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**Lotus**

**Journal For Personal Transformation**



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Society is a reflection of its people. As we are transformed, so is our society. We believe that personal growth and spiritual awakening co-evolve and are intricately related and that such growth is facilitated by *thoughtful reading*. *Lotus* hopes to energize, stimulate, and inform readers on their journeys of self-awakening and inspired living. *Lotus* is dedicated to providing resources for personal and spiritual development. Our purpose is to provide our readers with the most thoughtful writings available, current and time honored.

We chose the name *Lotus* because it is one of the most sacred symbols from antiquity. The seeds of the lotus contain, even before they germinate, perfectly formed leaves, the miniature shapes of what one day as mature plants they will become. This is a powerful reminder of the vast potential within us to manifest our essence, to be the grand men and women we were meant to be.

# From the Editor...

**“W**hat about your life do you celebrate?” Do you celebrate your transformation? What have you honored recently? Was it a risk? Some limit setting? A stretch beyond your comfort to do something new? A revision of plans to accommodate your dreams? Maybe you interrupted a criticism and responded with self nurturance. Took a day of rest and enjoyed it. Or gave compassion and tolerance to another.

At surface, the idea of celebration may sound trivial. Yet, acknowledging changes infuses them with our inner being. Such ceremony is integral to our growth. Celebrating is an act of honoring efforts and triumphs. Celebration commemorates an experience, a feeling, a decision, an effort or an accomplishment. Celebrations are private and public.

In our culture, we celebrate holidays and rites of passage. It may seem silly or self aggrandizing to commemorate our personal evolution, yet this growth is life-loving and life-giving. Nothing is more important to our individual and collective well-being. Celebrating makes our spirit rejoice and helps us integrate change as we become the men and women we are meant to be. Celebrating energizes our journeys. It helps us digest skills, experiences, and perspectives that become part of us. It aligns our inner experience with our outer manifestations and warms our deepest being.

I have been working with a very likable, accomplished man I'll call Bill. He is what I think of as a “bootstraps” person. He came from a disadvantaged background. There was much suffering in his family and he had premature responsibilities. He figuratively picked himself up by his bootstraps, financed his education, and became upwardly mobile. He is a self-made man. He has a loving wife and a solid career.

In spite of his successes, he suffered inferiority and anxiety. Bill was unable to benefit from his efforts. Like so many of us, he struggled with perfectionism. He never felt good enough and endured poor self-esteem.

As a part of his growing process, he began consciously and actively recalling decisions, accomplishments, and compliments that never soaked into his core being. He undertook a season of celebration, recalling and savoring life-changing events and relationships, fleeting feelings of pride, and courageous efforts made in the face of fear. He absorbed self-worth as he digested his history and experiences. His goodness began to stick to his ribs. Slowly, he released the familiar feeling of inadequacy. Old pain dissolved as self-acceptance filled his inner space. He is moving from perfectionism to contentedness and peace. He credits his ongoing practice of celebrating for much of his growth.

I shared Bill's story to inspire your celebrations as you unfold into your own wonderful essence. Our transformations, subtle and dramatic, are steps along our way.

Let the celebration begin.



Mary NurrieStearns  
Editor

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# Letters



The following are some letters from our readers. We encourage readers to share their stories of transformation as it empowers, and reading them inspires.

## TRANSFORMED LIFE

My wife subscribes to *Lotus*, I myself have not spent much time reading *Lotus* until the last issue. The interview with Elizabeth Harper Neeld caught my attention as I had a close family member die the day I saw the article. The article transformed my experience of the death and has had great impact on my life. I am deeply indebted and very grateful for your fine magazine.

Over the months since his death I have read many of the articles from your past issues. I realize now that I had a large dose of spiritual egotism. You see, I have been involved in a spiritual practice for over fifteen years and had secretly thought that I was beyond the need for the personal growth issues that were presented in *Lotus*.

I now feel humbled and very appreciative of my wife who has stood by my side during my years of superiority. While she struggled to deal with issues that were very powerful for her, I many times did not understand. I now realize that she has been my mentor and guide in life. Thank you for the transformation.—Robert Wolfe, Ventura, California.

## I FACED DEATH

I read the article on grief by Elizabeth Harper Neeld the same week my aged grandfather died. I watched my grandmother face the death of her husband of over sixty years. It was so painful to see her shock and grief. I was raised in a family that represses feelings. A part of me wanted to hush her talk about her loss and fear. I wanted to comfort away her tears.

I gave her a copy of the article and referred to it myself to help me be present to her experience, to just be with her during her crisis. Being with her also helped me feel and express my own sadness. Even though I am in my late thirties, I had not lost any close family members previously. The article on

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*1/2 V ad  
Eupsychia Inc.*

*1/6 H Ad  
Clayton School of Natural Healing*

**Letters**

*Continued from page 6*

grief helped me to not deny my own or my grandmother's intense feelings.

I enjoy your magazine and relate to many of your ideas but this was the first time one of your articles hit home in such a timely manner.—*Mick Star, Memphis, Tennessee.*

**I N S P I R I N G  
A R T I C L E**

Thanks for the inspiring article by Marilyn Mason on "The Challenge of Expressing Personal Power." I especially liked the picture of the woman with her mouth wide open. She looked so powerful. The article defines power as meaning "to be able." I was challenged by the article to confront one of my co-workers about smoking in our non-smoking facility. I was motivated to confront some of my fears about finances and to confess my secret savings to my husband.

These may seem like small acts but I sure feel more able to speak up about other things as they crop up. Thanks for support in my ongoing growth. I am a fan of *Lotus*. Best wishes and keep up the good work.—*Keri Ligh, Los Angeles, California.*

**V E R Y P R O V O K I N G**

Truly have found the magazine very thought provoking and uplifting. I am so glad I discovered it. Thank you very much.—*Marcella Olszewski, Dearborn, Michigan.*

**O U T L O O K I S  
U P L I F T E D**

I received as a surprise Christmas gift your journal from my dear thoughtful sister who lives in California. What great reading material! I'm so happy

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## *Lily Dale Ad*

## *Feldenkrais Ad*

### *Letters*

*Continued from page 8*

she introduced me to you because it would have taken a long time before I discovered you on my own. My highest compliments for an excellent journal.

Thank you for printing Jerry Mander's article in you winter 1992 issue entitled "TV Society's Toxic Medium." I have had an extreme aversion to TV since my teenage years as I watched my dear father become addicted to it as a form of evening entertainment. I am sure our family life would have been closer if we pursued other forms of entertainment that challenged and stimulated our creativity. However, looking on the positive side of my father's habit, I have never wanted to own a TV or use it as a way to break-up boredom in my life. I always preferred creating my own reality by initiating something. I agree with Mr. Mander when He said that TV does not allow you to engage in your own image-making process. It is "passive technology." I was happy to read it is now being compared to a drug, a mood alternating system or machine, while I was quite shocked to read it can and possibly is being used as a "system of mass brainwashing and political control."

The rest of your articles were equally inspiring and engaging. I am finding my outlook is being uplifted in a most positive way. I can't thank you or my sister enough.—*Patricia Stimac, Calumet, Michigan.*

### *E I G H T Y   S I X*

I have been a charter subscriber since your first issue. You have convinced me that at age 86 I still have very much to learn and to practice. Thank you.—*Mabel Weber, El Paso, Texas.*

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## *Robert Johnson ad*

*American Society of Alternative Therapist*

### *Letters*

*Continued from page 10*

#### *D I D N O T S U C C U M B*

Thank you for Winter 92 issue. I like it and was pleasantly surprised to see you did not succumb to the Siren's calls, but managed to navigate deftly around the rocks and whirlpools of New Age, Occultism-Exotericism, Political Correctness and Therapy-qua-Religion. My only criticism is factual. The featured quotation of page 15 was not written by Goethe. It was by a contemporary, W.H. Murray, who ended with a couplet of poetry from Goethe. (Roshi Philip Kapleau gave me a copy of that years ago.) And on page 6, the letter from Pat Haleck calls "When the student is ready the teachers appears" a Zen saying. It isn't. It comes from the Bhagavad Gita. (Of course, that wasn't your error. But I think it matters to keep true to the small facts, not just the big truth. While transcending facts, truth respects them.)

Again, thanks and best wishes for *Lotus'* success.—*Robert Granat, Alcalde, New Mexico.*

#### *A F F I R M A T I O N*

"I am Awareness, Love and Imagination." This is the strong impression and affirmation that I am left with after reading your Vol. 2, #3 publication *Lotus Journal*.

All the articles are interesting and seemed to speak to a different part of myself.

They seemed to reinforce the need to integrate "full sensory awareness," "unconditional love," and the "ability to imagine future states or future potentials." I intend to begin immediately establishing the integrity and presence of all 3, both in personal and vocational commitments. Maybe it's obvious to everyone else but this is a moment of truth for me. Again, thanks for your magazine and I look forward to future

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# Mt Madonna Ad

# Avatar ad

## Letters

*Continued from page 12*

issues.—*Bruce Lelsey, Colorado Springs, Colorado.*

### *M Y H U S B A N D ' S D E A T H*

Thank you for that excellent interview with Elizabeth Harper Neeld by Mary NurrieStearns. Being a widow myself, I felt the interview had special meaning for me.

At the time of my husband's death, I had no idea of a grieving process. My avenue was to escape—not to feel the feelings—and in this, I was heartily encouraged by my family who did not want to see my suffer. Now that I know there is a structure for mourning I should have followed, and still can, I believe I am on the road to recovery.—*Caterina Peregrine, Quebec, Canada.*

### *D E A T H*

I think the idea of having an interview by the Editor with a leading figure in the field of psychology is a good one.

This past week, two of my friends died just at the time I was reading the interview, "Taking Steps to a New Life" by Elizabeth Harper Neeld. One death was a humble, elderly lady, well thought of in the community. She leaves behind a devoted, hard working husband. I wonder how he will follow the grieving process. Perhaps his intuition and the wisdom that comes from living will guide him through.

The other death came to an aging gentleman from a privileged family. He and his wife lived lives of pleasure (and some substance abuse). I wonder how the widow will fare. Perhaps the numbness of her life will help her glide through.—*M. Jones, New Orleans, Louisiana.* •



## Success Story

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# Finding My Spiritual Path

B O B   R A M I N G

**I**t was on a Saturday morning in February, 1986 that the roof began to cave in. My second wife was getting ready to go out apartment hunting. After five months of marriage I had told her that I wanted a divorce. Then the phone rang. It was my therapist of the last nine years. We had recently become business partners. He threw in the towel on our venture that morning and our relationship came to an abrupt conclusion.

For nine years, I had pieced together the details of my story with this man. Therapy saved me from the self-destructive path I had been on. It helped me understand some of my behavior patterns and how I had been affected by a very traumatic childhood. It led me to my spiritual search, but it didn't help me solve my addictive use of drugs, alcohol, and relationships.

I never went back to therapy after that, but several months later, I read a book called the "Tao Of Physics" and my life began to change. I realized that I needed to go on a spiritual quest for my own salvation and inner needs. I felt I had gone as far as I could with therapy. It had been a very valuable experience but something was missing and I had to journey on my own. I didn't know then that I was going to end up as a psychotherapist. All I knew was that I was starving. I was hungry, and there was an incredible drive within me to seek the answers in a spiritual way.

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*Bob Raming, Minneapolis.*

# Atlantic Ad

## *Success Story*

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I quit my job as a commercial real estate broker in Beverly Hills and devoted all of my time to the pursuit of spirituality. During the next year, I must have read over one hundred books about spirituality. I practiced meditations and wrote out my novelized autobiography as a form of self therapy. I became certain that my recovery and mental well being depended on my successfully unlocking the puzzle box of my spirituality.

However, I was still hounded by my addiction to drugs and alcohol. Early one morning in February, 1987 I awoke after an hour and a half of sleep, still stoned and drunk and in a great deal of pain. There in the dark, I vowed that I would never again take another drink, do another drug, or smoke another joint. Although I had made this pledge many times before, something was different this time as I committed every fiber of my being to this decision.

Five days later, I was introduced to a new spiritual practice. It was like coming home. Something very incredible began to happen to me then, as I began inviting Spirit into my life. I became aware of the presence of Spirit in my life. Prior to this, my meditation practice had been a little sporadic. Now I began to devote a little time at the beginning and end of each day attending to and listening to my spiritual being.

I was having a spiritual awakening, an awakening of the heart. It was putting me in touch with parts of myself that had been dormant all my life, connecting me to the world and spirit that I had been only vaguely aware of. I

felt this spiritual presence helping me to discover a whole new reality.

This began my career journey that took me on ten moves in five years, encompassing five states and two islands. As a result of that search I am now in a career I feel truly suited for.

In October, 1987 I moved to Sedona, Arizona, and built my dream house. I read, wrote, and hiked as I came to know myself more deeply. Soon after moving into my home, I realized that it was time to take the next step. I felt spiritually guided to move to the Island of Kauai which I did in May, 1989. Later in the year I felt the nudge to move to the Island of Hawaii to study massage therapy. By February, 1990 it became clear that I wanted to take my new spiritual understandings into the practice of psychotherapy.

I moved to Portland, Oregon, to spend the next year and a half studying a holistic, body-mind approach to psychotherapy. I began a masters program in counseling psychology at Lewis and Clark College. I then began to have incredible experiences on the inner level, suggesting a move to Minnesota. My logical, pragmatic side said, "No, you'd better finish what you started here." I had this struggle because my heart, my being, wanted nothing more than to move to Minneapolis, to be close to my spiritual community.

I began a search for possibilities to complete my schooling in Minneapolis. I couldn't find anything. A few weeks later, I had a dream. I don't remember anything about this dream but it was very powerful and I got the

## *Success Story*

feeling that everything would be taken care of. That morning I went through my notes. At the top of the list was the number of a graduate school that I hadn't called. I knew this was where I needed to be. I called Lewis and Clark and had them ship all of my transcripts and records. I called my landlord and gave him notice. Three weeks later, I was living in Minneapolis.

I have completed my master's thesis and am now working as a psychotherapist. I have been fortunate that I could throw myself into my studies so wholeheartedly the last four years. Yet, what has been even more special is the knowledge and understanding of what it feels like to have survived the severe pain, trauma, and abuse of an extremely dysfunction childhood and to know first hand something of what my clients feel like as they sit across from me and try to convey a sense of the inner turmoil and confusion that haunts them.

My connection with Spirit kept me going during these years of transition. What has been of most value are the teachings and knowledge that have been imparted to me by my inner spiritual guidance.

My work has led me to understand that through the unconscious we can access the healing potential of our Higher Selves. I know that I am still on the threshold of much that is yet to be learned. If we can but understand and embrace the universal laws of Spirit, we can begin the process of healing our bodies, our minds, and our planet. •

## *Harper Ad*

## *Pocket Ranch Ad*



DEBORAH THARP

# Reducing the Trauma of Divorce

S A M M A R G U L I E S

*Adjusting to divorce is a process that may take from one to four years. Many factors influence how long it will take you to navigate this difficult transition successfully. But two are of special concern to us here: how well you manage the beginning of the divorce and how well you negotiate your agreement. These steps are closely interrelated.*

*Sam Margulies, Ph.D., J.D., has years of experience in divorce litigation, negotiation, and mediation, and is currently in private practice. He is co-director of the Institute for Dispute Resolution of the Seton Hall, N.J., University Law School.*



The initial phase of divorce is the hardest for most people. Even though some experience a sense of relief, the decision to divorce invariably means the death of dreams and fantasies of what might have been. It brings profound disappointment and, for many, acute anger.

Some people experience the decision to divorce as a threat to survival itself. Divorce brings out all the fear that comes from taking apart the old and familiar, no matter how uncomfortable it may have been.

Unlike other life crises that send friends and family running to help, divorce causes emotional supports to fall away. Friends often stay away for fear of taking sides—or worse, they do take sides and fan the flames. There are no ritualized forms of mourning for the death of a marriage and no social customs for drawing comfort from others and reorganizing resources.

Your children are very needy, and you and your spouse have diminished capabilities to meet their needs. Misunderstandings and missed signals are common. Gone is the assumption of good will that used to carry you through disagreements and bad moods. Now, any argument can turn into a screaming match. Each of you is prone to making mistakes and prone to interpret the other's mistakes as betrayals. You are simply at your worst at this time. Getting through the emotional upheaval of splitting up without getting into a war calls for you to exercise restraint when

**Unlike other life crises that send friends and family running to help, divorce causes emotional supports to fall away. Friends often stay away for fear of taking sides—or worse, they do take sides and fan the flames.**

you least feel like it. But how each of you behaves in the beginning of your divorce sets the tone for everything that follows.

#### L A C K O F M U T U A L I T Y

In most cases, one spouse reaches the decision to divorce before the other. Generally, the one who initiates the divorce is in a stronger psychological position because he or she has a greater sense of control and predictability. How well you and your spouse resolve this problem is probably the strongest predictor of success in managing the divorce.

Marriages die slowly. If you are the initiator of the divorce, you have probably thought about it for a long time. As the relationship deteriorates, there may be a pro-

longed period of stress and conflict. At some point, you call a halt. "It's over," you tell yourself. But you don't tell your spouse right away. Perhaps you have one or several affairs, think about divorce, consult a lawyer, and begin emotionally at least to separate. You get used to the fact first. *Then* you tell your spouse.

When you finally break the news, you are surprised to find that your spouse is shocked. While you, as the initiator, have prepared, your spouse has not. He or she experiences your announcement as rejection and abandonment. As one client put it, "I felt that I had been dumped, without warning and without justification. I was simply stunned." Such feelings are common even in marriages that have been troubled for a long time.

Breaking the news can take many forms. One man simply leaves unannounced. A woman has an affair and arranges for her husband to find out. An argument escalates, and all of a sudden bags are being packed. There are gentle partings, and there are cruel partings. The more you do to make the marital ending graceful and humane, the easier it will be for both of you. Dramatic, angry endings leave you both frozen in rage. This makes it very difficult to create a constructive dialogue when it's time to negotiate.

#### T W O D A N G E R S O F N O N M U T U A L D I V O R C E

The most common problem that arises when one wants the divorce and the other does not is that the non-initiator may slip into the role of aggrieved victim. Victimization as a psychological posture results from the non-initiator's need to deny responsibility for the divorce and to punish the initiator for "destroying" the mar-



riage. Those who play the victim tend to act out an entire constellation of destructive behaviors. They depict the initiator as a villain from whom they demand acts of contrition, admissions of guilt, and reparations. Often these demands are accompanied by an insistence that the initiator retract the decision to divorce and work on the marriage.

Some victims become obsessed with the fault of the initiator. "The divorce is his fault. I didn't tell him to fool around with that woman!" "It's her fault; don't ask me to suffer any more than I have. Let her take responsibility, let her pay!" The organizing principle for the victim is that only the initiator should shoulder responsibility and the dislocations that go with divorce. Because the victim is blameless, there is no reason for him/her to do anything. Victims behave passively and helplessly invite others to rescue them from

distress. And the rescuer is invariably a lawyer who offers, at least for a time, the illusion that the victim can be protected and vindicated in court.

If your spouse assumes a victim role or if you yourself play the victim, your prognosis for a decent divorce is poor. Such divorces are characterized by intense litigation and unsatisfactory results. Sooner or later the initiator becomes enraged by the punitive message of the "victim" and begins to fight back. Fighting then rapidly escalates into a war. Every effort must be made to avoid this problem. The initiator should be aware of the danger and should involve the other spouse in the decision to divorce as early as possible. Keeping your decision a secret while you get ready may be more comfortable in the short run but destructive over time.

This raises a second danger—bad timing in the way the decision to

divorce is communicated. Whether it is you or your spouse who "started" this divorce, you must stay sensitive to your spouses readiness to divorce. If you are the initiator, you have already resolved many of the issues your spouse is wrestling with now. You must give him or her time to catch up. Frequently the non-initiating spouse can begin to work through the emotional ending of the relationship before hard decisions are made. The closer you can come to mutuality, the better your chances for negotiating a reasonable settlement later. A decision to divorce is mutual when both of you agree that the marriage should end. Then, you both "own" the divorce and can take responsibility for struggling with the problems created by it.

When one spouse refuses to accept the divorce or genuinely believes the marriage ought to continue, the probability of pro-

PHOTO BY DEBORAH THARP

tracted conflict increases. Thus, it pays to invest considerable time and patience, if necessary, in talking about the divorce and reaching a mutual decision to end the marriage. Both of you could probably benefit from family therapy to help you through this decision.

During this early stage of divorce the initiator should resist the impulse to seek a quick resolution of the issues involving it. The initiator often presses to work out the arrangements for the kids, how the money will be divided, and how much support will be paid in order to "have it over with." To induce your spouse to cooperate you may even offer a very generous settlement. But your good intentions may backfire if the timing is wrong, and your impatience may evoke panic in your spouse. It often happens this way.

#### *NONMUTUALITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR NEGOTIATIONS*

The early period of divorce is a bad time for serious negotiation about long-term issues. Ideally, all you should do at first is maintain the economic status quo, avoid adversary legal processes, and work out a temporary arrangement that allows you both to survive this period with a minimum of legal conflict.

This may seem impossible. How can we act with restraint at the very time we are in angry crisis? How can I treat with respect someone who I feel betrayed me, or didn't love me, or abandoned me? But as a practical matter you have no choice. Premature negotiation produces either bad settlements or protracted litigation. If your spouse is not ready, one way she/he can slow you down is to begin legal proceedings. These hold off negotiations until the case

comes to trial in two years. Do not push.

Negotiation of a settlement agreement when it is too early is unproductive because the initiator may feel intense guilt—which can lead to an overgenerous settlement he or she may later refuse to honor. And if you believe your spouse is at fault and should pay for his/her sins, you can be assured negotiations will break down, so negotiation of a permanent settlement is unlikely.

A second obstacle to negotiation early on is that you are too overwhelmed to do the work required. You do not yet have sufficient information. You have not yet had an opportunity to try out your new roles, to think through your needs, or to make long-term decisions. In the early stage of divorce, it's all you can do to cope with the bubbling cauldron of emotions you are feeling. You are not yet ready to hear each other or to cooperate in the manner required for success.

#### *BUT WHAT DO I DO WITH THE ANGER?*

Divorce is the last act of the marriage, and entire families get frozen in the last pose when the curtain comes down. If that final image is only acrimony and disarray, it will dominate you and your children for years. Disappointment, sadness, and grief can be mourned and, in time, they fade. But hatred, a sense of injustice, or a feeling of betrayal only get stronger as they are nursed, and they can paralyze you for years.

What do you do with the anger? You work with it; you explore it with a good therapist. There is an important distinction between feeling anger and acting it out. Acknowledging what you feel is healthy. It's the acting out that begins a destructive cycle of

tit for tat between you and your spouse. Dealing with what you feel helps you to come to terms with the ending of marriage and your contributions to its good and bad parts.

It is important in the initial phase of divorce to mourn the marriage and to let your spouse mourn as well. Even the end of a chronically difficult relationship is a deep disappointment. If you don't mourn, you don't finish with the marriage. It lives on, in its worst form, interfering with all you do.

