when we learn what has happened. It is like

Additional Intimacy Builders and Suggestions

being a large dog vigorously wagging a long tail in a living room of precious objects unconsciously knocking things over all around us.

This tail in humans is not physically visible yet is very important. It is part of our energetic presence in the world. It includes habits of mind and body that come from our personal history, the patterns of our family, our genetic inheritance and our cultural heritage. It includes the aspects of our personality that we reject or do not own, remain ignorant about, or do not know how to relate to.

This energetic tail is an *apraxic limb*. “Apraxia” means the loss or impairment of ability to recognize stimuli or to execute intentional movements. In psycho-spiritual terms, apraxia occurs both 1) when we fail to recognize an aspect of ourselves such as our past, unconscious habits, rejected choices that still haunt us, and the energetic impact of our behavior that is out of our attention, and 2) when we know something is there but do not know how to use it and have it serve our life purposes. The energetic tail is an apraxic limb that we simply have not brought into consciousness and learned how to use.

Our conscious work must give special attention to this limb. We need to bring it into awareness, find out what lessons it has for us, and extract the energy from it to nourish the present. It is like uncovering the stranger within us and welcoming him or her so that no part of us is denied or exerting hidden destructive powers.

Other people are an important source of information about our apraxic limbs. Getting feedback from them can accelerate our growth as we treat even strangers as opportunities to discover the parts of life that have remained hidden to us. By ourselves we may have to work harder to bring those elements into consciousness. Intimate relationships bring all of our hidden qualities to the surface. Supportive relationships insist that we deal with and grow from what is revealed.

Intimacy with Ourselves

All intimate relationships in the natural course of interactions and connection will bring out and provoke our unresolved issues, wounds, fears, longings and traumas. We then have the opportunity, if we are somewhat conscious, to experience the emotional charge and contraction that is bound to these issues. We can even process them in ways that releases their grip and frees us to live and love more openly, intimately, and freely—authentically.

Over time, the growth of intimacy in a marriage tends to involve a growing intimacy with ourselves. The demands for personal presence in interpersonal interactions push us to heal and transform the splits within ourselves. There are sacred seeds and hidden potentials that live in secret chambers of our heart, apart from the battles that rage within us and the ways we react them out in everyday life. We carry these treasures until our heart is somehow opened by grief, love, an existential crisis, or even the simple tears of a lost child. From that opening a great spirit can emerge and redirect our life.

As we become intimate with ourselves, we discover the core fears and longing that have been driving our reactive habit body and created a personal history—our story—that we tell ourselves and each other. Like works of art, our story reveals not simply the contents of our lives but underlying themes and directions that make it a farce, a melodrama, a tragedy, a comedy, or a mythic guide that takes us beyond ourselves into the larger stories of life, the greater dimensions of being, and the wisdom of the Sacred.

When our story is told out of self-concern and preoccupation, it becomes a prison for our soul and cuts us off from the world and each other. In the confines of this small place, the interactions of the story are reactive and there is really nowhere for it to go. Even though we may try to fill it with great detail

Additional Intimacy Builders and Suggestions

and numerous events, it always remains a short story in what it encompasses rather than an epic that takes in the whole world, life, and the outer limits of the Sacred.

As we dig beneath the layers of fears and longings, of wounds, pains, pleasures, successes and failures, we find an aliveness, a wisdom, and a love at the heart of our particular story within the greater stories of family, community, people, life and the unfolding of Divine manifestation. Our story moves beyond the ordinary into the extraordinary, as our particular struggle is a pathway leading us ultimately and intimately to our true mission and role, what Joseph Campbell called our “bliss.” We discover that our journey is about bringing our unique gift to the story of humankind, of the planet, and of being part of a supremely sacred community.

Intimacy with ourselves involves confronting our aloneness. In working with that aloneness, the sense of separation, and being left on our own, we join the vast community of others who have taken and are taking that journey. We find a special communion on that path. We learn how to be connected in solitude, to speak through silence, and experience the beauty of stillness. We discover the threads of the Sacred that bind us to ourselves, to life, to others, and to the world.

This inner journey works from the principle of exploring and experiencing the entire process with an open mind and full body engagement. This means we are not particularly concerned with explanation, interpretation, and analysis. We become fully present emotionally and spiritually with whatever arises. We use our capacity for witnessing and hosting all the materials in our story to arrive at the deeper sense of our authentic self and basic wisdom nature that resides beneath the layers of intense reactive feelings and thoughts. In the process we establish an intimate relationship with all the parts of ourselves without reaction and attachment so that our deepest relationship with our authentic self is spontaneous, fresh, and open.

Hosting

To be open does not mean spaced out where substance is denied and nothing is fleshed out. This simply leads to an escape from life, not an engagement in it. To be open to life and to all that is, means to be involved and unattached, to be connected and not merged, to live beyond self concern and preoccupation and still have personal autonomy and responsibility.

