



# Getting Unstuck: Heal your Life

## Day Nine – Relationships

I have a friend who describes herself as an expert on relationships. She has a degree in psychology, and she points to her bookshelf of 35 relationship books. She also has three failed marriages, the last one lasting less than a year, and in the past decade, she's never had a relationship last longer than a few weeks before ditching it.

On the other hand, a gifted relationship coach with the perfect relationship for years would probably leave listeners thinking, "Well, of course, you're one of the lucky ones! But what about me?"

So here's the deal. I'm going to share my thoughts and some experiences with the kinds of things I continually see people struggle with, hear people complain and wonder about, and if any of that helps any of you at all, that's great! So here we go! If it's too painful, skip to the next chapter--but we're headed somewhere positive here. I promise.

To start, a few maybe hard to hear truths. Don't take offense...I'm including myself in these categories as well!

In the area of relationships, we are immature.

Well, at least less mature than in other areas--and for understandable reasons.

First, we spend less time on relationships. Work comes day after day, week after week, more or less throughout our lives, and like it or not, we learn at the very least to cope with it. Handling rent, balancing the food budget, keeping the check book straight--these are things we do continually. But relationships come, end, come, go, as periods at times during our lives, punctuated by periods of singledom. We just get more practice at everything else than we do at relationships. Or if in a long term relationship for years...it's a relationship with that person, and a change in partners later presents new challenges.

Second, when stressed or threatened, people tend to regress. It's a natural response...we retreat to what's more comfortable, to what we know better, and that's to what we used to be, not to what we've evolved. Imagine...first you're diplomatic. Then you get shorter and more pointed in your responses. Then you're a trifle brusque. Then...well, you get the idea. The emotional pressure increases, and the maturity of the responses goes down.

Seriously, think about some of the arguments you've had in the context of romantic relationships. These are at levels you would *never* use for any other adults. This is us at our worst, because it's the most immature/underdeveloped aspect of our experience. Here are a couple of reasons--Expectations and the Onion Effect.

We expect--no, even demand--things from lovers we would never reasonably expect from even our closest friends. And quite unfairly at that. Remember that person you met who was just the most amazing angel who ever walked the earth? How you walked around floating and glowing? And then how a few months later that same person was the most despicable, devious, horrific spawn of Satan in all the annals of evil? What happened? What's the truth? Neither. Both are your own projections, and both are completely your own invention, having little to nothing to do with reality. More about expectations in a moment.

When we get emotionally close to someone, we open up, and in so doing, unveil emotional layers we don't usually expose. While this is important to building trust, and while sharing deeply is an emotional need, these are also feelings we typically keep buried. They are raw, and we're still quite defensive about them, being so new at showing them the light of day. Consequently, we don't handle this process well, and when we feel hurt, we blame the only available person--our lover. The truth, though, is just that we've peeled into deeper layers of the onion. Reaction clouds logic, and the tears fall.

Anger is denial. True anger is a flash of a danger signal--something's wrong. Anything after a few seconds of that is all about ego--how could this happen to *me!* The real emotion is fear. Nothing true needs to be said in anger, because truth can always be said calmly and peacefully, standing on its own--or it's not really the truth. We raise our voices when we're feeling threatened, and in relationships (barring an abusive situation, of course), that threat is

internal. False Expectations Appearing Real. As the *Course in Miracles* says, “Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists.” But that takes emotional courage.

Expectations are resentments under construction. We each have a notion of how things are supposed to be, built from upbringing, culture, past experiences, and our own fantasies. But no one else shares this precise notion, and thus, everyone falls short! Losers. And we can never please them, no matter what we try. Ingrates. The one thing that can help--openly and honestly discussing these--never happens, or happens only partially, because we actually don't get that these notions are our own independent creations, not the ancient wisdom of all humankind.

So we rebury our feelings, only to repeat the process with the next partner. And when we bury our feelings, we bury them alive.

Nothing is particularly wrong with any of this. It is what it is. The important point is to become aware of it, and at that point, we can deal with it and grow, both individually and in relationships.

The problem is that we believe we are above all this. We are being perfectly reasonable, and all the others are being unreasonable. This is really the top place where we need to recognize that one finger pointing is three pointing back at us, but no, all that goes out the window. We are just right. But we aren't. We attract who we are.

And that's something most of us don't want to hear. So we pass the blame.

That, then, is the first step in getting unstuck in relationships. Recognize your part in all this, and start to understand the difficulties the others are having--similar ones to yours.

Next, recognize these relationships will be with human beings. They will not be perfect. They will make mistakes. I chuckle every time someone claims to seek a partner with no baggage. Good luck with that. Guess what? You are not perfect. You will make mistakes. And you have baggage. Don't look for someone without baggage; look for someone who likes you enough to help you unpack.