From every perspective, it is in your interest to bring the marriage to an end with as much civility as possible. If you have any doubt that this is in your own interest, have no doubt that it is in the best interest of your children. The mental health community is unanimous in its opinion that divorce should be organized so as to minimize the impact on children. How you behave now will determine what happens to the kids. The greater the strife, the greater the disorganization, the worse it is for them, the harder their adjustment, the greater their depression, the greater their destructive behavior.

This is more than a moral imperative for parents. The long-term impact on your children will reverberate toward you. Your children's pain and acting out will take up your time, money, and energy later on when you're trying to rebuild your life. Your children's maladjustment to the divorce will wreck your next marriage or relationship. To borrow a dictum, you can pay now or you can pay later. Your restraint, emotional honesty, integrity, and simple courage are required now.

#### *GOOD FAITH REQUIRED*

There are some elementary rules that allow both of you to get

through the early phase of the divorce process without touching off a war. Lawyers and legal proceedings are like any other weapon. If one side has it, the other side gets it, too. If one side uses it, the other side does, too. Often it is not your intention to gain the upper hand that touches off the war. Rather it is your fear that your spouse is attempting to get the advantage that prompts your preemptive strike.

You must do everything possible to avoid creating the impression that you are taking advantage. You need to be cautious before concluding that your spouse is up to some mischief. There are some absolute *No's* you must observe:

1. *No raids on the safe-deposit box*
2. *No changes in life insurance*
3. *No changes in title to assets*
4. *No secret bank accounts*
5. *No increase in debt without mutual agreement*
6. *No cutting off the credit cards*
7. *No abuse of credit cards*
8. *No cutting off support*
9. *No interference with access to the children*
10. *No sabotage of children's affection for the other parent*
11. *No threats of legal action*
12. *No insistence on premature negotiation*
13. *No provocation with paramours*
14. *No legal proceedings*

#### WHAT INITIATORS NEED TO DO

- Inform your spouse of your decision to divorce appropriately, using professional help when necessary.
- Be clear in stating your

**Living for any length of time with a dead marriage is terribly stressful for the entire family. It prevents both of you from adjusting to separation. Neither of you can get on with building a new life. Neither gets the peace and solitude needed to heal.**

resolve to divorce—do not hold out false hopes that you will change your mind.

- Allow time for discussion and for expression of feelings. The discussions about the divorce may require more than one session and may go on for weeks or even months.

- Acknowledge your spouses feelings of sadness or anger as well as your own. Be prepared to talk about these things more than once. It may take more than one attempt for you to be heard.

- Reassure the non-initiator of your patience and goodwill.

#### WHAT INITIATORS NEED TO AVOID

- Don't lay blame to justify your decision. The marriage has died—your spouse didn't kill it.
- Avoid unilateral changes of

circumstance. Don't cancel credit cards, raid the safe deposit bank or empty the savings account. These actions only create panic and guarantee hostility.

- Don't tell the children, your relatives, or your friends until you both are ready.
- Don't begin legal action. You want to negotiate your settlement first.

#### WHAT NON-INITIATORS NEED TO DO

- Seek maximum emotional support from friends and family. Use the services of a good psychotherapist if you feel it's necessary.

- Be honest with yourself about the marriage. Do you really believe that the marriage should continue? Do you really believe that the marriage could work?

- Take the time you need to think and if necessary to mourn the ending of the relationship.

- Stay responsible.

#### WHAT NON-INITIATORS NEED TO AVOID

- Don't give in to your impulse for revenge, vindication, and recrimination—it will only provide your spouse with justification to behave poorly.

- Don't surrender to uncontrolled anger. Despite your powerful feelings, you can *choose* how you act.

- Don't make yourself into a helpless victim.

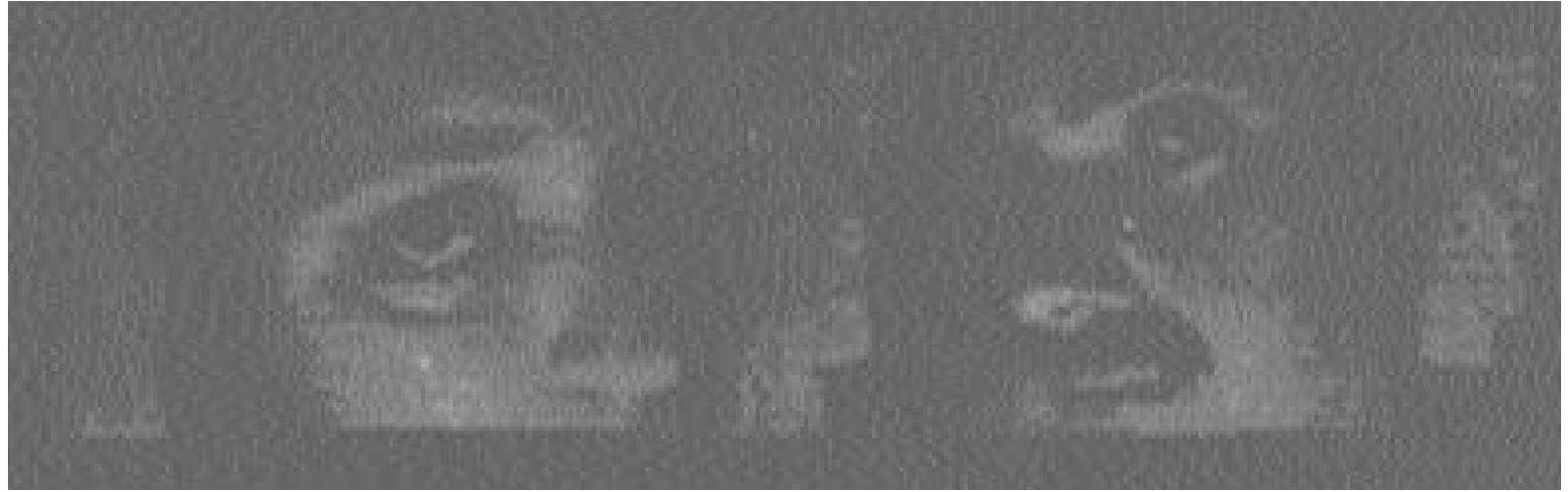
- Don't precipitate legal action.

#### SEPARATING AND MOVING OUT

If you are going to divorce, you will have to separate. The sooner one of you moves out, and the smoother the move, the better off all of you will be.

Once again, consider the typi-





cal family profile in which there are minor children. Usually the mother will stay with the kids, and the father will move out. The question is whether he moves out before or after a separation agreement is finalized.

Many men worry that if they move out their legal position will somehow be weakened. Unfortunately, many divorce lawyers routinely advise clients against such a move without considering the psychological damage that results. The advice not to move may be motivated by several misguided fears. The client or the lawyer worries that if negotiation is unsuccessful, the husband's move will be used to prove that he deserted his wife. The husband also worries that he'll forfeit his claim to ownership of the house or forfeit his right to move back in later. Let's look at each of these fears.

If you and your spouse agree in writing that you (or your spouse) are departing by mutual consent and that the move is neither abandonment or desertion, that issue is gone. You can also agree in writing that the one who moves out can reoccupy the house upon reasonable notice. Moving out does not mean you abandon your property rights, so that, too, is nothing to worry about.

Lawyers sometimes think that if you stay, the irritation and discomfort this gives your spouse will motivate her or him to make concessions in negotiation. If one of

the issues to be resolved is whether or not to sell the house, the lawyer and you may worry that your moving out constitutes a concession on that point. The problem is that you, not your lawyer, has to live with it.

Living for any length of time with a dead marriage is terribly stressful for the entire family. It prevents both of you from adjusting to separation. Neither of you can get on with building a new life. Neither gets the peace and solitude needed to heal. The anger and rancor between you can only grow more intense as a result. The fact that you continue to live together confuses your children who are hoping that you will reconcile. It confuses your relatives and friends and makes you both inaccessible to people who could provide relief. I have seen people live in this state of holy deadlock for years. It's like growing hate in a hothouse. There is absolutely no hypothetical tactical advantage that is worth the damage done by such folly.

Moving out is more often a problem when the wife is initiating the divorce and the husband is being asked to move. Sometimes men demand custody in an attempt to avoid moving out of the house. They join the kids and the house as a single entity, claiming that whoever gets the kids gets the house. It's even worse when the man convinces himself that he really is the better parent and ought to have sole custody in

order to get the house. It's not that he wants the house. It's just that he is frightened of change and of being on his own. If this is you, you need help fast. If this is your spouse, you both need help fast. This is too destructive a development, and it assures you both a miserable divorce.

I believe that most custody fights start because the noninitiating male is trying to maintain the structure of his life by holding on to the house and the children. This is not to suggest that mothers should always get primary custody or that any man who struggles for custody is just holding on. But many custody fights fit this unfortunate pattern.

Often people decide that they can't afford a separation for financial reasons. My advice is to treat the situation as an emergency and to use savings, or even borrow, to make a separation possible. If you absolutely can't do this yet, then at least separate within the house. Use different bedrooms, even if the kids have to double up, or turn the family's den into another bedroom. There is nothing so confusing as negotiating a divorce settlement with someone with whom you are still sleeping. And if you are still having or expecting sex, then both of you are exceptionally confused.

#### TRANSITION

Depending on how both of you handle the upheavals of the divorce process, a period of transi-

tion begins any time from a few months to a year after the decision to divorce is raised. While the first period is a time of crisis, confusion, and intense anger, the transitional period is a time when things have cooled off a bit and you have begun to re-establish some equilibrium. You have either separated or are anticipating permanent separation. Each of you is well on the way to accepting the reality of the divorce. You have recovered from the shock of the first weeks alone, but you may nevertheless be lonely. You have begun to look around and see what your life now is like, which old friends are still there, and which relatives are still close. You have begun to think about longer-range goals. You may have begun to date and to be more active socially. You begin to recover your self-esteem and your self-confidence. As in all these processes, there is no schedule; there is only recovery at your own speed.

This is the time to negotiate your agreement. Completion of the settlement agreement becomes an emotional watershed in the process of divorce. Your ability to emerge from the marriage and to rebuild your life is limited until you work it out. The settlement will express your agreements on how you will raise your children, what your income flow will be, and what property will be yours and yours alone. Until these decisions are made, you will feel that you cannot really make long-term plans because you are still tied to your spouse.

#### EMOTIONAL PREREQUISITES FOR GOOD NEGOTIATION

Good negotiation requires that you understand your own interests and that you understand the interests of your spouse well enough to

seek creative solutions to problems as they occur. Compromise is necessary, but it must be *intelligent* compromise.

Negotiation makes both intellectual and emotional demands on you. You must gather, assimilate, and use the information necessary to make decisions. You must learn about your assets, your finances, and your needs. Your first emotional requirement is to be settled enough to learn and to concentrate. Some of the topics—e.g., pension evaluation, equitable distribution—require you to pay attention. If you are still falling apart, you can't do the work.

You must also maintain civility toward your spouse. The less civility, the more you rely on intermediaries. A good mediator can keep you on track despite an occasional outburst. But if the sight of your spouse sends you into a sputtering rage, you will need a lawyer to negotiate for you.

Ultimately, the greatest emotional requirement is responsibility for yourself. You must feel that you are in charge, and you must understand that the decisions you make shape your future. You should be able to measure the usefulness of a proposal by whether or not it serves your future objectives. To do this well, you will first have to let go of the past and give up your attempts to vindicate your anger and resentment from the past.

#### EMOTIONAL OBSTACLES TO NEGOTIATION

The breakdown of your own restraint and playing the victim role are the biggest obstacles to your ability to negotiate. It is time to put aside blame. Fault is no longer relevant. If your guilt is still so palpable that you are willing to be blamed, you are not ready to negotiate.

During this transitional period, relationships between spouses are still sensitive. Now is the time to learn new ways to relate to each other. Respect for each other's privacy and for each other's need to establish an independent life is necessary and must be reciprocal. It is not unusual for newly separated spouses to conduct voyeuristic interrogations of relatives, friends, and children. "What did Daddy do?" "What did she look like?" "Who is she?" etc. This is hard to avoid after having been intimate with someone for many years, but you must mind your own business.

#### CONCLUSION

Remember that negotiating the agreement is a process that could last three or four months, depending on how much time it takes to develop and master the financial information. How you behave toward each other while *not* at the negotiating table is going to influence the attitudes you bring to the negotiations. There are an unlimited number of ways you can sabotage your negotiation. But to what end?

The key to all this is to remember the distinction between acknowledging your strong feelings and acting them out. Acknowledging feelings is healthy and helps you to cope. Acting out is generally destructive and hurts your chances of successful negotiation. You cannot go through a divorce without feeling strong and hurtful feelings, but you can choose to desist from hurtful behavior. Your ability to avoid hurtful behavior will determine the quality of your negotiated settlement. •

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*An Interview with Tom Rusk*

*Interviewed by Mary NurrieStearns, Editor of Lotus*

# Ethical Persuasion

*Feelings are the bridge or the division between people. They are that fundamental. If you feel resonance, then they are a bridge between you. If you do not experience respect, fairness, understanding, and caring for your feelings, then they are the division between you.*

*Tom Rusk, M.D. is a professional consultant on for both individuals and organizations and an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego. He is author of "Instead of Therapy" and the recently published "The Power of Ethical Persuasion." Dr. Rusk conducts private consultations, seminars, and workshops on the applications of self-change principles.*



**Lotus: What is ethical persuasion?**

Tom: I call it a strategic application of the Golden Rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If I am willing to hear you out and even be persuaded by your words, then I can ask in all fairness for you to hear me out, so that my point of view will be seriously considered by you. The first exploring phase of ethical persuasion is an investment in the relationship and in myself by considering thoroughly your point of view to your satisfaction.

**What surprises people when they apply this strategy?**

When you are courageously willing to hear honestly the other person instead of simply preparing your own argument while they're talking, over ninety percent of the time, there is no argument, no conflict. We are arguing out of our fear rather than out of true understanding of where the other person is coming from.

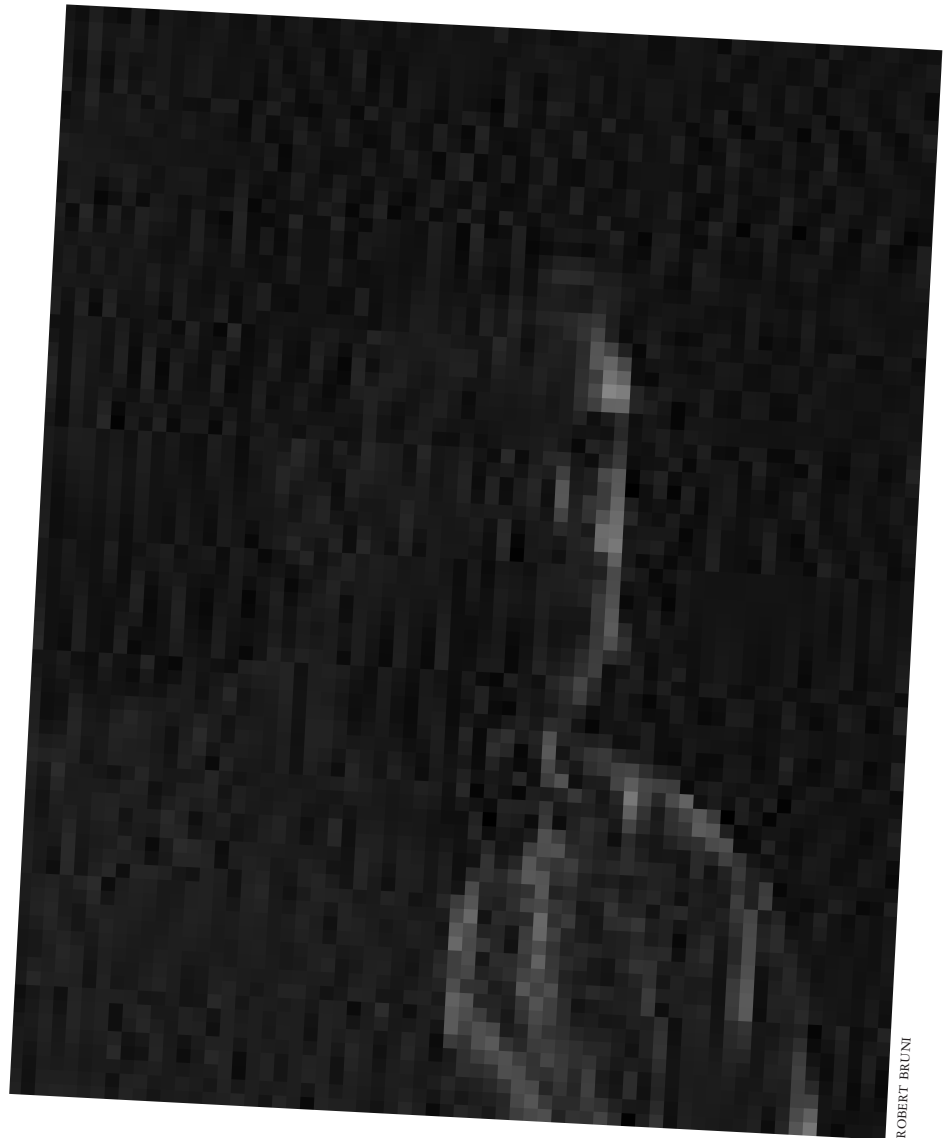
We're afraid of being co-opted and losing our position rather than being open to understanding. The deeper fear is that if we thoroughly understand the other's position, we may move towards it and lose who we are. That's a fear that many of us have. The familiarity principle is the major resistance we have to change.

**Please define the familiarity principle.**

We humans cannot tolerate for any length of time behaving, or being treated by others, in ways

that we are not used to, even if those new ways are in our own opinion better, healthier, and ultimately more fulfilling. When we start behaving in ways we think are better, it becomes increasingly uncomfortable to act in those new ways because it feels inauthentic. Such awkwardness is inauthentic to our habitual selves, our usual

referred to having accumulated a vocabulary for her feelings. It's very important to accumulate a vocabulary and to feel awkward, frightened, and excited. Those feelings are evidence you're changing. Awkwardness is evidence that you are pushing the envelope of the familiarity principle. You are helping your habitual self get used to the idea that there are other



ROBERT BRUNI

everyday selves. It is not inauthentic to our spiritual or true selves.

**This awkwardness can seem inauthentic to our true self if we confuse our feelings with our being or essence.**

Yes. One of your readers

ways to be. Awkwardness is excellent evidence that you're deliberately working on change. It takes courage to feel awkward.

**In your book you discuss caring, fairness, respect, and under-**

*standing as the value system for ethical persuasion.*

Yes.

*How do we use these values to sort through and express our feelings, and to ask for others' feelings?*

The first thing to recognize is that feelings are facts to the person having them. And they're very important facts. Feelings are one of the ways that the human spirit communicates with us. Our bodily sensations (physical pain, fatigue, acid in the stomach, tension in the neck) and feelings (resentment, sadness, joy, pleasure, ecstasy, tenderness, warmth) are messages, signals from the human spirit, letting us know of its moment-to-moment state of well-being. To recognize that feelings are facts is critical in your relationship with yourself and with others. It's very important to have a conscious and deliberate set of values by which to carry out one's relationship with one's self and others.

There has been a long-standing tradition that psychotherapy should be value-free. The conventional wisdom is that therapists should not impose values on their clients. I disagree. I think therapy should value the integrity of body, mind and spirit. What I'm suggesting is an explicit value system in relationships with myself and others.

Respect, understanding, caring, and fairness to one's self and to others are my values for relationships. This system begins with respect, understanding, caring, and fairness to myself and my spirit as recognized through my body and my feelings.

*The ethical persuasion process is, first, I hear you out fully and communicate back to you that I do. I then ask for you to hear me and communicate your understanding of what, said. We move into resolutions next if needed.*

*Ethical persuasion is a strategic application of the Golden Rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

*Talk about how the values are evident in that process.*

Long run-thinking is almost identical to thinking ethically. If all I think about is winning this argument, prevailing in this conflict, or talking my child, wife, husband, or customer into something, I am thinking in short term ways. I am not thinking about the value of this relationship to me. After all, how often are arguments or what we're arguing about more important than the relationship itself? I keep in mind that the relationship is far more important than any particular issue that we're dealing with—in the vast majority of circumstances. My relationship with myself and with others has more to do with the overall quality of my life than any other single factor. Nothing compares to good relationships in

quality of life. My premise is that understanding, respect, caring, and fairness are essential to good relationships.

Think of an excellent past relationship at work, at home, or wherever—and ask the question, “When it was good, was there a feeling of mutual respect, understanding, caring, and fairness? When it was bad, was there a feeling on one or both parts that there was significant lack of feeling—and I'm emphasizing feeling—of respect, understanding, caring, and fairness? Most agree that in excellent, times the feelings were there. During troubled times, there was a feeling, perhaps a misunderstanding, but a feeling that these values were not there. Respect, understanding, caring, and fairness are also conscious and deliberate attitudes.

I first embed the values of respect, caring, fairness, and understanding in my relationship with myself. Then if I don't feel respected by you, I express that to you. I tell you as an act of self respect. And fascinatingly, if I do not, you lose and I lose. Both of us lose significantly because ultimately we will not be able to benefit from knowing in what way we may be alienating each other. The relationship will deteriorate.

*Because we won't have understanding...*

And bonding, which builds intimacy. The essence of intimacy is understanding to each other's satisfaction what is going on in each of us. We really care about what we are hearing. We rejoice in the other's delight and victory. We hurt with the other in his or her pain. When that is going on between people, bonding grows. Bonding, at its essence, is resonance. You resonate with what I'm thinking and feeling and I resonate with you. That produces

closeness which requires vulnerability.

Vulnerability has two sides to it. Our needs, desires, and wants are on one side. On the other side are past hurts and our fear of hurting ourselves and those we care about. We become vulnerable to the extent that we need or desire anything. We are vulnerable to the extent that we are sensitive and perceptive and can be hurt. We are needy, sensitive beings, whether we admit it or not. And the brighter we are, often the more sensitive and vulnerable we are.

*Being vulnerable is inevitable.*

I think it is. I just came across an article dated 1986 from the Sherman group who studied intelligence. They report that in women with an IQ of over 135, the suicide rate is 250 times higher than those below 135 IQ. Isn't that incredible?

*That's incredible!*

And the statistics for males is similar. Men in the general population commit suicide four times more often than women. Still suicide is astronomically high in men over 135 IQ. Tortured genius is not just a phrase.

The more vulnerable we are, the stronger we must be in order to function in a constructive, creative way. Strength is defined as the capacity to withstand intensity of stress over time. The more stress we can handle, the stronger we are. The more vulnerable we are, the stronger we must be in order to handle our hurt and pain. I am exquisitely easily hurt. I've accepted that and realize my responsibility to take care of that needy, vulnerable spirit. That acceptance has made me stronger.

*By strength are you meaning that we need courage and skills?*

Both. I'm defining courage as the willingness to do what in my

## The Seven Steps of Exploring the Other Person's Viewpoint

1. Establish that your immediate goal is mutual understanding, not problem-solving.
2. Elicit the other person's thoughts, feelings, and desires about the subject at hand.
3. Ask for the other person's help in understanding him or her. Try not to defend or disagree.
4. Repeat the other person's position in your own words to show you understand.
5. Ask the other person to correct your understanding and keep restating his or her position.
6. Refer back to your position only to keep things going.
7. Repeat steps 1 through 6 until the other person unreservedly agrees that you understand his or her position.

heart I know is right, even though I am very frightened. To be courageous, I must be afraid. There is no such thing as courage without fear.

