



**Becoming Love Able**

*How a Man  
Can Grow to  
be a More  
Loving  
Partner*

**Richard Matzkin**  
*Author of Loving Promises*

# Becoming Love *Able*

How A Man Can Grow To Be  
A More Loving Partner

By Richard Matzkin

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Becoming Love Able  
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Also, By Richard Matzkin:

(With Alice Matzkin)

*THE ART OF AGING*

Celebrating The Authentic Aging Self

*LOVING PROMISES*

The Master Class For Creating Magnificent Relationship

*MANifesto*

A Call for Men To Become Warriors For Kindness

*To my beloved Alice*

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## Invocation

Before beginning a project or setting off on a journey, it is good to get clear on your purpose and set an intention. An invocation is a verbal setting of an intention. The following invocation is my intention for you on this journey we are about to take together. My hope is that you will adopt this intention for your own, and as you achieve it, pass the intention for love and peace to others.

*May the words of this book touch your mind and heart as you read them.*

*May they spark the flame of love that already exists within you.*

*May that flame spread from your heart, and ignite a fire in your relationship.*

*May that fire spread to your family, your community, your country.*

*May the powerful flame of your masculine love create a conflagration that consumes hatred and envelopes the world in kindness.*

The world needs the message of men's love. You can be a messenger.

## Introduction

Go to any book store or library and you'll see shelves lined with books on relationship, love and marriage. The vast majority of these books will be read by women—women who are trying to find love, make sense of their relationship, or discover ways to repair a love that had been broken. Almost all of these books are oriented toward the women who will read them; few, if any, are directed toward men. Yet most men lag behind women in their understanding about love and relationships. They need guidance.

Men love differently than women. Not better, not worse, just different. Taking these differences into consideration, I set out to write this book from a masculine perspective. A man tends to process information differently from a woman. He does best when he receives information from a male frame of reference, using ideas he can relate to and language he can understand. The book is to the point, without fluff and nonessentials like case histories, dialog, written exercises or experiential processes. I wanted the contents to revolve around specific, concrete, goal-directed tasks, because most men tend to be oriented toward action. And I wanted an emphasis on understanding and logical analysis, because men tend to assimilate insight through their intellect. So the book lays out, from a particularly male point of view, the raw truth about love and the actions it takes for a man to love an intimate partner and extend an invitation for that partner to love him in return.

The kind of love espoused here is distinctly masculine. It is not the “New Age” variety, where gentle, harmless men try with all their might to please their partner, then wonder why their women don't respect them. Nor is it the old model, where the guy attempts to dominate and control his woman in an effort to maintain his position as the boss, then wonder why their relationship is full of conflict and competition and lack of intimacy. What the reader will find described here is a love where a man shows up from his masculine core, and is unafraid to invite his partner to show up with her full feminine power. It is a love where the man cultivates his best, highest self, and by his example, encourages his partner to be her best.

The majority of men I know enjoy taking on a challenge. There are few things more challenging for men than relationships. Relationships offer a man the opportunity to confront some of his most fearsome dragons. In order to slay those dragons, he will be required to call up his potent masculine strength and fortitude. He must summon every ounce of his courage because the most dangerous dragon he must battle resides within himself. And he must summon his clarity of vision. The first rule when battling dragons is knowing where the dragon is hiding. Because men tend to have blind spots when it comes to love, *Becoming Love-Able* attempts to shine light on those places where a guy can get blindsided in his relationship.

The goal of the book is to help men achieve an uncommon love: a love that is deep, abiding, stable, comfortable, yet full of the fire of steady passion. It is a love where partners fully support one another and desire to deepen together and live in harmony into their old age. I'm happy to say that I am in that kind of loving relationship.

For almost four decades I have been blissfully married to my beloved wife, Alice. This book is the product of those decades of wedded bliss. I have looked back and explored our marriage in an attempt to find out what it is that makes our love so beautiful. What I have discovered is the essence of love—39 behaviors that express love, which I call Loving Promises. When these behaviors are practiced, they will bring love into any relationship. This is because these behaviors are the fundamental constituents of love. They are the elements of which love is comprised. Every day, Alice and I are actually living these practices I write about. That's what gives this book so much authority and power. It is not just some collection of ideas I thought up or read in a book. It is real. It comes from our direct experience. If you would like a preview, the Promises are listed in the “Introducing The Loving Promises” chapter. I recommend reading the chapter before you get too far into the book so you can understand the basic thesis I am putting forward.

Several years ago, I had written about the 39 love behaviors in my award-winning book, *LOVING PROMISES: The Master Class For Creating Magnificent Relationship*. At over 300 pages of small print, *LOVING PROMISES* is a daunting read and can better serve as a reference for couples who want a more detailed, comprehensive exploration of love and relationship. *Becoming Love-Able* is an abridgment and reworking of the material from that book. However, it is directed specifically towards the interest, language and understanding of men.

Whether presently in an intimate partnership or wanting to be in one, the book will clarify what love is and what steps a man needs to take in order to create deep, enduring relationships. This love is not exclusive to intimate

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partnerships. It also encompasses the love between parent and child, adult child and parent, siblings, close friends and more. It has been my experience that by deepening love for your intimate partner, love will deepen in all your relationships.

By use of the pronouns “she” and “her” the writing could be seen as taking form exclusively around love and relationships between men and women. However, the ideas here are by no means applicable only to men in heterosexual relationships. Couples in gay relationships will benefit, even though they are confronted with unique issues. Straight or gay, or anything in between, *Becoming Love Able* is about love. Everyone, no matter what gender or sexual orientation, will profit by becoming more loving and lovable.

I hope that the reader will forgive that I sometimes rely on generalizations when writing about gender. Masculinity, femininity and everything in between is a complex subject. At times I write about gender as if it is solid and fixed, whereas in reality it is fluid and multi-dimensional. It is obviously a given that most men tend to possess “masculine” qualities to a greater extent than women, and women tend to possess “feminine” qualities to a greater extent than men. Yet, some psychologically healthy men may incorporate more feminine qualities than some women and visa versa. A person's gender does not dictate their personality or skills, or determine their destiny. A woman is as able to head an international corporation as effectively as a man, and a man is as able to raise a child as effectively as a woman. Lady CEOs and house husbands are not rare anymore. The world is undergoing a sea change in the ways we define what it means to be a man and woman and the roles men and women are to play. This change is mostly for the good. The breaking down of fossilized concepts is what, in this era, makes relationships, and life, so rich and interesting.

The book is not for everyone. Young men and others who are still in the early stages of exploring who they are and what they want in relationship and in life will probably not find the book as useful as someone who has lived longer and been tempered by life experiences. Life has ways of ripening us. And the young are often not yet ready to settle down and make an extended commitment to one person. This intention for commitment is a necessary precondition for the Loving Promises.

The ideas included in *Becoming Love-Able* are definitely not intended for couples in deeply troubled relationships. Nor are they intended for those individuals who first need to work with specific issues like being a “people pleaser,” looking for someone to rescue, having a persistent need for approval, not being able to say “no” or set clear boundaries. These individuals and couples may benefit from psychotherapy, psychiatric treatment or pastoral counseling. *What is offered here is not therapy.* To delve into past trauma, gain insight into sources of painful emotions and maladaptive behaviors, improve clear communication and counsel a couple on how to set boundaries and get each individual's needs met are important and valuable psychotherapeutic objectives. But this is not what the book is about.

What the reader will find here is more of a spiritual approach. It draws on perennial philosophy and the underpinnings of world religious and spiritual traditions. One develops an understanding of the causes of human suffering such as greed and attachment. With that understanding, they engage in ongoing practice in order to cultivate exalted human values such as kindness, patience, generosity, honesty and compassion. These are values that are characteristic of great love. *As these values evolve in an individual, that person's ability to love evolves.* This is the key as to how the Loving Promises create relationship change. You use the relationship to become a better person, and as you become a better person, your relationship naturally evolves.

If you are looking for a quick fix, it's obvious that this is not it. Engaging with the Promises takes time and dedicated effort. It is a way of life and lifetime practice. Alice and I are still practicing and still discovering deeper truths about love. We will continue until the end of our lives.

Writing about such a complex topic as love is difficult. I have packed a lot of complicated ideas into a small package. Because the writing is so dense, I suggest you refrain from rushing through and reading the book in a few sittings. In many places, the thoughts I've distilled into a paragraph or two might require a whole book to fully explain. Therefore, take your time, re-read if necessary. Give yourself time to contemplate. Chew on and digest the ideas. The more carefully you read, the deeper meanings will be revealed to you, and these will lead to further insights. There are lots of beautiful seeds of truth scattered here. To make them grow and blossom, it is up to you to plant them, water them, fertilize them, and finally, harvest them. Without a careful reading, the book is just a collection of elevated words.

At the end of many of the “chapters,” (some as short as half a page or less) I have added several questions. These are designed to make the ideas more personal and meaningful for you. The questions are an integral part of the book, so I suggest you take the time to think about and answer them as best you can. Maybe write your thoughts in a journal.

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You might find it helpful to read and discuss the book with your partner or with friends. Maybe even read out loud. It is often beneficial to share input and receive other's perspectives. And while it is not essential for you and your mate to both adopt the Loving Promises, it really makes it easier if they are at least aware of what you are doing. If you both are working with the Promises, better yet.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part is about the nature of love and relationships and the differing ways men and their partners might experience and express love. The second part introduces and goes into detail about each of the Loving Promises. The third describes common issues and problems that might arise in implementing the Promises and ways the Promises can be used to create harmonious and fulfilling relationships. The fourth part gives tips on ways to best implement the Promises in your life and ways of deepening your love-ability.

About the title. The title says it all. *Becoming Love-Able* is about increasing your ability, your skill as a loving person. *How a man can grow*—this is about growth, a man's personal growth. The focus is not about his partner's growth, or even so much about the growth of the relationship. It's about a man growing himself, taking personal initiative to make changes in his life. When a man grows more able to love, his open heart makes him more loving, and thus, a more lovable partner. Being more lovable, he will be easier to love, and their relationship will naturally evolve to be fulfilling for both of them.

If I could distill the message of the book down to one idea, it would be this—more than clear communication, more than perceptive understanding, more than fairness and equality, more than sacrifice and compromise—the key to a fulfilling relationship with your partner is kindness, simple human kindness. When a couple is kind to each other and considerate of each other's needs, they generate love. The 39 Promises are an exercise in kindness. They are a practice for cultivating love.

The Loving Promises are powerful. If a man makes the commitment to learn, absorb, practice and integrate the Promises into his life, he will invariably grow into becoming a person who is more *love-able*, (able to love others more deeply and skillfully). Thus, he will become more lovable, (capable of being loved by others). This I guarantee. However, it is important for the reader to understand from the beginning, *the Loving Promises are ideals*. They are guidelines for an ongoing practice, not rules that must be followed. If you treat them as hard and fast rules, it can be easy for you to judge yourself against them and become disheartened when you don't measure up. Think of the Promises as part of a learning process, a process that can eventually help you to grow to be a more loving person.

There is another, larger objective contained in this book besides the goal of a man's relationship transformation and personal growth. Over a half century ago, women rose up and created a revolution. By demanding their rightful power, the Women's Liberation Movement and subsequent feminine social empowerment movements like "#MeToo" have had a powerful and lasting effect on the world. The revolution that awakened women began, as do all social movements, with a few dedicated, courageous souls. Now, the time has come for men to create their revolution. This revolution will begin in the hearts of men of truth and power. It will be built on a foundation of love and kindness. A foundation built on the bedrock of the solid love between intimate partners is just the potent vaccine needed to inoculate against the pandemic of entrenched hate, greed and injustice that is rampant today. By becoming a more love-able man, you serve this larger purpose.

## AUTHORS NOTE

### *My Journey Toward Love*

I'm not a Master of love and kindness, but I am an eager student—a person who is willing to learn, practice and perfect my lovingkindness.

My apprenticeship has taken a long and winding route. I was born in 1943, in Los Angeles, California into a middle-class family. My father was a businessman, my mother, a housewife. I was always loved. My mother loved me unconditionally. My father loved me too, but was judgmental of me, as he was of himself. I took on that self-judgement and it became a dominant theme in my life. I felt that I had to earn love; that not until I could be good enough, smart enough, creative enough, successful enough, would I be deserving of being loved by anyone, including myself.

I had a natural creative spirit and excelled in music and art. I did well in school in the subjects I liked, but everything I did was to get the approval of others. “See me, see how good I am, how talented, how intelligent.” All this was coming from a sense that I was not OK, not good enough. I eagerly displayed my gifts for all to see, and shamefully hid my failings.

The relationships I had were about grasping for the love and appreciation of others so I could love and appreciate myself. This is not the best way to approach an intimate relationship. It was all about me, my wants, my desires, my needs. I was so self-centered, it was as if the friends and girlfriends in my life didn't exist, except to fulfill my needs and confirm that I was OK.

On top of this, I was stingy. Both my parents had grown up during the Great Depression of the Thirties and, like many of their generation, were fearful that, unless they would hoard, there wouldn't be enough. I adopted this frugal mindset and my concern was about what I could acquire and hold on to, not at all about what I could give. I knew what I wanted, but didn't care what others needed. It's no wonder my relationship history was chaotic, and included numerous breakups, conflicts, infidelity and domestic violence.

In my early twenties I married Jean, a talented singer and pianist. The marriage lasted a very short time and we divorced. Shortly afterward I met Cookie. We eventually married and that too ended in divorce. While still with Cookie, I fell in love with Susan, and our relationship and subsequent marriage was filled with competition, criticism and even violence. Things were so bad between us that, when the opportunity to meet an Indian spiritual master presented itself, we both dove in.

This was a turning point in my life. When I met Baba Muktananda, I knew he had something I wanted and needed. For the first time in my life, I felt truly loved. For years previously, I had searched for fulfillment through therapy, workshops and relationships, but on the level of the mind. Meeting and loving Baba fed my hungry soul. The painful relationships and years of therapeutic work made me ripe for opening to Baba and his teachings, and the years of spiritual work with him made me ripe, shortly after my third divorce, to meet the love of my life.

Change doesn't have to happen through meeting a spiritual master. For some, a life-threatening illness; for others, deep contemplation of their life and goals is the event that initiates change. Everything that happens in your life brings you to the point where you are in the present moment. If I had met Alice just a few years earlier, we probably wouldn't have been ready to sync like we did. The connection with her was instant. We “knew” each other as if we had been lifelong friends. In fact, a few days after we met and fell in love, Alice surprised me. . .and herself, by saying, “I would marry you today.” A shocking statement to a guy who had just recently obtained divorce number three, but it didn't scare me off.

Mother of two teenagers from a marriage that ended ten years before, Alice was perfectly happy with her life, full with friends, art, dance and family. But in the previous months, she had begun to feel the desire for an intimate partner. When I showed up in her life, she too was ripe, having for years worked on herself in intensive, life-affirming workshops.

Alice's total acceptance of me and her full-hearted generosity was just the perfect spark I needed. Her acceptance lessened my need for approval and her open-handed generosity helped start to sweep away my miserly, close-fisted

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tendencies. Being loved by her and watching how she spread her love to friends and strangers was a loveschool for me. I felt I was studying at the feet of a master teacher. She felt the same. Our training continues.

Love is transformative and expansive. In a short time, our love spread out to the circle of our family and friends. Our families melded and we each acquired a large haul of cousins, siblings, children and in-laws. Friendships grew and multiplied as we brought together each set of companions.

Work advanced as I became director of a court-mandated program serving men who were violent toward their partners. I was hired as Program Director of the psychiatric hospital where I had been working as a therapist. Later, Alice was hired to work with me when the owners recognized the wonderful healing synergy we brought to the workplace.

Creativity blossomed, ignited by our love. Alice rediscovered her art that had laid fallow for decades and went on to have an impressive career as a nationally recognized artist. I rediscovered the joy playing drums I had abandoned for a career in psychology, and reconnected with old band mates. I began sculpting and captured the joy of creativity I had had as a kid. After creating a large body of artwork related to growing old, Alice and I collaborated in the writing of an art/inspiration book, *THE ART OF AGING: Celebrating The Authentic Aging Self*.

As beautiful and fulfilling as my life and love was, I had the feeling that something was missing. I felt complete in my relationship with Alice, yet what I hungered for was masculine bonding and deeper relationships with men. This was the early Eighties, when the Men's Movement was in full swing. I joined a men's consciousness raising group. The honesty, sharing and camaraderie filled the emptiness I had been feeling and allowed me to take my place as a man among my fellow men. Drawing from the heart-to-heart connections formed in that group, my friend Riley Smith and I began several men's therapy groups. I was able to bring home to Alice the maturing masculine connection that grew from my men's work, and our love became even deeper.

Our love keeps growing. It's hard for us to believe that after almost 40 years of marriage, it is possible for perfect love to become more perfect—but it has. Not only has love deepened for me and Alice, it has also expanded into the world. In recent years I have become acutely aware of the suffering and destruction visited on the Earth and it's human and animal inhabitants, primarily by those of the male gender. Rich and influential men, whose hearts have been overcome by greed for profit and hunger for power, need to be called out. That call is more effective if it comes from other men, men of conscience. I am not the kind of guy who relishes being in the limelight, but the condition of the world is so dire, with the rising emergence of more hate, more greed, more cruelty, more lies, I feel I must speak out. Calling out to men of like mind and heart through my writing and speaking will be my mission in this last part of my life.

Approaching my eighth decade, the experiences I've had and the people who I have connected with over the years have brought me to this point in my journey. All have contributed to the path toward love my life has taken. Now I want to give back. I want to share with men what I've learned, in the hope that they may not be burdened with the confusion and suffering I endured, and that they may some day pass on to others what they gained. This is my hope, and this book my offering.

# PART I

## MEN, LOVE AND KINDNESS

# LOVE

## Why Should You Learn About Love?

You go to school and learn to read and write and spell. You study English and math, history and science. These are all subjects that help you understand the world around you, communicate with others and prepare you for adult life.

But there is one course that is of vital importance, but which is never taught to you in school – not in grammar school, high school or even college. That course is LOVE. The subject matter of love is ignored, even though it is one of the most important parts of your life. It is neglected though it is a complicated and confusing subject, even for most adults. If you fail to attend to the lessons love has to teach, it will cause much chaos, upset and unhappiness throughout your life and the lives of those around you. But if you absorb your lessons and learn to love well, your life can be rewarding and filled with joy and harmony.

Everyone would benefit if more people knew how to give and receive genuine lovingkindness. Just think how much happier and peaceful the whole world would be if people were to become more kind and generous to each other. Would there still be as much prejudice, war and conflict if people were expert at loving? Would there be as many divorces? Would courts be filled with so many lawsuits and would prisons be so overcrowded? I don't think so.

One person alone may not change the whole world by becoming a more kind and loving person, but they can make a difference. Lovingkindness is infectious. You catch it from someone who cares about you and you instinctively pass it on to those who you care about. They in turn pass it on to others. And the circle of love gets wider and wider, like the expanding ripples caused by a rock thrown into the center of a pond.

Loving action is not a matter of favorable genes or good luck. To act with love is a skill. Like any skill, such as learning chess or playing piano, our expression of love can be learned and improved. But without classes, expert teachers, and inspiring models, you are forced to learn to express and receive love by trial and error. You learn by making painful mistakes, entering into one unhappy relationship after another. You know this is true. You've done this before. So have I.

Ignorance of the ways of love is not your fault. Often, the models of love you are familiar with have come from your families, and what you may have witnessed in your home were scenes of conflict and separation. Or you may have learned about love from your friends, who knew as little as you did. Or you learned about loving from romantic movies and from television soap operas and “reality” shows, where rather than viewing couples who act kind to each other, you saw fighting, manipulation, lying and cheating.

Why leave this all-important life task of learning to be a kinder, more loving person to chance? Why not actually study lovingkindness? Why not take a course on the subject of genuine love. This book can be that course for you. Consider *Becoming Love-Able* to be a textbook about genuine love—what it is, how to practice it, and how to become the kind and loving person you are meant to be.

## Why Should *Men* Learn About Love?

You probably know lots of things. You may know how to take an engine apart and put it back together. Maybe you're an expert gardener. Perhaps an experienced salesman. A college professor. A pilot. A skilled craftsman. You may have garnered lots of knowledge and experience, but I bet if you were to randomly pick the next woman who comes into view, she would have much more understanding of the ins and outs of love and relationships than you. Much more. It's a reality. Women tend to have interest in these sorts of things. It's their bread and butter. Guys—not so much.

Because we guys sometimes enter into relationships or find ourselves in an existing long-term partnership without a firm and detailed understanding of what it's really about, we are at a grave disadvantage. We're love dis-

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abled. Because of our dis-ability we're flying blind, and by flying without clear vision, it's more likely we'll crash and burn. We need to catch up to women. We need to learn what most women already know. We need to discover what love is from their perspective, so that we can better understand love from our perspective.

By educating ourselves about love and relationships, we can discover important things, like how best to communicate with our partner, how to feel and express our emotions, how to deal with conflicts and frustrations, and how to give without expectations. We can learn more about ourselves—our strengths and vulnerabilities, our fears, our blindnesses. In our relationships we can learn about our partner— what makes her happy, what frustrates her, what makes her feel secure, what makes her know she is loved. When she knows without a doubt that she is loved, and loved well by a worthy partner, she will open her heart. To be loved so completely by a woman in this open-hearted way will blow your mind and change your life. Your life will be infused by love. You will be a happy man. Your partner will be happy too. Your home will be a sanctuary of joy and tranquility.

And that's why men should learn about love.

## The Purpose of Life

Let me ask a question. This is probably one of the most essential questions that can be asked of you. *What is your life's purpose? Why were you born?*

Were you born simply to survive by satisfying biological needs for air, water, food, elimination? Were you born to reproduce in order to ensure the continuation of the species? Were you born to work, to provide money, food, shelter and protection for yourself and your loved ones? Were you born to enjoy sense pleasures—to savor delicious food, possess beautiful objects, engage in sensual delights and to be entertained by your favorite TV program? Survival, procreation, security, enjoyment, all are reasonable answers and all are necessary parts of a well-rounded life—but incomplete.

We all have a yearning to fully express our unique selves. Every one of us comes into the world with our own individual talents and abilities. We also have deficiencies that hold us back. To fulfill our promise and grow into the person we are meant to be and to take our rightful place in the world—these are what gives us a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. But that is not enough. For most of us, life can never be complete; we can never be fulfilled without an additional ingredient. The ingredient that alone makes life delicious...is love.

Like every other human being, our physical, psychological and spiritual well-being is dependent on the presence of love in our lives. Without giving and receiving love, life can be barren, empty. We can have riches, fame, and the admiration of the world, but what is it worth if at the end of the day, we come home to a cold and loveless house.

When the end of our life approaches and we look back at how we had spent our time, we probably won't boast, *"I made tons of money and owned lots of expensive stuff"* or claim, *"I was an important person and won many awards."* What will be most fulfilling for us would be the accomplishments of our heart. *"I loved well and I was loved."*

This, I believe, is the purpose of human life—to love with an open heart and be loved in return.

Our life is made up of a sequence of moments—minutes, hours, days. How we fill those moments determines our happiness or sorrow. Every minute spent in open hearted loving is a joyous moment in heaven. When we love, our consciousness is flooded with feelings of peace, unity, openness, acceptance and goodwill. Every minute spent in hostility and hating is a moment spent in a hell of anger, greed, fear, delusion and separation.

So love, love the best you can, love everyone you can. Do your work, accomplish your goals, play and enjoy yourself, but make love the center of your life. Embrace the real purpose of your existence. There is nothing more important you can do.

**Q.** *What is the purpose of your life? Why were you born? If you were to list the three most important things you want to accomplish in your life, would loving and being loved be on that list? If so, what number would it be?*

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## Love Is Who You Are

*Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.*

Rumi, 13th Century Persian poet

Maybe you have a good relationship and you want to make it great. Maybe your relationship sucks and you would be satisfied to get it to be just OK. Maybe you don't have a relationship and are yearning to create loving connection. Since you are taking the time to read this book, and you have turned the pages so far without putting it down, you have your heart's desire to bring more love into your life. This is good.

It is good because love is the source of joy and fulfillment in your life, the essential source, without which joy and fulfillment are not possible. It is good because love is healing. Love is the balm that can begin to wipe away the suffering that comes from a painful childhood, the distrust that comes from betrayal, the sorrow that comes from broken dreams.

The truth is that love is not something that is foreign to you. Love is your lifeblood. Love is your very nature. Love is *who you are*, who you have always been. You were born as a loving being. But as you grew, you experienced ugly interactions that hurt you and, piece by piece, ate away at your innocence. These painful experiences forced you to build a wall of self-protection around yourself and hardened your heart. But the loving core is still there, still inside you. Make it your goal to bring that constricted love alive again.

Bringing love alive is not some lofty goal that you must attain or esoteric knowledge you must acquire. Because you *are* love, in order to experience the love that you are, you can turn inside and look to where love resides—your feelings. Your unguarded emotions are where you'll sense your love. Experiencing the sweetness of those feelings will motivate you to taste more and more.

You can do this. Love is not a mystery. Loving is not an impossible task. Those obstacles that hold you back from love can be removed. The debris from the past that holds you prisoner of your history can be cleaned up. The walls that separate you from the people in your life can be broken down. What remains after the obstacles to love are removed is the warm, undefended heart that was always present within you. As you bring your loving heart out into the world, other loving hearts will find you. You will be free to joyfully dance together.

## The Heart

I often refer to the heart in this book. The heart I refer to is not the physical heart, the organ beating inside your chest. I am referring to the heart as a reservoir of energy, an energy that both receives and broadcasts our deepest feelings. The heart is all feeling, no thinking. It provides us a sense of connection with those we love. It tells us when we love and are loved, and guides as to when and how to receive and express that love. This heart is our home base. Like the flesh-and-blood heart, it occupies space in the center of the chest.

When we love someone, we feel it in our heart. Our hand automatically goes to the center of our chest when we experience deep feeling. The most loving embrace is heart-to-heart, when our chest and the chest of the person we are embracing are in close contact. If we lose a relationship or someone close to us, our heart responds and we can become "heart sick" or "heart broken." When we experience loss, we become "disheartened."

People use the term "open heart." Having an open heart is being able to freely experience the love sensations that are arising from the heart center. Those sensations can arise spontaneously, triggered by our warm, loving feelings. Or we can use our will power to focus our attention on the sensations emanating from our heart, thus amplifying those sensations. In this way we can consciously open our heart. This can be a powerful technique to bring more love into our life. More about this later.

## Nurture, Protect, Praise, Love

There is a sign on the wall of our county Child Protective Services that reads simply, *Nurture, Protect, Praise, Love*. These four words really resonated with me. To *nurture* a child is to provide sustenance for their growth, health, happiness and fulfillment. To *protect* them is to provide them safety, so that whatever threatens their growth, health,

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happiness and fulfillment is dealt with and eliminated. To *praise* them is to see their basic goodness and over and over let them know that they are a magnificent, capable and precious person. And to *love* them is to give them all your heart.

These four words don't just refer to the way we must treat our precious children. They also refer to the way we must love and treat our intimate partner if we want to create a great life together. Nurture her. Protect her. Praise her. Love her. She will thrive. If we ourselves are to thrive, these are also words we should apply to our own being. Nurture yourself. Protect yourself. Praise yourself. Love yourself.

### What Love Feels Like

What does it feel like to love someone? It's impossible to describe the feeling of love in words. (Try to describe the color red). But I'll make an attempt anyway.

I think the best approach to describe what love feels like is to compare it to a similar feeling and associate the feeling to a specific person or object. As I write this, the person I am picturing in my mind is my beloved Alice. (No surprise).

When I'm looking at Alice and feeling love for her, at different occasions I feel:

- Boundless excitement, as if I'm a puppy whose master just entered the room.
- Warm sweetness in my chest, as if I'm looking at an innocent newborn baby.
- Satiated and full, as if I've just consumed a delicious meal.
- Pride of ownership, as if I just purchased a cherished new car, and it's all *mine*.
- Mothering, as if I want to nurture, take care of her and make her happy.
- Fathering, as if I want to guide her and protect her from harm.
- Comfortable, as if I'm wrapped up in my favorite blanket on a cold day.
- Lustful, hungry, as if I want to squeeze her, possess, taste and devour her.
- Vulnerable, as if I am a helpless, powerless victim in love.
- Fortunate, as if I am the lucky one to possess such a rare, precious jewel.

It's such a personal thing. Everyone experiences love differently. But I'm sure you can identify with some of the above descriptions.

Alice just read the list and said that's what love feels like to her when she looks at me.

**Q.** *What does love feel like to you?*

### A Definition of Love

What is love?

People have forever tried to answer that question. But love is so wide and so deep that it is impossible to put it into words. Words give the barest indication of the depth and breadth of love. It's like describing the color red or the taste of chocolate using words—the essence of the color and taste is left out. However, the definition of love that follows is in terms of behavior, and the actions people take are visible and therefore can be described.

There is a great variety of objects we can love.

I can love my intimate partner.

I can love my pet.

I can love my parents.

I can love my friend.

I can love my child.

I can love my brother or sister.

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I can love my teacher.  
I can love God.

Each of these objects of love is unique, and the way I express love for each one is very different. I won't love my parents the same way as I love a friend. I won't love my teacher the same way I love my wife. I won't love my sibling the same way I love my child. Is there a thread that runs through the love we have for each of these objects, a quality that they all share that could be defined as love? I believe there is.

I think it's true to say that we have a warm attraction toward these objects that we love. And that attraction makes us want to have them be a presence in our life. Because we are attracted to the objects of our love, we appreciate and value them. Because we value them, we want them to be safe and do well. And because we want them to prosper, we are willing to do what is necessary to ensure their wellbeing.

So, to put these ideas into a definition:

*Love is my desire for the well-being of the object of my love and my willingness to commit my time, energy and resources to their safety and happiness.*

This definition is not the "hearts and flowers" kind. It leaves out the "juicy" emotional part that is the subject of poetry and love songs. This romantic quality is what most of us think of when we think about love. But the definition clearly goes to the central idea that I try to convey in the book, which is that love is about your readiness and intention to take *action*. You can feel loving feelings, think loving thoughts, say loving words, but if you are not prepared to act in loving ways, it's not real love.

*A couple's desire and willingness to take care of each other is the foundation of their love.* The strength of that desire and willingness to take action will determine the nature and trajectory of their relationship.

## Love is Dangerous

Love is sometimes portrayed symbolically by red valentines and pretty pink roses and cute, little, fat cheeked, grinning cherubs shooting love arrows. Sweetness and innocence is one side of love. But the other side is treacherous. Love touches you so deeply that it can bring up everything in you...the good, the bad, the beautiful, the ugly. All that is unbaked in you, all your undigested garbage, all your insecurities, all about yourself you despise and reject and try to hide from yourself and others will rise to the surface. You will be forced to face your neediness, your fear, your bodily shame, your sexual hang ups, your need to control, your fear of being controlled. At some points in your relationship, no matter how much in love you are at first, you will experience the whole range of possible emotions—tenderness, greed, indifference, anger, generosity, jealousy, ecstasy, competition, disgust and more. Love can do this.

Love is volatile and cannot be controlled. You are not in control when you love. If you are in control, it can't be real love. So powerful is love that in one moment it can lift you up to heaven, the next it can drag you crashing down to a hell of pain, confusion, jealousy and frustration. One moment you can feel like a genius, the next like a fool.

It is so much safer not to love. Love can rip open your wounds. Love can make you become vulnerable. Love can expose your hungry longings and bring up your deepest fears. *Do you really love me? Will you hurt me? Will you leave me? Am I deserving of your love? Is he more lovable than I? If you knew the real me would you still love me? Will I be trapped if I commit to you? Will you change? Will I change?*

Real love demands that you expose your undefended heart and put your fragile ego on the line. Without hiding or sugarcoating, you allow your partner to know who you are. You lay down your offensive and defensive weapons. No manipulation, no lame excuses, no lying. You stand naked before your partner and hand her the power to reject and hurt you. So of course, love is dangerous.

However, by opening your vulnerable self...and surviving, you discover that the layers of protection you erected around yourself were unnecessary. You discover that you are strong, you are durable. The act of allowing yourself to be undefended with your partner is an act of courage.

We all want certainty in our relationships, we want security, but with love there are no guarantees. The only guarantee is that one day love will end. If not by break-up, then by death.

Love is dangerous. Its heat can burn you. It's chill can freeze you. This is why it takes fierce courage to love with your whole heart.

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### Love, Fear and Hiding from Intimacy

Because love is so powerful and can cause so much pain, it can bring up your fear of being hurt and abandoned. Fear causes you to try to protect yourself from the potential pain of love. There are many ways you can do this. Most involve fleeing from intimacy by putting distance between yourself and your partner. You can distance yourself by:

- never fully committing to her,
- having affairs,
- cutting off your feelings,
- creating arguments,
- excessively involving yourself in work,
- communicating only at superficial levels,
- retreating to your “man cave,”
- compulsively watching TV or surfing the internet,
- minimizing or refusing to address relationship problems that arise,
- over-indulging in drinking and drugs,
- avoiding her by hanging out a lot with your buddies.

These can all be potent ways of avoiding depth of love with your partner. You can use them to give you an “out” if you become anxious or overwhelmed.

These ways that protect you from intimacy are effective. They create distance when you are uncomfortable and fear becomes overwhelming. However, the cost is steep. . . possible loss of her love for you. Each time you do something that puts distance between her and you can cause her flame of trust and love for you to dim. She will become uncertain of whether you truly care for her and cautious of giving her love to you. When you repeatedly retreat, your relationship will lack aliveness and authenticity. The bonds that bind you will weaken and you will become separated emotionally, maybe even physically. If you persist in cutting yourself off from her, eventually the light of her love for you will extinguish. Do you expect her to eternally stick around if you are not emotionally present with her?

Fear and love work in opposition to each other. When fear overtakes you, love is suppressed.

When love dominates, your fear recedes.

Fear is born in your mind. Love is born in your heart.

Your mind looks into the future with dread. Your heart is anchored in the present.

So, at the times when your mind overcomes you and fears about your relationship arise and you have the impulse to push your beloved away and hide—stay steady. Abide with your fear, but don't be carried away by it. Listen to the panicked mind, but avoid following it down the many dark alleys where it will take you.

Instead, quiet down, stay present and listen until you can hear the genuine voice of your heart. Your heart's voice holds the truth. It will guide you and give you strength.

**Q.** *Look at the different ways of avoiding intimacy listed in the first paragraph. Which have you used? Which do you use most often? What is your experience after you have used one of these distancing gambits with your partner?*

### What Love Needs In Order To Survive

Just as every human being needs a constant supply of air, water and food in order for the body to keep on living, a loving relationship needs basic, necessary conditions in order to survive.

I believe that without these three ingredients—the need to be *safe*, the need to be *appreciated*, and the need to be *connected*, love will wither and die. If even one of these conditions is absent, love cannot persist. The relationship may bump along and continue to exist, but it is unlikely to be a deeply loving one.

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**The Need To Be Safe With Your Partner.** Love will wither in an atmosphere of fear and distrust. Everyone, no matter how confident they seem on the outside, has a soft and tender place inside where they can be hurt. If we sense that we are in the presence of someone who doesn't care about our vulnerable feelings and who might hurt us, we distrust them and put up a protective wall that will keep love away. However, if we are in the presence of someone we know is safe and trustworthy and who will be careful of our vulnerable self, protective walls will dissolve and love can flow.

**The Need To Be Appreciated By Your Partner.** We all need to be appreciated, to be valued for who we are, just as we are, not as others want us to be or expect us to be. When someone who is close to us appreciates us, we can open and blossom. It is impossible to feel love if those who are important to us fail to see and value us and fail to express their appreciation in words and action. It is even more difficult if they judge us harshly, belittle us and withhold genuine affection from us.

**The Need To Be Connected To Your Partner.** To be connected to another person is to be attuned, open and responsive to each other. When you're connected with your partner you are interested in each other, inspired by the other. You listen, communicate, you care for and about each other's safety and happiness. Connection is the glue that holds a relationship together. Too many couples stagnate in relationships where there is no connection.

Safety—to know you will be not be purposely hurt. Appreciation—to know you are seen and valued. Connection—to experience bonding and intimacy together, these are the minimal, necessary conditions that need to exist in order for a relationship to survive. But mere survival is not enough. There are other qualities that foster love and allow it to thrive.

*Q. Do you feel safe with your partner? Do you feel appreciated by her? Do you feel connected with her? Do you think your partner feels safe with you? Does she feel appreciated by you? Does she feel connected with you?*

## What Love Needs in Order to Thrive

We all want more than to have our relationships merely survive. We want to have a loving relationship that will flourish. What then are the conditions that need to be present in order for love to do more than just limp along? What is necessary in order for love to grow and thrive?

I looked back at my relationship with Alice searching for what things we felt were necessary in order to feel fulfilling love with each other. These are listed below:

- **Love Needs Authenticity.** Partners need to feel free to reveal who they really are to each other. If they censor what they show about themselves in order to look good, they would be putting on an act and that would make true love impossible.
- **Love Needs Stability.** Love needs to be able to put down roots and know the other will be there for them. If partners run away at the first sign of difficulty, love could never have a chance to grow.
- **Love Needs Kindness.** Everyone is deserving of being treated with compassion and with respect for their dignity. This is especially true with those who are close to us and can be easily hurt by our unkindness.
- **Love Needs Generosity.** Generosity is the foundation of a loving relationship. It is contagious. Your generosity inspires generosity in your partner. Freely giving without expecting payback is an expression of your love.
- **Love Needs Independence.** Any two people are always separate individuals, with unique likes, opinions, needs and choices. It is important to respect each other's freedom to think, say and do what each believes is best.
- **Love needs Maturity.** Genuine love demands a mature outlook. There is no place for childish behavior. Couples should bring their wisdom, perspective and careful judgment into the relationship.
- **Love Needs Acceptance.** No one is perfect. Constantly judging, criticizing, seeking out fault and withholding forgiveness can kill love very fast.

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- **Love Needs Attention.** In order to truly love someone you have to really know them. That means you must look beneath the surface and use your mind, senses and intuition to see, hear and understand the one you love.
- **Love Needs Touch.** Holding hands, hugging, kissing and making love when mutually appropriate is a physical expression of love and caring.
- **Love Needs Stimulation.** Without a couple growing and exploring and meeting new challenges, their love can stagnate. This can eventually lead to boredom with each other.
- **Love Needs Joy.** The reason couples get together is to share play, laughter and celebrate life in each other's company.

Alice and I have tried to bring these qualities into our marriage. This is what we ask of ourselves and ask of each other. I cannot demand Alice be honest, generous and kind to me if I myself am unable or unwilling to be honest, generous and kind to her. Like creates like. You tend to re-create in your partner, the person that you are. What this means is that *you must be the lover that you want in a partner.*

To the extent we have done this, our love grows sweeter and our partnership is characterized by happiness and harmony.

## Kinds of Love According to The Ancient Greeks

When you think of the word love, what do you think? Most likely, your first thought is romantic love, the intimate kind between two people. Of course, there's also sexual love. And the caring feelings between family members is also love.

The Ancient Greek philosophers made a study of love and discerned seven types of love.

**Eros**—*Sexual passion.* We are all familiar with the hot lust of that form of love.

**Philia**—*Deep friendship.* This is soul-to-soul brotherly love, where we are loyal and care about our companion and are willing to go the extra mile for them.

**Agape**—(“aga-pay”) *Love toward humanity, nature and God.* This altruistic love is an expression of unselfish caring for all, friend or stranger, without expecting anything in return.

**Storge**—(“stor-jay”) *Familial love.* This is protective, kinship-based love, most often referring to love between parents toward children, and children toward parents.

**Ludus**—*Playful love.* This is the youthful, innocent love between young children and also the teasing, flirtatious, interactions of adults. It is akin to affection.

**Pragma**—*Long term settled love.* This is the committed, mature love between elder couples. It is opposite of romantic love, but related to storge. Eros can, and often does turn to Pragma over time.

**Philautia**—*Self love.* This is the healthy love, respect and care a person holds for their body, mind and spirit. It is similar to self-esteem. It is not to be confused with self-obsession or narcissism.

Though the Greeks categorized love many centuries ago, their descriptions still ring true today.

## The GIFT of Love. The WORK of Love. The FRUIT of Love

The *gift* of love is the feelings we get when we have fallen in love. It is the love that is celebrated in poetry and song, the love depicted in romantic movies, novels and fairytales. It is a gift because it is given freely and requires no effort. The gift of love happens when two people deliciously open to each other, explore their unfamiliar bodies, share past histories and declare their love.

The *work* of love begins as the intoxication of the gift begins to wear off. The work must take place in order to nurture love and make it grow. The work involves effort and action—listening attentively when she is talking, being honest, speaking kindly, being a helpmate, making compromises. Though it is work, it can be joyful work rather than

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hard work. It's not hard work to rub your beloved's shoulders when she is tense, tend to her when she is sick, compromise in order to make her happy. No! It's simply being a loving companion.

The *fruit* of love is the enduring love that is the result of doing the work of love. That fruit is the warmth, ease and comfort of well-worn love, the knowledge you will be accepted in all your glory and all your misery, the certainty that you will always be supported in the face of adversity, and the building of a shared life together. These delicious fruits will not be possible without putting in the required work.

## Life is a School for Love.

Life is one big schoolroom. There are many subjects we must master if we want a good life—friendship, family, self-care, financial responsibility, healthy habits. The motif that underlies all these subjects is always the same...*how I can imbue my thoughts, my speech and my actions with loving awareness.* This is the sole purpose of this school.

There are different grades in the school for love. Some of us are in grammar school, some are in high school and some are in college. No matter if we have just begun our education or are ready to graduate, we are all here as students learning how to love.

Your training about love isn't limited to romantic relationships. Every person you meet, every experience you have, every triumph, every failure, these are all subjects for study, all part of the curriculum. They all offer you the opportunity to deepen and broaden your ability to love. Are you kind to your pet? Did you retaliate when you were frustrated? Were you helpful to your neighbor? Did you share bread with a hungry stranger? These are all tests.

You are tested often. Life tests you. How you fare on the tests determines whether you pass or fail, advance or are held back. If you fail, (consistently choose unloving actions), you have to repeat the course. If you pass, you are able to move on to more difficult challenges, eventually graduating to another grade. Even failure is progress, but only if you are able to learn from your mistakes.

Great challenges in your school for love arise with those who are close to you—your parents, your children, your immediate family and your intimate friends. These are people with whom you have close attachments, and therefore offer possibilities to deepen love. But the greatest challenge you face is with the woman in your life, the person you live with, work with, play with and share your bed. Day after day, you must try to resolve conflicts and create harmony with this being who has different upbringing, different beliefs, different habits, different likes and dislikes. Her needs must be respected. Her voice must be heard. Her feelings must be honored. Your relationship with her is where you can be most easily frustrated. It is with her where your most difficult tests lie.

It is sobering to remember that you are not alone in loveschool. Your partner is also enrolled. She too is tested. And of course, the most difficult challenges she must face comes in the process of living with you. You are her test.

As you make progress in your classwork, gain deeper understanding about love and apply the things you have learned to your everyday life, you will become a more love able and lovable man. Your relationships will become peaceful and supportive and your life will become filled with joy.

To help advance in your studies, always keep in mind... *I am enrolled in a school for love. Everything that happens to me is part of the curriculum. The things I learn will affect the whole of my life. Whether I fail or graduate, it is up to me, and no one else.*

Once you understand and accept this, you can sit down and get to your homework.

## KINDNESS

In a study out of Swansea University, U.K., involving 2,700 college students from 5 countries, researchers questioned what characteristics in a lifetime mate were most important to them. Lead author Andrew G Thomas states, *“For men and women. . .the most important trait, hands down, was kindness.”*

*This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples, no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple. The philosophy is kindness.*

Dalai Lama

*Kindness is a language the deaf can hear and the blind can see.*

Mark Twain

### What’s Love? What’s Kindness?

What is love? Is it a feeling—a warmth in the chest, a desire to embrace, to please, to protect, a hunger to be in the presence of the one you love? Is it behavior—cooking a favorite meal for your beloved? Drawing a bath for her? Listening closely to her? What I’ve done in this book is to minimize the feeling aspects of love, and emphasize the behavioral. For the purposes of the book, love is not so much what you feel. It’s what you *do*. If love consists of the loving ways you act toward those you love, then might “kindness” be a more accurate word? I think so.

Kindness denotes action. It is love-in-action, action motivated by loving feelings. You don’t just *feel* kind, you *act* kind. Not that the emotional aspect of love is unimportant. The feeling of love is the “juice.” Using the analogy of a car, it’s like the loving feeling is the gas, and kindness is the motor. Without the “gasoline” of love, the engine of love will stall. But without the “engine,” you are never going to leave the garage.

People might confuse kindness with being “nice.” Nice is often about being cooperative. Nice people don’t create resistance, don’t “make waves”, don’t upset people. But sometimes it is the kind thing to do to tell people an uncomfortable truth, or show anger, or put people in their place, or say and do something that makes them upset. So kindness requires power, the willingness and ability to speak and act with honesty, strength and decisiveness when the situation calls for it. This is empowered love.

The strength of kind action needs another quality—wisdom. Wisdom provides insight into the right course of action. It enables us to act with clarity and accuracy. Wisdom informs us as to how to act, when to act, and when to refrain from action. Wisdom allows us to discern what action will create beneficial consequences, what will create destructive consequences. And wisdom encourages us to choose the beneficial. This is wise love.

Most of all, kindness must also be based in compassion for others. Merriam-Webster defines compassion as, *“sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress, together with a desire to eliminate it.”* There are two elements to this definition—the need to be aware, in your gut, of the needs and feelings of the other, and the intention to generously serve them and to aid them in achieving their wellbeing. A more comprehensive meaning of compassion would include a feeling for the frailty of the human condition, and all those enmeshed in that condition. You embrace, with caring and acceptance, the imperfections of others. . .and yourself. Compassion in this sense does not come from a feeling of separation. Rather, compassionate feelings arise from your experience of your own frailty, your own humanity. This is empathetic love.

Strength, wisdom and compassion are the foundation of kindness. The active part of love. Where do these qualities come from? Are they any more or less a foundational part of the human psyche than their opposite—weakness, ignorance and uncaring? I cannot help but believe that humans, every human, has within himself and herself, an impulse toward the positive. Weakness, ignorance and uncaring, though also a part of the human psyche, are somehow less basic qualities. Goodness is our core, our birthright, always present, always what we crave. But sometimes our goodness is obscured by life experiences. We are born open, trusting, but when we experience hurt,

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deprivation and betrayal, we become afraid. Fear hardens our heart and gives rise to the impulse to protect ourselves, push others aside and grab for whatever we can.

## A Simple Way to Kindness

How can we know how to be kind? Is there a way that will let us know if we are being kind or not?

Yes, there is. It is simple and easy to understand. It has been practiced for centuries. It is codified and included in every religion, every genuine ethical philosophy of life. It is the essence of kindness. It is The Golden Rule. *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

You want to be treated fairly. You want to be spoken to with respect. You want to be listened to. You want to be told the truth. Treat others the way you want to be treated. That is the essence of being kind.

But it's not that simple. Case in point. It's your partner's birthday. You want to do something nice for her. You invite her good friends and put together a grand party. She's not happy. Why? You're more social than she. She would have preferred a small gathering.

Another case. You love sirloin steak. You pick up a couple of the best slabs of meat at the butcher's for a TV date with your new girlfriend. She's not happy. Why? She's a vegetarian.

It's obvious that there has to be a modification of the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule assumes that people have similar needs and feelings, similar likes and dislikes. That's just not true. And if you base your actions solely on your assumption of similarity, you may get a disappointing response.

Try this as a modification of the Golden rule. *Do unto others as they wish to be done unto.* This is a lot more difficult. To follow this modification requires that you do more than just listen to your own heart and mind. It requires empathy. It requires that, to the best of your ability, you put yourself into *the other person's* heart and mind. This means you really have to pay attention to them, listen, watch, check in with your intuition, ask questions of them.

But what if how they want to be "done unto" is harmful to themselves and to those around them? What if they are alcoholics and wish to be done unto with you buying them a bottle of booze? Or if they are depressed and ask to borrow your gun? Looks like we need to modify our modification. What about *"Do unto others in ways that will manifest their highest good."* Treat others in ways that will optimize their enjoyment of life and their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth and wellbeing. Sounds good, but we are unsure of what will bring our own growth and wellbeing, much less anyone else's.

Looks like a simple way to kindness is not so simple. Maybe we should just listen closely to our heart and seek to treat others kindly, whatever that means to us.

## Love And Friendship

*It is not lack of love, but lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages.*

Frederich Nietzsche

It has been said that the most important ingredient in a loving, intimate relationship is friendship.

It's true. Being good friends is the foundation of healthy love. This is certainly the case with Alice and me. In addition to being passionate lovers, we are also best buddies. We genuinely like each other and enjoy each other's company. Liking a person is the basis of your friendship with them. You do not become friends with people you don't like. Liking your partner is also the basis of your love for her.

Friends are kind to each other. They are in each other's corner and want the best for each other. They listen to each other. They freely offer to help when needed. They forgive shortcomings and let go of bad feelings after conflict. Even if you haven't seen or talked for a long time to an old friend, when you reconnect, it is as if nothing has changed. The qualities that originally drew you together are still in force.

Think about the characteristics you desire in a best friend. What is it that makes you want to hang out together? Qualities like honesty, loyalty, generosity, playfulness, appreciation, forgiveness and dependability are most likely on your list. These would probably be attributes you would value in a friend. These are probably attributes that you yourself would want to embody as their friend. These are qualities of kindness.

## Becoming Love *Able*

Look at the list of Loving Promises. Most of the Promises, with the exception of those that apply specifically to intimate relationships, could be ideal qualities of enduring friends. You could consider the Loving Promises as training for friendship as well as for love.

If you want a lifetime partner, let go of the idea that hot romance and excitement is the be-all and end-all of the relationship. As wonderful as those things are, they are subject to fading over time. But friendship is solid and will endure.

For lasting love with the woman in your life, begin by being the best friend you can be.

*Q. What qualities do you value in a friend? In a lover? Do you yourself exhibit these qualities?*

## Even Unkind Men Have a Tender Spot Inside

Is it true? Does every man have a soft, loving, vulnerable place that resides inside himself, a place of childlike innocence, a safe place—where fear cannot reach, where he can relax, breathe and be his true self? Every man? Even a Hitler? Even a terrorist? Even a person who swindles helpless, elderly grandmothers? If even hard-hearted people have that vulnerable place inside them, why are they hiding it? How and where are they hiding it?

We are all born innocent. But maybe we had a difficult birth. Maybe our mother didn't want us or our father was an alcoholic. Maybe we were subjected to abuse and neglect when we were growing up. Maybe we were bullied in school. These experiences left us fearful, distrustful, needing to protect our soft spots. They may have crippled our mind, but painful experiences are unable to touch our deepest heart. Like clouds that obscure the sun, the loving place inside us endures.

Could it be that the most unkind, hardened, unfeeling person still has that vulnerable place inside? Could it be that he is afraid, afraid that others (and he himself), might learn of that place? Afraid that if he exposed his innocent heart, others would take advantage of him, hurt him, control him. Could it be that this scares him so much that he must cover that vulnerable place with an overlay of bravado, threat, anger, even brutality? Is he so afraid that he must scare others away? So terrified that he has to turn away from love and kindness because that threatens him? The message sent is, "Don't get close or I will hurt you."

If all this were true, then it would seem that the most unkind of those among us might be the ones with the most fear and the most sensitive heart. They must maintain their hard, outer wall to protect their soft, vulnerable inside. But the wall creates even more pain. While defending the heart from threat, the wall also prevents their love from flowing out, and prevents the love of others from flowing in.

Tender heart or not, there are evil people in the world who do evil, hurtful things. Knowing of their vulnerable heart, we can have compassion for them and see that they are suffering beings. But our compassion won't change the fact that they do evil, hurtful things. Or that we must stay the hell away so that their evil ways won't hurt us. Or that we must do what we can to neutralize them so that their evil cannot spread to others.

*Q. Have you erected a wall to protect your vulnerable insides? Describe your wall. What does it look like? Describe the vulnerabilities the wall is protecting. What would it feel like if the wall was suddenly removed?*

## Don't Assume. Don't Judge. Don't Blame

A kind person is cautious of making snap judgments of others. They understand that humans are a mystery. They understand they can never know the whole picture of the inner workings of the mind and emotions of any other person. They can never really know what formed others thoughts and feelings or motivated their actions. They may have only the faintest outlines of the trials and tribulations that grew out of that individual's personal history. So a kind person doesn't make assumptions about anyone until they know. They resist harsh judgments. They try to refrain from blame.

There is no way you can know that the driver who cuts in front of your car on the highway is in a panic trying to get his pregnant wife to the hospital. Or that the child having a loud tantrum in the park is in pain from an impacted tooth. Or the impatient waitress is exhausted near the end of working a double shift and her feet are killing her. Or

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the short-tempered boss is anxious because he has recently learned his mother has been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. You don't know these things until you know. And if you knew, it might soften your judgements, increase your patience.

The Native American saying, "You can never know another person until you walk a mile in their moccasins" is so true.

There is one assumption that kindness makes. That assumption is, *to be human is to be fallible*. All of us are fragile, fearful. We have all been wounded. Every one of us is suffering to one degree or another. It is the human condition. To see the human condition of another person invites compassion. Having compassion invites kindness. Having kindness invites the willingness to form loving human connection, person to person.

When we come from the place of *Don't assume, Don't judge, Don't blame*, it is so much easier to be kind and to make that person-to-person human connection.

## A Story About Making Assumptions

Every town has one. An odd, disheveled weirdo, man or woman, young or old. Bob (not his real name), was the one in our town. For several years he would be seen hanging out on street corners, staring at traffic, muttering to himself. He was always dressed in a wrinkled army camouflage outfit, with black combat boots and unkempt, greasy black hair. Nobody knew where he came from, where he lived or how he supported himself. There was an edginess and an air about him that said, "stay away". And everyone did.

I was setting up, getting ready to play a gig with my band at the local bookstore/café, when Bob walks in carrying a flute case. He comes up to me and haltingly asks if he could sit in and play a tune with us. I'm curious and say, "Sure. Why not." Bob proceeds to open his case and slowly, gently takes out a beautiful, shiny silver flute. He cradles the instrument in his hands, as if it is a newborn babe or precious jewel. We start to play our first set and Bob finds a seat at the back of the room. After awhile, I invite him to come up and play a simple ballad with us, figuring he couldn't screw it up too badly. We start the theme, and he steps up to the microphone and begins to play the most beautiful, heartfelt melodic flute music I had ever heard. We were all spellbound . . . band, audience, cooks, servers. To hear such beauty come from this person we had all dismissed as some "wacko" blew our minds. He stayed on and played the entire gig with us and finished to a standing ovation.

I spoke to him afterwards. Seems he was classically trained at Julliard in New York and other prestigious music schools and had played in concerts with symphony orchestras.

This was twenty years ago. A month after this incident, he disappeared and was never seen on the streets of our town again.

## Knowledge, Understanding and Kindness

When you first met your partner, you knew very little about her. As you got to know her, you learned more about her and a more complete picture of who she is began to emerge. I believe it is important to learn as much as you can about your partner. This will allow you to see the beauty of her being. Acquiring information about her will also help you understand her. That understanding can help you view her with kinder eyes and treat her with gentle hands.

Was she sexually abused as a child? That might help explain present sexual issues she has. Was there violence in a previous relationship? That might help explain her distress when you got angry around her. Was her father a harsh disciplinarian? That might help explain her unwarranted feelings of being controlled by you. Did her parents withhold affection? How were conflicts handled in the family? Was there a traumatic betrayal of trust? Death of an important loved one? Drug and alcohol abuse? Things like these are important to know about her, and for her to know about you.

Acquiring such information about your partner (and her about you), can temper your judgments and increase your compassion for her. Knowing her more deeply leads to your understanding how she came to be as she is. These residues from the past are important things to know. Such knowledge can provide insight into what automatically triggers her to anger, fear, defensiveness and retaliation. Knowing these things can help temper the tendency you might have to judge and blame her for things she cannot control, things she might not even be aware of. Knowledge and understanding can allow the refreshing air of acceptance to enter.

## Becoming Love *Able*

If you dig deep enough, everyone's life is an interesting story. The dramas and traumas, triumphs and defeats make for fascinating theatre, and also contain deep meaning. Alice and I have spent many hours sharing intimate details of our past. Besides satisfying our curiosity, it has led us to greater acceptance of each other's quirky thoughts and behaviors. And knowing our stories has helped us to be more understanding and kind to each other.

### Kindness And Generosity Are Contagious

The Cambridge Dictionary defines *kindness* as, "The quality of being generous, helpful and caring about other people." Isn't this a summary of what love is? Kindness is shorthand for love. Generosity is shorthand for kindness.

There is no doubt, kindness and generosity are contagious. One person performing kindly action compels kindness in the other person. Performing hateful and selfish action compels hate and selfishness in others. Being a normal person, if someone is generous, helpful and caring to you, you will have the instinctive impulse to be generous, helpful and caring back. If they act selfish, lazy and mean with you, you will be inclined to return the favor.

I "caught" the infection of generosity and kindness from Alice. In the past I have had the tendency to be selfish and stingy with others. Alice, who is a paragon of open-hearted giving, helped me to become more generous...simply by being generous with me. This was not something she or I consciously intended. My awakening willingness to give back just happened spontaneously in response to her unselfishness. She treated me like a king and simply wanted to make me happy. I was so blown away by her uninhibited kindness toward me that I was compelled to give back. I found myself treating her like a queen and doing whatever I could to make her comfortable and happy. It was effortless. After a while, generosity began to become a habit with me and eventually began to become a part of my character.

So the solution to some of the most pressing relationship problems is simple. If you want more kindness and generosity from your partner, try being more kind and generous toward her. Sometimes you don't "infect" your partner with kindness, or they don't "catch" your generosity right away. Be diligent. Keep practicing. And remember, your purpose is not just to infect your partner. What you want is to become contaminated with the contagion of love so you will infect all you come in contact with. Let's start a pandemic.

### Kindness Is Like Money in The Bank

Everything you do for, to and with your partner remains imbedded in her memory banks, just as her behaviors forever remain in yours. Whether you perform good or bad actions, treat her with kindness or unkindness, traces will linger in her mind. Memories of the way you have behaved toward her may be relegated to her subconscious, but are never really forgotten. The takeaway is—be conscious of how you treat her. Treat her with kindness.

Think of your behaviors toward your partner as deposits in a bank, a bank where love is the currency. Every kind and generous action you perform adds love to your account, while every unkind and selfish action is a withdrawal of love. If you have been depositing kindnesses, after a while, your account is bursting, and you've become rich in love. A bountiful love account will increase mutual feelings of appreciation and contentment. It will bolster your relationship throughout a time when it is undergoing a rocky period. An abundant account will cement your partner's commitment to you, and yours to her.

It is important to remember that kindness and unkindness come in disproportionate denominations. Deposits to your love bank from your kind actions, while valuable, are worth less than withdrawals for unkind actions. Lies, cheating, selfishness and manipulation are drastic shocks to the relationship and are major withdrawals from your love account. A few of these kinds of behaviors can easily overwhelm years of accumulated kindness. They will cause your partner to lose trust in you. Enough of these and your account will be overdrawn. With a negative balance, she will close down the account and look to invest her love in another bank.

The reason you're kind to your partner isn't just because you want to create a surplus of loving feelings in your relationship, or even in order to form a durable, fulfilling partnership. It's more than that. Kindness to others benefits you personally. By acting kind, you strengthen the quality of kindness in your personality and character. By practicing kindness with your partner, kindness becomes who you are.

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## Small Kindnesses Make a Difference

*A small boy was walking along the beach with his dad one morning. It was low tide and the receding water had left thousands of starfish stranded on the sand as far as the eye could see. The sun was heating up and the starfish were drying and would soon die. The little boy busied himself by picking up and throwing the creatures back into the surf. Growing impatient, his father said, "There are so many. The few you throw back into the ocean won't make a difference." The boy tossed another starfish into the water, looked up at his dad and said, "It made a difference to that one."*

There are so many people suffering on the planet and the need is so great that it can seem overwhelming. Of course there are limitations as to how much one person can accomplish. You don't have to change the world. Change *your* world. Start with the person who stands before you. Be sensitive to their needs. Be considerate of their feelings. Lend an ear. Lend a hand.

In practical terms, what this means is take the time to listen when you feel your partner has the need to vent her feelings. Make her a cup of coffee in the morning when she is running late. Pick up the bread on your way home from work so she doesn't have to make an extra trip. Rub her neck when you sense her tension. Bring her a blanket when the sun has dipped behind a cloud and the temperature drops.

Know that she does not consider these acts as simply trying to save her a trip or keep her comfortable. Your behavior means so much more to her. *She sees these things you do for her as acts of love.* Your small kindnesses are concrete, undeniable demonstrations of your love for her. This is how she knows she is loved.

Every act of kindness, no matter how small, makes a difference.

## If You're Not Feeling Kind

We all know that being kind is a good thing. But what you are not in the mood for being kind. What if your partner has done something so nasty that you can't get into the headspace of kindness?

You don't have to force yourself to be kind to your partner at all times. If you're not feeling kind, you're not feeling kind. To put on a phony act of kindness when you are preoccupied or pissed off is dishonest. She'll probably see through your act. Be kind to yourself. It's OK to take care of your needs first. Give yourself permission to feel angry and unforgiving toward her if she has been inconsiderate. It's OK to say "I'm angry at you and can't forgive you now." But at the very least, say it with kindness and maintain your connection with her.

Kindness is an intention we have as an ideal. If you are not feeling kind toward your partner in the moment, exercise your intention within yourself and with her when the time is right. When you feel the spark of a kind feeling beginning, fan the spark with a practice such as *metta*, which will help ignite that spark. When the time is right, you'll be back to your normal kind self.

## Kindness Begins with You

Our world is in a terrible state brought on by people being unkind to each other. What can one man do to bring more kindness into the world? You can begin by recognizing your present environment and mindstate.

First, recognize that the atmosphere you are living in and breathing is filled with anger, aggression and selfishness. Name it for what it is—unkindness.

Second, recognize the anger, selfishness and aggression is your own. Make it personal. Every time you seethe with rage when you perceive injustice, or flare up when contempt is hurled at "our side" you are being unkind. Every time you wish "they" suffer, or hope for revenge, you are being unkind. Every time you return an insult with an insult, you are being unkind.

Third, recognize the need for compassion. The main source of unkindness, in others and in your own self, is suffering. People who are happy and fulfilled rarely act unkindly. Fear, deprivation, jealousy, greed, injustice are sources of suffering and are the breeding grounds for unkindness. Your righteous response toward those who suffer, (even though they foist their suffering on others, and need to be penalized for their actions), should be tempered with understanding and compassion.

## Becoming Love *Able*

Fourth, recognize that those you hate, blame and judge are not your enemies. They are *us*. They too want to live peacefully. They too want to protect their family. They too want to prosper. They too want to love and be loved just as you do. They have had different experiences, hold different beliefs and have chosen different paths to those goals. See them from that perspective—members of the human family, our human family.

Fifth, recognize that your own actions can cause divisiveness. When those people you hate, blame and judge are confronted with your hate, blame and judgment, their unkindness becomes inflamed. They become threatened and defensive and will seek to hurt you in return. Now you become more threatened and defensive. . .and more hate filled, blaming and judgmental. It has always been so and will always be. . .*what you give is what you receive*.

Sixth, recognize that it is possible for you to effectively pursue your personal, social and political goals when your actions are fortified with the strength of kindness. Kindness is powerful. Civility and kind discourse, even if it comes from only one side, turns down the angry noise and allows us to better hear each other. You will be more effective if you act with respect and honor your “opponent’s” dignity, even if the kindness you extend is not returned to you. Especially if it is not returned to you.

Start from here. Start with yourself. Start by recognizing when the darkness of unkindness begins to overtake your mind and your gut as you read the news or watch your “enemy” speak on the TV news cast. These harsh thoughts and feelings that arise are poisonous and will take their toll on your peace of mind and physical health. They will sour the interactions you have with the people in your life. See this, know this, and commit to put effort into letting go of those constricting thoughts and feelings. Commit to replace your closed fist with an open heart.

This is the way the world changes. Not from mass rallies. Not from sermons or legislation. Kindness happens with the thoughts and actions of one person, one kind word, one loving act at a time. Let kindness begin with you.

### Poem by poet and artist Ingrid Goff-Maidoff

*Do Good Things For Each Other*  
*Do good things for each other—*  
*small kindnesses every day.*  
*Be a comfort to each other—*  
*a calm shore for turbulent times.*  
*Be good friends to each other—*  
*remain compassionate and tender.*  
*Lend a thoughtful ear, a gentle shoulder,*  
*an open heart, and a strong hand.*  
*And do good things for each other.*

## RELATIONSHIP

Dr. Robert Waldinger, current head of a 75-year longitudinal Harvard University study that tracked the lives of 724 of men, from teenagers to old age, answering the question, “What have we learned?”

*“The lessons aren’t about wealth or fame or working harder and harder. The clear message that we get from the 75-year study is this, Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period!”*

### Why Have a Relationship?

I’m going to ask you some questions that may sound silly, but I want you to think about them anyway. I believe they are worthwhile to contemplate. Please put down the book after reading the questions and ponder them for a while before you start reading again.

Except for the rare hermit or monk, a majority of us will have made the choice to forgo the freedom of the single life and decide to live as a couple. We choose intimate partnership knowing that we would likely have to make difficult sacrifices and be facing burdensome challenges. Yet in spite of the difficulties, we choose to be together. Why?

What is a couple’s relationship for? What is its purpose? What are its rewards? What does each partner hope to receive from the relationship? Why are you in a relationship or want to be in one? What are you receiving now or what do you hope to get out of a relationship in the future?

Alice and I have thought about these questions. I think our answers might echo those of every loving couple.

**We enjoy each other.** We got together in the first place because it feels good to be around each other. We laugh a lot and have fun doing exciting things and we delight in simply being together.

**We share life’s burdens.** Our life is so much easier and more manageable when we have a helpmate who nurtures us, helps us carry our load when we can’t do it alone and comforts us when we are down. Even the simple act of making our bed is so much easier with two rather than one.

**We grow together.** The experience of living with this other being who has different interests, tastes, habits and perspectives, helps us to grow. It enlarges our mind, challenges us, opens our heart and expands our universe. We elevate each other through our differences. In the process we discover who we really are.

**We learn to love.** By enjoying each other, sharing life’s burdens and growing together, our caring for each other deepens. We discover what love truly is and we learn how to give of ourselves with caring and generosity. That education is the most important thing that life has to teach us.

**We expand our love through sharing it with others.** We bring our love for each other out into the world and share it with family, friends, co-workers and everyone we meet. In doing so, not only do we bestow our love on others, but our own heart expands and heals.

*Q. These are reasons why Alice and I are together and are what keeps our relationship alive and well. What are your reasons for being in relationship or wanting to be in one?*

### Fulfilling Life=Fulfilling Relationship

It seems obvious that the reason we work to improve our relationship is so that we can have a happy, healthy, productive life together. We believe that having a happy, healthy, productive relationship will offer us the fulfillment we crave.

## Becoming Love *Able*

It's not that simple. If we depend on our relationship to make us happy, we have things ass-backwards. I believe that if we have a happy, healthy, productive life, it will enable us to have a fulfilling relationship. I even question whether a fulfilling relationship is possible without a well-rounded life.

In other words, a fulfilling relationship is the *by-product* of a life of integrity, meaning, joy and generosity. Those are the things you should pursue.

Don't worry about trying to be the perfect partner. Put your effort into becoming the best, kindest, most virtuous person you can be. Then you will be the perfect partner. And all your relationships will be fulfilling.

## An Intimate Relationship Is Not for Everyone

Pursuing a great relationship is not everyone's goal. Some couples might be perfectly satisfied with less intimate involvement. Some may even prefer a "roommate" type of relationship or are comfortable with separate living arrangements. There is a wide variety as to where people end up on the intimacy scale. Demanding a person who places high value on their freedom and privacy to be confined in an intimate relationship is forcing a square peg in a round hole.

Couples may have goals and other interests that conflict with intimate relationships. They may desire a productive career or want to pursue a project that they love. They may consider couple relationships a diversion, a pleasant addition to their life, while work, friends or achievement of a cherished goal takes first place. For these couples, the time and effort required for an intimate relationship is more than they are willing to devote.

Despite societal pressure to "couple up," there are some real advantages from living without a partner or having a relationship where each person has a high degree of independence. Freedom of choice, privacy, simplicity and financial independence, attract many to the single life or to less confining relationships. This is a legitimate choice and perfectly alright (as long as both partners are on the same page regarding their priorities). Every individual and every couple is different and each have their own definition of a "great" relationship. Decisions as to where they put their limited time and energies are each person's and each couple's to make.

However, if you choose to spend your life in partnership with your mate, the energy you devote to perfecting that partnership will be amply rewarded, not just in your relationship, but in your entire life.

*Q. How important is it for you to have a great relationship? Rate importance from 1 to 10. What things beside your primary relationship do you consider essential for your happiness?*

## Giving And Taking

Love is about both giving and taking.

Everyone is different. Some people are predominately "takers," for whom "getting their needs met" is of primary importance. In order to be healthy in a relationship, these people need to learn to be able to give more freely so other's needs can be met. Some people are "givers," who find meaning and value by giving to another person. They need to learn how to take for themselves in order to get their own needs met.

From the foregoing definition of love from a few chapters ago, that emphasizes the willingness to commit energy and resources for another person's wellbeing, you can tell that this book is more about giving. It's not that I am against taking. Being able to receive from others is an essential part of love. However, I am seeing that most of the problems in love and relationships stem from a couple's reluctance or inability to give to each other. They err on the side of too much preoccupation with getting from their partner.

A couple consisting of two takers is the worst. They would constantly be at each other's throat, each trying to get their individual needs met. Not a very good match. Two givers who couple up would be a good match, but there would be some frustration. Givers need takers. The couple would engage in arguing, trying to force goods or services on the other.

I think that it would be ideal if a couple were balanced givers and takers. It would also work well if givers, (with some counterbalancing taker qualities), coupled up with takers, (with some counterbalancing giver qualities), who

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appreciate and are willing to accept the way of being of their opposite partner. Their differences would be complementary. Most important, it would work best if each person would be willing to learn from the other.

Of course, this is an oversimplification. Much of my life before I met Alice, I was a person who was reluctant to give, but also reluctant to take. If I was on the receiving end, I felt like I needed to reciprocate. So, I felt uncomfortable when people tried to give to me. Alice is a world champion giver. She is unhappy and frustrated if her offerings are not accepted. It took hard work for Alice to get me to become a gracious receiver. But I learned.