This openness is best reflected in the quality of hosting. When we host all that is in our awareness, we are spacious, inclusive, and welcoming. We actively relate to everything that arises in the space of our awareness. Hosting excludes nothing. Hosting is what makes it possible to work through our fears, longings, and overwhelm. In the experience of hosting, we realize that, as we host everything, we are being hosted by all that is, by God as Reality.

To be fearless in relationships does not mean we have no fears but that our sense of being and presence is large enough to include all our feelings, our wounds, our losses and griefs, our joys, and our conflicting impulses.

The same principle applies in our intimate relationships. When we host each other, we create a welcoming and encouraging space for the other to show up, to be just as they are. In that hosting space we also hold the desire to be of service to them and for them to feel at home in our presence. In addition, we also experience being hosted by our partner and by the relationship itself.

The sense of inclusion resides in the heart and is an aspect heart to heart intimacy. At the same time hosting in a relationship is more than a heart space. It is an environment of welcoming that we maintain hand in hand, day-to-day, and it involves working together shoulder to shoulder as we include others as guests in the home of our relationship. Hosting as a shoulder to

shoulder endeavor invites the guest to become temporarily part of the hand in hand family of the relationship and to partake of the overflow of the intimacy of our heart to heart connection.

Responsibility

Our words, deeds, and interactions all have effects on others and on the world. This is expressed in the idea of karma in the Eastern spiritual traditions. Karma in its essential meaning is simply the result or effect of any action. All actions have an effect and those effects are their karma. We then have to live with the environment of effects of previous actions, our own and that of others. Every interaction contributes to the creation of the atmosphere and reality of the next moment and future moments. In this way karma also means creation.

Sustaining and deepening intimacy requires that we take responsibility in the relationship. “Responsibility” can mean many things ranging from blame, to control, to an attitude of creation. From the point of view of spiritual maturity, responsibility involves creating benefit from what is. It does not matter how things got the way they are, whether by our hands or those of others. The fact is that right now, all that we can do to take on responsibility is to work to create benefit now and in the future. This is not to suggest that we have control, only that our efforts and skills must be mobilized in the direction of improvement, love, beauty, growth, and wisdom.

All relationships must deal with differences of opinions, feelings, and attitudes as well as periods of discomfort. Taking responsibility means that we work with whatever is happening to make it better or to create something of value out of the situation. The heart postures of blame, regret, guilt and shame all keep us stuck in past patterns of self-preoccupation, victimization, and control. The heart posture of responsibility actively moves us and others into larger perspectives, current possibilities, and greater futures.



We create benefit by acknowledging and owning the consequences of the past, by grieving what is lost, celebrating what is here now, by opening to being worked by the experience, and by dedicating ourselves to acting in ways that are beneficial.

Seven Principles

Over the nearly half century that I have reflected on intimacy, I have come to realize that at least seven essential principles apply to intimacy.

The first is that intimacy is essentially spiritual and is vital to life, connection, and growth and thus is different than what most people imagine it to be.

Second, there is a vast difference between the chemistry of attraction and the experience of the mystery and miracle of the closeness of intimacy.

Third, intimacy is not a thing, it is a process of relating that can be developed and strengthened.

Fourth, we are the environment that others experience and the question before us is “What kind of environment are we creating through our presence and our actions?”

Fifth, responsibility is not about blame but about creating benefit from what is, however it got that way.

Sixth, the soul is a lover and is nourished by intimacy through meaning, caring, sharing, and being wholehearted.

Seventh, intimacy pervades all true spirituality, because of its open heart, its transcendence of self into some beyond, its profound sense of home, its natural impulse to serve, its

Additional Intimacy Builders and Suggestions

mutuality and sense of unity, and its wild closeness to the unknown.

Intimacy of all kinds places us on the inside of our experience, opens and connects us beyond ourselves, encourages praise and gratitude, engenders service to our loving connections, and evokes from our depths a dedication to aliveness and giving our gifts as gestures of love.



Appendix

The Biology of Sacred Intimacy

Our story of intimacy has many dimensions, from the physical to the Sacred, which are all based in the evolution of our design as human beings, individually and collectively. We exist simultaneously in multiple dimensions of being, which can be simplified to the superficial dimensions and the sacred dimensions. Our experience of intimacy and its sustainability over time involves physical, mental, emotional, collective and spiritual dynamics that shape our experience of aliveness, love, and connection. These dimensions and dynamics express themselves in the physical substances of emotion such as neuropeptides and hormones, the energetic activities of electromagnetic fields, and the informational exchanges that enable all organic systems and subsystems to operate, communicating at everything from the inter- and intra- cellular level, to organ to organ, to brain and body, and to the levels of individual to individual, individual to collective, and collective to individual.