A critical part of strength is also skills. Consciousness is one skill. For example, I became aware of my vulnerability and neediness. At one time I wanted more from my wife Judy. I recognized that it was not her problem. It was my problem but not my fault. My awareness helped me stop blaming her and myself. I began to explain my problem to her. She was shocked that I wasn't blaming her

any more. I got a card from her saying, "With all the love I have to give." I cried when I got it because I recognized she was saying that she was giving me more than she had ever given anybody. She was doing the best she knew how to and yet recognized that I was not satisfied. She was not withholding. I began to cry as I recognized how much I had tortured her for years.

Due to lack of acceptance of my neediness, I had been unhappy. I blamed her for making me unhappy. It was all a mistake, all a misunderstanding.

Another skill is the ability to ask to have your needs met. Another is to increase your familiarity with receiving love and support. I encourage people who are not used to being hugged to approach a niece, a daughter, son, or a pet if necessary, someone they fell tender towards and not threatened by. Go to them after a hard day and say, "Gee, I've had an awful day; I really could use a hug." Then stand back with your self-observer, that compassionate self-observing part of yourself. Ask the administrative or everyday coping self just to stand aside and let this child's hug go to the deepest part of your existence. Just get out of the way and let the hug in.

Strength also requires the skill of listening deeply.

*Being heard is so powerful and soothing.*

By any of us. Right?

*Yes.*

Men, women, children, all of us. Ethical persuasion is most powerful because being heard is so rare. If you become good at exploring other's feelings and thoughts, you'll begin deepening your personal relationships.

*You say that feelings are messages from our inner spirit. What do you mean by inner spirit?*

My sense of the human spirit is that it is the origin of all my energy, body, and mind energy. The spirit energy is the fuel, talents, weaknesses, needs, resilience, resources, and vulnerabilities that have been since the sperm joined the egg. It is my genetic essence, in biological terms, and my potentials, strength, and energy. It has no administrative capacity ever.

Inner spirit is a resource center and vulnerability center that is my true self. True self, inner self, and spirit are synonyms for me. It is my deepest layer of being. My coping self, or administrative or habitual self is the next layer. Outside of that, and capable of being significantly developed, is my observing ego or what I prefer to call the self-observer.

Turning that self-observer from a critical one to an objective one and then ultimately to a compassionate one is my own personal growth path. I want to become an increasingly compassionate observer of myself and others.

Feelings and body sensations are messages. Feelings are one way that my spirit lets me know what is going on. I cannot hold the spirit in my hand. I can't touch it. I can't measure it but I can know a tremendous amount about it. We use our minds to sort out and analyze feelings in this heart-mind partnership through the use journals, discussions with counselors, inner-child workshops, and quiet reflection.

*Feelings are messages but they're not always clear.*

They're not always clear at all.

*They become coded through our personality.*

Sometimes they're actually not worth analyzing. Late in the evening, I'm not very good at sorting things out. When I am physically ill or burned out, I will get all kinds of negative, messy feelings, and I'll quickly check them.

## The Five Steps of Explaining Your Viewpoint

1. Ask for a fair hearing in return.
2. Begin with an explanation of how the other person's thoughts and feelings affect you. Avoid blaming and self-defense as much as possible.
3. Carefully explain your thoughts, desires, and feelings as YOUR truth, not THE truth.
4. Ask for restatements of your position and corrections of any factual inaccuracies as necessary.
5. Review your respective positions.

After I get rest, if I still have a residue of these feelings, I take my journal or sit down with Judy or call one of my kids and say, "Gee, I've been feeling something. I'd like to think out loud about this and talk about it." I use my mind on my heart and figure out what this feeling is telling me. Feelings are never telling me that there is something bad about me. A feeling is never telling us whether we're good or bad.

I stand back as objectively and as compassionately as possible and ask why am I afraid. Hurt is the core, fear of hurt is next, anger about that is next. When you go from fear of hurt to anger, you are leaving vulnerability and getting into defensiveness.

*In relationships, feelings are part of our experience and have to be dealt with.*

Feelings are the bridge or the division between people. They are that fundamental. If you feel reso-

nance, then they are a bridge between you. If you do not feel respect, fairness, understanding, and caring for your feelings, then they are the division between you. There is nothing more critical. Without resonance, no information will pass over the bridge.

What I say to men is, "Look, all your logic and reason are fine but if the lines are cut, what's the good?" The only way to connect up, to put this fiber optic cable between you, is to resonate with her feelings. Unless she feels like you understand and care about her—want to understand at least—she will feel disconnected. The tragedy is that you do care about her feelings profoundly, but you are not conveying this in a way that is convincing to her. The only way to do that is the process of ethical persuasion. There can be no communication without it.

*What are the difficulties in human communications?*

Firstly, we all live in unique and private worlds. Each of us sees the world in our own way. No two of us see the same movie. We see it through the filters of our experience and our way of looking at things. It's impossible to see the same movie even if you're sitting a foot apart from one another. When we discuss something that we have feelings about, we tend to forget this truth.

No human being has ever spoken about anything except him or her self. You cannot speak about anything other than yourself. In everything we say and do, we are talking about that which interests us, what we see, feel, think, and perceive. Each of us lives in our own world.

Even if the other person is angrily talking about you, understand that at a deeper level, they are speaking about their reaction to you. Try thoroughly to understand that before you worry about

what this says or doesn't say about you. The other will appreciate deeply your interest and concern as to what they are saying and why they're saying it.

There is no actual truth. There are at least as many truths as there are people in the conversation. It is the experiential truth that makes a difference in relationships. If you care about relationships, it is each person's truth that is important, not this fiction called objective truth. Not recognizing that is a major obstacle. Arguing over who said what is a destructive waste of time. It makes no difference what was actually said.

What's important is intent. The other may not have said it exactly as they intended but it was her intent that really matters. It is my perception of what you said that makes a difference with regard to my feelings. The more we focus on "what did you perceive?" and "what did I intend," the more effective we become. It's intent and perception and the feelings around them that count, not actuality in relationships. This violates the rules we learn in science and business. It's very hard for people to recognize that different principles apply to relationships that to building a chair.

*There hasn't been value for relationship processes in our culture. We value those scientific processes. It's so unfortunate that we have applied those to our human relationships.*

Business is now concerned about quality and service. Business is concerned about what customers want. Business is finally recognizing that quality is an experiential issue. It's not an engineering issue. Unless the customer feels like there's quality, it makes no difference how technologically excellent the product is. Quality is a relationship issue, and we need

## The Two Steps Of Creating Resolutions

1. Affirm your mutual understanding and confirm that you are both ready to consider options for resolution.
2. Brainstorm multiple options.

**If a mutually agreeable solution is not yet obvious, try one or more of the options below.**

1. Take time out to reconsider, consult, exchange proposals, and reconvene, or
2. Agree to neutral arbitration, mediation, or counseling, or
3. Compromise between alternate solutions, or
4. "Take turns" between alternate solutions, or
5. Yield (for now) once your position is thoroughly and respectfully considered, or
6. Assert your positional power after thoroughly and respectfully considering the other position, or
7. Agree to disagree and still respect each other, then go your separate ways on the particular issue.

to pay attention to the principles of relationships.

The second communication difficulty is that we all have our insecurities. There is no such thing as a human being who does not grow up without wounds and hurt. When we feel hurt, afraid, angry, or threatened, our tendency is to be defensive and to blame.

We learn to communicate in the most severe hierarchy imagin-

able, a totally helpless infant with a parent, however effective or ineffective, with the awesome power even to kill. There is remarkable discrepancy of competence and power. We never get the opportunity in school or elsewhere to learn how one communicates in a fair and equal way. We carry what we learn in the severe hierarchy into our relationships at work and at home. Parents, except in rare circumstances, haven't acquired the skills for communicating with children at every age in a respectful, understanding, caring, and fair way.

The third difficulty is that everyone has trouble handling strong feelings. I believe that strong feelings "make us stupid" and that is one of the reasons feelings have a undeserved bad reputation. When we have a strong feeling, it jams our ability to use our mind with our heart to solve things. We become not very rational in how we handle the feelings.

You can't learn ethical persuasion by simply correctly handling your next experience with strong feelings. You need commitment. Soon after the unfortunate argument, when the feelings have calmed down, you go back. Say, "I'm not too proud of how that went last night; I'd like to start again if you're willing. I'd like to start by seeing if I can understand what you were trying to get across to me, by exploring first."

Have some compassion. Strong feelings do make us stupid and that's normal. We can learn slowly but surely to read feelings as messages instead of letting them take over forever.

*We need to learn to recover from mistakes.*

I remember when we first got our little camper trailer back in the late 1950's. Trailers wobble when they go downhill. The safest thing to do is accelerate straight



ahead and then bring the trailer to a stop in a straight line. The way to learn is not necessarily to correct what you're doing but to do it in a value-driven better way now, no matter how you've done it in the past. Accelerate in a better direction rather than correcting anything you've done, other than perhaps to apologize and explain.

***Take responsibility for it.***

Take loving responsibility for it as opposed to blame. The fourth communication obstacle we've already covered. Feelings are facts. Rejecting feelings makes a person feel rejected because you're rejecting something that's coming from their deepest recesses experientially.

The fifth obstacle is power imbalance. There is always power imbalance. Power issues need to be acknowledged, talked about openly, and some attempt made to balance and compensate when there are power imbalances.

***Define personal power and how we gain personal power through ethical persuasion.***

I'd like to distinguish personal power from positional power. Positional power is whatever power you have by virtue of your role or position and is defined by tradition. You influence others because you pay them or are bigger or earn the money.

Personal power is our creative power or our ability to make a difference on this earth. In communication it is our ability to get serious consideration for our thoughts and feelings and our contribution in the co-creative process. I have more personal power if I can get a very serious and fair hearing for my point of view.

The best way to gain personal power is by learning how, even when it's painful, to convince the other person that you are very seriously considering their point of view, to the extent of trying it on.

## Using Values to Decode Feelings

It takes time and patience with oneself—and ethical communication with others—to decode the garbling of feelings and to regain the values of the spirit in its native form. Whenever bad feelings arise, we can begin decoding them by asking ourselves such questions as:

1. What is this bad feeling trying to draw my attention toward? Is there something I need to do to better respect or care for myself or others in this situation?
2. Is this bad feeling an exaggeration of something important that I've been ignoring for a while? For instance, am I bitter about someone not listening to me because I haven't been speaking up for myself for a long time?
3. Is there a part of this bad feeling that has some positive energy? For instance, do I feel violent because I want to shout or make big, dramatic movements, and I never give myself the opportunity for physical self-expression?
4. Can I feel compassion for my pain even if I do not yet understand its source? Is there anything I can do right now in accord with the values of respect, understanding, caring, and fairness to arrange some comforting for myself while I begin improving the situation in which these bad feelings have arisen?

In all fairness, you then ask for reciprocity. My personal power will dramatically increase if you know that when we get into a discussion I will hear thoroughly your point of view, and understand it to your satisfaction. You are not afraid to bring things up with me when you know you will get an excellent hearing.

***Yes, I would not shut down.***

Ethical persuasion is the best process I have come up with so far to enhance personal power, to have people want to hear your point of view because they feel so thoroughly heard. This process deepens your relationship with that person. It is personally powerful to have very deep and trustworthy relationships.

***And enriching.***

A relationship you can count on. I can't imagine more personal power in life than having a number of relationships that you can count on.

***Personal power is also having the ability to utilize our energy, talents, and relatability in relationships and in the rest of our lives. It shows up in...***

The way we walk, the way we garden, the way we sit, the way...

***We conduct business...***

And the aura around us as we go through life. If you look deeply at ethical persuasion, it is a personal growth process. If I thoroughly hear the other person so that I can be heard, I don't allow my shyness to stop me. The exploring part of ethical persuasion would be easier for a shy person but the explaining part would be difficult and would take a lot of courage.

***Right.***

Whereas if you're outspoken, the exploring part is more demanding. Power is in the application of the values of caring, fairness, understanding and respect. We want tools in order to grow

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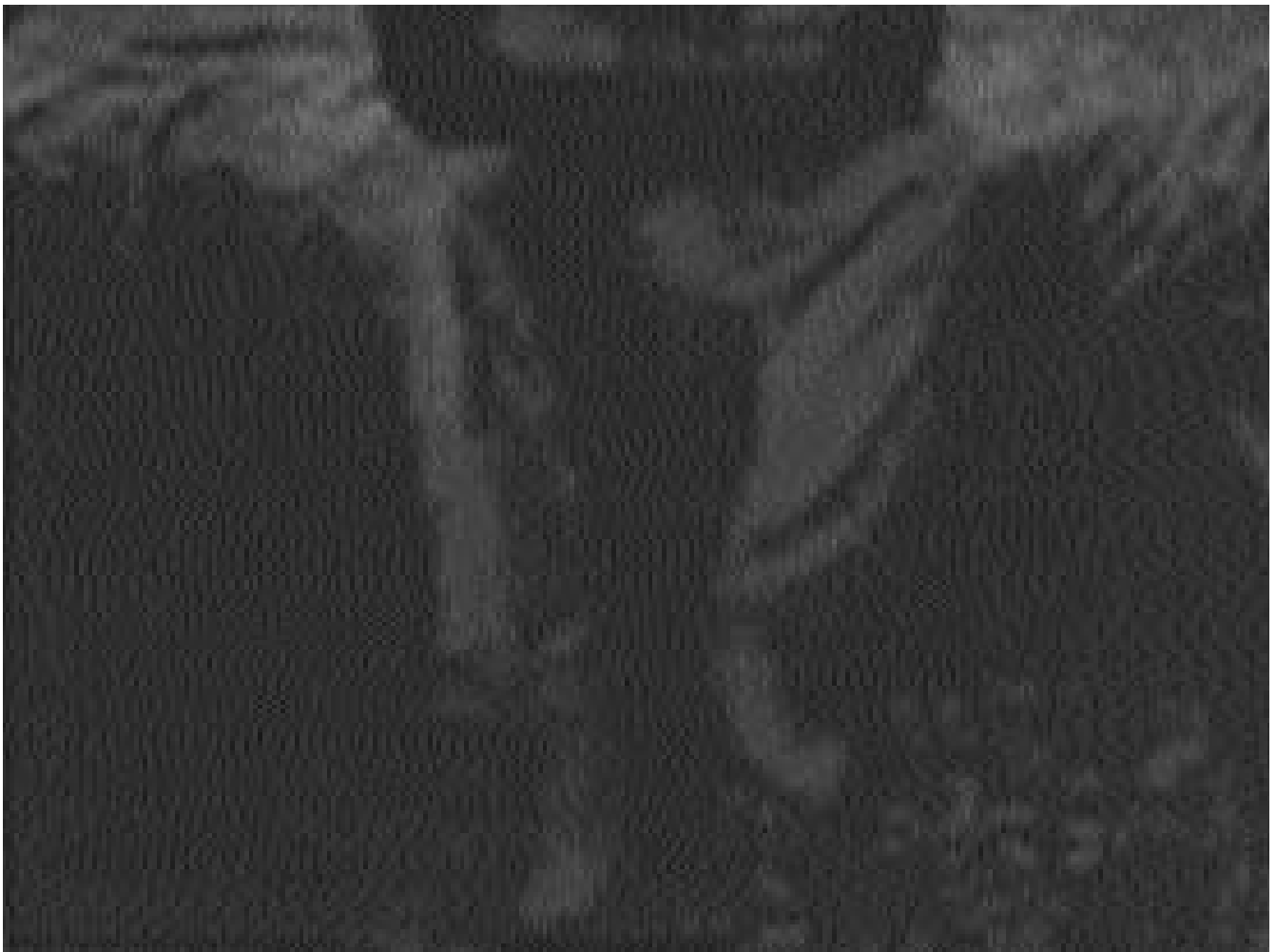


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# The Rewards of Regrets

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CAROL KLEIN AND RICHARD GOTTI

Carole Klein is the author of five books including "The Myth of the Happy Child," "Aline," and "The Single Parent Experience." She teaches writing at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Richard Gotti is a practicing psychotherapist and professor at Empire State College, Albany, New York. From "Overcoming Regret," copyright 1992 by Carole Klein. Printed with permission of Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group. All Rights Reserved.



Regret as a human and humanizing experience connects us to one another by reminding us that we are all struggling with the limits of existence. As less-than-perfect beings in a less-than-perfect world, we try to make the best choices we can over a lifetime.

Poets and philosophers turned their lamps on the shadowy presence of regret long before psychologists made the attempt. Literature has also mined the feeling as a trenchant source of our universal story, for the prism through which humanity views experience is deeply colored by regrets poignant tones.

One reason that regret is more the province of writers than psychologists is that it resists textbook explanation.

"A feeling of sorrow or a sense of loss over past decisions, dissatisfactions, or disappointments" is one dictionary definition, while another takes a somewhat different approach. Regret is "distress of mind on account of something beyond our power to remedy."

Both definitions are true. Both are also inadequate. Our own preferred definition of regret is offered by Professor Robert Sugden, "Regret is the painful sensation of recognizing that 'what is' compares unfavorably with 'what might have been.'"

In fact, for every choice we make we give up a host of other options, which will always leave us open to feelings of longing for the options we abandoned. There are realistic gains and losses to every choice and, even more significant, a certain tragic loss in having to choose at all.

We can however resolve the pain of regret by understanding that both "what might have been" and

"what is" are inextricable in the human experience. Used well, the pain of *if onlys*, wrong turns, and roads not taken can play a singularly important part in the search for a more meaningful life.

Regret is a hybrid emotion, a composite of many different feelings. People troubled with regret often confuse the feeling with guilt, depression, self-pity, or sorrow. In fact, regret resembles all of these but it's also significantly different; unless the differences are understood, we run the risk of failing in our efforts to find relief.

- Regret often lurks in depression, but feeling regret does not make us clinically depressed.
- Although regret involves remorse and guilt, it is not synonymous with either feeling.
- As grief is a response to loss, regret shares much with sorrow, but it is more complicated than sorrow.

- While regret contains a dynamic of anger, it is more complex than anger.

Regret is slippery, elusive, subtle, multifarious. It glides in and out of our consciousness. We shudder from its ache and grow exhausted from its relentless attacks. We try to hide from it, pretend it doesn't exist, call it by another name. At times our efforts pay off—something good happens, our self-esteem is restored, and we turn away from the past and the pain. But then we hear an echo of the past that reminds us of someplace or someone, and the feeling returns.

We can never know for certain what might have been if only we had chosen differently, acted oppositely, moved less blindly, but we can learn how to put much of the pain of those real or imagined "mistakes" to rest. No matter how stuck we feel in regrets from the past, we can direct our gaze and our energy to a future that is still ours to define.

Andre Gibe wrote, "It is a rule of life that when one door closes, another door always opens. Let us not, therefore, mourn so much for the losses behind the closed door that we miss the opportunities waiting for us beyond the newly opened door."

Some yearning for roads not taken is a natural part

**When we focus too much attention on "if only" and "what might have been," on how we might have reacted differently to some significant life event—on every error, failure, and missed chance for happiness—regret can become a way of imprisoning ourselves for these mistakes.**

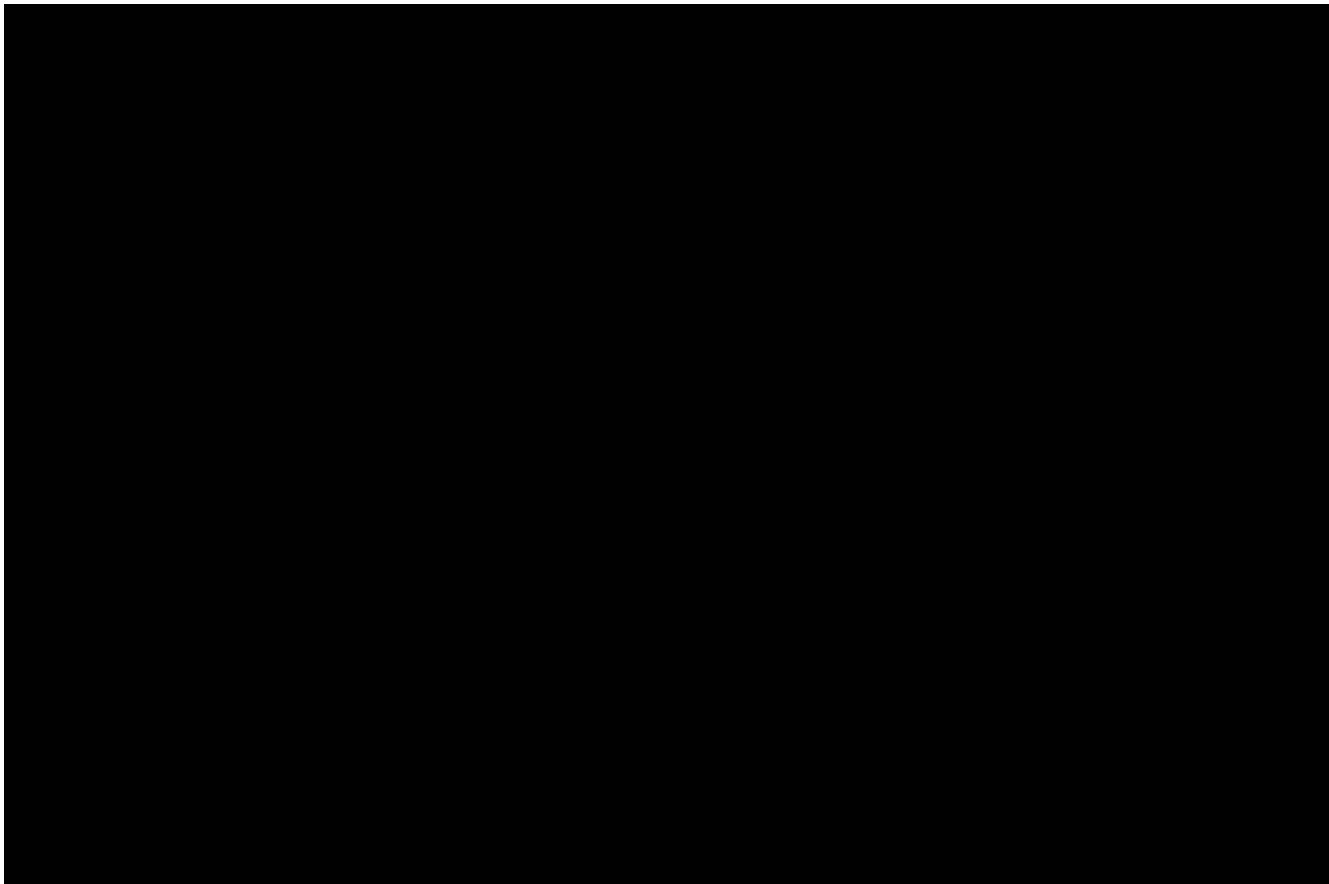


PHOTO BY DAVE DEVIKES

of life, but this doesn't mean we must mourn the past behind doors sealed shut with regret. When we focus too much attention on *if only* and *what might have been*, on how we might have reacted differently to some significant life event—on every error, failure, and missed chance for happiness—regret can become a way of imprisoning ourselves for these mistakes. And as our energy is sapped by an impossible longing to rewrite history, we lose initiative to make the future better.