*Q. How would you characterize yourself? Are you more a giver or more a taker? Would you like to change?*

## Monogamy or Consensual Non-monogamy: Which Is Right for You?

The natural predisposition of the male of most every species is to sow his oats with as many females as possible. I'm sure most of us guys have had some version of the fantasy of beautiful women lining up at our doorstep. It doesn't usually happen, (at least it hadn't happened with me). At the same time, we have been acculturated as an ideal, to value commitment to one partner, happily ever after, for a lifetime. However, this is changing. Indications of this change can be found in statistics showing fewer couples choosing marriage, increasing numbers of divorces, burgeoning frequency of extramarital affairs, and greater numbers of couples engaging in a variety of relationships with multiple partners.

There are benefits of monogamy, being in a long term committed relationship with one partner, and benefits of being in a consensual non-monogamous relationship, a relationship with multiple partners. I've written about some of those benefits (and problems) in the discussion of commitment found in Loving Promise #1.

But the choice for monogamy or non-monogamy is more than about advantages and disadvantages. It has more to do with each individual's personality makeup and their particular needs. To generalize, human beings have many basic needs. Two important ones, that are in opposition to each other, are the need for security and the need for novelty. The security need finds its expression in desire for permanence, comfort, safety, predictability. The need for novelty finds its expression in the search for variety, change, adventure, danger, the new, the unknown. Everyone has different degrees of these two needs, and obviously, these differences will strongly influence the choices they make about how they commit, or not, in their relationships.

There is also another pair of opposing basic needs. One is the need for connection, and its expression in the desire for closeness, unity and intimacy with another person. The other need is for separateness, and its expression in the desire for individuality, aloneness, freedom and distance. The degree of the connection versus separation needs that a person has will also reflect on the way they commit in their relationships.

Neither monogamy or non-monogamy is intrinsically right or wrong, better or worse than the other. They are lifestyle choices which, like all important choices a couple makes for their relationship, have consequences. Problems arise if individuals in the couple are not in alignment with each other's lifestyle choice or if one individual pursues their choice without the other's knowledge or agreement.

*Q. Where do you fall on the security/novelty scale? Where do you fall on the connection/separateness scale? Do you find the idea of consensual non-monogamy appealing?*

## Relationship Requires Sacrifice

Sacrifice is giving up something that is important to you, in order to acquire something you consider of greater value. Relationship requires sacrifice. When in a committed relationship, you sacrifice your freedom. You are no longer free to do as you wish. You have to take your partner's wishes into consideration. You sacrifice your time. Time is no longer your own but must be apportioned to accommodate your partner's needs. If you are the breadwinner, you sacrifice your finances. The bread you win isn't all yours any more to spend as you wish. Clothes, shoes, hair, cosmetics, etc., may take the lion's share of your earnings. If in a monogamous relationship, you must sacrifice opportunities to have exciting intimate relationships with a variety of interesting people. There are many other sacrifices that you must make in a committed partnership.

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These are real sacrifices and shouldn't be minimized. But since we sacrifice in order to obtain something of greater value, what are the things that we hope to get in return for the things we are forfeiting?

The short answer is, *love*. Without these sacrifices, it is impossible to have a loving relationship. In fact, it would be impossible to have any relationship. Relationship requires give and take. There can be no relationship if there is only taking.

There are many things a good relationship can provide you in exchange for your sacrifices; companionship, a safe harbor in a storm, sharing joy during good times and support during bad, and the personal growth that can only come about by dealing with the personal challenges and ups and downs of a close partnership. These, and many other things make it worthwhile to undergo the sacrifices that must come with every relationship.

## What Is A Successful Relationship?

When a relationship ends or a marriage dissolves, people often call it a "failed marriage" or a "broken relationship." They assume that because the relationship has ended, it is a failure. This is too simple. There is more to it. The success of a couple's relationship should not be measured by the length of its existence. Some partners stay together for life, even though they have little connection and are miserable with each other. Rather than set themselves free, they are content to polish the bars of their cage. Is this a successful relationship?

Success should be measured by the quality of their time a couple has spent together. It should be measured by whether it has propelled the partners to deepen and grow. By this measure, the most successful marriages or relationships can sometimes end in divorce or break-up. Each person has learned all they could from the partnership and now understands this is time to move on to other learnings, other adventures, other relationships and maybe even greater love.

I have been divorced three times. I love my ex-wives and, despite some mutually painful moments in the past, am thankful for the time we spent together and wouldn't change a thing. It helped me grow and made me a better person. It prepped me for my beautiful relationship with Alice.

If a couple remains together after the relationship is obviously over and beyond the time is ripe to move on, then that is truly a failing relationship. It's not smart to continue to carry around a rotting carcass. The stink affects everyone.

*Q. Describe a relationship where you stayed too long. What were the reasons you gave yourself for not separating sooner?*

## Fairy Tale Love

Here's a question to ponder. Research shows that happy people tend to have happy relationships. Is it because their happy relationship is what makes them happy people, or is it because being a happy, well-adjusted person helps make the relationship happy? Your answer to this question will have a lot to do with how you approach being in relationship. If you believe that it is the partner you have chosen to be in relationship with is what makes for a happy, healthy relationship, you will put your effort into searching for and finding the right mate for you. If you believe the basis of a good relationship is the result of two healthy, happy, mature people coming together, you will put your efforts into becoming a happy, healthy, mature person.

## Fairy Tales

The search for the right mate is the preoccupation with many single people. At some point, we have all had the belief and the hope that the perfect woman will show up and make our life complete. Once upon a time, a beautiful princess will enter our life and shower us with love and admiration, and life will be good forever after. The lonely frog awaits transformation by the princess' kiss. This fairytale, that the right woman will come along and recognize

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that we are her knight in shining armor, fill our emptiness, take away our pain, and make our life complete, is the source of much suffering and disappointment.

The simple truth is the knights and princesses live only in fairytales. When you begin to become complete within yourself, not starving for love and hungry for relationship, the right individuals are more likely to arrive at your doorstep. Until then, the potential mates that knock on your door are often themselves incomplete, needy people who are seeking security and wanting to complete themselves through you. They want *you* to be the knight to their damsel in distress. When both partners are hungry and needing to be fed by the other, it doesn't bode well for the relationship. Each will be grasping for scraps for themselves, rather than trying to provide nurturance for the other. Each will gobble up every word of praise, every smile, every approving pat on the head. The relationship will be driven by mutual hunger. There will be competition rather than cooperation.

The reality is that in order to attract the right partner, **you** must be the right person. To sustain a relationship that is fulfilling requires that you maintain a life that fulfills you. It all starts with you. Love originates within you and the power to create a fabulous relationship lies in your own hands.

## Discarding Fairy Tales

Getting rid of fairytale thinking about love involves letting go of assumptions and expectations you hold concerning the influence people can have over your life.

*You must let go of the expectation that the woman in your life will make you happy.* Ultimately you alone are responsible for your own happiness or unhappiness.

*You must let go of the expectation that the woman in your life will protect you from the pain of living.* Along with tears of joy, life inevitably dispenses tears of sadness. While your partner might accompany you in your suffering, your pain is yours alone to experience.

*You must let go of the expectation that the woman in your life will provide you with a sense of your own self-worth.* While other people have their opinions about you, your self-esteem is something you develop on your own.

*You must let go of the expectation that you will be the center of your partner's universe.* Each person is the center of their own universe. If you want to be the center of their world or if they expect you to be the center of theirs, you're both in trouble.

*You must let go of the expectation that the state of your relationship, your partner and yourself will remain consistently pleasant.* You don't always like the one you love. As a matter of course, people run hot and cold, feel closeness and distance. No continual happy ever after.

When you let go of fairytale thinking about love, it becomes easier to recognize the only place where you can begin to create a beautiful relationship—within your own self.

**Q.** *Which of the above assumptions and expectations do you hold regarding your relationships? Which might be most difficult for you to let go of?*

## True Fairy Tales

Let me step back and clarify my thoughts about fairytale love.

I believe, just as the fairytale says, love *can* be magical. Love *can* transform us. Love *can* kiss us awake and bring greater happiness into our lives. Love has the potential to do this. I know this to be true because this magic happened to Alice and me. I was the frog that the princess kissed, Alice was the sleeping beauty. The difference is that the magic

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was not the result of some alchemy that took place outside ourselves. When we were awakened by our love for each other, *the magic resided within us*. And it wasn't magic. It was intensive inner work. We made it happen. For years before we met, Alice and I individually did the hard work that created the conditions for love to thrive. We studied, attended therapy and personal growth groups, performed spiritual practices. We prepared ourselves by growing and maturing in mind and spirit. If we had avoided this work, if we had not been prepared, the awakening kiss would have been wasted and I would still be a frog and Alice would still be asleep. When the prince, (me) came knocking on Alice's door and the princess came knocking on mine, we were ripe, we were ready and able to awaken and give and receive our love.

### Sweet Romance

Romance is fun, exciting, titillating, sexy. But if you expect and demand constant, unvarying, starry-eyed romantic feeling in your relationship, you are in for a frustrating ride.

Starting off young with fairytales and later reinforced by TV, novels and movies, we are inundated with the idea that romance is the essential part of relationship, and if they are lacking everlasting romantic feelings, a couple's relationship is not worth having. This is a fantasy, a destructive one.

The reality is that after awhile, the heart pounding, breath taking romantic emotions will usually change form and give way to more subtle sweetness. Sweet romance can come, often unexpectedly, and in inconspicuous ways. It comes in tiny moments—the comforting touch of a hand, a smile of recognition, shared memories, a quiet meal together, a whispered “I love you.” These treasured moments are signs that your love is alive and well. If we recognize them as such, we don't need thunder and lightning to know that we are loved and our love is real.

The fire of love does not have to be a conflagration. It can be a white hot ember deep inside your hearts.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't fan the ember of romance. If your special someone likes to be romanced with love notes, flowers and special meals, by all means, go for it. Make her happy. Bring her a cup of coffee to the bed in the morning. Hand her a bouquet of roses when you come home from work. Compose a love poem and leave it where she'll see it. This makes romance more sweet. Do it as a gift to her. And enjoy yourself too.

*Q. Do you consider yourself romantic? Unromantic? What do you do to romance your partner?*

### Childhood Needs

As adults we have the belief that we are aware of and in charge of the direction of our relationships. There are, however, physical, mental and emotional forces that have a strong influence on the nature of all our relationships. Much of this influence occurred when we were children, in our family of origin. Our parents shaped our personality and character by punishing us, rewarding us and modeling how we should think, speak and act. Much of this early influence is subconscious because it occurred before we were able to speak and understand.

Many of the childhood emotional needs for love and approval we wanted fulfilled by mom and dad are the same needs, in a more grownup version, that we want our partner to fulfill for us now. We want our partner to always appreciate us and see us as special. We want our partner to give us their full attention when we seek it. We want our partner to “mother” us when we're hurt, sick or upset. We want our partner to keep us safe. We want our partner to acknowledge us when we've been “good.” And we want our partner to love us unconditionally, even when we've been “bad.” We wanted all these things from our parents when we were children, and most likely didn't get them as much as we desired. Yet, on some level we expect and demand them from our intimate partner when we are adults. If our partner fails to fulfill those needs for us, we can become angry and frustrated with them. We might up the volume of our demands or retreat into ourselves or leave the relationship to search for someone who can better fulfill our needs.

In our present relationships we attempt to get our childhood needs met using the same methods we used as a child with mom and dad. We attempt to get approval from our partner by being a cooperative “good boy” and not causing problems. We attempt to get our way forcefully by having temper tantrums. We attempt to get “motherlove”

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by being sick, helpless or hurt or having problems. We attempt to be seen as special by our partner by working hard and showing them what we have accomplished.

Child-to-parent relationship is from the past. Adult-to-adult relationship is where your love belongs. There is no way you can be in a loving partnership in the present if you are recreating a relationship from the past.

*Q. Have you used any methods described in paragraph #3 to manipulate or get approval from your partner?*

## Wounds

Whether our past has left us with superficial scars or deep wounds, it should be remembered...*we are all wounded in some way*. A lonely childhood, bullying by schoolmates, a tortured love affair or an abandonment or betrayal of trust by someone we loved has seared into our memory and left its mark on our mind and soul. Even if we are unaware of the wounds, or they are from the far distant past, they can still influence our feelings and behavior in the present.

As with physical wounds, some psychic wounds are deep lacerations caused by severe traumatic events, which can take years of concerted treatment in order to heal. Some wounds are simple abrasions that, left alone, will clear up by themselves. Some will never heal.

No matter how slick and well put together a person may seem on the surface, every one of us humans has a sad, scared little child buried somewhere deep inside. Sometimes the more slick and glossy the surface we exhibit to the world, the deeper the wound and the more we feel we must hide it. This wounded child is in need of love and comfort. If we deny, conceal or ignore our inner child, or judge him as weak and needy, we will be compounding that original injury or abandonment. It's not helpful to tell him, "You're weak, get over it, it's not a big deal." In order for healing of the scars of the past to take place, we need to listen to and offer lovingkindness to that inner child when they are in need. A safe environment and non-judgmental atmosphere can shine light into hidden corners and facilitate healing.

Rather than the go-it-alone, stiff-upper-lip pose that guys sometimes use when faced with unsettling emotions, maybe some gentle self-acceptance and encouragement would be more needed. That lovingkindness, focused inward, is a soothing balm and can transform us if it comes from our own self. It is also transformative if it comes from someone who loves us and who we love.

Though we are usually more tuned in to our own wounds and imperfections, it is important to remember that our partner also carries her own wounds and imperfections. This will help us look upon her with more patience and forbearance. She too judges herself weak and needy. She too attempts to hide her inner child. Her demons may be as terrifying as our own, her wounds as deep and painful.

As we maintain the awareness of our partner's vulnerable inner child, we are more apt to offer her empathy, forgiveness, praise and support, all elements which will help bring about her healing. In the process of being a safe refuge and reaching out to her with lovingkindness, we are assuming the role of loving adult in her life. Taking on this compassionate role, we also bring about the healing of our own wounds.

*Q. How would you characterize your emotional wounds? What in the past might have caused them? How do you deal with them? How do you avoid dealing with them?*

*What about your partner's wounds? How would you characterize them? How do you address them? Avoid addressing them?*

## A Couple's Journey

I had previously referred to a couple's long-term relationship as a journey. In many ways this is a useful comparison. Being in love is an adventure, an ongoing voyage of discovery. Over time, each partner learns about their mate, themselves and the process of living with and loving another person.

Typically, as couples grow together and become more comfortable and committed, their relationship will mature and they will progress through a series of stages. Each stage of a couple's journey presents new challenges to be encountered, new tasks to be accomplished, new learnings to be absorbed. Once the tasks of one stage are achieved,

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the opportunity to move on to the next stage comes into view. I think it would be useful for you to become familiar with the stages so you might get a preview of the form a relationship could possibly take as it develops.

### *Honeymoon*

New love is exciting, romantic. Holding hands, a first kiss, surprise gifts, confessing love. So many new things to learn as this stranger begins to become familiar. Both are on their best behavior. Neither person is aware of, or will tend to minimize the others defects. Egos bask in the warmth of being loved.

### *Disillusionment*

Reality sets in as partners relax and allow more of their real selves to come out. He's a bit of a slob, she's sometimes lazy, he flies into rages when frustrated, she talks on the phone for hours with her girlfriends. Sex becomes less prevalent and lusty. The excitement has begun to wear off. Annoyance and resentment start to grow.

### *Power Struggle*

Partners express their dissatisfaction with each other's supposed defects and try to get the other to change. They will try reasoning, arguing, criticizing, manipulating...anything to get him to clean up after himself or get her off the phone. It's also about competition. Who will win, who will lose, who will be in control?

### *Truce*

Power struggle is upsetting. It's unstable. Often couples settle control issues and negotiate a peace treaty, eventually becoming resigned to parts of their mate they don't accept. They are willing to "live with" their mate's imperfections. For the most part, the couple is happy enough and are getting most of their needs met. While things may not be fabulous, they are certainly good enough. This stage can last for a long time and most couples remain content in this non-demanding, relatively comfortable and peaceable stage. This is what many people would call a "good relationship."

### *Conscious Commitment*

The couple in this stage is not satisfied with a "good enough" relationship. They want their union to be great. They are willing to do what they can, as individuals and as a couple, to further their own and their partners physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual unfolding. They make mutual fulfillment a central goal in their relationship. They may enter therapy together or individually, or embark in efforts to grow their psychological and spiritual health.

This description of the form a relationship might take is just a sketch. Not all couples will go through all the stages or even most of them. I wanted to include it to give you a sense of the possibilities and pitfalls that might arise as a relationship progresses over time.

A loving relationship is a profound journey. The path to a great relationship must be trod step-by-step. You are in unfamiliar territory. You must explore. At times it will be inevitable that you will lose your way, be distracted and waste time and energy following detours that will eventually take you into dead ends. Progress is not measured only by forward movement, but also by learning the perils and pitfalls along the trail. There are no shortcuts.

## Beyond Conscious Commitment—Shared Service

In the Couple's Journey, *Conscious Commitment* is a beautiful place to be. It is a joyful experience and wonderful accomplishment to have reached this stage in a relationship. Most couples who arrive here are content to rest and enjoy the fruits of a great relationship. A few couples may want to expand their love farther into the world. For these few, there is another stage in the journey, Shared Service. These couples want to do more, they want to team up and pursue a shared calling in order to make their community, their country and the world a better place.

On a local level, a couple might work together to help create a neighborhood food bank or homeless shelter. On a national or international level, couples like Nelson and Winnie Mandela and Bill and Melinda Gates, use their resources and drive to benefit large numbers of people. Couples in service, by supporting and uplifting each other in their good work, are a so much more powerful force than one alone.

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Shared service doesn't require partners to serve in the same way. Most often, there is one partner who, by personality or skillset, is more inclined to be the public face and voice, while the other works behind the scene to support. I played the supporting role in helping to publicize Alice's poignant artwork, and was instrumental in getting her featured in a segment of the Oprah Winfrey Show. Alice plays a supporting role in helping promote my writing and speaking.

The world is suffering. On every continent there are divisions along racial, economic, cultural and political lines that threaten to weaken the fabric of civilization. When two powerful individuals who have a deep, healthy love for each other and a commitment to be of benefit, team up in shared service, they can move mountains. Who is better able to advocate for harmony in the world than couples who have created harmony in their relationship. They lead by example and inspiration because they have worked through the difficult chore of creating a peaceful, intimate relationship. They can take their lived experience with each other and apply it to the problems they encounter in their community and in the world.

Shared Service is not for everyone. Nor is it a better, more "advanced" stage of relationship. It is a calling. Couples are called to service by their desire to be of help and the resources, skills and talents they have available to offer.

What a blessing to have been given a lifespan of three score and ten. Why not use part of that precious time to be of service to others. And what better way than to be aligned in service hand-in-hand with the love of your life.

## Beyond Empathy

Empathy is the ability to sense what another person is feeling.

This is an invaluable quality to have in a relationship. With empathy, you can sense your partner's mood and share her experience. You are able to feel into her heart, see into her mind, which will enable you to share in her joy and be with her pain. Without empathy you are two separate beings, with little or no connection.

How are you able to become more empathic with your partner? By paying close attention to her. You listen to the emotional quality hidden behind her words. You watch for subtle signals in her facial expressions and body posture. You even look into your "gut" and rely on your intuition. By attending to her in this sensitive way, you get an intuitive sense of what it is like to be her.

When you are able to intimately sense your partner's thoughts and feelings in this way, a deeper kind of empathy can arise. You start to see how she and you are alike. She needs to be appreciated, as do you. She doesn't want to be wrong, as do you. She wants to be heard, as do you. She has the need to feel secure in the relationship, as do you. You begin to understand that your differences reside mostly on the surface, while your similarities run deep.

As you see how you and she are identical in so many ways, a sense of "oneness" can arise. Rather than see each other as two separate modules who are interacting with each other, you begin to see each other as one being, with common needs, common feelings, common goals. No *me*, no *her*, just *us*. When she wins, you win. When she loses, you lose. You feel her pain when she hurts. You share in her joy.

This sense of shared human experience is a powerful force. The feeling of unity with your partner cements your love. As it becomes more a part of your psyche, that feeling of interconnection you have with your partner can spread to family, friends, co-workers, strangers. By sensing yourself in others and others in yourself, you start to see everyone as a part of your family, and you as a part of everyone's family.

The world would transform if people would begin to consider all living beings as their relatives.

*Q. Is or was there another person in your life, male or female, who you feel or felt a sense of oneness? What is/was that like for you?*

## Relationship is a Three-Legged Race

You know the Three-Legged Race, the children's game where a pair of kids with one of their legs tied together compete with other pairs to try to cross the finish line first. It's fun to watch as the competitors struggle to remain upright as they try to coordinate their movements. If they are not in sync with each other, they'll work against each

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other and eventually take a tumble. There's always a couple of kids who figure it out and consistently zip to the finish line first.

Relationship is like that. To maintain a loving relationship, you have to consistently remain attentive to each other, sensitive to your partners desires, moods and thoughts. You have to be in the present moment with them, or else you'll lose touch. You need to be *for* each other, or else competing will tear you apart. You need to retain a sense of shared purpose, or else you might go off in divergent directions.

As a loving couple, you are tied together. Her well-being is your well-being. To a degree, her joy is your joy, her sorrow is your sorrow. You cannot be happy, nor can she, if either of you is in pain.

So it is in each of your self-interests to serve each other and make each other happy. When you do that, when you spoil each other with kindness, you'll reach the finish line in great shape.

## RESPONSIBLE LOVING

### Relationships, Like Cars, Require Maintenance

In romantic movies, there's often a common theme...guy and gal meet, fall in love, experience some kind of disconnect in their relationship, but finally discover they really love each other. And then...lights up, show over. We are left to assume that it's "happy ever-after."

That's fantasy. In the real world, the relationship is just getting started after the honeymoon period wears off. That is when the real work of relationship begins. The work begins with taking on responsibility, having goodwill, and employing focused attention. With dedication to make your relationship blossom, a deeper form of love can begin to manifest.

Great relationships take work...care-filled, ongoing attention. It's like the way you need to treat your car. You don't neglect your automobile and assume it will go on forever-after. No. If you want a smooth-running car that will last a long time, you listen for unusual sounds from the engine, keep your eyes on the gauges, change oil, add coolant, check tire pressure. You dust and vacuum the interior, wash and polish the exterior. You've made a big investment in your automobile and you want it to serve you well.

You have made an investment in your relationship too, and you want it to keep paying off in terms of making you both happy. So, like caring for your car, you must be attentive to the state of your relationship. You need to keep checking in with your partner to make sure things are clicking along. Ask her how you are doing as her partner and what you can do to improve. Listen to her responses. Try not to blame or be defensive. Make repairs that are needed.

You also need to keep abreast of your own feelings so that you can sense if things are not right. Be accountable. Monitor your behavior in order to be aware of how you are treating your partner. Are you appreciative of her? Are you being unselfish with her? Do you attempt to manipulate her? Are you being dependable? Do you express your love for her? These things are important for "relationship maintenance."

As with a car, the sooner that you become aware of problems that are beginning to emerge, the easier it will be to make repairs. You don't want to wait until you've blown a head gasket till you check the oil. And you don't want to find yourself in the Divorce Court before you discover that your partner has been feeling unfulfilled with you for a long time.

If you find yourself with problems that are beyond your knowledge and ability to fix, don't be quick to give up and look around for a new model. Consider seeking the help of a "relationship mechanic," a specialist with experience in couple and family therapy who can provide insight into communication, conflict resolution, sexual problems and other issues. An expert can help with a relationship tune-up that can furnish new perspectives so that you can both get back on the road again.

Automobiles come with a maintenance manual that can guide you in how to take care of your car. It tells you how often to rotate tires, the way to replace a headlamp and when you should change the oil. Each of the Loving Promises are ways that maintain a relationship and keep it healthy. You can use the Loving Promises as a maintenance manual for your relationship.

### Love Is an Inside Job

It is logical to think of love as an interaction that occurs *between* two people. I would like you to consider love in a different way. Think of love as occurring *within* each person. When you place your focus on the individual rather than the couple, you open to a whole new understanding of love. And you begin to sense the awesome responsibility you have for the state of your relationship and the profound power you have to change it.

The following are some ideas to consider that support the concept of each individual's full responsibility for their relationship.

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### Love Comes From Inside Me

When you fall in love with someone, you experience loving feelings when that person is around you and when you think about them. Your loving feelings dissipate when the person is away from your presence or out of your thoughts. Those loving feelings recur when the person reappears. Therefore, it is natural to connect the person you love with the occurrence of your feelings of love, and thus assume that that person is the *source* of those feelings. In actuality, your beloved is simply the *focus* of your love, the object upon which you have bestowed your love.

You probably believe that the qualities that your beloved possesses—their beauty, their brains, their humor, their radiant personality—are the things that generate your feelings of love. This is an illusion. Actually, love resides inside you. Your inner nature is loving. Your own loving heart is the source of love. The person you love and admire is the one with whom you open the floodgates of your heart. They are the one you bestow your loving feelings upon, feelings that have always resided inside you.

If you believe that the source of your loving feelings is some person outside of yourself, you will constantly be looking for Ms. Right, believing that only she holds the keys to your heart. However, if you understand that love comes from within, you can stop the endless search for the perfect partner and focus your energies on *becoming* the perfect partner.

### How I Love Myself Is How I Will Love You

The way you see yourself, value yourself and treat yourself will strongly influence how you see, value and treat others. If you are judgmental toward yourself, you will tend to set high standards and judge others by your standards. If you are kind and compassionate toward yourself, you will tend toward kindness and compassion in relation to others. If you have areas in your personality you are blind to, things you cannot see about yourself, you will tend to be blind to those same things with others.

This holds true for our ability to love. The way we love ourselves is the map of how we love others. If we do not possess self-love, i.e., know, respect and care for ourselves, how is it possible to give love to another person? *We cannot give to another what we ourselves do not possess.*

Self-love is not the same as self-obsession or selfishness. In fact, it is the opposite. Those who are selfish or self-obsessed usually don't love themselves, but are hungry to fill the emptiness they feel inside. Self-loving people are brimming with fullness and are able to easily share their love. Their love overflows. They are not dependent on the love of others because they can provide it from within themselves.

Self-love is the key. *A great relationship starts with a great relationship with yourself.*

### The Love I Give Is The Love I Get

The law of karma, as popularly understood, is "You get what you give." This is especially true in couples' relationships. If you give generously, love will more likely be returned to you. If you give selfishly or not at all, that too will be returned to you.

Love is a two-way street that involves both giving and receiving. The emphasis here is almost exclusively about the giving aspect of love. In our culture though, the emphasis is on receiving, on searching for love and *being* loved rather than *being loving*.

Open-hearted giving sows the seeds of generosity in relationship, seeds that will unfailingly sprout. Generosity is infectious. We catch it from each other. When I do things that make Alice happy and content, her happiness and contentment flow back to me. Because she sees me trying to make her happy, she wants to do things to make me happy. So we spoil each other. In the process of giving wholeheartedly to each other, we both get what we want.

### I Am Responsible For The Quality Of My Relationships

Any relationship is supposed to be a 50/50 proposition, an equally shared interaction where each person has an equal portion of responsibility. On the surface, this seems obvious. While 50/50 may be a realistic way of looking at relationships, it may not be the most useful way. By accepting equal responsibility, you give away half of your power. You can only take 50% responsibility for the state of the relationship, and only half of the ability to change it. If things go wrong you will tend to look at the other person's 50% as the cause of the problem. Also, you will expect and demand at least 50% from the other person. This will lead to comparison and examination of each of your performances in the relationship. It will lead to resentment if you feel the other person is not pulling their weight. You will end up keeping a tally sheet of what and how much you or they did or didn't do. Love deteriorates into a

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bargain you make with each other, and your ongoing efforts to ensure that the other person fulfills their part of the deal.

I would like you to consider something that's radically different, something that may seem very odd and difficult to do. Consider your love and your relationships as your responsibility—100%. This is not 100%/100%. It goes beyond that. Whether your partner gives back 100% or 50% or 10% or 5% is not the issue. The only relevant factor is the *quality of love you give*.

Does this mean that your partner is not in any way accountable for the state of the relationship? Does it mean that what they say and do will have no effect on the relationship? No! Of course, their words and behavior have an effect. They too have 100% responsibility (if they choose to accept it). And if they choose not to accept it, so be it. You taking responsibility for your love simply means that you focus on your part. Period. Not on hers.

In practical terms, this entails refraining from blaming your partner when things go wrong. It requires, when problems arise, for you to look inside yourself for your part, not just theirs. It requires that you examine what you could have done more skillfully and lovingly. It demands you lead with your love...do the loving thing. And do it irrespective of your partner's participation, even when you don't feel like it, even when you know that they are wrong, even when they are just being stubborn or spiteful.

I know this is difficult to ask, but assuming 100% responsibility will make you powerful...filled with power. It will allow you to take all your relationships in your own hands. This is where true freedom lies.

### **I Must Make The Change I Want To See In My Relationships**

A relationship is not simply two separate individuals. It is a single unit comprised of two components. The components are in close interdependence. It is impossible for one component to change and for the other to remain the same. Any change by one partner will invariably affect the other.

When you recognize the power you have to influence the quality and direction of your relationships, you see that it is in your hands to guide the changes you wish to make. You cannot guide by demanding that your partner change. That aggressive approach will most likely create defensiveness and resistance. The most effective way that you can improve your relationships is by actually making the changes in yourself that you wish to see in the other person. If you wish your partner were more considerate of you, you must be more considerate of them. If you wish them to be more attentive to you, you must be more attentive to them. Appreciative, truthful, dependable, receptive, caring...your partner will find it easier to embody these qualities if you would lead the way. And they will certainly be less inclined if you don't lead the way. Holding back and waiting for them to change won't cut it.

Seeing love as an inside job and taking responsibility for your relationships is difficult, but it has tremendous rewards. You could bring all your relationships to a whole different level. Think about these ideas you've just read and try to make sense of them.

A word of caution. If you try taking 100% responsibility with the wrong person, (an axe murderer), or go about it without a loving heart, this could be the exact wrong thing to do. Implementing these ideas requires thoughtful consideration. More about pitfalls later.

## **Loving The One You're With**

Alice is not perfect. There are things about her that bother me, things that I wish were different. (I won't go into detail here). But I choose her as my lifelong love.

Some people hold the belief that for everyone there is a soulmate, a person who is the perfect partner, "The ONE" who will fulfill all their wants and dreams. They keep searching for "Ms. Right or Mr. Right and won't be satisfied till they find them. Even when in relationship, they can't get over the faults and imperfections they see in the person they are with and treat them as temporary until their true soulmate comes knocking. (What a safe way to protect themselves from the fear of giving themselves to love.)

I say don't withhold yourself until your "true love" shows up. Don't wait for perfection. It will never come. There are many soulmates, each different, each full with possibilities to expand you in many ways you can never imagine. I say choose love.

The one you are with may or may not be your permanent partner. No matter. Choose to love them with as much integrity, generosity and heart as you can muster. This doesn't mean playacting or trying to convince yourself or

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them that they are “the one.” Be honest. But know that working with the Loving Promises shouldn’t be reserved only for your permanent mate. The Promises are for your benefit. Practice them with everyone.

Your love is a gift. Even if you know for sure they are temporary, if you withhold your best loving self from the person who happens to be in your life, you cheat yourself as well as them. Nothing is lost, and there is much to gain, if you show up in your relationship as the best lover you can possibly be with the person you are with now. Love the one you’re with.

### Heroic Love

What kind of person is a hero?

Heroes are persons who are willing to become engaged in a challenging task that involves reaching deep inside themselves to find the courage and determination to overcome difficult obstacles.

A hero is sometimes afraid. A hero sometimes fails. A hero sometimes wants to give up. But they see their task as valuable to themselves and/or others, so they “bite the bullet,” push forward, and persevere.

Love is a worthy challenge for a hero. For a man to give himself over to love is to engage in a heroic pursuit. Loving deeply takes you out of your comfort zone and puts you in unknown territory. This is a land where you are not in control, where you don’t know the rules, where force is ineffective, where unfamiliar, disturbing emotions can sweep through you, and where you can be humbled and hurt. Love can be dangerous.

According to the late philosopher, Joseph Campbell, there are three main phases that occur in many ancient heroic myths, adventure stories, action movies and fairytales the world over. These phases can correspond with the struggles you may be undergoing in your effort to come to peace in your relationship and become a more loving man. You could conceive of your struggles as a *Heroic Journey*. The first stage of that Hero’s Journey is *Departure*. The hero, an ordinary man or woman, living in a safe, comfortable environment, is called to adventure because of some danger that threatens the peace of the community (a fearsome monster, an evil villain, an invading force). The hero accepts the challenge (sometimes reluctantly), and begins his journey by passing through a threshold from his safe, comfortable environment, into the unknown. Once in the dangerous forest, perilous sea, dark cave or enemy territory, the hero then begins his entrance into the next stage, *Initiation*. Here he is challenged and must encounter difficult trials, (do battle with dragons, monsters or powerful enemies, who sometimes are guarding valuable treasure, great wisdom or magical powers). After engaging in battle and vanquishing the enemy and obtaining their bounty, the hero is ready to enter the third stage, *Return*. He crosses back over the threshold to the safety of the known, bringing with him the treasure he had stolen. But he is not the same. By embarking on the Hero’s Journey and overcoming challenges, he returns with strength, confidence and wisdom and is able to live in the world as a new man.

It’s not too difficult to see how the Hero’s Journey fits in with your quest to become a more loving person.

Every day, your relationship can present you with difficult challenges for you to overcome. It’s a challenge to open yourself up and expose your weakness and vulnerability to your partner. It’s a challenge to tell the truth when you know it will cause her to be angry and upset. It’s a challenge to give up what you want so your mate can get what she wants. It’s a challenge to admit to her when you are wrong and make amends. It’s much easier to hide your feelings from your partner, be defensive, lie to her and try to manipulate. Doing so may allow you to escape an uncomfortable situation in the moment, but these are cowardly, unloving behaviors which will eventually strangle love. You will become a heroic lover only if you stand up and accept these challenges and again and again, choose to do the loving thing on your journey to love.

So be a hero. Sharpen your sword, strap on your armor, lift up your shield. There are dragons to be slain. But remember, the most ferocious dragons are not out in the world. They reside within you. The Hero’s Journey can be conceived as an internal voyage. The most important decision point in that Journey is in the initial *Departure* stage. Here is where you decide to set forth on the road to engage in battle with your inner demons. Those inner demons are your most dangerous dragon. To slay the dragon requires you to battle and subdue the demons of your own devious mind, your own fear, your own laziness, your own greed, your own out-of-control emotions. These internal dragons are so much more threatening and more difficult to fight than those outside yourself.

Note: in the *Departure* stage, before crossing the threshold, the hero sometimes meets a helper or mentor, often a crone or old man who provides him with an amulet, potion or magic phrase that will protect him on his journey.

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The Loving Promises can be that powerful amulet. I hope I can be that old guy for you who offers you the protective magic through the Loving Promises. Please receive it and use its power.

Remember that love is a call to courageous action. To answer that call is an adventure that requires a man to summon his warrior spirit. A man who commits to the Loving Promises is a hero.

## Expanding Loving Concern—From I, To US, To WE

When we love, we take on responsibility for the well-being of those we love. However, to be a responsible lover involves more than cultivating self-love and love of partner, family and friends. There's a whole big world out there that is suffering. The news media is filled with reports of mass shootings, child molestation, road rage, vandalism, sexual-harassment and domestic violence. The incidence of war, rape, crime, torture, genocide and terrorism are rising. Totalitarian regimes, economic inequality, racism, pervasive corruption, environmental destruction are rampant. The single most powerful causative factor is the dominance of "me, me, me." We are a species whose main concern is for our own well-being. We have grown to lack care for anyone other than ourselves and maybe family and a few close friends. To hell with those who are different from us or from another tribe or for those we see as in competition with us.

For literally half my life, my focus was on myself, on "I"—what do I want, what do I feel, what do I need, what can I get that will make me happy. It was as if nothing and nobody existed outside the circumference of my personal world. Then, in my late thirties, I fell in love with Alice. My focus became "US"—Alice and I as a couple, and our family and close friends. I sought to make myself and these few people more happy and secure. My love for Alice had opened my heart so that my loving concern could spread to those close to me. This new focus from "I" to "US" was a great leap away from my obsessive self-concern. It brought me to the next step in my growth in love.

As I have grown older, the focus of my love has expanded beyond "US," to concern for the well-being of the people and animals that populate the planet, and of the planet itself. I am no longer content to stand by and watch as greedy, uncaring people wreak pain and destruction on the world and its inhabitants. I am ready to break out of my comfortable shell, stand up and speak out for what I believe. I attempt to make a difference, to in some way help to reduce the suffering I see all around me. My concern has extended now to "WE." (This book and my previous two books reflect this change).

The movement from "I" to "US" to "WE" is characteristic of the maturation from child to adult. Childhood is almost exclusively self-concerned "I." It is a time to be taken care of by adults. As children grow to teens and early adulthood, they assume more caring and responsibility, not only for themselves, but also with family, friends and schoolmates. Responsibility grows as the person opens up to the world, earning a livelihood, creating an intimate bond with another person, forming a family, raising children. With children comes a desire to bequeath them a safer, more sustainable world. As we age, we view from a wider perspective. Having less "ME" and more "WE" makes it easier to see the pain in other's eyes and reach out our hand to help if we can.

In this modern world, events on the other side of the planet have implications at home. Pandemics, global warming and nuclear bombs have no respect for borders. For our survival as a species it is incumbent on us to adopt more of an awareness that we are a global family. This requires of us to take on responsibility for more than ourselves and the tight circle of our lovers, friends and immediate family. It requires that we expand our loving concern beyond the personal "I" and dyadic and familial "US," to include a global, "WE."

Donating our money and resources to a charity of our choice, volunteering our time to help those in need, becoming involved in causes that benefit humanity, or speaking and writing as I am doing, these are ways we can express our concern for the other, the stranger. Reaching out to extend our love in these ways benefits not only those we seek to help. Extending love deepens and strengthens the power of our own love. Acting from "WE" is another way we can grow in love, with our partner and with our selves.

*In times of deep darkness, we not only need light. We need to BE light for one another.*

Parker Palmer

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### Men And The Ills Of The World

The world is in terrible shape. The news media is filled with reports of mass shootings, child molestation, road rage, vandalism, sexual-harassment and domestic violence. The incidence of war, rape, crime, torture, genocide and terrorism are rising. Totalitarian regimes, economic inequality, racism, pervasive corruption, environmental destruction are rampant. The single most powerful causative factor is the dominance of “I.” We are a species whose main concern is for our own well-being. We have grown to lack care for anyone other than ourselves and maybe family and a few close friends. To hell with those who are different from us or from another tribe or for those we see as in competition with us.

Unfortunately, most of the individuals who wield power in the world today—the politicians, heads of industry and media, mostly come from a place of “I”, with very little “US”, and just a smattering of “WE.” These men (and they are mostly males), are willing to use lies, manipulation and intimidation to enforce their greed for profit and control. And they will do everything they can to fatten their enormous egos.

What can a person do, aside from the suggestions stated earlier, that will help to move the world from “I” to “We”? You could become a prophet, run for political office or become head of an international corporation, but these are unlikely to happen to us ordinary guys. The only thing I can think of that has a chance of working, is to love. Perfect the love you have for the one you are with, for the love you hold for your family, for the love of your friends. Perfecting your love for the intermediate “US” is, I believe, the essential step in helping humanity move from self-concern, to the caring concern for the stranger.

### How To Change Her

How would you like your partner to be different? Would you like her to respect you more? How about more sex? Do you want her to be less critical of you? Less irritable? Less demanding? More attentive to your needs?

You could try to reason with her, show her where she is wrong and politely request that she change. Or you could use a sneaky approach and subtly try to manipulate her. Or you could try an aggressive tack—demand she change by complaining, blaming and shaming her, or threatening to leave her if she doesn’t treat you differently. Or go into a passive waiting game, do nothing and expect her to make the changes you think she should make. But none of this will work. More than likely, actions like these will only leave you frustrated and make her upset, defensive and less likely to alter her behavior. The only way to make her change is for you to change.

She was probably not like this when you first got together and were courting. Over time, she became more irritable, bored, critical and sexually turned off to you as your relationship progressed. Could it be that the change in her behavior has something to do with you and with the way you are behaving in the relationship? If so, I’ll say it again. . .*The only way to get her to change is for you to change.*

Start by paying attention to what her behavior is trying to tell you. Don’t dismiss the way she is acting toward you as merely “irrational bitchiness,” manipulation or nit picking. Rather than assuming she’s the one who needs fixing, see her increased irritation, boredom, criticism and demands as a way she is communicating with you. Ask yourself, “*What is she trying to tell me?*” She may be letting you know where you need to wake up and make changes. Her behavior may be saying, “*You are not treating me respectfully. You are not present with me. You are not acting with integrity. You are not being the man you have the potential to be.*”

Take seriously your partner’s displeasure. Her feelings stem from her perception of what behavior you need to change in order for her to feel more loved by you. They may be indications of how you can come more fully into your masculine power. Evaluate, as best and unbiased as you can, the truth of those perceptions of hers. If you see where she is correct, make appropriate changes. Your sincere effort to be a better man and more loving partner (more lovable and love-able), will inspire changes in the way she treats you. That’s the way you change her. Taking responsibility for yourself is how you will come to be a responsible lover.

## BECOMING MALE

*At birth we were given a male body, but this does not automatically make us men. To be a man we must discover our manhood.*

### Being Shamed As Boys

*Aw. . .you're hurting. Too bad. Come on wimp. Suck it up!  
Don't act like a girl.  
Boys don't cry. Girls cry.  
Why would you want to be friends with a girl?*

You are a young boy, in grammar school or junior high. You want to be liked. You really want to be like the other kids. You don't want to stand out as different. But you are different. Your nature is that you are sensitive, aware of your feelings, and you feel empathy for others. You are a bit shy and socially awkward. You have friendships with several girls in your class. Sports are not your thing. . .you would rather study and do well in school. You are creative and enjoy activities like making art, writing or music.

If you are like this, you have two choices. You could give up your desire to fit in and become a member of the out-group of geeks and weirdos. Or you could hide who you really are and imitate the way the other boys act. Because you fear being publicly shamed and being ostracized, you, along with most boys, choose the second alternative. You betray your natural inclination, but you are accepted as one of the guys.

At your young age, you have no idea how dehumanizing and soul deadening that choice is. You abandon what feels right and natural for you, and you take on a persona that your peers and society prescribe. It's a notion of what it takes to be a "real" man, cobbled together from action movie heroes, violent video games and the beliefs about masculinity of a large segment of American males. As you grow to manhood, those beliefs remain embedded in your psyche, unquestioned, but strongly influencing your life choices and relationships. Many of those beliefs are toxic and drain aliveness from you and from those close to you.

*Q. When you were young, did you sacrifice your uniqueness in order to be liked?*

### The Ten Commandments of Toxic Manhood

There are rules for what it takes to be a "real" man. We learn them as children. They are mainly enforced by other boys and men. Some "man rules" are vital and life affirming, such as having integrity, working with diligence and seeking to protect those who cannot protect themselves. But many rules are destructive for self and others. These negative ones listed below can be termed "toxic" because they are poisonous to the men who follow them and to their partners.

1. **Thou Shalt Not Display Any Feelings Except Anger.** The expression of softer feelings, such as sadness, empathy and hurt should be suppressed. Especially tears.
2. **Thou Shalt Hide Thy Weakness, Exhibit Thy Strength.** Any sign of confusion, vulnerability, indecisiveness and mistakes should be hidden from others. Show only strength, competence and confidence.
3. **Thou Shalt Objectify Women.** You should see women as objects of sexual conquest and as trophies to show off (more beautiful, more voluptuous—bigger trophy).

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4. **Thou Shalt Not Be Dependent On Others.** Independence, strength and self-reliance are values to be admired. Don't trust. Don't need others. Don't ask for help.
5. **Thou Shalt Be Dominant.** You should be aggressive, compete, control, and win. To be a "loser" is a sin.
6. **Thou Shalt Not Be Gay Or Harbor Homosexual Thoughts.** "Fags," "fairies" and "homos" are poison and are to be avoided and to be ridiculed. Physical closeness to other males is forbidden.
7. **Thou Shalt Value "Manly" Things, While Devaluing Women's Ways.** Cars, sports, money, work and politics are the important things. Demean women's interests (relationships, appearance, caretaking, etc.) Relegate their duties to cooking, housework and childcare.
8. **Thou Shalt Not Reveal To Your Buddies That You Care About Relationships.** Discussions about love and relationship issues should be left for the women, not with male friends.
9. **Thou Shalt Never Be Afraid.** Always be decisive, bold, courageous. Take risks. Be stoic in the face of pain. Action movie heroes are your models of the way you should act when dealing with fear.
10. **Thou Shalt Be Conspicuously Successful.** You should surround yourself with evidence of your ability to perform—expensive objects, beautiful women, fast cars and rich and famous companions that show the world that you are a successful person.

What happens if you fail to abide by one or more of these toxic rules? If you have bought into the "man rules," the consequence of not following them is shame—either enforced by other men (who have accepted the rules), who humiliate you, bully you and exclude you, and/or by yourself, by belittling your own manhood.

What happens if you do abide by these man rules? By playing by these rules, you gain acceptance of other men (who likewise have accepted the rules). But you are fated to live your life in a straitjacket that constricts the ways you are able to act and what you are allowed to think and feel. Thus only a fraction of the full bounty of what life has to offer is available for you to experience.

*Q. Are there Commandments in this list that are active in your life? Which ones?*

## Becoming "Hardened"

Where do the Toxic Commandments come from? I believe they originate as an outgrowth of the traditional role males have always played at all times in every society—hunter and breadwinner, protector of the weak and helpless. By virtue of being larger and stronger, and having the right hormonal makeup, the task of "bringing home the bacon" and protecting home and country from outside threat has fallen to men. Men are to be the hunters and warriors; women, the lovers and caretakers.

What does it take to be a protector? You must be "hard." You must be able to endure pain without complaint. You must armor your body with muscle. You must be willing to follow the orders of your superiors without question. You must dampen down your emotions. You must devalue what is soft and feminine. You must be willing to kill. You must be willing to die. And, in order to show you are hard, you must "disappear" your fear. This is true. This describes the "perfect" warrior.

Ask any veteran who was involved in a firefight what he really felt at the time. I'll bet he wasn't a Rambo, running toward the enemy with guns blazing, making the world safe for democracy. More likely he was in terror. And his terror of exposing his fear to his buddies and being seen as a coward was probably greater than his fear of dying.

The fears men face in daily life are not so dramatic as those encountered in war, but they are more numerous and varied. Fear of speaking to groups in public, fear of not "performing" sexually, fear of screwing up in work or school, fear of being rejected by a woman, the list is endless. Failure at any one represents a failure on our part to be hard and therefore to be a "real man."

Hardness and valor are values our society promotes for men, especially for men whose job it is to protect, i.e., police and military. In the line of duty, hardness is an essential quality. Not so for the average guy in daily life. Yet hardness is still considered a necessary trait for men. But if, because a man is compassionate, because he is afraid, because he has moral objections, because by nature he is gentle, he refuses to take on society's values, he suffers. He suffers not only because other males will look down on him and exclude him from "the club." He suffers because

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there is some part of him that has bought into the John Wayne image of manhood, and he believes he has failed the test. And because he failed the manhood test, he experiences shame and feels as if he is an outsider, undeserving to be called a “real man.”

There is nothing wrong with being hard. In fact, much of the qualities of male hardness is necessary and worthy of admiration. But if a man is able, along with his hardness, to incorporate the “softness” of kindness, sensitivity and compassion into his character, he becomes a real “real man.”

## Calling Forth Our Lion

An authentic masculine man is hard. And he is soft. He’s able to call up his hardness when needed, and also allow his softness. I, like many men, find it easier to be soft. Being gentle and easy-going when there is no confrontation is not difficult. But when faced with provocation—a tough business negotiation, an angry, dominating customer, a bullying and unreasonable boss, a manipulative partner—it is probably not the best time to smile, be agreeable and try to be liked. It’s time to call up your fierce “lion.”

Our lion is the tough part of ourselves. He can get angry and express his righteous anger. He can growl and say “no” when pushed too far. In fact, the lion’s greatest power, is the power to say “no” . . . and mean it, and not have to explain why. He can demand his fair share. He can set limits and he can protect those limits. He can prowl around and survey conditions and take over when things are getting out of hand. All this is from his ability to say “no.”

The main thing that keeps our lion in his cage is fear. We are afraid the other person will retaliate, we are afraid that we will fail and look foolish, we are afraid that our emotion will overwhelm us, that the well of rage we have been holding back will burst out uncontrollably. These are real fears and not to be minimized. But if we are afraid, and unable to let our lion out, then we’ll say “yes” under any circumstances. The “yes” is our effort to be nice, to avoid conflict and discord. But we give ourselves away if all we can do is say “yes,” and cannot say “no.”

It’s important to remember our lion is not fearless. He gets afraid sometimes. Maybe his adversary is strong and cunning. Maybe our lion forgets how powerful he himself is and how dangerous are his fangs and claws. But even when afraid, the lion in us doesn’t run and hide. He doesn’t make excuses. He can stand his ground, confront his fear, feel it, engage with it, and move forward. This steadfast quality defines courage--to feel the fear, and do it anyway.

The more instances you call for your lion to come out from his cage, the stronger and more confident he becomes, and the stronger, more confident you are, and the more other people listen to you and respect you as the powerful being you are.

*Q. Can you recall a time when you let your lion out of his cage? What was it like for you?*

## The Authentic Masculine Man

Every man has within him a mix of both masculine and feminine energies in his personality makeup. It is possible however, for some men to identify with characteristics typically ascribed to one gender, to the near exclusion of the other. On one side of the continuum is the “macho” male, whose qualities that are usually considered masculine dominate, and the other side is the “sensitive” man, whose qualities that are usually considered feminine dominate.

### Overly Masculine Man

Dominant  
Competitive  
Numb to own feelings  
Conceals emotion  
Action oriented interests  
Deficient insight into others  
Hides weakness  
Self-concerned  
Rigid gender roles

### Overly Feminine Man

Passive  
Cooperative  
Sensitive to own feelings  
Expresses emotion  
Artistic/creative interests  
Intuitive of others  
Can expose weakness  
Nurturing of others  
Fluid gender roles

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Mostly male friends

Mostly women friends

At the extremes, the Over Masculine Man and the Over Feminine Man are caricatures. They are not full human beings because they do not have access to essential parts of themselves that can be found in the opposite. They cannot partake of the full spectrum of their humanity because they are “either/or” rather than “both/and.” Those at the extremes can be either dominant or passive, either competitive or cooperative, either self-centered or nurturing, etc., but not both.

There is a third option, the Authentic Masculine Man. A man who embodies his full masculinity is able to be both dominant and passive, competitive and cooperative, self-concerned and also nurturing of others. Having access to his feminine as well as masculine energies, he is able to experience all of himself—his strength as well as his gentleness, his sensitivity as well as his power.

Unlike the other two types of men, who are limited in their ability to take action in accordance with the demands of the situation, the Authentic Masculine Man is free to act in appropriate ways in any situation. There are places and times when it is appropriate to be dominant, other times when it is appropriate to be passive, times when it is appropriate to be competitive, other times when it is appropriate to be cooperative. The Authentic Masculine Man is free to choose the course of action that fits with the situation he is faced with.

A man becomes more authentic by loosening his rigid ideas of what it means to be a male human being. He begins to open himself to appreciate the parts of his personality that he had previously rejected and/or neglected. He appreciates and fully embraces his masculine and feminine sides and becomes free to express both.

When a man is comfortable in his full masculinity, his male energy can stimulate his female partner to bring out her authentic femininity. Women also have their extreme gender characteristics, from the overly feminized women (compliant, emotional, timid) at one end of the continuum, to the overly masculinized woman (dominant, aggressive, highly competitive) at the other end. In the presence of an Authentic Masculine Man, a woman can more easily come to balance with her full, authentic feminine energies. She can surrender to her man, as well as assert her authority, she can serve him, as well as make sure her own needs are met. This freedom to be an Authentic Feminine Woman can occur naturally in the empowering, accepting, loving presence of an Authentic Masculine Man.

*Q. Where do you fall on the Overly Masculine, Overly Feminine scale? A rating of #1 is extreme masculine traits, #10 is extreme feminine traits.*

### Toward Authentic Masculinity

From the foregoing, it is an obvious benefit for an Overly Masculine Man to begin to engender more feminine qualities, and an Overly Feminine Man to begin to engender more masculine qualities. “Engender” means to cultivate the qualities that will make him more balanced, more complete, rather than eliminate those he already has.

Masculine qualities tend to be useful in areas like business, sports and the workplace, where passivity, exposing weakness etc., can be detrimental. In relationships though, masculine qualities of stoicism, competition and domination don’t work well for creating good, enduring partnerships. So what can a man with unbalanced masculine/feminine energies begin to do in order to move himself toward the equilibrium of being an Authentic Masculine Man?

For example, perhaps your exaggerated self-concern and lack of generosity are causing difficulties between you and your partner. Take the time to examine how your efforts to be the Boss, the one who is in control and whose needs come first, is affecting her and the relationship. Don’t just think about this. Allow yourself to feel the pain and dissatisfaction your bossing behavior is causing both of you. Decide which behaviors are creating the most dissonance. Which ones would you want to diminish? Which ones would you want to emphasize? Choose some specific behavioral changes you know will make a difference, behavior changes you know you can do, and experiment.

Let’s use some examples from mealtimes. Do you expect to be served, then gobble up your food? Experiment with a new policy of serving your partner at meals or at least waiting for her to serve herself before you start to dig in. Wait till she is ready so you can begin to eat together. Do you grab for the largest piece of dessert? Make a vow to ask what she wants or divide the dessert equally. Do you read or watch TV during meals? Make a commitment to engage

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her in conversation during every meal—not about you—about her. Do you expect her to clean up while you sit at the table picking your teeth? Commit to wash the dishes and cooking utensils after every meal.

These are not difficult changes to make. They don't take a lot of time and energy, and they don't make you any less of a man. But these behaviors send a strong signal. Your partner will be aware of your willingness to act differently and will appreciate your effort. Simple changes like these in your behavior can make a difference in your relationship.

*Q. What Over Masculine or Over Feminine traits are part of your personality that are causing difficulties in your life and relationships? If you would like to modify those traits toward more Authentic Masculinity, what changes in behavior would you make?*

## Bad Guys

In our culture we tend to admire “alpha” males, men who are powerful, focused, persistent, unafraid to take the lead and willing to go after what they want. But alpha has its shadow side, and that shadow can take the form of a “bad” guy or a villain.

I think many of us guys, even “nice” guys, secretly identify on some level with the tough guy image of the villain. He's the dude in the black hat who comes on the scene and inspires fear in the ordinary townsfolk. He's rough and tumble and doesn't give a damn whether people like him or not. He doesn't care to play by the rules. . .he makes up his own rules. He just wants to get his own way and doesn't care who he stomps on in order to get it. This is an image of a certain type of power and indicates a freedom from the constraints of “normal” society. Many men (and women), find this aggressive power attractive. The wildness and unpredictability of these bad boys is in bold contrast with the polite, comfy, work-a-day world that most of us inhabit, a world characterized by safety, security and elimination of unanticipated events.

Does this description of bad guys seem familiar to you? Are there elements you find attractive? Have you fantasied about occupying the bad guy role? Have you actually played out those fantasies? It might be useful if you examined your thoughts and feelings to see if you have some bad boy inclinations. If so, it would certainly impact your relationship if you played them out.

It's no secret that many women are attracted to bad boys. These men often display confidence and masculinity. They are not afraid to break the rules, they don't seek other's approval, they are not needy, they tend to lead interesting, unconventional lives and they are not afraid of a fight. You can see how a woman could feel protected by a bad boy, not so much by a “nice guy.”

However, in relationship with their women, bad guys might demand obedience. They can be tyrannical. It's not unusual for them to expect and demand their women to serve them. At times they may reject, show disinterest and “play rough” with their partners emotions, and sometimes even their bodies. Some women are turned on by this kind of wildness in their mate. In contrast to the quiet, settled, predictable “nice guy,” they are excited by bad boy power. The feeling of being “owned” by a powerful male they find appealing. They may even revel in uproar and be stimulated by arguments and enjoy the challenge of conflict and confrontation. While these kinds of turbulent relationships can be exciting and perfectly acceptable for some couples, they are not what the Loving Promises are about.

The abusive power of aggression can be confused with the power of assertion. It is an admirable quality in a man to be assertive in the world and in his relationships. An assertive man is not afraid to ask for and even demand what is due him. He is honorable toward others and cognizant of their feelings, even when taking a strong stand. Not so with an aggressive bad boy. He will stomp on others' feelings and take what he wants. And he is not reluctant to use fear and intimidation to get his way. This is the opposite of the meaning and aim of the Promises, which is to help a person cultivate love and spread kindness to everyone they meet.

Kindness can easily co-exist with assertion. Aggression has no place for kindness.

*Q. Answer the questions posed in the third paragraph. What are your thoughts about “bad boys?” Are you attracted to some aspects of being a “maverick” or a “villain?” Have you played this out in the past? What did it feel like?*

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### A Cool Dude

Across different time periods, what do the actors Humphrey Bogart, Marcelo Mastroianni, Steve McQueen, Sean Connery, George Clooney, Ryan Gosling have in common?

They, or at least the characters they portray in film, come off as “cool.”

I remember, as a teenager, sitting in the movie theater, watching the Italian movie, *La Dolce Vita* (The Sweet Life), and knowing without a doubt, I want to be like Marcelo Mastroianni. He was so cool. Skinny, clumsy, shy, tongue tied, sensitive, unsophisticated, I was the opposite of cool. (Still am). I’m sure most other young men secretly admired and wanted to emulate the quality of cool that these actors exhibited and even tried to copy their speech and style. But it’s not easy to be cool if you’re not.

What is this elusive quality of cool? What do cool guys do that makes them cool? Cool guys are sure of themselves, they’re independent and don’t need others, they are not in awe of authority and don’t have to please, they don’t crave power, but they have it, they’re successful, but they don’t try hard, they don’t brag, they’re composed even when things get out of hand and they don’t get flustered. Cool guys are cool.

Cool guys may have cool possessions. They may own an exotic car, a Jaguar or Mercedes, a beach house in Malibu and an apartment in London. They may sport expensive clothes, and be perfectly coifed. They may have a “trophy wife” or a beautiful girlfriend, maybe two or three (cool guys value their freedom and don’t like to be tied down). Or they may have none of this. It doesn’t matter to them. They’re cool.

Cool is disengaged. Cool is not caring. But living an authentic life requires you to be engaged, requires you to care. Caring can hurt sometimes. Yes, holding yourself back protects you, but cool can be a front that keeps you apart from others, and others apart from you.

I’m not cool and never have been. I want to be liked. I get hurt. I get confused, make stupid mistakes and try to hide them. Sometimes I crack jokes that aren’t funny. I say dumb things sometimes, or stand there and don’t know what to say. I’m impressed by famous people. I drive a 12 year old Toyota. I have a modest house and an old wife and love both. And while I would like to be cool sometimes, I can’t do it. It’s just not me.

Alice likes me this way. She’s not cool either.

*Q. Are you a cool guy? If not, do you want to be?*

### On Not Asking For Help When You Need It

We’ve all done these kinds of things at one time or another. We’re driving the car, lost in an unfamiliar town, but we are reluctant to listen to our “back seat driver’s” directions. We struggle while carrying a too heavy load and yet we are reluctant to ask for help. We are hiking uphill with friends and are reluctant to request a rest break, even though we are out of breath and our legs hurt.

What’s going on? Why are many of us guys reluctant to accept advice or ask for help? Is there meaning behind our reluctance?

Speaking for myself, the times I have to ask someone for help, I feel weak or dumb or needy, I feel embarrassed that I am unable to do for myself. I think I am not alone in this. Like most boys growing up male in our society, we are told to “be a man,” be independent, don’t show weakness or confusion. When we need to ask for help, it is a reminder that, in a way, we are failing as a man. It is a confirmation that we are weak and confused and dependent. The act of asking for help is itself a humbling experience. Unfortunately, our reluctance to ask for help when needed puts us in a bind. If we need help but can’t ask for it, our chances of really screwing up are increased. Then we are in real trouble.

Aside from receiving the help you need when you ask for it, there can be positive results from the process of asking and receiving. When you ask, you are coming into honest human relationship with the other person. You are exposing the truth of your vulnerability. Your asking another person is a tacit complement. Behind your words you are saying, “I trust you with my vulnerability. I value your strength and your opinion.” This has to feel good to that person. It makes them feel useful, empowered. It allows them the precious opportunity to be kind. So, in a sense, asking for a favor is a feel-good gift to the one who is being asked.

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If you are in a situation where the familiar reluctance to ask for help comes up, listen to the voices going on in your mind. Listen for the self-blame, the put-down, the desire to not be seen by others as stupid, weak or uninformed, your desire to be seen as a man who is in control. Note these thoughts and feelings. . .and ask anyway. By ignoring the ego driven voice that seeks to make you seem more manly, your reality-based voice who is unafraid to ask for help is the real man.

*Q. Are you reluctant to ask for help sometimes? Why?*

## Tears

Tears are not cool. Do you remember being told as a boy, “Grown men don’t cry?” And old-fashioned adult men didn’t. Crying is seen by many as weakness. It shows vulnerability. Not wanting to be a “crybaby,” we stoically held back and pushed down healthy but painful emotions that demanded to be released. Tears are at the center of many of those emotions, yet we were warned not to express them. If we did cry, we certainly didn’t do so in public. How many pillows have been soaked by boys and men who waited until they were alone before they could weep?

The water of tears is cleansing. It has the ability to begin the process of washing away the sadness of a broken heart, the tension of frustration, the sting of physical pain, the unbearable grief of loss. Without the ability to express these intense feelings, we suppress them, internalize them, dull them with alcohol and drugs. We can go for a walk, work out at the gym or watch TV with a beer in our hand, but that won’t do it. Our unwept tears will take their toll on our body’s health, our mind’s health, the health of our relationships, or even our very life. Suicide is among the leading cause of death for men, and males are three to four times more likely than women to kill themselves. I suspect many of the men who commit suicide do so because of unwept tears.

Tears can heal. I’ll never forget the moment that the divorce from my second wife became final. Sitting in my car in the parking lot of the government offices, holding the final dissolution papers in my hand, I experienced the deepest grief I had ever known. The end of years of love and pain, joy and bitterness, irrevocably documented by the legal document in my hands. The finality made real in black and white. My hope for a loving, lasting marriage dashed forever.

The dam broke. Deep sobs racked my body. A lifetime of held back tears flowed from my eyes and down my cheeks. I wailed from a deep, animal part I never knew I had within me. After a few minutes, the tears began to abate. There was a clearing, like the sun emerging from behind a cloud. I took a breath and felt lighter, as if a weight had been lifted. The tears helped to cleanse the sadness I had been holding, and began to allow an opening for the next phase of my life to begin.

*Q. As an adult, have you ever wept uncontrollably? What was that like for you? Was there a time as an adult you held back tears? What was that like?*

## Competing Against Other Men

One of the basketball greats, I think it was Ervin “Magic” Johnson, talking about competition, said he relished playing opposite great players, even those more skilled than himself. The competition drove him to excel, to put in maximum effort and be the best he could be. He was talking about competing *with* other players. The athletes were joyfully engaging with each other, driving each other to play at the top of their game.

There is another kind of competition, and that is competing *against* others. There is a world of difference between them. When competing against others, the effort is to win, to dominate, to prove how great you are. It’s not about playing the game well, it’s about coming out on top.

What might be the motivation of a person who tries to compete against other men? I would guess that a man who feels he has to be stronger, richer, smarter, more skilled than other men feels in some way that he is weaker, poorer, dumber and less skilled than those he competes against. He compares himself, and when he finds himself lacking, compensates by trying to rise above the other, or put the other down. There’s not a lot of joy in this. When he wins, he might feel the lift of momentary “manly” pride. If he loses, he has failed to validate his manliness. He can become

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disheartened, because this confirms his belief that he is weaker, dumber and less skilled. But there is still the constant comparison with other men, always trying to come out on top.

Wanting to be the best at what you do is a noble pursuit. The desire to be the best is so much more satisfying when you are competing within yourself, rather than competing against others.

*Q. In which areas of your life do you compete with other men? Is your competition “with” or “against?” Describe how it feels when you “lose.”*

### Competing Against Yourself

Competing with or against other men is one way of proving your skill and defining your manhood. Another way is competing against yourself. With this type of competition, you pit your grit and courage against some activity that challenges you to overcome fear. Some men engage in risky physical activity, such as cliff climbing, motorcycle racing or jumping out of an airplane with a parachute. Facing a dangerous undertaking, tests their skill. Confronting their fear tests their courage. The adrenaline rush is addictive and nothing else makes them feel more alive. If they survive, they have proven themselves, and the world knows they are manly men.

I'll never forget going to a bullfight in Portugal, where the goal of the fighters was to wrestle a full grown, 2000-pound bull to the ground with their bare hands. A group of eight men, called Forcados, stand in line in front of an enraged bull, with no protection or weapons. The front man provokes the bull to charge and tries to secure his head while the others try to wrestle the animal into submission. What usually happens is the bull tosses the fighters into the air as if they were dummies and tries to gore and trample them before finally being subdued. Imagine being the first in line. He is surely courageous, or stupid, or both.

There are other, non-physical ways of facing danger and measuring your courage. One is to become a *psychonaut*, a person who dives deep within himself to confront the unknown that dwells inside his own mind. For a man to explore and wrestle with his fear, grief, despair, loneliness and shame is surely a challenge as full of danger as facing an enraged bull. He faces the possibility of opening painful wounds that he has held in his subconscious since childhood. He is a courageous man.

Celibacy, meditation, prayer, yoga, restricted diet, fasting, extended silent retreats, conforming to strict moral constraints and adherence to an austere monastic daily regimen are some of the challenges a serious explorer of the soul sets for himself. These spiritual activities require a degree of discipline few men can attain. The search for God and enlightenment is not for sissies, and a spiritual explorer is a man to be admired.

There are other ways a man can define his manhood through pitting himself against some difficult activity. He can, like Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr., overcome popular resistance and devote himself to a cause that benefits others. Or he can take on an ambitious project that requires diligence and discipline over a period of time in order to come to successful completion. Men such as Henry Ford and Steve Jobs come to mind. Gandhi, King, Ford and Jobs were giants, but the person who takes on fighting corporate greed in order to protect his neighborhood from environmental pollution, or the guy who works out of his garage in the hours after his day job in order to get his startup on track also fall in this category. They too are competing against themselves. They are willing to risk failure, encounter their self-doubt and the doubt and the derision of others, overcome laziness and power through their vision to completion.

A person who courts the danger of exploring the dark crevasses of his mind or scaling the steep mountains of his soul, or who devotes himself to some noble cause or to accomplishing a difficult project, is courageous. He is as brave as anyone who challenges himself with physical tests, and is fully entitled to be called a manly man.

*Q. Are there ways you challenge yourself with a difficult goal or activity? Describe.*

### In The Company of Men

In many so called “primitive” cultures, there were ceremonies that celebrated or facilitated a person’s graduation from one status to another, such as the initiation from adolescence to adulthood or adult to elder. For men, these

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ceremonies were usually conducted exclusively by and with males, often in groups, and they usually required the exclusion from women for an extended period of time. There was good reason for this. The exclusive presence of men lent special meaning and importance to the ceremony. It meant that the initiates were officially welcomed into a fraternity of equals.

For years I was active in the men's movement of the 80s and 90s, both as a leader and a participant. It was therapeutic for me to be in the presence of other men, often in nature and often absorbed in doing the things that guys enjoy doing. Our gatherings and consciousness raising groups were very different than just a bunch of guys lounging around, drinking beer and talking sports. (Although that kind of camaraderie can be fun and enlivening and provide a man a special sense of community.)

In our men's group, we were willing to be honest, about ourselves and about each other. The atmosphere of safety and the rule of strict confidentiality made it more easy for us to speak our truths and reveal our vulnerable hearts to each other. We were a diverse group of men; a lawyer, psychiatrist, builder, teacher, several psychotherapists and one who was of indeterminate employ. But we were also the same—sons, fathers, husbands, lovers and friends, who had shared similar experiences as we grew up, went to school, discovered girls and experienced freedom and trepidation as we separated from family and embarked on a life path in the world. We were kindred spirits and we understood each other in ways no woman could. If we needed counsel, we knew we would get the truth from our brothers. If one of us was off track, the others could help set him straight. . .without blame and without pussyfooting around. Sometimes only men can do that with each other.

Drinking in and absorbing the masculine presence of a group of guys—the honesty, the competition, the humor, the raw physicality, was a breath of fresh air. For years we laughed, fought, wept, played and shared secrets together. It would not have been the same if there was even one woman in the group—that would have changed the energy in the same way that a man's presence would change the energy in a woman's group.

Here in our group, I was able to feel like a man among men, a brother among brothers, accepted for who I was, and accepted for who I wasn't. For the first time in my life I felt I had become a member of a tribe. Thank you, Riley, Howard, Ron, John, Akasha, Richard and Ken.

The masculine healing from the men's group lasted far beyond the hours we spent together. I was able to bring home to Alice the energy I received from my participation in the group, and it served to refresh and enliven our relationship. Being in the group helped straighten my relationships with my father, brother, boss and really, all men in my life. Women too. It served as a catalyst to help my manhood to solidify. I was able to relate more to the world from that solid, masculine place because of the growth I experienced in the group.

A fulfilling relationship with a good woman is a wonderful thing, but it isn't everything. Men have a need that even the best relationship could never satisfy, the need for male community. I believe that most men would benefit from spending extended time exclusively among their own kind, as would women. . .as long as at least some of that time was characterized by honesty, affection and goodwill.