If you could do the above, you'd be far happier and far more balanced right from the start. But remember...right now you're reading this with your rational self. The trick is to learn to do this with your hurt, afraid, defensive, suspicious, cautious, uncertain, reactive immature self. The one with the baggage. It won't come at once...but progress, not perfection.

All that is a prerequisite for this next step--learn to have couple's conversations.

Sounds easy, right? You're a good listener.

Well, truly, most people aren't good listeners at all, because all the while others are talking,

we're thinking about what we're going to say when they stop. We aren't really listening at all, and we aren't at all prepared to hear anything other than what we're expecting to hear.

The problems with that are obvious, but bear repeating. First, we don't really learn about what's going on with our partners. And second, we aren't being fair about the discussion--far from a balanced hearing, we're preparing our counter-arguments in advance of hearing and honestly considering what's being said. Yes, we believe we are making an honest effort. Are we? Is our attention even focused? Worse yet, is there a lot of mutual interrupting going on? That's not exactly the highest form of communication.

So something else to work on. And important. But not what I mean by learning to have couple's conversations.

I'm talking instead about making decisions as a couple. And not about the curtains or what to do Saturday night or whether it's time to give the dog a bath. I mean decisions about the relationship.

How many times has someone made a unilateral decision about the relationship? This is appropriate in a new relationship just starting out--if someone decides it's not right, that happens, and is why we date, to find out how people fit. But once in a committed relationship, it belies the concept of relationship. By a couple's conversation, I mean taking those thoughts and feelings to a partner and having a real talk about them--not about why you're packing already, but about how you can work on this together.

No, that doesn't mean you're "trapped." It means taking the ending as slowly as we often take beginnings, and doing so with respect and openness for our partner. Maybe this will be the end. That happens, and that's OK. But maybe also you'll work through it, and be glad you did. Don't be in such a rush for the door. You may hear things that make you feel very different, but either way, this is a path to growth. If you don't--you'll repeat the same patterns over and over again, with different partners who turn out to be always the same.

And that's what I really want to talk about in this chapter--a path to growth. Aside from the obvious, this is, I firmly believe, the main reason and the most wondrous aspect of a relationship.

That growth is difficult. It's kind of like telling people afraid of roller coasters to raise their hands in the air instead of gripping the bar with white knuckles. However excellent a case you make for this--it's so not going to happen. Fear is going to rule the day, not reason. Isn't that interesting--that fear rules our love lives? That's our goal--to live in love.

We are meant to live in love. We dance our independent dances, sure, and rightly so...but we are made to come together as well. We are built that way, built to feel driven to come together, built to find great pleasure in the physical touch, the ecstasy of joining, the warm emotional closeness, the fascination in sharing our minds, the spiritual connection, the

wondrous free flow of energy between partners, the synergy of enthusiasm, the selfless giving, the rightness of it all, the many positive effects on our minds, bodies and psyches.

Not the least of these benefits is the connection to the divine. David Price Francis touches on this in his book *Partners in Passion*, where he describes (along with a lot of other things) seven levels of relationships, each one more evolved and closer to the divine. After relationships where I felt a strong sense of connection separate from distance constraints--I could feel in my gut when she was focused on me--I then experienced a wonderful "Level III" relationship, where her energy was present even when we were apart, and when strong emotion or thought about each other instantly transmitted to the other. Even today, as friends, that connection remains. As Francis describes, a relationship moves from being "partners in passion" to being "partners in evolution," a transformation that would not have happened (or at least not so readily) if not for the relationship.

We all know that floating feeling, yes? That joyous timelessness? That ecstasy in which we lose touch with all else, right? And the beautiful afterglow, basking in love?

And then it ends. Our moments of joy used up.

Here's the thing--in those moments, we are as we are supposed to be. Call it the Vortex, the Atman, the Divine Union, Transcendence, doesn't matter...it's a taste of how we are supposed to feel most of the time, not once in a while. So why don't we? What gets us stuck back in the mundane?

Fears. We have a lot of trouble accepting things are meant to be happy. We're looking for that other shoe to drop.

And Projections. OMG! What if I'm now stuck with this person forever! Would it be horrible?

Those two tendencies alone make it miraculous anyone ever gets together long term. They've both got self-sabotage written all over them. And they both present challenges no human could ever overcome--so that leaves no potential partners whatsoever. All imagined terrors, with no end to what the imagination can construct. It's self-destructive, and it belies everything we know and believe (or at least say we do) about life, how we want it to be, how it is meant to be. You can't embrace something you fear, and you can't grow by predicting disaster continually.

So first...chill out. Learn to accept, to grow, to experience, to be in the moment.