A paradoxical reward of regret is that it can be a source of liberation, freeing us from the heartache and guilt of past errors and miscalculations. The wrong turns we mourn can fire the energy to meet new challenges and explore new opportunities. Yesterday's lessons may have been hard, possibly even bitter but with regret as our map, we can continue to grow.

In order to use regret as a positive force, we need to understand that the pain of regret is experienced as a continuum. In its mildest form the feeling can be a fleeting memory or fantasy, a pensive wish that the fates had been kinder or we had been wiser, but these regrets fade relatively quickly as we get caught up in currently satisfying experiences.

Further along the continuum as the experience of regret grows more acute, temporary disquiet turns into gnawing anxiety, diminishing our capacity to feel any hope or joy about the future.

At the furthest end of the continuum, the experience of regret appears in its most painful, crippling form. We are mired in sorrow and anger at ourselves, and our very sense of self is seriously eroded. Because regret seems to have taken root permanently in our lives, we feel hopeless and despairing about its pangs diminishing, about ever knowing any happiness again.

Psychoanalyst Karen Honey wrote that the emotional pain people feel often reflects not just their inner struggle but what is going on in the world around them. When a great many men and women suffer from similar symptoms, she said, there is reason to think that "something is seriously wrong with the conditions under which people live. It shows that the psychic difficulties engendered by the cultural conditions are greater than the average capacity of people to deal with them."

That statement seems to hold true when we examine modern life and the experience of regret. Contemporary society intensifies regret because it claims to present us with apparently infinite opportunities. While having so many choices might at first appear to diminish the dilemma of regret—after all, we have so many routes to happiness from which to select—it has just the opposite effect.

*Regret, which is inextricably linked to choice, has become*

*a major malady of modern life. The more options there are to choose from, the more options we must relinquish at the moment of choice. As we choose more, we give up more, and create more "might have beens."*

To understand our responses fully when we make certain choices or feel bad if we don't make them, we have to take into account what it means to be part of this particular time in history. Previous generations had far fewer choices than we have. For much of society, most children's lives mirrored those of their parents. They became the farmers or housewives or trainmen their fathers and mothers had been before them. If they dreamed of a different life, the dreams centered on limited, reasonably attainable gains over their parents' lives. They might, for example, hope to become a foreman instead of a worker or be able to afford a larger house for their children than they themselves had grown up in.

As society evolved, for a variety of social and technological reasons—from a diminishment of strong institutional controls, to a more complex economy, to inventions like the birth control pill that changed the size of families, to expanded transportation facilities that broadened people's horizons, to machines that changed the nature of work, to medicines and surgical procedures that dramatically extended the life span—people began to see that their futures might be sweepingly unlike and infinitely fuller than anything known in earlier generations.

Today, the value of ongoing possibility and limitless expectations is deeply entrenched in our culture, and there is a relative absence of social and moral restrictions to check our desires. This can make us feel insatiable for new experience at any age. Our dreams can be intricate and unbounded, and our regrets over failed dreams may be equally intense.

There is another dilemma in a culture that heightens expectations about choice. We are confused not only about what we can do but about what we should

**Our culture places a premium on decisive action rather than on considered reflection about our true needs and values. In a state of emotional tension we often make impulsive moves that can backfire, such as making a phone call to a rejecting lover, or saying yes to a commitment we seriously doubt we can handle.**

want to do. Living in an age in which competitiveness and extreme ambition are common values can make us doubt and regret our genuine needs and feelings. Today for instance, many women apologize for staying home with young children when they truly find great fulfillment in doing so. Similarly, both men and women feel self-conscious about not being driven to extravagant achievement, the better to acquire greater status and wealth and impressive possessions.

"Everybody I know thinks I should quit my job," says Paul, who is "locked" into a mid-level executive position at a large corporation. He sounds a little sheepish as he continues. "In a way I agree with them. I know I'm capable of moving up into top management and that ten years from now it will be a lot harder to find a new position. I'm probably going to be filled with regret when I realize I no longer *can* move on. But I'm contented here and the salary gives me a reasonably comfortable life. I'd rather not risk losing the security this job provides me to try and earn more."

Although he had never thought about the relationship between cultural values and regret, Paul followed this admission with a wish "to have been born into a simpler time when a man wouldn't have to be embarrassed about wanting stability more than an exciting career."

There is some evidence that more people are beginning to feel like Paul. They are choosing to live on a relatively modest scale, sensing that consumerism and blind ambition are not the definitions of a meaningful life.

For many other people, however living in a culture that continuously whets the appetite for more causes an acute kind of yearning and discomfort. Being encouraged—even expected—to seize every one of our allegedly unlimited options only makes everything

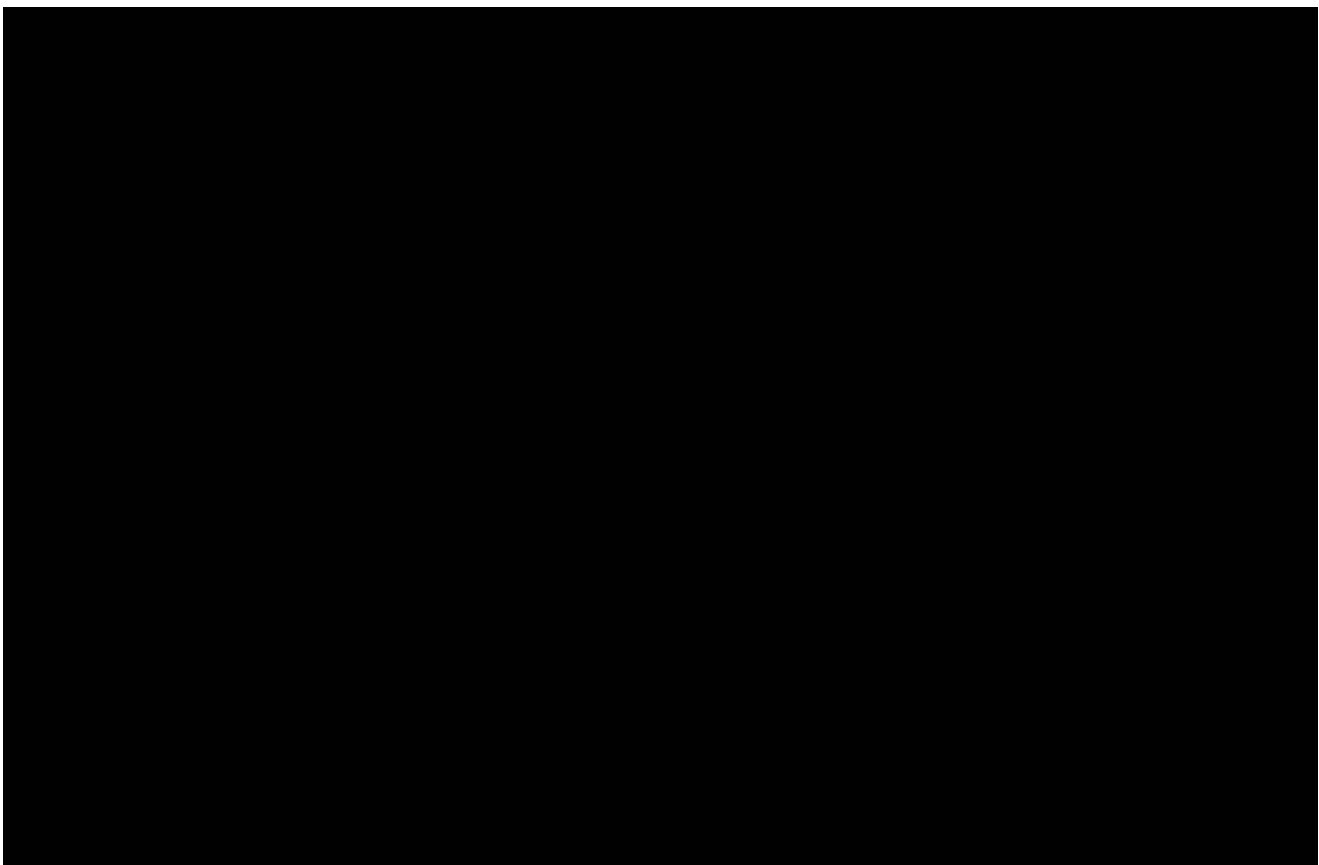


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seem like not enough. Carvings for everything unleashed, we resist the idea that *unrestricted choice is ultimately an illusion, that we simply can't do or have it all.*

It's understandable that some of us would have trouble accepting the idea of limits because the notion of limitations does seem to fly in the face of cultural propaganda. As historian Daniel J. Boorstin explains, "During the last century great historical forces have promoted both the rise of images and the decline of ideals."

Surrounded primarily by images, he says, we grow further away from the genuine ideals that have sustained humanity since the beginning of time. These ideals, such as loyalty, equality, or altruism, are "perfect" but they are not "simplified" by being presented as examples easy to achieve.

By contrast, the books, magazines, and newspapers we read, the films and television programs we watch offer us men and women whose lives are incredibly full of achievement. These media images of unrealistic lives threaten to engulf us with ostensibly accessible visions of glamour and fame and actions without consequence.

We live in a culture in which almost everything seems possible. If we can explore outer space and develop human life *in vitro*, then surely we can play several roles in life and competently juggle myriad demands on our time.

We live in a culture in which the rapid pace of daily life prevents the kind of self-examination that could tell us what we really need, instead of making us so receptive to the seductive appeal of what we want.

We live in a culture in which an emphasis on personal gratification seems to sanction greed and encourage grandiose goals.

In Frederick Exley's novel about contemporary angst, *A Fan's Notes*, the narrator exclaims, "There's nothing I don't want! I want this, and I want that, and I want—well, everything!"

Although he is not a particularly distinctive person, Exley's narrator has extraordinary expectations. He dreams of "a destiny that's grand enough for me! Like Michelangelo's God reaching out to Adam, I want nothing less than to reach across the ages and stick my dirty fingers into posterity!" When he finally realizes that he will not even come close to his ideals, he virtually falls apart.

This passage illustrates another fundamental element of contemporary regret. *In a culture that worships success, failure is intolerable.* When we don't reap conspicuous rewards in a society that for the most part still promises everything, we hold ourselves responsible for failure. Clearly, we tell ourselves, we misused our freedom to choose. Clearly, our choices were "wrong."

Another element of modern life that creates regret

is our confusion about the real meaning of autonomy and independence. We are supposed to be completely self-sufficient and never need to depend on anyone else. The price we pay for living up to this illusion is that we sacrifice the comfort and support of close human relationships.

In her novel *Rosa*, Cynthia Ozick writes about men and women who left active lives in distant cities to retire to Florida. The reality of the transition was often harshly disappointing. For protagonist Rosa Lubin, for example, "it seemed . . . that the whole peninsula of Florida was weighted down with regret. Everyone had left behind a real life."

When we interviewed a friend, June, in the sunny living room of her Florida condominium (she took a chair facing away from the beach-front window), she made it very clear that real life for her was still back in Chicago. A year ago at the age of fifty-one, June was widowed. She explained that with her children grown, the family apartment was hauntingly lonely.

"One of my husband's much older ex-partners invited me to visit him and his wife in their retirement home in Florida. While I was there, they encouraged me to move down permanently. God knows what, at my age, possessed me to agree. Mainly I didn't want my children to feel they had to see me all the time, and I hoped that I could find companionship with these old friends. Boy, was I wrong! They barely have time for a phone conversation once a week, and they socialize with married couples their age who seem to resent my relative youth and freedom.

"So here I am, away from everything I value, in a glitzy condominium I despise, feeling like my soul and mind are withering in the sun along with my skin."

Her voice full of self-disgust, June described how she had ignored all the literature about widowhood that warned against making major decisions soon after the loss of a mate. "I can't blame anyone but myself for what's happened to me," she finished bleakly.

If June had been widowed in an earlier era, she would probably never have impulsively relocated. Choices for a middle-aged widow (and fifty-one would have been considered beyond middle age) were very limited. Her children would probably have felt a real responsibility for her care and she would have felt much less compunction about accepting it. She would still have deeply regretted her husband's death, over which she had no control, but she would not have had to suffer what she condemns as the self-inflicted regret of severing all her major ties at once.

June's decision to move also shows the influence of yet another popular canon. Our culture places a pre-

mium on decisive action rather than on considered reflection about our true needs and values. In a state of emotional tension we often make impulsive moves that can backfire, such as making a phone call to a rejecting lover, or saying yes to a commitment we seriously doubt we can handle. Mainly, however, June's situation illustrates our contemporary preoccupation with independence. In an effort to appear self-sufficient during a time of genuine need, she cut herself off from a major source of emotional support.

In other instances, the credo of independence manifests itself quite differently. We feel sanctioned by the culture to put ourselves first in a relationship and often don't realize until it's too late that our self-centered expectations might eventually cause ourselves and others considerable pain.

Jeffrey is a stockbroker. "It's the damndest thing," he says, his voice raspy as he paces the room where we conduct our interview. "When I was in college I went with a girl who was an artist, a little older than me and very nurturing. It was great at the time. I got a big kick out of her being so bohemian and such an earth mother. But when I got a chance to come to New York, although I thought about asking her to come along, I decided not to. I did care about her a lot, but she seemed all wrong for the kind of life I was heading toward. I felt a little bit like a heel, but she was so supportive and understanding . . . just like she always was about everything that I was able to leave with a minimum of guilt.

"Well, listen. You know that big plane crash last month? She was on it. I was absolutely horrified when I saw her name on the passenger list. Then, by chance I ran into an old buddy from those days and we got together for a drink. And he told me that Maggie had fallen apart when I left . . . she'd actually stopped painting and hardly ever went out. I couldn't believe it. Evidently, things did get better for her after she moved to Chicago, but you know," Jeff says, his eyes full of tears, "the newspaper said she wasn't married and there weren't any children mentioned, and I keep obsessing about whether she was happy or not when she got on that plane, whether she was still hurt by what I had done to her. And all I hear in my head is my friend saying when we first started talking, 'Jesus, Jeff, didn't you know how much that girl loved you'"

Although Jeff's greatest regret is the tragedy of his ex-lover's death and his callous treatment of her, another regret surfaced as we talked—one that also reflects a modern emphasis on career gain over personal relationships. •

# *Spirituality*

*Fifty years ago, no one except those connected with religion would have thought that spirituality was an appropriate subject for discussion in a non-religious context. Some may still see spirituality as naive or irrelevant to the business of living. I believe it is our connection to the universe and is basic to our existence, and therefore is essential to our therapeutic context. ✂ My personal ideas and understanding of spirituality began with my own experiences as a child, growing up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. Everywhere I saw growing things. Very early, I understood that growth was life force revealing itself, a manifestation of spirit. I looked at the tiny seeds I planted and watched them grow into big plants. Little chickens emerged from eggs and little piglets came from a sow's belly. Then, I saw my brother being born. I marveled. This was something grand and wonderful. I felt the mystery, the excitement, and the awesomeness. Those wondrous feelings remain with me today, and I think they have guided me in finding ways to help people grow.*



Virginia Satir was a pioneer in family therapy and an internationally acclaimed group leader and therapist. The following is from her last book "Peoplemaking."



**W**e know how growth works, but we do not know how it starts. No one, as yet, has been able to invent an egg or seed capable of reproducing itself in any living thing. I respect the power of life; I know it to be both frail and tough. Any life can be snuffed out in a second, and it can also endure through impossible odds.

My reverence for life was set early in life. No plants ever grew better because I demanded that they do so or because I threatened them. Plants grew only when they had the right conditions and were given proper care, which for me, includes loving them and sometimes talking to them. Finding the right place and the proper nourishment for plants—and people as well—is a matter of continual investigation and vigilance.

Each of us emerges as a bud on a universal spiritual tree. That tree links *all* human beings through its roots. Each of us can learn how to become a wise leader who will love, take care of, and nurture the precious life we have been given.

When we ourselves have been nourished, we can then be appropriate in our nourishment of others. This is one reason that I recommend every community have a "cuddle room" where people can come to get spiritual and psychological nourishment. Fortunately, some churches have done something in this direction, providing a room for respite and personal connection.

Creating such caretaking approaches and crystallizing the inner recognition (what I call bone knowledge) is the realization that we are spiritual beings in human

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form. This is the essence of spirituality. How we apply our spiritual essence shows how we value life.

The creation of life comes from a power much greater than our own. The challenge of becoming more fully human is to be open to and to contact that power we call by many names, God being one frequently used. I believe that successful living depends on our making and accepting a relationship to our life force.

The physical connections to our spirituality are safely housed in our human seeds. Only when sperm and egg unite is the human seed complete and capable of becoming a human being. An egg and sperm alone are only storage tanks awaiting the great meeting.

For me, seeds and birth are spirituality in action.

When the union between sperm and egg takes place, a fantastic event occurs. Powerful energy is released and a new human being—unique, no exact duplicate of anyone else, ever before—begins getting ready to burst forth onto this earth. I feel overpowered when I try to comprehend how this very tiny human embryo can produce something as big, complicated, and multifaceted as a person.

Moreover, this tiny seed contains all the ingredients for the intricate systems that make up a living, breathing human being. The life force not only oversees the growth in each seed, but channels the energy so each part gets what it needs.

Is this not a miracle? We need to find ways to cherish, enjoy, nurture, and effectively use this miracle. Your birth, my birth, everyone's birth is a spiritual event and a cause for celebration. Obviously, we need to provide the richest context possible so that each child can grow up to be fully human. We are not at that point yet. For many, the miracle of birth is eclipsed by the grim conditions into which children are born. Nonetheless, when we accept the fact that each child contains the ingredients of a "walking and waking" miracle, we have a foundation for positive behavior on a world scale. Certainly, the family is the first place this happens. We are slowly moving to that kind of reverence for life.

In the effort to change behavior, it is easy to crush the spirit, thus crippling the body and dulling the mind. This approach is largely due to equating the value of a person with the nature of his or her behavior. (Remember that behavior is something we learn.) On the other hand, we can

simultaneously honor the spirit and foster more positive behavior.

Recognizing the power of spirit is what healing, living, and spirituality are all about. Many pay lip service to spirituality without living it. Conversely, the very effective Alcoholics Anonymous programs are built on the premise that when individuals accept and face their higher power, their life force is called upon and their healing begins. Literally thousands of people have shifted their lives from agony to joy and have become changed human beings through living this philosophy. No other approach has ever accomplished so much.

We are all unique manifestations of life. We are divine in our origins. We are also the recipients of what has gone before us, which gives us vast resources from which to draw. I believe that we also have a pipeline to universal intelligence and wisdom through our intuition, which can be tapped through meditation, prayer, relaxation, awareness, the development of high self-esteem, and a reverence for life. This is how I reach my spirituality.

We can more easily reach this wise part of ourselves when we are calm inside, when we feel good about ourselves, and when we know how to take positive approaches. I refer to this as being centered.

I work on learning to love the spirit unconditionally while at the same time recognizing, reorienting, and transforming behavior to fit ethical and moral ideals. This is one of the most urgent challenges of our time. My spirituality equals my respect for the life force in myself and all living things.

The following centering exercise is one that I practice. By doing it, you too can deepen your experience of spirituality.

*Sit comfortably on a chair with*

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*your feet on the floor. Gently close your eyes and simply notice your breathing.*

*Now silently go inside and give yourself a message of appreciation that might sound something like this, “I appreciate myself.” This is to give your spirit strength from your actions.*

*Next, visualize yourself affirming your connection with your creator.*

From time to time as you continue this exercise, be in touch with your breathing.

*Now go deeper inside and locate the place where you keep the treasure known by your name. As you approach this sacred place, notice your resources: your*

*ability to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell, to feel and to think, to move and to speak and to choose.*

*Linger long enough at each of these resources to remember the many times you used them, how you are using them now, and know that they will be available to you in the future. Then let yourself remember that these resources are part of you and are capable of many new sights, sounds, and so forth. Realize that you can never really be helpless as long as you recognize you have these resources.*

*Let yourself remember that as a creature in this universe, you are the recipient of the energy from the center of the earth, which brings you your ability to be grounded, and to make sense; the energy from the heavens, which brings you your intuition, imagination, and inspiration; and the energy from other human beings who are ready to be with you and have you with them.*

*Remind yourself to be free to look at and listen to everything, but to choose only that which fits you. Then you can clearly say yes to those things that fit you and no to the things that don't. You will then be able to do positive things for yourself and others instead of negative things such as fighting.*

*Now again, give yourself permission to breathe.*

This can take one minute or five minutes. You decide. Commit this exercise to memory and practice it often. Every time I do this, I am again reminded who I am and am given an opportunity to feel a new sense of strength which becomes my link to life. •

*From “The New Peoplemaking” by Virginia Satir. Copyright 1988 by Science and Behavior Books.*

# Learning to Listen

*Pain and suffering may often seem to be calling us to jump in and fix things, but perhaps they are asking us first to be still enough to hear what can really help, what can truly get to the cause of this suffering, what will not only eliminate it now but prevent it from returning. So before we act, we need to listen. When we do become quiet enough and “listen up,” as we now say in the cities, the way opens, and we see the possibilities for action. ✦ We give very little attention to learning to listen, learning really to hear another person or situation. Yet, think back to the moments with other people when our hearts were engaged and we felt fed by being together. In those moments, weren't we hearing one another? In times like those, when we have listened to and heard one another, we have felt life arising from a shared perspective.*

*Ram Dass has taught at Stanford, the University of California, and Harvard University. He has done volunteer work with the dying, prisoners, teenagers, people with AIDS, the homeless, ecological groups. Mirabai Busbs' most recent work has been in grass-roots village development in Guatemala for the Seva Foundation. She lives in western Massachusetts with her companion, E. J. Lynch, and her son, Owen.*



Each situation, each moment of life is new. We and this other person or group of people have never been here before. Oh, we've been in moments like it, but the present moment is new even if we have performed the same action with the same person hundreds of times before. Of course, it's easy to think, "Well, it's just like the last time, so I'll do what I did last time," and then not have to listen to the new moment. But if we do that, our lives become boring replications of what we have always done before, and we miss the possibilities of surprise, of new and more creative solutions, of mystery.

For our often humdrum lives to retain the taste of living truth, we have to listen freshly—again and again. A human interaction includes both the uniqueness of each being and the unity of the two, which transcends the separateness. For our minds to take such a subtle process and trivialize it to "just this again" or "nothing but that" is to reduce us to automatons, to objects for one another. And for action to be compassionate, we need to eliminate the idea of object, we need to be here together doing exactly what needs to be done to relieve pain and suffering in the simplest way we can. We need to listen.