*Q. Do you devote some time for exclusive male group companionships outside of work? Would you say that your interactions with these men are characterized primarily by honesty, affection and goodwill?*

## Finding Models for Manhood.

### The lion cub and sheep. *A Hindu Fable*

*There was once a young lion cub who became lost from his group. He wandered till he found a herd of sheep. Taken in as a member of the herd, he soon adopted the ways of the sheep, eating grass, making a bleating sound like a sheep and being terrified of the predators that occasionally threatened the herd. One day, several lions were out hunting and came across the herd of sheep. The head lion was curious when he saw the cub grazing with the sheep. He pursued and caught the terrified animal and said, "Why are you among the sheep? You are a lion, king of the jungle. Look at my fur, look at my claws, look at my fangs, hear my roar. You're the same as me." The young lion recognized himself in the adult lion. He followed the lions back to their den and let out the best roar he could manage as he found his place as a member of the lion clan.*

The best way to learn to be a good man is to have had a good man in your life as you were growing up. That man would serve as your model of what it takes to be a good man. You would have experienced how he took on responsibility, how he treated women respectfully, how he cared for parents, how he handled his business

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relationships, how he held integrity and how he behaved as a caring husband and father. Unfortunately, many of us have had faulty masculine models—fathers who were absent, angry, abusive and addicted. These were men who were difficult to respect because, in important ways, they had not earned our respect. They could not serve as models of authentic manhood.

As we were growing up, we couldn't rely on our friends to help guide us on how to become an authentic male. They were usually as clueless as we were. Our early relationships with girls were probably like the blind leading the blind (unless the girls had healthy male models of their own and could communicate their expectations to us). Entertainment and mass media were no help. Violent action movie heroes, male chauvinists, sexual predators, unethical politicians and greedy corporate heads provide the worst males we could emulate.

Many of us were left to discover our maleness on our own through a process of trial and error, a sometimes painful and ineffective way to learn. If you lack a model of authentic masculinity, you must consciously create one by yourself. This might entail devoting time to studying and contemplating the human qualities you would need to embody as a good man, a loving partner and a honorable human being. You could search for positive male models among men you know or public figures you admire. You may find those models in a men's group or men's fraternal organization, or connect with them through your religious group. They are out there. You will find them if you look.

Once you are fortunate to find models of good men, do all you can to be around them as much as you can in order to learn from them. Listen to them, and most important, observe what they do and how they treat others.

There is an old rabbinic tale. *The devotee of a famous rabbi was asked about the rabbi's basic teachings. The devotee replied, "I do not hang around to listen to his teachings. I am there to watch how he ties his shoes."* A good man's actions are what speaks most loudly. Watch what he does as well as what he says. And give more credence to what he does.

Building your own model of authentic masculinity won't happen automatically. It will take conscious effort, conscious choice. With time, the effort will pay off. The good man model you adopt will become part of you. Once you have integrated that model in your mind and heart, you will have a built in blueprint to continually guide you on your path to becoming the man you want to be.

**Q.** *If you lacked a male model, what was your source for learning to be a man?*

*Is there currently a man in your life you look up to as a model? What qualities he possesses do you appreciate the most?*

### Fathers

You probably learned a great deal about how to love and how to be in relationship from observing your father or the father figure in your life.

What was he like with your mom? Did he treat her with respect or did he belittle her? Was he demanding of her or was he generous? Was he physically close with her or did they rarely make contact? When he spoke to her did he use kind words or was he gruff and dismissive? Did he react with anger or was he patient and understanding with her?

What was he like with you? Did he spend time with you or was he absent much of the time? When he was with you, was he present or was his attention elsewhere? Did he express interest in your life or did you feel he didn't really care? Was he often critical of you or was he free with expressions of appreciation? Did he demonstrate his love for you by hugging and kissing you or was he reserved when it came to physical contact?

Your father, if he was present, or the father figure you had growing up, was your first model of what it was to be a man. The way he behaved toward your mom, your siblings and yourself set the patterns for your own behavior in relationship. For better or worse, these patterns are deeply imbedded in your psyche. Even now they affect your relationship—what you expect from your partner, what you demand from her, the ways you communicate with her and how much of yourself you are willing to share with her

Though your father's way of being in relationship may have influenced how you think, feel and behave in your relationship with your partner, it doesn't determine the form that relationship will take. You've grown up in different times and have had different experiences from your father and these experiences have changed you. Also, you possess free will. You can make choices as to the way you want to show up in the world and how you want your partnership to be. You are able to engage in practices that can change how you think, how you feel, and how you behave with your partner. These practices can have a profound effect on all your relationships, not just with the woman in your life.

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Exercising your free will and practicing becoming a more loving and lovable human being is what the Loving Promises is all about.

**Q.** Answer the questions posed in the second and third paragraphs. What do you feel like when you answer? How has the way your father was with you and your mother influenced how you are with intimate partners? If you grew up without a father or father figure, what was it like for you to read this section? Do you feel a loss?

### Masculine Influence On Sons: Then and Now

There have been dramatic changes in Western culture in regards to how boys are exposed to the adult males that form their sense of what it is to be a man.

#### Then

In the past, fathers worked at home on the farm or in their shop where they plied their craft. From an early age, sons spent significant time around their fathers, where they helped out or were taught the trade. Sometimes sons were sent off for apprenticeship with another man for a period of time, so they could in turn learn to become a tradesman or master craftsman. Fathers and older males were the teachers and leaders of their sons.

#### Now

With the coming of the Industrial Age, men (and sometimes mothers), work in factories, shops or offices. They leave the home early in the morning to go to work, and return after dark, hungry and exhausted. In some households, fathers are ghost figures, rarely seeing and interacting with their children. That's if the family remains together, and doesn't consider children losing fathers to divorce, desertion and death. In some families, even if the father is physically present, he is often emotionally distant. The average child experiences face-to-face interactions with their father for 37 minutes a week. That compares to 44 hours per week they spend on screen time.

In the absence of fathers, the majority of children grow up around their mothers or female caretakers if mothers work outside the home. When they become old enough for grammar school, almost all of their teachers are women (one male teacher for every nine female teachers). If there is a divorce, in most instances the child ends up living with the mother, with the father having periodic visitation rights. In their impressionable formative years, children are surrounded by women. The effect is less telling on the girls, whose model of womanhood is front and center. But where can a boy learn to be a man?

Is it any wonder that sons are confused about what it means to be a man when the most important male influence in their life is absent. Women cannot provide modeling for manhood. Only a man can, a good man who is present physically and emotionally. And without a dad or male caretaker who is present to share with them what it means to be a man, boys have to try to work it out for themselves. How do they do that? They devour the shit our culture and the popular media feeds them about manhood and use that as their model. The result is a disaster.

The statistics about the effect on children in fatherless homes are astounding.

- 68% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes. 5 times the average.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes. 32 times the average.
- 85% of children with behavior disorders are from fatherless homes. 20 times the average.
- 80% rapists with anger issues are from fatherless homes. 14 times the average.
- 71% of high school dropouts are from fatherless homes. 9 times the average.
- 75% of adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers are from fatherless homes. 10 times the average.
- 85% of all youths in prison are from fatherless homes. 20 times the average.

These statistics are for both males and females. They are even more astounding when females are not included.

### If You Need to Forgive Your Father

When my father was on his deathbed, I was fortunate to be with him right before he died. We had an intense connection. I held his hand and spoke directly to him. "Dad, you were a wonderful father to me. Your hard work made

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my life easier. I learned so much from you. I appreciate everything you did for me and will never forget you. I love you and know you love me. Your love lives on in me.” He heard me, smiled and nodded, and died peacefully the next day.

The difficult work of forgiving and being forgiven is best done far in advance of the end of life. Fortunately for my father and I, that had happened years earlier. With the passage of time, we had either spontaneously released or shared our blame, accusations and recriminations, and ultimately granted forgiveness. Our being clean with each other now, with no lingering resentment and unexpressed anger, allowed me to clearly, honestly speak of my love and appreciation for my father in his last moments, and for him to receive. This was precious for us both.

A man’s relationship with his father is one of the most important of his life. Some fathers’ behavior though, has been so destructive in their relationship with their sons and/or the rest of the family, that it would be extremely difficult to forgive him or even to contemplate forgiving him. Though this might be difficult, it is not impossible. There is almost always room for forgiveness.

If there is any possibility at all, try to feel forgiveness for this man. Realize that no matter what harm he had done, he’s only human, suffering through life and doing the best he could with what he had been given. Ultimately, you have a choice. In one hand, you are holding on to your hurt, blame and anger toward him. In the other hand, you hold love and forgiveness. To move forward you must choose.

You don’t have to lie or minimize the effect of his actions, you don’t have to deny the hurt you feel. You don’t have to like him, you don’t have to be with him. He may not even still be alive. No matter. If you are able to let go of your burden you will feel relief. Your forgiveness frees you. So, if you can, choose love. However, if you are not ready, you are not ready, and that’s OK. The pain you feel may be too overwhelming. His behavior may have been too monstrous. Know though, on the other side of blame and judgement, can lie a lifting of heaviness and sense of relief.

If and when you are feeling genuine forgiveness, and sense he might be ready to receive your truth, get one-on-one with your father. Speak from your heart. Tell him you are ready to let go of the past and forgive him for things he might have done that hurt you. Even better, maybe much better, by yourself or with professional help, work through your own pain. Examine the barriers that prevent you from feeling compassion for your father and prevent you from granting him forgiveness.

By doing this personal work, you may not even need to trouble your father with your judgements or deal with his remorse or his defensiveness. Resist the temptation you may have to hurt him or to exact retribution. You might even consider turning the tables and asking him to forgive you for anything you might have done to hurt him in the past or caused him distress. If it is true, tell him you appreciate what good he’s done and the beneficial effect it has had on your life.

This is hard, hard work. It may take a long period of preparation. Forgiveness of this magnitude is a spiritual path. It takes a certain readiness to be able to travel this difficult high road. Embarking on this journey of forgiveness is not for everyone. If you are not ready, there is no blame. However, if you are willing and ready, don’t put it off. Do this soon, before he dies. It can be a healing moment for both of you. If not for both, at least for you.

We have a friend, the renowned psychic, Gary Spivey, who demonstrated the power of forgiveness with his father. Gary’s father was patently evil with him. He forced Gary to work as a young child, put him down, beat him with a thorn switch, abused his mother, even shot his beloved dog in front of him as punishment. At one point, in his early teens, when his father was physically assaulting his mother, Gary got his gun and was ready to kill him, only to be stopped by his mother at the last moment.

As an adult, Gary sensed the effect of the hate he was carrying around and realized the necessity of forgiveness. In his father’s later years, Gary was kind towards him. He bought him a house, took care of his medical bills, made sure he was safe and well taken care of. His father never took responsibility for his behavior, never asked for forgiveness or expressed appreciation for the kindness Gary had shown him—until the day before he died.

Gary didn’t need any of this from his father. Gary is a happy guy. He releases blame and doesn’t hold resentment. That’s one of the reasons he’s happy.

### If You Need to Confront Your Father

The internal process of forgiving a person who has wronged you can lighten your load of hate and blame. But what if, in order to serve your father’s best interests, and also your own, expressing forgiveness is not what is needed. What if you’re holding an overwhelming load of hurt. What if what will lessen that load is to confront your father

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with the truth of the evil he created. This can serve him by forcing him look at his actions. It can afford him the opportunity to see how his greedy, hurtful behavior had affected those he loved. If he were able to understand what he had done, he would now be in position to admit culpability, and if appropriate, apologize and offer to make amends. What a powerful healing this could be for him and you. However, this may be asking too much of him. Few people are able to even stand still to listen to truth about their bad behavior and its effects, much less absorb it. But at least the opportunity is there.

It is more likely that the greater benefit of truth-telling will accrue to you. This could be like lancing a boil, which releases infection and allows healing to begin. Finally breaking your silence and speaking your truth can free pent-up energies. It can be an empowering experience for you. But it can devolve into an angry interchange, full of blame and defensiveness. “You did this. . .No I didn’t,” “You didn’t do that. . .Yes I did.” The result could be a tug-of-war where there is no progress, no benefits, and both father and son come away feeling angry, blamed, hurt and misunderstood.

Confronting a parent about past misdeeds is not something to be taken lightly. Like offering them forgiveness, it is a difficult, sensitive and complex undertaking, an undertaking that most likely entails deep emotional work. To be productive, it often may require a period of care full (full of care) preparation. Baby steps may be in order. Contemplate and try to get clear about your feelings, about what happened, about what you want to happen. Talk past history with other family members and enlist their support. Make sure your intention is for benefit, not revenge or to hurt. Write a heartfelt letter. . .don’t send it. Write another. Extend an invitation to your father for a time to sit down and talk. Get his agreement. You don’t want to blind-side him. Possibly you’ll need support. Maybe some professional guidance would be useful before the confrontation, maybe during, maybe after. Don’t minimize how important this moment can be.

## The Pressure To Be Perfect

Many of us, both men and women, have carried a burden since childhood. We’ve often been told by our teachers, parents and authorities in our culture to “Be special, stand out from the crowd. Be somebody.” So we do what we can to avoid the scourge of being a “nobody.”

Though today, women can become special through their own skills and intelligence, what it takes to be “somebody” still usually differs for men and women. Especially in the past, women became special by being beautiful, charming, sexy, efficient homemakers and generous family caregivers. And they established their elevated status by marrying someone special.

It is different for males. Performance is usually the sole test for specialness. As boys and men, we have had certain expectations placed upon us because of our gender. For some of us, those expectations were powerful demands. Be good at sports, or at least be knowledgeable about teams and athletic stars. Know how to do some home and auto maintenance and repair. Be competitive at school and work. Be confident with the opposite sex. Don’t let yourself be bullied by anyone. Be strong and able to carry heavy objects. Be expert or at least competent at many things, the more, the better. You will be judged by how much money you make, so earn lots, and you will be judged by the “man toys” you possess, so acquire many. Those of us who didn’t get with the program were excluded from the club or considered outsiders, not “real men”.

At first, these expectations and demands to be special came from outside us, from parents, friends and society. Very early on though, we co-opt and internalize them. They become demands we place on ourselves. We try our best to fulfill these demands because we want the acceptance and admiration of others, and we want to feel good about ourselves. Also, there are very real rewards that can be obtained by working to fulfill the demands—money, status, access to beautiful women, respect of other men, and the opportunity to live “the good life.”

Some of us go to the extreme and carry the burden of perfectionism—we have to be good, very good, at everything, or almost everything. If not, we judge ourselves, put ourselves down, force ourselves to try harder, be better. If we fail or make a mistake, we obsess about it, beat ourselves up, become depressed and morbidly self-critical. It’s not that we try so hard in order to excel for the sake of excellence, rather, we might push ourselves in order to avoid feeling the sting of being a failure. Or we push in order to avoid others seeing us as a failure. So we drive ourselves and work to acquire the symbols of success—money, position of authority, expensive toys, the “right” friends—so that everyone, including ourself, will know that we have it made.

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We look around and see other guys with their important jobs, expensive cars and beautiful girlfriends hanging on their arms. We compare ourselves to them, without considering that they too may be putting on a display to prove their perfection and worthiness. Yet their “props” of success are no guarantee of happiness, as the myriads of unhappy, successful men attest. Real success comes from doing things that fuel your passion, satisfy your curiosity, serve others, give you joy and uplift your mind and body. Pursuing these goals, rather than the props of male success are what really makes for “the good life”.

To strive to be good, to accomplish, to excel, is a great thing, and the pursuit of excellence is a noble pursuit. But no one can be consistently good, or good at everything. And perfectionism, if fueled by fear of failure, is a full-time job. Let up for even a moment and you run the risk of becoming a “loser.” So how can those of us burdened by the weight of our perfectionism survive our self-imposed imprisonment while still retaining a healthy attitude toward ourselves? How can we “cut ourselves some slack” while still maintaining the goal of excellence? How can we rid ourselves of the painful notion that our level of performance and the props we acquire determines our value as a man and as a person?

The source of the need to be perfect is, for most people, the belief that they are fundamentally bad, flawed, unlovable and/or unacceptable. They believe that if they become good enough, strong enough, smart enough, rich enough, obedient enough, they can earn the love and admiration they so desperately need from others and from themselves. Ultimately, this doesn't work. It is based on a lie.

*Q. Growing up, were you pressured to be perfect? Do you pressure yourself?*

### The Lie. The Truth

The antidote to men's fear driven drive to be perfect, is self-acceptance—to fully accept who we are, as we are, blemishes and all.

It is a gargantuan task to try to overcome the belief that we are not good enough as we are and need to earn the love of others and ourselves through our accomplishments. That belief is deeply ingrained in our psyche. On the surface it seems obviously true. People *will* admire us if we are accomplished. We *will* feel good about ourselves if we compare and judge ourselves to be a better man than others. But underneath, no matter how hard we try, and no matter what we have achieved, the sense that we are a failure still persists. We can still be motivated by a lack of self-worth. This will keep us on the treadmill of constantly trying to be perfect.

In order to get off that treadmill, we need a fundamental change of mind and heart. My dear friend, Riley K Smith has written a book on just this topic, titled, *ONE TRUTH That Changes Everything*. I'll quote here because he writes so clearly.

*“I have come to believe that almost everyone carries a deeply held lie that is the foundation of human suffering:*

**I am fundamentally bad, unlovable and/or unacceptable.**

*Living from that misunderstanding, keeps us in a constant, if unconscious, state of fear, shame and defensiveness. That lie drives aggression, hurt, betrayal, greed, hatred, lying, hunger for power and control, living as victims, depression, imperialism, competition and addictions.*

*Contrary to almost universal consensus, this is the truth, the truth that can set us free.*

**I am exquisitely who and what I am supposed to be. I am, in my core nature, lovable, worthy and good. I am a finite and personal expression of the infinite consciousness.**

*When we REALLY, TRULY trust this to be true, we are free. We can breathe. We can live our true selves, motivated not by fear or shame, but by inspiration, aspiration and love. When we live our lives from a certainty that we are perfectly OK, we stand at the doorway to infinite possibilities.”*

The process of rejecting this long held lie and embracing this expansive truth requires us to challenge years of unquestioned core beliefs about who we are and what it takes to live a fulfilling life.

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With the understanding of the destructiveness and pain that this deeply held lie is causing us, and with intention, attention and practice, it is possible to know the truth of who we really are, and to affirm our basic goodness. In that knowing, we can appreciate the awesome being we are, release the lie, and attain our perfectly imperfect perfection.

*Q. Have you bought into the lie that you are unworthy of being loved? If so, how has this affected your relationships and yourself?*

## Straight and Gay

As I wrote in the Introduction, the ideas about relationship in this book apply to straight as well as gay men and gay couples. Love is love and people are people, no matter what the gender or sexual orientation. However, especially in the past, gay men have suffered greater overlays of pain, stress and shame because of society's prevailing judgments about them. Actually, the meanest judgements leveled at gays come from other men, straight men. Even though our male culture has made tremendous strides in accepting homosexuality as part of the human experience, strong anti-gay sentiments remain rampant in some segments of society.

In many circles, a gay man is considered less of a man. His attraction to other males is considered "unnatural." Women are attracted to men, therefore, the thinking goes, if a man is attracted to men, he too should be considered more a woman than a man. And we know that to be likened to a woman is considered a great sin by "real men". The commandment, "Be a man," that boys have lived with since childhood has forced many a gay man into the closet, hiding his sexual preferences in fear of being discovered, or shunning straight society in favor of the comfortable, accepting company of other gay men, or being forced into an unfulfilling relationship with a woman. All these are demeaning and unsatisfactory alternatives.

The pressures to "man up" can be unbearable for many gay men. Ken was a long-term member of our men's group. He was honest and forthright and was a psychotherapist. Yet it took years before he opened up to us about being gay. Even though the group emphasized honesty, and emotional openness, and offered genuine acceptance and support, Ken's self judgements and fears of being judged and ostracized by us were overwhelming to him. When he finally opened up and revealed his "dirty little secret," which was met with our affirmation and appreciation, he broke down in sobs of relief.

The division between homosexuality and heterosexuality is not "either/or." There are gradations, in the same way that there are gradations in masculinity and femininity. Just as a feminine side exists in every man, I believe that the potential for bi-sexuality or homosexuality also exists in every man. A man who strongly rejects homosexuals and homosexuality may just be rejecting that gay part which he cannot admit to himself. His rejection can be expanded to the beautiful "feminine" aspects of himself, like gentleness and receptivity, which are an essential part of being a fully functioning human being. He may exhibit a forced, hyper-masculinity that shows to the world, other men and he himself, that he is a "real man." What a loss.

Homophobia creates another, perhaps greater loss. Fear of homosexuality, in self and others, robs a man of the capacity to relate on a deep level to another man. A verbal expression of love and friendship, a warm hug by another man, these will be received with suspicion and withdrawal. Thus, a homophobic man cuts himself off from relating to other men in all but the most superficial levels.

Now for the good news. Things have changed dramatically in the past few decades. For the most part, politically, socially and legally, gay men and women are not treated as pariahs any more. Rather than lispig, sashaying caricatures, they are being depicted in the entertainment media as real flesh and blood human beings. Gays, lesbians, LGBTQ folks have fought, and are fighting hard for this. We all benefit from their struggle.

I believe that it's important for those of us who are not gay to be more than merely tolerant of our homosexual brethren. In order for us to fully manifest our own masculine love, it is essential for "hetero" men to let go of our prejudices, embrace gay men's humanity and have compassion for their special challenges. We must be open to welcome them as equals into our lives and into our hearts. Most importantly, we must resist our tendency to see them as OTHER, and open to know THEM as US. Then we will not merely see them as straight or gay or anything in between, but simply as huMEN. As we come to embrace their humanity, we become more able to grow into our own humanity.

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*Q. If straight, what are your thoughts about gay men? Picture on your mind the image of two men kissing. What thoughts and feelings does this bring up?*

*Have you ever had romantic or sexual thoughts about another man? What was that like for you?*

### Being Blessed by An Elder

When I was growing up, I was never fully accepted by my father. I had to endure a lot of criticism from him because I was cut from a different cloth. He would always say, “Why can’t you be normal,” which really meant, “Why can’t you be like me.” Well, I wasn’t like him. Dad had many admirable qualities which I lacked, while I had my own admirable qualities. But there remained in me a residue of the persistent feeling of not being good enough to please him. I tried, but to no avail. I was left with a hunger for the acceptance of a father figure, an elder mentor who respected me and who I respected.

There were moments when I received that acceptance; being embraced by a world-famous musician and told that my performance was world class, having the validity of my ideas confirmed by a respected workshop leader, the expression of respect for my work by my old college professor of psychology. These moments and others were almost like blessings. The brief interactions I had with respected elders were able to slough off some of my years of accumulated self-doubt and feeling “less than.” They filled the hole in my gut left by my father’s lack of expression of appreciation for who I had become. It was as if a weight was lifted and I was able to be a bit more comfortable in my skin.

I believe that for almost every person, but especially for males, there exists the need for validation, to be affirmed that you are a worthwhile human being by someone you hold in high regard. That validation is especially potent if it comes from a respected elder male, a mentor or father figure. So many men I’ve met over the years have spent a good part of their adult lives in search for the validation that didn’t come from a father. The man might have a woman in his life who adores him, children who worship him, a mother who thinks he can do no wrong. But without the blessing of an elder male, that’s often not enough, especially for a man who has had issues with his father.

A respected elder male or mentor holds power. By affirming a younger man, he is able to transfer his power to that man. He is saying, in effect, “By who you have become or by what you have accomplished, you have elevated yourself and you may join me as a person worthy of respect.” The blessing of an elder is therefore a form of initiation. Indigenous societies understood this. That’s why initiation rituals of male adolescents were the most important ceremonies in those societies. Unfortunately, our culture lacks formal initiation into manhood and may be the reason why many men seek to be appreciated by elders they hold in high regard.

But, as affirming as it might feel for a man to experience the blessing of an older male, it can never be a full validation. Ultimately, the blessing cannot come from outside of you. If you do not affirm your own value as a man and as a human being, any affirmation you receive from outside yourself will fall short. The search for the blessing of self-acceptance and self-validation must end at your doorstep. Self-acceptance is yourself accepting your self, as you are.

*Q. Do you or did you have a mentor or respected elder in your life who affirmed your value as a person? What was/is that like for you? Are you lacking that affirmation from a male elder? What is that like for you?*

### Purpose

A hospice nurse who had worked for many years with the dying, wrote a book about the thoughts and feelings of those who were about to pass over. She wrote that the top regret of those who were dying was, “I wish I had the courage to live the life that I was destined to live.”

What a terrible time to have that realization. Too late!

A recent survey questioned a large number of young adults, “What do you want in life?” The top responses were *wealth, fame* and *high achievement*. I’m afraid that if these young people pursue those three goals, many of them might have the same regrets as those in hospice.

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It is a gross oversimplification that women find their purpose in love and relationships, with family, with children, with friends, with an intimate partner. It is also a gross simplification that men find their purpose in their work, in accomplishing their life goals, in pursuing their passionate dreams. While this is a simplification, I believe it holds a kernel of truth. Let's take a look at that truth.

It may be true that everyone is here for a reason, that they have a Divine purpose. I don't know about that. But I believe that everyone needs to discover their reason for living. If they don't try or are unable to discover their life's purpose, and if, once they do discover that purpose, they don't follow through and pursue it, an important part of their life will remain un-lived. And at the end of their life, too late, they may echo the regrets of many of the dying.

Everyone's purpose is uniquely their own. I won't speculate if one purpose is better than another, whether forming a foundation that creates housing for the homeless is better than sailing around the world in a catamaran, or whether painting your masterpiece is any better than trying to find a cure for cancer. That's not at issue here. What's important is that a man seeks to discover his own unique life's purpose and, "has the courage to live the life he is destined to live," whatever that is.

I do believe a man's purpose must contain two elements in order to be fulfilling. First, your purpose must give you excitement and joy. You need to find what you love, and love what you do. Whether you do it eight hours a day, seven days a week, or do it just a few hours on weekends, you've got to be excited and look forward to it like a kid looks forward to an ice cream cone. You can't wait to open the door to your workshop, your studio, your laboratory, your office, your mancave, because these are places that hold aliveness for you, places where you play out your purpose.

Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple said, "I've looked in the mirror and asked myself, 'If this day was the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been 'no' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something."

Second, your purpose must present a challenge for you. You have to push yourself to move out of your comfort zone. It can't be so easy that you lose interest because you can't fail, and it can't be so difficult that you fail all the time and want to give up. The challenge that you take on energizes you, brings you alive. Part of that aliveness is that there is the potential for failure. If you have chosen a valid, life affirming purpose, you *will* fail. Probably numerous times. It comes with the territory. You fail till you succeed. But remember this, *It is a form of failure if you stay within your comfort zone and choose a purpose that offers less difficulty than you are capable of handling.*

As you work through the challenges you encounter, the challenges will help you grow—stronger, wiser, more skilled, more confident. You will become more of the man you are destined to be, living the life you are destined to live.

*Q. Have you found your life's purpose? What is it? If you have not settled on a purpose, what are some suggestions you have considered as to what it might be?*

## Losing "Manliness" From Aging

A friend, who for years led African safaris, recently give me a rungu, which he had received from a village elder. This is a short, carved wooden staff carried by elder men of the Samburu tribe of north central Kenya. It is a symbol of authority and honor. When a man reaches an age when he finds it difficult to go on a hunting party, he trades his weapons for a rungu. Now, rather than lend his physical strength for the well-being of the tribe, he lends his wisdom and experience.

Age is a great thief. The passing years steal the things we had found important in our lives and takes away the ways we had defined ourselves. From women, it steals fertility and youthful beauty. From men, it robs our physical strength and erodes our definition of ourselves as powerful and self-sufficient in the world.

Loss is inevitable. Age takes its toll no matter how strong or smart or handsome you are now. As I've gotten older my body has grown softer, my muscles weaker. I've had to realize that I can no longer lift heavy objects I could have easily lifted just a few years ago. And I now must pay younger men to do chores I would have relished. With my wrinkles and grey hair, people treat me differently than they did just a few years ago. I recently underwent the embarrassment of having a young woman offer me her seat on the crowded subway. I refused.

Like most men, when younger, I defined myself by what I had acquired or could do—my work, the activities I could accomplish, the knowledge I could offer, my position and the esteem I had earned in the eyes of my peers. The

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relevance of these things is on the wane. No longer a “manly” man, (as if I ever was one), I have been forced to redefine myself. I now characterize myself more by who I am, rather than what I have or what I am able to accomplish. Who I am, the accomplishments by which I now define myself by, are more inner than outer—what wisdom I have been able to glean, the love I am able to give and receive, the service I am able to offer.

This is a great potential gift age can offer. No longer do we have to compulsively rush around building our fortune, creating alliances, making a name for ourselves, acquiring impressive toys. These were important in times past. Letting go of these things allows us time and inclination to leisurely sit back, smell the flowers, look within and pursue what holds meaning—the love of family and friends, and the joy of working at what we want to, rather than what and when we have to.

My advice to men as they grow older is, don’t be shy. Look Father Time in the face. He will take from you what he will. Let go with peace and acceptance of how you had defined yourself when you were younger. That was then. Don’t mourn the past. Enjoy you as you are now. The passing years can offer precious gifts. Welcome and appreciate them.

### Male Menopause?

We are all aware that women go through a “change of life” when their hormonal levels drop and their periods cease. Menopause is a time of physical changes and emotional upheaval that challenges many women. Less known is the physical and emotional changes that men can go through that are related to aging. Declining hormonal levels, chiefly testosterone, though not as rapid and complete as with women, can cause physical symptoms that are not so different from those experienced by pre and post menopausal women.

Termed *andropause* or *male climacteric*, it can be characterized by some of the following symptoms: Mood swings, depression, irritability and anger, memory loss, muscle loss and weakness, weight gain, insomnia, night sweats, lower libido, erectile dysfunction, lack of concentration, loss of bone density and possibly the occurrence of hot flashes. These physical changes can contribute to emotional changes as men age.

### Emotional Changes: Midlife and Beyond

Entering into the second half of life can signal a challenging time of life for many men. The physical symptoms of male menopause listed above can contribute added stress during a period that is fraught with difficult life changes for many men. As we age, our strength and vigor begin to wane. We may be faced with serious health issues. Parents fall ill and pass away. Our sexual interest and performance declines. Children leave home. We retire from “productive” work and positions of influence. As energy and interests wane, we are inclined to give up on our long held goals and cherished dreams. When we look in the mirror and see our wrinkles, grey hair (or no hair), pot belly and man tits, we have visual proof that we’re beginning to “circle the drain.” Our former definition of ourselves as a man is in need of revision.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. My friend, psychologist and author Jed Diamond, sees many positives. He has written extensively about the physical and psychological effects of aging in men. “The purpose of male menopause is to signal the end of the first part of a man’s life and prepare him for the second half. *Male menopause is not the beginning of the end, as many men fear, but the end of the beginning.* It is the passage to the most passionate, powerful, productive and purposeful time in a man’s life.”

I would modify the last sentence. It *can be* a passionate, powerful, productive and purposeful time for a man. It can be, but for many men, it isn’t. They dry up, withdraw, lose interest. They die before they are dead. However, if a man harvests the wisdom of his years and chooses to invest himself in living fully for his remaining days, elderhood can be a portal for entry into one of the most rewarding epochs of his life.

### Where is Wildness?

We humans are animals. Mammals. Primates. We are not animals in the wild. We are domesticated. We resemble more the caged animals in a zoo. Look through the bars at the lion, king of beasts, lying around bored, fat. His only

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interest is when the keeper will toss a slab of meat at his feet for his evening meal. Muscles soft, spirit broken. Where has his wildness gone? Are we like him? Where has our wildness gone?

The dirt beneath our feet is dead, covered over in layers of asphalt and cement. The air we breathe is laden with soot and fumes from burning petroleum. We live in drywall clad rooms, stacked one on another till they reach the sky. Seated in our cars, we busily rush around from place to place. Or staring straight ahead, we wait impatiently for the light to turn from red to green. Our lives are spent in air-conditioned cubicles, neat apartments, fluorescent lit offices, serenaded by bland, calming, piped in Muzak. Seated at desks or on comfortable couches, our eyes are focused hour after hour on the bluish light emanating from computers, smart phones, television screens. Our minds are swirling, full to the brim with facts, spreadsheets, numbers, abstractions. The world created for us is safe, comfortable, controlled. We like it that way. We don't want surprises. We try to eliminate the unexpected. Yet the more we control the world in which we live, the more we have need for what is wild and untamed.

Has our wildness gone? Has it disappeared? Forever? No. It still lives in us. Our heart quickens at the image of a mustang at full gallop across the plains, a red tailed hawk circling in flight. This is the kind of freedom and connectedness to our animal bodies we yearn for. We had it back then as a young boy when we climbed to the highest branches of the backyard tree and when we raced full speed around the bases. We can touch it now in the frosty morning air, watching the vapor from our breath as we labor up a steep mountain trail. Or wipe the sweat from our brow after an afternoon of digging in the soil.

For our sanity, we need the wildness that nature provides. We need to cool our overheated brain in icy meandering streams and on windy mountain tops. We need to challenge our bodies, strain our muscles, push our limits. We need to reserve time and remove the tie, take off the starched shirt, wash away the sweet smell of cologne and get dirty and sweaty. Our male body needs it. Our masculine soul needs it.

## GENDER ROLES

### What's Masculine? What's Feminine?

Ask most men in our society to define “masculinity” and they will reply, “Not acting feminine.” Not a very edifying way of understanding what it means to be a man.

I've been throwing around the terms masculine and feminine for some time. For the sake of clarity, I should define what these words mean. For the purposes of this book, it will be helpful to refrain from tying the terms masculine and feminine to males and females. From my way of thinking, masculine and feminine refer to tendencies to think, feel and act in certain ways. What might traditionally be considered masculine tendencies describe qualities like groundedness, perseverance, logic, focus, confidence, assertiveness, physical exertion, competition, protection. Feminine tendencies refer to qualities like emotionality, cooperation, creativity, nurturing, yielding, responsiveness, patience, connection, intuition. The terms masculine and feminine simply describe these tendencies, not males and females.

Look at these masculine and feminine qualities listed in the previous paragraph. You'll notice that both sets of qualities are entirely positive and beneficial. Man or woman, the more of these qualities a person possesses, the more well-rounded they are. A man who is able to be yielding, nurturing, intuitive and in touch with his emotions, in addition to his masculine qualities, is a very special person in that he is free to respond in a wide variety of ways. The feminine qualities he engenders will strengthen his relationships and enhance his life. A woman who is able to be grounded, competitive, logical, fiercely protective and physically assertive, in addition to her feminine qualities, is also a very special person for the same reason. Having feminine qualities doesn't reduce a man's masculinity. It adds to his masculinity, makes him more of a man, more of a fully responsive human being. Same for women.

Since the tendencies for thinking, acting and feeling can be independent of gender, a man can exhibit wonderful feminine qualities and still be considered a “normal” male. And a woman can exhibit wonderful masculine qualities and still be considered a “normal” female.

There is interesting interplay between masculine and feminine. In relationship, masculine energizes the feminine. Feminine energizes the masculine. That is one reason why women tend to be attracted to men with masculine qualities. Being around a guy who has strong masculine tendencies makes a woman feel her femininity. Without the need to take on an assertive male role in relationship, she relaxes into her womanliness. Likewise, being around a feminine woman makes a man feel his masculinity. He is not in competition and can comfortably be “the guy.” They can sizzle together.

It is similar to a magnet; opposite poles attract, like poles repel. That polar opposite includes women whose masculine traits predominate, paired with men whose feminine traits predominate. They may or may not sizzle in the same way, but they can do fine together as a couple. When a feminine man pairs with a feminine woman, or a masculine man pairs with a masculine woman, there might be some friction and it could get real interesting. But still, there are no hard and fast rules. I've seen couple pairings that I would have thought impossible work out to be loving relationships.

The interplay of masculine and feminine is a beautiful, creative dance. It is a joy when a couple embraces their differences and dances to the same tune.

*Q. On a separate Masculine scale and separate Feminine scale, each with 1to10, (Ten being the highest) how would you rate yourself on Masculinity? On Femininity? How do you feel about your ratings? Satisfied? Dissatisfied?*

### What Men And Women Want

In love and relationships, typically, what does a man want from his partner? A man wants the same things that a woman wants, like honesty and respect. But he especially wants his talents recognized by his partner, his body

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appreciated, his words and thoughts respected, his accomplishments admired and his comfort looked after. And what does a woman want from her partner in loving relationships? A woman wants the same things that a man wants, but she especially wants to feel loved by her man, her emotions listened to, felt and appreciated by him, her body accepted and cherished, her house comfortable, and the safety and security of her home and family fiercely guarded.

If a man would pay attention to and honor his partner's feminine needs and joyfully give her what she desires, and the woman would attend to and honor her partner's masculine needs and joyfully give him what he desires, what a beautiful relationship would blossom.

## Don't Be Just Her Husband, Lover or Boyfriend

In the old days, couples had separate and very restricted roles. The man was the breadwinner, decision maker, fixer and pillar of strength. The woman was the caretaker of the home, nurturer, and emotional support for the couple and the family. How limiting this was. Love encompasses so much more than just one or two roles.

Many men only allow themselves to be a husband, a lover, or a boyfriend to their partner. If you limit the roles you play with her to only one or two, you cannot give expression to your full being, and, neither can she.

In addition to being a husband, boyfriend or erotic lover, love your partner...

- *as a sibling or a friend--You are best buddies, playmates and trusted companions. With relaxed friendship, laughter, shared secrets and long history, you enjoy each other's company and are with each other as equals.*
- *as if you were her mother--Mother love is tender, nurturing, feeling, protective. This is closest to unconditional love. Men, too, are capable of expressing motherly love.*
- *as if you were her father--Mother love is traditionally concerned with nurturance and the inner world of feeling. Father role is traditionally more concerned with the outer world. He is protector from danger and champion of independence, discipline, adventure and responsibility. Women can express fatherly love.*
- *as if you were her child--With this role, you luxuriate in the nurturing, protective embrace of your partner's feminine energy. This can be a difficult role, especially for men who consider it "unmanly" to desire nurturing from their partner.*
- *as if you were her mentor--Partners in relationship have much to teach and learn from each other. Be a good role model and teach love by example.*
- *as if she was your mentor--Be willing to be mentored. Watch, listen and be open to learn from your partner.*
- *as you love yourself--Self-love, valuing yourself and treating yourself with kindness and compassion forms the template as to how you will love your partner.*
- *as if she were a goddess--When you honor your partner as a spiritual being, as the highest manifestation of who they are, you get in touch with that which is holy. You elevate yourself as well as your partner.*

Some of these roles are easy to adopt, some are more difficult. It would probably be easy for you to be her friend or playmate, but it would be a stretch for you to allow yourself to be as her child, or treat her like a goddess, or allow her to be your mentor. Think what a challenge to your ego it might be to allow yourself to be mothered by your partner, or have her be your teacher. What a spur to your spiritual growth it would be if you would attempt to love her as you love yourself. Taking on these difficult roles will expand you as a person, as well as deepening and widening the relationship. It will also allow your partner to expand. Imagine how empowering it would be for her if you would be able to accept her mentoring in certain areas, or if you mothered her, or treated her as if she was a goddess. This would prompt you both to redefine your relationship and yourselves.

Now, the truth is that it is way too much to ask that you be everything for your partner and they be everything for you. There's no way you can, or should, fulfill all your partner's needs, nor can you fulfill all of theirs. It's important to have others besides yourselves who play diverse roles in your relationship. It's necessary and healthy to have good friends and playmates. It's good for each of you to rely on wise mentors you can learn from. It's enlivening to include children and young people in your relationship. It's beneficial to have elders in your lives that you honor as parental models.

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Encourage each other to reach out to other people who can enrich your lives. Including other role players who are outside your dyad brings in fresh perspectives and novel experiences, and immeasurably adds to the depth and width of the relationship.

**Q.** *List the roles you play in your relationship. Rank them from most prominent to least prominent. What roles would you want to play more? Which less?*

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## A Man, Not A Boy

What kind of man do women want in their relationships? What qualities are they seeking in a mate? What role do they want their partner to play in their life?

It's simple—women want a grownup man, not a boy in a man's body.

**She wants** an equal, fully participating partner and helpmate, not a boy who needs her to be his caretaker and babysitter.

**She wants** an honorable partner who has integrity, not an unscrupulous boy, who would compromise his principles for selfish gain.

**She wants** a partner who will take a firm stand, unafraid to connect and engage with her, not a boy who will avoid by scurrying to the safety of his “man cave” at the first sign of conflict.

**She wants** a partner who will honor her with appreciation and deep respect, not a boy who will put her down, discourage her and be in competition with her.

**She wants** a partner who will show up with his naked, undiluted self, not a boy who tries to conceal his fears, needs, faults, and vulnerabilities from her.

**She wants** an industrious partner she can admire and respect, whose vision and admirable behavior will inspire her to be her best, not a lazy boy who lacks goals and motivation.

**She wants** a steady, committed partner who will stay with her through difficult times, not a boy who will bail out when the going gets tough.

**She wants** a partner who is present for her, who will listen and try to understand her heart and mind, not an insensitive boy who is only interested in his own self.

**She wants** a self-respecting partner who is proud of his accomplishments and the person he has become, not an insecure boy who seeks her praise and craves her approval.

**She wants** a dependable partner, whose word is his bond, who she can trust to follow through with what he says he will do, not a careless, lazy, unreliable boy.

**She wants** a responsible partner who is unafraid to take on the mantle of guardian and protector of his home and family, not a boy who wants to be taken care of and protected by her.

In the Bible it exhorts you to “put away childish things” once you grow into manhood. If you desire to have a good relationship with your partner, put away these boyish things. Fulfill the qualities she wants and needs in you. The grown-up qualities your partner wants you to possess are beneficial for you as well as for her. They are what makes you an admirable, adult human being.

Let go of childish things. Grow up. Be a man.

## Take The Lead: Be A Guide And Protector For Your Partner

Do not be afraid to take on the role of protector and guide for the woman in your life. Don't hesitate when you see she needs you. Step in and extend your wisdom and protective strength to her. She will take comfort in knowing that you stand ready to defend her. She will appreciate when you offer inspiration and guidance. She will be relieved when you come forward to take on some of her load. (Understand it works both ways. Don't be reluctant to be one who is willing to learn from her and is willing to accept her help).

Almost every woman I know has a deep part of herself that wants her man to be a masculine presence, a staunch protector and benevolent guide for her. She wants him to be able to take control and lead her when she needs him to. Of course, she is not a helpless damsel in distress. She is able to smash the black widow spider in the kitchen cabinet if need be. She is able to get out of bed at 3am to investigate the strange noise downstairs if she had to. She can carry a heavy backpack, haul out the garbage, balance a checkbook and open doors for herself. She can figure things out for herself if she is confused. She knows right from wrong and doesn't need a man to advise her.

But even if she is a karate black belt or is a champion body builder—it is of primary importance that she feels safe and cared for by you. She needs to know that you will guide her and stand up and protect her. She needs to know that you will be a solid presence if she is feeling emotionally fragile. She needs to know that you consider it an

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important goal that you provide a stable home for her and for your family. These are basic needs of the feminine psyche.

Woe unto you if you are unwilling or unable to take on those roles for her if need be. The less responsibility you take on, the more she will have to. She will be forced to become “the man” in the relationship. This will feel unnatural to her and unnatural to you. If it goes on too long, she can begin to lose confidence and respect for you. She may not be sexually turned on to you and not feel free to surrender to you when making love. She might admire the assertive and protective qualities of other men and enjoy being around them. And her feminine nature can become unfulfilled with you.

When you take on the guide and protector role you may be walking a thin line. The mindset you are coming from can make all the difference. If your offer of leadership is extended from an equal, rather than from a “holier than thou” position, it will be more welcome. Playing the “top dog, bottom dog” game creates resistance. You are not trying to be in control or prove to her how strong and smart you are. You simply want the highest good for her and offer your strong, caring hand for her to take, if she wishes.

When you offer your helping hand, don’t do so as THE solution to her problems. You don’t have all the answers. You don’t have it all figured out. The best leaders are those who are able to follow. Listen to her, watch her, feel her. You are her teammate. Work together. Offer your hand in ways she can accept, in ways that will help her come to her own understanding of the best solutions to move forward.

Once you are willing to take on the role of protector and guide, you come into right relationship with your partner. She will feel your strength. She will know that she can relax into your protective arms. She will be sure she can surrender body, mind and spirit to you, without fear. She will trust you because, by being trustworthy, you have earned her trust.

You don’t have to be musclebound or six foot five. You don’t have to be a millionaire. You don’t have to be her psychotherapist or spiritual advisor. You just need to have the strong instinct and willingness to protect and guide your partner.

Know that the masculine role is not something you can fake. Swaggering, bluster and false bravado won’t cut it. Masculine presence comes from your core. You either have it or you don’t. If you don’t have it, you can’t fake it. Both she and you will know you are a fraud. However, you can cultivate compassionate masculine presence. Working with the Promises can help you summon your strength and claim your masculine power. They are practices which convey gracious leadership.

*Q. Do you have reluctance to take on the “guide and protector” role with your partner? Does that reluctance stem from her? From you? Explore.*

## The Gifts Of Fatherhood And Family

*We need to direct our caring attention to the young. Children are of the future. They will be living in a world that present generations are building for them right now.*

*We cannot let them down by standing around while their future is being stolen piece by piece.*

*Take action so that we will leave them a legacy they will appreciate and a future we will feel proud of having helped create for them.*

*Children’s tender hearts are hungry now for our care and for that special kind of masculine love only a man is able to give.*

From: MANifesto: A Call For Men To Become Warriors For Kindness

When a man becomes a father or takes on the father role in his family, he can provide bountiful gifts for his family members as well as receive them for himself. Unfortunately, I was never able to have the full experience of fatherhood. My previous marriages were childless and I arrived into Alice’s family when her kids were 13 and 15 years old. I would’ve loved to have been a dad from Angela and Jason’s birth, but helping to raise teenagers gave me a pretty good idea of what it means to be a father.

My presence in the family was a gift to Alice and the kids in many ways. I was a stabilizing force. My masculine presence was a good balance to Alice’s feminine energy. Instead of only one human mind and heart, the kids were able to sample two very different people and were able to incorporate the best of both of us. Sharing the load of child

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rearing helped relieve the pressure on Alice of having to do it all alone, and of course, there was the factor of greater financial stability with both of us contributing. These gifts to my adopted family were just the surface. My most precious gift was the gift of my heart. I loved all three, and they returned my love. We became a family.

These benefits a family receives from a father's presence are fairly obvious. It becomes much more subtle when exploring the considerable gifts a man can receive for himself when he takes on the role of a father. Below is a summary of some of the gifts being a father can provide.

Becoming a father matures you. Fatherhood is an initiation. When your first child is born, you are now more than an individual, more than a couple, you are a family. You are responsible for an innocent life. You feel different. You've stepped into a more responsible role. You are a father.

Becoming a father allows you to experience the deepest love. New fathers talk about a "surge of love" they feel while seeing and holding their tiny, innocent newborn for the first time. The love they feel is indescribable and is unconditional and it's beyond any love they've ever experienced. Scientists have actually measured hormonal changes men go through during their partner's pregnancy and birth of their child. They especially noted men's increased secretion of oxytocin, the "love hormone."

Becoming a father gives you the opportunity to learn selfless generosity and other important qualities essential for love. As a father, there is little room for selfishness. You and your partner have to respond when your child needs you. Whether you want to or not, whether it's 3am, whether your favorite team is playing, it doesn't matter. You show up. You show up when they are teenagers, and you show up when they are in middle age if they need you. You also learn other necessary qualities, like patience, dependability, acceptance, flexibility and sensitivity. These are all qualities that make you capable of greater love.

Becoming a father offers you the chance to make a real difference in a life. Your love, and your actions, good or bad, will have an indelible effect on your child. The little ones will be watching you and absorbing the ways you treat them, your partner, others and yourself. Will you be setting a good example? What an awesome responsibility it is to have that much influence on the life trajectory of another human being. And an awesome, unique opportunity.

Becoming a father will aid you in recognizing the need to take better care of yourself. There is an innocent who depends on you. Will you think twice before you engage in dangerous habits like smoking and abusing drugs and alcohol, and reckless activities such as drinking and driving? Consider what an indelible loss it would be to your family if you died young.

Becoming a father will help you see your parents in a new light. Your experience as a dad will enable you to comprehend some of the difficulties and sacrifices they had undergone to raise you. It can give rise to a sense of gratefulness and forgiveness.

Becoming a father will help you heal your past. As your children grow, you will inevitably see yourself in their challenges and triumphs. This will offer you the opportunity to recall and reflect on your own life. You may also be able to heal your "father wound." If your father was absent or if his behavior toward you was harmful and uncaring, you can go a long ways toward healing those wounds by being the good father to your child that your dad never was with you.

Becoming a father invites your joyful inner child to come out. Who else than with your child can you crawl around on the floor with, talk gibberish with, have a tickle session with? Being with them and enjoying their curiosity, their spontaneity and their pure, unrestrained joy, helps to bring out the child in you that you had forgotten in the process of becoming an adult.

Becoming a father will help you to learn to let go when necessary. This is one of the most important life lessons. Trying to control what is uncontrollable is the cause of much suffering. You may have contributed to giving birth to this being, but they will grow to be who they are meant to be. If you raise them right, they will be strong-willed and their own person. Try as you might, you cannot control them. The more you try, especially during the teen years, the more resistance you'll encounter from them. All you can do is be the best dad you can, pray for them and wish them well on their journey.

Becoming a father is the only way you can touch the future. Your children will live on after you die. They and their decedents will be carrying a part of you. Many men report an increased sense of responsibility toward future generations after they become fathers. They see with larger perspective and want to leave the legacy of a better world for their children than the one they were born into.

These gifts a father's presence bestows on his family and receives from his family are potential. They are entirely dependent on the man himself—how completely and with how much integrity he embraces his role as father and husband. Being a father is a grave responsibility, one that requires a man's full masculine engagement. If he places

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his pursuit for economic gain, dedication to a cause, or his own pleasure above the welfare of his children and his family, he is cheating his family and himself.

Parenthood is a deeply rewarding endeavor—and also a lot of hard work. Growing a family is a lifetime commitment. When you consider the inevitable challenges of fatherhood as opportunities to learn, rather than burdens to endure, the gifts you give and receive are priceless.

### Focus: Inside v/s Outside

As men, taking on the role of “doer,” we tend to focus our attention more to the outside world. Our concern is with activities—making a living, solving problems, physical activities like sports and repairing things. This is in opposition to focus on the internal world, the experience of feelings, bodily sensations, the felt response toward others. We men tend to be more concerned about doing, rather than being. If taken to the extreme, this unbalanced focus can have a profound effect on our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Being outwardly oriented serves us well for getting things done. Fixing a flat tire, driving our car, shopping for parts, all these activities require our focused attention to the task at hand. But if our focus is predominantly on things outside ourselves, we can lose connection with our inner being. We can become estranged from the physical sensations that are coming from our body. Thus, our body can be tense, stressed or even in pain, and we may not know it. Our numbness can lead to physical injury. Strains and pulled muscles from sports and in the gym can often be attributed to focus on achieving outer goals rather than attending to inner sensations that would caution us to “ease up.”

Outward orientation can keep us estranged from our emotions. We lose contact with our “gut.” This disconnect from our feelings takes us out of the present moment, so we can be anxious and not know it, angry and not know it, sad and not know it. Blindness to our inner being is an invitation to a chaotic relationship and a chaotic life.

When oriented more toward “things” rather than our “insides”, our intuition is blunted, our ability to empathize with others is impaired. We are out of contact with others because we are out of contact with ourselves. We find it difficult to decipher what is going on with other people because we don’t understand what is going on within our own body, mind and heart. This can result in misunderstandings with those we care about. Our resulting confusion makes us want to retreat and double down on the things we know, can control and feel comfortable with—the outer world.

If we find ourselves out of balance by our exaggerated orientation toward the outer world, there are things we can do that can help bring us more in balance. The remedy involves becoming more familiar with our inner world. There is a time-honored way of going about this. Sitting. . . just sitting. We sit with a quiet mind and watch, as if we are simply an observer, as the parade of thoughts and sensations march by. Not following thoughts. Not following sensations. Just calmly watching. In time, our inner world will become more a part of our experience of living, and this will result in our being more in tune with our outer world.

*Q. Does this idea of inner vs outer focus resonate with you? Think about how it plays out in your life.*

### Fixer

Many of us guys like to fix things. There is something so satisfying in taking our wrench and screwdriver and solving the problem of the suspicious noise coming from our car’s engine or repairing the toaster that burns the toast. The role of the guy that fixes things works best when restricted to inanimate objects. When he expands his role to fixing his partner, he may be asking for trouble.

It’s one thing to fix a car or toaster, it’s another to try to fix a partner’s pain, unhappiness or depression. This is especially true if we are in part responsible for her distress. People’s psyches are complex. The old saying, “A smart man doesn’t try to fix his watch,” might well apply.

The “fixer” role is one many men gravitate to. A fixer is the guy in charge. It is assumed that he has the knowledge and skills to help the person needing to be fixed. It’s an uneven relationship, with the fixer on top, in a position of power and authority, a kind of authority similar to the one that parents hold over their young children. There are

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situations where this is appropriate; when a partner who is injured cannot do for herself, or when she is confused and in need of guidance and requests it. Here, there is a stated request or unstated agreement for the helper to be of help. Things get muddy when the guy assumes the helper role without permission and steps in and makes decisions for the other without taking her wishes into consideration. This violates her boundaries and can lead to resentment, resistance and power struggles.

If the guy's ego is involved and he is invested in being the rescuer of his "damsel in distress," this will make things worse. He's doing it for the glory or to gain brownie points, not for her. Since his ego is enmeshed in his role as helper, if she doesn't improve, he will feel like he is incompetent and he failed. If the guy wants to be of genuine help, he should not try to enhance his ego or cement his role as the capable man in charge. He needs to be present for her.

Being present is very different than trying to be "Mr. Fixit." Frequently, Mr. Fixit is more concerned about his own discomfort than his partner's pain. His partner's distress affects him, upsets him. He will numb his discomfort by cutting off his feelings, and try to get her to tone down her emotions. Or he will distract her by immediately offering her solutions, regurgitating facts or telling stories of people who were in similar predicaments. These efforts to dilute her feelings are exactly opposite from what she needs from him, which is his loving presence.

Being of help to someone in need, especially someone close, is a grave responsibility. It is a sensitive interaction and should be taken on with empathy, compassion and careful deliberation. You are equal partners. Her needs are of the greatest importance. Your role is to support, not take over and fix. You are there initially to listen, confer, ask, not direct. You are there to be a loving presence first, then problem solve if and when that is appropriate. With this receptive attitude you can be of greatest help.

## How We Learn And How They Learn

I attended a seminar recently. There were seven participants. The facilitator was a woman. I was the only male. We were each provided with a nearly one-hundred-page workbook that outlined the information the seminar was to cover in exquisite detail, logically ordered and succinctly written, filled with experiential exercises. (The content was developed by a man.)

I thought how different the seminar would have been if the leader was a man or if there were six men and one woman in the room. Throughout, I was struck by the way the leader presented the course content, (or rather, didn't follow the course content), and by the way the participants interacted with each other.

There was an air of familiarity in the room, an intimacy and absence of "carefulness" that spoke of a lack of defensiveness between the women. They freely shared details of their lives and their response to the material evoked their feelings more than their thoughts. They fully supported one another in a concerned and generous way.

The leader rarely referenced the material in the workbook, but instead, she drew out the participants understanding by asking questions of a personal nature. At first, pen in hand and ready to take notes, I found myself getting frustrated because I wanted to "get" the material. The way the seminar was progressing was not my usual method of acquiring information. But after awhile, I realized I *was* getting it. Because of the makeup of the group, the way it was presented was for the female mind. It was collaborative rather than top down, leisurely and loosely scattered rather than structured, emphasizing response rather than content.

Later, reading through the workbook, I discovered that yes, there was much of the material that was glossed over or not even addressed. But the bones were there in the seminar, and the way it was presented to us was juicy and alive, and as a result, made an impression that was much more impactful and enduring than if I had been fed a handful of facts or theoretical musings. I came away with a greater appreciation of the female mind and the way "they" learn.

## Right Relationship—Finding My Place Among The Generations

As a man of age, approaching my eighth decade, I've come to an understanding of how I am to be in right relationship with people of differing generations. It came to me almost in the form of a *mantra*, a concise repeated statement that conveys a wise truth.

*Men are my brothers.*

*Women are my sisters.*

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*Older men are my fathers.  
Older women are my mothers.*

*Younger men are my sons.  
Younger women are my daughters.*

This understanding has changed the way I view people and influenced how I try to treat them.

I am now one of the older generation. As an older man, I find fewer and fewer father and mother figures who are still alive. Those elders I meet, I treat with the deference and respect they deserve. There are however, many admirable men and women who have passed on that I am able to honor in my mind and heart as elders. I acknowledge the inspiring examples they have left behind and appreciate the efforts they have made to protect, educate and illuminate younger generations as we grew to be adults. Nelson Mandela, Ram Dass, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, former President Carter and Mother Theresa are among those respected elders. In a way, they are like my parents.

I can certainly relate best to the men and women in my own age group. It feels right and good to take my place among the “brothers and sisters” who are my contemporaries. We Boomers have lived together through times of change in art, music, armed conflict and social and political upheaval that characterized our generation. With our shared history, we are uniquely suited to understand each other in ways that older and younger generations cannot. In a way, we are like siblings.

Seeing young men and women as my children has really altered my outlook. I’m more aware now of my responsibility to the younger generation. This “fatherly” parental view has informed my desire to make the world a better place for ensuing generations. It has given me the juice to write and speak as a mentor. I am now more able and willing to step up to take my place as an elder wisdom keeper and make an offering of my time, energy and resources.

This mantra has also helped to purify my relationship to younger women. Seeing them from the perspective of a father, it becomes more difficult for me to view beautiful young women as sexual objects, nor am I still so unerringly attracted to the images of scantily clad women the media uses to sell products. (At least I try not to be. Old habits sometimes take a while to die).

With the passage of time, the circumstances of the persons in the mantra change. Sons and daughters grow up to become their generation’s brothers and sisters. Then they mature to share the parental position of fathers and mothers to the generations that come after them. We are all points in an ever-evolving lineage, finding our place as we move from past, to present, to future.

**Q.** *Do you relate to this mantra?*

*Are there unrelated people in your life you view as your siblings, parents and children? How would it change the way you view people if you could see them all as relatives?*

## Integrating Masculine Power and Feminine Gentleness

There are two distinctions you can make about the way you handle your life and your relationships. The first is “Will I maintain integrity within myself?” The second is “Will I extend generosity to others?”

Integrity is steadfastly choosing to adopt and uphold your moral, ethical, psychological and spiritual ideals. By maintaining integrity within yourself, your thought, speech and actions will reflect that integrity. People will trust you and feel safe around you when you have integrity.

Generosity is choosing to consistently take into consideration the needs, desires and wellbeing of others. By extending generosity to your partner and others in your life, you grow generosity within yourself. When you are generous, people love you, appreciate you and return generosity back to you.

Integrity and generosity are not either/or. You can cultivate and incorporate both in your life.

Integrity and generosity require different personal qualities of you. Maintaining integrity requires toughness, discipline and perseverance, the ability to take a stand and follow through. Extending generosity requires empathy, tenderness, openhandedness, patience and sensitivity. These energies of integrity and generosity, in their most basic

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manifestation, are the qualities of masculine power and feminine gentleness. Incorporating these seemingly polar opposites in your life makes you whole and complete.

Though people usually characterize power as masculine and gentleness as feminine, that is an artificial distinction. Power and gentleness are qualities of human beings, no matter what gender. The more we develop our power and gentleness in our lives, the greater is our ability to love.

Together, the power of integrity and the gentleness of generosity are like the two wings of a bird. Both are required in order that we may soar.

## MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS

### Guys And Gals Love Differently

It's obvious, men and women differ in the way they understand love, value love and express love.

These differences are the result of many factors, such as dissimilar hormones, physique, parental training and peer and society pressures. From early childhood, these factors mold how boys and girls think about love and are expected to behave in their relationships with the opposite sex.

Though not as prevalent now as in previous generations, there has been a significant divide between the sexes. There were strict rules for young boys and girls governing behavior, clothing, toys and interests. And woe unto you if you broke those rules. (*Don't play with dolls. Don't play with girls. Play with guns. Play with trucks*) Even as a young child you were urged to "be a man." Being a man meant having the interests men are supposed to have, (sports, cars, work, politics, money and sexuality) and being able to converse about these subjects *ad nauseam*. And especially, don't have anything to do with the things girls and women are interested in.

You were expected to have certain attitudes toward "the weaker sex." You were urged to think of women as another species, a lesser species. They were to be treated as trophies, (the more voluptuous and physically attractive, the more valuable the trophy). Females were seen as objects of sexual conquest in a game where the effort is to bed the greatest number and most desirable. Each gender had their predominant responsibilities. Theirs was to create the nest—to cook, clean, bear children and take care of their man's sexual needs. Even now these attitudes still exist, though not so prevalent and not in such virulent forms.

Many men consider feelings off-limits. Feelings, especially "shameful" human qualities like fragility, empathy, dependency, fearfulness and indecisiveness should be hidden from others (and from themselves). If you exhibit these qualities, you are looked down upon and excluded by other males. To be strong, independent, competent and decisive at all times is the masculine ideal. These are the qualities we admire in other men and wish to engender in ourselves.

Because we value strength and competence so much, what we want most from our partner is to be admired, trusted and respected. If we do not receive this appreciation from her we cannot feel fulfilled in our relationship. For many of us, our need to be looked up to and appreciated is even greater than our need to be loved.

The word "love" is not even in many men's vocabulary and certainly not to be spoken about with other men. Candid discussions concerning relationships, love and emotions are considered nonessential and are to be left to the women. Many of us guys consider love and relationships a wonderful addition to our life. We think of love to be the delicious frosting on the cake. The cake itself is our work, our career, our interests, our mission in life. This is where we find our greatest "juice". Until we lose it, we don't understand or admit how vital the importance of love and intimate relationship is in our life.

For most women, it is very different. Love, relationship and emotional engagement tend to play a much more central role in their life. This is where they get their "juice". Feelings play a more dominant role in women's lives, rather than thinking and problem-solving, which is traditionally considered more the domain of the man. Women tend to have more access to their interior lives, in contrast to men, who are more oriented to the exterior world. Men's orientation is toward fixing things, protecting against threat, solving problems. This puts men at a disadvantage when it comes to communication and relationship skills. No wonder we sometimes find ourselves confused when interacting with our partner. They speak a different language.

As bearers and primary providers of sustenance for their children, women, by nature tend to be comfortable engaging in nurturing, caretaking functions. These caring functions are a central part of love and essential to the maintenance of family and relationship. Men are caretakers too, but their caretaking is usually expressed in less nurturing ways, more oriented to protection and maintenance of home and hearth.

Both men and women desire intimate connection, but women are more comfortable with emotional closeness than men. The letting go of control and dropping of defenses that intimacy requires seems more threatening to us than to a woman. If we feel afraid, ashamed, weak or emotionally wrought, many men tend to turn inward and remain

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silent and uncommunicative. On the contrary, women tend to respond by reaching out for support and communicating with others when they are emotionally upset.

Women's embrace of their soft, feminine side allows them to be more open, accepting and flexible. Many of us men, however, adopt a caricature of the masculine ideal and feel it necessary to demonstrate "manly" qualities at all times. Adopting this artificial role limits our freedom and makes it difficult for us to be "genuine" and fully present with our partner.

The truth is we all have combinations of masculine and feminine qualities in our personality. Finding balance—men having access to their feminine energies and women having access to their masculine energy allows both genders to experience themselves as more complete, well rounded human beings. For a man to engender soft, feminine qualities, especially in the face of peer resistance, takes tremendous courage. "En-courage-ment" in this area is what many of us will need in order to become a more loving man. True love can be hard for a "real man" to swallow. True love requires that a lover surrender to and honor their mate, be able to express tender feelings and be sensitive and nurturing at times. These are admirable qualities of a superior human being, not just restricted to a male or female.

We must clearly understand that the path of love is not for sissies, but is a heroic journey. It requires great strength, guts and fortitude for a man to express the softer, feminine aspects of his psyche. In doing so he will be more likely to take to the path of love with vigor and conviction.

## Competition/Cooperation

Most men love competition. Most women don't understand it. Their tendency is more toward cooperation. They can't comprehend how we guys can spend hours in front of a TV set watching a football game or boxing match, cheering for the "good guys." Sure, we take sides and cheer for our side to win, but it's more than that. There is a primal jolt of energy most males receive from watching athletes in peak physical condition giving their all. The challenge of competing against a worthy opponent raises the stakes and calls up the best in us. And when that opponent is as skilled or is more skilled than we are, it energizes us and pushes us to greater heights. On a larger scale, the ultimate competition is war. War is where the stake in battle is the ultimate...life or death.

Whether it's seeing a ball carrier break through the line of blockers, or a runner streaking to the finish line (or watching a war movie), there is some part of us that puts ourselves in the competitor's place. We wildly cheer as if we ourselves have broken the finish tape or spiked the ball in the end zone. And by choosing a side we want to win, we become part of the competition and become energized. If I'm watching boxers on TV, I find myself ducking and bobbing along with the action.

Competition is great. Healthy competition can help us get ahead in our work, our education and our play. But the skills needed for good relationships have nothing at all to do with competition. Relationship is about cooperation. It is not a "I win, you lose" game. Relationship is "We win. . .together." Women tend to understand this and value harmonious relationships. They tend to be more skilled than men when it comes to cooperation. They have more familiarity with skills needed for cooperation—the ability to listen deeply, feel empathy, have goodwill and, when in conflict, tend to be open to compromise.

We men need to open our minds and learn from our women about how to cooperate. If we were to watch and listen more closely to women, and see how their desire for cooperation brings peace to human interactions, there would be more harmony in our families and more unity in the world.

## Feeling Safe

I write approvingly about guys being heroes, doing battle with inner dragons, using strength and determination to overcome problems, even approaching the Loving Promises in an aggressive way. This is the typical masculine approach to dealing with difficulties—attack. We enter the fray in order to force change. However, if we use this approach as the only one we have available in our arsenal for change, especially self-change, we severely limit ourselves.

As men, we want to be strong and capable and we are eager to show the world our strength and capability. Yet every one of us has a vulnerable center, a soft, tender place where we can be wounded. Maybe in the past we have

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been betrayed by someone we trusted, severely judged or harshly put down, ignored, or abandoned by someone who left us or passed away. We may try to cover up our hurt with a brave exterior, but we are still sensitive to potential threat. We are fearful. It's not like we're action movie heroes who fearlessly run toward danger. We're more like a turtle. If we sense we are in the presence of people and circumstances that might hurt us, we freeze and pull in our vulnerable parts into a protective shell. And we'll sometimes take a loud, aggressive stance in order to insure our safety, warn off potential enemies and counteract our fear. While our protective and/or aggressive posture may allow us to feel safe and help avoid further hurt, it can also prevent us from opening to change, opening to love.

Opening can happen if, instead of rejecting, hiding and blinding ourselves to our tender, vulnerable self, we welcome it. This is difficult to do, especially if, as men, we value strength and fearlessness, while rejecting our vulnerability. By being blind to our feelings of weakness, confusion, fear and hurt, we are denying reality. It is like we are building a wall of unconsciousness within our mind where any awareness of vulnerability is not allowed entry. However, these feelings of vulnerability persist below our awareness. This inner fissure can cause havoc. What we don't see or acknowledge can hurt us.

How can you open to your vulnerability? A turtle is protected when it draws its soft, vulnerable parts into its shell. Once the turtle feels it is safe, it will stick out its head, extend its legs from its shell and move on. The only reason the turtle protects itself is that it feels unsafe. The only reason you attempt to protect yourself is you feel unsafe. The key then, to opening, is feeling safe.

Feeling safe is a process. It doesn't happen all at once. You stick your neck out a little, sniff the air, check for danger. Rather than tensing up when you feel anxiety, you make an effort to relax. Rather than always challenging yourself when feeling anxious, you try to soothe yourself. This gentle choice of ease over distress helps avoid your being swept up into the emotional turmoil. Instead of gearing up for battle, you slow down, breathe, settle, pay attention to the feelings moving through you. You become a silent witness to the activity going on in your mind and body. In that silence is safety. Feeling safe, you don't need to attack or defend. You are able to see with clearer vision, move with genuine power, and open with heartfelt love.

For most men, this will be a radical departure and runs counter to the way they deal with the anxieties and problems they face. It is not something that comes naturally or easily. And it might be looked down upon by "real men" as behavior that is soft and unmanly. In many instances though, this gentle, self-nurturing approach is so much more effective than avoiding or jumping into attack mode.

## A Harmless Man Around Women

I had a dream once. I was sitting in a room with a bunch of women. They were all busy doing "women things"—sewing, crocheting, etc., while I was quietly present, relaxed and listening to the typical women's banter. What struck me about the dream was how comfortable and accepted by the women I felt.

While I am quickly bored by talk of shoes, babies, recipes and hair, I genuinely enjoy being around women. I appreciate how they care for and about each other and their honesty about their inner personal lives. I think most women pick up my appreciation and offer me the honorary status of being "one of the girls." This is fine with me since I have no great need to present a "macho" front to anyone. The fact that I am a married old guy, with no obvious sexual predator tendencies makes me safe. Being seen as safe gives me special status around women. We are comfortable together.

The importance of being seen as safe in the company of women was brought home to me when I was a participant in a training session for domestic violence counselors. Most of the hundred or so participants in that large auditorium were women. When asked by the leader, who of the women in the audience had experienced sexual harassment, rape, violence or threat of violence at the hands of men, virtually every woman's hand shot up. This was a revelation for me. I got a sense of universal fear and heightened levels of stress women must feel being in unfamiliar circumstances in the presence of men they are unacquainted with.

Being a guy, 6ft tall, with some knowledge of self-defense, the women's fear was foreign to me. But I can certainly understand it. Women are physically vulnerable to men. A man is usually larger, more muscled, quicker to anger and aggression. Many men feel superior to women. Many feel they are entitled to rights women don't possess. Unless a man is known to the woman, he can be perceived as a physical threat. A woman's fear is always present, always in the background. Short of being a Karate black belt, her physical safety is something she must continually be aware of.

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Ask any woman how often she has felt unsafe around men. How often did she have to ignore an offensive comment, minimize an inappropriate come-on, hide her anger in fear of antagonizing a man. How many times did she smile a shit eating smile and pretend she didn't see it, didn't hear it, didn't feel it? How often did she do a quick risk assessment as soon as she entered an unfamiliar environment? How often did she have to "hide" in a women's rest room of a bar till the boozed guy who was coming on to her left? How often did she have to make sure in advance she would not be alone where she might encounter unknown males? You will be surprised at how much this cautionary behavior is a part of women's experience. This is the reality in which many women live.