What I am suggesting here is that intimacy is grounded in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements within us, and between us and others. Connections, like emotions, exist both in the physical body in terms of biochemical, biophysical, neurological, hormonal, and physical energetic dynamics and in a realm beyond the physical where the content is characterized by awareness, subtle energies and consciousness. In this appendix, I briefly review some interesting explorations by scientists concerned with consciousness and connections.

Head and Heart

One picture that is emerging from the scientific community as a whole is that the brain and the heart are nodal points in a complex, interconnected network that has both closed and open loop aspects in its relationships with other networks beyond our body. These networks impact on the content of our experiences and connections and the nature of the content of our experiences, thoughts and connections impact on these networks. We are not simply passive reactors to each other and the world. We are active responders who can shape the inner and outer qualities of experience by the ways we think, perceive, and consciously access internal states. We can affect both the intrapersonal physical dynamics and the interpersonal or social dynamics of larger systems.

Biologically, as well as experientially, we can distinguish between passion and intimacy. Passion includes boundless enthusiasm, romance, and attraction. Intimacy involves feelings of closeness, connectedness, warmth and bondedness.

It appears that at least six chemical ingredients are significant in the experience of romantic love and intimate bonding—dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin, oxytocin, vasopressin, and testosterone. The nature and interaction of these can help us make distinctions at the level of our physiology.

Molecules of Romance

In the early stages of a romantic relationship, romantic passion dominates the emotional landscape. The passion of love increases both dopamine and norepinephrine in our body. Elevated levels of dopamine in the brain produce focused attention, motivation, purpose driven actions, exhilaration, as well as increased energy. When dramatically elevated, dopamine can cause hyperactivity, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, accelerated heart beats, rapid breathing, anxiety and even mania. Increased levels of norepinephrine, a chemical



derived from dopamine, in the experience of romantic passion, also produces a “high” with the sense of exhilaration and excessive energy.

Helen Fisher and her colleagues, using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) experiments, found that romantic love taps many parts of the brain that produce and distribute dopamine and norepinephrine and in particular the caudate nucleus, that is involved in detecting, perceiving, and selecting rewards and in motivating us to seek the pleasure of those rewards. “The caudate is also associated with the acts of paying attention and learning.”¹² The work of Fisher and others suggest that the high energy, focused attention, great motivation and exhilarated feelings of romance and devotional ecstasy are partly the result of these chemical dynamics.

Fisher also found that the dynamics were fundamentally the same for both men and woman. In her survey of over 800 men and women from the United States and Japan, there was common agreement about most of the components, feelings, and nature of passion in romantic love. This agreement carried across age, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation and ethnic groups. “None of these human variables made much difference in the responses.”¹³

One study cited by Fisher found that “...in-love participants and those suffering from OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder)...have significantly lower levels of serotonin than did the controls.” This helps to explain the obsessive as well as the addictive nature of romantic love. This does not mean that everyone becomes obsessed and addicted, but rather the chemistry of romantic passion produces tendencies in those directions which we must learn to work with, direct, and incorporate into our lives and relationships.

Need for Connection

Fisher concludes that romantic love, like the craving for

food and water, is a physiological need, an instinct to “court and win a particular mating partner.”¹⁴ This focusing on “need” revealed in Greek discourses thousands of years ago has recently been partially explained by neuroscience. It turns out that one of the effects of high dopamine and norepinephrine is often declining levels of serotonin that helps us maintain a sense of balance in our thinking and between our thinking and feeling. Sufferers of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) tend to have low levels of serotonin, which is treated with SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) such as Prozac or Zoloft, both of which increase the levels of certain types of serotonin in the brain.

Fisher also found the various chemical and neurological activities of the brain produced a sense of neediness for connection to the person we love. In Plato’s *The Symposium*, an account of a dinner party in 416 B.C.E., Socrates begins his homage to the God of Love by telling of what a wise woman from Mantinea said to him: “He always lives in a state of need.” This “state of need” aptly describes the feeling that most of us experience in passionate romantic love. It is not simply that we feel the “need” for our loved one, but that we experience “need” itself. Need takes us beyond ourselves. Even in religious devotion, there is this sense of need for union with the Sacred.

This longing for wholeness through connection is also expressed in ancient Greek mythology in stories by Aristophanes. He describes how original humans were hermaphroditic/ androgynous wholes, with two faces on one head, four ears, eyes, hands, and legs, and both sets of genitals. These primal beings challenged the gods causing Zeus to slice each into two. “That’s how, long ago, the innate desire of human beings for each other started. Each one of us is looking for his own matching half.”¹⁵

Sexual Desire and Romantic Passion

We can make a further distinction between sexual desire



and romantic passion. Sexual desire, lust, is the craving for sexual fulfillment and is biochemically associated with testosterone. While lust and romantic love are often entangled, lust does not necessarily lead to romantic love, but romantic love can activate lust. The elevation of dopamine that occurs with passion often, but not always, stimulates the release of testosterone, a hormone of sexual desire among other things. However, elevated levels of testosterone do not necessarily lead to an increased tendency to fall in love.