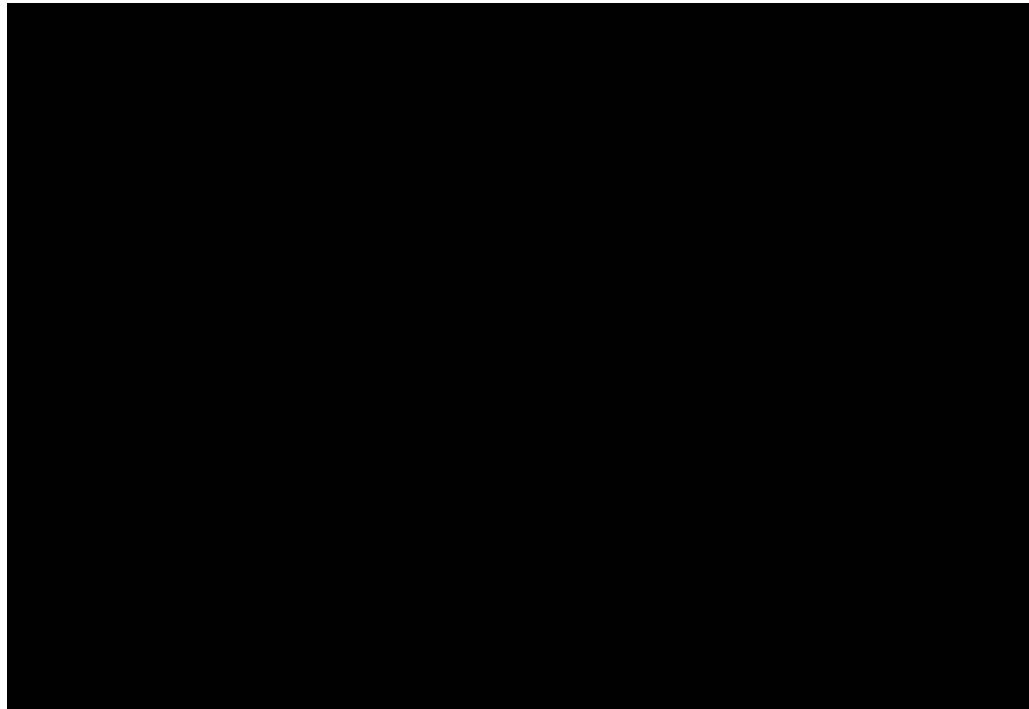
Francis Giambrone, who has

spent many years working with people with AIDS, tells how he began to learn to listen.

"I remember my first case. It wasn't AIDS; it was cancer. It was my first death case at the hospice. I would come in and say, 'Angelo, how are you?' and he would put on the television. Refused to talk to me. I would end up in his kitchen with his wife, and what was interesting was that I would

right.' And that, believe it or not, was the breakthrough. I sat there cutting his toenails and his fingernails, and slowly I asked him questions and I got him to talk.

"I had such strong ideas about what helping means. And what does it mean? It means *listening* and then doing... I had been thinking, Angelo, this is how you are going to die. These are the books you are going to read. But a



think, 'Oh my God, here's my childhood. Dad is in the living room, won't communicate with me, and Mom and I are in the kitchen laughing and talking.' It was my parents Frank and Katherine and me, and it was Angelo and his wife and me... And I thought, I'm going to do it differently this time.

"One day we were watching television and I lifted his foot and said, 'Angelo, look at your nails. They need to be cut.' And he looked at them and he said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'Do you want me to cut them?' And he said, 'All

lot of dying people are not concerned about how they are going to die. They want to stay alive! This experience had an impact on all my work—even my nondying work. I discovered that I'm not there to impose my reality on other people... I'm there to be a listener."

When we begin to act by listening, the rest follows naturally. It's not so easy, of course. It requires us to give up preconceived ideas, judgments, and desires in order to allow space to hear what is being said. True listening requires a deep respect and

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a genuine curiosity about situations as well as a willingness just to be there, to cut toenails and share stories. Listening opens the space, allows us to hear what needs to be done in that moment. It also allows us to hear when it is better not to act, which is sometimes a hard message to receive.

The music of our lives often gets lost in the music of our voices. We think that we already know what there is to hear. Sometimes we are simply moving a little too fast. Recently the phone in a friend's kitchen rang; it was the organizer of a local project that was bringing Guatemalan village leaders to town for a three-week conference. "Yes," she said, before he had a chance to ask. "That's great. I have a house you could use for a gathering." "Thank you, that's very nice," he replied in his Puerto Rican accent that sounded like salsa music, "but what we really need is someone to drive them around." Ah, it's small, you may think, but there it is again—acting without listening. Isn't it at heart the same impulse that leads the World Bank to build a dam for villages that don't want the electric power it provides or the U.S. Agency for International Development to decide that a village needs a road to the market without asking the people if they have anything to sell there?

After working with the Sarvodaya village development movement in Sri Lanka—a people's movement based on the integration of spiritual and cultural values, community organization, and self-reliance — Joanna Macy described how its members learned that "what we really need to do is to go to the people, generate communication, and be unafraid to listen." "It was with the villagers first and foremost

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that Sarvodaya's founder Ariyaratna and his colleagues sought to communicate; and since true communication is a two-way street, that meant listening, too. To listen with attention and respect is a skill that the Movement stressed, emphasizing that it is the villagers themselves who are, in the last analysis, the 'experts' on what they need and

what they can do. Instead of coming in with preformulated blueprints for action, organizers instigate 'family gatherings' where the local community itself assesses its needs and determines its priorities by consensus. These provide, sometimes for the first time, the occasion where a broad cross section of villagers can listen to each other, too. Out of this interaction has grown the fresh and deceptively simple formulations through which Sarvodaya conveys its philosophy of development."

When playwright August Wilson (*Fences*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*) was asked how he was able to express the reality of African-Americans so effectively (including those African-Americans who are very different from him), he said, "You have to listen. In the larger society, we are not listening to our kids, black or white. You may have to struggle to understand it because it's different from the world you know. For instance, if I go listen to rap, what these kids are doing these days is different from what I did as a teenager, and the way they're working out their social conduct is different from the way we did. So I simply say, 'Okay, I'll buy in on your terms, let me see what's going on with you.'"

There are now many people and organizations teaching techniques for clearer listening and appreciating the role of listening in the process of change. One such group is Rural Southern Voice for Peace, which has developed The Listening Project, a process by which members of grassroots groups go door to door or to familiar gathering places as they are beginning a project. They ask "open-ended questions in a non-judgmental but challenging way that encourages people to share their deepest thoughts" about the

area of the group's concern. They report that "remarkable things happen as this process unfolds: Activists empathize with former 'opponents,' replacing negative stereotypes with understanding and concern; barriers are overcome as both sides experience common ground and see each other as human beings with deeply held hopes and fears. People being surveyed feel affirmed, sensing that what the listeners really want is to know their opinions; some start to change their opinions as they explore, often for the first time, their deeper feelings about social problems."

Listening to others clearly opens the way to understanding the helping situation. But listening to others requires quieting some of the voices that already exist within us. When this happens, there is space not only for the voices of others but for our own truest voice, what the Quakers call the still small voice within. This voice always tells us the truth. And, as Alice Walker has said, "The inner voice can be very scary sometimes. You listen, and then you go 'Do what? I don't wanna do that!' But you still have to pay attention to it."

We need to take time to quiet down and listen to ourselves with attention—not only in the midst of action but when we are alone, walking in the woods, making tea, praying in an empty church, fishing in a stream, or sitting in meditation. A simple breath meditation can be helpful, because it returns us to a basic connection with the world. As we breathe in and out, and bring our awareness gently to our breath, we are experiencing the world coming into us and ourselves going back out into the world. We are reminded, in a simple physical way, that we are not separate from the world but

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together, and we  
are all we've  
got.*

continually interacting with it in the very makeup of our being.

Tiny Stacy, entertainment coordinator of the Blue Plate, a club in western Massachusetts, spends a big part of his life in service to others. He has organized many benefits, including one with Arlo Guthrie for Tibetan relief, and he has served as the Dalai Lama's chauffeur. It is meditation that has helped him learn to listen and to serve better. He describes it this way, "Your attention is focused, wholehearted. Meditation helps you bring awareness and caring into each action and each moment. It gives you a chance to deepen your awareness, to listen more

fully. It led me to direct my life more toward service and less toward concern for myself."

We need to listen fully. It's the basis of all compassionate action. We need to listen not only to the voice of the person who is hurting but to her bare feet, the baby wrapped in her shawl, and the stars in the cold night. Such full listening helps us hear who is calling and what we can do in response. When we listen for the truth of a moment, we know better what to do and what not to do, when to act and when not to act. We hear that we are all here together, and we are all we've got. In Gandhi's terms, we are letting the music of our voices make way for the music of life.

*When life itself seems  
lunatic, who knows where mad-  
ness lies? To surrender dreams...  
this may be madness. Too much  
sanity may be madness, and the  
maddest of all, to see life as it is  
and not as it should be.*

—Don Quixote

During the Gulf War, Gregory Levey, aged twenty-one, walked onto the Common in Amherst, Massachusetts, set down a cardboard sign that said PEACE, stuffed his clothes with newspapers, poured paint thinner over his body, and set himself on fire. He died within two minutes. On that same day, Iraq had announced that there had been 20,000 Iraqi deaths so far in the war.

For some of us, it is a daily struggle to keep hope alive when our dream is of peace. Abbie Hoffman and Mitch Snyder both left us this message. It's hard to keep any dream alive that includes harmony and justice, even a dream that sees only the fulfillment of basic human needs for everyone in the greater family. But we need to

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# Dreams

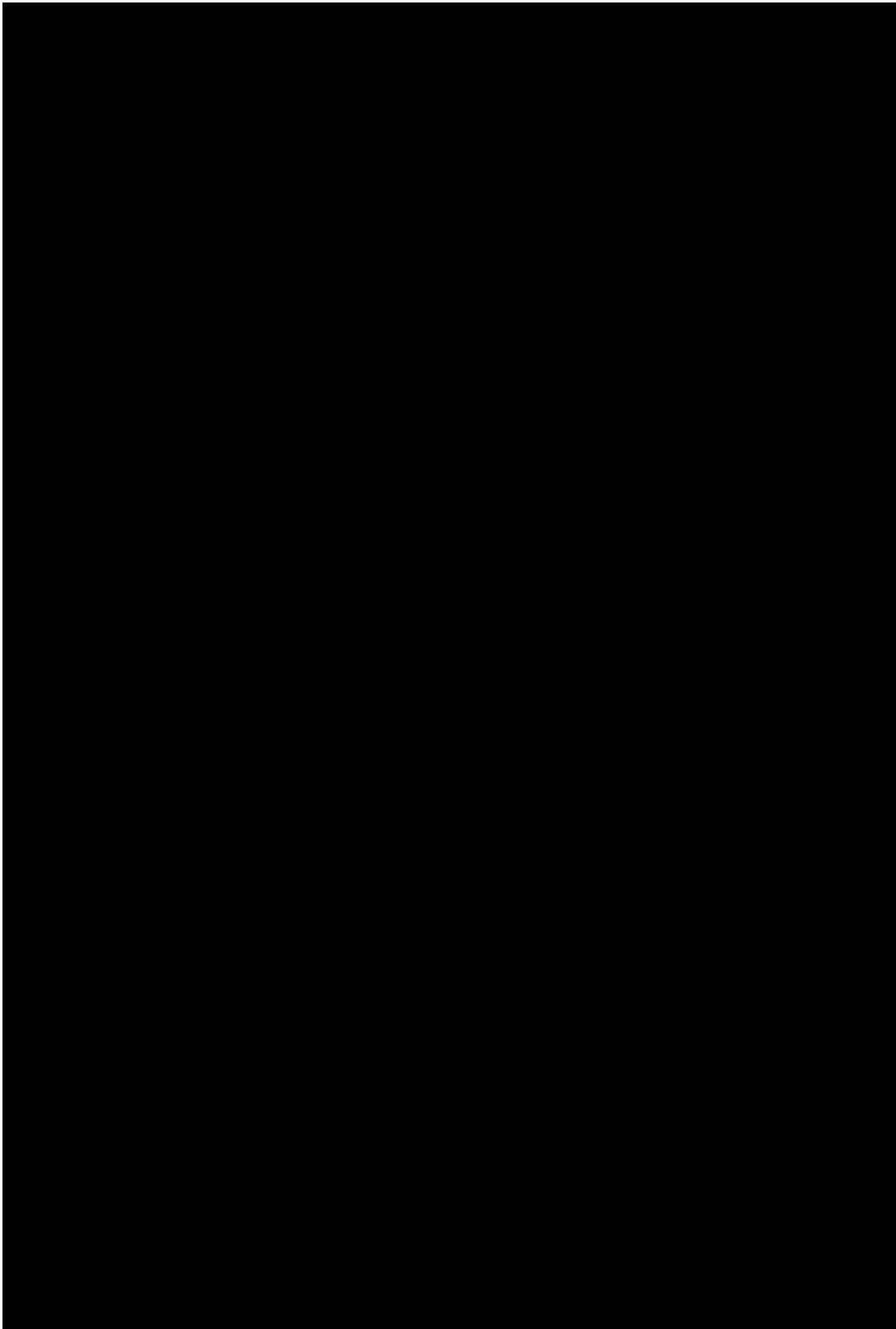
*A photographic exhibit of the desert.*

M A R G A R I T E H O E F L E R

MARGARITE HOFELER

*Hold on to your dreams for they are, in a sense, the stuff of which reality is made. It is through our dreams that we maintain the possibility of a better, more meaningful life.*

—Leo Buscaglia



MARGARTE HOEFLER

*It has been written that we are no greater  
than our dreams.*



MARGARITE HOEFLER

*Dreams are the touchstones of our  
characters.*

—Henry David Thoreau

S T E V E N J . H E N D L I N

# THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF PERFECTIONISM

*When Good Enough Is Never Enough*

**W**hen it comes to human beings and their actions in the real world there is no such thing as absolute perfection. Our behavior cannot be perfect. Our lack of awareness of this simple fact creates much frustration and suffering in our lives. This is one of the reasons the pursuit of perfection is a trap. As the psychologist Rabbi Reuven Bulka has said, "Perfection is not for human beings, perfection is for angels." What is the fundamental misunderstanding that leads us to believe that perfection in our performance is possible?

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Philosophers from the time of Plato have conceived of and written about mental perfection, the perfection of thought forms and ideas.

Some psychologists believe the concept of perfection is one of the archetypes (unconscious collective mental templates) with which we are born.

The fact that we can conceive of the perfect thought form or image does not mean these images can be actualized. *Our ability to conceive of a perfect image, combined with our failure to understand the impossibility of actualizing this image in our behavior, is the basic confusion that sets the trap of never measuring up for the perfectionist.*

It is as if our mind plays a cruel trick on us, taunting us to actualize the perfect images it produces. Our task is to learn to recognize and appreciate the images without believing they can be made real. This is not easy to do. We are told, "You'll see it when you believe it," and "You create your own reality," and other slogans that tantalize us with the notion that we should be able to turn all of our images and fantasies into real-world behavior.

When we fail to make this crucial distinction between the perfect mental image and real-world behavior, we have taken the bait and stepped into the perfection trap. Once we begin to separate our images from our behavior, we are free to enjoy these images

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without the burden of needing to make them real.

This is why we say that perfection is a fantasy, a mental image or idea of what we consider to be the ultimate standard as we wish it could be realized in the world. In our striving for excellence, we can only *approach* what we consider to be the perfect athletic performance, perfect body, perfect relationship, perfect health, perfect vacation, perfect lifestyle, or perfect religious experience. Such an experience may feel whole, complete, and satisfying but no matter how close the perfectionist comes to the image of perfection, the knowledge that he has fallen short results in feelings of inadequacy. For the perfectionist, *good enough is never enough*. If we can learn to sever the false but powerful unconscious connection between

*conceiving* of perfection versus *achieving* it, we can spare ourselves much of the suffering that accompanies this impossible pursuit.

There is an alternative way to think of perfectionism. We can view it as "the practice of demanding of ourselves and others a higher quality of performance than is required by the situation," as one psychological dictionary defines it.

#### NEVER-ENOUGH THINKING

The following list focuses on how the never-enough mentality influences the way perfectionists think and behave around a specific issue of overwhelming importance to them: their own performance.

*Perfectionists set unrealistically or even impossibly high goals for their performance.* For example, JoAnn tells me that she considers herself a failure because not all of the articles she has submitted to a magazine have been accepted for publication. Even though a number have been accepted, she is unable to handle the sense of worthlessness that lasts for days whenever she gets a rejection notice. Her all-or-nothing thinking casts a shadow on her accomplishments and diminishes her work. She says she just can't stand to have her acceptance record be less than perfect.

*Perfectionists cannot tolerate simply coming close to the goal.* They cannot tolerate anything less than hitting it on the nose. They leave little room for acknowledging gradual steps of successive approximation, or getting closer and closer to the goal with repeated practice. To the perfectionist, coming close is the same as failing. This all-or-nothing thinking can lead to feelings of self-disgust, anger, regret, and make the perfectionist try to blame others for the "failure."

*Perfectionists are not willing to be beginners.* They have little tolerance for the feeling of frustration that is

natural to learning a new skill. They expect they ought to be able to perform perfectly from the start. While they may realize this is irrational, they believe it nevertheless. If they can't learn a new skill immediately, they find some excuse for giving it up, because they cannot tolerate feeling foolish and dependent. In learning something new, we are often forced to get help from someone else, to depend on them to teach us and to surrender to their greater knowledge and skill. Perfectionists tend to avoid depending on others because they don't want to acknowledge their limits.

Unwilling to be beginners, they shy away from anything they have not already mastered. They especially don't like to be seen trying something new in public where the potential for feeling embarrassment and humiliation is even stronger. If they do let themselves try something new, they prefer to do so privately, where no one can witness their trial-and-error efforts.

Sometimes perfectionists rationalize their avoidance of trying anything new as a lack of interest. They would rather tell themselves and others they are simply "not interested" than admit their inability to risk the vulnerable feelings of being a beginner. They need to believe that if they only had the interest, they could do anything well. And as long as they don't try new things, this belief is never put to the test.

*Never-enough thinking often leads to procrastination.* When the perfectionist is willing to try something new, it may be only after long procrastination. Whatever initial excitement may have been aroused at the thought of trying something new is overcome by paralyzing fear of failure, possible humiliation, and feelings of shame. Procrastination protects the per-

fectionist from the dread of the less-than-perfect result, which she views as failure. Fear of failure may also lead the perfectionist to procrastinate with more familiar tasks and projects, stifling creativity and holding the perfectionist back from what she most desires—achievement.

Procrastinators often rationalize their inability to face their fears of rejection and humiliation with all

**He who knows  
when enough is  
enough will always  
have enough.  
—Lao Tze**

kinds of "good" excuses for not beginning a task. Thus, they not only avoid taking on projects that may expose them to shame and humiliation, they also avoid acknowledging the real reasons for their behavior. Because of this, it is necessary first to help procrastinators admit that they are, indeed, fearful of a catastrophic outcome. Once they acknowledge this fear, they can work more directly with their catastrophic expectations and negative thinking.

*No matter how well perfectionists perform, they struggle to feel satisfied with the outcome. They feel an inner emptiness instead of the joy of accomplishment.* John, who is accustomed to doing outstanding work at

graduate school, has just received word that his mathematics paper has been accepted by a prestigious journal. He says, "Yeah, I guess it's a feather in my cap. But it feels like I just measured up to what I expected of myself, so why should I make a big deal out of it?" He is unable to let this accomplishment sink in so that it can nourish him. Since he expects only the best of himself, he has simply measured up, so what is there to feel good about?

*Perfectionists are unable to savor the moment of accomplishment and unwilling to celebrate the event.* When they should feel excitement, joy, and satisfaction, they feel only an emptiness or deadness. Sometimes, the perfectionist is aware of this emptiness and says something like, "I know I ought to feel good about this but instead I just feel numb." Or he may ask, "Is that all there is to it? It didn't seem like the goal was hard enough to achieve," implying that there is no reason to feel good about an achievement unless the task was especially arduous. Sometimes he even uses the moment of accomplishment to put himself down, "Oh, it isn't all that important. I could have done even better."

This is the paradox of perfectionism, perfectionists want things to be magically easy to accomplish but at the same time they are mistrusting of themselves if they accomplish something too easily. Since they basically don't trust whatever talent they have, they are suspicious of anything they don't have to work very hard to attain. This makes for a frustrating no-win situation—"If things come too easily, I won't value myself, yet I expect to be able to do everything expertly without much effort."

*The perfectionist fears being found out as an impostor.* When he does

temporarily measure up, the perfectionist only succeeds in pushing away the fear of failure for a while longer. This is part of the reason why the perfectionist feels so little true satisfaction and joy. Failure is always lurking around the corner, with the next performance, promotion, or evaluation.

### F E A R O F B E I N G F O U N D O U T

This fear of failure is related to the perfectionist's often-stated feeling of being a phony or impostor. He feels he is deceiving others, that he is not as competent or worthy as he appears to be. The impostor knows he will sooner or later be found out—it is only a matter of time. He almost wishes it would happen sooner so he could give up the anxiety-ridden charade.

Anne, a 38-year-old who teaches literature at a junior college, says, "I finally got the promotion I've been working so hard for. But I keep looking over my shoulder, waiting for the faculty to find out. Even though I know the material, I still feel like I'm faking it. Sometimes I dream of my students laughing at me as I stand in front of the class."

The impostor phenomenon was popularized in a best-selling pop-psychology book a few years ago. You can bet that many bought the book thinking to themselves, "Yes, that's me. I feel like an impostor, too," were those with perfectionistic tendencies.

The fear of failure and of being found out is strong because the perfectionist lacks the inner self-worth to sustain any type of criticism. To be less than perfect is to be fallible, to make mistakes. And when the perfectionist makes a mistake, she believes others will make the same harsh, rejecting judgments of her that she makes toward herself.

When the part of the perfectionist's self-concept that strongly identifies with this role of being perfect is confronted by evidence to the contrary, she realizes that she is fallible like everyone else. Then, following all-or-nothing thinking, her inner critic tells her

**When we fail to make this crucial distinction between the perfect mental image and real-world behavior, we have taken the bait and stepped into the perfection trap.**

that admitting mistakes means that she is not only less than perfect but also incompetent and a phony. The reasoning goes like this: "If I think I am a perfectionist, but really I am fallible, then I am a phony, and my fallibility will be discovered and used to humiliate me. I'm really inadequate."

Perfectionists may also feel like impostors because they are able to create a surface picture of competence and control that covers their

inner sense of confusion and turmoil. But as they achieve higher levels of responsibility, the fear of having their incompetence found out begins to crack the outer pretense of self-assurance.

*Contributing to the driven nature of the perfectionist is the "So what have you done for me lately?" mentality.* This type of thinking is generated both from within himself, as well as from outside, by our performance oriented society. Movie and TV stars, no matter how many successful films or shows they have made, are "only as good as their last performance"; professional athletes are quickly forgotten by the public if they don't stay on top; the author who had a best-seller two years ago feels compelled to repeat his performance for his readers; the boss makes it clear that our last big sale was great, but, "Hey, that was two weeks ago. What can you do for me today?"

The message is clear: "You are only as good as your last victory or sale or performance. Don't stop—keep pushing for more." But this is heard and experienced by the perfectionist as, "You are only a good (lovable, worthwhile) person if you keep on performing. Don't stop now or you'll turn to dust." To stop performing is to diminish one's sense of self-worth, to feel empty, to have one's identity challenged to the core. The competitive nature of our society sanctions this "what have you done for me lately?" mentality. It is never enough to set a record once or to have one outstanding performance; we must do it again and again. If we can't, sooner or later we are sure to be viewed as nothing more than a vapor trail.

### T H E E L E M E N T S O F E X C E L L E N C E

We will now look at some elements of excellence that the per-

fectionist probably already possesses. The perfectionistic view of these qualities can be shaped into a more moderate form in realizing the good-enough mentality. This is not an exhaustive list but only an indication of those elements that I believe are most important in the pursuit of excellence.