It is important for us men to maintain an understanding of women's fear and pragmatic attention to their safety. This understanding would alert us to present ourselves as "harmless" around women we don't know well. Remember that innocent joking behavior can be taken as a threat or a proposition. Know that unclear sexual innuendoes like an uninvited touch, or even totally benign acts of chivalry like opening a door or positioning a chair for her, can be taken in the wrong way by a sensitive woman. This is especially the case if the woman has had a history of fearful traumatic experiences or a shocking "Me Too" moment with men. You cannot know her history by looking at her, so be careful with her.

Being "harmless" to women doesn't mean you have to be a eunuch (men who were castrated in order to serve as "harmless" harem guards for Turkish sultans). You can still be your confident, sexy, powerful masculine self. Just maintain an awareness of women's sensitivity to threat from men, especially men they don't know well.

## Being A "Good Boy"

There are times I catch myself trying to please Alice by showing her what a wonderful guy I am. Well, not exactly to please *her*, rather, having her being pleased with *me*. I might try to hide from her some weakness or uncertainty, a dumb mistake I made or stupid thing I've said. Or I try to make an obvious show of how intelligent, creative, kind or generous I am. I want her to admire me, respect me. Her approval is very important to me. I well know the things I need to do in order to get her approval.

I know I'm not alone in this. No one wants to have their shortcomings revealed on billboards for everyone to see, especially not by those whose love we cherish and whose respect we value. We all want to be admired by our mate, and many of us will do all sorts of things to earn Brownie points, receive praise and to get an approving pat on the head from her. Taken to an extreme though, this can lead to hiding who we are from our partner, building up a false identity and playing a role that just is not who we really are. It's manipulative, it's dishonest. . .but it's a hard habit to change. Even though I know this, I still find myself doing it.

Why do we go to these lengths to promote a false image of ourselves? It may have to do with fear of losing our mate. We think that if we build ourselves up in her eyes or make ourselves indispensable, she will be dependent on us and never leave. Or it may have to do with needing her approval in order to validate our value and feel good about ourselves. Or it may be that we simply want to see ourselves as strong and knowledgeable, actually, infallible.

No matter what the cause, our efforts to create and maintain a "good boy" image in our partner's eyes keeps us in the position of a child, forever seeking mommy's praise and chasing her approval. Being a good boy takes a lot of work. We have to constantly monitor what we reveal, what we need to hide. Our focus is on her, what we can say or do to please her. If both partner's play this game, the relationship becomes theater, with both partners actors playing roles that are distinct from who they really are.

Much better to be you. Aim to be kind, to be smart and to be proficient for their own sake, because kindness, intelligence and proficiency are good qualities to possess. The momentary ego flattery you'll receive when you curry your partner's approval is like an addiction. Shortly after you get a dose of your partner's approval, you'll need another, then another.

*Q. Do you try to hide your shortcomings from your partner and make a show of how good you are? What are some things you want to hide from her? What kinds of things do you want to show?*

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### Being A “Nice Guy”

It's comfortable being a “nice guy.” People like nice guys. Nice guys don't cause problems. They don't argue. They don't upset others. They don't offend others. They don't inconvenience others. Nice guys aim to please.

But sometimes nice guys may act nice, not because they are genuinely nice guys, but because they are afraid. They are afraid that if they demand what they need, others will abandon them or stop loving them. If they expose their weakness, mistakes and fears, others would judge them. If they show the anger they really feel, peace would be disturbed and others would be upset. If they refuse others demands, that person would not like them. So they swallow their fear, put on a smiling, happy face, and be nice. All the while they feel weak, feel they are a liar, feel they are putting on a phony act.

A fearful nice guy may run the risk of letting others needs dominate their own needs. They may be open to let others use them or walk all over them. They may need to numb and shut down their own feelings. They may need to compromise their values in order to be liked. In short, a nice guy, in his effort to please the other and avoid a “scene,” may lose his self.

The opposite of being a nice guy who is fearful of other's responses, is to be a genuine nice guy. A genuine nice guy does not act graciously out of fear, he acts out of concern for others. He is sensitive to others needs and feelings. He may still be reluctant to demand what he needs, expose his defects or show his true feelings, but he stands up for himself in spite of his reluctance. By honoring his own needs, he may lose a few friends, but he gains the respect of others, and most important, respect for himself. The “friends” who bail on him are not real friends anyway. They are users.

What differentiates a fearful nice guy from a genuine nice guy is the genuine guy has positive self-regard. He knows that he deserves to be treated with respect. He deserves to have his needs met. He deserves to be free to express himself without over-concern for others reactions and opinions. He deserves to say “no” when it suits him, and “yes” when he wants. And he deserves the admiration he gets from others who recognize that they are in the presence of a man of power and heart.

### Unsafe Women—Ballbusters

Knowing we are in safe hands, physically, mentally, emotionally, is the foundation of trust. Love will wither in an atmosphere of fear and distrust.

Our deepest feelings of vulnerability are associated with the woman in our life we are closest with. We are susceptible to her. We can feel hurt by her critical words and her demeaning manner, her manipulations and her lack of care. Even a critical look in our direction can send us on a negative mind trip. “Am I not good enough? What did I do wrong? How can I fix things?”

Yellow caution flags will pop up and your trust in her will begin to erode if she says or does things that hurt you. Here are some actions that should serve as a warning to you. They are the weapons of the kind of women who could be termed “ball busters”.

- She shames your physical appearance.
- She belittles your intelligence, skills and accomplishments.
- She knows your vulnerable spots, yet purposely keeps harping on them.
- She is sexually turned off to you.
- She breaks confidentiality by sharing your secrets with others.
- She displays little interest in things that are important to you.
- She rejects who you are and always tries to change you and correct you.
- She acts seductively around other men.
- She attempts to separate you from your friends.
- She blames you even when she is at fault.
- She is in competition with you.
- She tries to make you jealous.

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- She refuses to forgive you and keeps reminding you when you have screwed up.
- She spends your money lavishly beyond your means.
- She acts bossy and tries ordering you around.
- She dresses in an extreme sexually provocative way.
- She casts herself as an innocent victim, and you as her victimizer.
- She abuses alcohol and/or drugs.
- She tries to manipulate and take advantage of you for her own selfish gain.
- She ignores you and takes no action when you are in distress.
- She is quick to anger and rage.
- She refuses to commit to you.
- She lies to you and keeps secrets from you.

These are all hurtful actions that would make you feel unsafe around this woman. Even one of these behaviors should put you on high alert and make you want to close your heart to protect yourself. If you are in doubt, get another opinion. Talk to your good buddies. Ask them what they honestly think about her. Trust what they say.

No matter how beautiful she is, how great the sex is, or how many other sterling qualities she may have, a woman who is selfish and does uncaring things like these is nothing but trouble. Stay away! Protect your balls! Don't think she will change or that you can change her. She has revealed herself to you. Listen carefully to the message her behavior sends to you. I know this from personal experience.

## A Safe Woman

Understanding what are the qualities that make a woman a safe relationship partner is easy. A woman who inspires trust displays the polar opposite of the qualities of a ball buster. Once you find a woman like this, know you have found “keeper.” However, finding a safe woman is not enough. You need to be a “keeper” too. You need to be a safe man.

## A Safe Man

You've seen the qualities of an unsafe woman and you understand the qualities of a safe woman. Are you able to be a safe man around your partner?

- You appreciate her physical appearance, even though she may not have movie star looks.
- You congratulate her on her accomplishments and think she is smart.
- You know her vulnerable spots, yet you don't harp on them.
- You are sexually turned on to her.
- You honor her desire for confidentiality by not sharing her secrets with others.
- You are interested in things that are important to her.
- You accept her for who she is without trying to change her.
- You do not have interest in forming intimate relationships with other women.
- You like to include her with your good friends.
- You take responsibility when you are at fault and don't blame her.
- You are not in competition with her and enjoy when she triumphs.
- You do not try to make her jealous.
- You forgive her and are willing to move on when she has screwed up.
- You take care with her money.
- You do not have to be bossy and control her.
- You are not “seductive” toward other women.
- You do not play the “victim/victimizer” game.
- You do not abuse alcohol and/or drugs.
- You are generous and do not try to manipulate her for your own gain.

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- You freely offer your concern and help when she is in distress.
- You value peace and try to avoid angry confrontations.
- You are willing and eager to commit to her.
- You are honest and transparent with her.
- Her best friends tell her they like you and think she's got herself a "keeper."

*Q. Are you a safe man around your partner? Which statements characterize you most? Which characterize you the least?*

### Being Obedient

I am an obedient husband.

"Obedient" is not a word most men would like to use to describe themselves in relation to their spouse or girlfriend. It brings up images of "henpecked" husbands and Casper Milquetoast-type mates who obey their partner's wishes, aim to please and are afraid to assert themselves. Their standard response is usually a meek, "Yes dear, whatever you want, dear."

I am obedient in part because of Alice's personality. Alice has strong opinions and is often willing to fight for what she wants or thinks is right. I am much more flexible and willing to defer or compromise if Alice wants things her way. And I don't enjoy arguments. Often, I just "go along." But not always. If there is something that is important to me, I am more than willing to fight for it. However, I prefer to choose my fights and not get into arguments over issues that are not that important to me.

What do I have to sacrifice in order to be "obedient?" I have to give up my desire to be "right," my desire to be the winner, my desire to have the last word, my desire to act strong and show her who is the "man" and not have her tell me what to do. These are all things having to do with maintaining my ego. They actually get in the way of having a harmonious relationship.

Let me be clear. My obedience is a choice I make. It is not something I do because I am afraid of arguments or need to avoid conflict or want to be seen as a nice guy. When I choose obedience, I do so because it seems to me to be the appropriate thing to do.

Example. Alice and I have different ideas of what constitutes safe driving speeds. Alice is conservative when it comes to the gas pedal, while I am a hotdogger who enjoys speed. So when Alice exclaims, "Slow down. You're going too fast." I overcome that flash of righteous anger that momentarily courses through my brain and gut, quiet my inner resistant voice, and immediately ease up on the pedal. When I drive too fast for her, I know she becomes afraid, and since I don't want that, I overcome my initial resistance and obey. It's not worth fighting about. Also, not making her afraid is being kind to her and kindness is a quality I value.

There is a saying, "Happy wife, happy life." Giving up my ego demands is a small price to pay for having a happy wife. And also a lasting reward for having a happy life.

*Q. Describe situations in your relationship where you choose to be obedient. Why? Describe situations in your relationship where you refuse to be obedient. What would you have to give up in order to obey?*

### Men Abdicating Feeling to Women

*Since boys are taught not to cry, men must learn to weep.*

Sam Keen

We tend to find our appropriate "jobs" in our relationships, based on our skills and interests and the needs of the moment. I unscrew stuck jar caps and kill spiders and Alice purchases groceries and arranges flowers. There was one job, especially in past relationships, where my partner would take the lead, while I would stand by and gladly allow her to. She would be the one whose job it was to hold the feelings in our relationship. She would be the one to get excited when something great would happen with us. She would be the one who would shed tears when

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something sad would occur. She would be the one to get emotionally wrought when things would not go the way we wanted. I would be the cool, untouched, unperturbed one. I was in a safe bubble. In essence, I vicariously allowed her to express the feelings for me that I could not.

I'm sure many guys can relate. In general, women are so much better at feeling than we are. Public expressions of emotion are much more socially acceptable for women than for men. They are allowed to cry and mope, while we men are expected to "hold it together." Anyway, who wants to experience those messy emotions. Who wants to feel hurt, feel fear, feel sad, feel rejected, feel lost. Who wants to feel? So we numb ourselves and let our partner have the job of feeling for us.

While it might be more comfortable for us to allow our partner to express our suppressed emotional side, the negatives far outweigh the positives. The most obvious negative is that we miss the experience of the juiciest part of living—our feelings. As we numb ourselves to our emotions, we become more and more alienated from the feeling side of life. We are able to live only half a life, more from our head than from our heart and our gut. We live on the surface, and miss the depth of what life has to offer. What we are left with when we prevent ourselves from experiencing juicy feelings, is dry logic and a businesslike approach to life.

Our inability to express our emotions also takes its toll on our relationships. If we're busy hiding how we feel, we cannot be fully present with our partner. If she's in pain, for example, and we are trying to fix her or if we are voyaging in our mind, we are not with her in her distress and she can feel like we abandoned her. This is not true partnership.

It's not that those of us who tend to suppress our emotions don't have them. Everyone has feelings. Events and interactions that occur in our lives cannot help but evoke at least an inward emotional response on some level. My guess is that those of us who are most unable or unwilling to feel our feelings or allow them to conscious awareness, are more sensitive than others. We might numb ourselves because we feel hurt or sadness or anxiety more acutely. Our vulnerability scares us.

It's true that suppressing feelings will allow us to avoid the "lows" of sadness, hurt and regret. However, when we are detached, we are also unable to celebrate and fully express the "highs." We mute our joy and exhilaration along with the "lows." Our childlike enthusiasm is muted and replaced by dull, adult interactions that lack true depth.

Suppressing our emotions takes energy. Even though our process of tamping down a scary feeling that threatens to erupt to awareness happens subconsciously, it still exists in our being. We have to stay alert (subconsciously) because we might be threatened if that feeling is about to leak out. So we armor ourselves and put on our mask of invulnerability. We are hiding. Hiding becomes our way of life, a way that prevents true connection.

When we hide our feelings, we hide our heart. When we hide our heart, we hide ourselves.

When we hide ourselves, no one can truly love us, because we do not show up to make ourselves available to be loved.

But there is opportunity here. It's not like a guy becomes an "emotional vampire" and sucks the aliveness from his more feeling partner. There is real potential for change if a man is open to learn from his mate. I am an example. I had always chosen more emotional women as partners. Over time, I was able to appreciate the value of their way of being and begin to share my feelings more easily. This has been especially true with Alice, whose emotions are front and center. I can think of a number of my men friends, who, like me, learned to be a more feeling person because they adopted some of the ways of the woman in their lives.

How much I had changed was brought home to me recently while watching the movie *King Kong* on TV. When the big ape was shot and fell to his death from the top of the Empire State Building, I had to wipe away my tears.

## "Sweet" Surrender

*Surrender* is a very powerful word. The concept of surrender is viewed very differently by men and women.

Ask a man, and he might say that surrender means giving up. For him, surrender is a negative term that denotes defeat. It is about losing, giving away control, being overwhelmed by a more powerful, better equipped opponent. An army surrenders to a superior force. A suspect is charged and surrenders to police. A wrestler surrenders when he is pinned to the mat and is rendered helpless.

A woman will probably have a totally different take on surrender. For her, surrender might entail an opening. The word could have positive connotations, such as the phrase "sweet" surrender. What would make surrendering sweet for a woman? She might view opening her heart and mind and body to her lover as surrendering to him. Dropping

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any defenses, any doubts, any resistance, a woman may surrender and allow herself to be helplessly, blissfully overwhelmed by love. And she will find joy in serving her man and making him happy.

For a woman, surrendering in this way can be an uplifting, heart-opening experience. Could it be so for a man? I know it is possible because I am living it. I feel that I have surrendered to Alice and it truly feels sweet. Surrendering to her is like coming to rest, coming home. Letting go of my lies and defenses, greed and manipulations, is like putting down a heavy load. It's a relief to be able to be myself. I have placed my vulnerable heart in her loving hands and I trust I will be well cared for by her.

There is one condition that enables my surrender to Alice, and I believe it is a precondition to anyone's surrender to another person. That precondition is *safety*. In order to trust enough to let go of your defenses and open your vulnerable heart to your partner, you must feel safe. Otherwise, there will be a part of you that needs protection. To surrender, you must know that your partner will consistently be in your corner, always have intention to take care with you and never purposely cause you harm. I felt this early in my relationship with Alice. I knew from the start that I was safe with Alice, and this is what allowed me to open my heart as I never had before. When there is that level of safety, surrendering can come easily, even if you are a "manly" man. And surrender for that manly man can be even sweeter because it is so radically different from anything else in his life.

It works both ways. Surrendering to your partner makes you safe to her. By letting down your sword and shield, you become a safe partner. This is an invitation for her to surrender and open her heart to you even more. You'll both be swimming in sweetness.

*Q. Have you ever experienced a partner's sweet surrendering to you? What was this like for you? Have you ever surrendered sweetly to a partner? What was this like for you?*

## Is She Pretty Enough?

Look at your partner and what do you see? What are your thoughts about her appearance?

Is she pretty? Or is she too fat? Too short? Are her ears too big? Breasts too small? Does she have bad skin? Is she not as good looking as the ex? Are your friend's girlfriends sexier looking?

Right up near the top among traits that most men consider an important requirement for their partner is her physical appearance. We want our woman to be beautiful. We want to be turned on by her face and body. We believe that our partner's appearance is a reflection of our status, so we want others to admire *us* for the way *she* looks.

All is not lost if she is not gorgeous. We can urge her to change her appearance. Diet regimens, collagen injections, steroids, tummy tucks, hair dye, breast enhancement, magic pills and potions, all offer us the hope that she too can have a movie star face and body, or at least help erase the parts of her we consider unattractive. Then we can accept her as partner material.

Shallow, but real. Looks matter. I think most guys would compromise to some degree on other important traits if a prospective partner were drop-dead gorgeous. I don't demean having physical appearance on the list of requirements for a mate. (It certainly is on my list). It's important for us to be attracted to our partner.

However, physical attractiveness is not simple black and white. Beauty is an elusive quality. It is usually defined by the physical, by the way a woman looks, by what you *see*. Try to expand your definition of beauty to include what you *feel* from her presence. What you see is her *surface*. What you feel is from her *inside*.

### **Surface Beauty**

Surface beauty is the way we usually think about beauty. It is concerned only with the outer surface of the body, the result of the overlay of skin, distribution of fat, underlying musculature and supporting bone. Our culture describes what is a beautiful face and body, with strict standards of proportion, size and shape of body and precise metrics of facial features. The closer a person fits with those cultural norms, the more they are considered beautiful.

### **Inner Beauty**

Inner beauty is exactly that, beauty which originates from the inside. The way a woman looks is the visual tip of the iceberg and only one aspect of the way she appears to the world. There are many other ways that her beauty is displayed. What about other types of physical characteristics—the gracefulness of her movements, the sweet tones of her voice, the way her enthusiasm and vitality play out through her eyes and facial expression. These are physical

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reflections of a person's inner state. Could these be considered part of her beauty? What about non-physical factors like personality and character traits – her sparkling sense of humor, her clever intelligence, the depth of her feelings, her courage and authenticity, the kindness and generosity with which she treats others. Why couldn't these inner qualities be considered part of the concept of beauty? After all, these inner characteristics are somehow revealed in a person's outward appearance and will certainly contribute to the total impression they make.

So, there is surface beauty, which consists of the narrow set of physical characteristics that society dictates. It is a visual image, static like a photograph. And then there is inner beauty, which consists of all of who a person is, their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual being. Inner beauty is alive and vital. It is a fluid, dynamic process. Contained within it is the subtle “vibration” the person gives off which contributes to what an observer feels from them. It radiates and has a real power. The power of inner beauty can override a deficiency of surface beauty. A woman may lack conventional physical beauty, but if her inner beauty predominates, it can make her extremely attractive. Or a woman may have movie star good looks, but if she lacks the element of inner beauty, her presence may have a bland or even repulsive quality.

Over the years it is inevitable that a person's surface beauty will fade. Her skin will wrinkle, her breasts will sag, her hair will turn to grey. But inner beauty is untouched by the passage of time. It may even be enhanced as she grows older and wiser. So, take the time to look for and appreciate your partner's inner beauty. If you do so you will be rewarded with a “trophy wife” throughout your life.

**Q.** *If you are in relationship, is your partner pretty enough? Is it important that she be beautiful? Why?*

*Have you thought about if your partner or potential partners consider you handsome enough? How would it make you feel if you were judged and rejected for the way you look? It can work both ways.*

## Your Love for Her Makes Her More Beautiful

With the understanding that a woman's beauty entails much more than surface appearance, let's examine the idea that how you feel about your partner affects how you see her.

Love can alter how you perceive beauty. You probably think that it's the opposite, that beauty fosters love, that physical appeal is a dominant factor in who you choose to love and whether you are chosen to be loved. It is true that in the supermarket of relationships, women with attractive packaging do get selected first. However, when you look deeper into the relationship of physical attractiveness and love, this premise, the belief that beauty animates love, is only one piece of a much larger puzzle. Of far more significance is the opposite idea, that the love you feel for your beloved gives rise to beauty— in her as well as in yourself. It is the love partners have for each other that imbues the lover and beloved with beauty.

Love and beauty have a reciprocal effect on each other—love creates beauty and beauty creates love. This realization is contained in some general observations that may illuminate aspects of both.

Loving makes us both more beautiful. This is an observable fact and is visible testimony to the transformative power of love. A person's emotional state is expressed in their body. I'm sure you've noticed it in yourself and others. When in love, a person's loving feelings radiate and they actually become more beautiful or handsome.

There's a saying, “Love is blind,” which is usually taken to mean you tend to be unaware or ignore your beloved's faults and imperfections. The reverse is also true. “Love enhances your vision.” Seeing with eyes of love allows you to view those you love with greater clarity, and what you see more clearly is their *inner beauty*.

She actually becomes more beautiful by being loved. Being loved by others stimulates self-love and self-acceptance. Because somebody loves us and accept us, someone we trust and value, it's easier for us to drop our judgments and negative self-image and open to the beauty within us. With the mirror of the love you have for her, your beloved can more easily see and accept her own beauty, and thus become more beautiful.

The way forward is clear. Since your love and her beauty are connected, you can create more beauty by loving your partner more. The simple truth is that love and beauty reside inside, not outside. You won't obtain more love by trying to get your partner to lose those extra pounds or by applying cosmetics to enhance her physical appearance. You gain love and see her beauty by loving. So, if you want her to become more beautiful—inside as well as out, become an expert lover.

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### Mothering Women

Sometimes a woman will get into a relationship with a man she considers “half baked.” She has the idea that she will change him, teach him, make him grow up. This is not uncommon. A woman who does this is taking on the position of her partner’s mother. A grown-up man doesn’t like being corrected by his mother. In fact, he will be turned off by such a woman, unless he has a boyish and immature personality. In that case, a man like that would look forward to being controlled and mothered. He would want to be taken care of and protected by her. He would seek her validation and would be satisfied with an occasional pat on the head and being told what a good boy he is. If she is a caretaker-type person and enjoys being in relationship with a boy/man, they will be a good fit for each other. But they certainly won’t have a vital, spirited, adult relationship. And they won’t feel the sizzle that comes from healthy masculine/feminine polarity.

A mothering woman who tries to change her man is very different from a woman who will not accept selfish, dependent and immature behavior from her partner. Such a woman is asserting her strength and defining her boundaries. She is not trying to make him over, not trying to mother him, but simply demanding that her partner act like an adult. She is expecting him to be responsible and treat her with the respect she knows she deserves. And she won’t accept anything less than a grownup partner. A strong man admires a strong woman like that. He will want to be with her and would be willing to learn from her. He would see her not as a mother, but as an equal.

### Jealousy

Imagine two scenarios. First, imagine your partner has had a brief, mad crush on another person, thinks they are fabulous, but has had absolutely no sexual contact and doesn’t plan to in the future. Second, imagine your partner had become involved in a brief affair with another person and has had passionate, mind-blowing sex, but feels absolutely no emotional connection to this person and doesn’t plan a repeat performance. If you had to make a choice as to which situation you would prefer to have your partner be in, which would you choose?

Of course, neither of these scenarios is very appealing, but can you guess which men or women would prefer if they had to choose one for their partner? Surveys indicate that men would tend to choose the first scenario for their partner as it feels less jealousy provoking to them. Women would tend to choose the second.

Jealousy in relationships is a common, almost universal emotion. It’s human. Few people are immune to it. Jealousy involves three people, as opposed to envy, which involves only two. Country songs and romantic poetry may identify jealousy with love—the assumption is—the greater the jealousy, the deeper the love. This is not true. Jealousy has little to do with love. Excessive jealousy is based on fear, suspicion and greed. A jealous person’s fear is that another person has taken or will take something or someone that belongs to them.

In most cases, the root cause of excessive jealousy is usually insecurity, with underlying low self-esteem. A jealous person feels that they are not good enough or that the other person who is attracting their partner’s attention is better in some way than they are. They may feel that they will be compared to the competition and will be seen as lesser than the other person in their partner’s eyes. And they may feel threatened that their partner will leave them because they don’t measure up.

It is not unusual for people to feel a twinge of jealousy from time to time. Mild jealousy can be an indication that a person cares and values the continuity of the relationship. However, it can be pathological in its extreme forms. A guy can get so obsessive about real or perceived threats to his self-esteem or potential loss of the partnership, that he may drive himself and his partner crazy with his suspicion of betrayal and his habit of seeing every move she makes as evidence of that impending betrayal. He may try to interrogate her, monitor her every move, read her private emails and even hire a private detective to follow her in order to “catch her in the act.” He may try to limit who she sees and talks to, and use other control tactics. It is not uncommon for jealousy to lead to violence and even homicide. Obviously, consuming jealousy is toxic and can spell the end of a relationship.

So, what can you do once you find that you are obsessively caught up in your jealousy?

Take care. Realize that jealousy is a very slippery issue to deal with because it can often be irrational. You don’t know what’s true or not, and your mind can easily play tricks on you. It can create a whole convoluted story line over an innocent glance or harmless remark. Because of this, it is necessary to treat this whole issue with utmost care and seriousness. It’s not something you can “just say no” about.

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Look within. Rather than focus on what you think she did or didn't do, turn your focus on your own mind. Look for what triggered your jealousy. Was it your own feelings of insecurity that were triggered when you saw her talking to that handsome guy? Is she truly enamored of this guy, or is it your own insecure mind making things up? Looking within can provide productive insight into the source of your jealous feelings and can be useful for your growth and the future of your relationship.

Have a conversation, not an accusation. Speak to your partner in a non-accusatory manner. Accusation creates anger and defensiveness and sets you on a downward cycle of blame and hurt. Listen to her with an open mind. Honestly tell her what you are feeling. Let her know how much the relationship means to you, and express your fears of losing it. If her behavior is contributing to your suspicions, this would be a good time to sensitize her as to the effect her behavior has on you and alert her to ways she can be more conscious in her interactions with others.

Seek support. Don't isolate. Share your concerns about your jealous feelings with trusted friends and/or mental health professionals. Getting an outsider's opinion can help you gain perspective. Don't simply look to someone to confirm your suspicions. That will only serve to reinforce your jealous beliefs. Rather, share about the pain and distress your jealous ideation is causing you. Request honest feedback. Explore underlying self-esteem issues.

Jealousy is a very uncomfortable feeling. If you are able to explore your jealous feelings with a sense of curiosity unencumbered by self-criticism, you can gain valuable insights about yourself that can lead to a deeper, more trusting relationship with your partner.

*Q. Answer the question posed in the first paragraph.*

*Contemplate the times you felt jealousy. What do you think are the sources of your jealous feelings?*

## Bring Your Best Self into All Your Relationships

Every man, every woman has a part of themselves that *knows*. That wise man, wise woman knows good from bad, right from wrong, truth from falsity. It knows when we are shading the truth, taking the lazy path, manipulating others (and ourself).

We can know our wise man by listening to our inner voice. He speaks to us quietly, but with a strength and integrity that cannot be mistaken.

Sometimes, though, we don't want to listen. Our "wise man voice" asks, but doesn't insist that we be more courageous, more honest, more gracious, more thorough, more generous than we want to be or are able to be in the moment. And this is OK, because our wise self is wise enough to not demand that we be perfect.

If we would follow this voice of our highest self, think of how strong our relationship with our partner and all others would be. Think of the admiration and respect with which we would be viewed by our partner and all others. And the respect with which we would view ourselves.

*Q. Are you able to hear the voice of your highest self? Are you OK with not following that voice at times?*

## Part II

# The Loving Promises

## Introducing the Loving Promises

Relationship is never static. It is a dynamic, unfolding process that ebbs and flows, grows and recedes. Ideally it is a process that moves you and your partner in the direction of greater depth and harmony. Any relationship that remains frozen, where a couple lacks growing connection and reciprocation, risks becoming stagnant. A stagnant relationship is one that is gradually dying. What gives vitality to a couple's partnership is the shared intention to evolve and deepen, both as individuals and as a couple. This has been Alice's and my goal. Our Loving Promises are the way Alice and I have attempted to fulfill that goal and live our relationship and our lives.

The following 39 vows are what have made our relationship magnificent and our lives overflowing with love. While we have not adhered to all the Loving Promises with perfect fidelity at all times, we have set our intention on fulfilling them as best we can. This has been the foundation upon which our partnership is built. It is not as if Alice and I set out to consciously develop and follow a set of vows that would guide our relationship. We simply lived our lives together as best we could. These vows emerged only later from contemplating our relationship and writing this book.

Keep in mind that the order of the Loving Promises and the length of the discussions of each is not an indicator of their relative importance. They are all important and all necessary for a magnificent relationship.

Here they are:

1. **I WILL STAND STEADFASTLY BY YOU.** I am wholeheartedly committed to the permanence of our relationship. I will not leave or threaten to leave, even during times of great difficulty.
2. **I WILL REMAIN PRESENT WITH YOU.** I will abide with you in mind and body. I will not cut myself off from you by withdrawing physically, mentally or emotionally, especially when I am upset or overwhelmed.
3. **I WILL BE AWAKE TO YOU.** In order to know you, I will take interest in you. I will observe closely and listen carefully to you, with focus, empathy, patience and compassion. I will receive you with an open heart and mind, trying to intuit the feelings and decipher the meanings that lie beneath your words and actions.
4. **I WILL SERVE YOUR BEST INTERESTS.** I want the best for you in the same way I want the best for myself. I will take care of you, comfort you, encourage you and protect you from harm in ways that empower you and not interfere with you growing into your perfection.
5. **I WILL BE UNSELFISH WITH YOU.** I will make it my practice to attempt to give to you unconditionally. When our needs are in conflict I will seek solutions only in terms of our mutual benefit. I will delight in and resolve to consistently do what I can to foster your happiness.
6. **I WILL PARTICIPATE IN YOUR LIFE.** I will make the ongoing decision to extend myself and choose to participate with you in the interests and activities that you find important and enjoyable. I will create time for us to be together.
7. **I WILL BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOU.** I will always remain open to relinquishing my stance and altering my behavior when it is appropriate. I will aim to do so graciously, without regret or expectation of compensation.

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8. I WILL BE ACCEPTING OF YOU. I will not expect perfection from you. I will seek to recognize and appreciate your individual uniqueness and acknowledge your human frailty. I will be patient with you. I will not attempt to change you into my idea of who you should be.
9. I WILL REGARD YOU AS MY EQUAL. I will immediately cease when I become aware that I am judging you to be inferior or superior to myself, believe that my needs are more important than yours, assume I cannot learn from you or expect that I am entitled to better treatment than you.
10. I WILL EMPHASIZE YOUR POSITIVE SIDE. I will applaud your admirable qualities, activities and accomplishments and refrain from focusing on your failings and imperfections.
11. I WILL INSPIRE YOU TO BE YOUR BEST. I will persistently urge you to strive to be the very best person you can be. I will encourage you to pursue your dreams.
12. I WILL CHALLENGE YOU WHEN NECESSARY. I will not shrink from asserting my power in order to influence you for your benefit. I will confront you and offer constructive criticism when I recognize you are in need of guidance.
13. I WILL BE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR GIFTS TO ME. I will be mindful of the things you do and have done for my benefit. I will not take these things for granted or automatically expect them from you. I will receive graciously.
14. I WILL APPRECIATE YOU. I will honor the miracle, mystery and beauty of who you are. I will keep alive a sense of appreciation of how your presence has enhanced my life. I will not hesitate to express that appreciation.
15. I WILL EXPRESS MY FEELINGS OF LOVE FOR YOU. Everyone wants to know they are loved. I will demonstrate my love for you through my words, my touch, my giving and especially through my conduct.
16. I WILL BE FORGIVING OF YOU. Holding on to ill will hurts both you and me. I will look upon you with compassion and strive to let go of my anger, blame and judgments when I feel you have wronged me. I will never engage in any form of retaliation.
17. I WILL BE DEPENDABLE WITH YOU. I will try to the best of my ability to identify and accomplish the things that need to be done for our mutual well-being. I will attempt to always follow through with what I say I will do. I will perform my tasks with care.
18. I WILL BE TRUTHFUL WITH YOU. I will not tell you anything I know to be false, nor will I omit telling you what I know to be true. I will not bend the truth in order to gain advantage, protect myself, or keep peace.
19. I WILL BE TRANSPARENT TO YOU. I will allow you to know the real me. I will not attempt to protect myself by maintaining a false facade and by withholding my true feelings, thoughts and motives from you – especially when I feel vulnerable.
20. I WILL SPEAK TO YOU WITH CARE. My words have power for you, so I will take care to honor your feelings and your dignity, not only with what I say to you, but also how and when I say it. I will be especially aware when we are in conflict.
21. I WILL NOT MANIPULATE YOU. I will not exploit your vulnerabilities in order to control you. I will not belittle you, blame you, threaten you, deliberately hurt you with words, or intentionally withhold money, favors, information or affection from you in order to get my way.

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22. I WILL PROTECT OUR CONFIDENTIALITY. I will not share anything about you, me or us that you would not want others to know.
23. I WILL RESPECT OUR INDEPENDENCE. You are not my possession. I will honor your freedom to think, say and do what seems right to you -- even if I do not agree or understand. I trust you can take care of yourself. I will foster my own independence so that I can be free and autonomous when necessary.
24. I WILL BE CONSIDERATE OF YOUR DESIRE FOR PRIVACY AND SOLITUDE. Periods of interior time are necessary and healing. I recognize your occasional need for privacy, silence and alone time, and I will abide by your wishes.
25. I WILL TOUCH YOU AND WELCOME YOUR TOUCH. I understand that touch is a gift and a healing. I will welcome physical expression of our love for each other through loving caress, in ways that are reciprocally appreciated and at times that are mutually desired.
26. I WILL REMAIN FAITHFUL TO YOU. Sexual fidelity is a bulwark of our relationship. I consider you my exclusive sexual partner and reserve intimate caress for you alone.
27. I WILL PLAY WITH YOU. An essential purpose of our connection is to create mutual joy. I will do what I can to make humor, entertainment, curiosity, surprise, creativity, imagination, romance, excitement and childlike playfulness – vital elements in our relationship. I will make sure to schedule playtime in our calendar.
28. I WILL VITALIZE OUR RELATIONSHIP. A partnership that does not continually grow can stagnate. I will instigate and participate in uplifting activities, learning and adventures that inspire us to evolve physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.
29. I WILL HONOR YOUR FAMILY. Family ties are complex and binding. I will treat your family with respect and graciousness, ever mindful that my first loyalty is to you.
30. I WILL BE ALERT TO NEGATIVITY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP. I will not allow harmful feelings and destructive situations to persist and fester. I will attend to the first indications of disharmony between us so that minor problems never have the chance to become major.
31. I WILL ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY DETRIMENTAL BEHAVIOR. When there is discord, I will curb my tendency to act in ways that create more problems. I will take impartial account of my part and do what is necessary to make things right. I welcome feedback that shows where I can be more loving.
32. I WILL INVOKE THE LOVING PROMISES WHEN WE ARE IN CRISIS. During stressful circumstances, our relationship requires greater loving from me. At those trying times, I will attempt to apply the Loving Promises to the best of my ability.
33. I WILL HONOR MY OWN NEEDS AND MY OWN FEELINGS. When trying to uphold these LOVING PROMISES, I will attend to the way I feel. I will not disregard my needs and desires, compromise my values or allow others to overstep my boundaries. I will ask for what I want. I will be who I am.
34. I WILL NURTURE MYSELF FOR BOTH OF US. My well-being affects you as well as myself. I will strive to choose wholesome alternatives in my life that keep my body healthy, my mind positive and my spirit uplifted. I will look after my own needs so that I am not overly dependent on you.
35. I WILL MAINTAIN THE AWARENESS OF THE SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP. You, our love, and the bond we share are sacred gifts. It is an essential aspect of my spiritual path. That understanding will inform all choices I make.

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36. I WILL REMIND MYSELF OF THE FLEETING NATURE OF OUR TIME TOGETHER. At some point one of us will be alone. I will endeavor to keep this in my mind and savor the preciousness of each moment I have with you.
37. I WILL DEEPEN MY LOVE FOR MYSELF. If I do not love me, I cannot give love to you, nor can I be available to receive your love. I will aspire to acknowledge myself as unconditionally lovable. I will adapt the Loving Promises so that they apply to myself.
38. I WILL EXPAND MY LOVE INTO THE WORLD. My love will wither if it is reserved only for you. I will extend my love, respect and care to family and friends, acquaintances and strangers, to nature and to all of creation.

The final Promise is not listed in order here because it is different. Promise #39 will be considered at the end of the next chapter.

Every religion and every spiritual tradition incorporates a code of ethical behavior that lays the foundation for living a good and upstanding life. The Ten Commandments of the Judaeo/Christian religion, the precepts of Buddhism, the Yamas of Hinduism and the Islamic moral commandments set forth in the Koran are examples. Prohibitions against lying, stealing, killing, abusing intoxicants, sexual impropriety, etc., are common behavioral guidelines. There is good reason why these ethical/moral conditions are considered so important as to be included in all major traditions. If a person does not abide by these basic moral injunctions, they cannot live in harmony with others. Moreover, they cannot be at peace in their own mind. One who kills will be ever fearful of retribution. One who lies will be afraid of being found out, one who steals will fear being caught or being stolen from. Conversely, abiding by ethical principles brings peace and harmony to one's life. The Loving Promises is a list of ethical behaviors – a kind of “39 Commandments,” designed especially for loving, intimate relationships.

A shared life built on virtue is the foundation of a magnificent relationship. The idea is simple and self-evident. A generous couple, a patient couple, a kind couple will have a happier life together than a stingy couple, an impatient couple and a couple who are unkind to each other. The Loving Promises are antidotes to those “negative virtues.” The Promises work by diluting the power of the negative and introducing positive, loving habit patterns. The emphasis on acquiring and practicing new, loving behaviors or eliminating old unloving behaviors are two sides of the same coin. Both will make you a more loving and love-able person. And also, more lovable.

One way of understanding the Loving Promises is to see them as an extremely detailed and comprehensive set of marriage vows. When you marry and repeat vows to each other, you and your partner are undergoing an initiation. Initiations are events or ceremonies that mark the transition from one state to another. Graduation from school is an initiation. Becoming a parent is an initiation. Retirement is an initiation. The marriage ceremony and vows contained therein initiate you from being a single individual, to being a couple. After wedding, no longer are you responsible for only yourself. You have taken upon yourself the awesome task of caring for the well-being of another person. You are no longer two separate individuals. You are one. Cementing and purifying this oneness is the intention of the Loving Promises. Adopting these Promises initiates you into a relationship bond of expansive scope and fathomless depth. It is a true initiation into the deepest levels of love.

It is obvious that the Loving Promises are no popular self-help quick fix, no neat, comfortable formula (“39 Easy Tips for A Magnificent Relationship”). The Loving Promises are ways of being, ways of living. They are a lifelong practice for living a pure life. Though presented here in the context of relationship, they have much wider application. They define a way of being in the world with integrity, kindness, patience, presence and compassion. These are the qualities that are essential for love to survive and to thrive. Previously, I described the three Necessary Conditions that allow love to survive. The Loving Promises fulfill those conditions. They allow love to survive because the Promises embody *safety, appreciation and connection*. And, the Loving Promises also fulfill the Optimal Conditions to allow love to thrive because they are actually a more detailed and behavior-based expression of those conditions. There is a major difference. Unlike the Optimal Conditions, the Loving Promises are not written as if to another person. They are not an agreement you make with that person. They are promises you make to yourself. You are bound not by the commitment you make to your partner; rather, you are bound by a commitment you make to your own integrity.

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Because of this, the Loving Promises differ from a contract. Contracts are based on distrust. They stipulate rights and obligations, more the language of the law rather than the heart. A contract is a binding agreement made with another party and enforced by sanctions. Fail to abide by the agreement and negative consequences will ensue. The Loving Promises is an internal agreement, a private choice made by one individual that states how they will govern their behavior in the relationship and in their life. The Promises are enforced not by negative consequences, but by recognition of the truth and goodness of the Promises and recognition that life and relationships will be greatly benefited by following them. The motivation behind the Promises is a drawing towards the positive, rather than avoiding the negative.

The only enduring way you can guide a relationship is through your own behavior, your own example. It is impossible to coerce people to be the way you want them to be by force. However, you are able to influence them by your love and your truth and your courage and your goodness. That influence is powered by attraction. Your way of being, the benefit gained by your way of being and the joy that emanates from you as a result of your way of being serves to compel your partner to emulate the way you are. The Loving Promises act as a catalyst for love. As you incorporate them into your life, you inspire others to love as you love.

Another way the Promises influence your partner is that they create an atmosphere that encourages reciprocation. Your actions encourage corresponding actions in your partner. Your unselfishness, your honesty, your dependability and all your other positive qualities will tend to bring about those qualities in your partner. It is a natural consequence – be generous with your partner and an atmosphere of generosity is created in your relationship that invites generosity from her. Be honest and an atmosphere of honesty is created. Kindness, patience and dependability will be the environment both of you will live and breathe in. The effects of that atmosphere are subtle. They are indirect. The changes in your relationship may not occur immediately, and they may not occur exactly the way you want, but they are bound to occur.

Your behavior has an incredibly powerful effect on those you love. That effect is additive. As you love more, your love accumulates. Think of your loving behavior with your partner as if it were a bank account. The goodwill generated by your acts of kindness and consideration toward your partner accrues every day and will eventually lead to a surplus of your partner's feeling loved and feeling greater love for you. They in turn deposit their love into the love account. Pretty soon you both will be rich in love. Those abundant feelings of love will characterize your relationship. In lean times – periods of stress, conflict and disappointment, you both will be able to draw upon the bountiful love.

If you incorporate the Loving Promises in the way you treat your partner, you WILL become more love-able because the Promises, taken together, define love in its finest, highest incarnation. They define love not in intellectual or emotional terms, but primarily by behavior, by describing how you might act towards your beloved. For example, my love is made manifest by speaking to Alice with respect, by being truthful with her, by listening attentively to her, by refraining from manipulating her, by acting unselfishly with her. All these are behaviors.

Once you understand that the essence of love is behavior, you dramatically increase your ability to alter the quality of your love. Feelings are in the domain of the psyche. Feelings are not easily changed. For the most part, all we can do is passively experience feelings and involuntarily react as they spontaneously arise. But, behavior is different. It is in the domain of the physical world and the material body and, therefore, your behavior is more subject to the power of will. You can much more easily willfully initiate some action, or interrupt or cease some action, than you can alter your feelings. Intention and will is what empowers the Loving Promises.

To bring will from the mental sphere into the material world involves choice. We choose the actions envisioned by our will. In relationship we are constantly faced with choices and these choices we make determine the nature of our relationship. "Should I serve myself, or serve my partner?" "Should I shade the truth and manipulate, or should I be straightforward?" "Should I try to win for myself or should I help us both to win." Each Loving Promise involves choice and the choice the Promise presents you is noble and sets a high standard. Each asks of you to be the best partner and the best person you can be. The Loving Promises clarify the choices you make to love, or not.

Choosing loving actions is a first step. Becoming a loving partner is more than simply making a choice. It is necessary to follow up choice with action. Effective loving action doesn't always occur spontaneously. Often practice is needed. Repetitive practice of the Loving Promises imbeds them in our mind, our gut and in our muscles. Practice increases the probability that a loving response will occur. So, practicing the Promises is essential for them to become ours.

The Loving Promises have been described as daunting, and they are. They are even more daunting when you realize there is no cherry picking allowed. To fully engage them, you cannot choose which Promise to include, and

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which to leave out, which to work with intensively, and which to let slide. They must all be included. They must all be addressed. Every single one of them is essential. Some are more comprehensive, like the Promise of being committed to the permanence of the relationship or of serving your partner's best interests. Some are more limited in scope, such as protecting confidentiality or respecting a partner's need for solitude.

Whether limited or comprehensive, the Promises are like links of a chain. If there is one weak link, the chain can break at that spot when pressure is applied. The Promises are also interrelated. You cannot be truthful with your beloved and at the same time not be transparent. You cannot be accepting of them, and at the same time try to manipulate them. You cannot be unselfish with your partner, and at the same time not serve them.

The principle underlying the Loving Promises is very simple—the behavior and emotions expressed by you induce corresponding feelings and behavior in your partner. It could be a similar or different response, but inevitably, what one partner feels, says and does affects what the other partner feels, says and does. And like a feedback loop, how you respond to your partner's response affects them, and on and on in a cycle of action /reaction.

For example, if Alice expressed anger toward me, sometimes I would express anger back at her or, at other times, I would shut down and become mum. Both of these responses would tend to elevate Alice's anger, which in turn would make me want to strike back more or become even more withdrawn. These are not effective ways to improve the situation. However, if I were to quietly listen to Alice, inquire of her as to the cause of her upset, admit culpability if I am at fault, and openly express a willingness to change or be of help, her response would be quite different.

The corollary to this principle of one person's behavior inducing corresponding behavior could be, goodwill induces goodwill, and ill will induces ill will. Every one of the Loving Promises is an expression of goodwill. The Loving Promises set up a positive feedback loop, where the kindness and thoughtfulness of one partner invites reciprocation by the other. Each of us, by exercising goodwill or ill, has the power to make our partner feel better or worse, feel cooperative or defiant, feel oneness or separation. It is so much more pleasant, both to them and to us, to make them feel better, more cooperative and more unified with us.

The Loving Promises are not some new, groundbreaking concept. They are as old as the hills. The theory behind them is simple. Instinctively, you already know the Promises and understand how they operate to make relationships great and make yourself love-able. This book just serves as a reminder – a reminder of the power of your love and the effect of your love on others. When you behave with integrity and generosity you will be admired and loved. Your presence will heal. You will be a magnet. People will want to be around you and want to respond to you with the same kindness and generosity that you exude.

It's not rocket science to comprehend the concepts underlying the Loving Promises and understand how they work. But putting them into practice is not a minor task. It's a monumental undertaking. The Promises are not for "wusses." At times they will require every bit of your strength. At times you will have to be a warrior, a Warrior of Love.

There will inevitably be times when the warrior in you will be a scared, overwhelmed kid and want to turn tail and beat a hasty retreat. The Promises will seem an impossible chore. It's important to remember that they are ideals. You will lose heart if you expect that you must be perfect. Do the best you can. No one is grading you. No one is going to punish you if you are not impeccable. We are all in this to learn.

When you first encounter them, the Promises seem overwhelming. Don't despair. It's like this with any new endeavor. As you actually work with the Promises, they become more familiar. You get a greater sense of what is involved as the newness wears off. Soon the novel ways of thinking and new behaviors become integrated into your life and become your normal, natural way.

The Loving Promises are a path, a profound path. A loving heart and a loving relationship is your destination. There are no shortcuts. The path to greater love must be trod step by step. You are in unfamiliar territory. You must explore. At times it will be inevitable that you will lose your way, be distracted, and waste time and energy following detours that will turn into dead ends. It will happen to everyone and it will happen often. There are no shortcuts. Working with the Loving Promises is a lifetime enterprise.

Don't worry about having to reach the destination. Keep the destination in mind as inspiration. Your job is to put one foot in front of the other. Work as best as you can. Hasten slowly and engage with your heart.

## Exploring The LOVING PROMISES

Underlying all the Loving Promises is a single-minded commitment. That commitment is to the growth, well-being and psychological and spiritual unfolding of your partner, of yourself and of all others that you hold dear. That commitment is love. In a sense, you are not committing to your partner—you are committing to *love*. You are committing to be a messenger of love. So comprehensive is that fundamental commitment, that it alone could serve as a guide to creating a spectacular relationship. Each of the Promises can be considered a different avenue leading to this goal. They each delineate specific areas and specific behaviors that move us toward embodying living love.

This extended chapter will explore each of the Loving Promises in detail.

Please understand that the order of the Promises and the length of the discussions of each have nothing to do with their relative importance. They are all important and all necessary for a great relationship and a great life.

**#1. I WILL STAND STEADFASTLY BY YOU.** *I am wholeheartedly committed to the permanence of our relationship. I will not leave, or threaten to leave, even during times of great difficulty.*

*Though the accommodations a man must make in the service of his commitment to his partner may seem like ropes that fetter him, they actually are the means to set him free.*

I think just about every man and woman has an elemental desire to have at least one person throughout their life who will commit to be there for them, to stand by them and support them through good times and bad.

This first Promise addresses this desire. It is the most basic one. If one member of a couple is not available to remain in the relationship, there is no relationship. The commitment is not just to be in relationship for the moment, but to remain in perpetuity.

Commitment is compromise. By committing to one person you are giving up a portion of your independence. Never again will you be able to make decisions based solely on your own desires. You must take your partner's needs and preferences into consideration. . .always. In monogamous relationship it is forbidden for you to explore the excitement of intimate connection with another woman. By committing, you forgo the open road and its dream of freedom, variety and adventure.

Maintaining monogamy and commitment is generally considered to be more difficult for a man than for a woman. Our instinctive tendency leans us toward having multiple mates. It is the male function for the propagation of the species to fertilize as many females as possible. Women however need to provide a safe, stable environment to raise their young. Having a bonded mate around to help provide protection, food and shelter supports this function.

Though commitment to one woman for life may be more difficult for a man to maintain, there are many positive reasons why men commit. The gratifying benefits of stable, supportive companionship, the opportunity to have children and create a family, and the prospect for self-discovery—these and other advantages make the option of settling in with one partner the choice for most men.

A committed relationship is a vital avenue to discover your inmost self. By committing to stay with one person, you make yourself available to allow undigested issues in your life to arise and be worked through. Issues such as your fear of intimacy, of revealing yourself, of being abandoned or being controlled by others will inevitably come up. If you have these issues, they will be stimulated in the day-to-day living with another person. This is what happens in relationships. Without the commitment to stay, when things get difficult and your fears overtake you, your bags are already packed and you're "out the door." You've missed the opportunity to learn about yourself and learn how to be a more love-able partner.

This Promise is unequivocal. When you commit to one woman, there are no "ifs," such as "I will be with you, if it is not too difficult, if I really feel like it, if you don't get fat, if you don't confront me about my drinking, if you don't lose your sexual desire, if someone more exciting doesn't come along." Each "if" you place on your commitment weakens your bond until the relationship becomes so fragile that it falls apart.

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A commitment this comprehensive cannot be taken lightly. And it is not to be made with just anybody. If you are unsure of your desire for permanence with the one you're with, don't make this Promise.

The first and foremost question to be answered before you commit to another is, "Is this person the one for me, the woman I will choose to settle in with for the rest of my life?" Without having a clear, black-and-white answer, you cannot make a full commitment. The problem is—there is no black-and-white answer. There are no perfect partners. Mr. Right or Ms. Right always has something wrong. So the choice of a partner is always a compromise. The proper questions are, "Is this relationship workable enough to commit to? Is it workable as it is now?" The woman in your life may or may not change in the future. You cannot know that. But you are not committing to a partner in the future, you're committing to them as they are now.

Once you do commit, does commitment meant really mean forever? Are there circumstances where a lifetime commitment can and should be broken? Sometimes couples grow in different directions or individuals change in destructive ways, such as addiction or domestic violence. And sometimes a relationship just dies and has no possibility of being revived. The truth is that some relationships are not meant to last "till death do us part." Should you grit your teeth and force yourself to stay in such a soulless relationship no matter what? Or, could it be that the problems you are experiencing with your partner hold a hidden treasure that, if explored, could be life-changing and provide you both with incredible riches?

There are no definitive answers to these questions. The only advice worth giving is, as with any other important decision in life – think about it, pray on it, feel into it, be conscious of the depth of it. The breaking of a commitment is not a minor thing. Neither is committing to stay imprisoned.

When couples abide by their commitment to stay and be a solid presence throughout the inevitable ups and downs of a long-term partnership, a powerful feeling of trust ensues. This is especially true if they have endured difficult trials together. The couple has demonstrated their proven commitment to each other. With the passing years, they have the perspective of time and certainty. They know, "We will face all challenges together and we will endure. This too shall pass and we will gain from it." This certainly creates a powerful bond that is unbreakable. That bond of trust is the fruit of the Promise and the unshakable foundation of their relationship.

Commitment may seem like hard work. Must commitment be such that we capture and cage our partner and are captured and caged in return? Must we effort at commitment? That's not the way it usually works. If love is deep and true, and the relationship fulfilling, commitment is not even an issue. A desire to remain together is the natural consequence of the sweetness and comfort of the relationship. Spoil each other with love, commitment will take care of itself.

*Q. Are you reluctant to commit? To a person? To a project? What about commitment scares you?*

**#2. I WILL REMAIN PRESENT WITH YOU.** *I will abide with you in mind and body. I will not cut myself off from you by withdrawing physically, mentally or emotionally, especially when I am upset or overwhelmed.*

The first Loving Promise, the commitment to not abandon the relationship, is a basic one. However, simply committing to be in someone's presence is just the first step. All ensuing Loving Promises clarify the ways we can be with our partner once we commit to remain in the relationship. This second promise is about staying open and present, which here means not cutting off and withdrawing from your partner, especially when the relationship is under stress and you are feeling uncomfortable.

Being present with another person is more than just being in physical attendance. It is being in the *here and now* with them, not *there and then*. You could be standing face to face, and still be miles away, roaming in some fantasy of the future or memory of the past. When you do this, you are in essence abandoning them mentally and emotionally. You could just as well be on another planet.

Breaking presence, if it becomes a common occurrence and serves to avoid genuine encounter, can be destructive to a relationship. Recurrent withdrawing can stunt the growth of the relationship by keeping certain areas "off-limits." Withdrawing becomes extremely destructive when patterns of escape constitute the normal method of a couple's relating. The connection is like two ships passing in the night.

A most obvious way of escaping presence is addiction. Simply stated, addiction is using some chemical or behavior to alter an uncomfortable state. Drugs and alcohol are the classic addictions. However, common activities can be used addictively—gambling, compulsive work, obsessively watching television or checking your smartphone,

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viewing pornography, compulsive shopping, and other activities could be used to escape genuine encounter with the partner and the self. (See Promise #34 for more about addiction.)

“Stonewalling” is a technique some of us guys sometimes use to avoid the present moment when we are upset, confused, bored, preoccupied or being criticized. Our attention drifts. We might play-act that we are in attendance, reflexively responding with appropriate body posture, head nods, facial expressions and vocalization, but not really being present. It is an act, and it rarely fools anyone. By pretending we are present, we cheat the other person. And we cheat our self as well.

It takes two to be present. If one person is not present, soon the other person’s attention drifts away and both are not present. They end up just going through the motions of communicating, with little real connection. The opposite is also true. When we are fully present for the other person, it draws them into here and now presence with us. The moment becomes alive with shared energy.

The impetus to break presence with our partner is strongest during a period of impasse, conflict or emotional upset. These are uncomfortable times and we tend to cut off feeling, mentally drift away or actually leave. But these are times when our presence is most required. What is needed is a conscious commitment on our part to be awake, to stay put, stay open, listen, communicate and work things through. Often this is the only solution. Staying present, especially during difficult times, sends a message to your partner that the health of the relationship is vitally important to you and that peace and connection with her is more important than the temporary escape from your discomfort.

Staying in contact is what is needed, yet our partner’s emotional storms, and our own, can pull us off-center. Then we lose contact with her as well as ourselves. The trick is to be sensitive to our partner’s feeling state yet maintain our balance and not be triggered by her. Empathy is a wonderful quality, but not when her anger makes us angry, her fear makes us afraid or her agitation makes us crazy.

Staying in contact is easier said than done. Our mind can easily take us on a wild ride, chasing one thought after another, ending up in fantasyland. Staying present involves vigilance.

Vigilance in this case is being alert to the first stirrings of the mind’s effort to escape. The sooner you catch those stirrings, the easier it is to place your mind in the present moment. Once your mind begins taking you for a ride, it is almost always too late. You are already on the roller coaster and about to go down the first slope.

We can become more vigilant through practice, through holding focus of the mind in one place, on one object. There are meditation practices that are very helpful for this.

Life can be conceived as a series of encounters. With each encounter we have a choice. Do we fully enter each experience, even an uncomfortable one, and become enriched by it, or do we withdraw our presence and thereby become impoverished? Much of our life we have made the choice to break presence by any means in order to numb ourselves to avoid discomfort. Yet, by that very avoidance, we preclude aliveness. The height of joy we are able to experience is limited by the depth of discomfort we are willing to allow ourselves. By cutting out and numbing the lows, we also eliminate the highs. We end up dulling ourselves rather than digging deep into the bountiful richness and celebrating what life has to offer.

This Loving Promise is about being present, with a focus on ourselves. The following Promise is also about being present, but the focus is on our partner.

*Q. What “out” do you use most often to break presence when you are bored or upset? (See paragraphs 3 and 6)*

**#3. I WILL BE AWAKE TO YOU.** *In order to know you, I will take interest in you. I will observe closely and listen carefully to you, with focus, empathy, patience and compassion. I will receive you with an open heart and mind, trying to intuit the feelings and decipher the meanings that lay beneath your words and actions.*

The first Loving Promise is a commitment not to abandon you physically. The second is a commitment not to abandon you mentally and emotionally. This third Loving Promise explains what I *will* do in order to be with you in loving communion. This Promise is to receive your partner, to intuit and understand who they are on the deepest level. When she is attended to and known this way, she will feel valued and loved by you. You cannot truly love her without knowing her in this deep, intimate way. So knowing her is a prerequisite to love.

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However, your partner may not always be an open book. Her words and actions may not convey her inner reality. She might at times even use her words and behavior to conceal her true thoughts and feelings. What is necessary in this case is to pay special attention to her, to look below the surface to try to intuit what is really going on inside. *Realize that your partner's every movement is a communication.* Tiny signs—a sigh, a nervous blink of the eye, a held breath, a lifted eyebrow, can speak volumes. It is essential for you to be able to read those volumes. By ignoring these signs, you might miss the anxiety behind her humor, the fear behind her bravado or the frustration behind her anger. This can cause a communication nightmare. Pay attention to these signs:

Visually scrutinize your beloved, especially during times of conflict and duress. Watch posture, gestures and subtle changes in breathing pattern and facial expression. These visual signs reveal what words cannot.

Listen to your partner with open ears. *Listening is an act of love.* Listen carefully beyond just the words. Listen for what has *not* been said. Listen for vocal inflections, pauses, choice of words. Listen for more than just the content of what she says by attending to the feeling tone in the stream of conversation. Listen to hear if her words and vocal tone match the content of the message.

Be curious about your partner. *The key to this whole Promise is curiosity.* What are her thoughts, her feelings, her dreams? This is an active process. Rather than being a passive receiver, actively engage your curiosity and ignite her involvement by asking questions, probing for answers, requesting details. The truth is that she is more interesting than you, in the sense that you already know you, but she is a whole new world waiting to be explored. Your understanding of your partner through listening is an essential aspect of being awake to her.

Check in with your gut. "What am I feeling about what she just said?" Your inner feelings are where you tap into your intuitive power. We all have this ability, we just have to make space in order to attend to it. When you attend to your inner feelings and intuition, you gain access to information that may not be available in any other way.

Receive your partner with your heart. You can attend to your beloved through your eyes, your ears, your mind and your gut, but to really know her, receive her with your heart. The area near the center of the chest where our heart is has traditionally been considered the repository of love and of our deepest emotions. Try to experience your partner through your heart. Feel your heart when you look at her. When she speaks, hear her voice through your heart. Visualize her and see her image in your heart. This simple process will really deepen your experience of her. Try it.

Consistently receiving your partner in this intimate way usually doesn't happen by itself. You will have to practice in order to get good at it. The effort you put into knowing her will be well worth it. And your enhanced skill in knowing your partner will help you to more deeply know, understand and communicate with all other people in your life.

When you are fully awake to another person, you are as close as possible to empathically feeling what they are feeling and experiencing what they are experiencing. To be able to enter another's world like this is a real gift...to both you and to them. Being empathically awake to them goes beyond knowing and understanding them. It is the *entrée* into true togetherness.

When you bring your total attention and full presence to your partner, a few minutes is worth way more to her than many hours and days of half-baked, divided attention. Receiving her in this way says "I love you" more powerfully than any words. Receiving her in this way allows you to see into her heart, see into the beauty and magnificence of who she is. Receiving her in this way is an experience of "ONE-der." It is the foundation of a great love.

**#4. I WILL SERVE YOUR BEST INTERESTS.** *I want the best for you in the same way as I want the best for myself. I will take care of you, comfort you, encourage you and protect you from harm in ways that empower you and do not interfere with you growing into your perfection.*

When a couple commits to each other, they enter into a mutual pact to serve one another. It is a pact that supersedes family, relatives and friends. Each assumes responsibility for the other person's welfare.

Committed relationship is a partnership of helpfulness, growth and mutual joy. When one hurts, the other feels it. When one is down, the other offers support. When one is feeling elevated, the other is lifted up. Where one has weakness, the other provides strength. Two working together in loving support of each other can form a powerful unit that is really so much greater than one alone.

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In many ways they are like one mind, one heart and soul inhabiting two bodies. Their health, finances, living conditions and future are aligned. Their physical and emotional wellbeing is dependent on the other; one cannot be happy while the other suffers. Because they are so tied together, they have a stake in each other's quality of life. By serving the other, they serve themselves.

"Serve" is a strong word, especially in reference to a man. What man wants to be a servant to his partner? However, any sense of inequality is not intended here. With this Promise you serve your partner from a position of equality, not superiority or inferiority. The optimal position of service is of two equal adults who have mutual respect for one another. It is inevitable that sometimes, one would require support; at other times, the other requires support. Each partner can freely be the provider or receiver of comfort and protection as the need arises. There is no advantage or disadvantage to either position.

An important point to remember is that being of service to our partner is not just taking over and doing things for her. Sometimes it is far more helpful if we would empower her by standing back and allowing her the space to do for herself. By doing too much, we assume control and responsibility that should rightfully belong to her.

It should be obvious that generously serving your partner is not just giving to her indiscriminately. One must be discerning as to what to give and how and when. Sensitivity to her readiness to receive is also to be considered.

Should you always be proactive in taking care of your partner by always comforting, encouraging and protecting when she is in need? Maybe, but not always. Maybe what she needs at times is to follow her path unimpeded, even though you see it would lead to a dead end and may have painful consequences. Sometimes a bruising she might receive will wake her up and provide important lessons, lessons she could not learn any other way. Overprotectiveness on your part may deprive her of a valuable learning opportunity.

The last part of the Promise states that I will serve you in ways that "do not interfere with your growing into your perfection." This is a very meaningful but elusive statement. It implies that I can know what another person's "perfection" is. I cannot. What I can do is not just look and see my partner as she is now but have the breadth of vision to perceive her potential, to envision who she could be if she realized her highest, best self. This doesn't mean that I do not accept her as she is now, or that I demand she change or attempt to force her to adopt my vision for her. It simply means that I have a sense of what a highly functioning, happy and fulfilled human being is like, believe that this level is possible for her, help where I can, and avoid saying and doing things that get in the way of her attaining that consummate state.

If you ask for my advice and help, I will be there. If you take a wrong turn, I will guide you. If you stumble and fall, I will lift you up. I will be your cheering section and will shout encouragement to cheer you on. But I will not face your demons for you or fight your battles. These are yours to fight.

This Promise is not so simple as it seems and the decisions that arise from it not so easy. It requires thoughtful consideration in addition to a loving heart. The issues that arise from this Promise stimulate more questions than answers.

**#5. I WILL BE UNSELFISH WITH YOU.** *I will make it a practice to attempt to give to you unconditionally. When our needs are in conflict, I will seek solutions only in terms of our mutual benefit. I will delight in and resolve to consistently do what I can to foster your happiness.*

*Life is good when you're happy, but much better when others are happy because of you.*

Pope Francis

The previous Loving Promise, the vow to serve your partner, entails unselfishness. The focus is on your partner—serving her by helping to care for her needs. This Promise is also about unselfishness. However, the focus is on you. It is concerned with cultivating the inner quality of generosity—working through the barriers you may have that prevent you from giving freely.

Being able to give freely is a major source of joy and satisfaction in any relationship, as well as a major source of happiness in life. And giving freely is an essential ingredient needed to implement the Loving Promises. A person simply cannot and will not work the Promises if they are coming from a self-centered, greedy place.

True generosity is difficult to achieve because it is giving without conditions. It is giving without the demand or expectation that we will receive something in return. Most of the time, when we give, we want to get something back.

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"I'll give you a neck massage now, but I expect a back massage later." Giving in this way becomes a business deal where you try to maximize what you get and minimize what you give.

The opposite of unselfishness is, of course, selfishness. The theme of selfishness is "me, me, me." Selfishness is the obsession about what you can get rather than what you can give. It is based on fear—fear of loss, fear of not having enough, fear that others have more. Selfishness puts us in a world of craving, clinging and lack, where we hungrily try to hold on to everything we have and feel diminished by every gift we give. *Selfishness is at the heart of every bad relationship, every break up.*

Generosity arises from the quality of letting go, releasing, in our mind, the things and conditions we think we must have. Being able to let go lightly is the basis of inner peace and contentment. It is expansive, spacious, and abundant. Giving doesn't diminish us, but instead provides us a sense of affluence and potency. *Generosity is at the heart of every great relationship.*

When you give from true generosity, you give from the simple joy of giving, you give because you know your gift will make a difference in a person's life, you give because you enjoy seeing the happiness on the faces of those who have received.

The key element in generosity, the very foundation – is caring – caring about what is important to another person, what their needs are, what causes their suffering, what they value, what makes them happy. When we care about a person, our caring blossoms into generous action.

Generosity is a skill that can be learned. Like any other skill, you can become more generous through practice. Generosity practice has certainly worked for me. Before I met Alice I tended toward greediness and self-centeredness. For years I have worked to overcome those character defects and I know my practice has made a difference in my relationships and in my life. I know the practice of generosity, if pursued with diligence, will work for you.

The intimate bond is the perfect setting to explore and practice unselfishness. Living in close proximity with your partner presents the perfect opportunity for practice. Frequently, moments will occur where you have to make a choice between serving yourself or your beloved. "Do I insist we see the movie I really want to see?" "Do I take the biggest piece of pie?" Shall I finish scrubbing the pots now, or let them soak and have her finish the pots later?" These choice points are the perfect time to practice unselfishness. I try to be aware of them when they occur and to make the conscious choice to push my envelope and choose the generous alternative.

I attempt to do these things, even when I don't feel like it, without complaint, without seeking acknowledgment or asking for thanks and without wanting anything in return, other than for Alice to be happy. I "attempt" and sometime it is not easy, especially when I don't feel like it. When I am feeling loving and things are going well, giving is easy. But if we are at cross purposes, or when I feel I've given more than my fair share, or when I'm feeling depleted, or when Alice is being a complete ass and rudely demanding I comply with her wishes, my reluctance to be generous comes up. It is at those times when I feel like digging in my heels, taking an unyielding stand and insist she give in and give more. Being generous is the last thing I want to do. Giving at these times may be more difficult, but the rewards are far greater. The practice of generosity becomes most meaningful when I am reluctant to give. I'm working at it.

That said, there are limitations to generosity, and the limits vary for each individual. There is a point where you can give too much and deplete yourself, or give when it is not appropriate. If you pass that point, it is not good for your partner, and not good for you. Generous people especially need to be conscious of their tendency to give too much. They must develop the ability to firmly and decisively say "No." Generous givers need to set limits on their giving, because takers have no limits in taking.

Generosity begets generosity. When you freely give to your partner, your generosity stimulates hers. So, when she experiences your open-handed giving to her, she will have the impulse to give back to you. As the saying goes "When you give. . .you get." Gandhi is reputed to have said, "The fragrance remains on the hand that offers the rose."

When your intention is to give freely and not receive anything in return after you've given, you receive anyway. This is because each act of simply giving openly from your heart, eats away, bit by bit, the hard, cold mass of selfishness of which your ego is composed. Each act of whole-hearted giving is a self-healing.

**#6. I WILL PARTICIPATE IN YOUR LIFE.** *I will make the decision to extend myself and choose to participate with you in the interests and activities that you find important and enjoyable. I will reserve time for us to be together.*

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Every person lives in their own separate universe. When two people come together as a couple, the two universes converge. There are private areas where they remain separate, and areas they share experience together. Some couples desire greater amounts of sharing and stick to each other like glue, some desire less, and are like two ships passing in the night. This Promise is not as concerned with the quantity of shared time as it is about the quality. Hopefully, each couple will find balance in the kind and amount of shared experience that is comfortable and appropriate for each individual. The number of minutes or hours per week you spend with each other is of secondary importance. What really matters is during that time you are fully present.

When you attend to each other's needs and go places for each other's sake with purity of heart, you do not expect or demand any favor in return, you do not do it to avoid an argument, you do not do it grudgingly. And you do not carry resentments for your choice. You "extend yourself and choose to participate" because you wish to follow the path of generosity and love. You do it because you want your partner to be happy. And you do it because it is important for the quality relationship for you to show up and be a part of your partner's life.

Alice and I value being together. Sometimes I will accompany her on errands I might find boring. I know she appreciates my presence. And sometimes Alice will be with me throughout some task she has no interest in. We take the time to listen to each other's complaints, share in each other's passions, help out with tedious chores. We show up for each other and this makes our life a shared journey.

If you only join with your mate in the parts of her life that you personally find interesting and enjoyable and ignore the rest, you are not really extending yourself. This Promise becomes relevant when you extend yourself and participate in activities you are not drawn to or you dislike. Here you are making a sacrifice. To sacrifice is to give up something you care about, something that is valuable to you. Sacrifice could be difficult for you, but it always contains a positive. We make sacrifices in order to obtain or achieve something we want. What you achieve through this Loving Promise, besides being a full partner in your beloved mate's life, is a happier, grateful, more loving partner; one who will be willing to extend herself and is eager to choose to participate in the things that are of value to you.

The quality of your participation is important. If you simply allow yourself to be dragged to someplace your mate wants to go and then hang out there in body only, you are not participating. To participate, you must put in the effort to engage. You must commit to be present in mind and in spirit, not just in body. Presence equates with aliveness. As you make the effort to be attentive and participate, you will feel more awake and alive. When you are present in this way, you just might be surprised to find yourself having an enjoyable time.