Over time the elevated levels of dopamine and norepinephrine are not sustained and the glow of romance begins to wear off even as the memory of it remains prominent. Romantic passion reveals in dramatic fashion aspects of the role emotions play in our experience and sense of life.

Emotions do more than infuse our lives with vibrancy and meaning. They make up the foundation for every act that we take that is more complicated than a reflex. Emotions are our motivators and our ever-present guides. They can be reactive and habitual or they can become conscious and their energy marshaled in the service of our growth and connections. They make us feel alive and connect us to the world, both inner and outer.

Neural Imprinting

The intensity and energy of emotions and the ways they are repeatedly evoked and activated create imprints on the neural programming of the physical brain and body and on the patterns of energy in what can be called our “subtle” body. Similar emotional experiences tend to be abstracted by the brain into ever more generalized and embedded patterns that are simultaneously configured in the physiology of the body and in our energy system. When we strike certain emotional chords, they bring to life past memories of the same feeling.

When memory forms patterns it does so partly because the

neural network encodes the similarities into a synthetic summary that links with other summary encodings. The stronger ones enlist a set of other configurations to form a pattern that fits into an emerging and evolving world view. These strong configurations are like suns that attract into their orbits whatever comes in the range of their gravitational pull. In this way they form systems that become relatively stable over time, unless a powerful influence breaks them apart and replaces the central sun with another one as powerful in its attractor capacities.

When we fall within the orbit of one of these powerful emotional suns, if we remain reactively unconscious, it can overwhelm our other memory networks so completely that their content becomes inaccessible. Within the confines of our inner virtual world, those other memories barely exist and seem to have no significance. When we are severely depressed, we forget that we have had happy times and meaningful lives, even in the face of other information pointing to evidence from our past. At times when we experience extreme rage, drawing upon piles of undigested anger, we can attack people close to us without hesitation or guilt, having forgotten that we love them. At other times, we may be euphoric as in torrents of romantic passion, and forget that there are other relationships and roles in our lives that are also important.

These emotional floods can be triggered by external events, internal thought processes, or a combination of the two. While we often tie such emotional reactions to external events, it usually involves some thought process of the neocortical portion of the brain. As it waxes hypothetically about the possibilities of a situation, it can send the limbic brain, unable to distinguish between the sensory experiences stimulated by external prompts and those of our inner imaginings, into spirals of fear, longing, despair or ecstasy. Then our feelings further trigger our thinking and our thinking enlarges our feelings.



The balance between these functions in the brain is maintained by many chemicals and mental activities, among those are the chemical serotonin and the mental capacity to access a more witnessing and mindful awareness.

Memory

It is also important to realize that memory is not a thing but an event, a configuration of processes that has no mass and cannot be placed in space. It is mutable and thus changes over time. Memory is a shifting phenomenon where, after the instant of experience, memory traces start shifting away from what they were, incorporating fragments from earlier and later events, interpretations by others, outside expectations, and implications of leading questions about what happened. Once memory has changed it keeps its feeling of certainty because it is still the glue that holds our mental world together.

New experiences blur the features of older ones in the operations of a neural network. It is also true that the neural impressions of the past shape the imprints of the present. As psychiatrists Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini and Richard Lannon in their book *A General Theory of Love* put it: “Experience methodically rewires the brain, and the nature of what it *has* seen dictate what it *can* see.”¹⁶

The distinction between memory and addiction is that memory does not necessarily lead to the obsessive activation of a chemical cascade that hijacks the brain and the body into limited functioning. Addiction moves us into self-preoccupation and diminishes our mental and emotional capabilities over time. It becomes a destructive attachment to experience and an escape from life.

Positive Attachment

Bonding, or positive attachment, is another quality altogether, characterized by feelings of connection, belonging, and

security. When people are bonded there exists a kind of ease and peace in the relationship. There is increased sense of a *we*.

Studies have found that with longer relationships additional regions of the brain become increasingly active, particularly the neocortex. Emotions, attention and working memory interact in complex and regular patterns that take into account our own inner dynamics and the emotional states of other people. An increasing number of emotional processing centers appear to come into play as people become more familiar and intimate over time.