*Knowledge.* Are you willing to acquire, through reading, study, and experience, the basic and advanced knowledge of your discipline that is necessary to perform thoroughly your skill at a high level? Have you chosen an area in which you are capable of obtaining this knowledge? Is this knowledge interesting and meaningful to you?

*Compatibility.* Does the area in which you wish to excel follow naturally from those skills and talents that you already possess? If not, is it an area in which you have a realistic possibility of learning at a high level, given your natural limitations? Are your temperament and personality compatible with the skills and talents necessary to perform at a high level? If others are involved in your chosen area, can you work with them well enough to do the job you desire?

*Dedication.* How much does it matter to you whether you excel? Are you willing to practice your skills in your chosen area as much as is required to reach a high level of proficiency? Are you, within reason, willing to sacrifice certain pleasures and diversions if necessary? Are you willing to hang in there without quitting even after repeatedly falling short of your goals?

*Motivation.* Are you sufficiently motivated not to allow yourself to be distracted by other interests? Are you, without being driven, strongly pulled toward reaching the top? What makes it so important for you to excel in this particular area? What are your true

**We can't find perfection in the world of doing, nor can we find perfection in the behavior of human beings toward each other. We can find perfection in the beauty of the natural world that surrounds us.**

motivations for caring about it? Do you have any ulterior motives that you don't like to admit?

*Commitment.* Is reaching excellence in this area a short-term goal for you? Or are you willing to be committed over the long term, refining your skills even after you reach your desired level of competence? What will you do when your attention is captured by another, equally interesting area? How much are you willing to dedicate your life to becoming truly an expert over time?

*Satisfaction.* Do you derive satisfaction from incremental steps toward your goal of excellence? Do you know how to break your goal into various subgoals that bring you enjoyment, pleasure, self-respect, and sense of well-being? Is there anything else you'd rather be doing than this particular area

of striving? Are you able to make your efforts a dance toward excellence rather than an all-consuming struggle?

#### MOVING FROM PERFECTIONISM TO EXCELLENCE

In transforming perfection to excellence, the perfectionist's attitude toward these six elements can evolve in the following ways.

*Knowledge and excellence.* We can move from knowledge that confirms an air of superiority to knowledge that ensures adequate grounding in a chosen discipline. We can learn to use knowledge to gain confidence and to acquire skills rather than to feel superior to others or to boast about our intelligence and learning. We can learn to give up the narcissistic attitude that our superior knowledge entitles us to special attention and treatment.

*Compatibility and excellence.* We can learn to choose pursuits that are right for us, not just those that carry high status or reflect what our parents and friends think we should do. We can find the work and projects that fit our personal style. We can move from a viewpoint of "me against the world" to "we're in it together." We can learn how to cooperate with others for the mutual benefit of others and ourselves. We can move beyond jealousy, envy, and vindictiveness to take an interest in and feel joy for the triumphs of others. Instead of thinking there's only room at the top for one, we can believe there's room enough for everyone.

*Dedication and excellence.* Instead of conditional dedication based on easy reward and low frustration, we can cultivate dedication based on personal integrity. We can move beyond blaming others when something isn't easy. We can persist even after failures. We

can learn to tolerate second-best, if necessary. We can make use of constructive criticism.

*Motivation and excellence.* We can move from motivation by fear of failure to motivation derived from personal satisfaction and achievement. Instead of desperate performance to avoid shame, we can practice spirited, interested engagement and find reward in both the process and the goal. Instead of compulsively moving on without taking time to savor our achievements, we can make room for the celebration of success as a way to gain nourishment for further challenges. We can use our obsessive tendencies positively to sustain motivation despite distractions.

*Commitment and excellence.* Instead of commitment based on short-term ego gratification, we can seek commitment based on strong investment in the skill or work itself. From surface-level narcissistic gratification, we can move to a deeper sense of right livelihood or doing work that we enjoy that is consistent with our ethics, temperament, and personal beliefs and that fulfills our personal needs. We can transcend short-term interest based on fad and fashion.

*Satisfaction and excellence.* In place of momentary relief based on temporarily fending off anxiety and the fear of failure, we can achieve deeper satisfaction and contentment based on a sense of pride of accomplishment and enjoyment of the process of reaching it. We can shift our focus from the end goal to enjoyment of the incremental steps toward the goal, from frustration and fragmentation to a sense of wholeness and completeness.

Are you willing to make these changes and to address the elements of excellence you may be lacking? If you are, you will be in

**When we learn to live in the present, we do not give up striving for excellence. We do not give up having goals. But we do give up the perfectionist's paralyzing anxiety and fear.**

a strong position to break out of the good-enough-is-never-enough mentality. As Lao Tze put it, "He who knows when enough is enough will always have enough."

#### P E R F E C T I O N N A T U R A L L Y

We can't find perfection in the world of doing, nor can we find perfection in the behavior of human beings toward each other. We certainly can't find perfection in human suffering. Is there anything in this imperfect world in which we *can* find perfection?

Yes. We can find perfection in the beauty of the natural world that surrounds us. We can find perfection in the ocean, the mountains, the deserts. We can find perfection in the shape of clouds, in the color of the sky as the sun rises and sets. We can find perfec-

tion in the basic elements of earth, wind, fire, and water and our relationship to each of them.

There is, as well, perfection in the natural rhythms of nature: the rhythms of day and night, of sun and moon, and the seasons of the year. We can find perfection in the cycles of change and repetition that make up our lives. There is perfection in the rhythm of creation and destruction of the natural world, the various checks and balances that nature provides to keep things in order. There is perfection in the natural circadian rhythms of our bodies and their adaptation to changing conditions. There is perfection in the physical life cycle: birth, development, full maturation, decay, and finally death. And there is perfection in the predictable passages we go through as we make transitions from one stage of life to another.

There is perfection in the universe, the solar system, the stars and galaxies upon which we gaze with mystery and wonder. This gazing may give us perspective, helping us realize our relative place in this much larger universe.

We may find perfection in the animal world, in the way that various creatures possess the anatomy and genetic inheritance that are required for survival in a particular habitat. And there is perfection in the evolutionary food chain, with more complex and sophisticated animals at the top and less evolved species on the bottom.

We can find a certain perfection in material things—in their beauty and usefulness or the security, comfort and esteem they may bring to us. Beautiful art objects, tools of our trade, technological gadgets that make our lives easier, antique relics of the past that bring meaning and perspective to the present—we can find perfection in all of these when we look for it.

There is perfection in the

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K E N T N E R B U R N

# Letters to My Son

*My father was not an extraordinary man. There could be no epics written about his accomplishments. But he was a good man. He never harmed another person willingly, and he was always ready to do a kindness for those in need. ✂ For the last ten years, I have watched him slowly lose interest in life. ✂ He is not unhappy. He is beyond unhappiness. He is depleted and defeated by the losses that have taken all sense of self-worth from him. First it was his job, then his physical strength, and finally any sense of usefulness that gave him a way to value his presence on earth. ✂ It is a sad thing to see. All of us still love him and respect him and honor him as the father, but he no longer loves and honors and respects himself. His world and his body have betrayed him.*



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How did such a thing happen? How could a man who was always strong suddenly become so weak? Why did he give up when the horizons of life still stretched out to unknown distances before him?

I am afraid he gave up because he no longer considered himself a man.

He had done his best to meet the image of the man he had been told he should become—to raise the brightest, be the strongest, earn the most, need the least. And he had done well. Perhaps not as well as he would have dreamed, but for a boy who was alone in the world by age sixteen, he was more successful than he might have hoped. He raised himself up, found a place in the world, and built a family with honor, dignity, and caring. What took place in his mind that caused him to value his achievements so little? Why should he, who started with nothing and accomplished so much, feel that his manhood is gone?

The answer is harsh but clear. He confused being a male with being a man.

Being a male is part of our biological coding. It has to do with strength, domination, territoriality, competition, and a host of other traits that were essential in the days when dominance was the key to human survival.

Being a man is something different. It is taking these male traits and forming them into a life

**Search out new ways of expressing strength, showing mastery, and exhibiting courage—ways that do not depend upon confronting the world before you as an adversary.**

that meets the demands of the world around you while serving the needs of others. It is action in service of a dream. It is being grounded in belief while reaching for the stars.

The world into which my father was born did not allow him to see his manhood as separate from his maleness. Mere survival called forth all the powers of aggression, competition, and physical strength he had to offer.

He was born into poverty. His father ran off. His mother died. Before he was even an adult, he was swallowed up into the Great Depression. To get food, he had to work and to get work, he had to be stronger and work harder. Soon Nazism and Fascism appeared on the world stage, and he was called

to take up weapons against other men. After the war was over, he came back with nothing and had to carve out a place for his family in an economic and social order he had never seen.

From his earliest childhood, he had been cut adrift in a world where a person needed to emerge the winner to keep from being annihilated. No wonder his sense of manhood was so deeply tied to his sense of male dominance and mastery.

Now as his body fails him, that sense of dominance and mastery has been replaced by a sense of dependence. He feels purposeless and meaningless. The loss of his job, the loss of his physical strength and sexual powers, the loss of his ability to control the world around him are the loss of his manhood. He is a shell, living out his days in a benign hopelessness.

It did not have to be this way. As his son, I see his real manhood. I see the man who went for days without sleep to help people who had lost their homes to fires and floods. I see the man who worked two, sometimes three, jobs to give his children Christmas presents and who always put his own needs last. I see a man who took his male strengths and put them in service of a vision of caring and sharing, and nothing can diminish his manhood in my eyes.

He was a good man. In a small way, he was a great man. But he cannot see this. He lived in a time when manhood meant maleness, and he measured himself by those terms.

But now the times have changed.

You were born into a different world that will present you with different gifts and challenges. A new vision of manhood will be called for that does not tie so closely into the more aggressive

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# REDEFINING GENDER ROLES

A L F O N S O M O N T U O R I A N D  
I S A B E L L A C O N T I

**T**he structure of the relationship between the sexes is the clearest indicator of a society's basic paradigm concerning human interaction. In fact, the elemental relationship between man and woman influences every aspect of our lives, as well as humanity's interaction with other species and the entire planet.

According to Riane Eisler, "The way we structure the relations between the two halves of humanity, women and men, profoundly influences everything—values, social structure, institutions. Once we start changing the rules of the relationship between women and men, we really have a hope, a realistic hope, of changing the system because that's all there is. It's called humanity. But until we do, there isn't much hope. There is simply a change of the dominator guard."

Why are men and women the way they are? And why is there a supposed war between the sexes? One simple answer might be, "Because men and women are taught to be that way." The dominator system has set up certain specific guidelines for what constitutes being a man and what doesn't; and the same applies for women. An entire system of training, or socialization, keeps these guidelines imprinted on our minds.

What do you think it would be like to be someone of the "Opposite sex? What would your body feel like? What kind of worlds would open for you, and what thoughts, activities, careers, feelings, would shut down? Do you think you could succeed in a different gender? What would you look for in a mate? What would you be afraid of? What would you look forward to?

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Alfonso Montuori, Ph.D., is a writer specializing in creativity and social change. Isabella Conti, Ph.D., is a writer and consultant who works with large companies applying partnership principles. Excerpted from "From Power To Partnership." Copyright 1993 by Alfonso Montuori and Isabella Conti. Printed by arrangement with Harper San Francisco.



We have only to think back at the toys we received, the activities that were planned for us, the way adults would speak to us and what they spoke to us about, even their body language, to begin to get an idea of how subtly but surely a vital part of our identity was shaped for us by others' beliefs about the significance and role of our gender. When was the last time you saw a little girl with a toy gun or a little boy with a toy kitchen? There is no question that our gender makes a big difference in shaping our lives, and there is little question that, beyond biology, our gender is shaped by others rather than by nature.

These socialization guidelines, which create what we call our gender, are beginning to break down. Although this is causing a considerable amount of chaos and confusion, it has the potential to effect important positive changes. We are at a point in history when the fundamental relationship between woman and man is being questioned, and this gives us an incredible leverage for creating positive social change. Human relationships have been put into question before. Class and race

based perspectives have been challenged dramatically in the past 150 years. But with the reformation of the relationship between men and women—the two halves that form humanity, both literally and figuratively—our entire notion of what it means to be a human being is changing.

In a dominator system, our conception of who we are as human beings has been fundamentally male. In other words, politics, business, and economics, as



well as psychology, medicine, and just about every other public human endeavor, have been based on perspectives, assumptions, and images drawn from males and by males.

This interpretation of what it means to be male is itself shaped by the dominator paradigm. This is not just men left to their own devices or the way men really are. Let's get very clear before we go on that this is men as they have been mangled and brutalized by a system that in its grimmer moments sets them against each other, brother killing brother, whether literally or symbolically, in the streets or in the office. It's a system that considers this behavior normal, or more, the way to prove manhood.

That Western culture has used the *man* to describe humanity as a whole is surely not just for the sake of convenience. This extreme one-sidedness has engendered some of the more bizarre outgrowths of the dominator system, as we shall see, not the least of which is a painful distortion of what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man.

The differences in basic training for women and men give us some important insights into the functioning of the dominator system. This training does not (necessarily) take place in an institution. There is no specific school, no homework to learn and forget. Dominator training occurs everywhere: from the family to the workplace, with friends, on television and in the movies, sometimes just waiting in line at the checkout counter. Dominator training is pervasive inasmuch as it is potentially in every relationship we encounter.

The dominator system's ideal defines four roles for the female and the male, particularly in the West. We are supposed to embody these societal myths or images. If we deviate from them in any way, we feel somehow inadequate. Even if we consciously reject these images, or are unwilling or unable to play the game, they still haunt us because we are force-fed them every day.

The four principles for basic training in gender roles are worth pondering not as cultural relics of some historical interest but as active forces in our psyches and our culture today.

*1. Men are trained to be independent; women are trained to be dependent.*

Basic training for men stresses their independence from their environment. Men should be self-sufficient, capable of taking care of themselves and relying on no one. Women, on the other hand, should be dependent on men for their basic survival. Historically this took the form of the man bringing home the bacon, so that the woman was dependent on her man for food and shelter.

What does it mean to be independent? In essence it means that we do not need anybody, that we are self-sufficient and self-reliant. It means men—"real" men, you understand—don't call electrician's or plumbers or even mechanics. They hate to ask for directions even after they've been driving around for hours—they prefer to trust their Davy Crockett-like "homing instinct"—and do it themselves. They don't, or shouldn't, need anyone's help. They are supposed to define their own lives and live at the mercy of no one.

Men are driven to define themselves as autonomous entities. They must become individuals, preferably heroes of some kind, so that they can differentiate themselves from their environment. At some point, some psychologists argue, men have to let go of Mommy's apron strings and go out into the real world. (Mother doesn't live in the real world? In the logic of the dominator system, the private world, where Mother is, is not real. Only the public is. That's also why he can beat his wife and still be a good, upstanding citizen.) This process of letting go of Mommy and everything she stands for (unconditional love, support, security, warmth, etc.) is painful but absolutely necessary to become a man. Any hint of Mommy (a "mommy's boy") will be sniffed

out and will unleash a thousand taunts.

Women are supposed to be but a reflection of their man, since they are as dependent on him as the moon's light is on the reflection of the sun's rays. If the moon could produce its own light, it surely would. In the same way, women are dependent on men



because they cannot generate their own source of light—they cannot do certain things that would allow them to escape from dependence. If women make money and act assertively, then how will we distinguish men from women? No tolerance of ambiguity is permitted here. From the dominator perspective, it's not natural for women to do certain things. Lest we think this is all Neanderthal thinking, we should consider that in reliable polls men still find their single greatest source of manliness in being the breadwinner and having the largest income in the family.

The dominator system is set up

in such a way that any deviation from it is perceived as a sin against God or at least against the natural order of things. Women who try—and do—all these unnatural activities get to hear about how different they are and how sooner or later they will come to regret it. Their lack of femininity will repel every man and they will die spinsters; they will never know the joy of motherhood; they will return to their husbands humbled and repentant, promising never to stray again. All of these have been the plots of countless books and movies until very recently. Worse, all of the above are the "lessons" that countless fathers, brothers, and husbands are still teaching women the world over.

These gender roles may have originated a long time ago when physical characteristics played an important part in the division of labor. Role specialization based on physical characteristics is not wrong in itself. Undoubtedly, there are tasks at which nearsighted people excel and tasks that farsighted people do much better. It seems reasonable for people to specialize in those tasks for which they are better suited. What is utterly unreasonable is to make these specializations so rigid as to exclude options. And what is extremely cruel, and ultimately self-destructive, is to assign much greater value to the tasks and activities performed by one gender. Yet, this is exactly what the dominator system has done.

This gender difference seems to make little sense in these supposedly enlightened, post-feminist days. Women work; men are clearly not as self-sufficient as early pioneers; and not all women are helplessly dependent on them.

As ludicrous as they may sound

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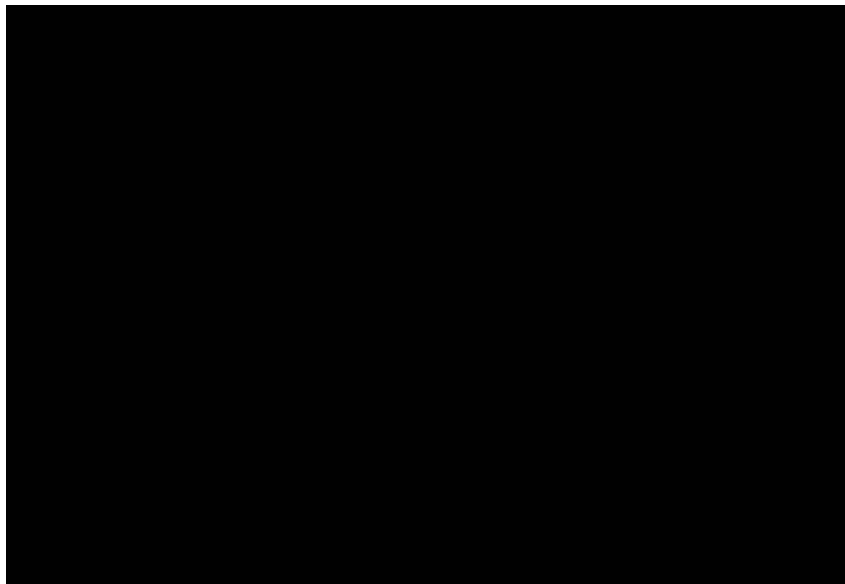
to some, these myths or images are deep inside us. No matter how aware we might be, they still hover around in our consciousness, deposited there through years of training. These myths creep up on us when we feel weak or distressed, when we least suspect it. Both women and men can suddenly find themselves wanting to play their assigned part or wanting the "opposite sex" to play their assigned part. It's still somehow more "natural" in our dominator society that if only one partner works, it should be the man; that

a woman should not make more money than her husband; that it is men, not women, who are brave; that women who accuse men of sexual harassment or rape are spurned lovers or a little hysterical; that the president of the U.S. will be a man; that if a woman's career advances rapidly, she should have to put up with accusations about opportunistic sex. But there is nothing natural about any of this.

Our fantasy lives still resonate to these images. Men love the idea of saving a beautiful damsel in distress, who will be eternally grateful. Women occasionally don't mind the idea of a white knight in shining armor coming to the rescue. But perhaps we should invent some images of what this lovely couple will do once they're finally united, after they've spent days gloriously making love and holding hands under the moonlit sky. These indepen-

dent knights saving dependent damsels are all well and good, but how are they going to fare afterwards?

What happens when men who are told that their fundamental nature requires them to be independent, always moving along, end up marrying women who believe their natural role is to be dependent on their man for every breath they take? These men fear being drowned in domesticity, engulfed by overbearing female mother figures, and these women cling to men who are always



attempting to escape the moment they get their prey.

Things have changed rather rapidly over the past hundred years, but most of the change occurred only recently. In Italy, for instance, women did not have the vote until the end of World War II; and in America the entry of significant numbers of women into the paid work force did not start until that same period. Older women are aware that when they were growing up, they had far fewer rights and opportunities than they do now. Real change has only just begun, and although it

may appear significant, we should not think that our work is done.

*2. Men are taught to control and manipulate their environment, whereas women are taught to be part of that environment.*

Many methods exist to train males to gain control of territory and then assert their control over it. Boys are indoctrinated early in organized sports, watching their peers in action, checking out the playground pecking order, through endless displays of domi-

nation submission rituals on television shows ranging from "The Roadrunner" to "Transformer" and "Miami Vice." Boys are bullied into this system. Very few of them have the wherewithal or the good fortune to stay out of the top-dog, bottom-dog game that develops in playgrounds

and on street corners, and even with brothers. Ask any boy why he got into this whole lark and if he is truthful, he will mention fear and pain and his desire never to feel them again. In order to avoid them, he has to play the dominator game.

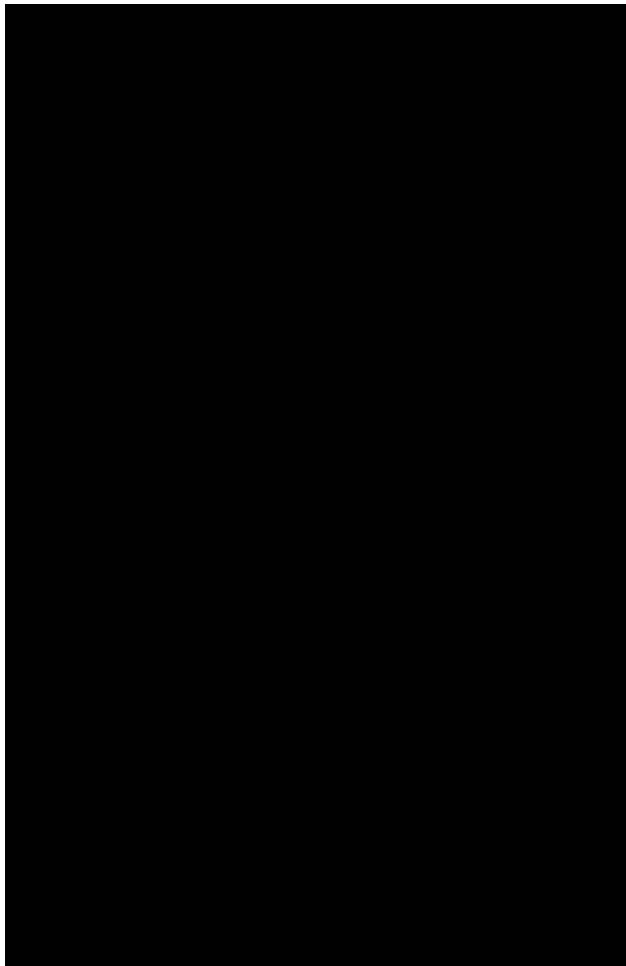
Anger plays a great part in the development of these roles, according to Riane Eisler. "In male socialization, the expression of anger is almost a rite of initiation. In a dominator society, the moment you are permitted to act out your anger, which women and children are not allowed to express, you're initiated into the

male fraternity of dominators of various ranks. The degree to which you are socially permitted to express and act out that anger, and the occasions of it, vary according to circumstances. But the expression of anger is a crucial element of a system that is ultimately held together by force or the threat of force.”