An important way you can participate in each other's life is to take the time to check in and share your thoughts and feelings about the happenings in your daily lives. The news, gossip and other tidbits that you exchange may not be monumental or earthshaking, but the consistent interchange that takes place daily keeps you current and connected. It demonstrates that you are interested in your partner and maintains the sense that you are a part of each other. A daily check-in can significantly contribute to your feelings of intimacy.

Please understand that this Promise doesn't demand that you devote yourself to satisfy your partner's whims, or that you have to be together all the time, or that you are compelled to do every little thing together that she wants. Just make the effort to share in your partner's life. Your relationship will thrive.

**#7. I WILL BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOU.** *I will always remain open to relinquishing my stance and altering my behavior when it is appropriate. I will aim to do so graciously, without regret or expectation of compensation.*

A tree with a rigid trunk could more easily split or be uprooted during a hurricane. A tree with a flexible trunk has the best chance of surviving. Yielding, when merited, can be strength. Rigidity, while seeming strong, can be weakness.

The one constant in the universe is change. Nothing stays the same. The weather changes, seasons change, the stock market changes. Humans change; our bodies, our minds, our moods, our likes and dislikes. Relationships are a hotbed of change. One day things are nice, the next everything is screwed. Flexibility is accepting change, working with it, and moving on.

When you are flexible, you allow things to be as they are without having to exert control. Flexibility is your ability to let go, to not stubbornly cling to ideas, beliefs, behaviors, and to "shoulds" and "oughts." It is readily conceding when you are wrong, freely admitting when your partner is right. It is graciously compromising when compromise is appropriate. It is surrendering when surrender is necessary.

## Becoming Love *Able*

Being flexible is an inner quality, an orientation of “allowing” toward others, toward yourself and toward the events that happen in your life. It is one of those essential personal qualities, along with generosity, patience, presence, perseverance, kindness and humility, which are the very foundation of a great relationship and a great life. The easy give and take of a flexible approach to your partner makes the practice of following the Loving Promises much, much easier.

People, especially men, can easily mistake flexibility for weakness, and rigidity for being strong. Standing firm and not bending may seem more powerful and the more “manly” approach. However, by consistently taking a rigid stance, you are unable to yield, even if it is advantageous to do so. Flexibility is being able to change and adapt to any situation as it arises. Yielding when it is merited, is true strength.

Of course, there are circumstances where it is more suitable to take an unyielding position. The difficulty is knowing when it is right to be firm and when to be flexible. There are appropriate times for each. Whatever the situation, I feel it is important to always maintain a *willingness* to let go when the situation demands. That willingness is the basis of flexibility.

In my relationship with Alice, I try to practice being flexible. If Alice has strong preferences about an issue at hand, I make an effort to relinquish my preferences. I ask myself “What do I really want or need here?” How important is it to me? I try to determine the strength of Alice's preference, and if it exceeds mine, and if I don't have a strong objection, I defer to her desire “graciously, without regret or expectation of compensation.” This letting go of what I think I would prefer and enjoy, in favor of Alice's inclinations, has been an interesting experiment for me. It is helping me live more lightly in the world, and it makes Alice happy too.

**#8. I WILL BE ACCEPTING OF YOU.** *I will not expect perfection from you. I will seek to recognize and appreciate your individual uniqueness and acknowledge your human frailty. I will be patient with you. I will not attempt to change you into my idea of who you should be.*

Accepting is saying “yes” to reality, to the way things are. “Yes” means opening to life as it comes to you.

However, accepting is easy if the experiences coming to you are pleasant. It's easy if your partner is always kind and sweet, always agrees, always does what you want. It's not so easy if she is sometimes difficult to be around, argumentative, demanding. That will test your ability to accept.

Accepting is an internal process. It is acknowledging the actual existing condition of the person or situation and not fighting against it in your mind. It doesn't refer to what action to take. You may be taking strong measures to actively resist what it is that is bothering you, yet at the same time you are willing to accept any outcome with equanimity.

If we translate acceptance into a statement about couple's relationships, it might go something like this, “I will be more happy and more at peace if I don't demand you think, look, feel, speak and act in the way I believe you should. Instead, I allow you the freedom to follow the dictates of your inner urgings.” This “hands off” approach is made more difficult because we have the illusion that we can control our partner. It seems so obvious to us that if she would only be different, listen to us and do what we say, we both would be so much happier—or at least that's what we tell ourselves.

Rather than accept our partner, we think, “If only I could badger her hard enough and long enough, or if only I could communicate my complaints about her in the right way, then she would ‘get it’ and change.” Yeah! Like she's going to say to you, “You're right; I'll change that immediately. Thank you for bringing it to my attention.” No way! She cannot or will not change just to make you happy, and your harping on her will only get her to resist you more.

Acceptance is just that—accepting the whole package. This means, in addition to accepting the things you like about your partner, if you choose to stay with her, you must also accept the things you can't stand, even the things you know she won't ever change. No one person can ever fit all your likes and dislikes perfectly. There will always be a thing or two. . . or three things about her that will keep getting on your nerves. But these things are part of the package. Choosing to accept them means that you are also choosing to accept your reaction to the parts of her that are not aligned with what you want. Dealing with your own frustration and dissatisfaction may present your greatest challenge.

If you love your partner but refuse to accept what cannot be changed, you are the problem, not her. Your stubbornness may be exacerbating the problem. If you know she is not about to change in the way you want her to,

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find a way to live with it, adapt to it. Accept the way things are and stop hoping for a miracle. Grieve that you won't get what you want and then move on. You are not helpless; you are not dependent on her. Do what you need to do to take care of yourself. Stop beating a dead horse by arguing and nagging and complaining. If your partner won't spend enough time with you, find friends who will. If she doesn't appreciate the food you like, allow her to prepare her own meals sometimes and you prepare yours. If she's always late, perhaps leave without her. Most important, don't do these things out of spite or to manipulate or "get back" at her. Simply find a way to accept who she is, take care of your own needs, and move on.

Accepting is not the same as liking. You don't have to like the things about her you find difficult to accept, but, especially since there are so many lovable qualities she has, you can learn to live with it. By "living with" the parts of your partner that are less than perfect, you are content. Being content is "being at peace with." Acceptance helps calm your drive to make things different. Now you can relax.

Of course there are limits to what you should and shouldn't live with. You shouldn't live with physical abuse. You shouldn't live with constant lies. You shouldn't live with betrayal. You shouldn't live with drug and alcohol abuse that endangers your family's safety and stability. If you are in a monogamous relationship, you shouldn't live with an adulterous partner. When you compromise your own and your loved one's security and when you compromise important personal values, you harm yourself and your relationship. Be clear about the limits of what you'll accept.

Acceptance is easier in the earlier stages of romance. The person you love is exciting. She is "the one." She's perfect, you're perfect, the world is rosy and there are rainbows and butterflies everywhere. At first the differences are fascinating, but after awhile things start to get on your nerves. You notice she yacks on the phone too much, she nags a lot, she doesn't want sex as often. Around this time, you begin to think you made a big mistake. The truth is, this is the point where the work of true love begins. This is the point where, if you've tried and see that things are not going to change, you need to start to accept your partner. If you don't, you are both in for a rough ride.

If you hold strong judgments against your partner, a rift is created that is filled with tension, anxiety and defensiveness. Even if not expressed in words, she will pick up your sentiments and react. What is required is a transformation on your part, an internal movement beyond judgment toward genuine acceptance. Work to alter the way you see your partner and her behavior. Try putting your self-interest aside and view her and her behavior from a place of witness. Instead of viewing her through the condemning eyes of a judge, see her with the compassionate eyes of a grandparent.

This accepting attitude is powerful medicine in relationship. To be accepting is to be non-threatening. To be non-threatening allows your partner to feel safe being themselves. If you blame them, punish them, criticize and judge them as wrong and compare them to others, you are inducing fear. Fear perpetuates fear, promotes hiding, activates defenses and dampens love.

Try to understand that her maladaptive behavior might come from personal suffering, possibly brought on by painful experiences from the far distant past. She may be confused or blind to the negative effects that her behavior is having on you. Remain aware of her present limitations and do not demand of her more than she is able to give at this time. Be patient with her rather than rushing to try to control or fix her, even though you may be uncomfortable. When you are patient with your own discomfort, you will be more able to be present with her. Approaching your partner in this accepting, non-judgmental way has the best chance of being helpful to her. And your generous and compassionate response allows for the greatest growth on your part.

Letting go of judgments and accepting your partner as she is now takes patience and the understanding that everyone has within them a drive for health and wholeness. Positive results will manifest in their own natural rhythm. We need to honor our partner's rhythms, and not demand she change according to our time schedule. She will progress at her own pace, or not progress. Our job is to accept, support and be patient. This will allow change to happen in its own time.

I think it would be good to see that we're all just ordinary folks, living out our lives, trying to make it through doing the best we can. Seeing others with more compassion will help you see yourself with more compassion. You too, are frail and imperfect. You too, are in need of patience and understanding from others. Appreciating your own neediness will give you space to "cut yourself some slack," and others too. The less you judge yourself, the less you will feel compelled to judge others, and vice versa. In this atmosphere of acceptance, we all blossom.

The Serenity Prayer of AA says it clearly, *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Becoming Love *Able*

*Q. How judgmental of others are you? Very. Somewhat. Not much. Little bit. Not at all. On the same scale, how judgmental are you of yourself?*

**#9. I WILL REGARD YOU AS MY EQUAL.** *I will immediately cease when I become aware that I am judging you inferior or superior to myself, believe my needs are more important than yours, assume I cannot learn from you, or expect I am entitled to better treatment than you.*

Love doesn't judge the value or measure the worth of another person. Love honors the other. That is true equality.

Some of the worst deeds of mankind that one group has visited upon another come from the belief that “we” are better than “them.” War, slavery, ethnic cleansing, institutionalized financial and educational prejudicial treatment are the result of believing my people are superior because we have greater intelligence, strength, wealth, beauty, moral character, etc., then yours.

Prejudice can happen with interpersonal relationships. Maybe I feel more important than you because I have advanced college degrees. Maybe I expect you to defer to me because I am male and you are a woman. Maybe I feel I deserve more consideration than you because I bring home a higher salary than you. You can find many reasons to retain a sense of inequality with your partner. However, a loving relationship is truly a partnership – a bond between equals. This assumption, that each person is of equal value, is an absolute necessity. A relationship based on superior/inferior is bound for unhappiness.

Of course, no two individuals are equal. People vary in intelligence, maturity, physical attributes, creativity, etc. They have different strengths and weaknesses and different acquired skills. But in spite of differences, no one should be considered an intrinsically better or worse, higher or lower human being. We humans are a community of equal souls.

The higher/lower game gets played out in different ways, often with the element of gender bias. Simply by being a male, you tend to automatically be treated with slightly more deference and respect by many women friends and strangers. Your words are given a bit more credence. You are often accorded the luxury of being served. You are not always required to do the “cleanup detail.” It's just the way it is. However, for you to fully embrace this Promise, you have to relinquish some of the luxury of male privilege. You are not your woman's “lord and master.” You should not be entitled to be “the decider” for important decisions. Domestic duties like cooking and cleaning are not “women's work” but should be considered shared responsibility unless other mutually agreed arrangements are made.

Equality is stable. Inequality is unstable. It's a rare occasion when both partners are in complete agreement for long about their inferior/superior positions. What often happens in this case is the person in the superior role, believing their needs are more important, their decisions more relevant, their power more extensive, may begin to demand greater “goodies,” expect the other to defer for important decisions or start treating the other in demeaning ways. The person in the inferior position begins to harbor resentment and insist on fair treatment. The stage is set for conflict and power struggle.

What about circumstances where partners really aren't equal? One has special knowledge or skills, or is more developed in one area than the other. What then? Equality in this Promise refers to believing that each of us are beings who are essentially *equal in value*. The person who knows deep down that they are truly equal to their mate will have no qualms about letting their mate take the lead if they are more skilled or knowledgeable. Their understanding that they are truly equal to their partner takes away the desire for them to control or compete with the other. He or she can then become a supportive follower.

This Promise would be easy if you could expand your conception of what a human being is. See your partner, yourself and all humans not merely as individuals consisting of bodies, minds and personalities. See them as souls, as part of the Creative Consciousness. At this level we are all the same, made of the same divine “stuff.” One divine soul cannot be better or worse, higher or lower, more valuable or less valuable than another divine soul. They are equally divine.

When you see and honor the divinity in your beloved, you will treat her with utmost caring consideration, as if she were a precious, sacred treasure.

She is. As are you.

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**Q.** Name some people you consider “better” than you. Name some that you consider “lower” than you. What criteria do you use to judge?

**#10. I WILL EMPHASIZE YOUR POSITIVE SIDE.** *I will applaud your admirable qualities, activities and accomplishments and refrain from focusing on your failings and imperfections.*

*The way to sing the song of joy is by seeking the good in all people, especially ourselves. Each good point is one more note in the song of joy.*

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

Of course your beloved partner has some imperfections. Everyone does. Choose not to go there. If your interest is to look for negativities in your partner, you will surely find them. Invariably, the harder you look and the more you analyze, the more detrimental things you will discover. When you start adding up all the negatives, doubts will creep into your mind and you will wonder if you made the right choice of a mate.

I think it works this way energetically. Once you place your attention on what is wrong with your partner, you invite negative energies into the relationship. Your judgmental words, even your nonverbal communication, can cause her to wilt. You become her judge and jury. Your words put her shortcomings on display, right in front of both your faces. Negative criticism can immediately bring on her fear and defensiveness. Fear takes her out of her heart and puts her into her mind. Along comes shame, blame, hiding, justification, and this can start round after round of bitterness and mutual finger pointing.

On the other hand, praise motivates. When you focus on the positive, on what is good and what is right with your partner, those behaviors and qualities are reinforced. The energy of her negative feelings will weaken and dissipate. Positive praise, appreciation and encouragement will empower her, strengthen her. She will feel better about herself and about you. And by emphasizing her good side, you will feel better about her.

In the past I was skimpy with my praise. I was judgmental and would only offer praise that I thought was clearly deserved. But if it serves others to complement their qualities and accomplishments that might not quite yet be praiseworthy, what’s the harm in that? Praise is a great motivator.

I am not advocating only looking for and expressing the positive. Praise and admiration have no depth and meaning unless you are also able to openly express the negative. You must be free to be able to give honest feedback without fearing the consequences. Part of your job as a loving partner is to be clear about what can be helpful to her and not withhold what you see and believe, irrespective of how she may respond.

This Promise does not require you to turn a blind eye, or lie or remain mum about negatives. If you have legitimate, constructive criticism, it would be dishonest to withhold it. The key words in the Promise are “emphasize” and “focus.” It’s a matter of what you accentuate. Emphasize the positive, keep attending to the good that is there. And tell her. Be aware of the negative, but don’t focus your attention on it. If you feel legitimate criticism is necessary, do it with the full intention to benefit. The surgeon cuts with a sharp instrument. So does the warrior. One intends to heal, the other intends harm. Use a scalpel, not a sword, and most importantly, wield it with kindness and sensitivity.

Emphasizing the positive encompasses more than what you say. It begins with your attitude, your desire to see the good that exists in your partner. It’s so much more productive and fun to focus on their light, and celebrate, than just focus on their shadows, and complain.

There are few greater contributions you can make to a person’s life than to show them how good, how precious, how beautiful and how appreciated they are.

**#11. I WILL INSPIRE YOU TO BE YOUR BEST.** *I will persistently urge you to strive to be the very best person you can be. I will encourage you to pursue your dreams.*

**Q.** How would you feel if the person you loved was living a life of mediocrity, yet had so much potential for living with zest and goodness? What if she was not enriching her life, but spent hours a day watching TV, playing video games, drinking and drugging? Would you accept her as she is? Or would you try to inspire her to do more and be more?

## Becoming Love *Able*

Promise #8 is about accepting your partner just as they are. Promise #11 is about seeing your partner, knowing your partner, accepting your partner for who they are, and at the same time, *envisioning the person they could be if they reached their highest potential*.

Because you love her and know her differently than she knows herself, sometimes you are able to see your partner's potential more clearly than she herself can. Your encouraging vision and faith in her can inspire her. Inspiring her is not enforcing *your* vision of what she must do or how she must be. That is her choice. Inspiring her to be her best is sharing with her your intuitive insight into her unique potential, a potential that, if realized, could bring her greater joy and aliveness.

Each person's potential is unique unto themselves. One discovers that capacity through living experience, through exercising their gifts and overcoming their deficits, through breaking out of their comfort zone and reaching for the stars. Potential implies a view into the future. However, an important part of potential is the way a person lives their life now. To live as the best person you can be means conducting all your interactions with integrity—being of sound moral character and overcoming obstacles in life with toughness and persistence. Being your best also means living with generosity—behaving toward yourself and others with kindness, patience and sensitivity, and doing so with openhanded lightness.

You cannot force your partner to live with integrity and generosity. You can congratulate her when she does, and enthusiastically cheer her on. You can support her by holding her vision and kindly reminding her of her vision if she loses her way. Most important, you can stand as an example by the way you yourself live with integrity and generosity. There is no more powerful way to inspire your partner to be their best, than by you being your best.

If your partner lies around on the couch watching TV while eating handfuls of bon-bons and throwing the wrappers on the floor, this is not conducive to being her best self. What may be missing is passion. When people lack things in their lives about which they are passionate, they miss out on energy and aliveness. People are at their best and feel most alive when they are fully engaged, when they are enthusiastically pursuing something that has captured their passion. It could be as mundane as making quilts or researching ancestors for a family tree, or as lofty as ministering to people's spiritual needs, serving the sick and homeless or writing a book that will change the world.

A person's passion can evolve into their dream. A dream is some project or undertaking that a person is passionate about, which can produce a result for which they have profound yearning. A dream often takes energy and involvement over an extended period of time. People can organize their lives around their deeply held dreams. Human beings feel most energy and aliveness when they are in pursuit of their dreams.

Do what you can to bolster your partner's involvement in her pursuits. Your inspiration and support for her passions and dreams is a great service you can provide for her. By encouraging her to "follow her bliss," you help her along on her path to joy and aliveness.

*Q. What are your dreams?*

**#12. I WILL CHALLENGE YOU WHEN NECESSARY.** *I will not shrink from asserting my power in order to influence you for your benefit. I will confront you and offer constructive criticism when I recognize you are in need of guidance.*

Some couples make an unstated agreement with each other, "I won't make waves in our relationship if you won't. I won't press you to look into sensitive and uncomfortable areas of your life if you won't press me. I won't point out your failings if you won't point out mine." A pact like this keeps both partners from realizing their full potential. Individuals in a couple relationship could have a powerful, positive impact on each other. However, if they collude to avoid growing by staying within safe boundaries and evading challenges, they insure the mediocrity of the relationship...and of themselves. By tolerating their partner and themselves being less than their best, such a relationship becomes a cozy cocoon where little real growth can take place.

Most of us tend to seek partners who agree with us, who will give us the benefit of the doubt, who see things the way we see them. Because they are in alignment with us, there is a limited amount we can learn from them. Sometimes our best teacher is our opponent or enemy, one who opposes us and challenges us, one who tries to find where we are wrong and searches for our weak spots. If you listen to your opponent and are open to learn from them, they might even be considered your ally.

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This is not to say you should take on the role of being an enemy to the woman in your life. However, if you become aware of her straying from integrity or entering a path that can bring her loss and heartbreak—speak up. Be honest, don't let her off the hook. Challenge her for choosing mediocrity over nobility. Show her where you believe she is mistaken and how it can cause harm. By simply telling your truth, with strength and kindness and with sensitivity to her feelings, you serve as a loving mirror for her. If your reflection is clear and accurate, your input can wake her and help get her back on course.

Sometimes a challenge can lead to arguments. I'm not referring here to the kind of arguments where one partner is trying to win for themselves, trying to get their way for their own advantage. I'm referring to the kind of argument where one partner is trying to wake up the other to their unconscious, self-defeating behavior and provoke them by rattling the cage of their complacency. It could be very uncomfortable for them when their laziness is exposed or when a part of themselves they want to remain covered is revealed. If done in good faith and with love, your challenge can melt your partner's defenses and allow her to receive the messages she needs to hear.

It takes courage to stand up for what you believe is best for your partner, especially in the face of her opposition. You may frustrate her, disappoint her or arouse her anger and resistance. Sometimes she might become defensive, maybe even attempt to attack you. Fear of these reactions may make you inclined to withhold your opinions and "sugarcoat" what you tell her. Saying your truth means silencing your fearful "Mr. Nice Guy," who will go to any length to avoid upsetting anyone. Confrontation requires of you a willingness and readiness to stand up and wound your partner if it serves them. Sometimes her feelings might be hurt or her ego punctured. Occasionally though, these are the consequences of truth. Wounding can sometimes waken.

Being available to challenge your partner when needed is a valuable and, at times necessary function in a loving relationship. Ultimately, your strength in this area can come to be greatly appreciated by her, especially if you handle it with tact and sensitivity. However if you refuse to challenge or offer criticism when it is required, you are shirking your responsibility to be of help to your partner and inspiring her to be her best. Failure to challenge your partner when necessary is a failure to love.

*Q. Now or in the past, have you made a pact with someone to not "rock the boat?" What is/was the result?*

**#13. I WILL BE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR GIFTS TO ME.** *I will be mindful of the things you do and have done for my benefit. I will not take these things for granted or automatically expect them from you. I will receive graciously.*

For many of us guys, the women in our life often enjoy taking care of us and making us comfortable. They may do much of the cooking and shopping for us, comfort us when we're sick, listen to our complaints, make sure we have a jacket when it's cold out, cuddle with us at night, and on and on. These gifts of care create a space for us to be safe and snug, a space to be loved.

Day after day you spend time with your partner. You get used to each other and can get comfortable with her. You lazily trust in the durability of your relationship. Familiarity takes over and it becomes easy for you to take her for granted. Then you reflexively expect things from her without thinking. You can neglect to pause and respectfully make a request rather than a demand. You can forget to be gracious and appreciative in accepting her generosity. You can become oblivious to her needs and neglect to offer help to ease her burden as a gesture of your appreciation. These kinds of behaviors kill love. Love requires ongoing vigilance. Love requires gratefulness for what is given. You need to always remember that when your partner gives to you, it is a gift you are privileged to receive, not a right you are entitled to.

Gratitude is an essential part of a great relationship. It is a reminder of how fortunate you are to have this wonderful partner in your life. With gratitude, the seeming importance of her blemishes, defects and deficiencies melt away. Gratitude gives you perspective. Your problems seem to shrink when you focus on what is good in your life together. When your partner knows that you appreciate her and knows you are grateful for her generosity, she knows she is loved. And she is more inclined to continue her generous behavior.

Don't hesitate to express appreciation when you are gifted by your beloved. This is receiving with graciousness and is an act of generosity on your part. It's not that your partner needs or even wants validation for her acts of generosity. However, it would probably bother her to know that you expected or didn't appreciate, or possibly didn't even recognize when you had received her gift.

## Becoming Love *Able*

It may seem odd to speak about improving your ability to receive from others in this book whose theme is predominately about giving. However, paradoxically, your receiving graciously is a generous offering you give to your partner. Many men, myself included, have difficulty receiving. They reject offers of support, minimize their partner's encouragement, brush off compliments, ignore advice, spurn an intimate gesture or criticize the gift their partner offers. The origin of this "I don't need anything from anyone, I can manage it myself" attitude probably has its roots in adolescence and in male conditioning that emphasizes a show of strength and independence. Whatever the source, if you continue this behavior, you will inevitably dampen your partner's joy in giving, and this will eventually turn off her desire to give to you.

It would be helpful from time to time, to periodically contemplate the things your partner does for your benefit. Make a written list if you want to make it more tangible. Luxuriate in the warm, appreciative feelings that result. Just thinking about how she takes care of you will fill your heart with love for her.

When it comes down to it, gratitude is a choice of where you want to put your attention. You can attend to all the positive things your partner does for you and be grateful and happy. Or you can focus on all the negative things and feel frustrated, angry and miserable. I choose to be grateful.

**#14. I WILL APPRECIATE YOU.** *I will honor the miracle, mystery and beauty of who you are. I will keep alive a sense of appreciation of how your presence has enhanced my life. I will not hesitate to express my appreciation and admiration for you.*

We can have the most wonderful person in our life, possess limitless wealth, be surrounded by the most beautiful objects, but if we don't appreciate them, we have nothing. *Joy arises not from having, but from appreciating what we have.*

Appreciation can open the door to bounty. Our appreciation is like an affirmation that says, "I give thanks to the universe for the gift I have been given and I am open to receive more." That appreciation and openness makes it more likely that the universe will provide.

With the previous Loving Promise, we are grateful for the things our lover does for us, for her actions. With this Promise, we appreciate and are grateful for the person she is. Her very being is her gift to us—her smile, her walk, her voice, her integrity, her humor, her tenderness, her deep feelings. We can even cherish what could be seen as negatives—her less than perfect physical features, her quiriness, her weakness, her foolishness, her stubbornness—the whole package that comprises this amazing, mysterious human being with whom we are privileged to share our life.

With any relationship, time can remove some of the sheen that was originally there. Dirty clothes left on the bathroom floor, dishes in the sink, smelly farts, petty arguments, the same old routines. . .these things make us wonder if the person living with us is the same one we first fell in love with. How can we regain the spark that seems to have gone out? There is one sure way. . .look at her with eyes of love. Actually, do that. Look at her, or look at a photograph of her with a feeling of love coming from your heart. Let the loving feeling bubble up. When you appreciate her essence, the spark will never extinguish.

Seek to experience the beauty in myriad forms in your partner. It is there. You will find it if you look for it. Just take the time and make the effort to open your eyes and look with your heart. Count the blessings inherent in her very presence. Focus your positive thoughts on her. Intentionally contemplate those qualities that make her adorable, ponder the ways she has enriched you just by being in your life. Experience the gratefulness you feel in her presence.

When we feel appreciation in this way for our beloved, we will treat her as if she is a precious jewel. The Loving Promises manifest spontaneously, a natural response to the appreciation we feel. It becomes a joy, not a burden, to engage the Promises. They are not a struggle. They are an easy, natural outgrowth of our feelings of appreciation for our partner.

Appreciation cannot be a significant factor in relationship unless it is expressed. The next Promise speaks in more detail about expressing love and appreciation.

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**#15. I WILL EXPRESS MY FEELINGS OF LOVE FOR YOU.** *Every one of us wants to know they are loved. I will demonstrate my love for you through my words, my touch, my giving, and especially through my conduct.*

An essential aspect of every person's happiness and well-being is to be able to feel good about themselves, to appreciate their positive qualities and not be overwhelmed by their negative ones. Being loved by someone special who appreciates us is an affirmation of our worthiness. Our partner is a mirror, whereby we can look and see our beauty reflected back to us in the love from her eyes, hear it from the words on her lips, feel it from the gentleness of her touch. In order for us to really know our worthiness beyond a shadow of a doubt, we must see it, feel it and hear it from one who loves us.

Everyone has their own style of expressing love and appreciation. Some do it with gifts, some with written or spoken words, some with loving touch, and some with caretaking or comforting actions. There's no proper way or best way. Whatever form you use to express what is in your heart, if you aim that communication in a way that your partner can best receive and appreciate it, your expression will be a sweet, loving message from heart to heart.

Expressing love is an integral part of a loving relationship. It greatly enhances both of your experiences of love. It brings the feelings in your heart from a vague, nebulous place, into the solid here and now, where that love can be seen and felt and tasted by both of you. Expressing your love, no matter the way you do it, makes your experience of love more real.

Some of us guys have difficulty expressing love. We tell ourselves "She knows I love her. I don't have to say it." This is no excuse. Don't assume. Say it. Show it. It will melt her heart to hear it and feel it from you.

An evening candlelit dinner in a private booth in a charming French restaurant with your honey is a romantic way to say "I love you." However, you don't have to wait for the perfect time or the perfect place to declare your love. Anytime is the perfect time. Anyplace the perfect place. Don't wait till you have the perfect words. The words in your heart are the perfect words. Don't put it off. Do it now. Do it again and again.

Every single day for the almost 40 years we have been together, Alice and I have told each other, "I love you." And each time it warms our hearts.

Expressing love with only words or gifts is not enough. Love needs to be proven by action, by kind and generous behavior. Only then will it be a full expression of love. There is a complete, all-inclusive way to communicate love, one that will be forever welcomed by every woman. That way is to embody the Loving Promises. The Loving Promises are a clear, authentic, comprehensive communication of love.

**Q.** *Do you sometimes feel reluctance to verbally express love and appreciation for those you care about? What might hold you back?*

**#16. I WILL BE FORGIVING OF YOU.** *Holding on to ill will hurts both you and me. I will look upon you with compassion and strive to let go of my anger, blame and judgments when I feel you have wronged me. I will never engage in any form of retaliation.*

Alice and I do not hold any unresolved issues from the past against each other, no unexpressed anger, no resentment, no withheld considerations of unfairness. Absolutely none. If those thoughts and feelings arise, we deal with them right away. If one of us has been hurt by the other, we can acknowledge the hurt, deal with the issue, then forgive and move on. Even better than having to forgive or ask forgiveness, Alice and I put our effort into always behaving lovingly with each other. When we do so, there's no need for forgiveness because nobody has done anything wrong that must be forgiven.

Forgiveness is relinquishing demands about how the past should have been. It is letting go of insistence about the way another person should have felt, spoken or behaved. It is releasing your anger, resentment and righteousness, and relinquishing the desire to punish or gain compensation for your pain. The events that triggered the pain occurred in the past. The past cannot be undone. However, you are experiencing your anger and frustration in the present. Through releasing blame and painful memories from yesterday, you are able to live more lightly today.

If your partner has done something to hurt you, forgiving her is an act of kindness. It helps to release her from guilt over her misdeeds and un-binds her from obligation. It restores balance and equanimity. It helps her to be around you without shame. Forgiveness is also an act of kindness toward yourself. It releases you, because holding

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on to festering anger and resentment is a painful, self-imposed prison. The heart shuts down and the hurt and anger are walled up inside where they fester because they cannot be freed.

If you have been demeaned, frustrated, let down, or treated unfairly by the woman in your life or by anyone, it is an instinctive emotional response to want to strike back, to retaliate. This is especially true if you perceive the offense to be deliberate. You want to give her a taste of her own medicine. You want her to realize, "Now you know how it feels. How do you like it?" The Old Testament even recommends, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth." However, this leaves both parties blind and toothless.

Retaliation is essentially a declaration of war. If it doesn't result in your partner's capitulation, it is almost certain to invite escalation. While you may feel justified to inflict discomfort on your mate in order to "get even," you cannot do so without violating the Loving Promises. You should not even attempt to exact revenge covertly, such as by undermining her behind her back. Passive aggression is still aggression, and the intention is the same—to hurt. Retaliation must be removed from your behavioral armory. The joy of getting even is not worth the disruption of love.

Should you "turn the other cheek" instead? Ignoring another's offense is risky because it might invite further mistreatment. Instead of a passive response, like ignoring or turning the other cheek, or an aggressive response, like accusation or retaliation, a viable alternative is an assertive response. This is where you directly address the person and confront their offending behavior. If you feel wounded by your partner, what is required is a vocal "Ouch, what you did hurt." This should be followed by an earnest discussion of her behaviors that have caused you pain, an airing of your genuine feelings in response of those behaviors, and firm demands for her to cease, if she has not done so already.

Sometimes an apology, amends or restitution by her is required in order for forgiveness to be complete. This is as much for the benefit of the person who is the cause of the pain as it is for the one who is hurt. It allows them to air their remorse and brings things back into balance. Once you have been heard and understood, and your concerns heeded...then...offer forgiveness.

There are lots of things we tell ourselves in order to avoid forgiving. "I am the right one. I am the injured party. I am the one who has suffered through your actions. It is only fair that you should suffer for what you have done to me. You haven't even admitted your part in it. Why should I forgive first?" These arguments against forgiving come from a mind that clings to the past, to a time which is gone and cannot be changed. Forgiveness comes from our heart that looks to the present.

How do we open our hearts and release our burden? I think it helps to view the harmful behavior of another with a larger perspective and with compassionate eyes. The person who has hurt you is, as you are, as we all are, a flawed, wounded human being. When people you care for hurt you, most often they are acting out of their own pain and ignorance. So much of people's beliefs and behavior are "knee-jerk" reactions. They are not thought out. They may be inherited responses, passed down from parent to child, adopted as a youngster from friends and classmates, or picked up from the cultural norms or from the media. These patterns are so ingrained that a person is not able to see or understand their own process. Are we to heap blame on one who is so blind?

To see the causes of your partner's hurtful actions can bring on compassion and make it easier for you to forgive her. It does not, however, excuse her actions. And it does not allow her permission to keep hurting you. Transgressions that go unpunished will tend to be repeated. But compassion and forgiveness remove some of the sting of your anger and the voracious hunger for retribution. That anger and hunger is your pain.

Forgiving is not complete without forgetting—putting the incident or situation out of mind so you don't keep chewing on it. Forgetting is wiping the slate clean. Forgetting is the only circumstance where having a bad memory is an asset. Without forgetting, you still hold on to remnants of anger and blame.

Drop the blame, let go of angry feelings if you can. Wipe the memory from your conscious mind, but don't be stupid. Don't close your eyes to the possibility you could be harmed again. Protect yourself and avoid persons and situations where you are exposed to harmful influences. Don't swim in shark infested waters.

Please don't blame yourself if you are not willing or ready to forgive. If you are not ready...you are not ready. Mouthing the words when you don't feel it would be a lie. If you are still feeling the sting of hurt and heat of anger, don't be too quick to forgive. Don't cut off your true feelings. You deserve to retain your anger and they deserve to receive your anger. But don't carry it around too long. Anger internalized can eat you up inside and cause physical and psychological harm. So if you really feel ready to forgive, don't wait. Do it now. But if you are not truly ready, don't do it. If you rush the process, you are being unkind to yourself.

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Forgiving when someone close to you has hurt you is not instantaneous. It is a process that can take a long time. Once a loved one has been unkind or hurtful to you, the residue of pain and resulting caution and distrust you hold in your mind and gut can remain for years. Though it may recede from your consciousness, it may never go away.

Is there a limit to forgiveness? Is it possible that your partner has done something so drastic, so hurtful, so unforgivable as to create damage and pain which is beyond forgiving? Did they lie, have an affair, violate a sacred trust? I suppose that it is possible to withhold forgiveness. But I know that it is rarely impossible to put the past behind you, attempt to clear the air and perhaps begin anew. Believing this to be true can be enough to open a dialogue. If both partners feel the relationship still has value and is to endure, opening to forgiveness can occur for even unforgivable circumstances.

It's not unusual for people to wait until the end of life to forgive. Forgiveness of others and of yourself is too important to wait till you are on your deathbed. . . or they are on theirs. Understand this, and if possible, forgive now.

*Q. Who have you not forgiven?*

**#17. I WILL BE DEPENDABLE WITH YOU.** *I will try to the best of my ability to identify and accomplish the things that need to be done for our mutual well-being. I will attempt to always follow through with what I say I will do. I will perform my tasks with care.*

Being dependable is the willingness to be depended upon. It is assuming responsibility for what needs to be done. It is saying what you will do and doing what you say.

Alice and I have certain responsibilities for maintaining our lives. Some of mine includes picking up after myself, taking out garbage, paying some of the bills, helping prepare food, doing the majority of the dishwashing, pot scrubbing and cleanup after meals, overseeing maintenance of the lawn, house and auto. I do the “manly” jobs of carrying heavy objects, reaching for stuff on the higher shelves and killing bugs. Also, as a convenience to Alice and women everywhere, I always leave the toilet seat down.

These chores we do to help each other, even the minor ones, are important and not to be minimized. They indicate we are each full partners and helpmates to each other. In doing them, I show that I respect our living space, care about her wishes and want to please her. If I stopped doing these things, or kept “forgetting,” or kept putting them off, or kept doing them half-assed, I would be sending a different message to her, a message I don't want to send—that I don't respect her wishes or care about our living space. It would also send a larger message. “What you want doesn't matter,” and an even more encompassing message, “I don't care about your feelings.” Therefore, I do what needs to be done. I want my message to her to be, “I am dependable, I care. You can count on me, I love you.”

Aside from taking care of necessary business, the result of my being dependable is that Alice knows she's in good hands. She knows she is safe and taken care of. She knows she can trust me and that her wishes are being taken seriously. This is comforting to her and feels right and good to me. Alice trusts me. Her trust in me didn't appear out of thin air. I *earned* it. I earned it by over and over, demonstrating my trustworthiness.

When I act responsibly, I feel potent, I feel strong, I feel productive, I feel good about myself. When I act in an undependable manner, I lose potency. Every time I tell Alice I will do something and then don't do it, do it half-assed, or put it off till the last moment, I lose credibility in her eyes. What's worse, if I tell myself I will do something and then don't do it, I lose credibility in my own eyes. My integrity is at stake as well as my sense of potency.

In prior relationships, I was able to avoid domestic chores by claiming that I have a disability. I was affected by CD, (Cleaning Disabled), meaning I would purposely do such a slovenly and incompetent job that my mate would give up on me and do it herself. Alice would have none of it. She understood that my CD was just a ploy to get out of doing something I didn't want to do. My “disability” has cleared up quite a bit now.

The Promise asks you to do more than just to simply *do it*. It asks you to do whatever tasks you are responsible for with care. So, when I scrub a pot, I make it shine. When I sweep the floor, I make sure I don't leave dirt in the corners or under the rug.

I am dependable because I love and respect myself, I love and respect Alice, and I love our home and our life together. My dependability is an expression of that love. I do work that needs to be done as an offering to love.

*Q. Do you consider yourself a dependable person? Do others in your life consider you dependable?*

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**#18. I WILL BE TRUTHFUL WITH YOU.** *I will not tell you anything I know to be false, nor will I omit telling you what I know to be true. I will not bend the truth in order to gain advantage, protect myself, or keep peace.*

Many of us learned as children that lying can be useful. If we did something wrong we could sometimes escape punishment by denying the truth. Dishonesty may have saved our skin when we were kids, but it is destructive in adult relationships.

Here, in a nutshell, is what I know to be true about lying or withholding truth in relationship.

- *Trust is the cornerstone of a relationship. A lie is an attempt to deceive. It is a severe breach of trust.*
- *Call it a fib, a yarn, a white lie, exaggeration, rationalization, stretching the truth. All are efforts to deceive and are a breach of trust.*
- *Lying is habit-forming. Tell one lie and it becomes easier to tell another.*
- *Lies are self-perpetuating. Each lie requires additional lies in order to cover it up.*
- *Lies always take their toll on the liar, the person lied to, and the relationship. Big lies take a big toll, little white lies take a lesser toll, but all lies, large or small, have their affect.*
- *If a partner is caught in a lie, it could take years for the relationship to heal.*
- *Healing is never complete because a lie which is exposed is never completely forgotten by the person lied to.*
- *A lie, unexposed, even if the partner never finds out, creates a festering separation within the couple.*
- *The only way to heal the fallout from a lie is to tell the truth and accept the consequences.*

People lie mainly for two reasons: fear and greed. They lie because they are afraid that someone will find out about who they really are or about something they might've done that is harmful and of which they are ashamed. Or, they lie in order to obtain something, some gain or some advantage or to avoid some punishment. Therefore, when you make a commitment not to lie, you are making a commitment to do more than simply tell the truth. You are committing to confront your fear and/or your greed. By choosing truthfulness, you touch the very foundation of your integrity.

Honesty is the simple, direct path. It leads to calm and inner purity. Honesty is standing up and speaking your truth, even when you are vulnerable and afraid. It takes real courage and inner power to choose the truth when lying would be so much easier and seemingly less messy. The results of that courageous, honest choice is a sense of inner strength. The result of choosing to lie is that you propagate suspicion, disharmony and complication. When you lie, you must be ever vigilant to make sure the lie remains undiscovered. If others sense your lie, you must now cover up with additional lies. You can easily lose track and be caught in the complicated web of your dishonesty. As Sigmund Freud said, *"No man has a good enough memory to be a successful liar."*

Lying to your partner makes you feel dirty and leads to a furtive sense of inner weakness. Dishonesty builds upon itself as lies, withheld feelings, and unexpressed grievances accumulate. It becomes more and more difficult to be truthful the longer the truth is withheld. Like water accumulating behind a dam, pressure builds and there is fear that the dam will break and that lies will pour out and be revealed. Even the revelation to your partner of a single lie brings on her suspicion that there may be many more hiding in the wings. So we reinforce the dam with additional lies. More than likely, unless she is brain dead, your partner can sense that things are not right, and this creates distance. The way out of this dilemma is simple. . . *tell the truth.*

The truth is potent. When we speak our deepest truth, something very powerful happens—our hearts crack open. Two people who are conversing in superficialities suddenly drop into the depths of honest feelings. This is the power of truth.

The injunction to always be honest, to not hold things back, is an ideal. The reality is that sometimes telling the raw truth is hurtful, or premature, or unkind. Truth spoken at the wrong time, or delivered in the wrong way, or without consideration for the feelings of the receiver, is not truth. It is aggression. Therefore, it is important to use discrimination and avoid blurting out what you believe to be true, or else your honesty will cause unnecessary pain or shut down communication. I am not advocating lying. I am suggesting you modify your truth in ways your partner

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can hear. Postpone speaking until your partner is receptive. Delay hard truths until you are feeling clear and harmless. Withhold truth if it would cause needless suffering.

If I was forced to make a choice between being honest and being loving, I wouldn't hesitate. I would choose loving.

**Q.** *Are there circumstances where you consider it OK to lie? Look at and answer the questions at the end of Promise #19.*

**#19. I WILL BE TRANSPARENT WITH YOU.** *I will allow you to know the real me. I will not attempt to protect myself by maintaining a false façade and by withholding my true feelings, thoughts and motives from you, especially when I feel vulnerable.*

Transparency means you are being “seen through,” nothing hidden. To be truthful, transparent and non-manipulative with your partner, (Loving Promises, numbers 18, 19, 21), requires that you reveal yourself to her. You stand vulnerable before her without trying to control the image you project in order to look good. You show up simply and honestly as you are. You don't have to speak or act sweet, you don't need to fulfill the other person's expectation of you, and you don't need to expend the energy to constantly maintain a false image.

When two people first meet, they are blank tablets, two unknowns. Gradually, stories are told, memories recounted, thoughts revealed. A picture of the other is constructed in each person's mind. Transparency is about the accuracy and completeness of that picture—what is included, what is held back. When a person is willing to let their partner see the whole unedited picture, their fears, desires, failures, stupidities, only then is it possible to be truly loved. Otherwise, if someone loves us, they can only love the superficial mask we have shown them, not the real person behind the mask. This effort to seduce others with a false presentation of self is a prescription for isolation and loneliness, and of never really feeling loved.

In many people's minds, transparency is equated with vulnerability. Vulnerability is seen as being weak and helpless. Vulnerability is not weakness. Vulnerability can be strength. It takes strength to open yourself, take down your guard, remove your mask and be exposed to your partner. It takes strength to drop the carefully crafted persona and reveal painful and humiliating feelings of helplessness, guilt and low self-esteem. It is weakness to maintain your mask and hide your vulnerability.

It's easier to be transparent if you appreciate and accept yourself. You have little preventing you from opening up to others and sharing who you are. It becomes a lot more difficult if you judge yourself and reject parts of yourself. In order to become more transparent, you must consciously see and feel those parts you don't accept, the parts you would be horrified if others knew, the parts you don't even want to know. With all our insecurities, pettiness, kinky sexual fantasies, letting others into our unedited inner world is not an easy thing to do. Shame can hold us in a powerful grip. At all costs, we hide those things we are ashamed of from others, especially our partner, and sometimes even from ourselves.

Not all should be revealed. To be transparent doesn't mean that you have to blab anything and everything that pops into your mind. Imagine if the entirety of your interior life, your most embarrassing petty thoughts, judgments, narcissism, lies and manipulative schemes, were to be broadcast to everyone you meet. In order to function, we must have private space. Part of us must remain unknown to the world. And to our partner. We are two individuals, and we have the right to privacy. The fact that we have an interior life that we don't wish to share doesn't mean that we are hiding things from our partner and are not to be trusted. It means that we are human and we are uncomfortable sharing parts of ourselves. Transparency, while beneficial in a relationship does not have to be complete and total.

Your transparency is a catalyst, an invitation that can bring out the same transparency in your partner. When you leave down your defenses, there is no need for your partner to maintain hers. Your willingness to not lie about who you are makes you safe. When you are safe, she can feel free to open up and trust you with her secret life. The feeling of safety cannot be rushed. She will feel safe when she feels safe, no sooner.

The truth is that we are all human. No matter how strong we appear on the surface, we are all dealing with essentially the same issues of fear, weakness and vulnerability. When we take the risk and share our struggles, we share our humanity. We are most lovable when we reveal our raw, naked humanity, not when we pretend to be someone we are not. Transparency is a gateway to love.

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You are in relationship in order to share your true self with your partner. Being transparent is a gift you give to them. The gift is you.

**Q.** *The following questions will help you examine some of the things you might withhold from your partner. Read each question and answer honestly to yourself. It would be helpful to list your answers and write them down.*

*What feelings do I have that I don't want you to know?*

*What fantasies do I have that I don't want you to know?*

*What thoughts do I have that I don't want you to know?*

*What desires do I have that I don't want you to know?*

*What failures do I have that I don't want you to know?*

*What fears do I have that I don't want you to know?*

*What things have I done that I don't want you to know?*

*What things have I not done that I don't want you to know?*

*For each of your responses, ask, "What do I fear about expressing this to my partner?" Coming clear about what you don't want to share with your partner is an excellent first step.*

**#20. I WILL SPEAK TO YOU WITH CARE.** *My words have power for you, so I will take care to honor your feelings and your dignity, not only with what I say to you, but also how and when I say it. I will be especially aware when we are in conflict.*

Though they don't leave a visible bruise, uncaring, harsh and belittling words can hurt much more than a slap, and the pain can last far longer.

Having lived together for so many years, Alice and I are fairly certain of the effect of our words on each other. I'm still surprised, though, at how quickly and intensely the wrong choice of words or an abrasive tone of voice can arouse us to anger or hurt. Therefore, we are always mindful of how we speak with each other.

Our #1 rule in communicating is to speak to each other with kind intention, respecting each other's feelings, respecting each other's dignity. Clear and effective communication is important, but that is secondary to kindness. You can use all sorts of effective communication techniques, but if your ulterior intention is to hurt, control, put down or subtly manipulate, those potent communication techniques will be used in a negative way and effectively achieve detrimental ends. If your intention is to be kind and respectful, kindness and respect will be communicated. Even harsh or murky communication will be forgiven if there is underlying kindness.

Beside kindness, other rules for care filled communication would include the following:

It should be *truthful*. If it's not true, don't say it.

It should be *beneficial*. If it's not for the good, don't say it.

It should be *necessary*. If it doesn't improve on silence, don't say it.

It should be *timely*. If the receiver can't take it in, don't say it.

Kind, true, beneficial, necessary, timely. These are general guidelines rather than strict rules. Things like idle chatter, joking, gossip and light conversation have their place as part of everyday human social interaction.

Even the best communication at the wrong time could be bad communication. There are times to push, times to remain at rest, and times to retreat. It is especially important for me to monitor my state of mind before Alice and I are to speak about emotionally touchy subjects, or if I am emotionally wrought. At these times it is best for me to look inside, "Am I feeling angry, hostile, fearful, upset?" It's not that I should always wait until I am calm and centered before I speak, but if I am not conscious about my mental state, I can sometimes muddle into an emotional storm and wonder why my ship has foundered and sunk.

One of the most difficult, yet necessary, things that I have had to learn is when to "hold my tongue." At those times when Alice is emotional or not in the right mood to address an issue, or is focused on something else, or is not receptive in the moment, I may need to restrain my impulse to speak. It can be hard for me to do this sometimes. I may feel cut off, powerless and unassertive if I have to quash my speech around her, but I've learned it can be better for both of us if I do.

Most people assume that arguments are inherently bad and are a sign of a troubled relationship. This is not necessarily true. An argument is a form of communication. There are destructive fights and productive fights.

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Destructive arguments are clashes that lack goodwill. The intent is to hurt, control or get even. They often involve blame, sarcasm, name-calling and put downs. The result is that both partners come away feeling defensive and angry, with the sense that nothing has been resolved.

Arguments can be productive and have a positive outcome. Sometimes an emotional storm is exactly what needs to happen if your feelings are bottled up or you are being too careful, too “nice.” An uncontrolled outburst can sometimes reveal your true, unvarnished feeling and get to the center of truth long before hours of cool and cautious “processing.”

Even though we have been married for so long, Alice and I still find it important to use proper etiquette when we speak to each other. The words, “Please, May I, Thank you, You’re welcome” are a necessary part of our vocabulary. Using them is a way we demonstrate how much we value and respect each other.

The Golden Rule of “couple speak” in regards to your partner could be, “*Speak to each other in the manner in which you would like to have others speak to you.*” Most of the world’s communication problems would be solved if everyone would implement this simple rule.

**#21. I WILL NOT MANIPULATE YOU.** *I will not exploit your vulnerabilities in order to control you. I will not belittle you, blame you, threaten you, deliberately hurt you with words, or intentionally withhold money, favors, information or affection from you in order to get my way.*

The person who loves you most is the one who can be hurt most deeply by you.

When your beloved partner opens her heart to you, she becomes vulnerable. She wants to please you. She wants you to appreciate and approve of her. She is afraid of losing you. Because she is in this vulnerable position, what you say and do can bruise her emotionally. Even a harsh word, a physical “pulling away,” a slight criticism or an angry glance by you can be very painful to her. This gives you power over her. Manipulation is the abuse of that power. Manipulation is using another’s vulnerabilities to your advantage. It is exploiting their weakness, fears, ignorance and insecurity in order to get your way.

I know Alice’s weaknesses and vulnerabilities. I know what buttons to press to get an emotional response. She knows mine. We have chosen to lay down our weapons. If either of us begins to manipulate, we say “no” to ourselves and “no” to the other in order to stop it in its tracks. We have made the choice to meet and connect with our hearts and work out our differences on an even playing field. It could not work for us any other way.

Manipulation is destructive. It poisons love and leaves a partner feeling unsafe. Love cannot survive in an environment of dishonesty, competition or tactical maneuvers that are used in order to gain advantage. It poisons love by creating an “I win, you lose” mindset that encourages a grasping, selfish atmosphere. It poisons love because it is dehumanizing, it is treating the one you love as if they are an object or an obstacle that stands in your way. It poisons love because it is basically dishonest, and thus introduces a lapse of integrity into the relationship.

An essential initial step in being able to reduce or eliminate manipulation is to become aware of how and when you manipulate. This could be difficult because manipulation is an accepted aspect of our culture and not necessarily looked down upon. Because much of manipulation takes place below awareness, you must devote some time and attention on focused self-observation so you can become familiar with the methods you use most often. Then, when you become aware in the moment that you are manipulating, make a committed effort to stop. It all pivots on your awareness of when you are manipulating and your willingness to relinquish the advantage manipulation provides you.

A good place to start is to become aware of which manipulations you and your partner use most often. (We all use some manipulations to one degree or another.) Manipulation by both partners can range from the extreme—physical violence and intimidation, to subtle—acting helpless or inducing guilt. Below is a list of some common manipulations:

**Withholding**—Holding back from giving what your partner wants or needs until you exact punishment or get what you want. Becoming emotionally cold, ignoring, cutting off sex or physical contact, refusing to discuss, using the “silent treatment” or minimizing communication (“I’m fine. Nothing’s wrong.”)

**Bribery**—Giving to your partner, but with the unstated expectation on your part that you will be given something you want in return. Trying to make the other feel guilty or feel as if they owe you something. Giving sex in exchange for favors or favors in exchange for sex. Giving gifts when you want something from them or when you’ve done something wrong.

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*Theatrics* -- Acting, taking on a false persona or attitude in order to get your way. Turning on the tears to get your partner to feel sorry. Acting helpless to get them to assist you. Acting angry to scare them. Pouring on the charm, inducing jealousy, playing “hard to get.”

*Enlisting an ally*— Bringing in a third-party in order to bolster your position or pressure your partner. In a conflict, invoking another, a “neutral” person, or person in authority, (who you know supports you), so your partner will believe they are wrong and outnumbered.

*Reasoning*— Justifying your position or action using intellectual argument to overwhelm and belittle your partner. Debating, teaching, preaching, disputing, acting like a lawyer. The game is not to seek a fair or honest solution, but rather to persuade and pressure your partner using what seems like reasonable argument.

*Guilt or shame induction*—Doing and saying things that make your partner feel they are wrong or bad. When they feel down about themselves they can be more easily manipulated. Attacking their self-esteem with cutting criticism, calling them demeaning names, continually bringing up their shortcomings, comparing them to someone else who is “better.”

*Harassment* —Continually doing and saying things that bother your partner so that they eventually will give in to what you want. Constant pleading, incessant demands, nagging, name-calling, “joking” (not for humor, but to bother), relentless arguing, spite attacks.

*Threats*—Trying to gain leverage by warning your partner about what you will do if you don't get your way. Threatening to leave, threatening bodily harm, threatening to have an affair or get a divorce, threatening suicide, threatening to withhold money or favors.

Recognizing your favorite manipulations and understanding how poisonous they are to your relationship will help bring you to the point where you could consider giving them up.

True power is not about control and manipulation. It is about the ability to build, restore and maintain love. When heartfelt love perseveres, there is no need for manipulation.

**Q.** *What is your favorite form of manipulation? Are there people in your life that you are currently using manipulative behavior with?*

**#22. I WILL PROTECT YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY.** *I will not share anything about you, me or us that you would not want others to know.*

Confidentiality is refraining from sharing personal or impersonal information with outsiders that might compromise or embarrass your partner or yourself. This is a very important Promise. If you do not respect your partner’s need for confidentiality, she would not feel safe to reveal sensitive personal information to you. She would be wary of telling her truth to you.

People have different levels of comfort in revealing to outsiders their personal information and their inner thoughts and feelings. It is important that you become aware of these differences and that they be honored. Respecting a person’s need for confidentiality is an essential foundation of trust.

I tend to be more “loose-lipped” than Alice when it comes to divulging personal information. I've changed my ways when I saw how important it was to her that we maintain privacy. Now, if there is anything about her or us that I suspect Alice might want to keep confidential, I'll either keep it to myself or check in with her before I tell others.

There are a couple of Rules of Thumb I would suggest regarding sharing information that your partner may feel is confidential. One is: *Don't share with others any information about your partner that you would be unwilling to tell her to her face.* If you would be hesitant to tell her what you just told her best friend about her, that is a warning sign that you will be crossing the line. Another is, *If you have any intuition that your partner would not want this information about her shared with others, don't do it.* Much better to err on the side of caution than risk hurting your mate. If you ignore these rules and reveal private information to others about your partner without her knowledge or if you criticize her in public, it is not innocent, it might be an effort to put down, humiliate and control. It is an obvious breach of trust.

Anytime you plan to divulge information that will touch on issues with confidentiality, this should be done with the full knowledge and permission of your partner. With that in mind, if some other person shares with you issues they have regarding your mate—complaints, criticism, etc., it would be best to direct them to speak face-to-face with

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her rather than get involved in a three-way conversation that doesn't involve you and could lead to suspicion of breach of confidentiality.

**#23. I WILL RESPECT OUR INDEPENDENCE.** *You are not my possession. I will honor your freedom to think, say and do what seems right to you, even if I do not agree or understand. I trust you can take care of yourself. I will foster my own independence so I can be free and autonomous when necessary.*

We must start with the premise that all individuals are free. Even though we yoke ourselves to another person through our commitment to them, ultimately, we are all independent individuals, free (within society's legal boundaries), to choose to live our lives as we see fit. The rights our partners have to disagree with us, come and go as they please, to speak their minds and to act in ways that they perceive as in their best interest, are sacred and not up for compromise. It is their prerogative to live in accordance to their strongly held values and deepest wishes. This is true, even if it is painful and confusing to us, and even if it is harmful to us.

The journey to a loving relationship is not only about developing intimacy and togetherness. While creating a healthy relationship involves learning to overcome separateness, it also involves striving to develop individuality and cultivating the ability to be separate. When you are comfortable in yourself and have established your separate identity, you are then free to lose yourself in another. You can experience the joy of melting in oneness without fear that you will permanently disappear in your partner. And you can easily flow between intimacy and separateness.

Between the extremes of *fusion* (when you become dependent and lose your sense of self and become absorbed in your mate), and *isolation* (where you live a separate life with a little shared connection), are the positive qualities of interdependence and autonomy. Healthy interdependent and autonomous couples are two distinct individuals, whole and complete within themselves. They have come together because they want to, not because they need to. They can be comfortable in being apart when they want to be. They have joined because they enjoy each other's company and derive benefit from each other's presence. They have the strength to handle their own needs, goals and emotional life. When needed, they can ask for, and accept support.

Allowing your mate the freedom to say and do what she considers right is one aspect of independence. Another aspect, which is very much related, is your own ability to be free and independent from her. Your own independence is key. If you have strong dependency ties to your partner and have exclusive needs for sustenance, affection and emotional support from her, you will feel panicked by the thought of losing her. It would be exceedingly difficult for you to freely allow her to be independent. When she exercises her freedom, you will feel threatened. The panic will drive you to try to control her. Your primary work then, is to accomplish your own independence.

With all this talk of the necessity of being independent, I may have overstated its importance and made dependency out to be a villain. It is not. In fact, being able to be dependent on your partner and thus being vulnerable to her is an important and valuable part of a relationship. Couples need each other and depend on each other, and this is good. One of the great benefits of being in a relationship is that you don't have to carry your load all by yourself. In a sense, it takes strength and fearlessness to allow yourself to be vulnerable in this way. If you felt compelled to be too independent, too self-sufficient, especially if that is motivated by fear of vulnerability, your drive for independence will be instigated by fear.

Any discussion of independence must include the topic of possession—seeing your partner as belonging to you. To some people who consider their independence to be a paramount value, freedom from all sense of ownership between partners is considered a virtue. I cannot accept that for myself. While I value Alice's independence, and my own, I take comfort in the idea that we belong to each other. I consider her mine and she considers me hers. This “belonging” has nothing to do with coveting her as my possession or needing to control her. It is more about the sweet, heartfelt bond we share. There is something human and comforting about “owning” Alice, and being “owned” by her in turn.

While I don't really own Alice, and she doesn't own me, we have borrowed each other for our lifetime, however long that shall be.

**Q.** *Where would you place yourself on a scale of Dependence/ Independence?*

Very Dependent.

Somewhat Dependent.

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Neither Dependent or Independent.

Somewhat Independent.

Very Independent.

*Are you content with where you are on the scale?*

**#24. I WILL BE CONSIDERATE OF YOUR DESIRE FOR PRIVACY AND SOLITUDE.** *Periods of interior time are necessary and healing. I recognize your occasional need for privacy, silence and alone time, and will abide by your wishes.*

Solitude is a sanctuary, a place of healing, a quiet forest pool where we can go to be by ourselves and rest and refresh. Yet many of us fear being alone. We don't know what to do when we are in our own company. When there is a lull, we immediately need to fill it. We compulsively make our way to the computer, turn on the television or radio, talk on the phone, go to the refrigerator and nibble on a snack—anything to avoid the panic of loneliness.

This fear of being alone often drives the need for a relationship. If the relief from the panic of being alone is the basis for your relationship, you are bound to be disappointed, because loneliness is a bottomless pit that can only be temporarily satisfied by being around others. As soon as you are by yourself again, the emptiness and anxiety begin anew. People think that having a relationship is a cure for loneliness. It is not. The only cure for loneliness is to become friends with *aleness*.

Aleness is a hunger also, but a hunger for solitude, a desire to rest in inner peace. It is ease and comfort in being with ourselves. To be comfortable in solitude is freedom. When aleness is the ground of your being and the ground of your relationship, you are settled in yourself and are free of the unending hunger for companionship.

It is through aleness and silence that you can learn most about yourself. Being in silence, your true thoughts and feelings are free to arise, unimpeded by the noisy pull of the conflicting needs of the outer world. That silence and aleness, be it in meditation, or contemplation, or in just ambling by yourself down a country road, allows you to hear the quiet voice within, the most subtle urgings of your heart. In silent reflection you are able to digest and contemplate your thoughts and experiences, and thus move forward from a place of clarity. In silence, complex events become simpler. There is an Arabic saying, *"If speaking is of silver, then silence is of gold."*

All of us have a quiet, inner core, a place of serenity. Our busy activities, our manic mind and the sights, sounds, touch and tastes we experience, can draw us away from our center. A healthy balance between the inner world and the outer world is needed, as is the ability to float easily between the two worlds.

In couple relationship, the ebb and flow between aleness and togetherness is healthy and natural. The separation is just as important as the togetherness. Without the ability to disconnect when needed, a couple can too easily become enmeshed and lose themselves in the other. When a couple finds the right balance between togetherness and solitude, the times of solitude allows for greater enjoyment of togetherness, and the times of togetherness makes solitude more meaningful.

It is not always easy to find balance. It is in some people's nature to have a strong need for privacy and space, just as it is in the others' nature to be gregarious and seek frequent companionship and emotional closeness. Neither is right or wrong. However, if the one who values privacy and solitude is pressured by the one who wants closeness and company, and visa-versa, this is a recipe for frustration. While both parties are just trying to get comfortable in accordance with their own nature, they only succeed in creating conflict and making themselves and the other uncomfortable.

Compromise helps. I am a more private person than Alice and require more alone time. Our life is more social than I am comfortable with, but I don't want to deny Alice's pleasure in other's company. If I feel the need to be alone, I have the freedom to retire to our bedroom or my workshop, and Alice takes that into consideration and honors my tendencies to be a hermit.

**#25. I WILL TOUCH YOU AND WELCOME YOUR TOUCH.** *I understand that touch is a gift and a healing. I will welcome physical expression of our love for each other through loving caress, in ways that are reciprocally appreciated and at times that are mutually desired.*

*Richard Matzkin*

We express the love we feel for our partner through our actions. We offer help to our beloved, we listen, we give gifts, we speak loving words. The most concrete way of expressing love is through our physical touch.

Though touch is wordless, it speaks volumes. The simple act of physical contact can convey many messages, both for the one touching, and the one receiving touch. Reaching out, caressing, holding, embracing our beloved amplifies and clarifies the feelings we have towards them. Receiving touch—being caressed and held by our beloved also amplifies the feelings we have toward them.

With the right person, under the right circumstances, being touched can evoke feelings of pleasure, security, passion, encouragement, comfort, and healing. With the wrong person, it can evoke fear and disgust. Even with the right person, but at the wrong time, or approached in the wrong manner, being touched can be an unpleasant experience. Sexual touch amplifies feelings even more. There is a clear line of difference between the comforting touch of a friend and the sensuous caress of a lover. Most people are instinctively attuned to the intention of the person who touches us. When you take it up a notch and remove your clothes and make skin-to-skin contact, you instantly remove layers of defense. You become vulnerable. No other human experience reaches such depth of vulnerability. When Alice holds my penis in her hand, I feel that she is holding me, all of me in her hand and the vulnerability opens me to the experience of surrender, sweet surrender. There is no other way than through physical touch that I could surrender to her so completely. And there is no other way I can feel Alice's surrender more concretely than through my lovingly touching her.

Sexual touch is not simply the contact of skin on skin. It carries the weight of personal history and meaning and all sorts of emotional baggage. Included in the mix are idealized notions of romance, parental prohibitions from childhood, shameful desires, religious and cultural injunctions, struggles for power and remnants of past sexual abuse. None of this is on display. Because of all of these unknowns, the person entering a relationship with a new partner has no idea of what they're getting into. Becoming involved in such a complex brew requires the utmost sensitivity and tact.

Through your sexuality you can come to know your partner and be known by her. It is no accident that in the Bible, "knowing" is used euphemistically as having carnal knowledge. The experience of physically opening to your partner is exposing yourself to being known by her—your bodily "flaws" being seen, having your raw, needy hunger revealed, being judged and rejected, being "entered," "taking" and "being taken." This is emotionally powerful stuff.

Because of this power, sexuality can be one of the most confusing and emotionally charged domains of human experience. A person's sexuality can be tied in with satisfying needs that are way beyond the simple function of the rubbing together of two bodies. Sex can be used for releasing stress and tension, overcoming feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, gaining conquest, being accepted, wielding power and control, exacting revenge or assuaging loneliness— basically using sexual touch as a way to distract oneself, achieve a goal or feel better. To expect the sexual act to accomplish all these things is a tremendous burden placed on (or rather misplaced) on sexuality. This is a job that would be better achieved through internal psychological therapeutic work rather than a workout in the bedroom.

It is usually given that during sexual encounter, men tend to be more interested in "getting off" while women tend to desire emotional closeness. It has been said that women need to feel love in order to have sex, while men need to have sex in order to feel love. (A gross generalization, but with a kernel of truth). The difference between satisfying bodily needs and the needs for intimacy and connection can be an area of confusion and frustration for couples. Both partners would be frustrated following a sexual encounter if one is primarily driven to satisfy bodily need, and the other craves intimacy and closeness. This could lead to the person wanting connection (more often ascribed to the woman), feeling used, and the one wanting carnal experience (more often the male), feeling deserted. In the long run, for a long-term committed relationship, fulfilling both emotional connection and lust is essential for a full sexual experience.

Ideally, the full sexual experience involves the alignment of heart and body. When your heart—your tender feelings, generosity and openness, is fully present with your body—your senses, lustful excitement and physical arousal, the sexual encounter can be ecstatic.

You may be pleasantly surprised if, instead of initially pursuing lust and rushing to make physical connection, you first attend to emotional connection. Make it your intention to begin by connecting with each other heart-to-heart. Focus on the love you feel for this woman who will soon share her body with you. Experience your desire to give her pleasure. Send each other loving energy, make extended eye contact, embrace one another with love and tenderness, reach out and touch each other's hearts with your fingertips. Make these moments a special, conscious ritual. When you delve deeply into the vibration of love in your hearts, your love will find expression through your bodies.

This is the difference between "having sex" and "making love."

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*Q. Are you satisfied with your sexual life? What's good? What would you like different?*

**#26. I WILL REMAIN FAITHFUL TO YOU.** *Sexual fidelity is a bulwark of our relationship. I consider you my exclusive sexual partner and reserve intimate caress for you alone.*

Alice gives her body as a gift to me. Mine is a gift to her. For us, these are special, exclusive gifts, sacred gifts. No one else has access to our bodies; no one has the right to touch us as we can touch each other. We have vowed sexual exclusivity, a commitment to contain our sexual experience within our relationship. This vow has not imprisoned us but has set us free.

Every choice entails a loss, every road taken means there is a road not taken. This pledge to forgo the excitement of physical intimacy with other partners is seen by some as a sacrifice. The reward for this sacrifice is that we experience far greater depth and fulfillment with each other.

Without the Promise of sexual exclusivity, there is a tendency to fall into a predatory mindset, ever on the lookout for new, potential erotic partners. We would tend to place people we meet in one of two categories. Category 1; Would I want to take this woman to bed? Category 2; Or not? And it's impossible to avoid time and energy being pulled away from the primary relationship when involved in an intimate relationship with one or more additional partners. For most people, even one relationship is all they can handle.

These are minor considerations compared to devastating effects on your partner and on the relationship caused by a rupture in trust from your having an affair. When you, the person she trusts the most, the one she is most intimate with, choose to be intimate with another, and do this secretly, how can she ever trust you again. The road back to trust from such a severe rupture is long and difficult. Some couples never make it. And once broken, trust can rarely or never return to the level it was before the affair.

The thought of sharing intimate relations with another person can be an enticing fantasy. How exciting to begin a sexual dance with someone new. For most people though, over time, sexual passion wanes with familiarity. It's just a fact of life. There is no way a long-term sexual partner can compete with the excitement of the new liaison. The exciting adventure of a different person, a new, unfamiliar body, the absence of the old daily routines, the uncertainty, the danger and especially the ego satisfaction of sweeping someone off their feet, can ignite dormant passion. However, the intoxication can often be like a mirage. When the excitement begins to settle down...then what? Seek another partner and begin another cycle with hopeful expectation?

What if couples in an established relationship have barren and unsatisfying sex, or no sex? What if they feel emotionally or intellectually unfulfilled with their partner in some areas of their life together? What if they genuinely believe that an affair will be a positive growth experience for all involved? Might having an affair or bringing another person into the relationship for a ménage et trois be constructive rather than distractive? Maybe. However it is a self-evident fact—the more partners you try to share yourself with, the less of yourself you have available to give each. In nearly every instance I am aware of, adding another person into the emotional and sexual mix has eventually proven destabilizing, so much so that the primary relationship ended or was so severely tested that the negative affects persisted for years afterwards.

Is a sexual liaison with another person outside of the relationship the only act that determines adultery? Could there be lesser degrees of infidelity? What if you had obsessive sexual fantasies about your neighbor? What if you routinely viewed pornography? Compulsively masturbated? Got massage with a "happy ending?" Played flirtatious games with women at work? Some would say that whatever draws sexual energy away from your partner is a form of being unfaithful. In a sense this is true, but it is important to remember that we humans are just a higher order of primate. Our behavioral and mental activity is strongly influenced by hormones. That fact doesn't give us permission to act on all our impulses irrespective of the consequences.

Ultimately, the decision for sexual fidelity rests with the couple. There is no judgment either way.

**#27. I WILL PLAY WITH YOU.** *An essential purpose of our connection is to create mutual joy. I will do what I can to make humor, entertainment, curiosity, surprise, creativity, imagination, romance, excitement and childlike playfulness vital elements in our relationship. I will make sure to schedule play time in our calendar. "*

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*"We don't stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing."*  
George Bernard Shaw

The term that is opposite of "play" is not "work." The opposite of play is deadness, heaviness, depression. Play brings us alive. When we are into the experience of play, we are fully engaged. Our senses are more acute, our mind becomes more alert, our body more alive, our spirit buoyed. Unless you are a pro, when you play games and sports, the real goal is not merely to win by putting the ball in the hole or smacking the ball out of the park. The real goal is to play for the joy of it. If you play only to win, then it is work.

Over the years it seems like almost all the happy couples we've known have had a playful streak. They are lighthearted with each other and refuse to take the other or themselves too seriously, even when they are at odds. Conversely, most of the unhappy couples we've known do not laugh or joke together. Humor is not just the punchline at the end of the joke, it's the way you interact with people and the way you view the world.

There were lots of things that drew me to Alice when we first met. But the thing that grabbed me the most was her playfulness and sense of humor. She knew how to make me howl with laughter, and still does after almost four decades of marriage. That sense of levity is the one trait in a partner that for me is indispensable.