Chemistry of Bonding

The chemistry of bonding is somewhat different than that of sexual desire or romantic love. Recent research is beginning to unravel the mystery of long-term bonding, revealing that two closely related hormones made primarily in the hypothalamus, in ovaries and in testes, vasopressin and oxytocin, are involved in many of the behaviors associated with bonding. Studies of both animal and human behavior have indicated these hormones to be involved in the bonding of couples and between parents and children, particularly between mothers and newborns. We secrete these two hormones during sexual stimulation and orgasm, affection, facing mutual challenges, and working together.

Many scientists examining the biological capacity for love see the glue that keeps social bonds between parent and child, between parents themselves, and between extended family and community units strong, is the feelings of pleasure, reward, and satisfaction that occurs in our brains and our bodies from oxytocin and vasopressin when we enter into loving relationships.

The relationships between all these chemicals in us are very complex and only partly understood, with each new research finding generating many unanswered questions. In reading the



literature, I am struck by the fact that the effects of these hormones on each other over time is subject to inner and outer conditions and that the context of our relationship will often impact how they operate. For example, in men levels of testosterone generally decline when they become expectant fathers and even more when they hold a baby. At the same time the levels of bonding hormones may rise. Or put another way, high levels of bonding hormones may cause levels of testosterone to decline in us.

Yet under the right circumstances of time and place, such as a vacation, the elevated levels of oxytocin and vasopressin can increase testosterone production triggering sexual desire. These chemical relationships are even more dependent and complex when it comes to those involved in bonding and romantic love. As Fisher points out: “Under some circumstances, dopamine and norepinephrine can stimulate the release of oxytocin and vasopressin—and contribute to one’s growing feelings of attachment. But increasing levels of oxytocin (found in both men and women) can also interfere with dopamine and norepinephrine pathways in the brain, *decreasing* the impact of these excitatory substances. Hence the chemistry of attachment can quell the chemistry of romance.”¹⁷

Mind-Body Interaction

In discussing the physiological basis for bonding, love and the experience of intimacy, we are also talking about the mind-body interaction. Recent research validates what people have known and yogis have used for thousands of years. Namely, what we think, the way we think about something, and the ways we feel all affect our bodies and are affected by our bodies. For example, Dr. Candace Pert, a psychoneuroimmunologist, has studied the effects of the mind and emotions on health. Her work has focused on biochemicals called “neuropeptides,” which are molecules that carry messages, primarily but not

exclusively, from the brain to every cell in our body. These molecules fit into receptors that cover the surface of all the cells in our body, including the immune system, the endocrine system, and the autonomic nervous system.

Neuropeptides tell the cells in the heart to beat faster or slower, the cells in our adrenal glands to release adrenaline, and our sweat glands to secrete moisture. These molecules also play a critical part in the regulation of our emotions and make emotions and internal states whole body experiences.

The Heart

Over the past decade, fields, such as neurocardiology, have been changing the way we understand the organ of the heart and the region surrounding the physical heart. So far, research has found that the heart communicates with the brain and the rest of the body in at least four ways: neurologically (through the transmission of nerve impulses), biochemically (through neurotransmitters and hormones), biophysically (through pressure waves of the blood), and energetically (through electromagnetic field interactions). For example, besides having its own neurological capacities to sustain its own beating, the heart is part of a mutual feedback loop with the brain and other parts of the body.

Biochemically, we know that the heart produces the hormone ANF which is involved in multiple functions, such as blood pressure, body-fluid retention, electrolyte homeostasis, stress reduction, reproductive health, immune functioning, and motivated behavior. The heart also synthesizes and releases dopamine and norepinephrine. There is increasing evidence that the human emotional system is a body-wide network with the heart and brain as central players.

It is also becoming clear from scientific work on the electromagnetic, neural, and hormonal dynamics of the heart that this organ and the region around it play a powerful role in learning



and bonding, though the parameters are still beyond definitive description. For example, if we take a cell from a live heart, put it *in vitro*, and examine it through a microscope, this lonely cell will pulse evenly for some time but then fibrillate and die. However, if we take two live heart cells, and place them increasingly nearer each other as they begin fibrillation, they, at some point will stop fibrillating and resume their regular pulsing in synchrony with each other.

The electrical energy output of the heart is some forty to sixty times greater than that of brain waves and forms an electromagnetic field that radiates out some eight to ten feet beyond the body. These fields have impacts not only within the body but with others who are in the vicinity. Energy fields are also carriers of information that can entrain the energy of those organs and people within the field. From this point of view, the heart carries on an intricate set of interactions with our brain, body, each other and the world around us.