We learn in relationships, and in a couple of ways.

Ever hear of the Johari Window? Imagine a quadrant. The first line is things you can see (i.e., recognize), and the second is things you cannot see (recognize). The first column is

things your partner can see/recognize; the last column is things your partner cannot see/recognize.

So there's an area where you are both on the same page. There's also an area where both of you are clueless. And there's an area where you see what your partner doesn't, and another where your partner sees what you don't.

That's the first problem--and the first need--with relationships and learning. We think we're on top of it, but we're largely clueless, and much of what we think we know is not only mistaken, but also arrogant to pretend we could know it at all. Our individual vision is limited.

But the strength of a healthy relationship, one with trust and communication, is that second pair of eyes, that second mind, bringing extra information and perspectives from different vantage points than any person can ever have alone. "I know and you don't" is simply always wrong--at the very least, an incomplete and hence flawed picture of reality.

To get to that communication, that trust, that free flow of knowledge and perspective--we need to let go of ego. You simply cannot stand reasonably above or ahead or in place of another person--you must stand side by side. And isn't that what you wanted from the relationship? If you can't do it, learn to do it. No relationship can happen without it in any real and lasting terms. If this is not a person you can or choose to do this with, that's fine, find another. But take responsibility--personal responsibility--for the change and the reason for it. Otherwise, you'll just repeat the same patterns with new people.

The second way we learn (and the second problem) is through growing with another person.

We don't really grow by ourselves. Yes, we can work on ourselves, and that's beneficial, but we are always going to grow in our own image by ourselves. To some extent, that's helpful, because we can follow our own vision without distortion. But very, very few people ever actually do that. Fears, excuses, time constraints, justifications, all very human, all very common, chip away at most people's dreams and visions. Day to day redundancy thrives instead. But a second person shakes out of those self-made ruts, those worn paths we follow not by inspired choice but by established habit. Do follow those dreams, but the interaction with others keeps you from creating a pretty fiction for yourself.

We tell ourselves all kinds of things that don't really hold up to careful scrutiny. The mere presence of other people quickly shakes that foundation. And while that can happen negatively, as in "the turkeys are dragging you down," it also wakes you up to mediocrity, error, and self-delusion in ways that can clarify your thinking and direction and purpose, leaving you better able to follow your dreams. Now, in a relationship--this is, I would hope, by definition a person you see as a positive influence in your life, not a dull anchor, so assuming you chose someone positive in the first place, let that person in.

Lots of people tell themselves they do just fine by themselves. I've said that myself, more than once. But those periods of retreat are periods of abstinence from growth. Isolation is helpful for a time, but a detriment long term. It is easy to be a holy man on a mountain. Only when we can take who we've realized and share do we really move beyond where we are stuck. We don't live as well alone as we think...we just live as we are telling ourselves, and support the myth.

We are meant to be together. Our physical selves are made not only to fit, but also for that union to be pleasurable, with hormones driving us to the pairing. But our emotional selves also are driven to come together--the stereotypes of strong and nurturing are simplistic, but underscore that we recognize a dynamic here. The same applies to our mental approaches; again from the stereotypes of single-focused and broadly-focused to a more complex reality, we recognize a dynamic here as well. Male and female energy differs as well, and even flows differently. Between two people tuned to each other, an amazing cycle of energy flows naturally, each increasing the energy in the other, she increasing his masculine energy level, he increasing her feminine energy level, higher and higher, a beautiful synergy building taking each far beyond any level either will reach alone. And we've all felt this, at least at times.

It's so perfect. So why do we have so much trouble with this? We even institutionalize those problems in our culture, assuring ourselves they are real. They aren't. They really, really, aren't. Here's my take on a few of these. I hope it helps.

I'll freely acknowledge that recovery from alcohol taught me about a lot more than alcohol. It happened in a backwards way. I *had* to take time and face things, completely and honestly, thoroughly and without shortcuts. It was not easy. But it *was* productive. Things I'd normally have rushed through, I had to work through. No more running. Turned out to be a good learning experience for relationships as well.

### Time to take time

Sometimes we do need to take time, and we don't always recognize this.

For a short while in early recovery, I was lonely and upset. But then I realized that I needed to focus on myself, and that I simply wasn't ready to pursue a relationship. Yes, an obvious point, I know, but it's one that saved me a world of frustration. I could have easily beat myself up over why I wasn't meeting anyone or dating, but realizing I just wasn't ready--and that everyone could see that too (and why I wasn't meeting anyone to date)--allowed me to relax, to stop worrying, and to focus on where I was at the time; the time to date again would (and did) come.