Looking at all the Loving Promises might leave the impression that maintaining your relationship is a lot of hard work. Yes, it's no easy task to always be honest, accepting, generous, awake, grateful, forgiving, dependable, etc. It sometimes takes grueling work. However, you don't enter into a relationship in order to do hard labor. You want to find happiness. Why else would you pursue your life's partner other than with the expectation that your union would bring you joy? The glue that holds a couple together is their enjoyment of each other's company.

Finding joy together is an essential part of any relationship. It's too easy, though, to sink into the "serious" business of living—taking on the burdensome adult responsibilities for support and maintenance of self, home and family. Nothing can kill joy faster than having to be a grown-up all the time, and in the process, neglect to leave time for play. Taking on an adult persona, we put away precious, childlike qualities like silliness, boisterous laughter, wonder, innocence, openness, creative imagination. Instead we become polite adults, go about the serious business of making a living, being a parent, connecting with the "right" people, saving for retirement. The playful child in us becomes abandoned. We lose the freshness and innocence of a human being not yet jaded by years of having to act like a responsible adult.

Even if partners are each holding down two jobs, struggling to find time for kids and for household duties, it is essential to create time to be able to relax and enjoy each other's company. Just the two of you. Often though, what free time that is available is taken up with the essential tasks of daily living—do the lawn, take care of the kids, change oil in the car. These are our priorities. We do these things first and save play for "later." But then, after tasks are done, there is little time left over for being together, talking, relaxing, playing. "Later" never comes.

Let's be honest, obligations, limited time and shortage of money are excuses. If you really wanted to make time for play, you could and you would. If you had a regularly scheduled few hours play time written into the calendar, maybe a weekly dinner date or a movie, that pre-scheduled event might make it easier. Creating room for quality time in a busy schedule may take some strategy and planning, but the health and stability of the relationship depends on it.

Often a couple's main shared leisure activity is watching television. Zoning out by staring at the moving images from a lighted rectangle in a darkened room is not conducive for joyous connection...or any connection. As an experiment, try turning off the tube for a while. Instead, create a romantic evening with a candlelight dinner, share leisure activities like sports, playing board games or exercising together. Take trips and excursions. These things are not just enjoyable shared activities, they are essential for a healthy relationship. Even a short change of scenery, any escape from the responsibilities of everyday life—a walk in the park, a couple of hours in a day spa, a visit to a museum or art gallery, can re-invigorate, recharge and provide a fresh perspective.

You don't need entertaining electronic gadgets or expensive toys. You have each other. Skip, dance, tumble, make noise and yell at the top of your lungs. Hold hands with your honey while you stare at the moon. Celebrate holidays and special occasions. If there are no special occasions, create them. Every day is a special occasion. Surprise her. Do something special that she doesn't know about. The element of surprise is exciting.

You know how to have a good time with the woman in your life. You know how to romance her. You've done it before. Remember when you first met and fell in love? You acted differently towards her. You did what you could to impress her and make her feel appreciated. You flirted with her, went out to fun places, made sure you were clean, smelled nice and were well dressed. You listened to her, made clever conversation, laughed at her jokes, told some

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of your own. You surprised her with little gifts, took her out to nice restaurants. If you treated her now the same way you did when you first dated, the relationship would still sizzle. So do it! Date your mate! Play, delight together in the joy of being alive.

**#28. I WILL VITALIZE OUR RELATIONSHIP.** *A partnership that does not continue to grow can stagnate. I will instigate and participate in uplifting activities, learnings and adventures which inspire us to evolve physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.*

We humans have an inborn hunger for new and diverse stimulation. We are oriented toward growth and expansion. We are energized by passion and creativity. If the impulse to grow is thwarted or lies dormant, some part of us is switched off, deadened. That deadness cannot help but negatively impact our relationships. Yet, at the same time that we are enlivened by novelty and excitement, most of us also have the tendency to want things to remain the same. We are disturbed by the unfamiliar. We stubbornly resist change and value safety and stability. These two opposing tendencies—seeking expansion and at the same time wanting stability, can be at war with each other in our psyche.

Do we use our relationship as a "safe harbor" to provide for security and comfort, as a protection to buffer us against fear of the unknown and the unpredictability of life? Or do we use our relationship as a challenging ocean voyage of adventure on the high seas, where we dive into wakefulness and encounter danger and uncharted waters? Or can we incorporate the two and find dynamic balance between both extremes, retreating to security and comfort when stressed and overwhelmed, and reaching out to confront what we find fearful and challenging when we feel emboldened?

Vital and alive partnership invigorates each partner and brings energy to, and receives energy from, everyone and everything they come in contact with. Partners who desire to grow are curious. They will reach out to meet new friends to bring into their dyad who will enliven and stimulate them. They will search for new and challenging shared activities—hobbies, entertainment and intellectual pursuits that stretch mind and body and bring aliveness back into a relationship.

Not just any activity will do. This Promise specifies that it should be more than a pastime or mindless activity. It should be a challenge. It should stretch you, stimulate you and push you to grow. It should encourage communication and spark interest and foster discovery. Take a yoga class together or engage in a challenging sport, share your love of art and theater, attend classes and lectures, travel. Do something you haven't done before, go places you've never been. Push beyond your comfort zone. When you become engaged in activities that are new and stimulating, you feel more awake and alive.

Shared experiences are fun, and cross-pollinating ideas make joint activities even more significant. But it's not only the activities you share together that can energize. When one partner is energized, both will benefit. Encourage each other to take up individual pursuits that could be brought back into the relationship. The stimulating new energy will light a spark in both of you. A person who is impassioned and turned on to life is very, very attractive.

*Q. What are some activities you could explore that would bring more aliveness into your life?*

**#29. I WILL HONOR YOUR FAMILY.** *Familial ties are complex and binding. I will treat your family with respect and graciousness, ever mindful that my first loyalty is to you.*

Parodies about mothers-in-law used to be part of every comedian's staple of jokes. It was taken for granted that married couples would invariably be having issues with the in-laws. There is reason for this perception that our partner's relatives can be a source of problems.

For most people, outside of the couple bond, their relationship with their family is of greatest importance to them. When you and your mate form a committed partnership, it is more than just the coming together of two people. It is the melding of both of your families and both of your social networks. Your partner's family now becomes your

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family and your family becomes your partner's family. This means that whatever issues you and she are having with your respective families, now becomes part of your relationship.

Entering into another's family takes you into uncharted territory. It is like crossing the border into a foreign country that you have never visited before. New personalities, new relationships, new history, new traditions become part of your life and can expand you and offer rich and rewarding experiences.

Being a participant in your partner's family puts you in an interesting position. You are at once both an insider and an outsider, and there are advantages and disadvantages to both. Not being a "blood relative," you may be treated differently, somewhat as an invited guest. Her family may be reluctant to share secrets and reveal things that would show family members in a bad light. You may be able to remain aloof from family conflicts and infighting, but if you are not careful, you can be drawn into a web of family intrigue.

The following are some suggestions that may help prevent you from being caught in that confusing, and entangling web:

*Follow the wishes of your partner in regards to her family.* Your partner's family is hers, not yours. She is the one that has intimate ties and has access to information and experiences that you do not. She is the one that will bear the blame and feel the greatest pain if she has been alienated from her clan. Even if you are right about the way to behave in a situation involving your partner's family, it's not your decision to make.

*Educate yourself about your partner's family background.* It is valuable to know about your mate's family. Ask about her family history. What were the defining events that have had important impact? What are ongoing family dramas and traumas? Who is in, who's out, and why? Are there alliances that divide the family? What are family rules that are talked about and those that are not? What is OK to do, and what is forbidden? These things will help you better understand your partner. They will also help you avoid getting entangled in the web of family intrigue.

*Use discrimination concerning what you share with her family about your relationship, your partner and yourself.* Word gets around quickly in a close family unit. Sometimes it is necessary to take family members into confidence; however, if there is information that doesn't have to be shared that might cause harm or discontent, assume it will be spread and think twice before disseminating it. Always be sensitive to your partner's feelings about confidentiality.

*Be cautious about taking sides in family conflicts.* Entering into your partner's family disputes can be like stepping into a minefield... blindfolded. There may be histories, loyalties, emotional triggers and hidden agendas that you may be totally unaware of. This can result in family members turning on you. This is not to say that you should always remain neutral. Just be aware of the minefield.

*Remember that the bond with your partner is the most important one you have.* Loyalty to her and concern for her well-being takes precedence over any other connection. No other relationship is more important.

Cautions about potential problems aside, being included in your partner's family can be a wonderful experience. Coming into Alice's family more than doubled the number of relatives I had. I became like an adopted son, brother, nephew, father and cousin. I felt love for, and felt loved by every member of her family. The experience expanded my ability to love.

The simplest and best advice I can offer for becoming a loving and beloved member of your partner's family is this—honor her parents and family elders as your own elders. Honor her brothers and sisters as your own siblings. If in a blended family, honor her children as your own children.

As with any relationship, when you give the best of yourself, you receive the best of others.

**#30. I WILL BE ALERT TO NEGATIVITY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP.** *I will not allow harmful feelings and destructive situations to persist and fester. I will attend to the first indications of disharmony between us so that minor problems never have a chance to become major.*

If there is a fire in your house, put it out immediately. It would be easier to extinguish at once than if left to spread. Better yet, don't play with matches.

Many couples tolerate negativity. They allow adverse situations and detrimental feelings to persist far too long in the hope that things will get better by themselves if just left alone. Neglect won't solve problems. What often happens is if problems are left unaddressed, the situation at best remains the same, and by not improving, gets worse and turns into a festering wound. Feelings are hurt, the hurt held inside. Anger heats up and boils over. In order to

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maintain equilibrium, the person tamps down and deadens emotions to avoid a blow up. Or alternatively, anger is released and explodes. Neither of these alternatives is healthy or constructive.

Fight or flight does not work well for couples who are having problems. It isn't skillful to pick fights (attack) or take flight (withdraw) as your usual way of dealing with conflict with your partner. These are emotional responses rather than an attempt to get to the source of the problem. So much can be accomplished by simply sitting down together and talking about what is causing the distance between you. The sooner, the better.

Alice and I are highly sensitized to negativity. Harmony is our normal state – the only condition that is acceptable for us. Even a slight twinge of irritation or hurt by one or the other immediately gets our attention. We respond quickly with earnest discussion about feelings and exploration of what might be the cause of disharmony. Then we make a sincere effort to set things right. Because of our zero tolerance for discord, we can honestly say that we have no backlog of emotional baggage—no unexpressed blame, guilt, anger, hurt. This is not to say that we have never done things that have hurt or upset each other. But, if one of us is feeling hurt or upset, they would let the other know. We will then both immediately address the problem. It is too painful not to.

Negative feelings and situations do not occur spontaneously. They are caused by one or both partners acting in unloving ways toward each other. Thought is precursor to action. Unloving thoughts lead to unloving actions. This is why it is important to monitor your mind and be aware of thoughts that could lead to selfish, grasping, hurtful words and unkind actions. The sooner you are aware of these thoughts as they arise, the easier it is to abandon them so you do not act on them.

There is a well-known saying, "Couples should never go to bed angry with each other." This is sage advice. How painful it is to climb into bed at night and lay next to someone we are furious with and who is furious with us. If you make up your mind never to go to bed with your partner while holding onto unresolved issues, your disharmony with her will never last for more than one day.

**#31. I WILL ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY DETRIMENTAL BEHAVIOR.** *When there is discord, I will curb my tendency to act in ways that create more problems. I will take impartial account of my part and do what is necessary to make things right. I welcome feedback that shows where I can be more loving.*

The reason we need the Loving Promises is because we are not perfect. Every one of us has personality quirks and habits that make it difficult for us to live with others, for others to live with us...and for us to live with ourselves. We may be uncommunicative, defensive, emotionally reactive, unreasonable, quick to anger, afraid to assert ourselves, judgmental and blaming of others. We may have to be right, have to be in control, need assurances that we are lovable. Each of these things causes problems and creates suffering for ourselves and for those close to us. This Promise asks us to look for and identify these qualities in ourselves, remain aware of them, and if not change them, at least prevent them from interfering with the free flow of our love, especially during times of duress. It asks that if we have made a mess, to clean it up. In short, this Promise asks us to be accountable for our actions.

Identifying our defects and failures is difficult. First of all, nobody wants to look at how they fall short. And we certainly don't want to hear about it, especially from our partner. Second, nobody is eager to admit their faults to others, especially under duress. Thirdly, and most important, we all tend to be blind to our defects—maybe even see them as normal or even positive. It is almost an automatic reaction to look for fault outside ourselves and think that it's the other guy that screwed up when things go wrong. When we are unaware of these problematic tendencies, it is easier for us to become reactive and defensive.

If you believe you may have caused a problem by your behavior but are uncertain as to what you have done, one way to clarify your responsibility is to view it in your imagination from another person's perspective. What would you feel if others had witnessed your behavior? Would you be ashamed? What would they think? What if children had witnessed your behavior? Would this be an example you would want to set for them?

Of course, if you believe that you've screwed up with your partner, the easiest way is to ask her. She will probably be very happy to tell you. The question, "What have I done to hurt you or make you angry?" asked in a sincere, non-defensive way, can demonstrate to your partner your genuine intent to take responsibility and make things right. If you are open to hearing, her response could be enlightening.

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If I have not already done so, I want to make it clear. ALICE AND I ARE NOT PERFECT. Like everyone else, at times we goof up, say and do dumb things to each other. But we don't sweep our mistakes under the rug. We make repairs, we talk, take responsibility, try to understand where we went wrong.

These are the steps that I try to take in order to be accountable after I have done or said something stupid and unfeeling:

**I recognize that Alice feels hurt or angry at me and I acknowledge these hurt or angry feelings.** First off, I need to know, either by Alice communicating to me or by my own surmising, that my behavior has affected Alice, and I must let her know that I am aware of what she is feeling.

**I contemplate the situation and try to understand where I have erred.** I need to think about it and be clear in my mind what I have done to hurt or anger her.

**I admit my culpability to myself and then to Alice.** I need to acknowledge my responsibility, first to myself and then to speak to Alice about it, clearly describing the ways I have erred.

**I ask Alice for forgiveness.** Apologizing is a way of me admitting that I screwed up and at the same time letting her know that I am not happy about my actions. I speak with Alice, express my genuine remorse and ask her to forgive me.

**I attempt to make amends if possible.** If there is something I can do to repair or make amends for my behavior, I do it.

**I resolve never again to repeat the offense.** I learn from my mistake. I give my full intention to not repeating my actions if a similar situation comes up in the future.

Acknowledging her hurt and anger, understanding my error, admitting my responsibility, asking for her forgiveness, making amends, resolving not to repeat offense—how rational, how reasonable. This is the ideal, the steps I try to take. But I, and the rest of humanity are not always reasonable, especially when it comes to admitting when we are wrong. Our ego can easily get in the way and give rise to defensiveness. As long as you defend and blame, you and your partner will be locked in a grappling match, unable to release, unable to hear the other.

Assuming responsibility for mistakes is a humbling process. At these times, the quality of humility is a necessity. Humility makes it easier for us to admit when we are wrong. It also makes it easier for us not to boast when we are right. When we exhibit true humility, it makes it easier for our partner to forgive us.

There is a Talmudic tale told about Rabbi Eliezer, who taught that we should repent our wrongs the day before we die. When his disciples reminded him that no one knows for sure the day of their death, the Reb replied that we should repent today, lest we die tomorrow. If we do that, we will be conscious of and atone for our hurtful actions every day for the rest of our lives.

**#32. I WILL INVOKE THE LOVING PROMISES WHEN WE ARE IN CRISIS.** *During stressful circumstances our relationship requires greater loving from me. At those times, I will attempt to apply the Loving Promises to the best of my ability.*

Just as there are peaks in life, there are also valleys. We live with triumphs as well as defeat, joy as well as sorrow. When enmeshed in crisis, we are caught in life's valleys.

Some dictionary definitions of crisis:

1. *An emotionally stressful event or traumatic change in a person's life condition.*
2. *A situation that has reached critical phase.*
3. *An unstable condition involving abrupt, decisive change, especially one with distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome.*

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Crisis in relationship could be caused by stressful circumstances external to the relationship dynamic, such as physical illness, intrusive relatives or financial setback. It can also be caused by internal conditions such as a couple's conflict, incompatible goals or a partner's dishonesty. No matter what the source, crisis is stressful and is a test of the couple's bond. The tension from a crisis can rend a couple apart, or can draw them together in order to preserve the integrity of their bond.

Every crisis, if we engage with it and don't run away, contains within it the opportunity for growth and resolution. Crisis grabs our attention and demands we garner our resources in order to overcome the challenge.

The way I suggest to deal with crisis is simple, but not easy. I can think of no better way of approaching and overcoming the effects of a crisis in relationship than by invoking the Loving Promises. During perilous times, the supportive atmosphere created by the Loving Promises is ideally suited for resolving conflict, reducing stress and inducing mutual support. How better to work through difficult problems than with a large dose of honesty, respect, generosity and lovingkindness.

But unfortunately, during times of crisis we tend to find it more challenging to work with the Loving Promises. Our stress, anxiety, exhaustion, resentment or agitated emotional state depletes our resources and makes it necessary for us to put out that extra bit of effort to utilize the truth and power of the Loving Promises. It is at these times we must garner our energy in order to take the lead and do the loving thing by saying loving words and acting in kind and generous ways. When we reach into our hearts and act from our most loving space in times of crisis, we and our partner both can reap the greatest rewards.

It is not only your mate who is in need of greater love during crisis. It is imperative that you treat yourself with loving kindness. Give your body, mind and soul needed nourishment. If you yourself are running on empty, it is difficult to garner the inner resources to provide love and care to your mate.

Sometimes the route to heaven takes us through hell. Our time in hell, however, gives us greater appreciation of heaven. The suffering we endure during crisis can open us, deepen us, expand us and give us a greater appreciation of each moment of our life. And by showing up with strength and compassion throughout the duration of the crisis, we prove the depth and durability of our love.

**#33. I WILL HONOR MY OWN NEEDS AND MY OWN FEELINGS.** *When trying to uphold these Loving Promises, I will attend to the way I feel. I will not disregard my needs and desires, compromise my values or allow others to overstep my boundaries. I will ask for what I want. I will be who I am.*

Almost all of the Loving Promises refer to the way you are with your partner. This Promise approaches from a different angle. It asks that you look at yourself and question "What is right for me? How will I protect myself if I have to? How will I get my needs met?" These are very important questions. But also very tricky. This Promise could appropriately be used as a safety valve that protects you from over-pressuring yourself and ignoring your own real needs. But it could also be used as a weapon to gain advantage over your partner by demanding your selfish "needs" take priority. Or it can be used as a cop-out to excuse your unwillingness to fully engage with the Promises.

The Loving Promises is a document that sets out ideals of behavior. The Promises serve as guidelines. Even the most diligent person will fall short. I fall short. This Loving Promise takes into consideration our humanness and fallibility. It gives us permission to accept ourselves with our limitations and not beat ourselves up if we have pushed too far, too fast, exceeded our present limits or need to beat a hasty retreat. It allows us to opt out if we feel our values are being compromised. If we didn't include this Promise, we could force ourselves into situations where we are unready or unwilling. When we look into our situation and say to ourselves "I cannot go there now, it asks too much of me at this time, I'm too afraid, too rushed, too uncomfortable, too conflicted," we are not giving up or running away. We are simply acknowledging our present reality and making a thoughtful choice to retreat until such time as we have gathered strength and feel able to confront the challenges we face or make a determination to withdraw.

With this Promise, you are able to take on all the other Promises with self-care and self-acceptance, rather than self-pressure and self-accusation. This is the key to success with the Loving Promises—do it with love and awareness. Do it when you're ready—or not quite ready, but don't take on any situation that will cause you to suffer more than you are able to endure at present. And don't become involved in any situation that will jeopardize your safety or integrity.

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The Loving Promises are not meant to be followed mindlessly. If you place no limitations on how far you will go to fulfill the Promises, you might be too steadfast and commit to stay in relationship with your partner, even when it would be harmful to both you and them. (Promise #1). You might intend to serve your partner's best interest, making it your life's mission to care for them, while neglecting your own needs and losing yourself in the process. (Promise #4) You might be ruthlessly truthful with your partner to the extent that it causes them needless pain. (Promise #18) You might be accepting of your partner's selfish and demanding behavior, even when that behavior is totally unacceptable and inappropriate. (Promise #8) This is why it is necessary to use discrimination when applying the Promises.

In order to work with this Promise it is important to stay in touch with your feelings. Feelings guide you and provide insight into your inner state. The Promise asks you to attend to those feelings and honor the messages they are sending. A question to ask yourself, "Is this course of action beneficial to my body, my mind, my psychological and spiritual growth and well-being?" Listen closely to the feeling texture of your answer. Ask again and again until you receive clarity.

A necessary key to implementing this Promise is making your wishes known—being willing to ask for what you want and expressing what you don't want. Your partner is not a mind reader. Clearly stating your own boundaries helps her by letting her know what your limits are and when and how she might be overstepping those limits. The clearer you state your boundaries, the easier it will be for her to honor those boundaries. And it won't be necessary for you to have to continuously negotiate to reestablish them.

Safeguarding your needs usually doesn't involve taking an inflexible stand and insisting your partner bow to your demands. It usually involves a process of negotiation and compromise. With compromise, I get some, but not all of what I want, you get some, but not all of what you want. Negotiation is not about getting advantage. The aim of fair negotiation is to try to give what your partner needs without denying your own needs. If you give too much, you will feel depleted and come in touch with your sense of unfairness. If you take too much, the imbalance fosters guilt and creates tension.

This Promise affirms your right to be as you are—without shame, without apology, irrespective of pressure from others. This is a sacred birthright. It deserves to be honored, not only by others, but also by yourself. Especially by yourself, because if you don't fully accept yourself as you are, you won't assert your right that others accept you, and you won't feel worthy of receiving all you rightfully deserve.

**#34. I WILL NURTURE MYSELF FOR BOTH OF US.** *My wellbeing affects you as well as myself. I will strive to choose wholesome alternatives in my life that keep my body healthy, my mind positive, my spirits uplifted. I will look after my own needs so I am not overly dependent on you.*

Once you are in a committed relationship, you are no longer a lone individual. You are now involved in an interdependent complex of shared experiences, shared responsibilities and shared consequences. Because you are so closely bound, the way you manage your life intimately affects your partner. This Promise acknowledges this fact and asks that you take exquisite care of your whole being, not only for your own sake, but also for the sake of the ones you love and who love you.

The clearest example of the shared effects of attending to your self-nurturance or lack thereof, is how you care for your body. If you neglect your body through faulty health practices, your beloved lady suffers with you. She will have to watch with helpless anguish as your health declines. She has to expend her time and energy, and both of your financial resources, taking care of you when you fall ill. And she will mourn your unlived life after your early demise.

Conversely, she can share in the benefits of your healthy, vital life if you eat nutritious foods, exercise, attend to your body when something goes wrong and avoid things that can weaken it. She will also share the positive effects of choices you make in nurturing your mental and spiritual health—the loving attention and care you give to your mind and soul.

This Loving Promise affirms that you have choice. It remains for you to stay conscious of the choices before you and keep in mind the consequences of those choices. . . then responsibly choose to cultivate behaviors based on self-love, the love of your partner and others you share your life with.

A wide range of choices can contribute to your wellbeing:

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**Your Family:** Are you able to commit enough time and attention to your relationship, your family unit and family of origin?

**Your Finances:** Are you bringing in enough money so that you and your loved ones are living safely and comfortably?

**Your Career:** Are you doing work that provides you a sense of fulfillment and is in alignment with your life's calling?

**Your Leisure:** Do you take pleasure in your free time, and have you reserved enough?

**Your Environment:** Does your living and your workspace suit your needs. Is it safe, clean, neat and attractive?

**Your Community:** Do you enjoy the people you associate with and do they stimulate, enliven and uplift you?

**Your Spirit:** Do you allow yourself time and space to be alone and in the company of like-minded seekers in order to replenish your inner reserves and elevate yourself?

**Your Endowment:** Are you able to contribute to society to make the world a better place for present and ensuing generations?

All of these areas of your life are conducive to living happily or living unhappily. If and how you choose to engage has an impact on yourself as well as on your loved ones. Are you engaging with these areas of your life fully, with your whole being, or are you compromising, faking it, being lazy or giving in to your fears and apathy? What you give to your life is what you'll get from it.

More should be said about addiction, which I consider to be one of the most damaging scourges of our culture. It takes a tremendous toll on the health of our body, mind and soul. I expand the definition of addiction to include anything that we consistently use which numbs or takes our awareness away from uncomfortable experience. Obvious addictions are drugs and alcohol. Less obvious are food addiction, compulsive shopping, work and gambling. When we are bored, unhappy, lonely or upset, we use these addictions to erase or dull the uncomfortable emotions.

An addiction that is almost universally used in our media saturated culture is addiction to entertainment. How many times a day do you check your smartphones, click the computer to watch YouTube, play computer games or surf the porn channels? How many hours a day do you watch television? How many days a week do you view movies? We are compulsively glued to our screens. Entertainment is good, but when used addictively, it can siphon energy and aliveness from our relationships, our work and our sense of purpose. You will nurture yourself and benefit your loved ones if you have an intention to set a limit on your screen time and substitute life affirming activities instead.

Take care of your body. Take care of your mind. Take care of your friendships. Take care of your soul. Master yourself. Confront the issues that drag you down. The greatest gift you can give the ones you love is your own happiness. As you work toward your own fulfillment, know that you are also working toward your loved one's fulfillment. Taking care of yourself in this way is not being selfish. It is being kind. It is being generous with those you love.

*Q. How do you nurture yourself? Are there other ways you can offer yourself more nurturance?*

**#35. I WILL MAINTAIN THE AWARENESS OF THE SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP.** *You, our love, and the bond we share is a sacred gift. It is an essential aspect of my spiritual path. That understanding will inform all the choices I make.*

Previously, I wrote about the evolution of love as a process of moving from a self-serving, "What can I get?" to a generous, "What can I give?" This Promise prompts us to ask, "What can I become?"

The traditional view of the span of a human life is an arc. You are born, grow, peak in early adulthood, begin your decline in middle age, and it's a rapid downward trajectory from then on. That may describe the body, but not the soul. More often, the trajectory of the growth of the Spirit is an upward evolution, increasing with age. Conscious effort can affect the angle of the trajectory and this, in turn, will have a profound effect on your relationship.

The word "*spiritual*" can conjure images of dimly lit rooms, burning incense, New Age music and pictures on the wall of foreign looking people with long beards and white robes. These are all merely trappings. That which is spiritual is concerned with a reality greater than oneself. It is in contrast to the small, self-concerned world of the

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ego (that which identifies itself with body, gender, profession, social status, etc.) versus an expanded Self, that seeks connection with all creation and taps into an elevated consciousness and/or a connection with a Divine Being.

As you identify more with the expanded Self and relinquish identity with the small, ego-dominated self, tendencies toward grasping, ambition, jealousy, need for control and power will begin to evaporate. In their place flow feelings of serenity, unity and joy that result from identifying with a source of infinite power, infinite consciousness. In the realm of relationship, the same characteristics of serenity, unity and joy are descriptive of the feelings loving couples in soul-centered relationships have toward each other. In this sense, the love that couples share is a spiritual experience.

The further you progress along the spiritual path and the more closely you identify with the expanded Self, the more deeply you enter into love. This is because the fullest expression of spirituality is love. Whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish or Christian, whatever religion or type of spiritual practice, the single characteristic shared by advanced spiritual practitioners is love. This is not the kind of love reserved only for the near and dear, but unlimited love, love that is extended to all beings. Since love is the essence of spirituality, a person can enter into greater love through engaging in spiritual practices, or they can enter spirituality through the practice of greater, more expansive love.

All religions and spiritual traditions have practices which can help us tap into the Self and transport us to spiritual realms—among them, prayer, meditation, chanting, contemplation, study of scripture etc. The purpose of these practices is to help us turn inward in order to become familiar with the Divine energy that permeates the universe and that also resides within. The serene, timeless, boundless essence is cloaked and hidden from us by our everyday mind that jumps, like a crazy monkey, from thought to thought, sensation to sensation, desire to desire. By quieting the mind and tapping into that essence, it is possible for us to enter a pool of peace and serenity.

When, through spiritual practice, you aim to bring the energies of the Self into your consciousness, you are not trying to add or develop something that is not there. The Self already fully exists within you. The work of spiritual practices is to lift the veil and make manifest the radiant being that you are.

Discovering even a taste of this inner essence and the resulting tranquility and harmony will have a tremendous impact on your relationship. Any change you experience will inevitably affect your partner. Whether or not she joins you on your spiritual path, your inner harmony will lead to harmony with her; your tranquil mind will help calm her mind. As the experience of the Self grows within you, that evokes your partner's Self, and visa-versa. This mutual growth is the purpose of your shared spiritual practice. The ultimate effect of your spiritual practice on your relationship is that you would be more able to connect from the Self in you, to the Self in your partner. This is Self-to-Self communion.

Many couples have brought God or Christ or a Higher Power into their relationship. What a blessing to have the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, instruction from sacred texts, counsel from a compassionate cleric, inspiration from uplifting religious services and support from a flock of like-minded friends. For many loving couples, their belief in a Higher Being, acceptance of His love and willingness to listen to His word and follow His instructions is the very foundation of their magnificent relationship. Their love of Him is the glue that binds them together.

There are those readers who are atheists and don't believe in the existence of a divine being. It's not necessary to believe in a higher power or for you to follow a spiritual path in order for you to incorporate this Promise. You just have to know that the higher power is not you. To discover the sacred in living doesn't require acknowledging the existence of a divine being. Holiness is hiding in plain sight in a child's smile, your partner's touch and in your loving heart.

Years ago I asked my spiritual teacher a question, "What is a spiritual marriage?" His answer was simple and profound. "*Treat each other as gods and goddesses.*" To see the divinity of the woman in your life and treat her with reverence, is honoring and serving God. This attitude of honoring your partner as a manifestation of the Divine is a foundation of a spiritual marriage and is the very essence of the Loving Promises. It is also a sure path to a love-filled relationship.

However, what if our "goddess" partner frustrates us by behaving like a selfish, lazy or stubborn, not-so-godly goddess? When she acts in this ungodly manner, it is easy for our reverent attitude toward her to evaporate as we are forced to deal with our own disappointment, annoyance and resentment. This is our test and our burden. But it is also a path to our higher Self. When we use our feelings of frustration with her as motivation to work with and overcome that frustration, it's like using a thorn to remove a thorn. In simple, practical terms, when your partner is late, practice patience. When your partner is agitated, practice serenity. When your partner is selfish, practice generosity. When your partner is moody, practice equanimity.

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Without a doubt, what can play a dominant role in enhancing your spirit in relationship can be maintaining the Loving Promises. The Promises are spiritual practices in themselves. The qualities of awareness, unselfishness, patience, acceptance, kindness, forgiveness and grateful-ness that are inherent in the Loving Promises are spiritual attributes. So, by following the Loving Promises, you expand your spirit.

If, as has been said, “God is love,” you bring godliness into your life and relationships as you practice and perfect the Promises. That godliness permeates your partnership and makes it holy.

**#36. I WILL REMIND MYSELF OF THE FLEETING NATURE OF OUR TIME TOGETHER.** *At some point one of us will be alone. I will endeavor to keep this in my mind and savor the preciousness of each moment I have with you.*

*We have two lives, and the second begins when we realize we only have one.*

Confucius

Two opposing processes are at play in our life, *attachment*—holding on, and *surrender*—letting go. Attachment is more prominent at the beginning of our life. We acquire physical strength, knowledge, friendships, accumulate material goods and struggle to hold on to and increase what we have acquired. Nearing the end of our life, one by one, these things are taken from us. We are forced to surrender our health, our memory, our friends, our possessions. Our final surrender is death.

The Buddha said, “All meeting ends in parting.” The price you pay for having a great relationship is the excruciating pain you or your partner will experience at the death of your beloved. Not so much if you hate each other. That’s the downside of a great relationship—you have so much more to lose.

No matter what our age, we are all engaged in the process of dying. Our dying started the moment we were born. Each day we live brings us a day closer to death. If we could love our beloved partner with the understanding that this year, this month, this week, or this day, could be the last time we could see them, speak with them, touch them, how beautiful the love would be and how deeply felt our gratitude that we are privileged to share this day and to have had all those yesterdays together.

From time to time, Alice and I would have marriage vow renewal ceremonies. These were a chance to share our love with family and friends and also a great opportunity for a party. Several years ago, we decided to have our final ceremony. We had been living our vows and felt we didn’t need to repeat them. So we decided to include one last vow that, as we grow older, has taken on greater meaning for us, “*May we always remember that this day could be the last day we might be together.*” The meaning behind this vow continues to reverberate within us and has added to the sweetness of our life together.

Of course you know you are going to die. However, it’s so easy to forget. Oblivious to the ticking clock, you go about living your busy life, working, doing the laundry, complaining about the lousy weather, traffic, rising prices. It takes a conscious effort to bring your mind around to contemplate the fragility of your existence. Most people’s tendency is the opposite—they want to obliterate the disturbing thought. On the contrary, Alice and I want to keep the idea right in front of our noses. Together we read the obituary section when we get a hold of a newspaper, knowing that one day we too will be listed. For years I wore a ring with a skull as a reminder. We keep a digital x-ray of Alice’s head by the light switch in our office, knowing that one day this skull is what her head will look like. All we have to do though, as a reminder of our impermanence, is to look in the mirror. We see ample visual evidence that the sand in the hourglass of our life is running out.

This contemplation of aging, death and your own mortality is important work that will enhance the meaning of your life. It is far too important to save till death is close at hand. Don’t assume you can do the work on your deathbed. It is too late then. You have no idea of what your mental state will be at that time. So start now, start a dialogue with impermanence at whatever age you are. When you have incorporated the wisdom from impermanence into your life, you will be able to draw on it when the time comes.

Contemplating the end of your life is not a morbid thing to do. It is simply an unvarnished recognition of reality. All you see and know will arise, stay for a while, and then pass away. As a couple, the reward for bringing this to your awareness from time to time is a deeper appreciation of your relationship, thankfulness for the presence of your beloved partner, and greater enjoyment of each precious moment of your life together.

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That appreciation can translate to action. Since you don't know when your life will end and when will be the last time you will see your beloved, seize the moment. With the knowledge that in the end the Grim Reaper will inevitably win, love her with all your heart. Don't hold back! Give love! Give the best of yourself! Express your love! Love not expressed will cause you pain later on. Don't hold on to anger. Don't judge. Don't delay. Feel your love, speak your love, act your love. The most precious gift you can give is your loving heart.

This little poem I wrote succinctly expresses the truth.

*From cane  
To walker  
To wheelchair  
To bed  
Ashes.  
Love now!*

**Q.** *Are you afraid of dying? What aspect of death makes you most afraid? Pain? The unknown? Leaving loved ones? Do you have a belief that gives you comfort?*

**#37. I WILL DEEPEN MY LOVE FOR MYSELF.** *If I do not love me, I cannot give love to you, nor can I be available to receive your love. I will aspire to acknowledge myself as unconditionally lovable. I will adopt the Loving Promises that apply to myself.*

This Promise is a quintessential one. Self-love is the prototype for all love. Without self-love you cannot give and receive love. Though the Promise is about giving love to yourself, one effect of loving yourself is that you become better able to receive love from others. This is crucial. If you don't believe you are deserving of love, you will not be open to receive love. You will be running on empty and therefore unable to replenish your reserve. Without a cachet of love in your tank, you will hoard and have little available for others. You will be miserly in your giving and constricted in your receiving. However, when you are overflowing with love and acceptance for yourself, giving love to others and taking in their love for you happens easily. So, self-love is the key to both receiving and giving love.

Though you may think you are able to hide the way you feel about yourself from others, you cannot. If you do not love and respect yourself, that message is broadcast in myriad ways, mostly unconscious. The words you use, your tone of voice, your posture, eye contact etc., reveals your true feelings of unworthiness. Others pick up the signals you send and will tend to offer you the same disrespect you offer yourself. And the way others treat you provides you with feedback that confirms how you are undeserving of love.

Self-love is not about deserving, and it's not about the future. If you think you can't love yourself until you live up to all the ideals you have set for yourself, right all the wrongs you have done, erase all the imperfections you believe you have, self-love will never happen. You will be busily engaged with working on your self-improvement for the rest of your life. To be self-loving you need to accept yourself and love yourself as you are now, not as you wish to be.

To see yourself clearly for who you are, to know that you are capable of great kindness toward others (as well as great greed), great wisdom (as well as great stupidity), gives you the right to join the human race. Yes, under the right conditions you could be cowardly, mean, lazy, or selfish, just like everyone else. As much as you want to separate yourself from all of those qualities, they reside within you. Recognizing, accepting and befriending these disowned qualities opens the way for you to love yourself, and that opens the way for you to love others.

This is not as easy as it seems. The difficulty achieving self-love often originates early in life. Most of us are born into families where we are raised by people who love us conditionally—love is extended when we are good and withheld when we are bad. From childhood on, in school we are graded, evaluated and assessed. We are judged better or worse, good or bad, and rewarded or punished based on comparison with our peers. Only if we are considered smart, beautiful, obedient, rich, glib or talented do we get the goodies. If we are not, we end up with the wrong end of the lollipop. Fearing being left out or “less than,” we adopt and internalize the standards set by others.

Often, one of the most influential of those “others” is our judgmental father. Even if he is not still around, many of us continue to carry the burden of his criticism. We may try to live up to our father's expectations and please him to

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show him that we are worthy. If we fail to measure up, we judge ourselves deficient and unworthy of love. This conditional self-appraisal poisons our soul and strangles our ability to love.

On the surface, the way out of the self-criticism dilemma seems obvious—work harder at becoming smarter, more handsome, richer, etc.— or at least fool others into believing you are. Get people to love you “because” . . . because you do them favors, because you don't create problems, because you have money, because you're cool, because you're interesting, because . . . This rarely works because deep down you believe the “real you” is blemished and broken.

The truth is you cannot earn the love of the person who wants and needs this love the most—yourself. You can earn others praise, approval, respect and admiration. But in your heart of hearts you want more. You yearn to be immersed in love, to be embraced and held by love. This could only come from you. For this to happen, your love for your self must be unconditional. You must see clearly all your warts and scars, all your weaknesses and stupidities, all your past failings. You must acknowledge these and still be able to honestly say. . . “I am lovable. I am lovable just as I am.”

The Loving Promises can help cultivate self-love. The Promises are guidelines for loving your partner. Why can't they be used as guides for loving yourself? With a change in the wording of the Promises and elimination of those that cannot apply, the Loving Promises could be a useful guide for helping you to greater love for yourself. Below are some Promises that could apply to yourself:

- I will be awake to myself.
- I will be supportive of myself.
- I will accept myself.
- I will regard myself as equal to others.
- I will emphasize my positive side.
- I will inspire myself to be my best.
- I will be grateful for the gifts I receive from myself.
- I will appreciate myself. I will be forgiving of myself.
- I will be dependable for myself.
- I will be honest with myself.
- I will speak to myself with kindness.
- I will honor my independence.
- I will be considerate of my desire for privacy and solitude.
- I will bring joy and play into my life. I will seek to grow and evolve.
- I will be alert to my negativity when it occurs.
- I will assume responsibility for my detrimental behavior.
- I will honor my needs and my feelings.
- I will make a place in my life for the spiritual.
- I will remind myself of the fleeting nature of my life.

Just as the Loving Promises are about coming to peace with your partner, these Self-loving Promises are about coming to peace within yourself.

It is important to understand that the Promises are not about judging yourself good or bad, but about becoming more skillful and utilizing your energies to more effectively reach goals that will bring yourself and your partner positive, life affirming outcomes. By minimizing the element of self-judgment, this concept of skillful/unskillful is very different from good/bad. It doesn't carry the weight of self-put-down. And skills can be learned, giving you the option to work on your issues free of judgment. If you can incorporate the idea of skillful/unskillful into your life, it could be a powerful opening. Applied to relationships, it can help resolve conflicts, avoid blaming self and others, and enhance your ability to let go of frustrating situations. Labeling your judgments about the less than perfect parts of yourself as “unskillful” rather than judging yourself defective can make it easier to love yourself.

**#38. I WILL EXPAND MY LOVE INTO THE WORLD.** *My love will wither if it is only reserved for you. I will extend my love and care to family and friends, acquaintances and strangers, to nature and to all of creation.*

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In order for love to be complete, love needs to reside in three domains—the domain of love between intimate partners (which is the subject of most of this book), the domain of self-love (the subject of the previous Loving Promise), and ultimately, the domain of love for the world (which includes those people and things that extend beyond intimate partners and immediate family). This third domain is the subject matter of the present Promise. In a nutshell and to oversimplify, the process of the evolution of love is *expansion*—it is the movement from the focus on (*me*) myself, to (*us*), intimate dyad and close family and friends, to (*we*), the world.

Many people think that the true measure of love they have for their partner is that they love them exclusively. The refrain, “I love you, only you, and nobody else but you,” is considered a compliment. But is it? Can your love be real if your intimate partner is the only person you care about, and you remain indifferent to the rest of humanity? No! *Love is the concern for the well-being of that which we love, and willingness to act on that concern.* It is not a product of the beauty and specialness of the partner or relationship, but rather a quality of the person who is doing the loving. It is the way they see the world and is woven into the very fabric of who that person is.

Love has a natural tendency to enlarge and become more inclusive. The more love you have to give, the more you will automatically attract loving people into your life, and when they come, they will bring their love to you, and you will spread your love to them. Love will infuse your whole life and all within your sphere. After I met and fell in love with Alice, my relationship with others transformed. The acceptance, generosity and compassion that were awakened in me spread out into my whole world. I took on Alice's family as my own and my love expanded to her two teenage children, to her parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews. My relationship with my own parents, who I had kept at arms length, vastly improved. Old friendships were rekindled. I reconnected with my ex-wives and we re-experienced the love that had been dormant for years. My work improved as I brought the love I shared with Alice into the workplace. Opening to love allowed me to bestow loving feelings on literally everyone in my life.

We expand our love into the world through a process of inclusion. When the sphere of our love and concern is condensed and focused mainly on our self—on meeting our personal needs, we tend to fixate on others mainly as sources for the satisfaction of those needs. We also tend to see the rest of the world as being in competition with us for “goodies,” for attention, for affection. If we are able to bring even one other person within that personal, self-focused sphere, and find joy and value in satisfying *their* needs, our world expands tremendously.

However, the rest of the world is still left out and in competition. If we include family, friends, those in our religion, our ethnic group, our social class, our country, we still eliminate most of the world from our area of love and concern. Even if we include all of humanity in our circle of love, we have still left out animals, the non-human living beings that we share our planet with. And what of our love and concern for the Earth, its climate and resources. If we do this, include everyone and everything as if they are beloved friends, relatives and intimate partners, we will be immersed in love. There will be no “me” versus “us,” or “us” versus “them”—only “we.”

The desire to love all humanity, love all creation, is a noble purpose. But “humanity” is an abstraction. What is real and concrete is the person who stands before you “in the flesh.” That is where your “love of all creation” should start.

I find mouthing the words of love easy. Practicing “in the flesh” is hard. As I walk down the street, I notice a disheveled man sitting on the sidewalk holding a hand lettered sign, asking for money. He puts his palm out and tries to catch my eye so he can begin his well-practiced entreaty. Do I avoid his gaze and walk on as if I didn't notice him? Do I reach into my pocket to fish out a few coins to throw onto his palm so I don't have to engage? Do I pause and place bills rather than change in his hand and walk off congratulating myself that I've performed a good deed? Do I stop, look him in the eyes and see and connect by sharing a few words with this human being who is obviously in need? Though in this book I intone lofty words of love, more times than I wish to remember, I cast my eyes down and pass by such a person as if they didn't exist.

Loving in the expanded way described by this Promise is loving without limits. Loving without limits is very different from what we consider “normal love” which is based on our judgment of the attractive qualities of the object of our love, on their willingness to love us back, or what we think we can gain from them. Limitless love does not involve judgments. It sees the “lovableness” in everyone and everything.

Expanded love like this is not natural. Our natural human tendency is self-interest—me first, me most, me best, me now. Me, me, me. There's no judgement in this. It's just the way we humans are built. But we can be more. It takes hard work, consistent practice over time to loosen our normal selfish tendencies and make ourselves into more generous and love-able humans. This is the work of the Loving Promises.

As you work with this Promise and imbibe its power, you become ready to approach the final Loving Promise. As you will see, Promise #39 is different from the others.

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**#39. I WILL EMBRACE LOVE AS THE GUIDING LIGHT OF MY LIFE.** *My ultimate goal is to think more loving thoughts, feel more loving feelings, speak more loving words, act in more loving ways—at all times, in any situation, with every person—including myself. I will monitor my journey by taking a loving inventory. My intention is to bring more goodness into my life, into your life, into our relationship and into the world.*

This final Loving Promise differs from the others in that it is not a vow that you make. Rather, it is a realization that comes upon you. It is the fruit of your work with all the other Loving Promises. It dawns upon you and beckons after you have worked the Promises for a while and have grown within them. Because it requires a certain degree of ripeness, it is necessary to refrain from taking on this Promise unless you feel strongly moved to do so, and until you have matured in love.

You cannot rush this final Promise. It happens of its own accord, and in its own way, and in its own time.

Over time, as you worked with the Loving Promises, your goals have evolved. At first, it was all important for you to overcome some of the problems and frustrations you were having in your relationship. You initially began working with the Promises with that goal in mind. But as you worked with them and integrated them into your life, you evolved, and you deepened. By bringing loving awareness to your heart, loving feelings started to take over your consciousness. Gradually, all that was loving began to increase; all that was unloving weakened and began to dissolve. Acceptance increased, judgment weakened. Sharing increased, selfishness weakened. Compassion increased, uncaring weakened.

If you think about what is important and meaningful in your life, many things lose their luster. How important is the label on the clothes you wear, the model of car you drive, who you are seen with, how your favorite sports team is doing? What really matters, what gives your life meaning, is giving yourself in love and receiving love from others. This is your ultimate reason for being.

This Promise invites you to not limit love with the people in your life, but to expand love to include “all times” and “any situation.” Love doesn’t happen only when you are with your sweetheart. Loving feelings can well up when you are taking out the garbage. It is entirely possible to imbue the little things in life with the same heartfelt care and affection as if you were cavorting with your beloved. You feel love welling up when you watch a beautiful sunset, when you see a bird in flight. Why not open yourself to feel love waiting in line purchasing groceries? On the morning commute? Cleaning out the cat box?. Why shouldn’t you aspire to experience everyday life as an opportunity to experience and express love.

We must not wait until we encounter someone or something we consider “worthy” before we are able to experience love. Love is not an automatic response to that which is lovable. We don’t become a more loving person by looking around for and discovering objects we consider more worthy of our love. *Love is a conscious decision we make.* We decide, by focusing our attention and intention, to consciously imbue the objects and people that come before us with more love. We commit to make the effort to see them with more loving eyes. *Love is a choice to bring loving care and show up with an open heart.*

The way you work with this final Promise is simple, but not easy – discern what is the more loving action, continuously choose it, despite your resistance, despite your lethargy, despite what wrongs they have done or are doing to you. Choose love especially when stressed and frustrated and pissed off. Choose love, kindness and courtesy anyway. Choose it every day, in every situation, with every person – no exceptions.

At times you will be faced with a fork in the road, one of two alternative actions you must take. The question you can ask yourself when deciding on a course of action is this, “*Which action will bring more love?*” This powerful question, carefully considered, can be your reference point, your yardstick to help discover the highest and best action for any situation. Instinctively, you know what actions bring more love, more peace. . . and which don’t. You have an unerring inner voice that speaks with love and integrity. It’s a matter of listening to that voice. . .and following it.

As you go through your day and interact with friends, lovers and strangers, reflect on the ebb and flow of the energy of love. Observe yourself. Are you being a messenger of love and acceptance? Are you being a messenger of dissatisfaction and frustration? Are you looking to find goodness, or looking to find fault? Wanting to be special and superior or celebrating others gifts? Seeking to gain for yourself, or opening your hands in generosity? This is “loving inventory.” It is *loving* because you are not looking to find fault or criticize yourself. You are observing yourself and

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your behavior with loving eyes. Your intention is only to learn to be more skillful so you can improve your ability to love. This is what the Loving Promises are all about.

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The Loving Promises are true and powerful. And they are beautiful in their depth and comprehensiveness. You could design a fine poster, put it in a nice frame and hang it on your wall. Or you could read and reread the Promises until you have committed them to memory. But in order to benefit, you must engage the Promises, work with them and integrate them into your everyday life. Use them as guidelines for the choices you make with your partner. Utilize them as a yardstick against which to measure your behavior. The Promises are meant to be translated into action and, until they are, they are essentially useless and not worth the paper on which they are written.

You will never satisfy your appetite by reading a recipe book. Get into the kitchen and start cooking.

## Part III.

# Relationship issues

In this section we will examine some of the major issues that often can become sticky problems in committed relationships. These common relationship issues are fertile ground for the application of the Loving Promises

# CONFLICT

*Conflicts are not a sign you married the wrong person. They simply affirm you are human.*

Dr. Gary Chapman

## About Conflict

When you live alone, you are able to rest easily just being yourself. You are free to see and do things your own way, unimpeded. There's no one around you to obstruct you, challenge you, or offer a contrasting perspective. When you are living with a partner and that person is sensitive to you, vocal with her opinions and not afraid to assert her boundaries, the inevitable conflicts you have with her will allow you to find out just how selfish you are, how inattentive you are, how sloppy you are, how intolerant you are. Or how love-able you are. These are valuable insights.

Simply stated, conflicts originate between two people when their beliefs or needs or intentions do not match.

Conflicts can be positive. They can provide clarity. They can help you become more observant, more kind, more considerate. . . more human. In this sense conflict is beneficial. It is the instrument that has the potential to wake you up, inform you, challenge you and help you to grow.

Often, couples think that when they are having conflict there's something wrong with the relationship, that conflict is a bad thing and should be eliminated. Actually, the collision of desires and wills is an indication that the relationship is real and is on track. A relationship where conflict is ignored, avoided or covered up is in trouble. The absence of conflict does not indicate that the relationship is healthy, nor does the presence of conflict indicate that the relationship is in trouble. If you listen to your conflicts with an open mind, you can learn from them. With this understanding of conflict as teacher, we can ask the questions, "What can I learn from this conflict? How can I devise creative solutions?" This is much better than questioning, "How can I avoid this conflict?" Or worse, "How can I change my partner in order to get them to agree with me so that they will leave me alone?"

It would seem that two rational people can come to agreement on their differences. The problem is that though we have a rational brain, our nervous system is primitive. Prehistoric ancestors were faced with life-or-death challenges. Their bodies were primed for fight or flight. Our bodies retain those same primitive responses. In your everyday life, conflict can be blown way out of proportion, experienced as a threat, as a catastrophic life or death situation when no such threats exist. Such events as being criticized by our boss, holding back anger, or engaging in a heated argument with our partner, can cause powerful psychological responses. These give us a jolt of energy and can amplify strong fight or flight reactions. While our physical safety and survival might not be at risk, we think that our beliefs, our sense of right and wrong and our ego is being challenged. Our body automatically responds to the challenge by secreting chemicals that activate us and stimulate our emotion. Reason goes out the window and the dispute now turns into war.

## Approaches to Conflict

When there is conflict, we are compelled to action. There are three broad kinds of actions we can take. We can move *toward*—placate, give in, accommodate, in order to avoid conflict (Passivity). We can move *away*—withdraw, evade, ignore the conflict (Evasion). Or we can move *against*—compete, argue and try to win (Assertion).

Situations exist where passivity, evasion and assertion are appropriate, and situations where they are inappropriate and ill-advised. If you use an action in an inappropriate situation or use one action as your exclusive strategy for conflict resolution, you could inflame the conflict or frustrate yourself. The problem with overusing a passive approach is that you can sabotage your own needs and bruise your self-esteem. By evading, you can fail to address conflicts and therefore cannot resolve them. With asserting, you risk creating a non-productive, combative situation.

Each approach to conflict has its positive side. There are times when there's good reason to give in, times when withdrawing in order to avoid conflict is the best move, and times when setting limits, standing your ground and

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going after what you want is the right thing to do. A loose, eclectic approach, where you remain open and gauge your actions to the situation is the most workable.

Easier said than done. Each of us has personality characteristics that draw us to one or another method of conflict resolution. The person who tends to want to please and accommodate others might find it difficult to challenge and confront when needed. A person who thrives on engagement and competition might find it difficult to withdraw from conflict when that is the appropriate action. With an understanding of our personality tendencies, a clear appraisal of our own and our partner's needs, and a genuine desire for a fair outcome, we have the basis for an approach to conflict resolution that will be helpful for all but the stickiest conflicts.

*Q. Which of the three approaches to conflict—passive, evasive or assertive, do you tend to use more often?*

### Tendencies Toward Combat

There are two divergent meanings for the word "conflict." There is a conflict that is a fight, where opponents are at war, competing against each other, each trying to win. I call this "combat conflict." Another kind of conflict is one that reflects a difference—different wants, different needs, different perceptions. These kinds of conflicts can be termed "disagreement conflicts." Disagreement conflicts are workable. With discussion and compromise, partners can come to an agreement if they are willing and able to put in the effort and to meet halfway. Partners in combat conflict aren't interested in resolution. Their only interest is to engage in battle and emerge the victor.

Disagreements are an inevitable result of living together. Two people cannot avoid having dissonant needs and differing perspectives at times, but disagreements do not have to turn into combat.

Most people have immature and ineffective tendencies inherent in their personality makeup that, in conflict situations, can act to detonate disagreements and blow them up into combat. These tendencies to combat become energized in the heat of an argument. As the conflict progresses and heats up, these personality characteristics impel a person to take a rigid, polarizing position, one that invokes opposition in their partner. Emotions escalate and soon a mild disagreement turns into a war.

I believe that all but the meekest among us have, at least to some degree, most of these tendencies listed below: (I know I have.)

- We tend to be blind to others needs and feelings.
- We tend to want to win and come out on top.
- We tend to need to be right and avoid being wrong.
- We tend to avoid disapproval by being defensive.
- We tend to blame others.
- We tend to take a rigid stance.
- We tend to be reluctant to reconcile.
- We tend to try to maintain control.
- We tend to take things personally.
- We tend to be impatient.
- We tend to take for granted that we know what is going on in another's mind.
- We tend to depend only on our own beliefs and perceptions.
- We tend to stir things up and provoke when challenged.
- We tend to become emotionally charged.

In a conflict situation, each of these tendencies makes combat more likely. Fear, powered by underlying insecurity, is the motivation behind these tendencies. And fear is what makes them so potent— fear of being judged to be wrong or bad or incompetent, fear of being unable to control a person or situation, fear of not being able to get a fair share. Fear brings on defensiveness, rigidity, impatience, need to control and all the other combative tendencies on the list.

What makes conflict so confusing sometimes is that the struggle in an argument is usually not about the issue being argued, but about *those lurking fears and insecurities that live behind the issue*. Adding to the confusion, the tendencies to combat themselves ratchet up the conflict.

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When these tendencies are active in an individual or couple, it is far more likely that the disagreements in which they are engaged will turn into combat, and when two people are locked in combat, they are stuck, and there is little chance of problems getting resolved.

*Q. Which of the tendencies to combat do you have? Which are your top three tendencies?*

## From Combat to Goodwill

Though the tendencies to combat are present in adults, they originate in our childish ego state. That's the part of ourselves that believes and demands, "The world revolves around me . . . Gimme, gimme—Now! . . . I know what's best. . . Take care of me. . . I'm special. . . My needs come first." As adults it is possible for us to grow beyond these childish ego demands, espouse patience, awareness and generosity and thus moderate these combative tendencies. Approaching conflict in this mature way, we are able to create an atmosphere where conflicts can be resolved peaceably. That atmosphere is *goodwill*. In conflict, goodwill is the generous intention for the highest and best outcome for everyone involved. Goodwill feels safe because it helps to dissolve fear and animosity.

In conflict, goodwill creates safety and dissolves fear because you are:

*Attentive and sensitive*, rather than unaware and indifferent.

*Fair*, rather than trying to win and take advantage.

*Flexible and open-minded*, rather than closed and unyielding.

*Aiming to be calm and rational*, rather than emotional and impulsive.

*Oriented toward problem solving*, rather than blame.

When you are attentive, fair, flexible, rational and solution-oriented, you are actively demonstrating goodwill. You are evoking trust in your partner. With an atmosphere of goodwill, two people can feel safe enough to abandon their fears, lay down their defensive weapons and embark on the process of working things out.

It is not always necessary for both partners to be of goodwill in order to create an atmosphere of goodwill. Goodwill is such a powerful sentiment that it is possible for one person who demonstrates goodwill to draw out the goodwill in the other. It takes two to tango, and if one partner is gracious in their approach and unwilling to engage in combat, there is no one available with whom the other can do the conflict tango. Even if your partner never comes to a place of peace with you, at least you can come to peace within yourself. That is the most important requisite for conflict resolution.

## Countering The Tendencies To Combat

We will go into more detail now about how to uproot each of the habitual Tendencies To Combat, which cause and perpetuate conflict, and replace them with mature, loving, peaceful intentions. Holding these intentions, and converting them to behavior, is how to bring harmony to conflict. As always, it begins with you.

*Intend to decrease self-absorption – instead, try to observe and listen to your partner's thoughts and feelings.* If you were involved in a conflict and your only concern was to push your point across, prove yourself right or disparage your partner's position, this would only serve to ratchet up the dissension. If, instead, you listen patiently to your partner, show genuine interest, take time for serious consideration of their thoughts and feelings, this would demonstrate that you honor what your partner has to say and have an earnest intention to reach a fair outcome to the disagreement. So the first and foremost activity in a conflict is not to promote, defend or explain your position, but to absorb your partner's point of view. That atmosphere of receptivity is the best opening gambit for resolving conflict.

*Intend to curb the need to win or avoid losing – instead try for you to both win.* "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." Coach Red Sanders' statement describes an attitude that will get you far in competition. However, relationship is not competition, it's about cooperation. Either/or mindset promotes competition and is fuel for the fire of conflict: *If my way is right, yours must be wrong. If I win, you must lose. Your getting more, means I must get less.* Start off with the proposition that it is possible for both you and your partner to get your needs met. Intend this. This approach counters the fear that one of us might end up the loser. And it might be me.

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*Intend to eliminate the compulsion to be right and avoid disapproval – instead, try to be fair with your partner and see the merits of their position.* Being right – asserting, “I am the correct one, I am the fair one, I am the honest one, I am the mistreated one, I am the reasonable one”— gets you nothing more than the booby prize for righteousness. It doesn’t solve problems, it derails solutions. Asserting that you are right puts your partner in the position of being wrong. Nobody likes that, so they get defensive, angry, stubborn and argumentative. You are now in a difficult position of trying to provide evidence to convince them that they are wrong, and having to criticize, complain and nag them to change. Give up the right/wrong game when you are in conflict. Do this even if you are clearly in the right. Make goodwill your goal. Even if you are right, sometimes it is best to keep it a secret.

*Intend to counteract your tendency to become defensive – instead, try to be open to hear your partner’s disapproval without needing to justify yourself.* When someone, especially someone close to you, criticizes you, admonishes you, puts you down, asserts you are wrong, it is natural for you to become defensive. You might express your defensiveness by denying wrongdoing or trying to justify your actions, attacking your partner or distancing yourself by becoming silent and unresponsive. Defensiveness in any form escalates conflict because while you are busy defending yourself, your accuser doesn’t feel that they have been heard. It’s true, your defensiveness puts up a wall that prevents their message from getting through to you. If you feel defensiveness coming on, take a few seconds to breathe, be quiet and go inside to collect your thoughts, rather than blurting an ego-driven reaction. That short break can allow your defensiveness to begin to evaporate.

*Intend to resist seeking to blame — instead, try to focus on solutions and on your own responsibility.* Rather than a genuine search for a solution, making accusations against your partner invites a fight, a defensive response, or their self-recrimination. It brings up all sorts of emotional reactions in the person being blamed. “Am I guilty? Was I wrong? Am I stupid? Are they unfairly accusing me?” Instead of finding fault and blaming, put all your attention on exploring the source of the conflict and seeking a solution.

*Intend to moderate your rigid stance – instead, try to be flexible, compromise and open to adapt to your partner’s needs and ideas.* Rigidity is seeing things only one way, as if everything is either black or white, right or wrong, good or bad — then tenaciously holding on to that opinion. One person being rigid brings out the rigidity in the other person. Both sides stubbornly hold onto their position and unless someone is open to compromise, the conflict goes on forever. Rigidity narrows vision and makes it more difficult to see what is in plain sight and to conceive of novel solutions. Flexibility, the opposite of rigidity, relaxes an open space. Flexibility allows for creativity, and creativity is an important key to resolving conflict.

*Intend to restrain your desire to dominate or be in control — instead try for both to be equally empowered.* Only when we feel powerless do we seek power. Only when we feel lack of control do we seek to control. The need for control is powered by fear. Fear is a result of a sense of impotence and lack of trust in our ability to handle ourselves and master our situation. When we trust, relinquishing control is not that difficult. Power struggle, the effort by both parties to assume control is the source of many conflicts. In power struggle, the true points of contention are lost, buried by the efforts of both sides to assert dominance. Try to see conflict as a cooperative endeavor rather than a contest, and the whole face of the of the conflict will change.

*Intend to let go of your reluctance to reconcile – instead try to make the first move toward restoring harmony.* “They are wrong, it’s their fault, they started it, they hurt my feelings, they should apologize.” These are excuses we give ourselves for not making an effort to reconcile. So we wait for them to make the first move, and they wait for us. And no one takes any initiative toward resolving conflict. It can be difficult to overcome our ego and pride, come to our partner, reach out our hand and ask that we let go of the past, accept blame, offer forgiveness, and start anew. Sometimes though, this is the only way through an impasse, and we are the ones who must do it. Offering our hand in reconciliation is usually a sign of strength rather than weakness, adult wisdom rather than childish obstinacy.

*Intend to avoid taking things personally – instead, try to be clear as to where your accountability lies.* People often respond to us not because of our actions, but from their own vision, their own needs, their own history. How others see us is their business. How we act react is ours. If we believe other’s aggressive actions are personally directed at us, we become emotionally reactive. The resulting feelings of hurt, insult, anger and indignation do not create the best environment for solving interpersonal problems. Assume you are not the target. You just happen to be walking in front of the target as they release their arrows. That assumption that *it ain’t personal* will help to harmlessly deflect their arrows.

*Intend to diminish your impatience – instead, try to be tolerant and allow things to ripen in their own time.* Impatience is the experience of the discomfort of not having the world meet your expectations, or not doing it on your time schedule, and stubbornly demanding that it should. Sometimes if we could only sit back, take our eyes off

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the clock, relax and let go of our demand for immediate resolution, problems will ripen and the way forward will become clear. Problems might solve themselves in their own time. In some situations, the most appropriate action can be inaction.

*Intend to avoid thinking you are mind reader — instead, try to use your powers of observation and question if you are unclear about the meaning of other's words and actions.* It is not so much the actions of others that causes grief. Our interpretation of those actions play an important role. We make assumptions that have no basis in fact, then act on them, and this can cause conflict. If we reign in our assumptions, base our conclusions more on what we observe rather than what we fantasize, and directly ask for clarification when we are confused, we can avoid many conflicts, and keep conflicts from needlessly escalating. You cannot read minds, but you can watch and listen.

*Intend to be aware when your mind is closed to appreciating viewpoints that differ from your own — instead, try to listen to and welcome divergent perspectives.* If we could, even for a moment, put ourselves into another person's skin, we could open our mind and see the logic of their position. For them, their position is the right one. The way to begin to step into their skin is to place our agenda aside and listen to our partner from the viewpoint of a disinterested third-party. Better yet, listen as if we *are* our partner, and feel into their thoughts, reasoning and experience. That emptying our own mind and welcoming in the thoughts and experiences of another is really the beginning of the process of resolving conflict.

*Intend to minimize provocation — instead, try to pacify and use neutral, non-inflammatory language.* When people are challenged and disrespected, they often consider it a call to combat. Provoking a person can easily get out of hand, spark tempers to a boiling point and create full-out war. When you recognize this tendency beginning to arise, stop, breathe and make the effort to calm yourself. Pay close attention to your words and how you deliver them. Know that the wrong word at the wrong time can cause an emotional explosion. The right word at the right time relaxes tension and increases trust. As the saying goes, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

*Intend to curtail your impulsiveness and emotionally charged outbursts — instead, try to ensure that calm and reason predominate your disagreements.* Conflict is frustrating. The immediate response to frustration is impatience and anger. Without the ability to contain your feelings so that they can be calmly expressed in a way that could be received by your partner, in your agitation you are liable to impulsively say and do things that can create more problems, rather than resolve them. Your angry outburst is likely to elicit anger, hurt, defensiveness and possibly payback. This is hardly an atmosphere for a peaceful resolution. Intend peace, intend kindness. These will help guide your response.

The process of turning Tendencies to Combat into goodwill, and goodwill into action is not instant and it is not easy. I can attest though, that it is effective. We use it and it works. And it generates love, not war.

## Goals For Conflict Resolution

When Alice and I have a disagreement, maintaining goodwill is uppermost in our minds. As unusual as it sounds, we want our conflict to be a positive experience. The following is our intention for the way we want to act and feel during and after we go through the process of resolving our conflicts:

—*We want each other to be pleased.* Alice genuinely wants me to be satisfied with the outcome and I want her to be satisfied too.

—*We want a fair outcome with each other.* We want the conclusion we arrive at to be balanced. We don't want each other to lose. We are unwilling to take advantage of each other in any way.

—*We want the process of coming to resolution to be harmonious.* Neither of us wants angry arguments, hurtful words, manipulation or power struggles.

—*We want there to be no lingering ill will.* We want, as much as possible, for there to be no under-addressed issues, no leftover resentments, no unexpressed bad feelings and no unspoken expectations about the future.

While we have not met all these intentions in every disagreement we have had, these consequences are our goal. The goal of goodwill is important to us. Because it is so important, we look deeply into our hearts for loving solutions. We work through the resolution process carefully, patiently, consciously, trying not to hurry through just to get it over with.

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## How We Do Conflict

Cultivating a mature, loving, adult approach with your partner won't eliminate conflict from your life because conflicts are an inevitable part of relationship. However, approaching disagreements with a loving heart will make combat less likely, reduce the amount of conflicts you have, decrease the intensity of your conflicts, shorten the time it takes to resolve your conflicts and improve your experience of your conflicts so that they actually become a positive encounter for you both.

When Alice and I have one of our rare disagreements, kindness and goodwill do not evaporate. In fact, we instinctively feel the urgent need to get more in touch with our lovingkindness. The sense of impending conflict awakens us and makes us hyper-vigilant. We seem to instinctively go through a process of conflict resolution that tends to contain the following elements, generally in this order.

—*We acknowledge there is a conflict.* This is the essential first step. We speak to each other and address the fact that a conflict exists. We don't ignore the problem, minimize it, sweep it under the rug or wish it away.

—*We try to understand the other's position.* This is a time for careful, focused listening, rather than asserting our position. We try to enter each other's experience and sense from the other's point of view. We ask ourselves questions like, "What does she really want?" "Why is this so important to him?"

—*We probe to discover the strength of the other's position.* We can simply ask, "How important is this to you?" We can govern our actions by considering the response. Sometimes we test each other to see how strongly each of us is committed to holding onto our position. We do this by taking an even more extreme stand in order to "negotiate back" later. This plays on the edge of manipulation, but it is what we do and part of the way we test. It is one gambit in the process of how we come to agreement.

—*We remain sensitive to the arousal of the "tendencies to combat."* We avoid accusations, blame, negative judgments ("you" language) and try to speak from the heart about what we are feeling ("I" language). There is nothing to argue against when a sentence begins with "I feel." At any point in our conflict, an ill-tempered word, a demeaning glance, the hint of the other taking a rigid position, can awaken our tendencies to combat. We are sensitive to timing and continually monitor the other to see if they are open to receive or are shut down. We keep close check on the temperature of our interaction to make sure it doesn't boil over and get out of hand.

—*We use humor when appropriate to lighten the situation.* At the right moment, humor can break the tension, or at the wrong moment it could make it worse. In the midst of a dispute, there are times when we have loudly exclaimed in jest, "I hate your guts. I want to divorce." That over-the-top declaration tends to give perspective and lighten things up.

—*We keep to the specific issue that is causing dissonance.* It becomes crazy and complicated if we lose track of our core conflict and begin to bring in irrelevant concerns, additional complaints and unresolved issues from the past. Focusing on the immediate issue keeps us on track.

—*We explore for areas of compromise.* We negotiate for some sort of agreement where we both get our needs met. It is almost invariably an amicable process of give-and-take in order to find a satisfying solution for both of us. Our intention is to be generous without "giving away the shop."

—*We delay making a decision.* If we are at an impasse and there is no time pressure, sometimes we can solve the conflict by simply doing nothing, putting off the decision. This cooling off period, where we forget about the problem, allows the subconscious mind to incubate. Just the passage of time can allow the situation to mature to the point where it can resolve itself or ripen so that a perfect solution can make its appearance.

—*We leave it to chance.* If each of us is willing to accept either outcome, and we can't decide which, we flip a coin. This works best if neither of us has taken an unyielding position. The coin makes the decision, and it clarifies our feelings. And if we don't like the decision the coin makes, we go for two out of three.

—*We examine our willingness to surrender our positions.* This is not "giving in" or "giving up" in order to avoid a conflict. Part of our spiritual practice is to turn our needs into wants, our wants into preferences, and our preferences into being OK with any outcome that occurs. With an attitude of openness to whatever outcome we settle on, we can say to each other, "Whatever makes you happy," and mean it.

Our approach to conflict doesn't eliminate it from our lives, but it sure makes conflict rarer and less upsetting.

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*Q. How do you generally respond when a conflict arises with your partner? Do you utilize any of the conflict resolution techniques that Alice and I use?*

## Letting Go When We Are In Disagreement

What happens when I am in strong disagreement with Alice...when what she wants is too far from what I am comfortable with and I am unwilling to compromise? What then? Now we come to a real test. Do I push for what I want and leave her to deal with it? Do we get into a fight? Do I give in and feel angry that I didn't push harder for what I wanted? When Alice and I are in a standoff like this we usually talk things out and decide what to do on a case-by-case basis.

There is a whole other way of handling a difficult to compromise situation. This way is to use the situation as my spiritual practice. I recognize that when I have a unbendable demand to have my way, or an inflexible expectation that I should get my needs met, I am courting frustration. However, if I have a "let go lightly" mindset and am able to substitute my nagging demand for a preference. Even if I fail to obtain that preference, I'm still OK.