Social philosopher Myriam Miedzian asserts that the whole process of growing up teaches many boys to be violent, especially through organized sports and its enormous demands—usually for victory at all costs rather than real excellence. Rough and tumble may be a natural part of childhood. But taking out a sports opponent by breaking his leg, with the sanction of a sports coach, is beyond all bounds of good sense, sportsmanship, and even esthetics. Perhaps within the context of the winning frenzy this kind of violent behavior makes sense, particularly if money is at stake; but, anyone looking in from outside this world is likely to be appalled. There are not only other sports but other ways to do sports, ways that in older days were more gentlemanly.

Stuart Schlegel gave us a vignette illustrating how the Tiruray of the Philippines play. “When the men come back from hunting or working in the field, they’ll gather in the clearing in the midst of their settlement and play a game called *sesifa*, which is like our hackysack. They bounce a rattan ball to each other with the inside of the foot. The idea is to keep it going as

long as you can. There’s no winner. The longer you can keep the ball going, the happier everybody is. You win by having it go a long time. *Win* probably isn’t the right word. The game has a happy outcome if you keep the ball going a long time. It involves a lot of skill, and it’s a wonderful metaphor for their life because it’s a skill that is used cooperatively and interpersonally in a common enterprise. Every player is dependent on every



other player to use his skill to keep the ball going. Which means you kick it to another person not away from another person.”

Eighty-nine percent of crimes in the U.S. are committed by males, generally young males. The primary cause of death among black males is murder. If boys

have so much fun being violent, they certainly seem to pay the price for it.

Girls, on the other hand, are shown how to become part of the boys’ environment. This is one of the main reasons why they typically have to be beautiful, submissive, and good housekeepers: one’s environment should, after all, be attractive, controllable, and clean. Television shows from the 1950s featured this image of woman-as attractive-household-appliance. Like an obedient child who should be seen and not heard, a woman could at the most be the one behind a great man but could not be heard directly.

Boys are generally taught to follow the strategy of the lion. They should assert themselves and get what they want by roaring and showing muscle. This is the standard, manly thing to do. If necessary, a knock-out, drag-down fight will sort the men from the boys. The strategy of the fox is looked down upon somewhat, since it is devious and involves more thought than is considered strictly kosher in a dominator system. “You’re too clever,” we say, “too smart for your own good, you sneak.” The fox strategy is for nerds. It’s also for women, who normally can’t get what they want John Wayne style. Women are devious, as we all know, and their “little minds” plot away to cause the downfall of the poor men.

Yet, it’s fairly obvious that not everyone can be a lion all the time. The game of domination and submission that lies at the root of the

PHOTO BY FRG/SPENCER GRANT

dominator system requires far more followers than leaders, far more submissive, dominated people than dominators. But here the dominator hierarchy comes to the rescue in a most democratic way. If we're dominated at work by an overbearing boss, he's the lion and we're without real power. We have to play the fox, sneaking in an extra few minutes of break time here or there, arriving a few minutes late and working out some outrageous excuse, being nice and friendly to the big man—we all know the fox routine. Moreover, the beautiful thing about the dominator system is that unless you're just a complete "wimp," almost inevitably someone will be below you somewhere in the hierarchy. If not at work, then perhaps a busboy in the restaurant, perhaps a recent immigrant, or the wife and kids. After all, if we are real men, we have to flex our muscles every so often.

*3. Men are taught to think abstractly; women are taught to communicate.*

It is not unusual in many parts of the world to find men heatedly debating politics on street corners and in cafes, discussing the fine points of political theories and the merits or demerits of the local candidates or of world leaders. Women, on the other hand, will be found "gossiping" about this and that (but mostly about "little things").

Here, dominator basic training presents us with a lesson in dominator psychology: Men are supposedly better at abstract, visuospatial processes; women are better at the use of language. This seems to make sense, since men are required to build theories and explanations on a high level of abstraction so as to govern home and country with some kind of homespun rationalizations.

**As ludicrous as they may sound to some, these myths or images are deep inside us. Both women and men can suddenly find themselves wanting to play their assigned part or wanting the "opposite sex" to play their assigned part.**

Women, who are generally the governed, talk about the web of relationship they are enmeshed in. Although these differences used to be apparent in test scores, mounting evidence shows that the gap is closing and that these differences have to do with education and socialization not with biology.

Alexithymia involves the inability to express emotions. David Loye suggests that many people in Western society suffer from a chronic low-grade form of this problem. When men do talk, they discuss sports, cars, politics, and other issues of a technical nature. But, as we all know by now, they supposedly have trouble expressing emotions. Not all men have this impediment; some, after all, are poets. Others are very good

at showing anger but would never get a role in a movie playing anything else.

"Alexithymia," explained David Loye, "is a pathological condition that makes the verbalization of emotions extremely difficult. The theory is that people with alexithymia begin to feel emotions in the right brain, but then something goes wrong in the crossover into the left brain across the corpus callosum. It is as if a gate were there that didn't allow the feelings to come through. The consequence is that the affect is blunted. I find this an extremely suggestive explanation of moral sensitivity in dominator systems where you repeatedly find the brutalization of people. The whole thrust in the training of the stereotypical dominator male is not to show weakness, to be tough, and at the extreme to be brutal. It's a blocking of empathy, a blocking of tenderness, a blocking of caring in dominators and, stereotypically, in males. An enormous body of literature corroborates this blunting of affect in the male. Men's lack of emotion is also a common complaint of women. Now, men's sensitivity groups are trying to open men to their emotions and get them to express their feelings. What I see very vividly is the degree to which all of us are brutalized by this training, males and females."

The difficulty in the expression of emotions is not simply a lack of poetry and song or a deficit in romantic wooing skills or other seemingly nonessential characteristics. The dominator dynamic has crippled the free expression of human beings' full emotional range. Our First Amendment rights are being violated deep inside our souls, and we don't even know it. It's not true that women are emotional and men are not. Men can be extremely emotional,

and women can be cold as ice. When a woman is emotionless—a trait valued in a man, who is then typecast as the strong, silent type, Clint Eastwood being a great example—she is called a frigid bitch. In fact many people express only a small part of their human emotional range, and in some cases people actually experience only a tiny portion of it.

Riane Eisler is passionate about the need to develop new archetypes or role models for women and men. We are constantly bombarded with images that reinforce the dominator society, she argues. “We have suffering heroines, sacrificing heroines, masochistic heroines, helpless heroines, dying heroines, and deranged heroines, but how about some adventurous heroines or wise heroines or healing heroines?” The same applies for men, where new characters are sorely needed. Writers may have to stretch themselves to develop this new pantheon of heroines and heroes, for which Eisler and Loye provide models in their joint book *The Partnership Way*, but the potential rewards are immense.

For Eisler, the media represents one of the most powerful forces in society. It can contribute to reinforcing the dominator system or move us toward partnership. The challenge now lies in creating new images, new characters, and new visions to populate our imaginations.

Philip Slater has fun figuring out the rationalizations movie critics give for panning movies with women as the heroes. He suspects the critics themselves don't even know that they're doing it because they're disturbed by not finding a male hero. But movies like *Thelma and Louise* and even *Terminator 2*, with powerful roles for women, are beginning to point another way.

**The dominator dynamic has crippled the free expression of human beings' full emotional range. Our First Amendment rights are being violated deep inside our souls, and we don't even know it.**

“I remember years ago before I understood much about anything,” Riane Eisler told us, “I was in the park near my house and there was some wailing and crying nearby. I was sitting under a tree and there was a man hitting a little boy. The little boy kept crying and the man was saying to him, ‘I’m going to keep hitting you until you stop crying because boys don’t cry.’ It’s very sad. It’s such a completely messed up system from A to Z that the wonder, frankly, is not that people have so many problems and difficulties in relating; the wonder is that we do as well as we do.

“In my new work I argue that our fundamental desire is pleasure, what I call the human yearning for connection. And yet, we’ve con-

structed a system that systematically rewards the giving and taking of pain rather than the giving and taking of pleasure. Isn't that amazing? I'm not just talking about the repression of sexuality by Christianity, I'm talking about the dominator system.”

It is not surprising that, according to research, a major cause of domestic violence can be traced to mistaken perceptions of emotions as dark and basically forbidden, coupled with a profound inability to express them. If a man cannot express what is happening to him in his most intimate moments with the person who is closest to him, if expressing these feelings in itself casts doubt on his manhood, and if any kind of conflict is always viewed as a zero-sum game with a loser and a winner, as a war, what chances do we stand of establishing a decent relationship? Stay tuned.

*4. Men are taught to emphasize the importance of justice and absolute rules, whereas women are taught to be more concerned with caring and contingency.*

We are all familiar with the good cop/bad cop routine that goes on in police stations during interrogations (at least in the movies) and in families when kids misbehave. There's the warm-hearted cop that softens you up, and then there's the tough guy who knocks you out with a quick one-two to the chin. They're a team. At home, Dad is usually the tough one, the one whose final rules can't be broken, the one with whom no excuses matter anymore. Mom is the one who cares about you; yes, she loves you unconditionally—until you go too far or she just gets fed up and defers to Dad. This duality reflects to some extent the way the dominator sys-

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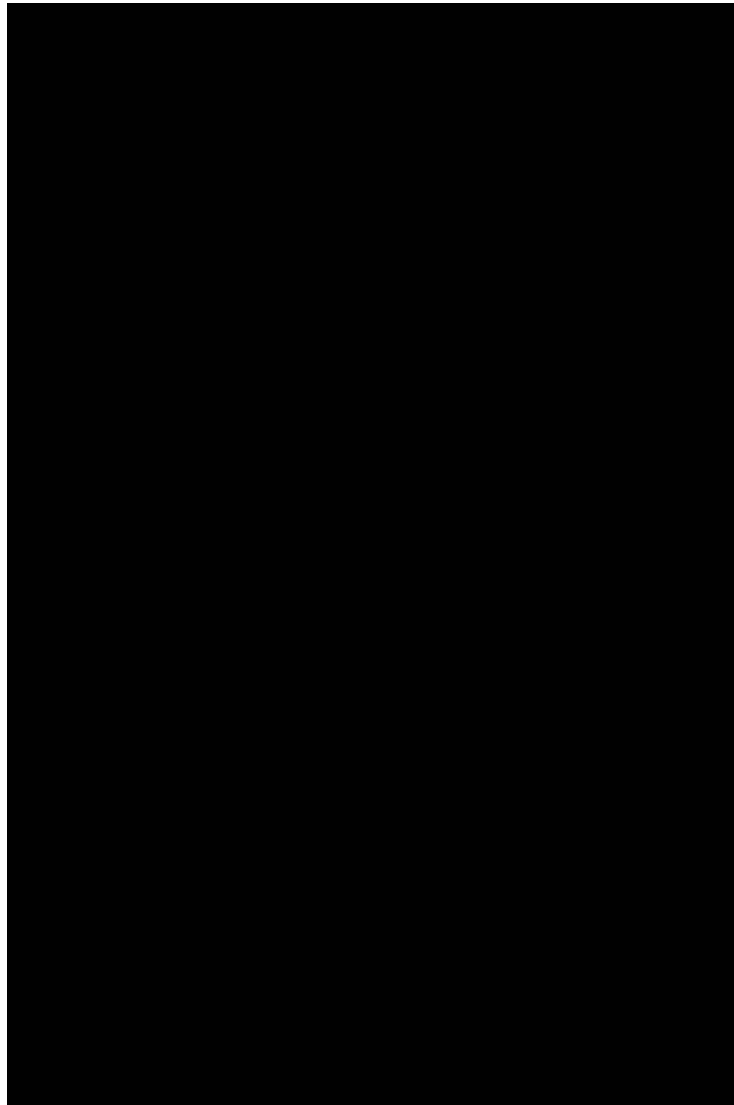
# Media Violence

The screenwriter for the movie, "GoodFellas," summed up the attitude portrayed by TV and movies which display untold amounts of violence. "There are, of necessity, lots of murders, but the violence isn't too graphic." And the director of the movie, "Casualties of War," was quoted in *New York Woman* magazine, "When people talk about violence in cinema, it's like talking about cheese on pasta. It sort 'o comes with the dish and that's what makes the dish."

Speaking of "dish," there is in this country an insatiable *appetite* for violence in films, TV, rap and rock music. Most of that entertainment is written by men, produced by men, acted by men, sung by men, and is about men. It is about things which are important to men. One has only to look at the list of movies playing in town or a list of the TV shows for the week to see that movie and TV-watching is *man-watching*, with a sprinkling of women thrown into minor roles. Even the news reports are mostly about men, with women peripheral to the main action.

And what are these actors doing? Many are committing violence. Even the recent children's movie "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II, The Secret of the Ooze" is filled with mindless violence, presented as good clean fun. During the Gulf War, one of the rock stars had a ten foot replica of Saddam Hussein on stage. At a certain point in his performance, he shot a bow and arrow into Hussein's groin and the audience went wild with applause.

PHOTO BY GAMMA-LIAISON



*Arnold Schwarzenegger in a scene from "Terminator 2" sprays his adversaries with bullets from a machine gun canon.*

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Violence is applauded also in the huge salaries paid to actors who portray the “winner” in these violent movies. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s salary from “Terminator 2: Judgment” was \$15 million. Total costs for “Terminator 2” were listed at \$94 million. This is a movie where the robot, Schwarzenegger, is told by a child he cannot go around killing people. Because he is an obedient robot he, henceforth only shoots people in the legs, policemen included, or anyone else who gets in his way. The audience laughs as the victims go hobbling off. “Terminator 2,” the most expensive film ever made, is said to be a movie of violence for the sake of violence.

Compare these films of men doing violence with the film “Thelma and Louise” where women murder a rapist, blow up a truck, rob a store, and lock a policeman in the trunk of his car. This film was criticized as “toxic feminism.” “Women,” the critics said, “should be role models in movies, *Thelma and Louise* were not good role models for other women.” One needs to ask why men in movies aren’t being so criticized as role models.

What are the lessons from the movie “Chicago Loop” when a man chews a woman to death? It seems that just raping or murdering women is no longer enough to entertain. Now Hollywood must display women’s body parts strewn about. Hollywood’s version of violence, prettied up with slow motion and muted colors, numbs the sense of compassion and

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Authors are also doing their part to whet the appetite for violence in the reading public. But what are the lessons to be learned from the books like “The Big Nowhere,” where the victims’ eyes are poked out and their genitals mutilated? Stephen King, whose novels about violence are eagerly sought by movie script writers, says he “gets off” on make-believe violence. He explains that as long as violence in the world is seen as a solution to problems, the world will enjoy make-believe violence. Interesting that he says he “gets-off” on make-believe violence. Jonathan Demme, the director of “GoodFellas,” says, “I come out of ‘Alien’ and ‘The Texas Chainsaw Massacre’ refreshed. Movies can provide catharsis.” Like an orgasm? As mentioned before, many men tend to relate violence with sex. Interesting, too, that Stephen

King uses the word “diet” similar to the previous referral to violence as a “dish” to be served to the public.

In the month of March, 1991, the three top moneymakers in films were “Silence of the Lambs,” the story of one male cannibalistic serial killer and another serial killer who skins his women victims whose bodies the viewers see, skinned and bruised; “Sleeping with the Enemy,” the story of a battered wife who kills her husband in self-defense; “New Jack City,” the story of gang greed and violence which will probably top the other two in proceeds.

“New Jack City” has become a controversial movie which National Coalition on Television Violence and a group of ministers in Houston, Texas, have alleged promotes violence. As the research director of the Coalition was quoted in the Newsweek article “Violence on and off-screen at ‘New Jack City,’” March 25, 1991, “It’s certainly playing a triggering role in the violence at theaters... this film is like throwing gasoline on a fire.”

Having learned violence from his early years watching TV cartoons and then in his later years at the movies, a boy is not immune to violence. By the time he is 16, he will have seen 200,000 acts of violence committed by men. His sisters may have seen all this violence also, but because the violence is committed by men, the girls do not relate to it as something they would do. The movies are telling boys “this is the way men act.” Of course, the boy knows the violence is only fiction, nevertheless the brain takes it all in and gives him permission to practice what he has learned, should he later want to vent his anger for his immediate gratification.

As the boys grow up, begin to take their girlfriends out on dates, and are given the choice of seeing

*Many in  
our society  
do not see  
the parallels  
between  
media  
violence  
and real  
life violence.*

a movie like "Steel Magnolias," a story of human drama among women friends, or or "Die Hard," chances are the boys would select the violent "Die Hard." Just as they don't want to read "*sissy books*," they don't want to see "*sissy movies*."

The barrage of daily violence not only teaches boys what men do, or can do, but it also teaches girls to expect that men act violently and that women might be victims of this violence. Destroying women is a general theme in the media. Consider the words from the Gato Boys music, "Mind of a Lunatic," which tell of a girl begging a man not to kill her. He gives her a rose and in spite of her pleading, he slits her throat and has sex with her corpse.

Just as the frequent use of pornography can lead to violent crime against women, as admitted by convicted sex-criminals, so can frequent viewing of entertainment violence lead to violent action of viewers. There were studies about fifteen years ago which indicated that seeing bad action in entertainment did not produce bad action from viewers any more than seeing good action inspired view-

ers to do good. Those studies were made before the recent preoccupation with producing violent movies, TV shows, and music videotapes. Lately, however, there is growing concern about the effect on children, not only of the amount of violence but of the numerous hours of children's TV-watching. Studies now indicate that children's exposure to violence, whether it is from entertainment or from being a spectator to violence in their own homes, with other factors present such as poor school performance and poverty, can contribute to their own violent behavior, both as children and later as adults.

Entertainment violence minimizes the value of human life. The theatre crowd applauds as the "*bad guys*" are gunned down, teaching that violence is the way to get rid of a bad situation. Said to be a catharsis, violence in films is preliminary to teaching that war is the solution to international problems

What can be done? In the face of critics who would call for the

First Amendment rights and scream that any curtailment violates their right to free speech, the national crime crisis would indicate that some action should be taken to regulate the amount of entertainment violence. If, as the director of "Casualties of War" said, violence in cinema, "makes the dish," then this country needs to find another national dish. •

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# Trivial Talk

*One of the obstacles to learning the essence of being is indulging in trivial talk.*

**W**hat is trivial? Literally it means “commonplace” (from Latin *tri-via* = the point where three roads meet); it usually denotes shallow, humdrum, lacking ability or moral qualities. One might also define “trivial” as an attitude that is concerned only with the surface of things, not with their causes or the deeper layers, as an attitude that does not distinguish between what is essential and what is unessential, or one that is prone to reverse the two qualities. We may say, in addition, that triviality results from unaliveness, unresponsiveness, deadness, or from any concern that is not related to the central task of man: to be fully born.

The late Erich Fromm is the author of "To Have Or To Be?," "The Art of Loving," "The Sane Society," "Marx's Concept of Man," and many other classic works. The Continuum Publishing Company; 370 Lexington Avenue; New York, NY 10017.



Perhaps most trivial talk is a need to talk about oneself; hence, the never-ending subject of health and sickness, children, travel, successes, what one did, and the innumerable daily things that *seem* to be important. Since one cannot talk about oneself all the time without being thought a bore, one must exchange the privilege by a readiness to listen to others talking about themselves. Private social meetings between individuals (and often, also, meetings of all kinds of associations and groups) are little markets where one exchanges one's need to talk about oneself and one's desire to be listened to for the need of others who seek the same opportunity. Most people respect this arrangement of exchange; those who don't and want to talk more about themselves than they are willing to listen are "cheaters," and they are resented and have to choose inferior company in order to be tolerated.

One can hardly overestimate people's need to talk about themselves and to be listened to. If this need were present only in highly narcissistic people, who are filled only with themselves, it would be easy to understand. But it exists in the average person for reasons that are inherent in our culture. Modern man is a mass man; he is highly "socialized," but he is very lonely. David Riesman has expressed this phenomenon strikingly in the title of his 1961 book *The Lonely Crowd* (New York: Free Press). Modern man is alienated

from others and confronted with a dilemma. He is afraid of close contact with another and equally afraid to be alone and have no contact. It is the function of trivial conversation to answer the question, "How do I remain alone without being lonely?"

*There is no contact between human beings that does not affect both of them.*

Talking becomes an addiction. "As long as I talk, I know I exist, that I am not nobody, that I have a past, that I have a job, I have a family. And by talking about all this I affirm myself. However, I need someone to listen. If I were only talking to myself I would go crazy." The listener produces the illusion of a dialogue when in reality there is only a monologue.

Bad company, on the other hand, is not only the company of merely trivial people but of evil, sadistic, destructive, life-hostile

people. But why, one might ask, is there a danger in the company of bad people, unless they try to harm one in one form or another?

In order to answer this question it is necessary to recognize a law in human relations. *There is no contact between human beings that does not affect both of them.* No meeting between two people, no conversation between them, except perhaps the most casual one, leaves either one of them unchanged—even though the change may be so minimal as to be unrecognizable except by its cumulative effect when such meetings are frequent.

Even a casual meeting *can* have a considerable impact. Who has not once been touched in his life by the kindness in a face of a person whom he saw only for a minute and never talked to? Who has not experienced the horror that a truly evil face produced in him, even being exposed to it for only a moment? Many will remember such faces and the effects they had on them for many years or for all their lives. Who, after being with a certain person, has not felt cheered up, more alive, in a better mood, or in some cases even possessing new courage and new insights, even though the content of the conversation would not account for this change? On the other hand, many people have had the experience, after being with certain others, of being depressed, tired, hopeless, yet unable to find the *content* of the conversation responsible for the reaction. I am not speaking here of the influence of persons with whom somebody is in love, admires, is afraid of, etc.; obviously *they* can have a strong influence by what they say or how they behave toward a person who is under their spell. What I am talking about is the influence of per-

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# Relationship As a Spiritual Path

*I*n former times, if people wanted to explore the deeper mysteries of life, they would often enter a monastery or hermitage far away from conventional family ties. For many of us today, however, intimate relationship has become the new wilderness that brings us face to face with all our gods and demons. The challenges of relationships today are calling on us to free ourselves from old habits and blind spots and to develop the full range of our powers, sensitivities, and depths as human beings—right in the midst of everyday life. ✦ What will allow two partners to keep moving forward together through all the ups and downs of their life together, through all the challenges, disappointments, sacrifices, and heartbreaks they may go through? What can serve as a firm basis for relationships in these uncertain times? Romantic feelings? Gratification of sexual and emotional needs? Common economic or lifestyle goals? Raising children?

*John Welwood, Ph.D., is a psychotherapist, teacher, and writer, and a leading figure in the field of East/West psychology. Former Director of the East/West Psychology program at the California Institute of Integral Studies, he has published numerous articles on East/West approaches to psychotherapy, health, consciousness, and personal change. This article is adapted from his work, "Journey of the Heart: Intimate Relationship and the Path of Love."*



I suggest that none of these any longer provides an unshakable ground for a healthy, enduring relationship. Romantic feelings continually ebb and flow. Needs change, and, once met, are no longer so compelling. Moreover, no single individual, no matter how compatible, can ever fill all our needs. Shared livelihood goals and interests change with time. Children used to contribute to family stability; however, now that they are an economic liability, rather than an economic asset, and now that the stigma of the single parent family is disappearing, they no longer provide as strong a reason for a couple to stay together. Even love is not enough to keep two people together. How many times do people say, "I really love him (her), but I just can't live with him (her)" ?