One acquaintance, Greg, would love to date again. He's divorced; he and his ex got married really because they wanted marriage and children, rather than a real commitment to each other, and so it didn't last, and they parted amicably. Now he'd love to be in love again and settle down. And he'd be a great catch! He's easy-going, hard-working, attractive, a super

nice guy--and he's frustrated that he just can't meet anyone. Know why? He's got a sign on him, "Stay away! I'm not ready!" and everyone can see it--but him. If he could just recognize and appreciate where he is at the moment, he might not be happier just now, but he'd be a lot less frustrated, and could take the time to heal where he needs to heal.

Another friend, Kevin, called me one evening to ask a question. "The other night, when you were saying I wasn't ready--how do you know that?" It wasn't a challenge; he was sincerely asking how that was so apparent to others when it wasn't clear to him. "Kevin," I told him, "You mention your ex continually--*everyone* knows it!" But these are sometimes surprisingly difficult truths to see for ourselves. A few months later (when he had stopped driving by her house), he settled down, stopped mentioning her, looked a lot happier--and someone considerably more attractive to a potential partner, now that he's more himself again.

When we have to heal, take the time. Time takes time, and that's OK. Let it.

The same goes for people who pretend to themselves they're looking but clearly aren't in any meaningful way. Ever see a dating site, and think "All these profiles look the same"? After all, who DOESN'T want "someone who can make me laugh"? Can you picture it? "Please be serious--I don't like to laugh." If nothing about a profile shows that person in any unique way, that person isn't sharing who he/she is--and gender seeking a gender isn't very convincing. Open up and be a person. People will like that.

Notice the world around you. When I find people aren't drawn to me anymore, I stop and consider--what am I sending out? If I'm consciously withdrawing for a time and a reason, that's fine. If I'm just sending out negative "keep away" messages without awareness, I need to step back and take a look at what's going on with me.

When will I know I'm done? The people attracted to me again will tell me. And the same for you.

### Letting go of baggage

I've heard many people wonder this: "Could I ever get past the baggage?" I know the feeling. And...yes, you can.

When I was 18 months into recovery, my head starting to clear, I used the clarity to start to think ahead. I took one day a week for "Tim Day," and headed out to the Adirondacks for a long hike, sometimes up a mountain, sometimes into the John Brown's Tract wilderness. I'd experienced before a real clearing of my head on long hikes for years; by the sixth hour, things that had seemed confusing and overwhelming became simple and straight-forward. So on this day each week, I simply got up and walked away from everything, taking a day for myself, coming back to it all the next morning.

There's a real peace in taking time to let the mind rest. And I've used long walks to work



through things since childhood. Add to this the wilderness, where the constant sound and energy of human society starts to fall away, the true reality of nature quietly shining through. At least this works for me--you'll find your own way.

So on these walks, enjoyable as they were--I kept missing someone to be there with me. I imagined what she would be like. Or maybe that I'd meet her sitting in a lean-to. Who knows.

But how? I had just gone through horrible pain in recovery. I had fantastic hurts from past wrongs, from difficult breakups and love lost to the trauma of a partner's betrayal. I was a wounded animal, carrying incredible hurts. I felt like witches were flying all around me, taunting me: "You're no good! You're damaged goods! You're no good for anyone!" Was this my future? Was this what I had to live with for the rest of my life?

At this time, I was preparing material for a Literature of Sports class, searching for background to share about major Negro League stars, and I came across Satchel Paige's quote, "Love like you've never been hurt." I couldn't imagine how I would do that. But I could clearly see that if I didn't learn how, I would never have healthy relationship again. I would learn how.

It. was. not. easy. But it was a lesson in several things, starting with Acceptance. For Acceptance, I would have to let go of all feelings of being wronged. Resentments had to go. I had to find humility. I do not mean deciding everything that had happened was fine. I do mean letting go of the part of me that wanted to cling to it---my ego. Face it. These long festering hurts, once we get past all the justification and the righteousness, all boil down to "I can't believe you did this to ME!" Time to get over myself. And that, certainly, was. not. easy. But it *was* necessary. Absolutely, bottom line necessary. If I couldn't do that, I couldn't heal and let go of the hurt I had packed up to drag around. I had to do it. And it took time.

But I felt *so* much lighter! No longer was I having replays of incidents long past, existing solely in head, clinging to victimhood like a badge. And once I recognized what was happening, things got easier. Feel the pain. Work through it. Let. it. go. Over. Done. History.

Consequently, when the Holiday Season came up--which I define as Thanksgiving through Valentine's Day--instead of dreading it, I starting thinking about how to make my own new happy traditions. One of those things was to get out and meet people, just to have fun, to start to live again. And because of that--I met Beth...and sat having a seven hour conversation over coffee. I was in a wonderful relationship again. Magic and Romance had returned.