Addiction Versus Emotional Intelligence

The psychological and neuroscientific literature on romantic love and bonding would appear at first glance to suggest a chaotic and almost impossible situation for couples and for the fabric of society. Romantic love, with its euphoric high that is difficult to control and produces cravings, obsession, compulsion, distorted perception, emotional and physical dependence, and personality change, shares a great many characteristics with substance addiction. In fact some psychologists have come to look at romantic love as an addiction, one that is positive if requited or a negative fixation if spurned and not released. There are studies that have compared the brain scans of love stricken subjects with men and women injected with opiates and found that many of the same brain regions became active. In addition they point to three classic symptoms of addiction which are increasing tolerance that requires more and more,

Appendix

withdrawal when the romantic love disappears, and relapse into craving and potential compulsion whenever triggering images or events occur.

What is being missed in these discussions are the roles these relationships play in the larger context of our inner and outer lives, of the larger circles of other intimate relationships and of the sacred contexts for love and intimacy. This is true of substances as well, such as the use of wine in religious ceremonies and peyote among Native Americans in kiva rituals. When there is a sense of appropriate use in a setting of meaning, participation and contribution, abuse is not an issue and we do not become addicts.

When the intense emotions, energies, and associations are directed in conscious, collective and sacred ways, by the guidance of mentors, rituals of the society, and vital contributions we make to the group, we deepen the bonds of intimacy with ourselves, each other, the community and the larger stories that we are part of.

Emotional skills, also called emotional intelligence, depend on an integration of the workings of our brain functions that engage the neocortical brain with the limbic brain and its emotional energy. From a biological point of view we can locate at least some of the functions that we call consciousness in the neocortex as well as in the senses. The neocortex orchestrates our experiential world and it is in this region that enduring images and patterns of love and belonging are translated into embodied experience and memory. Because this part of the brain contains the skills of abstraction and reasoning and can direct the more action oriented limbic region of the brain, does not mean that everything is determined by neocortical activity. Yet it is critical in developing the capacity to become more conscious in relation to ourselves and each other. This is also the part of the brain that has the power of understanding,



multiple perspectives, and capacity for expanded connection and wholeness.

Learning

From a learning point of view, as we have more experiences, we gain a sense of the look and feel of relationships, telling us at an unconscious level what relationships *are*, how they function, what to expect, and how to become engaged in them. These patterns get modified over time by later relationships and the powerful pull of love and bonding in those connections. While it appears that the brain's biology limits to some extent adult emotional learning owing to declining plasticity—the readiness of neurons to sprout fresh connections and encode new information and skills, we can still make major revisions in our inner world, particularly when we dedicate ourselves to cultivating our spiritual nature which is not bound by rules of reaction and habit that we have been describing.

In the way that learning works, we strengthen neuronal patterns by exercising the neural networks, namely the more we do, think or imagine a thing, the stronger the pattern in the brain. This is how training works to develop strong images, working conceptual frameworks, and skills. When the circuits are sufficiently established, thoughts and feelings glide along them easily and they feel like part of us. These circuits make up our learned habits of thought and feeling.

Even with well established circuits, they can be revised through the influence of strong experiences, practices which override them, and intimate relationships which add new elements to the circuitry and create a resonance that can transmit another reality.

Revolutions in our emotional circuitry that change our world view rarely occur suddenly, except in the case of an emotional, mental and spiritual earthquake that shakes the very core of our being and breaks down the foundation and structure

of our world as we have known it. This can happen in cases of war, extreme loss, or being subjected to extreme violence and violation. Most changes in emotional circuitry come about through the introduction and reinforcement of new powerful experiences, images, and patterns that replace or override the archaic ones over time. Love of a partner, among members of a team, or of a spiritual teacher all serve to erode old reactive patterns and create new bondings from which we can grow and experience deep connection just as an abused child can learn to trust through a relationship with a teacher.

In spiritual work, as we access the witness dimension of our being, our awareness takes us beyond identification with our habitual thoughts and reactive emotions. Over time we sense the power of consciousness to reshape our inner life. Further, as we lovingly connect to a spiritual mentor and sacred teachings, powerful chords of profound recognition resonate throughout our being that are not based on past experience so much as a transcendent knowing.

Another factor in spiritual work is the cultivation of our capacity for conscious attention and the ability to access and maintain alert and peaceful states of mind. When we enter states that access *theta* and *delta* brain waves and in which normally active limbic portions of the brain are relatively quiet and neocortical portions are active, we experience a deep sense of wholeness, home, and interconnection. These states, often induced by meditation and sacred rituals, involve a much more generalized sense of connection than the limbic emotional connections which are often specific. The qualities of loving-kindness and compassion are accessed through these states and tend to strengthen the capacities of the states themselves.

Basic Emotions and Higher Cognitive Emotions

Paul Ekman distinguishes between two categories of



emotions—basic emotions and higher cognitive emotions. The basic emotions refer to those that are considered universal and innate such as fear, sadness, anger, disgust, surprise, and joy. The higher cognitive emotions may be universal but depend on cultural conditioning for their expression, such as love, jealousy, and gratitude. Current scientific theory suggests that the basic emotions are largely processed in the subcortical structures of the brain, and the higher cognitive emotions are processed more in the neocortex. The neocortex is the most recently developed part in human evolution and it carries out the most complex activities such as reasoning.