Of course, I have preferences, but when I notice those preferences have turned to demands and I am feeling driven by those demands, it's time for me to decide what's important to me. Example--- we are going out for a special dinner Saturday night. Alice prefers Chinese food while I have a hankering for Mexican. Unless I feel I will die if I don't have an enchilada, I will go with Alice's choice. Doing so will make her happy, while by "letting go lightly," I have practiced the spiritual value of renunciation of a desire.

This won't work if I retain remnants of feeling taken advantage of or if I feel like a "wuss" or if I expect to be compensated later. I have to genuinely let go and move on.

This "renunciation of desire" approach to potential conflict is not for everyone. However, to up-level demands to preferences makes for an easier relationship and an easier life. And happier wife. And really, is an enchilada any better than chop suey?

## Mental and Emotional Requirements For Creating Goodwill

Goodwill requires maturity. Acting as a mature adult in high conflict situations that beckon you back to immature responses is very labor-intensive work. Some people are not prepared for this difficult work.

Throughout the book I have made several basic assumptions about human nature and about the psychological motivations of individuals who are reading this book. I assume that they value goodwill toward their partner. I assume they want to resolve their divisive issues in order to have a peaceful and harmonious relationship. I assume that they are willing to and able to understand their own responsibility for the origins of their problems and conflicts. I assume that they are motivated to put in the hard work that it takes to resolve conflicts and create a meaningful relationship. Unfortunately, with some individuals these assumptions do not apply. When they attempt to resolve conflict, those people don't intend goodwill and instead will raise the level of tension and instability, make it more difficult to resolve conflicts and sabotage any effort to implement the Promises.

*Some partners do not value goodwill.* They may be so full of anger, hurt and resentment that they will do what they can to frustrate their partner and cause them grief.

*Some partners do not want their conflicts to be resolved.* They actually enjoy arguing, sniping and undercutting their mate. For them to give up blame and resentment would be more difficult than to continue their harmful patterns of interaction.

*Some partners are unable to comprehend the personal origins of their problems.* They cannot or will not look into themselves to search for the personal sources of their relationship issues. They blindly insist that their partner is the cause of their pain.

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*Some partners lack the persistence and discipline that it takes to resolve conflicts and work with the Loving Promises.* Once they take on a difficult issue and their initial excitement wears off and the work begins, they will slack off and have difficulty carrying through to completion.

For these couples and individuals, the approach I have recommended in this book, which requires goodwill, genuine desire to resolve conflict, self-examination and prolonged effort, cannot apply. Probably one or both of the individuals in this relationship have strong unconscious motives that keep them bound. Most likely, they will require extensive self-inquiry and rehabilitation. Extricating themselves from their conflicting predicaments is probably not a “do it yourself” project. Professional help may be required if they are motivated enough to seek the advice of clergy or a mental health professional. After working with and through their personal issues, they may be able to mindfully work on their conflicts and take on the Loving Promises at a later time. There is no fault in this. I am an example. In the relationships before Alice, I simply was not mature enough to generate the goodwill to be a genuine loving partner. I needed to do my “growing up” before I was ready for her.

### Recurring Conflicts

The previous discussion concerns disagreement conflicts that can be worked with, conflicts where there is a solution and where partners can work toward that solution. What about those disagreements that keep coming up again and again, ones that involve the same tired old arguments and end up in a stalemate, each partner feeling exhausted and misunderstood? Then those same disagreements occur again in the next week or two. And then again.

Couples conflicts that recur over and over usually revolve around a host of common thorny issues—money, intimacy, parenting, in-laws, lifestyle, etc. With these issues there will always be fertile ground for ongoing disagreement.

Tough, perpetual conflicts are often the result of a deep divide, a divide not easily bridged. They often entail the clash of different values, different ways we view the world and ways of behaving that we believe are proper and right. These ways of seeing, believing and behaving are deeply imbedded in our minds and our bodies. They originate from diverse influences, such as our innate temperament, our gender, our childhood upbringing and our life experiences. They are so much a part of us that they have become knee-jerk responses, unconscious and not amenable to reason. We firmly believe our way is universally true and proper, and our partner’s way is false and improper. Problems arise when we don’t just believe our way is best, but we try to impose our way on our partner. When we continually attempt to tenaciously impose our position against our partner’s will, we will find ourselves in perpetual conflict.

For example, one partner may have been brought up in an affluent household, where money was never an issue and they could obtain whatever they wanted simply by asking. They marry a person who is raised in an environment of poverty, where every penny was pinched. When the affluent-minded one purchases a nonessential item or pays top-dollar without shopping around for the cheapest price, the thrift-minded one gets aggravated, judges and criticizes, causing an angry or defensive response, and another round of the same old argument begins, with each side trying to make the other wrong.

There are many varieties of divergent values that can lead a couple into persistent, recurring conflicts. The following is a description of some of the more common ones. Each of these opposing values provides fodder for their recurring arguments.

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### ***Cautious vs Impulsive***

Cautious—The desire to be safe and protected, to know there is enough for the future.

Impulsive — Willing to be spontaneous, take risks, trust that things will turn out well by themselves.

For the partner who is not security minded, the other person can seem unduly fearful and overly cautious. For the one with strong security needs, the other can seem reckless.

### ***Gregarious vs Isolative***

Gregarious—Desire for frequent social interactions.

Isolative—Desire for privacy and aloneness.

Some people are energized by social interaction, others become drained and need time alone to find their center. Different degrees of sociability can lead to a variety of ongoing conflicts, like disagreements over the frequency of attending social occasions, use of leisure time and amount of time spent apart or together.

### ***Dependable vs Inconsistent***

Dependable— Sense of duty and obligation, importance of completing task and doing things correctly.

Inconsistent —Tendency to flaunt rules, desire for freedom from obligation.

The partner who is more relaxed about responsibility will see the other as unbending and overly conscientious. The responsible partner will view the other as careless and untrustworthy.

### ***Devoted vs Indifferent***

Devoted--The need to have the intimate partner be priority over other people and things.

Indifferent— Energy and interests lie outside the relationship.

One partner feels the relationship is of primary importance. The partner who is less invested in the relationship will think of the other as needy and feel hemmed in by their demands. This will tend to create distance and cause their mate to feel threatened or abandoned.

### ***Nurturing vs Detached***

Nurturing— Taking personal interest, exhibiting concern, caring for and tending to your partner.

Detached— Passing concern for the partner's welfare, greater self-interest.

The partner who is the more nurturing of the couple will view the other as uncaring, disinterested and self-concerned. While the detached partner may welcome being cared for, nurturing others is not their natural inclination.

### ***Meticulous vs Disorganized***

Meticulous—Wanting things organized, planned in advance, under control.

Disorganized—A haphazard, less systematic approach.

The partner who is "looser" will see the other as too rigid, too detail-oriented and lacking spontaneity. The methodical one will see the other is inefficient, messy and chaotic.

### ***Close vs Distant***

Close— Desiring physical presence and emotional intimacy.

Distant— Requiring physical and emotional space and clear boundaries.

The partner who needs closeness will experience the other as cold, rejecting and standoffish. The partner needing distance will pull away from the other from fear of being controlled and smothered.

### ***Emotional vs Cerebral***

Emotional— Willingness to feel and express emotions.

Cerebral—Logical, intellectual, reluctant to feel or express emotions.

The partner who is more emotional might put down their mate as cold, shallow and unfeeling, while the other may dismiss their partner as too temperamental and overly emotional.

### ***Gentle vs Assertive***

Gentle— Soft, patient, flexible approach.

Assertive— Brusque, overbearing, rigid, direct way of communicating.

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The placid partner is sensitive and flows with the moment. They can feel overwhelmed, their thoughts and feelings not given consideration when faced with an assertive partner. The assertive partner could feel impatient and frustrated and is inclined to try to enforce their will.

Despite the negative or positive connotation of some of the wording, there is no greater preference to be placed on one or the other divergent value. They are just different ways of being, part of an individual's natural inclination. There are times when it is OK to be impulsive, inconsistent or detached, and times when it is undesirable to be devoted, nurturing and dependable.

If people can accept and accommodate for the divergent characteristics of their partner, few problems will arise. But when one partner continually judges and denigrates the other for their values, perpetual conflicts will keep recurring.

These divergent values are relatively unchangeable because they are so deeply ingrained in each person's personality. No amount of self-effort and no amount of pressure from others can force a transformation. Don't expect to change an introvert to an extrovert, or a disorganized partner to a meticulous one. Coercion, whether external or internal, may modify the surface but, in most instances, will never radically alter a person's underlying personality. Hold transformation as a possibility, but don't expect or demand it.

A more reasonable expectation is to work with yourself and your partner toward attaining *breakthroughs*, getting past stuck points so that recurring conflicts don't keep recurring so often and so intensely. To paraphrase psychotherapist John Weakland, before working on your recurring conflicts, "it's the same damn thing over and over." After successfully working through them, "it's one damn thing after another." That's great progress.

In a nutshell, the advice I have to offer about dealing with recurring conflicts is simple, but not so easy. Try to understand the dynamics of both yourself and your partner's personality. With that understanding, try not to judge. Try to be accepting. Try to be generous. When there are black and white decisions to be made, do so with a heart of genuine compromise.

*Q. What conflicts keep recurring in your relationship? How do these fit with the nine divergent values described in this chapter? Where do you fall with each of the nine values?*

### Mirroring Your Partner's Behavior

We all have the tendency to respond in a like manner to our partner's behavior. If she has made a generous gesture toward us, we'll be inclined to return that generosity. If she is patient with us, we will make the effort to be patient with her. If she praises us, we'll want to praise her back. It's a largely instinctive response to match positive with positive. Mutual kind actions are feel-good moments and keep the love flowing.

However, we tend to also mirror her negative behaviors. If our partner pulls away from us, we are inclined to pull away from her. If she acts rude to us, is selfish, puts us down, we tend to instinctively mirror her action. What she has done will put an obstacle in the flow of love and slow it down or even choke it off. If we respond in kind, we double the size of the obstacle. We erect a dam that can completely stop the flow of love.

Your relationship will benefit if you keep on mirroring your partner's positive behavior but don't mirror her negative behavior. If she does something that curtails the flow of love, consciously refrain from doing or saying anything that will up the ante. Not that you should remain mum or refuse to comment how her action has affected you. But if you respond with an attempt to match negativity for negativity, you may be jumping into a fight where there will be no winners, only losers.

This is easier said than done. It's a real challenge to not respond in the moment to your partner's negativity when you are seething inside because you feel hurt, or put down, or unfairly treated by her. Usually, your tendency to react in a way that mirrors her behavior is a purely emotional reaction, done without thinking or considering the consequences. To counteract that knee-jerk tendency takes strong intention to remain conscious so that you are not drawn into an emotional boxing match. Powering that intention is your understanding of how harmful negative mirroring is.

When you take the high road and refrain from reacting to your partner's negative behavior towards you, you maximize the chances that she will start to mirror your positive behavior. That will begin to dislodge the obstacles to the free flowing of love for both of you.

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## The Root Cause of Conflict

*A man was being given a tour of heaven and hell. He entered the elevator, his guide pushed the DOWN button, and they were off. Soon the doors parted, and before them was this endless hallway with a vast number of doors. The guide opened a door and inside were hordes of miserable, famished people, sitting around an enormous crock of nourishing soup. Delicious aroma filled the room. However, attached to the end of each persons scrawny arm was a long spoon. The spoon was so long that they were unable to get the soup into their mouths. The people were frustrated and starving. "This is hell," said the guide as he closed the door. The elevator zoomed UP and came to a stop. The doors opened and before them was what looked like the same hallway, the same doors. The guide opened the door and the same delicious aroma filled the room. Inside were many people with long spoons at the end of their arms, but these people were happy and laughing and well-nourished. They were dipping their utensils into the soup and gleefully spooning it into each other's mouths. "This is heaven," said the guide.*

If we each have the desire to nourish other people, most conflicts would dissipate, and the world would become more like heaven.

# ANGER

## About Anger

Simply stated, anger is a response to an uncomfortable experience. You come up against frustrating circumstances, or someone says or does something that touches off an anxious, resentful, threatened, vulnerable feeling in you. You react with clenched fists, tightened muscles, aggressive stance. Feelings of rage take over your mind. You're prepared to do battle.

There is nothing wrong with anger *per se*. Anger is a valuable resource that guards your boundaries and is an instrument of your healthy assertiveness. Angry confrontation, with a loving intention, can shock you and your partner to “awakeness” and wash away bullshit. It can be like a fire that burns away impurities. Because anger is so important, it should not be wasted by being suppressed, diluted with mental analysis and rationalization, or by incessantly imposing it on your partner.

Like a cyclone, anger has a way of building in intensity. One partner expresses their anger and the other reciprocates with their angry response. It becomes a contest where each partner refuses to “lose.” Both become angrier and angrier and the argument spirals out of control. What began as a minor scuffle has quickly escalated to a major battle.

It is not uncommon for people to hold a vast reservoir of anger in their subconscious. Anger is a powerful energy that can accumulate more and more. If it is below consciousness, it can explode and be destructive. Unexpectedly, feelings of rage, a temper tantrum or an impulse to hurt may suddenly arise out of the blue and surprise both partners. Acts of cruelty and vindictiveness may take place that are unwarranted and totally out of context. As long as you are unaware of your anger, it controls you. Once you are caught up in your anger it is usually too late, and the fierce emotions will likely run their course.

When angry feelings first arise, that is the time to be aware. The first stirrings of anger is the moment when you have a choice—allow it to spill out—or restrain it, examine it, learn from it. What is there to learn from anger, what does anger have to teach us?

There are many different story lines about the proximate causes of our anger. *She disrespected me. He stole from me. They were unfair with my daughter.* If you go beneath the surface, you will see that *your anger is an expression of your caring.* If you didn't care, it wouldn't matter, and your anger would never arise. But you do care. You care about the way you are treated, you care about your property and you care about your family. You care, but your ability to effectively act in the moment is frustrated. Your anger results from your frustration. Follow the anger back to the caring, back to the frustration, and you will gain important insights into who you are and what you care about.

## Anger—The “Go-To” Emotion

We men tend to find it difficult to experience and express the “softer” emotions such as fear, vulnerability, sadness and shame. From an early age we are taught that these feelings are unacceptable. If you feel them, you are considered weak or like a girl. There is one emotion though, that many men are not hesitant to express—anger. The expression of anger is a “manly” thing to do. It is a demonstration of boldness, authority and strength. If there is a choice between feeling insecure and picking a fight, some guys will pick a fight every time. Feeling defensive?...they attack. Feeling shame?...they blame. Feeling impotent?...they get aggressive. Feeling fearful?...they threaten. In this sense, anger is a secondary emotion. It occurs often as a response to a previous, unacknowledged, vulnerable feeling.

Anger obliterates feelings. It is so dominant that we become unaware of any other feeling. When we're angry, all we feel is the charge of adrenaline coursing through our bodies. Our muscles tighten, jaw clenches, fists curl in a ball. Once seething in anger, we don't have to contend with all those other messy emotions. Since anger prevents us from feeling our true feelings, it makes it impossible for us to get to the root cause of our problem—the insecurity, sadness,

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etc., that was behind the anger. Without knowing the cause, we cannot find the solution. If the emotions behind our anger are ignored, they can intensify and anger can turn to rage. Blind rage blinds us and in doing so, also binds us.

Not only that. Anger has consequences. Our angry outburst can provoke an angry response in others. The ensuing cat fight fully engages our attention. We're into an argument now, attacking, parrying, defending. Or our angry outburst has so frightened our partner that she freezes and becomes passive, unable to fight. Either way, we have created an atmosphere of fear, distrust and ill will in our partner and in others that will not easily evaporate. We, and those we love, have become prisoners of our rage.

## Anger—The “Run-From” Emotion

While it is true that many men use anger as their “go to” reaction when feeling hurt, vulnerable or afraid, it is also true that many men do the opposite. They suppress their anger, hide it, run from it.

Anger is powerful energy. Many men fear its strength and unpredictability. They fear the responses of others if they allow their angry feelings to be displayed. So they make the conscious decision to withhold expression of their anger. The force of their anger may be so threatening to them that they may go unconscious and not even recognize their anger as anger.

Whether “go-to” or “run-from,” the way we respond to our angry feelings often was influenced by our families as we were growing up. In some families, it is a constant angry free-for-all. In others, it is forbidden to express even the hint of anger. It was like this in my family. I can remember the image of my father screaming at the top of his lungs, red face, veins bulging on his forehead, “Don’t you ever get angry at me.” What a confusing mixed message for a child to receive. And for many years it caused me to suppress my anger. Even now, when I feel the heat of anger arising, I experience the impulse to run away.

## Channeling Anger

Anger is persistent energy. It can remain in your system indefinitely. The energy of anger doesn't just go away by itself. It finds outlets and can be channeled in several ways.

You could *discharge* it. It might feel good to “go off” on the person who upset you, but it could lead to mutual upset and outright war. While there is something to be said for the healthy release of the pent-up energy of anger, it could become a habitual, knee-jerk response to frustration and conflict. And it's not exactly enlightened behavior to go around dumping on people.

You could *suppress* it. Out of fear or intimidation, you could avoid a flareup by sitting on anger and holding it inside. There is evidence that suppressed anger turned inside can cause numerous health problems. Anger withheld is ineffective in that it does not address the issues that provoked the anger, and they remain as before.

You could *rationalize* it or *spiritualize* it. This involves “rising above” anger by finding reasons to excuse the person or circumstances that are the source of the anger, or by understanding anger as an ignoble response and meditating it away or witnessing it dispassionately without expressing it. This distances you from the fire and fails to address the source of the anger.

Working skillfully with anger varies with each person's “anger style.” Sometimes a dose of the opposite style is helpful. Thus, those who are easily upset and quick to anger might benefit in the midst of anger to mindfully pause, moderate and sometimes withhold the anger. Those who tend to withhold anger might need to feel it, and when appropriate, express it.

While anger is a valid feeling, frequently and habitually indulging in expressing it is harmful, just as is habitually holding it in. Anger suppressed doesn't disappear but can take many indirect forms that aim to punish the partner, like emotional withdrawal, sexual withholding and such passive aggressive acts as “forgetting” important engagements, sulking, procrastination, sarcasm, nagging and chronic lateness. Anger that is passively expressed is still aggression, and like much aggressive behavior, the aim is to hurt.

Each of these three ways of addressing anger have their positives and negative points and each might be appropriate in the right situation, at the right time, with the right person.

**Q.** What is your most common “anger style”? Describe what it feels like and how you use it.

## Becoming Love *Able*

### Anger Triggers From The Past

When paying attention to your anger, especially anger that seems unreasonable, erupts unexpectedly and with a force that is out of proportion to the circumstance that arouses it, you may discover that you are not responding to the present situation. Anger is sometimes triggered by memories of events from the distant past. You may hold a reservoir of anger and resentment from as far back as early childhood. The memory remnants of upset over bullying, violent arguments and unfair treatment in the past may be long forgotten. However, an event that happens in the present, perhaps your partner's disparaging look, her demeaning words to you or a false accusation, may spark a flood of feelings that have been penned up, waiting to explode. Most likely you won't even be aware what it was that stimulated your knee-jerk response.

When disproportionate anger occurs, it is important to make the effort to put the breaks on before doing damage. Giving expression to misplaced anger will only cause confusion and hard feelings. See your excessive anger as a signal that there might be subconscious processes that are occurring. Use this as an opportunity to pay attention and explore what might be the true cause of your upset. Is it grief, hurt, helplessness? Are the feelings you are experiencing in the present or related to events that have occurred in the past?

Understanding the authentic source that is triggering your anger can open an opportunity for healing. And if you and your partner become aware of the real origin of the angry outburst, that simple recognition can help relieve a lot of blame and pressure.

*Q. What kinds of things make you the angriest? Are there events that have occurred in the past that you are able to connect with those feelings of anger?*

### Toward Violence. Away From Violence

Years ago, I got ahold of a video of the TV segment of the Geraldo Rivera Show that I would screen for groups of my domestic violence programs. It showed clearly, visibly, the accelerating ignition of a violent explosion between two men. In a few seconds, right before the viewers' eyes, a normal conversation escalated to angry words, to confrontive stance, to touching, to pushing, to physical blows, to heavy objects thrown. In the pandemonium, Rivera sustained a broken nose and bloody hand. This was a perfect illustration of how easily anger can escalate to violence.

Violence exists within us as potential. If the safety of self and loved ones is at risk, almost every man, no matter how pacifist, would become violent or even kill if necessary. Violence and murder is always wrong, but sometimes necessary.

As kids, we idolized the heroes, and we fantasized being a hero in our games. With bulging muscles, a powerful weapon and fearless demeanor, heroes represented pure power, masculine power. When there was a dispute, they didn't hold discussions or compromise their position, or use conflict resolution techniques. They just took action. . .often violent action. How strong, how manly, how admirable. But in our childish play, we had no idea of the actual fear, pain and physical and emotional damage real violence exacts.

We are a generally peaceful people, but also a violent people. Gun violence per capita in America far exceeds any other country. We are entertained by violence. Gory video games, boxing and MMA matches, violent war dramas and cops and robbers movies celebrate violence in full color. Much of what we consider the "news"—murder, rape, insurrection, war, is violent. We are so immersed in violence that we are desensitized to it. Instead of a violent act being the last resort in an extreme situation, we come to see violence or threat of violence as just another way of resolving conflict. Our immersion in our culture of violence makes it easier for us to justify taking violent action. And scenes like the reactive explosion into violence on the Geraldo Rivera TV show becomes more common.

Violence begets violence, peace begets peace. I took some classes in Karate years ago from a Japanese master Karate teacher. He was an older man, in his 60s, slim and small in stature, but I saw him toss burley young men as if they were cardboard manikins. He always stressed the importance of avoiding violence if at all possible, even if you can easily vanquish an attacker. The aim is to maintain peace and to avoid hurting anyone. He taught us a powerful but little-known self-defense technique that he himself had used at times—*fall to your knees and beg the aggressor for mercy.*

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Wow! Nothing to prove to others and himself about his manliness. How merciful, self-confident and steeped in peace a man must be in order to be able to do that.

## Defusing Anger

Rampant anger can be explosive. The blast can cause lasting damage.

There is an appropriate time, place and way for you and your partner to strongly express frustration and anger. If your partner is totally unreceptive and if she is also in a rage, it is the wrong time. If you and she are in public or with friends, it is the wrong place. If you are out of control and unable to think clearly, there is no way for you to deal with your anger in a productive way.

What to do when you are seething with rage and want to tear into your partner? First, you must calm your body. Breathe. A few deep breaths can help relax the body and calm the physiological response to anger. Hold your tongue and do not try to communicate until you know that you do not want to cause harm. If you are so worked up that you need a time-out, leave the scene, but not without first explaining to your partner why you are leaving and assuring her that you want to deal with the problem at a later time, when you are able to communicate with her from a source of love.

What if your partner is raging at you? This can instantly bring up your own anger and defensiveness, creating a potentially explosive situation. Slow down. Try not to take it personally. Your calm, honest receptivity can help lower her level of agitation. (There are occasions, however, when your calmness can spur her to greater rage.) Hold off on the tendency to immediately defend yourself. Instead, listen to her. She needs to know you have heard her. If she feels you haven't been listening, she will turn up the volume. Try to see from her perspective. Keep assuring her that you want to resolve the problem and are willing to assume responsibility for your part in causing it.

More than anything else, your sincerity can help bring boiling emotions to a simmer, eventually allowing for cooler heads to prevail. Mean what you say, and be available to do your best to take actions that will not just placate her, but actually help resolve the problem.

The actions mentioned here that will help to defuse anger are reasonable and effective. However, in the heat of an angry episode it would be difficult to remember them, much less carry them out. What is needed is a strong desire to not be carried away by your anger and a willingness to do what you can before you are too deep into your emotional storm.

## "Loving" Anger

Experience has shown me, no matter which way I deal with anger, I need to do my best to keep my heart open. Anger with an open heart supports love. Anger with a closed heart, devoid of love and compassion, can be mean and hurtful. I have found, when I work at it, even in the midst of a fierce, passionate encounter with Alice, it is possible for me to still feel great love for her.

I'll never forget the time when we were having an intense argument, nose to nose, screaming at each other at the top of our lungs. In the midst of our fury, we both looked down at the same moment. We were holding hands. The anger dissolved into laughter.

Combining love and anger is not an easy thing to do. Our natural inclination when immersed in the heat of anger is to shut down our heart and be swept away by the emotion. Once adrift in the sea of emotion, anger is in charge. We can be overwhelmed by it or withdraw from it by stonewalling or going blank or numb. Either way, it takes energy and focus to keep coming back to love.

What does it mean to "come back to love?" It means you don't judge your partner to be wrong or stupid. It means you don't throw verbal bombs or accusations that will only create more friction and pour gasoline on the fire. It means you consciously keep in your mind that you love this person you are furious with, and that love is the ground of your relationship, not the anger.

The anger will pass. The love will endure. When you are able to combine your love with your anger, i.e., be able to *bestow* your anger on your partner, when needed, as a loving gift, love is strengthened and intimacy deepens.

## Becoming Love *Able*

### The Source of Anger

The other night I was talking with a friend and she mentioned that a major problem she was dealing with was her anger. When I asked her what she was angry about, she described it as “free floating” and said it would come up unexpectedly. My mind went blank. I, who spent years helping men with anger issues, had no response. I reread my writings about anger in this section and realized that I was just nipping around the edges of the issue of anger. I had written more about trying to deal effectively with anger once it arises. But why wait till after the rainstorm before you build your dikes? I think it is good to acknowledge the source of the stream of anger, the tributary from which anger flows.

I believe the source of anger is non-acceptance. Anger is based on resisting “what is.” There is no way anger can take root if you accept things as they are. This doesn’t mean that you have to like the person or thing that frustrates you. It doesn’t mean that you remain passive and don’t do anything to address your situation and change it. There are many situations that are plain wrong and require strong action. Instead of emotionally freaking out, try evolve an underlying mindset that accepts, “It is what it is.” You don’t cry “poor little me,” tremble with rage, obsess about how things should have been different or plot how you are going to wreak revenge. You integrate, as best you can, the hurt feelings, repair the damage, do what you can to make things right, and go about the business of taking care of business. Many times, this is the pathway to minimize suffering.

No one is saying that acquiring this mindset of equanimity is quick and easy. It necessitates evolving an expanded view of the world and a tolerant view of some of the ignorant and unskillful people who populate it. Alice would sometimes say something that reflected that tolerant attitude if John, for example, said or did something that was stupid or hurtful. Rather than stew inside, she would say, “That’s just John being John.” People have limited capabilities and do what they can do. Or, as Jesus said, “They know not what they do.” To develop an accepting mindset, especially if you are nailed to a cross, takes time and effort and a commitment to inner peace and outer harmony.

### Cleansing Rage

Developing equanimity, keeping an open heart with “loving” anger, defusing explosive anger--all well and good. All aimed to avoid loss of control, harmful interactions and keep the uncomfortable feeling of anger and rage at a safe distance. But what if the rage is overwhelming? What if it’s so real that you can taste it? What if your daughter has been raped? What if you were betrayed by a close friend? What if someone you trusted stole a treasured, irreplaceable item from you? Should you tamp down your rage?

Maybe in situations like these, it is not time to distance yourself from your rage, but to feel it, express it. Anger is power. When righteous anger is withheld, it is bound up and lodged in the body, leaving you powerless. When it is directed, your rage can effect change. At the very least it can cleanse your body and soul.

Just know that the unlimited expression of rage, without safe containment, can be dangerous for yourself and harmful to others. Safe containment might mean sharing your anger with friends or a therapist so you can gain clarity. It might involve first expressing rage away from the presence of the person or persons who are causing the anger, at least until your murderous impulses abate. With your intention to harm the source of your anger disarmed and manageable, the power of your anger and rage can be safely expressed, cleansed from your body, and be more effective in bringing about change.

### Heaven And Hell

*In ancient times in Japan, a Samurai warrior approached an old wise man and asked him for a few words of wisdom about heaven and hell. The wise man replied, “Why should I give a stupid, filthy worm like you any wisdom. You’re too dumb to understand.” The Samurai was overtaken with anger. He unsheathed his sword and was about to behead the old man when the wise man said, “That’s hell.” The warrior instantly understood, broke into a smile and bowed down at the old man’s feet. “That’s heaven,” said the wise man.*

## COMMUNICATION

Actually, there's lots of stuff about communication throughout the book so I won't say much about it here. Not that being able to communicate your thoughts and feelings openly, clearly and succinctly isn't important. It is. But what's more important is the impulse behind the communication. If you don't have love in your heart or if you aim to lie and manipulate, your communication will serve to facilitate those ends. Even if your communication is sloppy, if you are coming from love and kindness, somehow those feelings will be received. What I am saying is, become more love able. If you do, communication will take care of itself.

## ARGUMENTS AND EMOTIONAL UPSET

### Bickering

Bickering is a relationship killer. It's ongoing, back and forth criticism. It's not outright war, with cannons and bombs. It's more like using a verbal BB gun that causes lots of annoying little stings that hurt the other, put them down, make them feel wrong, defensive. "You never. . . You always. . . Why can't you. . . ? Why do you. . . ?" The result is the other feels belittled, unloved, left wanting to defend themselves. Bickerers can end up feeling bad about themselves, and bad about the other.

What is the most common response when one partner begins to bicker? Give them back what they gave you. So you criticize back. And they criticize back. Then you both end up feeling belittled, unloved, etc. Sad to say that bickering is the main form of communication for some couples. Both partners seem to get off on the caustic interplay.

It's not like it's rocket science to stop bickering. What it takes is one person stops. That's all. That person refuses to return the lob of criticism and blame served up by their partner. Since it takes two to tango, the dance is over when one partner refuses an invitation to dance. Easier said than done. Often bickering couples are so entangled in the snare of their angry repartee that they cannot consider peaceful coexistence. So the bickering continues, and so does the distance and the bad feelings.

Behind every bickering criticism is a request. "You never help me with the housework;" contains the request, "I've had a hard day. I would appreciate if you would help me by vacuuming the living room rug." That simple, specific request is so much cleaner, and it doesn't contain stinging criticism. It would be much easier for the person to respond with cooperation if the statement is in the form of a request. And there would be less chance for defensiveness too.

Bickering may be unpleasant, but it doesn't always produce distance and bad feelings. Studies have shown that even with couples who bicker, if the relationship is grounded in love, bickering doesn't affect the partner's happiness and satisfaction with each other. Bickering couples who know they are loved and supported by their partner report being as satisfied with their relationship as those who rarely bicker. However, given a choice, wouldn't you rather have the statement of a direct, honest request made of you, rather than snarky criticism?

### Blowups

More often than not, conflicts could be best worked out if both parties first look inside, center themselves and share their thoughts and feelings. With mutual loving intention, and with the desire to resolve conflicts fairly and in a cool, composed manner, people have a much better chance at conflict resolution. This can avoid needless hurt and upset of an argument.

It may seem like I'm saying, "Don't rock the boat, carefully keep the situation at a reasonable level, and avoid an emotional argument if you can." However, playing it safe may not always be the best strategy. The worst kind of argument can be the one that never takes place.

Are you OK? What's the matter?

Nothing.

You seem distant.

I'm fine.

Now what happens is...nothing, except an air of heaviness all around, a feeling of incompleteness and a sense of foreboding. The argument that never takes place dams unexpressed feelings that can build and build. When the dam breaks. . . uncontrollable devastation.

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Sometimes what is needed is a full-on, uncensored, nose-to-nose, top-of-the-lungs argument. If fueled by caring and desire for improving the relationship, rather than to hurt or win, a uncensored blowup has the potential to reveal true feelings that were held back and possibly clear the air. Anything less than that can rob anger of its truth and passion. If your goal is to tamp down passionate feelings in order to try to avoid a flareup, you can short-circuit the truth.

However, with an all-out blowup, there is a risk of saying things you may regret later on. You must maintain a degree of self-control during a blowup. When you are emotionally exploding there is the danger that you may purposely say things that are intended to hurt. This is the one thing that you must avoid like the plague. Once your hurtful exclamation leaves your lips it cannot be taken back. And its effect on her may be lasting. So if you detect a murderous vibe begin to arise in you during a spat, stop, keep checking in with yourself, moderate your approach. Leave the scene if you need to. Don't take chances when you know you are lacking goodwill in the moment.

*Q. If you see a blowup approaching, what do you usually do? Avoid? Leave? Become aggressive? Become numb? Become silent, frozen? Describe a typical incident from the past.*

## Arguments About Money

Near the top of the list of subjects for arguments that couples have are disagreements about money—who makes it, who controls it, how it's spent, how it's saved. Money is power, and as power, holds a strong emotional charge. The charge arises from unquestioned beliefs passed on by family, culture and socio-economic caste. Those beliefs are often so embedded and so unconscious that they are usually untouched by logic. Here are some common themes that trigger arguments about money:

*Who makes it.* If there is a large disparity in the amount of money each partner brings in, there is the opportunity for the high earner to feel possessive of their money, feel used or feel taken advantage of.

*How to spend it.* If there are high ticket purchases like cars and houses to be contemplated, or large debts to be paid, how are decisions of what, how and when made? Who makes the final decision?

*How to save it.* One partner may be frugal and want to save and invest, the other a spendthrift who has a hole in their pocket. How to resolve this disparity?

*Who manages it.* One partner is usually more involved overseeing the money. The other can have issues involving lack of control and need for transparency.

Resolving financial arguments is every bit as tricky as resolving emotional ones. It involves careful attention, patience and clear communication. Sit down together and talk about your finances, not just the dollars and cents, but also the dollars and sense, the feelings each of you have about money. Don't blame, but speak of fears, hurt and resentments. Try to understand the sources of you and your partner's beliefs about money. When you have a handle on the emotions behind the financial disagreements, look at ways you can resolve money issues by budgeting for ongoing expenses and paying off debt. Once emotions are in check, the nuts and bolts of financial disagreements can be worked out much easier.

## Weathering Your Partner's Emotional Storms

Women are traditionally considered more emotional than men. Whether her moods are caused by female hormones, a bad hair day, or something stupid you did, your female partner is probably more prone to "losing it" than you are. More likely than you, when upset, she may scream and yell, threaten suicide or lock herself in the bathroom while hysterically crying. (Please excuse my crude attempt at humor with these over-the-top dramatic scenarios. A person who does these things would need professional help rather than the calming and defusing strategies suggested here.)

What can you do? You could try to calm her down. You could point out how unreasonable she is being and try to reason with her. You could match her emotional intensity with an emotional storm of your own. You could try to be "Mr. Fixit" for her or alter the situation that is causing her upset. You could withdraw to your man cave with the

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promise that you'll return "When she calms down." Obviously, none of this will work. In all probability, your efforts to fix, calm, defend and withdraw are intended primarily to get rid of your own discomfort which is caused by her upset, rather than help the situation.

When she, and you, are caught in an emotional storm, there is no way you can fight a hurricane or wrestle with a tornado. Actually, her storm may be doing some needed good. She may be exposing some unspoken truth that needs to be out in the open. She may need the emotional catharsis to blow off withheld emotions. Your efforts to fix her, defend yourself or shut her down may interrupt what she needs to go through and what the relationship needs. You might be doing more harm than good.

The storm will eventually pass, but the way you handle yourself and her during the storm will have a lasting effect.

What you can do in the midst of the storm is stand your ground. No matter what she says or does, stay focused on her with your love. Listen, listen, listen. Take her feelings seriously and don't belittle her behavior. Make sure she knows you are "with her" in loving masculine presence. Breathe and relax. Remain calm, but not emotionally removed. Be present with her in her emotions. Be present, but steadfast. Above all, *don't lose your center by getting drawn into emotional chaos with her*. That will only cause more chaos. And if you bear responsibility, admit it and don't try to make excuses and slime out of it. Man up, take on the blame if you were wrong and make necessary changes.

Remaining strong and present and open with her is what she wants of you in this moment. Strong and present with your enduring love.

## Responding--Not Reacting

When you are in a stressful situation, especially an emotional conflict with a person close to you, you may tend to react. The other person may be angry and shout at you, falsely accuse you, threaten you. These are highly stimulating experiences. Your emotions can easily be triggered, and in this unstable state, you can blindly lash out with your own anger, accusations, threats. You are helplessly at the mercy of your out-of-control emotions. You are reacting.

Reactivity usually has its source in your unconscious mind. It is most often triggered by what you perceive as a threat to your ego. The threat touches a sensitive nerve. When you feel your partner is blaming you, you react by getting defensive. When she is emotionally upset, you react by desperately trying to fix her. When you feel hurt, you react by withdrawing. When you feel threatened, you attack, or you roll over and play the "nice guy." Because your reactive state can immerse you in blind emotion, the actions you take when in that state can be, at the least, ineffective, and at worst, destructive.

Reacting to situations that emotionally trigger you is not your only choice. You can respond. Responding is acting from awareness. You are present, awake to your feelings, awake to what is triggering you, awake to the other person. Being present, you are better able to consciously choose your actions. You can choose to not react. Instead, you might slow down, breathe, take a moment of calm introspection. In that momentary pause, you allow your nervous system to quiet down. This can give you time for your conscious mind to enter the picture. With greater awareness, you have choice. You are able to consider responses that are constructive, effective and kind.

Responding rather than reacting to what you perceive as threat is not easy, but it can be done. It might take intention, time and focused practice. It's all about the pause. As you feel an emotional reaction arising, pause to let your conscious mind take over. That pause might just allow an opening for kindness to enter.

## Receiving Anger

It is difficult for me to hear Alice's anger. When she is mad at me, my tendency is sometimes to go numb and cut off feeling. I've become deaf and dumb, erecting a brick wall to avoid the intensity of Alice's wrath. Alice senses this and my passivity adds another layer to her fury. My task is to keep opening to receive her anger without shutting down and trying to protect my ego.

Anger directed at you can easily upend you emotionally. Then you can react mindlessly by trying to deflect, blame, manipulate, minimize, shut down or retaliate – any defensive measure that will stem the flood of angry words directed at you. Another's anger sends signals of blame, rejection or put-down. What is most needed, and most difficult to do when anger is directed at you, is to drop the defensive stance, open to receive the anger your partner

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is expressing, and listen. If you listen carefully to her anger, you may be able to hear her feelings behind it; the hurt, vulnerability and helplessness that lives beneath the surface. This is what her anger is covering up.

This is not easy. When anger is directed at you, all your mental/ emotional stuff comes up, all your defenses. “She can't talk to me that way.” “It's her fault.” “Was it me, did I screw up?” “I've had it, I'm leaving.” Hard as it may be, you've got to listen to that stuff too. Hear it. Know that it is not the way you choose to be. Let the defenses go as best you can. Then listen to her with an intention to take in her anger. . .and maybe her pain.

*Q. How do you usually react when someone close to you verbally expresses their anger toward you? How do you react when you know they are angry but they don't express it?*

## Choose Your Battles

A good general knows when to engage his troops in battle. . .and when to retreat.

Some issues are worthy of an argument, some are not. It's up to you to decide what to raise a stink about, and what to let slide. There's lots of variation. For some people, a partner leaving the cap off the toothpaste tube is grounds for a fight. For others, clumsily knocking over and shattering Grandma's precious antique vase deserves nothing more than a mild rebuke from your partner.

There are some couples who enjoy fighting. They love the excitement and the exchange of energy that comes from butting heads. It's true that an intense argument can stir up lots of energy and aliveness. Sometimes a free-for-all can clear the air by exposing feelings that had been left unsaid. During an argument, the truth of a situation might be revealed much faster and more effectively than hours of careful conversation.

But arguments can be exhausting. They can leave the combatants feeling raw. They can escalate, spiral out of control and become angry personal attacks. Hurtful words, once uttered, cannot be taken back and can leave lasting wounds. If a couple keeps picking at each other day after day, arguing characterizes the nature of their relationship. Arguing becomes their main form of communication, maybe even their main form of entertainment. This is not very nourishing. It doesn't allow any room for loving connection.

But some arguments are necessary. It is inevitable that divergent issues will arise that are important to each partner. Sometimes these issues cannot be resolved in the moment through compromise. In such a case, arguing the rights and wrongs, innocence and guilt, pros and cons is the best alternative. An argument, even a heated one, is preferable to one partner trying to avoid upset by giving up something they really want or really believe. They end up retreating and licking their wounds, while feeling cheated and holding their hurt and anger inside.

So, if you are aware of the negative results of arguing about every little thing, or the opposite, not arguing about issues that should be addressed, it's important to make the choice about what you are willing to fight about and what you are willing to allow to pass. Is it worth repeatedly contesting a situation that you know your partner has zero interest in changing? Is it worth bringing up an issue that might hurt your partner but yield no positive result? Is it worth engaging in a fight over something that will accomplish nothing more than allow you to triumph over your mate? Is the issue you are fighting about the real issue, or is there something deeper that an argument would be covering over? Questions like these are important to consider. They clarify intention and help you make the decision of when to fight, and when to let go.

It's hard to forego an argument if you have strong feelings, and especially if you know you are right. But if it serves the best and highest good of the relationship, it might be better to let go lightly and move on.

Be a good general. . . and a loving partner. Choose your battles.

## How To Shut Your Mouth

During an argument, would you rather be right or rather be kind? Would you rather win if you are right and she is wrong, or would you rather have both of you win?

If you want to be kind and have both of you win, sometimes you have to zip your lip, hold your tongue, shut your trap.

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Remaining quiet is not an easy thing to do, especially if you're in a heated argument and she is obviously wrong and you have incontestable, verifiable written proof that she's wrong. It would be so easy and so satisfying to lay it on her, to gloat, to put her down and to demonstrate how right you are and how wrong she is. However, taking the low road will not end a conflict. In fact, it will most likely fuel an escalation.

How do you take the high road? How do you choose a kind, win-win alternative during a conflict? *You Just Do It.* You do it because you understand that your relationship is not a competition. You do it because you realize that if you win, or if she wins, you both lose. You decide to be kind. If you see there is nothing to be gained, you decide to keep the peace and not have an ongoing power struggle. You know she is sensitive and your words and actions have an impact, so you decide you won't hurt her feelings or deflate her ego. You decide your pride is not worth it. You let it pass. And you use your time to look within at your own shortcomings—your desire to be right, to enter the fray, to put her down, to win. And so, as difficult as it might be, you just shut your mouth and let it go.

There are always times and circumstances though, where the correct course of action is to take a stand, to speak up and let her know what is useful and necessary for her to know, even if she might get upset or hurt or become reactive. But the most significant factor is your state of mind. If you come from a place of kindness and harmlessness, with your ego on hold, you will be able to communicate that caring. And if it is genuine caring, she won't feel so challenged and will be able to receive your communication in the spirit it is given.

The trick is to know when the time is right to speak up, and when to be quiet. Timing is everything. If she is emotionally wrought, or angry, or preoccupied, it is probably not the right time to have a disturbing discussion. Especially at these times it is necessary to keep aware of her emotional state. Is she open to hearing what you have to say? Is she closed? If you are uncertain, it might be better to shut your mouth and err on the side of silence.

**Q.** *Answer the questions posed in the first paragraph. What makes it hard for you to remain quiet even though it might be the kind thing to do?*

## LISTEN, The Most Important Thing You Can Do In An Argument

Shutting your mouth when appropriate is a good thing to do during an argument, but there's more. You need to listen. If your partner doesn't feel she's being heard, she'll keep on, louder, and for longer, until she feels you finally got it. So here is a mini-tutorial on the art of listening.

Communication consists of input and output—listening and speaking. People tend to think that speaking is the more important part of conversation rather than listening. It is not. You cannot receive your partner when you are speaking. And when they are not received by you, they don't have a strong impetus to listen and receive you. So listen well to your partner. She will be more inclined to listen to you when your turn comes to speak.

Everyone with functioning ears can hear, but not everyone who hears can listen. Listening involves more than the sound coming from her lips. Pay attention to more than just the words. Listen for vocal inflections, pauses, choice of words. This hold hidden meaning beyond the words. Listen to more than just the content of what is being said, by attending to the feeling tone in the stream of conversation.

There are many obstacles that prevent you from accurately listening to what your partner is saying. These mostly have to do with following your mind rather than following her words. Obstacles to listening can take the following forms:

**Analyzing**—trying to figure out in your mind the meaning and, in the process of thinking, missing the *feeling* tone of the communication.

**Judging**—condemning, finding fault, criticizing in your mind.

**Impressing**—trying to look witty, smart, “deep,” to impress the other person.

**Defending**—thinking of ways you can respond if you believe you are being challenged.

**Inattention**—thinking about other things rather than attending to what is being said.

**Rehearsing**—thinking about what you're going to say when your partner stops talking.

What these obstacles to listening have in common is that listening takes place within your self- preoccupied mind. They reduce your ability to receptively listen to others. How can you receive when your mind keeps saying, “Hurry up! I have something important to say.” The best way to be a receptive listener is to empty yourself. A cup that is full

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of water has no room for more. (In Yiddish, *cup* means head.) Emptying involves quieting your mind so you are a receptive, empty vessel, with room to take in her thoughts and feelings.

Allow your partner plenty of time to speak. Don't interrupt. Your silence is an invitation for her to say all that is on her mind and in her heart. She needs to be finished with what she needs to say. Your silence after you or she finishes expressing your thoughts is also an opportunity for you both to digest and contemplate what has been said. That quiet moment is full with meeting as you sit and absorb in silence.

When your partner is speaking, there is only one thing you should be doing—trying to take in, as much as you can, the essence of what she is trying to communicate to you. Listen to your partner with such strength of intention as if the next words out of her mouth will save your life.

Listening in this way is an act of love. Your genuine interest and receptive listening is a powerful gift and healing for your partner. It sends her the message, "What you say has value. You have value. You are valuable to me." If your open-hearted listening is received by her during an argument, it will go a long way toward putting out the fires of anger and confusion.

## Be Like An Elephant

*One day, an elephant was walking to a water hole when he was set upon by a pack of wild dogs. The dogs surrounded him, wildly barking and nipping at his heels. This didn't phase the elephant. He kept up his steady pace, not even acknowledging the dogs' presence. Eventually the frustrated dogs became bored and trotted off to surround a giraffe. The elephant, aware of his superior size and strength, hadn't even felt the need to bother addressing the ruckus.*

It's easy to be pulled into an argument when you feel attacked or put down, especially by someone close to you. When your ego is dinged and you feel yourself getting defensive, remember the elephant. You are big, you are strong. Your kindness is powerful. Your love is invincible. You don't need to be drawn into an argument where nobody wins. Keep on your path and don't let the noise of yapping slow you down or knock you off course.

## SEX

### Performance

As we get older, the location of our sexual encounters progresses from the back seat of the family car, to a motel room, to the bedroom that we share. Our sexual relationship can transform from a pair of fumbling, inexperienced adolescents, to sexually sophisticated married partners. For some men, pride in our “performance” becomes an issue. “Was I good?” “Did she come?” “Was she satisfied?” Proof of our potency as a lover evolves from how many women we can fuck and how many times we can fuck them, to how good of a lover we are for our partner. Even with the knowledge that women take much longer than men to reach orgasm, and most will rarely climax with intercourse, her orgasm is the “gold star” we are awarded for being a good lover. I suspect that the star we give ourselves may have less to do with how pleased she is with our lovemaking, and more to do with how pleased we are with ourselves for being a good performer in bed.

The sexual act can be many things. One thing it is not is a performance, especially an ego performance that intends to prove to ourselves and our partner how much of a man we are.

In the bedroom, the proof of our manhood our partner really wants is probably totally different from the one we might try to offer. Most likely she wants us to hold her sweetly. She wants to feel our loving heart reaching out to her through our gentle, patient hands. She wants to be “taken” by our desire. She wants us to openly reveal our carnal, animal pleasure as we enter her and thrust, and she wants to receive and enjoy it. She wants to allow her body to be the generous source of our pleasure. And she wants to rest in the oneness of laying together in the afterglow of our loving embrace.

When we share ourselves with her in these ways, it is not a performance.

### Be A Loving “Seducer”

Men who seduce women are usually considered “politically incorrect.” We think of a seducer as a man who tries to manipulate women for his own pleasure and control, and he does so with as many as he can.

This is not the kind of seduction I am writing about. Seduction is a fine and masterful art that can be appreciated and enjoyed by both the seducer and seducee. The seduction considered here is “loving” seduction. As a loving seducer, you are not trying to manipulate multiple women to bed. Your attention is on your “one and only.” And you are not grasping exclusively for your own pleasure. You consider your partners pleasure as important as your own.

Sexually, the male is generally active and the female is receptive. Your role, more often than not, is as a guide. Be a sensitive guide. Realize your partner usually takes longer to “warm-up.” So be patient and enjoy the wonderful process of warming her. As a guide, you have responsibility. You cannot get lost. Be present. If you lose yourself in your own sensations, you will lose contact with her. However, if you are overly attentive to what’s going on with her, you will lose contact with yourself.

Seduction is a dance, a joyful dance. Dancing is teamwork. As couples move around a dance floor, they are sensitive to each other’s movements. If one of the partners always takes the lead, always decides the moves, tempo and directions, the dance will lose its spontaneity and creativity. Likewise, sexual dance can lose spontaneity and creativity if one or the other partner always insists on being the leader. Enjoy the dance when you take the lead as a loving seducer, and also open to allow yourself to be lead. The spontaneous give and take will allow you both to relish your dance even more.

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## Politically Correct Sex

Among the ongoing gender trends that have emerged since the 60s, two stand out—the empowerment of women, and the “softening” of men. Women have been encouraged to demand equality in work, in legislation, in relationships and also in the bedroom. Men who wish to be politically correct have been encouraged to surrender male privilege and to cultivate their receptive, sensitive feminine side.

For the most part, gender equality is an overwhelmingly good thing, but not necessarily between the sheets. Let me clarify. Men and women are equally entitled to sexual pleasure, but the roles they play in initiating and consummating that pleasure can be very different.

More than any other human interaction, sex involves instinctive, biological roots. Even though our sexual behavior is moderated by our minds, especially when young, our sex drives are guided by our hormones. With just about every animal—mammals, insects, reptiles, fish or fowl, sex is initiated by the male of the species. The male is the leader, the one who takes the initiative. This is his primal drive. This is his role in the dance of procreation.

Contrary to this traditional role is the more recent cultural expectation that in his courting relationships with women, a modern man is expected to always obtain verbal permission, must always show respect, must always avoid aggressive, dominant sexual behavior. Yet if a man consistently hides his lust and takes a passive, gentle, polite approach to his partner, (i.e., come from his head, rather than his balls), he risks extinguishing the fire of a passionate encounter. Meekness is not a turn-on. I’m not saying that a man should act like a caveman and drag his mate to bed by her hair, or that he should force himself on her against her will. But boldness, confidence and lust-driven assertion with his lover can be a powerful aphrodisiac for her, a joyous celebration of his masculine self, and an electrifying interlude for them both.

I believe that, (with the possible exclusion of women who have had traumatic experiences at the hands of unkind and unfeeling men), a majority of heterosexual women have a part of themselves that sometimes desires to be “taken,” sometimes desires to be held by a strong male she can surrender to. Lacking this element of sexual surrender, lovemaking for the woman can possibly lose fire or become boring. Eventually she may lose interest. Sexually, the couple may even become like friends—without benefits.

While she may appreciate sensitivity and gentleness, a man’s partner will more likely welcome his approach if he is open with his passion. But for her to respond, that assertive approach must be rooted in the three elements mentioned earlier, that are the necessary pre-conditions for love to survive—the need for safety, the need to be appreciated, and the need to connect. If she doesn’t feel like she is in safe, caring hands, doesn’t feel like she is known and appreciated for who she is, doesn’t feel that her partner is present and in connection with her, she could be reluctant to give herself fully. And her reluctance is well-founded.

A dominant, assertive approach may not always be politically correct, but in the right way, at the right time and place, it can be hot.

*Q. How would you rate your degree of “political correctness” when you approach your partner for a sexual connection? Too much? Not enough? Just right?*

### Hot Sex v/s Cool Sex

The foregoing might seem to imply that hot sexual encounters are best. This is not at all true. Sexuality is never a “one way is always right” proposition. Couples find what is right for them. Alice and I have a very satisfying sexual relationship, yet we rarely have had hot sex. Ours is cool “slow hands” sex. We are best friends with benefits. I am long past the age where I am fueled by testosterone. Our lovemaking is fueled more by love than by lust. For us, sexual union is an opportunity to express, through our physical bodies, our generous love for each other, and enjoy the ecstatic, sensuous pleasures our bodies can provide. It works for us.

## Teaching Each Other To Be Expert Lovers

Good sex requires teamwork. Teamwork requires good communication. Good communication requires openness. But people tend to be shy or embarrassed when it comes to frank discussions about their sexual needs and preferences.

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In order to be expert lovers, it is important for you both to take responsibility for your own pleasure, i.e., ask for what you want and say what you don't want. You both are not mind readers—or rather, body readers. There is no clarity when both you and she lay there mum in the dark. Giving your partner direction and taking direction from her can be awkward, even embarrassing, but how else will she know what pleases you unless you show her. How will you know what she likes and dislikes unless she shows you. So don't leave an important part of your intimate relationship to chance. You be the one to start the conversation.

Being able to communicate to your lover what you want and what you don't want can really boost your sexual satisfaction. Finding out from your intimate partner what turns her on and gives her pleasure can boost her satisfaction too. There are many ways besides words that can do this. Guiding her hand, spontaneous pleasure sounds and a whispered “yes” are more instructive than a detailed sex manual. And openly expressing the pleasure you gift each other is a real turn-on.

*Q. What would you like your partner to know what you would prefer more of or less of in regards to your sexual play? What holds you back from telling her? What holds you back from inquiring about her sexual preferences?*

### Foreplay

Foreplay. What a strange concept. Some guys think that the purpose of all that kissing, stroking, licking, fingering, sucking, is so that you can get hot and get her hot, and then you are both prepared for the main event, fucking, and finally, the big payoff—orgasm.

You wouldn't go to a fine restaurant and quickly gobble down your gourmet meal in order to get to dessert would you? Why would you forgo the delicious sensations your body receives from her touch, and your touch provides her. Instead of rushing for the grand finale, slow way down and enjoy savoring the moment-by-moment experience. Focus on the pleasurable sensations that arise and surrender to them. Enjoy her enjoyment as well as your own.

The greatest artistry in the sexual act isn't humping. You'll find your craft in foreplay. It's called fore *play* for a reason—its play. Like all play, it involves creativity, imagination and spontaneity. If you play well, you're both winners.

The act of giving sexual pleasure to your partner is a concrete act of generosity. Patient, creative, generous foreplay enhances closeness, enhances love.

### Monotonous Monogamous Sex?

The complaint of sexual boredom is not uncommon with long-term, monogamous couples. Monogamous is not a synonym for monotonous. Avoiding sexual boredom doesn't require novelty—changing partners or learning new techniques, although a change in routine can temporarily pique interest and excitement. Novelty is more about what you reveal about yourself rather than some new, exotic sexual position.

There will be novelty if you are present for your partner moment-by-moment and willing to focus on their delight, and be present for your own delight. Being in the moment can ramp up satisfaction for both of you. Who would reject a partner who is fully focused and present with them? Who would reject a partner who takes great pleasure in giving them pleasure? And who would reject a partner who takes great pleasure in receiving the pleasure you give? Sex is a dance, and like dancing with a partner, it is important to be sensitive to the moment-by-moment flow.

What happens in the bedroom is not separate from what is happening in the rest of life. Desire is very sensitive to what is currently occurring in a couple's relationship in their daily life. Your state of mind—stress, worries, busy schedules, sense of distance—these all play a role. Also, it's important to remember that it is completely normal for sexual passion to wax and wane. There may be extended periods when, for no discernible reason, you are horny, and periods when you are not.

The way you treat each other outside the bedroom very much influences what happens inside. You can't expect that if you ignore your partner, antagonize them, act indifferent or belittle them, they will be excited to jump into bed with you. While being good to each other will not guarantee good sex, treating each other unkindly will likely result in unsatisfying sex or no sex at all.

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Lack of technique is not the primary issue that cools the fires of sexual desire. Near the top of the list of passion killers is if there is a backlog of unexpressed negative feelings. Unresolved conflicts and withheld anger and frustration make it difficult to feel generous toward your partner. You are not anxious to pleasure that jerk, even at the expense of your own pleasure. The famous “after argument sex” is a demonstration of the power in communication. After a fight, garbage has been aired and the exhilaration of clear communication is a strong sexual stimulant. If you keep the channels of communication clear you may not be able to enjoy after argument sex, but you won’t need to, because arguments will be a rarity.

All this being said, if you have only one or two moves in your repertoire, things can get monotonous. If that is the case, it may be time to get creative. Check in with your partner. See if she is willing to try something new or has something she wants you to try. If you are in need of some ideas, there are lots of books on the subject, watch porn, take a workshop or online class. And have fun experimenting. But remember, it’s not all about technique and novelty. Your presence is your present to your sexual partner.

## Mismatched Desire

Couples are rarely a perfect match in their sexual preferences. One partner desires sex more frequently than the other or at times when the other is turned off. One prefers a certain kind of touching that the other finds unappealing. One is a jackrabbit while the other is a turtle.

How do you handle this disparity?

With a large portion of patience, sensitivity, flexibility and generosity—all qualities of the Loving Promises. Sexuality holds so much vulnerability that without these loving qualities, it is easy to wound or be wounded, frustrate or be frustrated.

Involuntary celibacy is not an attractive solution to mismatched desire for most people, nor is masturbation. In the past, the only other acceptable solutions were affairs, separation or divorce. Increasingly, for couples who love each other and want to stay together, there are other alternatives to a cold or sexless relationship. Polyamory (literally, many loves) open relationships and swinging are some of the permutations for individuals and couples in sexually frustrating relationships.

The primary sexually frustrated partner faces sometimes monumental challenges. Their mate is in the driver’s seat and has the power to control the nature and timing of the next sexual connection simply by their willingness to “do it” or not. To deal with their frustration, the more sexually motivated partner would need to call up all the patience, understanding and loving qualities they can muster in order to avoid falling into lazy, destructive responses like anger, blame, coercion and guilt induction. It is important for both partners to understand that, whenever there is mismatched desire, both partners suffer frustration.

There can be many reasons for mismatched desire. It’s important that you explore so that you know what you are dealing with. A place to start is to sit down with your honey and have an honest heart-to-heart talk. Let her know your feelings. Find out what her experience is. Is there an unresolved emotional issue that has built up a wall between you? Is there some external issue that is blocking feeling? Stress? Overwork. Could alcohol or drugs be an issue? Is there something about your technique that turns her off? Are you too fast? Too rough? Don’t discount a physiological cause. Disturbed hormonal levels can be a factor causing low libido.

Sometimes, especially if the mismatched desire is periodic rather than long lasting, it might be best to take the problem into your own hands. Masturbation, or a more appropriate term, self-pleasuring, can be a practical means of alleviating built up sexual tension.

The partner with lower sexual motivation can be a force for healing, both for their mate and for themselves. If they are able to understand touching, caressing and the sexual act as the gift that it is, a gift of letting their partner know that they are desired and desirable, appreciated and loved, then in addition to sensual pleasure, both will be healed. This may mean engaging in erotic play even if the desire is not initially there. Common belief is that first comes interest, then stimulation, then intercourse. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Stimulation can often lead to interest. Bestowing the gift of generously saying “yes” when not turned on can quickly change and can result in some very pleasant interludes for both. An open heart and mind is a turn-on.

Sometimes the desire for sexual connection is a substitute for the need for emotional connection. An extended session of non-sexual cuddling may help satisfy the desire for intimacy. Sharing loving embrace makes clear that it

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is not *you* that is being rejected by your partner not desiring sex at this time. And it can be much more intimate than a fuck.

If your desire is to experience intimacy with your partner (not just the sexual form of intimacy), then pursuing sex might even tend to block intimacy. The narrow focus on genital pleasure might inhibit the intimate connection you desire. Engaging in non-sexual, intimate embrace with your partner can bring you closer together.

*Q. Are you and your partner mismatched in some ways sexually? In what ways? How do you handle the mismatch?*

## Withholding Sex

Withholding sex is a way a partner, more often the woman, can control, manipulate, punish, or gain revenge for some transgression by her man. It is a very effective and very hurtful, destructive manipulation. She can be straightforward, like “I won't fuck you unless you...” or she can be more subtle, “Not tonight dear, I have a headache.” You are now put in the position of either being frustrated, being a beggar or being pissed off. None of these are very attractive alternatives. If this has happened to you, you know how painful and demeaning it is. The woman could be saying, in effect “I've got you by the balls and I won't let go till I get what I want.”

There are other, less direct forms of manipulative, withholding sex, such as selfish sex, where your partner totally disregards your desires and pleasures; mechanical sex, where she just goes through the motions; bored sex, where she just lies there and is obviously disinterested, wanting you to “just hurry up and finish.”

Denying or manipulative sex is very painful. It is a two-way street. You both end up being punished. It denies both of you closeness, warmth and pleasure. But the one who withholds gets to be right, obtains “payback” and gets to be in the driver's seat. Not very rewarding.

*Q. Has a partner purposely withheld sex from you? How did you feel? Has there been a time where you have been the “withholder”?*

## Consent

It has been said that given the right circumstances, such as uncontrollable lust or extreme sexual frustration, any man would engage in rape or coercive sexual relations. I don't believe this is true. Most men, no matter what the circumstances, have respect for another's personal boundaries and an inner prohibition against dehumanizing other people by forcing them against their will. But non-consensual sex happens. It happens between relative strangers and it happens between long-married couples. And it occurs far more often than is reported. Some men devalue women and feel entitled to have their way, and the fact that males are larger and stronger than females makes it easier to take advantage of them.

Coercive sex is physical touching or sexual activity without the other's permission, or, with their reluctant permission, but gained by force, manipulation or threat of force. Even when permission is given, if there has been coercion, that permission is not valid consent. A woman who is repeatedly badgered by a persistent, aggressive male, besides being pissed-off, often becomes afraid. A woman who is afraid is usually not able to freely say “no.” Her inability to say “no” does not mean that she has said “yes.”

As an honorable man, it is important for you to be able to place clear limits on yourself in regards to sexual touching. I would suggest you incorporate the following simple statement as an ironclad rule toward your partner.

*“You are in charge of your body. I will not coerce you into doing anything sexual you do not want to do.”*

The heat of the moment may make this rule more difficult to implement. When you are turned on, you might be tempted to “mistake” a subtle “no” for “yes” or “maybe.” You might not hear her refusal of consent, and instead give in to the belief, “She really wants it, she's just playing hard to get.” However, it's essential to listen to the truth behind her words. More than that, ignore the “little man” between your legs and listen to your gut and sense her feelings that she has left unsaid. And remember the ironclad rule: *No coercion.*

If you are able to clearly define limits to sexual coercion within yourself, and maintain those boundaries with your partner, she can feel safe and respected, and you both will avoid regrets later.

*Richard Matzkin*

## Being Sexually Attracted to Other Women

No matter if you're young or old, single or in a committed relationship, if you are a male who has a heartbeat, you are probably attracted by the sight of a beautiful woman, maybe even sexually aroused. This can happen with many women, day or night, at work or play, on the street, in a store. This is a natural, healthy and normal masculine response. Throughout history, in art, poetry, song and story, men have celebrated attractive women. And wanted to bed them.

Even if you have a perfectly satisfying intimate relationship with your partner, at one time or another you've probably entertained the idea of a mistress or two. If you were living in a culture that embraced polygamy or polyamory, this would be no big deal, but in our culture this is not widely accepted. So most likely you appreciate from a distance, keep your tool in your pants, and go on with your life.

It's one thing to be attracted to and appreciate the radiance of a woman, and then go on with your life, as opposed to try to capture and ravish her. Ravishing can sometimes invite complicating consequences, some of which may be very unpleasant. It would be wise to be mindful of those consequences before you go chasing after anyone in a skirt. This will probably require a degree of suppression of desire, self-discipline and regret. If you choose to have a deep, enduring relationship with one woman in your life, this is not a big price to pay, given the joys, heartfulness and growth that comes from a long term, committed love.

My exclusive relationship with Alice doesn't mean I am not able to be attracted to other women. A beautiful face and body and a buoyant spirit are a joy to behold and there is no reason why I cannot appreciate them. Many a time I have "fallen in love" (or lust) for a minute or two with a cute waitress or salesperson. The world is filled with so many wonderful women, why not have permission to admire them. And I do—at a distance. Alice gives me that permission. I am very clear about my limits within myself and with others. I might compliment, but I don't send mixed messages. I freely acknowledge my momentary infatuations to Alice and she indulges me. Even a rare, playful back-and-forth flirting is OK with her, as long as it's understood to be part of an innocent, mutual game where all parties understand the rules. She doesn't feel threatened, and shouldn't. She knows, "she's got her man." And she knows I am hers. . .all hers.

Being turned on by feminine radiance and beauty is a gift, to you and to the women you admire. You diminish the gift by only channeling the appreciative energy to your genitals. Enjoy your desire. Enjoy your masculine energy. Being turned on is an expression of your aliveness.

## Affairs

The issue of infidelity is rich in meaning. If we explore it more deeply, without judging right and wrong, victim and perpetrator, it can reveal valuable truths about a long-term committed relationship.

The standard assumption is that people have affairs for deeper reasons than just a momentary lapse, too many drinks or a chance opportunity. Observers think, "If things are OK at home, why would you stray? Obviously, there must be something wrong with you, or your partner, or the relationship." This is usually the case. If things were perfect with you two, there would be no reason to seek to become involved with another person.

However, it's not as simple as it seems. Not all affairs occur because things are bad with a couple. The relationship may be fine, but possibly one partner is longing for some personal need the relationship is not satisfying. It can be less about the sex and more about a need for the fire of passion, a search for vitality lost, an effort to recapture youth, a need to feel special, desired, appreciated, a yearning for exploring an exciting, un-lived life. Time is passing. The question keeps recurring, "Is this all there is? Is this all there will be with us?" Often, a long-term relationship cannot fill these needs, answer these questions.

These are real needs, real questions. An affair can bring these issues to the light. It's a heart-rending way to learn, especially for the "betrayed" partner. If the affair remains hidden, even after long over, the dishonesty injects a poison of guilt and lies into the relationship that can be lethal. If the affair comes to light, the resulting pain and distrust experienced by the one who is cheated on can be indelible. To say nothing about the effect on the family.

I surely don't recommend affairs. However, there is potential for positive outcome. If handled with respect, intelligence and with heart, this breach of trust can be used to re-define the relationship, lead the couple to further growth and self-awareness. If it survives, it is possible for the partnership to be renewed on a deeper, more honest level.

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While this greater understanding can be beneficial for the relationship, it's best to do your soul-searching before starting an affair. The yearnings you may feel are vital and real and cannot go unaddressed without ultimately causing problems. The feelings of needing to feel passion, feel special and desired that you are experiencing need to be shared. No matter how difficult this conversation might be, by being silent about longing for what's missing in the relationship and in your life, you are inviting seeking for fulfillment in the arms of another person.

If there are problems, deal with them. If it is beyond your ability, seek professional help. If the relationship cannot support your needs, maybe you shouldn't remain in it. But try to be forthright, and do it before your eyes start to wander to your co-worker or the neighbor next door.

The best hedge against infidelity is creating vibrancy, adventure, humor, growth, honesty and intimacy in your personal life and expanding that to the relationship. Create the life you want rather than seeking it in someone else's bed.

*Q. Have you been tempted to have an affair? What were the reasons you gave yourself? If you didn't go through with it, what reasons did you give yourself?*

## If Your Penis Could Talk

To some degree, a man's penis has a direct connection to his ego.

At one time or another, we have all considered our penis as a measure of our manhood, and by extension, our value as a man. We've glanced sideways at other's dicks in the gym showers, or in the next urinal and compared how we measured up. We have seen the swollen organs of porn stars and felt the pang of envy or the sting of shame. We are proud of the hardness of our "tool" and ashamed when that tool becomes soft and cannot do its work when we need it to. We want our partner to worship our cock and we see her appreciation of our organ as appreciating us, worshipping us.

If your little man had a voice and could speak, how would he describe his relationship with you? With your partner? What would he say to you? What would you say to him? What would your lover say to him? No doubt there would be some interesting conversations.

Our penis never speaks verbally, but it doesn't lie. its message is obvious, visible to our partner and ourself. An erect penis signals our desire and excitement and readiness to engage. A flaccid penis signals something else. When a man loses his erection or is unable to have one, the message sent cannot be hidden. There can be multiple reasons behind the message—"You don't turn me on, I'm exhausted, I'm afraid of failing as a potent man." But whatever the message, it cannot be denied. And our response too often is shame. We are "impotent," shrunken, lacking in masculine power.

How free we would be if we could separate our penis from our ego and know it as just another part of our body—like a hand, a foot, an arm. So what if our foot is smaller or larger than others. So what if our hand grip is not as strong or stronger than another man's. So what if our leg muscles get tired and we can't go the distance on a hiking trail.

If we could weaken the link between how we view our penis and how we value ourself as a man and as a person, what a difference that would make. We could use, but not abuse our penis. We could share it with our lover and gratefully appreciate its sublime sensations. But we wouldn't allow this little piece of meat that dangles from the top of our thighs, and our unreasonable demand for it to always perform on command, to define who we are as a partner and as a man.

*Q. If your penis had a voice, what would it say to you. How would it describe its relationship with you? With your partner?*

## Does Size Really Matter?

The simple answer is, "yes," to some women, "no," to most. Surveys show that what really matters to the vast majority of women is the connection you create with her, the sensitivity you have to her, the generosity you share with her. It's not what you got. It's how you use what you got that matters most to women.

*Richard Matzkin*

The more important question is, “Does size matter to you?” If the size of your penis is something you obsess about and feel inferior about, it will get in the way of you being able to freely give of yourself sexually to your partner. Your self-criticism cannot help but impair the connection you have with her every time you make love. So realize that your greatest skill as a lover is to be a love-able man.

## The Secret Affair—Porn and Masturbation

Pornography and masturbation, what powerful stimulations. So addictive and easy to get hooked. And so close at hand. Tap the computer keys, unzip the fly and quickly you have an easy escape to moments or hours of pleasure and fantasy. Therein lies the problem. Viewing porn and masturbating are not intrinsically bad. It’s not so much that the excitement and discharge that porn and masturbation provide is the problem. Problems can arise when you use these activities to escape from life.