### Working through the painful moments

After years of experience in relationships, when things got difficult, when she and I weren't seeing eye to eye, when conflict arose and wasn't going away, fortunately I knew just what to do. So did she. Run!

Um....no. Couple of reasons.

The first is that you haven't resolved anything. Like it or not, however improbable this seems, you had a hand in why this person is so unreasonable. And it's bothering you this much because, however improbable this seems, you're looking at qualities you don't like in yourself. I know that's going to be hard to see. But it's true, and if you don't work through it, you'll simply carry the problem to your next relationship.

You've seen this, right? People you know who seem to always date the same kind of person and repeat the same kind of problems? You do this too--and you don't have to keep doing it.

The second is that you'd be running from exactly the personal growth opportunity you need. We don't attract problems we don't need to face--because we wouldn't see those things as problems; that you've defined this as a problem marks it as a lesson crafted for you--ironically, by you. Not how we're used to seeing things, I know. But imagine how different all these experiences would be if you could get a grasp of this perspective. Before...you're a victim at the hands of another and a situation. Now...you're the one crafting the experience.

So what to do about it?

Slow down. Stop reacting. This took me a very long time to learn. In fact, I only learned it at the hands of very good and very sane friends. I had been dumped--by email--with no warning. I was hurt, and my impulse was something like, "Fine. There goes that. I'll just tell her to mail me my stuff and I'll have to move on."

"Not so fast," said my friend. I thought he didn't understand, and explained she had made it quite clear we were through. "Maybe not," he said. "Give it a few days." I thought he was insane, but I listened to him, and didn't send the long email I had written and read to him.

He was right.

When I calmed down after a week or two, I jotted down the objective things I wanted to say--not the angry hurt ones. In particular, if we were going to end what had so recently been a marvelous relationship, I at least wanted to work through it, to not carry the same pain and lessons forward. After all, I had just worked so hard to let go of baggage; I didn't want to start collecting a new set! Consequently, I had already been taking long walks to work through hurts and confusions and difficulties. We were reflections of each other, and I

wanted to learn the lessons.

We had set up a time to talk. She did not make it easy--cold and unyielding. I was glad I had jotted down my objective thoughts, and let the other stuff go. I felt like I was walking through a wall of fire, with only the help of my Higher Power--and part of this experience led me closer to my Higher Power. And when I explained what I wanted to do and why, she began to soften: "Well, THAT I'm willing to do."

In a few weeks, we got back together. Then we broke up again. Then we got together again. Then we broke up again--this time terminally. But each time brought fresh lessons. In particular, this was NOT about just her--it brought up old, buried issues from past relationships every time, finally clearing it away, no longer to pop up in new relationships. Done. Growth. What a blessing that is!

And what if we could learn to see all these processes as the blessings and healings they truly are. Imagine how substantially we would change, how our experience would change, how the stories we tell about our relationships would change--no longer sour, but healing.

Why won't you share your feelings?

Without a doubt, it's true--some people won't open up and share their feelings.

But remember, hard as it is to see, to face, to admit--we attract our experiences, and the problem not only *may* be, but probably *is*, partly--or entirely--our own fault.

Sharing feelings in relationships isn't like expressing our feelings in day to day interactions, even with our friends. Why? Most of those day to day conversations are "safe." Even if you're working through something difficult, facing your friend isn't the difficulty; in fact, your friend is helping you through this. The difficult part showed up before your friend became involved. And certainly relationships have these type of conversations too. That's not the problem I'm addressing.

Those "friend" conversations--whether with friends or within relationships--are easy because they are *reactive*. No effort, no opening, no probing new depths was necessary to start; the damage came first, then the coping. A reaction. We can learn more about each other in these interactions, of course. We can build trust, and we can bond over them. And all that's important, sure. But it's not difficult (other than the discomfort of having to go through the original experience and its aftermath at all).

I'm talking here about those deeper feelings, the ones we have to sort out, the ones we keep buried, or at least out of sight, a good portion of the time. The ones that touch our deepest hopes and dreams and truest selves, and hence the deepest doubts and fears and insecurities. Those feelings. The not so easy ones. And in this pile--the deepest feelings about the relationship itself, how it feels, how you feel about the other person, not generically, but the

entire kaleidoscope, the mixed bag, the everything possible and everything dreaded--though we'd never admit it.

So first, before any such sharing can take place, we need to start with a person who looks into that muddy pond and strives to feel the clarity beneath the swirls. Nothing to share about those deep feelings if not. Blood from a stone and all that.

Let's assume, though, that those feelings are there, and this person is ready and willing to share them, even if those feelings are nebulous, shifting, and uncomfortable sometimes.

Here's why those feelings don't get shared.