In studies by Paul Ekman and Robert Levenson of a Tibetan Buddhist monk who they wired to record his physiological responses found that the states of consciousness that the monk maintained affected not only his own patterns but also those he interacted with. In experiments designed to produce everything from startle to distress when exposed to certain stimuli and interactions with contentious individuals, the monk not only displayed equanimity externally and internally but impacted on a difficult person who was supposed to dispute with the monk. This person reported that he could not maintain his confrontation feelings and style and was overwhelmed by the presence that radiated from the monk.

Similar findings have emerged from studies at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in their studies of meditation using EEG with both control groups, groups taught meditation, and advanced spiritual practitioners. Davidson and his colleagues in Madison have found that activation of the left frontal part of the brain is associated with positive emotional feelings. For many of us these include joy, a sense of home, wholeness and larger connection. People in the meditative group and the advanced practitioner they studied all had left prefrontal

activity and reported more positive feelings in their lives. The control group did not.¹⁸

Shared Resonance

The development of emotional and spiritual intelligence aligns the head, heart, and the body through a process called *entrainment* whereby each organ can induce the others to work with the same rhythms. This synchrony creates harmony and, as a result, our entire system works more smoothly. When the heart and the head are mutually entrained, we feel more peaceful, together and whole. Further, as in the example of the monk in the study by Ekman and Levenson, the quality of our presence impacts on those around us.

We create this sense of connection through our external physical expressions and our internal states. Externally, one of the most powerful images that bonds us to others is their smile. Smiling exchanges produce pleasure for both parties as we are both instinctually wired to delight in the expression of pleasure of other people and to express that delight ourselves through smiling. The early work of Ekman revealed that emotional expressiveness equips human beings with a sophisticated communications system. The receptive component allows people to acquire complex knowledge about the internal state of another person, irrespective of tribe or dialect.¹⁹

Laughter is another largely social dynamic that leads to social bonding. The physical mechanism of laughter arises from the brain stem, the most ancient portion of the nervous system. Laughter can play a role in maintaining bonds of affinity, in marriage, friendships, and in community activities. We laugh mainly because laughter is a crucial component of early childhood bonding and then gets mapped onto future relationships.

Lewis, Amini, and Lannon in their book *A General Theory of Love* argue that we, as mammals, can detect the internal state of each other and match our own physiology to match



the situation leading to a dynamic of mutual adjustment. They call this capacity for mutual reading and adjustment *limbic resonance*, "...a symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation whereby two mammals become attuned to each other's inner states. It is limbic resonance that makes looking into the face of another emotionally responsive creature a multilayered experience."²⁰ Candace Pert calls this *emotional resonance*.²¹

Limbic resonance is the relational counterpart of the inner process of bonding. For them it is the doorway to connection. It supplies the framework for a dynamic synchronization that we can see between well-attuned spouses, parents and children, teammates, and old friends. Using the pathways of limbic resonance, emotional states often become contagious tending to draw the emotions of people who are together into congruence that maintains the connection we often call "rapport."

Adult bonds are woven with a variety of connective threads, each with important functioning in the resonance of the relationship. Conversation supports a sense of sharing a world of thought and ideas, while physical contact affirms the body connection and being in the same physical space. Responding to bids for attention keeps the channels of influence working reciprocally and supports the feeling of home in the relationship. Without the sense of home and with a prolonged feeling of alienation and separation, our cardiovascular functioning, hormone levels, and immune processes are all disturbed. With the sense of home, we are more energized, active, and engaged in everything from relationships, work, and life, feeling a sacred quality to our personal and collective existence.

The feeling of closeness has not only emotional components, there is physiological resonance working that synchronizes us. For example, we know that women who spend time together frequently tend to have their menstrual cycles at the same time. These cycles come into spontaneous alignment. It

has been found that this harmonious, hormonal communion is also affected by our feelings for each other since close friends more readily become synchronized than women who merely room together.

According to Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, "Evolution has given mammals a shimmering conduit, and they use it to tinker with one another's physiology, to adjust and fortify one another's fragile neural rhythms in the collaborative dance of love."²² They call this mutually synchronizing exchange *limbic regulation*. From another point of view, we could say that mutual entrainment and regulation arises within a field of collective consciousness that grows from our collaborative endeavors and intimate relationships.

Open and Closed Loop Systems

While I think that there are limitations to emotional resonance and limbic regulation as well as the role of collective consciousness and that the science is not well developed theoretically or experimentally for such phenomena, I have included some of these ideas to point to the fact that we are both a closed-loop and an open-loop system physiologically. In our open-loop aspects, we affect the hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, immune functioning and neuropeptides of each other.