Let’s not look at compulsive use of pornographic material and compulsive masturbation from the viewpoint of a moralist who shames and blames you for your “dirty habits” and threatens you with fire and brimstone if you fail to cease immediately. This will only induce more shame and hiding. And let’s not be so permissive as to remove all judgement and accept compulsive masturbation and porn use as harmless, natural and even beneficial. This will ignore the real problems that these practices create. Instead, let’s view compulsive masturbation and porn use as an often-unskillful utilization of your attention, time and energy. They are unskillful in that they can stunt your emotional growth, unskillful in that they can cause harm to your intimate relationship.

In a way, pleasuring yourself and compulsively watching porn are ways of withholding of yourself from your partner. Though not as blatant or destructive, it is like having an affair, a secret affair with yourself. Rather than sharing with your partner the beauty and generosity that is central to the sexual act, you withhold yourself. Withholding in this way forecloses opportunities of coming to communion with your partner.

The most insidious effect of porn and masturbation addiction, like all addictions, is that it obscures reality. When we are in distress, it soothes us. When we are deadened, it excites us. When we are bored, it entertains us. The quick fix of excitement and the instant relief of ejaculation distracts us. It takes us away from the hurt and unpleasantness that might be really happening in our life. And it could often be covering up sexual and relationship problems that need to be aired and worked with. Continual temporary escape from real life issues is not a good problem-solving strategy.

Once you begin to understand your compulsive sexual habits as potentially harmful and unskillful, how should you now view them? Rather than see these habits as a stable, unalterable part of your life and a built-in component of your personality, begin to see them as a part of you that is changeable and can be worked with and matured through. See them as a set of malleable behaviors that can, with motivation and focused attention, be modified and replaced with behaviors that serve your growth and the growth of your relationship. To do this you need to begin to address your unresolved wounds. You need to explore the roots of your addiction with compassion and with open eyes.

The roots may run deep. Sexual addiction is usually not a sign of “manliness” or heightened sex drive. Rather, it is sometimes a sign of childhood trauma or sexual abuse. Sometimes it’s a sign of a fixation at an adolescent stage of development. And often it is an outgrowth of the sexualization of contemporary society. We live in a world dripping with sexual images. Sexy women are used to sell everything from hamburgers to refrigerators. Women’s clothing is more about revealing than concealing. Sexual images are everywhere in the atmosphere and hard to avoid. They capture your attention and enslave your mind.

A good many men feel fine about their sexual addiction, even enjoy it. It is only those who are disturbed by their habit who are looking for a way to modify it. If you are sensing that you need a change, a good starting point is to examine the effects of porn and masturbation on your life and the life of your lover. Questions arise that need your answers. What would you do if you were not spending time masturbating or watching porn? What are you avoiding—boredom, depression, stress, insecurity, powerlessness, loneliness, inner deadness? What parts of yourself are you withholding from your partner by your masturbation and porn habit? In what ways is it impacting your shared sex life? How is that creating separation and lack of intimacy? What are the effects on you? Do you feel shame? Self-loathing? A sense of powerlessness and lack of self-control? These are uncomfortable questions, not easily answered, yet needing answers if you want a healthy relationship with your partner. . .and yourself.

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You may have the desire to “go it alone” once you decide to make changes in your sexual habits. This is understandable. Most likely, you carry a load of shame and embarrassment. But growing through these forms of sexual addiction is nearly impossible without sharing your burden with others or seeking professional help. You’ve probably tried “white knuckling,” forcing yourself to refrain, and you’ve seen that likely doesn’t work, at least not in the long run. Like trying to eliminate any deeply entrenched habit through the force of will, the more you resist, the stronger the habit becomes. The root causes are as active as ever and your addiction is so easily available with the click of a computer mouse. Forced abstinence can lead to a painful cycle of restraint, binging, self-put-down, restraint, binging, etc., etc. This can bring an additional layer of shame and a sense of hopelessness.

Without perspective view, the shame and hopelessness of being caught in sexual addiction can be overwhelming. It might be helpful if you could examine your sexual fantasies and favored types of porn with the uncritical eye of a curious scientist. In real time, without judging yourself, describe, in detail, the actions taking place, the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing. What are the storylines, common recurring themes that turn you on? What do the actors look like? What are their interactions like? What brings you to orgasm most easily?

Addiction to porn and masturbation are a complicated and deeply rooted set of habits. If you are wanting to make a change in those habits, there are self-help groups and specialized professionals who are highly experienced in the field who can work with you if you desire help.

*Q. Reread paragraph #7 and try to answer the questions posed.*

*Reread paragraph #9 and try to answer the questions posed. Can you do this without judging yourself?*

*There are times and conditions where porn and masturbation might be a useful solution to an ongoing relationship problem. What might those conditions be?*

## Kinky Sex

In the past, before the sexual revolution kicked in, sex was often treated as a secret, a source of hidden shame. Not so much now. But there are things you won’t talk about, even to your lover and closest friends. If you are like most people, you probably have “secret pleasures”—odd fantasies, masturbation, obsessions and fetishes that you might feel ashamed of if your partner or anyone else knew about them. Do you masturbate to porn? Do you think about adding a third person to your sexual experiences? Is there a man that you feel sexually attracted to? Do you fantasize being tied up by your woman? Or tying her up? Would you want to try wearing her clothes? Is there a part of her body you obsess about? Her breasts? Her feet? Her ass?

Because these “kinky” ideas are rarely spoken about publicly, we tend to think that we are the odd, twisted one. However, if you were to be able to listen to some of the the kinky thoughts kicking around in most people’s minds, you would be shocked. And you wouldn’t feel so alone. You’ve probably sampled some of the variety that’s available on internet porn.

Sexual pleasure can manifest in many forms. There’s no right way to “do it,” no fixed standard as to what constitutes “correct” sex. Sexual response is unique to each individual, to each couple and to each encounter. And whatever provides mutual pleasure and is consensual, respectful and not destructive to the relationship and one or both partners. Why not at least consider exploring it.

If these “secret pleasures” that you withhold in shame could be shared with your partner, a new level of intimacy, physical and psychological, might be achieved. She may even share her fantasy with you. And you both may find, if you play out your fantasies together, that you enjoy yourselves even more. But it’s not easy to share with her things that can be so charged with self-judgement.

The main reason we withhold our fantasies from our intimate partner is fear and shame. We are afraid that she will be shocked and judge us, afraid that she will think us weird or perverted, afraid that once she knows that we have withheld secrets from her, she will believe there are more quirky ideas we are keeping from her and this will erode her trust in us. Also, we are ashamed that we even have such kinky thoughts. “Normal” people don’t have those thoughts.

Sharing our kinky desires is one way of working with them. Another way is to explore them. Sexual fantasies are like dreams, and like dreams, they can be a pathway to our subconscious world. Looking upon our fantasies as if they are dramas we create out of the raw material of our childhood experiences, neglected needs and unresolved traumas can give us insight into old wounds that are still operating in our present life. Stripped of their erotic content, our

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sexual fantasies can reveal childhood origins of our present day need for control, attention, dominance and submission. This can be a step toward making our subconscious more conscious, which will help us live more fully in the present, rather than again and again playing out old traumas clothed in sexual fantasy.

FYI, among the most popular sexual fantasies, as reported by over 4,000 American men and women, are: #1. *Multiple Partners*, orgies, threesomes. #2. *Power and Control*, bondage, submission, sadism. #4. *Taboo Activities*, fetishism, voyeurism. #7. *Gender and Sexual Fluidity*, being other gender or sex as other gender, cross-dressing. (Justin Lehmiller, PhD, Psychology Today, April, 2020).

*Q. What kinky thoughts and fantasies do you have? Do you conceal them from your partner? If you do, what is your fear if she knew?*

ED

It used to be called “impotence”—not being potent or having potency. Talk about judgement and shaming. . .and involving our most masculine part, the ultimate symbol of our manhood. Yet if you live long enough, you'll probably at some point be dealing with ED—erectile dysfunction. One study of men over the age of 65 found that 91% experience some degree of erectile dysfunction. ED medication is less effective than advertised and much less effective as you get older. What do you and your partner do if you can't get it up?

I prided myself for my hard-ons until I reached my seventies, then I joined the ED generation. I wasn't about to become celibate. I enjoyed sex with Alice too much. And our lovemaking was an important part of our relationship. So we changed our sexual habits. We slowed way, way down. Our hands and our mouths became instruments of sensual pleasure. Our goal during our sexual interludes is to pleasure each other to the max. Sex has become times for the physical expression of our love and generosity toward each other. It is a crystal-clear expression of our love. And honestly, with or without a stiff rod, our present sexual encounters are the best yet.

*Q. Imagine that from today forward you are unable to ever have another erection. What are your thoughts and feelings?*

## POWER/EQUALITY

### About Power

There are many kinds of power—physical, intellectual, social, interpersonal, economic, political.

Power is the ability to take action, to influence, to bring about change. It is there for us to use. We can use it for good or ill. We can use it to control and overpower others, to get what we want, to hurt others. Or we can use it to benefit others and ourselves. The way we use our power defines us. It's no secret that men, much more than women, tend to define themselves around power—how much they have, how much they lack, who they hold power over, who holds power over them.

Power is attractive because power generates privilege. Powerful people can break rules, make decisions, punish and reward others. And people with power have more access to “goodies.” They can get what they want.

Issues around power are the cause of many conflicts in relationships. Who's opinion matters most? Who controls the finances? Who makes the final decisions? Who is listened to? Who is ignored? Who gets the lollipop? Who is left with the stick? This can lead to power struggles.

Power can be shared *with* others, and it can be held *over* others. Shared power is essential for equality in relationship. Equal power can allow for love and stability. Power enforced by coercion or manipulation uses fear. Domination of one person over another can lead to separation and conflict.

### On Not Wanting to Be Controlled

I think it's fair to say that most men have a need for independence—they don't want to be controlled, especially by their partner. They want to do things the way they like and not be forced to behave one way or the other. They want to be a mustang grazing free, not an ox pulling a cart. Yet being together with a partner entails compromise, and here is where things can get sticky. Some women try to “domesticate” their man, train him. They joke that he is not a good fit off the rack and in need of alteration. (It should be said that today, women too are less inclined to being controlled by their partner.)

Women tend to have a lot more expertise with housekeeping and relationships. So, they might try to train their man to become more neat, more socially conscious, more sensitive to her needs. These are beneficial changes and will lead him to feeling more pleased with their living space and more fulfilled in their relationship. However, her efforts can bring up her man's fears and resentments about being controlled. He can begin to feel “one down,” judged or like the child in the relationship. This can get his hackles up and make him defensive. Minor issues, like how to load the dishwasher or appropriate clothes to wear can lead to major arguments or power struggles.

Power struggles are not fun. And they are usually not productive when they don't touch on the issue at hand. The discussion about the best way to load the dishwasher should be about the best way to load the dishwasher, not about who's right or who will win or who is trying to control who. If you are bothered by what you perceive as your partner trying to over-control you, make the time to sit with her and hash it out directly. When you clarify your boundaries you'll be happier, your partner will understand you better and you'll both make greater progress in your relationship. And you might also have cleaner dishes.

Richard Matzkin

## Unequal Loving

The person in a couple relationship who loves less, holds more power. The one who gives more of their heart is more vulnerable. They have more skin in the game. They can be hurt by the actions of the other more easily. They have less control.

Many men understand this. That is one reason why some men withhold themselves. If they show their cards, allow their partner to see how much they love them and need them, or even allow themselves to feel the depth of their love and need, they become afraid. They fear they will have less control. So they “play it cool.”

It’s supposed to be a truism that men are afraid of intimacy. Could it be that men are not so afraid of intimacy, but more afraid of the loss of control that intimacy requires. When you allow yourself to love deeply, you can be hurt more easily, more intensely. You must give up control and cannot demand your way when you love deeply. This can be threatening to some men. They would prefer to have a less warm and loving relationship than to have to deal with a partnership where they hold less power. Their fear prompts them to build a protective wall around their heart, but the wall keeps out love. They choose false safety over a loving relationship.

*Q. Have you tried to be less vulnerable by “playing it cool?”*

## Power Struggles

Whenever two or more people get together, there will always be conflicting needs, viewpoints and priorities. These conflicts are the source of power struggles.

In the couple’s journey, the Power Struggle stage comes after the Honeymoon stage, where everything is hunky-dory, the couple is blinded by love and blissfully unaware of issues which will cause friction and present challenges to the relationship. Those challenges will show up soon enough. *He has a trigger temper, she demands too much of his time, he doesn’t help with the housework, she becomes snickered from her glass, (glasses) of wine every night.* At first, the couple turns a blind eye to what bugs them or walks on eggshells to avoid a scene. When their partner doesn’t change, they become frustrated. Differences lead to arguments as each tries to convince the other to be more to their liking. They become polarized, their positions harden. They are deep in power struggle.

*Productive Power Struggle.* The phrase “power struggle” sounds like a bad thing, but actually it is an important part of any relationship. It’s a time of great potential, where partners can learn about themselves, their mate and their relationship. Power struggles allow the individuals in the couple to lay out what is important to them, reveal where their boundaries lay, indicate what’s negotiable and what isn’t, and establish “rules for engagement.” This is a necessary process if the individuals are to hold their power.

Couples who treat their power struggles in a positive way begin with a win-win mindset. They are focused on problem-solving, not winning. They seek to create a compromise where both parties win. If one side wins and the other loses, both lose. The bottom line is respect—respect for each other, respect for their differences and respect for the process of coming to agreement. When power struggles are resolved in a positive manner, love, trust and understanding will deepen. The relationship will become stronger.

*Destructive Power Struggles.* Power struggles become destructive when they persist on an ongoing basis without an effort to resolve the conflicts. They also become destructive when one or both partners attempt to gain power *over* the other rather than share power *with* the other. Negative power struggles begin with a win—lose mindset. One or both partners would prefer to win rather than compromise. They see compromise as a defeat.

Men, especially men who resist and devalue their partner’s power and influence, tend to become embroiled in negative power struggles. These men, for whatever reason, usually having origin in childhood, fear women’s power and thus use any tactic to control them. Another factor is social conditioning that says that men are entitled to be the one in control of the relationship. They see any attempt their partner makes to thwart his control as her effort to “wear the pants” in their relationship. This gender-based power struggle leaves men unwilling to grant their partner equal say in the relationship.

## Becoming Love *Able*

Power struggles that are negative and persist tend to weaken trust and understanding. They can cause the relationship to fracture.

### Power OVER v/s Power WITH

The way you use your power in your relationship will determine the nature of the relationship. To oversimplify, you can use your power to dominate and control your partner in order to get your way, or you can share power with your partner so you both are able to get your wants met.

#### **Methods For Acquiring Power OVER A Person.**

When you want control over another person by force, there are many tactics you can use, varying anywhere from subtle manipulation all the way to physical violence. \*

*Emotional abuse.* Putting her down. Making her feel bad about herself. Calling her names. Playing mind games. Humiliating her. Making her feel guilty.

*Male privilege.* Treating her like a child or a servant. Making all the big decisions. Acting like “the master of the castle.” Being the one to define his and her roles.

*Economic abuse.* Preventing her from getting or keeping her job. Making her ask for money. Giving her an allowance. Not letting her know about or have access to family income.

*Isolation.* Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, where she goes. Limiting her outside involvement. Using jealousy to justify actions.

*Coercion and Threats.* Making and or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her. Threatening to leave her, commit suicide, report her to authorities.

*Intimidation.* Making her afraid by using intimidating looks, actions, gestures. Yelling at her. Smashing things. Destroying her property. Displaying weapons.

*Physical Violence.* Beating her up. Raping her.

Once that physical violence has occurred, even one time, the woman must keep on guard. She fears for her safety because she knows it can happen again at any time. Physical violence amplifies the threat of all the other control tactics her partner uses.

The underlying force that maintains power and control over another person is fear. As we know, where there is fear, there cannot be love.

#### **Methods Of Sharing Power WITH A Person.**

In contrast to using tactics to gain power over another person, sharing power fosters love and trust. Here are ways for working together and sharing power in your relationship. (These correspond with each of the methods for acquiring power OVER a person.)

*Respect.* Listening to her non-judgmentally. Being emotionally affirming and understanding. Valuing her opinions.

*Shared responsibility.* Mutually agreeing on a fair distribution of work. Making family decisions together.

*Economic partnership.* Financial transparency. Making money decisions together. Making sure both partners benefit from financial arrangements.

*Trust and support.* Supporting her goals in life. Respecting her right to her own feelings, friends, activities and options.

*Negotiation and fairness.* Seeking mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict. Accepting change. Being willing to compromise.

*Non-threatening behavior.* Talking and acting so that she feels safe and comfortable expressing herself and doing things she wants.

*Non-violence.* Defining all the power and control tactics as violent and committing to avoid using any of them.

When you share power and control in your relationship, you become true partners. Love and trust flow unhindered.

Richard Matzkin

\*Adapted from the Duluth Model, Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

## Rejection—A Woman's Power Over A Man.

*You were fixed up on a date with a beautiful, smart, interesting lady and you were head-over-heels. You feel it went well and you angled for a second date. Then you receive an email from her. "I had a very pleasant time with you the other night. You're very nice, but I don't think it will work out." Rejected!*

*It's Friday night. You showered and shaved, splashed on her favorite cologne, and are eagerly looking forward to a night of wild lovemaking with your honey. "Sorry dear, not tonight. It's been a long day and I'm exhausted." Rejected!*

We all long to be loved and accepted. That's why being rejected is so painful, especially concerning romantic relationships. When we are vulnerable, with our feelings out into the open, and we reach out to ask for our heart's desire from this someone we care about, that's when being rejected hurts the most. Asking makes us vulnerable. The one we ask holds power. We give her power. She can judge. She can reward. She can punish. With her thumbs up, we're in heaven. Thumbs down, hope is dashed and we're in hell.

Rejection hurts. It stabs us right where we are most sensitive, in our sense of self-worth. We immediately go into our head and assume that we must be "rejectable." We may take the blame and think, "I'm not good enough," or "I must have done something wrong." Alternatively, we might blame her. "She doesn't know the real me," or "She doesn't know what she's missing." Or we minimize our desire. "I didn't like her much anyway." or "I don't really care." No matter what our response, the rejection still stings.

Sometimes our fear of rejection is so great that we become paralyzed, never making the first move. We might carefully avoid situations where we might be rejected. We would rather live with our frustration, loneliness and depression rather than face the possibility of having our invitation denied and our feelings hurt.

Intimate relationships offer the equal possibility of rejection for both men and women. However, because men are usually expected to be the assertive one, and more often are the ones that extend an invitation, we are more likely to experience the slap of being rejected if our overture is refused. That puts women in the driver's seat. The helplessness and frustration of being the one who is being rejected can lead a man to anger, confrontation, and has sometimes resulted in violence.

We hurt most when we take rejection personally. But it may not have anything to do with you. Maybe it's not that she's sexually turned off to you, but she's genuinely tired. Maybe the real reason she doesn't want to continue with the relationship after the first date is because you remind her of her ex-boyfriend, the one who treated her badly. So don't assume you're the one at fault.

Truth be told, rejection might be a gift. Assuming the woman is telling you the truth about the way she feels, the rejection might avoid unpleasantness later on. Her honestly telling you, "I don't think it will work out," may save you time and more hurt feelings if you persisted. Her refusal has set you free to find a more suitable partner. Thank her and move on. If she is in no mood for sex, you both might have been in for a frustrating evening if you had persisted. Thank her and move on.

As with all experience, the pain of rejection will fade over time. Avoid looking to the woman to lessen the pain. This is your issue to deal with, not hers. Accept the fact you've been rejected. Acknowledge to yourself your feelings of pain and helplessness. Don't take it so personally. Don't blame her. Try to look for the gift in the rejection. Remind yourself that this is only one incident and that you are a valuable, worthy human being. See this as a learning experience and as an opportunity for growth. Bow out graciously. Move on and don't let this spoil your day. Don't let rejection throw you off balance and deter you from expressing your desires.

## Becoming Love *Able*

### Can You Pass Your Partner's Tests?

Tests reveal important information. You take tests in school so your teacher can determine what you've learned and what you haven't. The test will also help you to see where you need improvement. So tests, even though they may be anxiety producing, are very useful for providing information for both the "testor" and "testee."

On occasion, some women will put their partners to the test. She may criticize you, challenge you, provoke you, argue with you, distract you, nag at you. Often this is without malicious intent on her part. And often it occurs below her awareness. What she may be subconsciously trying to accomplish by her testing is to *assess your strength*. This is not an inherently bad thing.

More than anyone else, the woman in your life knows your weaknesses. It is in those vulnerable spots she will test. Will you retain firm boundaries? Will you cave in if she nags you? Will you stand up for what you feel is right? Will you veer from your purpose if she distracts you? Will you feel threatened if she challenges you? Will you allow your irritation to erupt into anger? And most important, will you hold steady in your love for her?

If you remain unshaken, keep your focus, retain your sense of humor, maintain your cool and remain present and lovingly open to her throughout all her tests, you will have demonstrated your masculine strength and passed her test with flying colors. If not, you will have demonstrated your weakness, and she may be reluctant to fully trust you to be an abiding force in her life. You can expect more tests in that area until you pass.

Your partner isn't testing you in the hope you'll fail. She wants you to pass her tests. She wants you to resist. She wants to feel your strength. She wants to be able to trust you. This is what her testing is all about. When you demonstrate that you are a grownup, that you don't need her approval, that you can follow through with what you feel is true and right and don't have to have things between you to always be "nice," then she can trust your strength. Only then can she cease her tests.

She can now relax into your arms, secure in the knowledge that she is in the embrace of a man capable of both power and love.

*Q. Have you been tested by a partner? What was the test about? Did you pass?*

### Doing "Women's Work"

Clean the toilets, wash the laundry, sweep the floor, tend to the children, cook dinner, scrub the pots and pans. In my dad's time, this was called "woman's work," and a man would rarely lift a finger to help. The house was the woman's domain and it was her duty to take care of the inside of the home, even if, in addition to taking care of the kids, she held down a job. Things have changed, but there are still some guys who won't help around the house, or, if they do, they will occasionally, reluctantly help her out with "her work" by deigning to wash a dish or pick up a broom.

Of course, partners in a couple have different interests, skills and abilities. I take out the garbage because I am better able to lift the heavy cans, and Alice does most of the cooking because—well, no one would want to eat most of the things I cook, especially me.

There is no such thing as male privilege in our home. We equally share KP duties around the house. When I say "equally" I don't mean the "same." Alice cooks and I do garbage, but we try to make sure that one or the other is not consistently bearing a greater share of the load of housework. And when there is a household chore to do, I don't just "help her out." I am a full partner in keeping the house in order.

While I don't consider these activities fun, I'm willing and actually eager to do them. I'm so grateful for what Alice does for me that I look for opportunities where I can share the load and do for her, for us.

The way a couple apportions the household workload makes a clear statement of the way they value each other and consider each other as equal partners.

Richard Matzkin

## Are You Ready For A Strong Woman?

This is a poem about powerful women by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nobel Prize winning South American poet and novelist.

### *An Intelligent Woman*

*"How many men have I heard say they want a smart woman in their lives?! . . .  
I would encourage you to think it over.  
Smart women  
they make decisions for themselves, they have their own desires and they set limits.  
You will never be the center of her life because it revolves around herself.  
An intelligent woman will not allow herself to be manipulated or blackmailed, she does not swallow guilt, she assumes responsibility.  
Smart women  
they question, analyze, discuss. they do not conform, they advance.  
Those women had life before you and they know they will continue to have it once you're gone.  
She is there to warn, not to ask permission.  
These women do not look for a leader nor a partner to follow, for a father who solves their life, nor son to rescue.  
They do not want to follow you or mark the way for anyone, they want to walk by your side.  
She knows that life free from violence is a right,  
not a luxury or a privilege.  
They express anger, sadness,  
joy and fear alike,  
because they know that fear does not make them weak in the same way that anger does not make them "masculine."  
Those two emotions and the others, all together, make her human. And now!  
An intelligent woman is free because she has fought for her freedom.  
But she is not a victim, she is a survivor.  
Don't try to chain her  
because she will know how to escape.  
Remember that you have done it before.  
The intelligent woman knows that her value does not lie in the appearance of her body,  
nor in what I do with it.  
Think twice before judging her on her age, height, volume or sexual behavior,  
because this is emotional violence and she knows it.  
So. . .before you open your mouth to say you wish for a smart woman in your life, ask yourself if you were cut out to fit hers".*

\*\*\*

A strong man will welcome the power and independence of a strong woman. He will value her strength and do everything he can to help her cultivate it. He will not be reluctant to share power with her. He will listen when she questions his authority. He will smile with approval when she asserts her righteous power, even when her power makes him uncomfortable. He will be open to learn from her when she is right. He will be unafraid to challenge her when she is wrong. In relationship, a man must meet the strength of a strong woman with his own. In this way, being with a strong woman makes a strong man stronger.

A weak man fears the strength and independence of a strong woman. He will do what he can to minimize her strength. He will try to control her, manipulate her, compete with her, belittle her, threaten her, neutralize her power. All because of his fear. And because he is unsure of his own power.

The way a man treats the power and independence of the important women in his life is a clear reflection of his own strength, or lack thereof. The same goes for the way he views all women.

A strong man celebrates strong women.

Are you a strong man?

## Becoming Love *Able*

*Q. Are you prepared to invite a powerful, independent woman like the one described in the poem into your life? Do you feel a tinge of fear at the thought?*

### Prejudice Against Women.

At the heart of prejudice is fear—fear of being controlled, of not getting a fair share, of being excluded or disadvantaged by the *other*. Those who are prejudiced usually attempt to keep the other, the stranger, “in their place.” At all times and in every country, women have been the target of prejudice, even in the supposed democracy of America.

When I was born (1943) and growing up, men tended to consider women to be second-class citizens. Men’s work was considered more vital, men’s opinions more relevant, men’s needs more important. It was scarcely 20 years prior to my birth that women (white women), were given the right to vote. Even then, the 19th amendment granting them that right, passed in the Senate by only two votes.

Women at that time had very few opportunities. Their supposed emotionality and irrationality disqualified them from “important” work, as did their comparative physical weakness. The vast majority of women were relegated to the home and expected to be mothers and housewives. There were few areas of employment open to them, mostly in jobs that involved caretaking—nurse, waitress, secretary, school teacher. And of course, prostitute.

We boys were taught bias against girls from an early age, mostly by our school mates. In school, girls were looked down upon by boys. The meanest insult from other boys was to be “like a girl.” We were shamed and ostracized if we didn’t excel in sports, associated with girls, or if we showed feeling and sensitivity. Our fathers demanded we “Be a man.” Even our mothers perpetuated prejudice, often treating the boys in the family as special. This prejudice against the “weaker sex” was baked into us and existed beneath our awareness. The inferiority of women was considered a given by both men and women.

Thankfully times have changed and are continuing to change. Women hold top positions in industry, science, medicine and government. More women than men are getting college degrees. Some fields, like psychology, real estate and public relations, formerly dominated by men, now have women in the majority. Women are standing up and refusing to be bullied by men who don’t treat them with respect. They are demanding equal opportunities, equal wages, equal recognition, equal respect.

In spite of the progress women have made, many of us men still hold prejudice against girls and women. Gender bias can exist within us in subtle, or not so subtle form. We might reflexively assume that we deserve preferential treatment because we are male. We might automatically give more credence to the opinion of a male expert over that of a woman. We might get ruffled when a woman beats a man in competition, and feel emasculated when that man is us. We might feel we have the right to interrupt or speak over a woman who is talking. We might feel we are entitled to touch a woman without her permission. We might tell demeaning sexist jokes to our buddies or not object when these are told to us. We might pass up an opportunity to teach our son when he shows signs of gender bias. We might bristle around a strong, opinionated woman, or one who demands respect. At home, though we might occasionally help with housework, we may consider cleaning and cooking exclusively “women’s work,” that we are pardoned from participating in.

Gender equality begins in our own heart and mind and in our own home. I think it would be helpful if you would look into your heart and mind to see where your prejudices against women lie. Then look for where those prejudices impact your partner. Examine how those prejudices are affecting your relationship. The biases you may hold against women cannot help but negatively affect your relationship with your partner and with the interactions you have with all the women in your life.

*Q. Do you hold gender-based prejudices? Describe them. How do those prejudices impact your partner and your relationship? If you were around a group of guys who were speaking disrespectfully about women, would you stand up and object?*

Richard Matzkin

## For Men Who Want to Support Women and End Sexual Harassment

There is a variety of bias that affects far more numbers of people than racial, religious, social and cultural prejudice. It is bias against half the population of the world. It is gender inequality and one of its active forms—sexual harassment.

Men who use their unequal physical power, financial resources and position of authority, to pressure vulnerable women into unwanted sexual situations are engaging in sexual harassment.

What can you do if you feel incensed by the unfairness, powerlessness, fear and humiliation that is part of many women's days? What concrete actions can you take to help protect the women in your life and women in general from sexual predators?

As a way to begin to engage with the problem, here are five steps, five resolutions, similar in form to the Loving Promises, that a man can make that addresses the roots of sexual harassment. Start with yourself. Why yourself? Because each man is the agent of his own change. That personal change, one man at a time, can extend out and awaken many other men.

Read the following five resolutions, contemplate them. Then, if it seems right, pledge to yourself that you will direct your will, and, to the best of your ability, incorporate these resolutions into your behavior.

The initial step for solving any problem is understanding. We start to understand by listening. Thus, the First Resolution.

**I Will Not Minimize Women's Complaints of Sexual Harassment.** *I will pay attention to the voices of women and make an effort to sense the genuine pain behind their words.* It's easy to become so numb to the barrage of accusations against politicians, actors and businessmen that the reality never sinks in. We often minimize by taking a "macho" approach; "Get over it. It's no big deal if someone grabs your ass. I would love it if a woman would do that to me." However, if you would try to empathize and imagine yourself in a woman's place, unwanted attention is not pleasant. It's scary. It would fill you with fear to be pressured by a person who is far more physically imposing than you, who holds power over you, sees you as only a piece of meat or considers it a challenge to break your resistance and who feels he has access to your vulnerable body.

You can deepen your understanding by listening to women. Pay attention to what they say, watch on TV. Read their stories in the news and #MeToo. Sense the fear, pain and humiliation these women had to endure. Know that this is just the visible tip of the iceberg. Not recognized are the nameless victims in secretarial, factory and service industries who continue to silently endure abuse.

If you can feel empathy for the survivors of harassment, you are ready for the Second Resolution, which deals with prejudice, and is identical to the 9th Loving Promise.

**I Will Regard Women as My Equal.** *I will immediately cease when I become aware that I am judging a woman inferior to myself, believe my needs are more important than hers, assume I cannot learn from her, or expect that I am entitled to better treatment.*

Many men believe that women are weak, less intelligent, too emotional and interested in dumb things like clothes, hair and feelings. Believing they are an inferior species allows the man to assume he is deserving of special treatment and gives him permission to try and control and abuse women.

Though attitudes are changing in America, there is still a pervasive gender bias that looks upon women as the "weaker sex," who are to be valued for their bodies and the way they look, rather than who they are, and whose proper domain is in the kitchen rather than the halls of business or government. This resolution affirms that women are not superior or inferior, but have the unquestioned right to stand as equals with men. It affirms that you should respect that right, and should always, always treat women as your equal.

When men genuinely honor women as equals, they will pay attention to women's feelings and not overstep their boundaries. Thus, the Third Resolution.

**I Will Honor Women's Personal Boundaries.** *I will be awake to a woman's responses to my words and actions and I will desist if I sense that my behavior is causing her distress.*

A sexual predator is not interested in his victim. For him, the woman doesn't exist as an individual. She is seen merely as an obstacle to his desire for control, as a source of ego gratification or as an object for sexual release. What

## Becoming Love *Able*

she feels is of no consequence. An honorable man cares about a woman's feelings and assumes responsibility for his actions. This resolution asks you to monitor your behavior and to be aware of the effect it is having on the woman you are interacting with.

There is no way of knowing what another person considers appropriate behavior, and no way of being sure of the effect of your words and actions on others. That's why you need to contemplate the meaning of "consent." You must take a woman's word as the truth. "No" doesn't mean "maybe." It means NO! The absence of "yes" also means no. When uncertain, err on the side of caution.

If there's a chance your behavior might be hurtful or misinterpreted, it's important to listen and look for signs of distress. If a woman seems fearful or uncomfortable in response to what you have said or done, maybe it's time to pause and check in with her and see if you've crossed her boundary beyond where she feels safe and respected.

It is entirely the woman's feelings that determine if you have crossed her boundary of acceptable behavior. It is not up to you to make that judgment. And you cannot argue with her feelings. If she feels violated, you have to honor that and act appropriately.

When you truly believe that women and men are equal as human beings, and are aware of how and when you might have caused her pain, you would tend to be reluctant to exploit women for your own selfish ends. Thus, the Fourth Resolution, which is similar to Loving Promise #21.

**I Will Not Manipulate Women.** *I will not exploit a woman's vulnerabilities in order to control her. I will not belittle, blame, threaten, deliberately hurt her with words or intentionally withhold money, favors, information or affection from her in order to get my way with her.*

A person is vulnerable who you hold power over or who is in need of something you have or something you can take from them. You are in a position of power over them, power to reward or punish. Manipulation is using that power to exploit the other person's need, weakness, fears, ignorance and insecurity in order to get your way. Most of the manipulation in the recent news is attempts by predatory men in positions of power to pressure women in exchange for sex. But there are other forms of manipulation that include belittling, threats, insults and shaming that are often used in unequal power situations. These maneuvers are tactics for maintaining control and can make a woman more vulnerable to sexual harassment.

We all manipulate to one degree or another. It is important for us men to look into our hearts and examine the methods we use to manipulate our partners and other women in our life. Acknowledge the damage this causes to them and to us. Then, if you feel ready to resolve to lay aside your use of manipulative behaviors, consider taking on this Fourth Resolution and make it part of your life.

The Fifth Resolution that men can make in order to do our part to reduce sexual harassment of women involves taking a public stand. Having resolved to listen to women's feelings, honor them as equal souls, respect their boundaries and avoid using manipulative behavior, the next step is to bring your understanding into action in everyday life.

**I Will Support the Rights Of Women.** *I will lend my ears, my voice and my time and resources to support the rights of women as equal human beings, not to be demeaned, manipulated or sexually harassed. I will bring this message to other men and I will express my protest when I see women's rights being violated.*

Though gender bias is not so prevalent now as it was in the past, many men still publicly speak about and treat women in demeaning, sarcastic and dismissive ways. Men face powerful hidden cultural pressures to maintain these prejudices. It takes awareness and courage for a man to oppose that pressure and treat members of the opposite sex with the honor and respect they deserve. And it takes even greater courage to personally step in and rebuke a man who is displaying these toxic attitudes and behaviors toward women.

Public rebuke is precisely what must be done in order to break the cycle of gender bias and sexual harassment. And we men must be called upon to do it. The message, "You must stop this disrespectful behavior towards women" is so much more persuasive when it comes from another man. The message becomes stronger and more insistent as men speak out in greater numbers. Lend your masculine voice to the cause. Stand up and march arm in arm with your sisters. Write letters to your Congressperson and the editor of your local newspaper. Urge the administrators of the schools your children attend to include coursework on gender equality in their curriculum. Don't just smile and allow men's sexist comments to pass unchallenged. Speak candidly with your male friends about their demeaning attitudes toward women. Start early and talk with your children when they are young. Explain to your sons about gender equality and teach them that it's OK to be friends with girls. Talk with your daughters about their

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equal worth and the necessity for them to have clearly defined boundaries. Contribute your time and resources to organizations that promote women's safety and equality.

In recent years, women have broken their silence and spoken out about sexual harassment. As a result, the world is experiencing an unprecedented moment of heightened awareness of the extent and devastating effects of sexual predation. Will this just be a moment? Will the media move on to the next big story and the awareness fade, as so often happens? Or will this awareness grow and blossom into a movement which will lead to lasting social and political change? If this is to happen, it must entail the active participation of men of conscience. Hopefully, you can be one of them.

## Part IV

# Working With The Promises

## Resistance To Change

*Giving up smoking is the easiest thing in the world. I know because I've done it thousands of times.*

Mark Twain

Much of *Becoming Love-Able* applauds the beauty of the Loving Promises and their power for transforming your relationship and your life. Now for the bad news. *The cards are stacked against you.* Despite your desire to be a more loving partner, your mind and body have strong impulses to maintain the status quo and likely will stubbornly oppose any changes you try to make. Your own mind may even try to sabotage you. No matter how strongly you desire change and how much you recognize the need for the Loving Promises, you, (the part of yourself that wants the best and highest for yourself), are at a great disadvantage. This healthy "you" is trapped in opposition to your mind and body's habitual behavioral patterns.

You may be like me. When the New Year rolls around, I start to dream up resolutions. These are good and noble vows, things that would be very beneficial if followed up . . . but more often than not, I don't. After a week or two, my resolve begins to weaken. I might gradually bend here and there, make excuses and exceptions. I'll tell myself, "Maybe just this one time I'll have this cookie", or "My knee hurts a little, maybe I should skip my exercise session." I eventually give up and end back where I began – eating more of the foods I had sworn not to and exercising less than I decided I would. Except now I'm feeling guilty for being so weak and letting myself down. This is the classic conundrum we all face when we embark on a path of change. As soon as we commit, resistance to and rebellion against the change we wish to make begins to set in. The firmer our commitment, the stronger the resistance.

The most potent weapon you have in your arsenal for grappling with resistance is your willpower. The Promises are about summoning your will. ("I will stand steadfastly by you." "I will remain present with you.") However, as everyone knows who has tried to quit smoking or alter their diet, the will is notoriously weak when it comes up against a deeply-ingrained habit. Will resides in the domain of the mind. It concerns an intention for the future. The reward is in the future and it takes concerted effort over time to make real that intention and claim that reward. Instituting willpower in order to coerce yourself to do something to which you have resistance puts you in the world of reluctance, of forcing yourself, of "I should," "I must," and "I have to." In contrast, an established habit is in the world of craving, immediate pleasure, comfort and ease, the easy world of "I enjoy," "I want," "I like." Pushing yourself to change by sheer force of will is usually not a very efficient, pleasant or long-lasting method.

If this sounds familiar to you, please don't blame yourself or put yourself down. You are in good company. No one is immune to resistance. Concerning the war within, even the Apostle Paul has written, "*I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*" (Romans 7)

With repetition, habitual patterns become deeply ingrained in the synapses of the brain and embedded in the muscles and in the gut. Habits form a groove. With each repetition, the groove becomes deeper and more difficult to escape. Old habits "feel right," while new habits feel odd and uncomfortable. We naturally gravitate to our usual ways of doing things unless we receive a strong, immediate, pleasurable reward for novel behavior, which rarely happens. (Immediate reward trumps future reward.)

So, for example, in my mind, I know that it is entirely right and beneficial for my relationship, my partner and myself, for me to try to forgive if I have been hurt by them (Promise #16). However, my emotions of anger and resentment say, "No way am I going to let that jerk off the hook." Another example. Even though I know that dishonesty is harmful to our relationship, (Promise #18), my fear of the uncomfortable consequences of telling the truth to my partner prompts me to lie to them. It will take determined effort for me to undo those ingrained patterns.

The collision between behavior toward my partner that is beneficial in the future, but uncomfortable now, and behavior that is detrimental in the future, but convenient and comfortable now, sets up an inner conflict, in which one part of me is fighting against another. The classic picture comes to mind, of a person with a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other. The devil is the person's sense cravings, supported by their devious mind. The angel is their benevolent intention, supported by their vacillating will. The devil keeps whispering in the person's ear, "Go ahead, have that delicious chocolate chip cookie," while the angel keeps saying "Be good. Think about your waist. Munch on a raw carrot instead." The devil has a much more compelling argument.

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By deliberately trying to change a habit, you come to the realization how powerful are the forces that impel you to maintain the habit. When you put an intention into practice, it often brings its opposite into being. Thus, a positive intention creates the conditions for negative intention to arise. For example, I want to avoid eating sweets, yet when I deny myself a chocolate chip cookie, I become hyper aware of my desire for the sweet. (Don't think of a cookie, don't think of a cookie, don't. . .) I want to control my temper, yet the more I try to dampen it (don't get angry, don't get angry, don't. . .), the more intensely my anger boils up. By concentrating on what you don't want, you are actually reinforcing that which you don't want.

Denying yourself pleasure or forcing yourself to maintain an uncomfortable condition puts you in a quandary between the flesh and the spirit. What often happens is, if the angel prevails and you refrain from eating the cookie, the devil redoubles his efforts. Once you give in to the temptations of the devil, the angel shames you with blame and self-recrimination. Then you promise that you will restrain yourself, but here comes that ol' devil's temptation. This process can lead to endless cycles of restraint, giving in, self-blame, restraint, giving in, self-blame, etc. This is the origin of the binge/purge cycle.

There is another dynamic that can be at work here which can increase resistance and dampen motivation. Psychologists called this the *approach/avoidance gradient*. This occurs when there is a goal that has both pleasant and unpleasant effects. So the goal is appealing and unappealing at the same time. For example, you want to get closer to your girlfriend, however you have feelings of inadequacy and fear of intimacy. As you make moves toward bonding (pleasant consequence), at the same time, your feelings of inadequacy and fears are activated, (unpleasant consequence). The closer you get to becoming intimate with your partner, the greater your fears and self-judgments become, thus motivating you to run for the hills. Many people deal with double bind conflicts by being frozen, doing nothing because they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. However, if you do nothing, your desire for intimacy increases, motivating you to making moves to become closer. And the whole process of conflicting motives starts again.

Another powerful dynamic that makes change difficult is the ability of signals in the environment and from other people to trigger your attention back to your old habit. Like Pavlov's hungry dog that would salivate when a bell was rung, certain signals elicit habitual responses. When in conversation you raise your voice, your partner has a fear response as she relives an image of her father looming over her, screaming. Your loud voice triggers her fear. You find yourself getting angry when your partner makes a minor criticism of you, because it triggers a memory from a previous relationship. Criticism is your trigger. These triggers, often unconscious, have a powerful potential to influence your behavior. And they exist by thousands in your environment and your partner. They keep you in the web of your old habits.

Yet another factor that makes change difficult is that you won't obtain immediate positive reinforcement from practicing beneficial behaviors or working the Loving Promises. Immediate positive reinforcement, like a pleasant result that happens right after you perform a good deed, is a great motivator. But it rarely occurs when trying to change a deeply ingrained habit. If you demand immediate results you'll be sorely disappointed. It's like you go to the gym and have a great workout. Then you go home, look in the mirror, and—no change. You go back a few more times—still no change. Disappointed, you decide it's not working and give up. Or you buy your partner flowers and afterwards she's still the same. You try gifting her with her favorite perfume—still no change. *The key to habit change, for yourself and others, is consistency.* You have to keep at it over time, without the expectancy that what you are doing will bring immediate change. Have faith that your efforts will pay off in the long run. They will.

I offer the Loving Promises as a solution. Yet, the Promises are themselves based on willpower and therefore are subject to the same conflicts between the angel and devil, the same conflicts from the approach/avoidance gradient, the same conflicts from powerful stimuli, the same conflicts from lack of immediate positive reinforcement. I write this not to discourage you, but to provide you an accurate assessment of what you'll most likely be facing when approaching habit change.

The Loving Promises treat acting in a loving way as if it were a conscious, willful decision, a deliberate choice to become a more loving person. Yet change is rarely the result of a simple deliberate choice. Change in thought and behavior can involve deliberate choice, but generally, the motivation for change is far more complex. Change, when it occurs, will most likely evolve from the confluence of a variety of mental, emotional and situational factors that lead a person to the condition of being "ripe" for change. To ripen is to be ready. A ripe fruit is one that has matured to the point where the flavors are at their peak and it is ready to drop from the branch of its own accord.

To be ripe for change means that you have gone through some sort of an awakening process. Perhaps you hit bottom, had a painful breakup, awoke due to a realization brought on by a serious illness, or came to a deep insight

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through longstanding contemplation. The difficulty and pain of your situation has finally broken through to your awareness, sounded an alarm and woke you up. This is the gift that can come from the despair of the dark night of the soul—the dawning of a new day. Something has changed inside and you now view the world with different eyes. This awakening has made you hungry for change and given you resolve to follow through with actions that will facilitate that change. When you ripen, you eagerly embrace change and engage more easily in activities, like the Loving Promises, that will bring change about. When you are not ripe, you are faced with an uphill struggle. Your devil is invigorated.

Being ripe is a good beginning. Becoming ripe can provide the motivation to practice new, healthy behaviors. With practice, these new behaviors begin to overtake the old ones. The new behaviors become the established ones and feel easy and comfortable, while the old ones feel odd and uncomfortable and are less likely to occur.

Growing more love-able is a long-term project for most people, and staying with that level of loving partnership is the work of a lifetime. The devil usually doesn't just disappear. He can be expected to repeatedly make his appearance, sometimes often. His arguments are persuasive and his temptations enticing.

But let us not be so quick to demonize our devil and so anxious to banish him and pursue our angel. The Prince of Darkness can actually be a source of light. He gives voice to a real part of us, a voice that we should listen to and not ignore. His words illuminate the conflict that is going on within us. When we attend to that conflict, work with it, dig in and get our hands dirty, we can move through it. If we are unconscious, we can be blindsided and resistance can take over.

The Loving Promises call up the devil. Every one of the Promises is an invitation for our devil and angel to get into the boxing ring and duke it out. To have to be dependable when you don't feel like it, to have to be generous when you don't feel like it, to have to be forgiving when you don't feel like it, these bring your internal conflicts right into the bright lights of the arena. It is important to pay attention to the conflicts and resistance you have about entering more deeply into love with your partner. The resistance is comprised of the barriers you have erected to love. Embracing, exploring and working through your resistance is a legitimate path to develop your ability to change.

With so many factors that cause resistance to changing habits, is permanent habit change even possible and if so, what will it look like?

We all want to be transformed, we all want to be struck by the lightning of enlightenment and have all our problems disappear and suddenly be the great person we know we are. It doesn't happen that way. We are creatures of habit. It's rare for people to make major changes in their life. When there are life changes, they are often subtle, almost unnoticeable.

I've been practicing the Loving Promises for many years and still the same habitual thoughts come up, and still I have to wrestle with my devil at times. But when I look back at the way I was, I realize, I am transformed.

To paraphrase the words of the well-known spiritual teacher, the late Baba Ram Dass, "I've gone to college and have gotten higher degrees, had years of psychotherapy, met many enlightened masters and have undergone a lifetime of spiritual practices, yet I still have the same hang-ups and neuroses I started out with. The difference is that when my old hang-ups come up, they are not as strong as before and I can say to them, 'Hello old friend, not today.' The work I've done on myself has given me the ability to choose."

You'll never be perfect. No matter how hard you try, your old habits will never disappear completely. But by working with the Loving Promises and other self-change practices, you will be able to choose to say, "not today." You will be able to more easily feel love in your heart and choose more often to follow the loving path. That is transformation.

## Helpful Suggestions

This chapter is meant to offer some help, in the form of ways you could approach working with the Loving Promises. See it as an overview, a summation and a reminder of important points that can help you develop a personal action plan. Most of the suggestions here have already been covered in other parts of the book and so will just be touched upon. See the following ideas as a summary of seeds to be planted. Each seed holds powerful truths. Contemplate them, consider how they apply to your life. Your mind will be fertile soil that will encourage the seeds to germinate, sprout and grow.

## Becoming Love *Able*

*\* Do whatever works for you to fortify body, mind and spirit. Use everything you can to make your practice of the Loving Promises easier and more effective.*

Before entering battle, the samurai warrior is fully prepared. He checks his armor and makes sure his sword is sharp. He readies his mind through focus and meditation. He beseeches his ancestors to protect him and give him strength. He makes sure there is nothing left undone. His life depends on it.

Engaging with old, destructive habits and tackling new, productive ones is like entering into battle. When you are fully prepared, you have the best chance of victory. Make use of everything at your disposal. The ensuing suggestions can be of help to make your work with the Loving Promises more effective. Your success depends on it.

*\* Motivate yourself by understanding and valuing the Loving Promises. Your knowledge of and respect for the Promises will serve to empower you.*

Like many people, I find it helpful to first have a conceptual understanding of things I am involved with. Knowing how the Loving Promises work and why they work is motivating. Understanding the Loving Promises will also serve to bolster your confidence in them. That understanding will carry you through when you hit a bumpy road. The Loving Promises make sense. The concepts behind them are logical and internally consistent. When you appreciate the rationale behind them, you strengthen your incentive.

Don't just read the Loving Promises. Deeply contemplate them. Consider how they apply to your life. They contain deep truths about love and are powerful and potentially life-changing. Understand them as a gift that can change your relationship and your life.

*\* Don't judge yourself harshly or compare yourself to others. Accept the totally unique individual that you are.*

Judging is comparing, and comparing can be harmful because every person is different from all others. Each has individual strengths and weaknesses. Each person moves in their unique direction at their own pace. Respect your uniqueness. Accept your differences and start from where you are. Admit who you are and stand in the center of your truth. If you start with wanting to be different, you are coming from an idea in your mind. If you try to start from where you want to be, or expect to be, or think others want you to be, you are in fantasy. Seek to move forward from your own center rather than trying to conform to some image of perfection.

*\* Don't demand change from your partner. Embarking on the Loving Promises is your adventure.*

Practically speaking, Loving Promises work best when both partners are on the same page, when there is a sense of teamwork, where both are moving toward creating a more perfect union. Without that unity of purpose and concerted effort, it is more difficult to sustain the Loving Promises. By all means try to enlist your partner to work together with you. If she is amenable to taking on the Promises, great! If not, no amount of discussion or cajoling will get her on board. Your time and energy is better spent working the Loving Promises on your own. Do a good job and your partner may get sucked into your energy and the powerful energy of the Loving Promises. Be the change you want to see in your beloved.

*\* Practice. Repetition is the way you learn.*

Old habits are deeply ingrained. Through repetitive practice, old behaviors become extinguished, and new ones are reinforced. Love is a set of learnable skills that can be acquired, refined and integrated through practice. Choose the generous response over the selfish one. Choose to calm yourself rather than emotionally react. Choose to apply the brakes when you see yourself becoming defensive. Make these choices over and over again. With each repetition, you are increasing the probability that the desired behavior will occur. A well-practiced behavior will recur automatically. When you practice loving behaviors, they will become your natural response.

*\* Keep a journal. Writing down your thoughts and experiences makes them more solid.*

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Thoughts, experiences, dreams and inspirations are ephemeral. They can float around in your head like butterflies and then take off, never to be seen again. Any of those inspirations could be life-changing. Using a journal to write down those thoughts and experiences makes them more solid. Once you have put them down in black and white, you can revisit them, think about them, allow them to percolate. You will also be able to chart your progress over time if you maintain a record. When you track your progress, positive results from practicing the Promises will energize you; negative results will inform you.

*\* Cultivate endurance. Understand that fulfilling the Loving Promises is a lifetime project and takes prolonged effort.*

If you expect instant results, what you will get is frustration. Change happens slowly. If there is a rapid change, it is usually the result of the gradual summation of a number of proceeding changes. My aunt called the ability to follow through with a difficult task "stick-to-it-ness." There are a number of aspects of stick-to-it-ness. Determination is the motivation to put out continuous persistent effort. Patience is the ability to wait and let go of having to have things happen when and how you want. Endurance is the ability to keep going over the long haul. Working with the Loving Promises is not a short sprint; it is a marathon, a lifetime project. It is important to understand this from the beginning. Keep reasonable expectations. If you don't, you'll give up when you are faced with your first major challenge.

*\* Aim to be consistent. Consistency generates trust.*

Consistency is required in two ways. The first is consistency within each Promise—working each Promise at all times, not letting up from time to time because you don't feel like it or it's too difficult. The second is consistency between Promises—working all the Promises, not ignoring some because you are having a hard time or you don't consider one to be as necessary as the others. When your partner senses your inconsistency, they cannot help but question your willingness or ability to comply with the Promises and your dedication to become a love-able man. They will lose trust. And you will lose purpose.

*\* Take on the small things. Big love is expressed in a multitude of small ways.*

Mother Teresa said it beautifully, "We can do no great things – only small things with great love." The Loving Promises sound sweeping in nature – "I will stand steadfastly by you," "I will serve your best interest," "I will participate in your life." These grandiose pronouncements are actually abstract. In real life, love is expressed in small, concrete ways – making coffee for your beloved, showing up on time, rubbing their aching shoulders, listening patiently to their complaints. Love is compounded action by action. If you could concentrate on doing the small things with great love, you will be giving "great love" to your partner.

*\* Don't overwhelm yourself. Be considerate of your needs and limitations.*

In any undertaking, there are moments when "the force is with you" and you can make tremendous progress with little effort. And there are times when the force is absent, and any amount of "forcing" gets you nowhere. It is important to keep aware of what your energies are telling you. The Loving Promises require a dynamic balance. If you push too hard and take on too much, too soon, you can go beyond your present limitations and throw yourself into overwhelm. On the other hand, if you lie back and fail to apply yourself, you can easily go nowhere and stagnate.

*\* Acknowledge your partner as your teacher. They know you better than anyone else.*

Your partner is perfectly positioned to provide you feedback about yourself and your behavior. They live with you or are with you often, interact with you intimately and know you far better than others do. Every day they hold up a mirror that allows you to see yourself. Of course, you want to see how grand and smart and beautiful you are, but sometimes the image that is reflected back to you is of one who is greedy and insecure. Your ego may be bruised at times, but if you can acknowledge and be thankful for the honest feedback you receive from your partner, it will provide valuable insights that are available to you no other way.

*\* Accept slip-ups and setbacks when they occur. Reverses are an important part of the learning process.*

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You are not perfect. If you were, you wouldn't need the Loving Promises. There will be times when you are not kind and compassionate, but would rather fight, times when you are not supportive, but are mentally absent, times when you are not truthful, but choose to lie rather than face your partner's ire. There will be times when you are manipulative, selfish, judgmental, non-communicative. When these times occur, don't wallow in self-blame. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off (and dust your partner off) and use the incident as a learning experience. Determine what it was that you said or did that created distance, hurt or upset them. Your understanding of your part and commitment not to repeat the offense will make it less likely to happen in the future. There are two ways to learn your lesson. You get it right, or you get it wrong. Though getting it right may be more comfortable, the learning may be less effective than getting it wrong. Understand that your failings are just part of the process of learning to love and can provide you with valuable insights if you are willing to listen.

*\* Seek support when you need it. Don't be a solitary hero.*

Problems that exist in the relationship can hang on for years – or forever. Rather than trying to be a hero and tough it out alone, reach out to friends and loved ones when you can use a hand or shoulder. Also, consider seeking professional support from like-minded mental health professionals or clergy. Sometimes the intervention of a disinterested and knowledgeable third-party can help an individual or couple find clarity and inspiration. It is also possible to obtain guidance from books, classes, recordings and workshops. For those who have a religious bent, appealing for blessing or intervention from a higher power through prayer is an important and valuable way of obtaining support. To be able to admit to yourself and to others, that you cannot handle your problems alone and seek help is a sign of maturity and strength rather than weakness. Arriving at the point where you acknowledge your need for help is the hard part.

*\* Lighten up and maintain a sense of perspective. A broader view will keep things in perspective if you become too serious.*

When you are feeling down and things are not going the way you want, it's easy to fall into a dark funk. Everything wrong dominates your mind. This is "catastrophizing," where the negative is blown way out of proportion. It's not life or death. Everything changes. Pleasant follows unpleasant; unpleasant follows pleasant. When you understand this, you'll feel more at ease when you see pleasure leaving and pain coming. Turn it around by widening your view and remember, "This too shall pass." Find the humor, count blessings, and place your attention on the positive. You are on a journey and are bound to take wrong turns and find yourself in dead ends before you reach your destination. Blow your perspective wide open by reminding yourself of your mortality. Even your worst problem will not matter when you are gone. Go outside on a clear night and look up at the stars. Your problems will pale when compared with the grand scale of the universe.

*\* Keep the company of like-minded couples. Being with happy, healthy couples will inspire you.*

Alice and I are energized by being in the presence of couples who have a magnificent relationship. There are so many miserable couples whose conflict, anger and competition can drag you down if you spend a lot of time with them. The atmosphere around loving partners will raise your spirits. Being in their presence is an education in love. It is truly a pleasure knowing couples who love each other and are putting their love into action. Their happiness serves as a confirmation that healthy, resilient relationship is possible and their presence in your life will reinforce your love for each other.

*\* Focus on the positive parts of your relationship. The affirmative will propel you forward; the negative will bog you down.*

With relationship everything is flux. The easy times are not the real relationship. The difficult times are not the real relationship. The good, the bad, the happy, the sad – all are part of the flow that is the stream of relationship. If you define your partnership as "troubled," you solidify that which is fluid. By focusing on problems, you give energy to problems. Attend disproportionately to what is dissatisfying in your relationship and that aspect will be blown out of proportion. You will be bathed in negativity, obstacles and discouragement.

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Rather than just attempting to reduce your unhappiness in your relationship, try increasing happiness. Focus on what's working, on the good parts. Put your energy into creating fun, closeness and good feelings. Attend to the positive things about your partner. Contemplate those things. Write them down. Share them with her. This positive focus will create an atmosphere where, when problems arise, they can be solved more easily. Positive focus is an affirmation that opens your life to positive experience.

*\* Address problems immediately. Don't wait until bad situations get worse.*

Problems don't normally go away by themselves. If you ignore them, they usually get worse. Do not tolerate the persistence of bad feelings between you. Sometimes just a willingness to make things better and a heartfelt conversation will do the trick. "I've been sensing a distance between us. Are you feeling that too? I don't want things to stay this way. How about you? Let's explore what it is that is causing this distance and see what we can do to get back in connection." It would be hard for anyone to reject such an open-hearted offering. It's so much easier dealing with hurt feelings, discontent and anger right off the bat, rather than trying to clean up the mess after an explosion.

*\* Assess your behavior. Determine if your actions are in line with the Loving Promises.*

The Loving Promises do not happen without your volition. You must apply your energy and attention. Attend to yourself. Are you slacking off or ignoring one or more Promises? Attend to your interactions with your partner. Are you speaking and acting with loving-kindness? Attend to her response. What can you learn from how she reacts to your behavior? Observe without judgment or blame, but correct your course if you are off base with the Promises.

*\* Re-envision issues that arise in your relationship as opportunities to practice loving more.* Problems are occasions to further your practice.

Everything is fuel for the fire of love. When times are good and there are no problems, the joy you both feel cements your love. When times are bad and you experience painful challenges, that pain deepens you and opens you to greater compassion and wisdom – if you are able to envision problems in a productive way. When your partner is acting unloving, that is the best time for you to practice love. The question to ask yourself is, "What is there for me to learn about love in this situation and how can I best learn it?" Looked at in this way, problems are portals to self-discovery. Their purpose is to help you awaken.

*\* Allow the practice of surrender. Letting go when appropriate is powerful medicine.*

Surrender is not giving up. It is not giving in. It is not being defeated. Surrender is a choice. It is choosing to let go of a behavior, feeling or idea that you tightly held onto in the past, but now is not appropriate and no longer serves you. So, you release it, and in that release is a relaxation and a sigh of relief. An example of surrender is letting go of insisting your partner go on a healthier diet when they are not ready, or giving up a day of golf in order to stay home to help her take care of the kids. The Serenity Prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous is a statement of surrender. "God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and Wisdom to know the difference."

Surrender is not always a choice you make, rather, it may be a choice made for you by the overwhelming intensity of the circumstances you find yourself in. Everything you do seems to have no effect or only makes things worse. You feel helpless, hopeless. You are frozen and depressed. You have reached "the dark night of the soul." All you can do is give up trying to control. . . and surrender.

*\* Be willing to delay gratification. Putting off your own immediate pleasure in favor of future benefit will pay dividends later on.*

A healthy relationship involves giving, and giving often involves putting off or foregoing your own gratification in order to meet your partner's needs. Delaying gratification includes a whole basket of related skills – tolerance, restraint, abstinence, patience, sacrifice, persistence, surrender, endurance, self-discipline. These are all qualities that help us become comfortable with hard work and repetitive practice.

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I work out in the gym three days a week. Most days, I don't like it. The other days, I hate it. Sometimes, if it's hot or I stayed up late the night before or I'm just not in the mood, I'm inclined to skip the workout or abbreviate it. I know myself, though. Barring a major calamity, if I fail to show up on the gym floor because of some rinky-dink excuse I give myself, I will have just lowered the bar and, next time, it will be easier to make excuses.

The secret behind every creative endeavor of lasting value, be it sports, arts, business, or relationships, is the ability to postpone immediate pleasure in order to take the sometimes laborious actions that will help us accomplish our desired goal. If we lack discipline, we will be a helpless slave to passing whims and momentary desires and cravings. Many of the Loving Promises require us to practice this skill in some form or another. Discipline is a necessity when working with the Promises.

*\* Maintain an awareness practice. Clarity of inner perception is an essential tool for the Loving Promises.*

An awareness practice – meditation, yogic postures and breathing, quiet contemplation, all serve to focus your consciousness. They cultivate "choice-less awareness" – a seeing without preferences. These kinds of practices are tools, like a magnifying glass, that will help you explore with precision what's going on inside your mind and heart. Clarity, insight and inspiration spring from the quiet of an inner-focused mind. That quiet mind, in addition to giving you self-awareness, will enable you to more clearly see and understand your partner. You bring the serenity you obtain from awareness practices to your partner and, as a result, your relationship becomes more peaceful. As a bonus, these are excellent techniques for reducing stress.

*\* Understand the Loving Promises as part of your spiritual practice. The root causes of most problems in relationships and in life are spiritual in nature.*

When Alice is shopping and I am waiting for her, tolerating my restlessness becomes a spiritual practice of patience. When Alice and I are in a conflict that cannot be resolved, my spiritual practice is to let go and accept. I sometimes find myself trying to prove I am right with Alice. If I realize that this is pride and ego speaking and I am able to hold my tongue, I'm engaging in the spiritual practice of humility. When I reach for the perfect peach for myself, I pause, reflect and then offer it to Alice – this is my spiritual practice of generosity. These are all part of my intention to become a more spiritual person by making patience, acceptance, humility and generosity more prominent parts of my character. When I am impatient, judgmental, prideful and greedy, I cause pain to myself and Alice and cause problems in our relationship.

*\* Treat your work with the Loving Promises as a practice of loving-kindness toward yourself. Become your own best friend.*

Befriending yourself, accepting yourself just as you are, is the foundation upon which the Loving Promises are built. Trying to improve your relationship with your partner while despising yourself, hiding from others and being unkind to yourself is an empty exercise. It cannot be done. Your self-love enlivens the Promises and gives them power to transform. And, at the same time, working with the Promises energizes your self-love.

*\* Apply the Loving Promises to the one you're with. They have shown up for you to love.*

It is an extremely rare thing to have found your soul mate. Few are fortunate to be with their perfect partner. You ask for love, yet, when love knocks on your door, you don't open because the visitor standing before you is not the image of perfection you have in your mind. If you won't accept anyone less than the perfect mate of your dreams, you're in for a long wait. There's always something wrong, something that doesn't fit. And who's to say that once you choose that perfect person, they will choose you.

When you are in a relationship with a partner who is less than perfect, should you withhold committing, keep shopping around until you find that perfect mate? I say "No." Unless there is a "deal killer," some quality your partner has that you simply cannot live with, or some internal voice warning you not to commit, I say give the best of your love. (This doesn't mean you should choose someone just because they have shown up at your doorstep. You should use discrimination when offering your gift of love.) The person you are with may or may not be "the one," may or may not be "forever," but it doesn't matter. If you love half-assed you are cheating yourself and your partner.

Richard Matzkin

However, if you apply the Loving Promises, serve up your heart and love with integrity and kindness and generosity, you cannot lose.

*\* Honor the spirit of the Loving Promises. Don't just follow the word.*

The spirit of the Loving Promises is different than the words. You can impress your partner by talking a good game and you can sleepwalk through the Loving Promises by rote. If you are inclined, you can probably even manipulate your partner for sex and induce other goodies by simulating compliance with the Promises. You can fake forgiveness by mouthing the words while seething in anger inside. You can fake transparency by sharing some genuine-sounding revelation, but withholding the real you. You can fake being present with your mate at the same time you are roaming about in your mind. These pretenses are empty and ultimately will end up harming you, your partner and the relationship. To really follow the Loving Promises you must surrender to them – put your heart and soul behind them, embrace them as your own. Only then will they transform you and your relationship.

*\* Don't wait for loving feelings to come to you before putting the Loving Promises into action. Understand that your actions will bring on loving feelings.*

The Promises are guides for ways to act with love. They will work even if you are not feeling love. Remember that you are the source of love. As source, you have a say as to where, when, how and with whom you will offer your love. As Saint John of the Cross said with great wisdom and simplicity, “Where there is no love, put love, and you will find love.”

*\* Accept that everything changes. Don't be attached to having things be the way you expect them to be.*

The nature of the world and of your mind is change. It is natural for the loving feelings you have toward your partner to wax and wane at times, as well as your sexual passion, your progress, your enthusiasm. If you expect consistency, you will be sorely disappointed. Be patient and do your work, and allow what happens to happen. The effort you expend will eventually be rewarded.

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The Loving Promises read as if they are strict commandments. They are not. They are pliable guidelines, not rigid regulations. They are directions in which to go rather than unequivocal destinations where you must end up. They aren't meant to be meticulously followed, at all times, in every circumstance. Use discrimination when applying the Promises. Let kindness be your guide. There are times when the raw truth is hurtful to others and should be modulated when dealing with a painful subject or sensitive person, times when a little manipulation gets the job done more efficiently, times when it is not necessary to show all and be fully transparent, times when it is OK to raise your voice in anger, times when it serves others to withhold rather than to give. Again, let kindness be your guide.

When is it alright to bend the Promises? What is the criterion to use? For Alice and me, some Promises are not meant to be broken or even altered. I consider committing to the permanence of our relationship (Promise #1) to be inviolable, as is accepting Alice as equal (Promise #9), and sexual fidelity (Promise #26). Vows like these, if broken, would cause a rift that would cripple our relationship.

While you might occasionally deviate from the words of the Promises, don't deviate from the intent. If you do waffle, do not do so solely for your own comfort or convenience. The overriding principles for applying the Loving Promises are kindness and compassion--kindness and compassion toward your loved ones, and kindness and compassion toward yourself. Be wary of any actions you take that are not kind and compassionate. Monitor the thoughts that pass through your mind because our thoughts give birth to action and govern who we are and who we will become.

*Watch your thoughts, they become your words.*

*Watch your words, they become your actions.*

*Watch your actions, they become your habits.*

*Watch your habits, they become your character.*

*Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.*

## Becoming Love *Able*

Lao Tzu. 5th Century Chinese Philosopher

*There are two wolves fighting inside us.*

*The first one is evil, the second is good.*

*Which one will win?*

*The one you feed.*

Native American proverb

Feed the behaviors you want to incorporate in your life, starve those you want to eliminate.

## A FINAL WORD

Now you have it—I've shared the hard-earned knowledge I gained from the first half of a life full of missteps, dead ends and wrong turns in my relationships—and the second half of a life where I am enjoying the fruit of the knowledge I gained. I hope you too will partake of this fruit. A love- filled partnership is delicious and fulfilling.

I am a sculptor. In describing ways of working with the Promises, I can use the analogy of creating a piece of sculpture. There are basically two ways you can sculpt. You can take away material or you can build up material. A sculptor who uses the former method first envisions in his mind the image of the piece he wants to create. Then he chisels away anything that is not the image until the finished sculpture appears in the stone. If you want to be a love-able partner, keep chipping away to remove thoughts, feelings and behaviors that are not loving. What remains is the love you have envisioned. You are the sculptor of your life and you yourself are your work of art, the work of love that you create.

A sculptor who produces his piece by adding, also starts with his mental image. He then models a basic supporting form, and then keeps adding more clay and works it until he has fashioned the sculpture to fit the image in his mind. So to be a love-able partner and have loving relationships, keep adding more and more loving behaviors in your daily interactions with the people in your life. What you will create is love. You are the sculptor of your life, and you yourself are the work of love you create.

The artistry of that love and that life is solely in your hands.

Like fashioning a piece of sculpture, the process of becoming a love-able person is so simple – simple but never easy. It requires that you open your eyes and ears and pay close attention – to yourself, to your partner, to the relationship, to all your relationships. As you interact with people, one-on-one, sense the effect of your words and actions. Attend to their responses. Become aware of what your heart is saying. Listen to the voice in your head, the feeling in your gut. Be clear in your intention to be a love-able man. Then, if a response is required of you, ask yourself the question—“Am I being kind?” “Is my behavior in line with the Loving Promises?”

If, in answer, you feel that you are behaving in a way that is harmful or is creating needless pain for your partner or others. . .*stop it*. In that moment you will be chipping away that which is unloving.

If you see a way in which you can act with more generous love. . .*do it*. With each kind act, each kind word, you will be adding more love to your life and to the lives of others.

*Change your behavior and act in a more loving manner.* This directive is the simple essence of the Loving Promises. This is the essence of creating a loving partnership, the essence of creating a meaningful life. When you apply your masculine strength and warm heart to become the kind and loving man you are meant to be, you will sculpt a grateful partner, a beautiful relationship and a fulfilling life. Do this and you will become a love-able man.

Your life and the love you create around you is your work of art. Make it your masterpiece.

## AUTHOR

RICHARD MATZKIN, MA, Psych. counts as his life's greatest accomplishment his four-decade loving marriage to his wife, Alice.

Retired now, except for speaking engagements, seminars and workshops, Richard was Director of a court mandated program for men who were violent towards their partners, and Program Director of a psychiatric hospital in Los Angeles. He had been active in men's work both as a leader and participant, and for years was a facilitator of men's therapy and consciousness raising groups. He is an accomplished sculptor, jazz drummer and multiple award-winning author, and has taught meditation in the Siddha Yoga tradition. He lives with Alice, three chickens and Roamio, the cat, on an acre at the end of a road in the hills above the small town of Ojai, California.

# Becoming Love *Able*

Men love differently from women. Not better. Not worse. Just different. *Becoming Love-Able* is a book about love, deep love, from a masculine perspective. Whether presently in an intimate partnership or wanting to be in one, the book will clarify what true love is and what specific behavioral steps a man needs to take in order to be able to create intimate, enduring relationships.

*“Becoming Love Able is a book every man would do well to read and every woman wishes the man she loves would have the good sense to devour. For any man who has the desire and courage to become love able, I highly recommend this book.”*

Jed Diamond, PhD

author of *The Enlightened Marriage: The 5 Transformative Stages of Relationship* and *Why The Best is Still To Come*

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