1) A partner who doesn't listen. Our hesitant Sharer gathers courage and begins to explain in starts and fits, but the "Listener" keeps interrupting, perhaps with good intention, but interrupting none the less. This can only shut down the Sharer, either immediately or after a short time. Two reasons. One, what's the point? The Sharer can't get a feeling out among the distractions and the interruptions. And Two, all those interruptions are tangents, taking the conversation *away* from those feelings you want shared. Even if well-meaning, the interjections are *preventing* the sharing of real feelings. This leaves the Sharer frustrated, even if silently, and the likelihood of a future sharing just dropped considerably.

2) A partner on the defensive. For each point the Sharer brings out, the "Listener" responds as if there's a threat here that must be countered. Not only is this annoying, an interruption, and a tangent, as in #1, but also this is ultimately starting either a fight where there was not one to begin with or, if the Sharer decides not to get in to it, a resentment seething under the surface. Certainly, the Listener has taught the Sharer the pitfalls of sharing and why it should never be done.

3) A partner who judges. For meaningful sharing to actually work, the relationship has to be a safe place for it. If everything brought up is paraded before the jury, those deeper, sensitive, tentative feelings are NOT going to be shared--at least not with the partner.

4) A partner who's jealous. And so, as a result of #2 and #3 in particular, the Sharer, when need pushes feelings to the surface, shares them with someone else. If that's a problem for that partner, double resentments will be building. And all of it needlessly.

More benignly, a partner who wants to be the role hearer of feelings shared is also being unrealistic. People need friends and non-romantic relationships outside of their romance; it's healthy. Let your partner go with the guys, with the gals, and don't trouble yourself over what they talk about. It's the sign of a mature and vibrant person.

5) A partner who's controlling the relationship. If one person is always calling the shots, or trying to, deep sharing is not going to happen. The Controller only wants to hear what's on the talking points agenda--whether the Controller recognizes that or not.

All of these make impossible any real couple's conversation. If you want your partner to share, to really share deep feelings, be willing to make it safe, for it to be alright no matter what comes up, to let it go without advice unless specifically asked, and most important--to listen.

I once had an angry partner ask, "So what, I'm just supposed to listen?" If she really wants to know what I think--Yes.

And if you don't really care to hear your partner's feelings...perhaps you aren't a good match.

### Threatening the relationship.

"Well, then maybe we shouldn't be together." If you're going to pepper your romantic discussions with comments like this, break up now and save time. Good grief. This has to be the one safe place, where you're in each other's corner, where you can have disagreements, difficult conversations, and even fights and know nobody's going anywhere. If the trump card is potentially leaving, it's already over--you just don't know it yet.

I cannot emphasize enough this point. If the two of you aren't committed to a "we work this out, not threaten to get out," then you aren't in a committed relationship (probably never will be with this person), and you are never going to have a true couple's conversation.

It's the "we sit down and discuss this with intent to somehow work it out" that marks a communicating couple and a committed relationship. Without that, you have neither commitment nor real relationship. An ending, if it came, would be a mutual decision.

Obviously, relationships end unilaterally all the time. Just be aware that if you're threatening the end, you're at the end already, and aren't trying to do anything different than find the exit. If you don't see it, perhaps you should ask yourself why.

### Share your own feelings.

You can't expect a very long relationship if you want to imitate the sphinx. Trust and commitment are built when mutual sharing, when mutual "putting-oneself-out-there" risks are taken. To listen, even well, but not share, is to distance oneself from any real connection, and as before, the relationship is over before it begins.

"As I learn to love myself, I automatically receive the love and appreciation that I desire from others. If I am committed to myself and to living my truth, I will attract others with equal commitment. My willingness to be intimate with my own deep feelings creates the space for intimacy with another. As I learn to love myself, I receive the love I desire from others."

--Shakti Gawain

### Impatience for “The One.”

This ironically kills more relationships, and faster, than fighting.

On the face of it, it's completely understandable. Who doesn't want to meet that special someone? Who doesn't get tired of the dating scene? Who wouldn't want to settle down and get on with happily-ever-after? And as people get older, they seem all the more certain that there's no time to be wasted--you're It, or you're Out.

The problem is two-fold. First, it's unrealistic. Do you normally expect your intuition and gut feelings so powerfully unerring that you are always right? You just know? And, really, do you really expect a relationship, a real one, to just spring up like that?

I'm a romantic. I am. Love at first sight rocks. And rarely lasts. Powerful relationships take time to build. I once heard a friend say, “It's been three months--we should know by now.” Really. If a teenager said after three months he/she had found the love of his/her life and was rushing off to get married, you'd step in to talk some sense into that misguided notion. Guess what? Your notion would be equally misguided in deciding three months was any guide to long term happiness. You're just starting to get to know each other!