Generally, we are designed to be social so that most of us do not function optimally when we are wholly on our own. We need others to maximize our basic functioning. This physiologic dependence is obviously truest for young children. Yet, as adults, we remain social animals, desiring sources of stabilization as well as support for our higher functioning outside ourselves. Because intimacy involves reciprocal physiologic, emotional, energetic, and spiritual influence, it entails a deeper and more embodied presence and connection than is generally recognized. Intimate bonds support our physical health as well



as our emotional well-being and, I would suggest, the realization of our spiritual potential.

We experience our lives in the subjective world of feelings, emotions, thoughts, and the values, hopes, and spiritual visions based on them. If we try to reduce these to simple physical processes, we distort the nature of subjective experience and lose the richness of our own existence. We then have no way of comprehending or working with the complexity of reality and of life.

While we can understand a great deal about the physical processes that go into the experience of love and bonding from biology and the neurosciences, these only tell us about the chemical reactions that operate. These sciences can tell nothing about the content, texture and detailed feelings of experience and it is important that we do not reduce everything and all knowledge to physical descriptions. This is a kind of radical materialism that narrows our vision, understanding, and intellectual capacities and is not really a scientific position but a philosophical and metaphysical position.

Endnotes

- 1 John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us* (Doubleday, 2008), p. 136.
- 2 Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom* (Henry Holt, 1965), p. 252.
- 3 Marc Gafni, *The Mystery of Love* (Atria Books, 2003), p. 118.
- 4 Stephen and Ondrea Levine, *Embracing the Beloved* (Anchor, 1996), p 46.
- 5 Jeanette Lauer and Robert Lauer, *Til Death Do Us Part* (Routledge, 1985).
- 6 John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (Three Rivers Press, 1999), p.17. [See also: John M. Gottman and Joan DeClaire, *The Relationship Cure* (Crown, 2001).]
- 7 Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection* (Bantam Books, 1992), p. 242.
- 8 John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (Three Rivers Press, 1999), p. 3.
- 9 John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (Three Rivers Press, 1999), p. 11.
- 10 Marc Gafni, *The Mystery of Love* (Atria Books, 2003), p. 45.
- 11 Marc Gafni, *The Mystery of Love* (Atria Books, 2003), p. 59.
- 12 Helen Fisher, *Why We Love* (Henry Holt, 2004) p. 69.
- 13 Helen Fisher, *Why We Love* (Henry Holt, 2004) p. 5.
- 14 Helen Fisher, *Why We Love* (Henry Holt, 2004) p. xiii.
- 15 Helen Fisher, *Why We Love* (Henry Holt, 2004) p. 67.
- 16 Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (Vintage, 2001), p135.
- 17 Helen Fisher, *Why We Love* (Henry Holt, 2004) p. 91-92.

18 See Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson, *The Nature of Emotion* (Oxford, 1994). Also, Joseph Ciarrochi, Joseph P. Forgas, and John D. Mayer, *Emotional Intelligence in Everyday Life* (Psychology Press, 2001). Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (Bantam, 1995).

19 Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (Vintage, 2001), p. 40.

20 Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (Vintage, 2001), p. 63.

21 Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion* (Scribner, 1997), p 312.

22 Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (Vintage, 2001), p. 84.



THE DEDICATED LIFE INSTITUTE (DLI) supports spiritual exploration and growth and is dedicated to making the essence teachings of many traditions accessible in a Western idiom. Incorporating the principles of the mystic way, we promote both recovery of our wisdom ground of being and development of our capacity to use our daily conditions as a means of growth and the opportunity to manifest our true wisdom and loving nature. Our dedication to living as an expression of wisdom and love serves to encourage both personal and social transformation. The Institute offers meditation groups, retreats, workshops, and a home study program. For more information please visit our website at www.dli.org.



MARTIN LOWENTHAL, Ph.D. is an ordained senior meditation teacher, founder and mentor with the Dedicated Life Institute. Dr. Lowenthal is the author of *Alchemy of the Soul*; *Dawning of Clear Light*; *Embrace Yes*; *Heart to Heart*, *Buddha and the Art of Intimacy*, and is coauthor of *Opening the Heart of Compassion*. In addition to creating and teaching trainings, workshops and retreats internationally, he serves as a pastoral counselor, consultant, and writer. He has been on the faculty of Boston College and Harvard University Extension and has studied with Buddhist and Taoist masters for forty years. Dr. Lowenthal received his doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley in 1970, has worked as an applied anthropologist in Botswana, Africa, and directed a research institute from 1970 to 1977. Dr. Lowenthal has worked as a pastoral counselor and therapist with individuals, couples and families for more than thirty years.