Slow down. Time takes time. I'm sorry. But it does--and it will be worth it. If you don't--no relationship will ever be worth it.

The second problem is that this rush to judge whether someone is “The One” puts too much pressure on a relationship that is only just being built. You might very well have found this person, but in the frenzied examination to judge the permanency of a relationship with someone you've only just met, you're going to kill what's starting to grow--even if it's growing into something truly marvelous.

“I won't settle for less.” Then you're going to be alone. No one can pass those barriers; they are barriers to growth.

Build friendships. Date different people. Enjoy people even when you don't know what's going to happen, if anything. Let things grow.

You may find yourself in love.

And if things don't work out ultimately--it's NOT a loss, unless you've missed the entire point of this chapter. It's growth, and in particular, growing into the person your better partner would want.

But know this--real relationships are messy. There are conflicts and disagreements. You'll get on each other's nerves sometimes. There will be irritations and disappointments. And if

there aren't--then you aren't opening up and sharing.

Bless each other. Learn. Grow.

And Love.

### Watch your metaphors

When we're describing feelings, we often turn to metaphors (or similes--same difference for the point of this discussion). Remember, though, that metaphors are perspectives, not facts.

Years ago, when I was distraught over a lover's betrayal, I felt like a sword had been thrust right through me. And that perception fueled my anguish for weeks. When I started moving into recovery, however, I first faced a hard (to me) reality--I did NOT feel like a sword had been thrust right through me--that would feel MUCH worse! That reality (adapted from Tony Robbins' material) showed me that at least part of the problem was in my head and in the story I was telling myself. I pulled back from that description, paid attention to what I was telling myself, and began to heal.

Quite a few conflicts are stretched out by one metaphor in particular: "He/she knows how to push my buttons." When did you become a machine, so predictable, so readily manipulated? You don't have buttons to push. Take a look right now--see? Not there. What you *\*do\** have is an ego--and that's what people are pushing around.

Think of this as T'ai Chi. When force is applied, the T'ai Chi master yields before it, using the opponent's own strength against him/her. When there is only soft nothingness, there is nothing to grab or hit. But when there is resistance, then the opponent has a target to strike against.

Your buttons are your resistances. Yes, those close to you know them well. And maybe sometimes they are used against you intentionally (though probably far less than you think). But they are still *your* resistances. Your problems. Your areas requiring growth. And they're probably pushed not as often as you believe, but rather, involve you pushing them against things yourself.

Let go. Grow past these blockages. There will be nothing to push.

And your reward? Serenity.

Incidentally, this is also practical. Years ago, in business, I learned to use T'ai Chi in day to day interactions. When I didn't push, but yielded, my "opponents" found their strength used against them, leaving me free to calmly pursue my objectives while they got tangled in their own egos. In short, I let them win the argument--and I achieved my bottom line purposes.

Recognize also that often when people are “pushing your buttons,” they actually are struggling with their own issues; it has nothing to do with you--you’re just in the room (with an ego ready to be pushed). Instead, put a mirror (figuratively) between you and the other person--this “pushing” is about them, not you. Don’t then make it about you. To the extent that it is--is what you’re seeing in your own mirror.

Sort out these individual issues. Give each other space to work them out, with love. Make allowances for each other, without resentment.

Then, the two of you can begin to have real conversations about the real matters between you--the lovely as well as the things that need working out.

### Living as a couple

Bliss will be punctuated with friction. Know this. Conflict between people is inevitable. See these as the opportunities they are for growth. Walking from them will only ensure they are repeated, with this person or another.

We seem hardwired to find things going wrong. Change this. If we could truly open our eyes, we’d be walking around in wondrous bliss moment to moment. Certainly, in the context of our romantic relationships, we can find the value in appreciating what we have.

I forgot where I heard this story, but I love it:

One woman’s husband got up every morning, toasted a poppy seed bagel, and carried it over to the counter to add topping. In the process, he dropped poppy seeds on the kitchen floor, and he seemed oblivious to them. So every morning, this woman would clean up the poppy seeds.

One morning, perhaps just a lot of things were going on in her life, so she wasn’t her usual self, she did so with some resentment. “What would it take,” she wondered, “For me not to have to pick up poppy seeds every morning?!” Then something hit her. “Oh my God,” she thought. “That would mean Jim was dead!” And she changed her thought. Now, every morning, poppy seeds on the kitchen floor means another day with Jim, a true gift.

I’m impressed--though I doubt many of us live this way.

Catch each other doing things right. Make that a priority (and why not, for the most important person in your life?).

Remember that expectations are resentments under construction--and we all have them, often on unfounded grounds. Replace these with communication. Instead of asking “Why can’t they see,” recognize they don’t see and share the information.



Truly, 98% of conflict is miscommunication. That's fixable.

And again, recognize that the contrasts that arise are gifts of growth, clarifying what we desire and where we have issues we aren't facing (that's why they bother us when they surface).

And remember that growth never ends. Alex Baisley points out that an oak tree starts as an acorn, then grows, then grows, then grows, then grows, then grows, then grows, then dies. Often we see ourselves as at a static place from past growth, when in truth, we should be continually growing.

That will mean growing pains. Including the continual growth of a relationships.

And that's a good thing.

### Put the relationship first

Far too often, we see the various aspects of our lives as in competition for scarce resources. Our work lives, especially, can take control, crowding out parts at least equally important and often more important. This is not inevitable--it's a sign that there's a problem with our work life just as much as a relationship challenge.

Take the case of Mike Jaffe. Every morning his wife drove him to the train station, their daughter asleep in the back seat. And late every evening she would pick him up, their daughter asleep in the back seat. It occurred to him that he was only seeing his daughter on weekends, and it was tearing him apart.

So one day, he made a decision. He would take a later train, and have breakfast with his wife and daughter. It was wonderful, though he did worry what would happen at the office, what consequences he might encounter.

He would never find out; that morning, before he got to work, a plane crashed into his offices at the World Trade Center, killing everyone.

But while that difficult event certainly had a profound impact, he says his life really changed the day before, when he took control of his life, and made the decision to spend breakfasts with his wife and daughter.

Most of us are in work situations that need revisioning. All the parts of our life, our desires, our needs, our uniqueness, need to be in play in a balanced, fulfilling, even celebratory way. Our relationships should be a keystone here.

### Letting people love us

Nat King Cole's hit "Nature Boy" (by eden ahbez -- pseudonym of George Aberle) ends with these lines:

"The greatest thing you'll ever learn  
Is just to love and be loved in return."

The last phrase is the most fascinating--to learn to be loved in return. We have to learn to allow people to love us. Imagine. But true.

So much of what we fear is only projection. And the opposite of fear--is love.

### Divorce

I've never been married. I've certainly never been divorced. So in fairness, I know nothing about the experience of divorce. (Or marriage.)

But I have watched several friends struggle through this, and I have a few observations.

Be gentle with yourself. However nasty or however smooth the divorce, clearly, divorce is difficult--as in difficult for the first two years. Be patient, and be kind to yourself. Just know that all this will take time. Surround yourself with friends. Allow yourself time.

Watch for the "Well what about YOU" responses to your ex. Totally counterproductive, and not at all the point. Resentments are only going to seethe inside you. Go through the angry and the sadness and the bitterness and the regrets and the fears and the projections and all else that's natural to such a tear in a relationship that started as a marriage, but ultimately, don't camp out at any of these places. Work through them. When they pop up again, work through them again. But don't allow yourself to become trapped in any of them. Move on. Slowly, that's fine. But move on. Not to let your ex off the hook--to let yourself off.

In time, all will heal--except for those who cling for years to one of these phases. Let it be. Let it go. Move on. You will be \*far\* happier. If not now, in time. It will happen.

### Divine marriage

A friend of mine pointed this out to me--among my goals, objectives, priorities, is a dynamic, vibrant relationship to the divine, an energetic, invigorating exchange in all areas of my life, including work, clients, lifestyle, love, everything. I like it. I saw the truth of her words immediately.

If you've studied the Tarot, you know that far more than a method of divination, it's an

unbound book of wisdom and natural principles. The Two of Cups, for example, shows a young couple pledging their love to each other. The Lovers, though, shows two lovers with a third supernatural energy, an archangel in a triangle of love, a divine love flowing through them. This, above all, is what relationships teach us.

I have seen, in the woman I have loved most in all the world, not only this divine spark (which I've seen in a number of people), but also the full beauty (as far as I can see it) of who she is divinely--even at times when we are pursuing different paths, and even at times of disagreement or even conflict. It's the unique, permanent Truth of who She is, and whatever else is happening, I will always see this amazing energy, this Light that never dims.

That Truth about who we are and how special we are is revealed in relationships--and then dimmed by our fears and uncertainties. Or rather, not truly dimmed--but denied. Once we're past this, though, in part or more wholly, we can see the Truth of this in All Things.

Our work then becomes a partnership with the divine, a helping, creative exchange with all possibility and abundance. Our day to day mundane activities become sacred moments.

The Nine of Pentacles shows a man happy, surrounded by his wealth. But the Ten of Pentacles shows a family surrounded by true abundance, growth, love, the entire wealth of the divine embrace.

There is always this third spiritual connection created between and around a couple. It is wonderful. Embrace it. Cherish it. Love it. And grow with it.

I wish you all Love.