To find a solid foundation for relationship we need to consider what we most value in our connection with someone we love. What are the moments in a relationship we most cherish? Perhaps we answer, "When I feel loved." Or "When I fall deeply in love with someone." Or "When I really feel seen and understood." Yet, what is really happening here that we cherish? In such moments we become more fully present and thus taste the richness of our being. We no longer have to prove ourselves. Something in us relaxes, our usual cares and distractions fade into the background, and we feel more awake, more alive.

Genuine love is nurturing because it affirms our being and thus inspires us to be more present. That is why we value it so much. All the best intimate

moments are those in which we are fully present, being ourselves, and sharing that with the one we love. So beyond all the particular things two people do for each other, their strongest connection is the quality of being they experience in each other's presence.

Thus, if intimate relationships are to flourish in these difficult times, they must reflect and promote our deepest being. Yet, how many of us are really at home in ourselves? Most of us skim along the surface of our being, never bothering to explore or even wonder about the depths below. Therefore creating a healthy relationship today presents a tremendous challenge, for it means undertaking a journey in search of who we really are.

Our connection with someone we love can be one of the best vehicles for that journey. When we approach it in this way, intimacy becomes a path—an unfolding process of personal and spiritual discovery. And relationship becomes, for the first time, conscious. Through appreciating relationship as a path that can help two people develop greater awareness, depth, and spirit, we discover a larger vision and purpose that can help us persevere with our partner through the most difficult of circumstances.

The notion that relationship can help us learn important life lessons is not entirely new. Underneath our romantic ideals, most of us have some understanding that intimacy takes work and that though "you can't always get what you want" in a relationship, nevertheless if you keep at it, "you just might get what you need." I am suggesting that if we recognize and welcome this "path quality" of relationship at the very outset, we will be better prepared for the challenges we meet along love's way instead of being totally shocked by love's outrageous demands and reluctantly forced to deal with them. Indeed, our current difficulties may allow us no other choice. Unconscious relationship simply no longer works very well.

**The love between two people also presents a sacred opportunity—to go beyond the single-minded pursuit of purely personal gratifications and tap into larger truths and energies that are at work in life as a whole.**

*T H E  
N A T U R E O F  
T H E P A T H*

Relationship as a path leads us on a journey of the heart—which involves becoming more fully human, more available to life as a whole. Intimate relationships are ideally suited as this kind of path because they inspire our heart to open while at the same time showing us where we are most stuck. The more we open to another in love, the more we encounter all the obstacles that stand in the way of being fully open and present—habitual patterns of resistance, avoidance, and denial that we have developed as ways of coping with painful circumstances in our

past. When we really love someone and discover all the ways we shut ourselves down in his/her presence, a desire to break out of this self-imprisonment naturally begins to stir in us. There is ferment, there is alchemy, there is the possibility for change and renewal. Our path begins to unfold.

Becoming fully human involves working with the totality of what we are—both our openness and our imprisonment, our heart and our karma. On one hand, we have become conditioned into a number of habitual patterns that cloud our awareness, distort our feelings, and restrict our capacity to open to life and to love. Our defensive postures, which we originally fashioned to shield us from pain, have become a dead weight keeping us from living as fully as we might. Yet underneath all our conditioning, the basic nature of the human heart is an unconditioned awake presence, a caring, inquisitive intelligence, an openness to reality. So each of us has these two forces at work inside us: an embryonic wisdom that wants to blossom from the depths of our being, and the imprison-



ing weight of our karma—all those conditioned personality patterns that narrow our perception and keep us half-asleep. From birth to death, these two forces are always at work, and our lives hang in the balance. Since human nature always consists of these two elements, our journey must involve working with both of them.

If we emphasize only one side of our nature at the expense of the other, we have no path and cannot move forward in any meaningful way. And we wind up distorting our relationships as well. If we focus only on the loving side of a relationship, we may become caught in the “bliss trap”—imagining that love is a stairway to heaven that will allow us to rise above

the nitty-gritty elements of our personality and leave behind all our fears and limitations. “Love is so fantastic! I feel so high! Let’s get married, won’t everything be wonderful!” Of course, these expansive feelings are wonderful. But the potential distortion here is to imagine that love by itself can solve our problems, provide endless comfort and pleasure, or save us from facing ourselves, our aloneness, our pain, or ultimately our death. Becoming too attached to the heavenly side of love leads to rude shocks and disappointments when we inevitably return to earth and have to deal with the real-life challenges of making a relationship work.

The other distortion is to try to make relationship something totally solid, safe, and familiar. This is the security trap. When we try to make a relationship serve our needs for security, we lose a sense of greater vision and adventure. Once we have lost a larger vision, we try to fill the void that remains by creating a cozy materialistic lifestyle—watching television,

PHOTO BY EFG/RONCHAPPLE



acquiring upscale possessions, or climbing the social ladder. And our relationship may become a kind of business deal, where everything must be negotiated. Or if we collude to play everything safe, it may become totally monotonous.

Neither of these approaches provides a path. Neither of them really goes anywhere. The heavenly bliss illusion may allow us to ascend for awhile, but we eventually crash when our relationship inevitably comes back down to earth. And the security illusion keeps us glued to the earth, so that we never venture to reach out beyond ourselves at all.

Love is a transformative power precisely because it brings the two different sides of ourselves—the expansive and the contracted, the awake and the asleep—into direct contact. Our heart can start to work on our karma. Rigid places in us that we have hidden from view suddenly come out in the open and soften in love's blazing warmth. And our karma can start to work on our heart. In coming up against difficult places in ourselves and our partner, our heart has to open and expand in new ways. Love challenges us to keep expanding ourselves in exactly those places where we think we can't possibly open any further.

From the perspective of bliss or security, it's terrible that relationships force us to face so many things in ourselves that we would rather

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not look at. But from a path perspective, it's a great opportunity. Intimate relationships can help free us from our karmic entanglements by allowing us to see exactly how and where we are stuck. When we live alone, we are often unaware of our habitual patterns because we live inside them. But when someone we love reacts to our neurotic patterns, they bounce back on us and we can no longer ignore them.

So even though the current upheavals going on between men and women may seem daunting and perplexing, they are also forcing us to become more conscious. Looking beyond comfort and security needs, we begin to appreciate the pure essence of relationship, which is to bring together all the polarities of our existence—our pure, loving nature and our karmic tendencies, heaven and earth, male and female, self and other—and heal our divisions, both inner and outer.

Most of us start out imagining that if only we could get rid of the difficulties that arise in our relationships, if only we could just “get it right,” then we could get on with “the real stuff.” However, since a relationship is always a living process, never a finished product, new questions and challenges continually arise. As soon as we handle one, another soon appears. When we realize that they are there to help us keep growing and expanding, the difficulties we have with intimacy

become not so much an obstruction as an integral part of love's path .

### THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE PATH

Relationship as a path has at least three major dimensions: evolutionary, personal, and sacred.

At the collective level, developing a new depth and quality of intimacy in our relationships today is an important step in healing the age-old rift between masculine and feminine and bringing together the two halves of our humanity. Until human consciousness can transform this ancient antagonism into a creative alliance, we will remain fragmented and at war with ourselves, as individuals, as couples, as societies, and as a race. Intimate relationships are where each of us has an opportunity to heal this collective wound. As we move in this direction, the challenges of relationships take on a larger meaning; they become an evolutionary path—an instrument for the evolution of human consciousness.

Since we can only be as present with another person as we are with ourselves, another important dimension of this path involves becoming more intimate with ourselves—contacting a deeper level of our being, exploring and working with our personal barriers to love, and gaining access to a wider range of our untapped inner resources. By helping to refine and transform us as individuals, relationship is also an intensely personal path .

Beyond that, the love between two people also presents a sacred opportunity—to go beyond the single-minded pursuit of purely personal gratifications and tap into larger truths and energies that are at work in life as a whole. By helping us discover what is most essential and real—the mysteries, depths and heights of human experience—relationship also becomes a sacred path .

I don't mean to suggest that intimate relationships

are a substitute for other spiritual disciplines. But if we have some aspiration and dedication to wake up to our true nature, along with a practice that helps us do that, then in that context, relationship can be a particularly potent vehicle to help us contact a deeper kind of truth. Just as meditation practice helps us wake up from the war between good and bad, pleasure and pain, self and other inside us, relationships help us see how we enact these same struggles outside us. And they provide a training ground where we can receive immediate feedback about how deeply and genuinely we understand the principles of peace, freedom, love, and surrender.

Thus, the difficulties and challenges that two people encounter in joining their energies together are not just personal travails. They are also invitations to open ourselves to the sacred interplay of the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, and to the larger powers born out of intimate contact with the great mysteries of life. •



PHOTO BY GAMMA-LIAISON

# Reviews



B Y R I C H A R D H O L M E S

*No Place to Hide: Facing Shame So We Can Find Self-Respect*

By Michael P. Nichols, Ph.D.  
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991  
\$12.00 Paperback

"Shame takes us to the heart of human nature."

Michael P. Nichols has written a touching and very profound book that exposes this heart. In the Preface he admits that writing *No Place to Hide* was difficult because, as he puts it, shame is "one of the most deeply repressed and ugly emotions in human experience."

And what is most ironic about shame, he continues, is its "controlling power." Most of us will do almost anything to avoid facing shame, especially public shame.

I have not read any psychology/self-help books that explore the anatomy and dynamics of shame with such depth of perception, compassion, and even humor. There is something wonderfully engaging about the way that Nichols writes. His insights into what drives us to conceal shame and avoid it at all costs are like depth charges that explode into your conscious awareness, clearing away the debris in your mind and revealing yourself *to* yourself.

Of course, I'm confessing to how the book affected me personally. As a reviewer, I also confess to this being one of those rare books that can't be valued enough.

Nichols will take you through childhood and adolescence and remind you with amazing clarity that to truly be human is to recognize our fragility and vulnerability as a species, to shed our personas that are most repressive, and to learn that accepting others is an important first step towards accepting the self.

It is commendable that a book on a subject so

potentially painful is handled with such grace and style. For example, Nichols is observant enough not to jump on the culture-bashing and parent-bashing bandwagon that rolls with vicious abandon through the media wasteland. Yet he sees to what extent that parents and the culture they're part of are responsible for the oppressive concealments of shame.

A major strength of the book is how he frames basic Psychology 101 type information within real-life contexts. He might be discussing defense mechanisms that we use he writes to "edit our awareness, filter our emotions, and divert unruly impulses into safe channels." So whether he is discussing withdrawal, arrogance, contempt, ridicule, defiance, disavowal, numbness, boredom, envy, narcissistic rage, or shamelessness, we will understand fully their function and meaning through his examples drawn from literature, psychotherapeutic sessions, or his own personal experiences (he is very open and giving in this respect).

One might wonder how Nichols can interject with humor in a narrative about shame. He is certainly not the first or last person who has commented on how difficult and challenging it is to understand ourselves. How difficult? Nichols writes, "Getting to know yourself is easy, like driving at high speed in heavy traffic and studying what goes on under the hood at the same time." But be assured that he thinks all efforts at individuation are necessary.

The advice he gives about facing shame is uncomplicated but effective: look in a mirror and record what you see, tell the story of your life, note strengths and weaknesses, tap into memories about shame and humiliation, understand what your aspirations are and why, be honest with yourself and others, be good to yourself, and engage in some healthy pleasures.

The ultimate message of *No Place to Hide* is, as it should be, that all of us should work together to face our shame and heal our wounded selves—a message expressed eloquently by Nichols:

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## Trivial Talk

*Continued from page 69*

sons on those who are not bound to them in special ways.

All these considerations lead to the conclusion that it is desirable to avoid trivial and evil company altogether, unless one can assert oneself fully and thus make the other doubt his own position.

Inasmuch as one cannot avoid bad company, one should not be deceived. One should see the insincerity behind the mask of friendliness, the destructiveness behind the mask of eternal complaints about unhappiness, the narcissism behind the charm. One should also not act as if he or she were taken in by the other's deceptive appearance—in order to avoid being forced into a certain dishonesty oneself. One need not speak to them about what one sees, but one should not attempt to convince them that one is blind. The great twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, recognizing the effect of bad company, made the drastic proposal, "If you live in a country whose inhabitants are evil, avoid their company. If they try to force you to associate with them, leave the country, even if it means going to the desert."

If other people do not understand our behavior—so what? Their request that we must only do what they understand is an attempt to dictate to us. If this is being "asocial" or "irrational" in their eyes, so be it. Mostly they resent our freedom and our courage to be ourselves. We owe nobody an explanation or an accounting, as long as our acts do not hurt or infringe on them. How many lives have been ruined by this need to "explain," which usually implies that the explanation be "understood," i.e., approved. Let your deeds be judged and from your

deeds your real intentions, but know that a free person owes an explanation only to himself—to his reason and his conscience—and to the few who may have a justified claim for explanation. •

*From the book "The Art of Being" by Erich Fromm. Copyright 1989 by the Estate of Erich Fromm. Printed with permission from The Continuum Publishing Company.*

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## Ethical Persuasion

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and transcend our habitual selves. This is a value system that is explicit and can be readily translated into attitudes and ultimately into feelings and behavior.

*What are the questions people ask you?*

Two people can't explore the others viewpoint first. If both people know the process and know how effective it is to explore first, you have an interesting but wonderful problem. You can say, "You heard me out last time, I want to hear you out first this time." It's a very rectifiable problem and a wonderful culture to live in. Who would not want to live in a family or an organization where everybody wants to hear you thoroughly first. •

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## Letters to My Son

*Continued from page 57*

and competitive residues of our male character. You will need to search out new ways of expressing strength, showing mastery, and exhibiting courage—ways that do not depend upon confronting the world before you as an adversary.

To a great extent, you will have to find the ways for yourself. In times past, there were rituals of passage that conducted a boy into manhood, where other men passed along the wisdom and responsibili-

ties that needed to be shared. But today we have no rituals. We are not conducted into manhood; we simply find ourselves there.

When our bodies tell us we have arrived, it is with a desire and a longing and a sense of unfulfilled outreach. But what we think is manhood is nothing more than our maleness coming into full flower. And when maleness operates untempered with moral value, it visits damage upon the earth.

I want you to consider this distinction as you go forward in life. Being male is not enough; being a man is a right to be earned and an honor to be cherished. I cannot tell you how to earn that right or deserve that honor. But I can tell you that the formation of your manhood must be a conscious act governed by the highest vision of the man you want to be.

As you reach for that vision, the echoes of the male will always be with you. The competitive, the dominating, the great sexual urgency and desire for outreach will always whisper. But if you are able to transform them, these male attributes will become the true measures of manhood—strength and honor and moral force; courage, sacrifice, and confidence of touch.

So acknowledge your male characteristics. Celebrate them. Honor them. Turn them into a manhood that serves the world around you. But do not let them overwhelm you and do not let those who confuse maleness and manhood take your manhood from you. Most of all, do not fall prey to the false belief that mastery and domination are synonymous with manliness.

Be like my father. Be like the generations of nameless men who served as stewards of the age into which they were born and never willingly raised their hands to do harm to another.

Measure your greatness by the length of your reach, but also by the

gentleness of your touch. For now, the world needs hands that love, not hands that conquer. Let your hands be among them. •

*From "Letters To My Son," copyright 1993 by Kent Nerburn. Printed with permission of New World Library. Call (800)227-3900 or (800)632-2122 in California to order the book, (\$14.95).*

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## Redefining Gender Roles

*Continued from page 64*

tem splits off the role of men and women in matters of law and ethics.

Research has shown that men get upset when rules are broken or principles or individuals are interfered with; women are more concerned with caring than with rules, and they get more upset if one doesn't help someone who asks. Men are interested in the fact that a moral or legal principle was broken (the importance of law and order). Women, it seems, want to know the circumstances under which the breach occurred and the intention of the accused.

Men's concerns with rules, abstractions, and ideas have led to a certain willingness to sacrifice people for the sake of ideas, faith, "progress," the revolution, or even science. Women have different priorities.

Psychologist Susan Hales gave an example of how a parent might instill an internalized motivation to live a moral or caring life. She explained what is meant by teaching kids "the moral point of view." "If a child is taking some other child's toy, the mother would say, 'How would you like it if he took your toy? Do you remember when Jimmy did that to you two weeks ago? When he took your train? Do you remember how you felt? That's what you're making Timmy feel like. That's bad, I won't let you do that. It's wrong.' You teach the moral point of view by focusing on the child's feelings in relation to his

actions. You focus on the consequences of children's actions, but you do that using their own feelings. You ask, 'Remember how it felt when he did that to you?' or 'How would you like it if he did that to you?'"

The importance of seeing the connection between justice and caring, reason and emotion is crucial to developing this whole system, partnership perspective. By becoming aware of how we would feel if others behaved toward us the way we behave toward them, we gain more insight into ourselves and develop greater sensitivity. David Loye's term *moral sensitivity* originates precisely in this empathic dimension of morality. According to Loye, this sensitivity tends to be blunted in males because of dominator-system pressures. But there is little evidence that this blunting is innate. Instead we see in prehistory—and all around us today—the evidence that moral sensitivity is a powerful drive within men as well as women.

Since men are taught to strive for independence, they view as oppressive any outside force that interferes with that independence. Women, who are usually taught to see themselves as part of a larger web of relationships, feel the need to help others because of this common connection.

The Tiruray have a way of dealing with moral issues that draws more on feelings and sensitivity toward others than laws and regulations, according to Stuart Schlegel. "The fundamental rule of Tiruray life is not to give anybody a bad gallbladder," he said. "They believe that the gallbladder is the center of emotion and feelings, much as we say the heart is. It's a symbolic place in the body. So you don't give people a bad gallbladder, meaning you don't hurt them, you don't make them feel bad, you don't frustrate them. You try to do

things that will be helpful to one another. I call it the *fedew* rule, because the gallbladder is the *fedew*. You never give anybody a bad *fedew*. That means you always try to help people achieve what they want to achieve, and you try not to interfere with them. •

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## Learning to Listen

*Continued from page 46*

do everything we can to keep these dreams alive because the odds are against them. They are not something static, something to cling to; they are alive and changing, and we need to stay flexible and change with them.

Our dreams are the reason we act. Our visions of a better world give direction and meaning to our lives and our deaths. Keeping the dream alive keeps us alive, awake to our senses and our souls, to cold water, the underfoot crunch of a country road, the smell of summer honeysuckle, and the feeling of an open heart. We all have our vision of a world in which we'd like to live. When we are aware of this vision and yearn to bring it to life, compassionate action makes sense, right opportunities more often present themselves, and it is easier to be renewed when the dreams seem to have turned into nightmares.

Martin Luther King's dream still awakens us with its power. "I have a dream that one day men will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers. I still have a dream that one day the lion and the lamb will lie down together." His dream was inspired by the dream of Isaiah "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." And John Lennon's life and ours were inspired by his sweet

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# Princeton Ad

## Reviews

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"Discovering our human interdependence gives us a sense of self-expansion and a feeling of transcendent value. The power of self-transcendence is joy and love. When the question of who we are and how we should live alerts us to our interconnectedness, we may discover that collective respect liberates us from collective shame."

### *Being Intimate: A Guide to Successful Relationships*

By John Amodeo and Kris Wentworth  
New York: Arkana, 1986  
\$9.95 Paperback

One will not read far into *Being Intimate* before warming to its gentle and wise message of going beyond the cultural myths of romantic love and sustaining a "process commitment" of genuine intimacy.

An "alive, spontaneous intimacy" is possible, John Amodeo and Kris Wentworth affirm. The authors, who have both dealt with relationship issues as counselors, combined their observations and experiences from thousands of hours of interviews with individuals and couples to write this book of unfailing sagacity and empathic values.

Their emphasis on the technique of Focusing—developed in the mid-1960s by Eugene Gendlin—is appropriate for a society in which relationships often crumble at the foundations. Focusing facilitates self-awareness through active listening to ourselves, to others, and to larger life patterns around us. It provides "a more workable perspective that embraces our human limitations."

Amodeo and Wentworth call to

mind Robert Johnson's Jungian interpretations of the romantic myths that pervade Western civilization. They likewise perceive the myopia and unconscious cruelty that often characterize relationships when the consequence of illusory projections of idealistic images onto a partner (e.g., a husband expecting his wife to be the Perfect Princess of his dreams).

"By clinging to an unattainable person," they reason, "we became an emotional captive, painfully attached to the experience of desire or longing, which we misidentify as love."

In short, men and women cannot live by romantic myth alone, always shielding themselves from negative feelings, projecting "noble virtues" on each other, and otherwise distancing themselves from all that is vulnerable about being human.

As we open up to ourselves through Focusing, the authors point out, we can discover that vulnerability and from there learn the real meaning of courage (from the Latin root "cor", meaning heart), which "means acting with heartfelt integrity even though we may fear unknown consequences..."

We can also go in new directions with such values as being increasingly honest, open, self-affirming, and self-directed.

And having faith in our "basic humanness," the authors continue, is important, not as some spiritual idea but as a practical means of discovering the trust and intimacy we thrive on. They write, "Just as sexual pleasure is heightened as we give up control and surrender to a natural bodily function, so can having the faith to surrender to our honest, more vulnerable feel-

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### *Reviews*

ings lead to the joy of experiencing loving contact with others.”

To reiterate, Amodeo and Wentworth have found that Focusing—a present oriented process with an open-question format (described at length in the book)—is an effective tool to pry through the delusive layers embedded in the body and mind. One begins to understand “life issues” through a “bodily felt sense.” In fact, the authors clarify this “Taking time to Focus on the bodily felt component of unresolved matters is a primary means of becoming more attuned to our experience.”

The Steps required for Focusing are provided and many examples of how the technique has resulted in positive changes can be pondered as well.

*Being Intimate* is a positive book—that is, positive in a realistic sense. Sometimes people utilize positive attitudes as a sophisticated form of denial.

Just like all the positive realists, though, Amodeo and Wentworth know that people in whom the “innocent child” is buried most deeply, the avoidance of pain will be most prolonged. And these are the people who will continue to perpetuate the romantic myth—a myth that we need to relinquish.

### *Stop Improving Yourself and Start Living*

By Roberta Jean Bryant  
San Rafael, California:  
New World Library, 1991  
\$10.95 Paperback

Roberta Jean Bryant—teacher, lecturer, and writer—has come out of denial. She has admitted to being a “veteran self-improvement junkie.” She calls self-improvement a “national obsession.” Formerly, too, she was

## Reviews

obsessed with food and weight, getting caught up in dieting schemes and not realizing at the time that what she thought was change for the better actually yielded the illusion of change, due to the superficiality of “image management.”

Now she knows better, as is obvious with her upbeat book that challenges people to get creatively involved in living fully and meaningfully. *Stop Improving Yourself and Start Living* is a lantern that casts light where we need to look—inside ourselves, embracing all that we are. She counsels against over identifying with a problem and viewing oneself through “addiction-colored glasses.”

Bryant: “It’s important to move beyond false goals such as being thin or not drinking to positive goals such as a healthy relationship with food or enthusiastic sobriety... Recovery *of* health, not recovery *from* illness, needs to be the goal.”

She supports an initial contact with a 12-Step or alternative support group for one seeking to recover from serious problems, but a dangerous trend of lapsing into an unhealthy dependency on the group itself must be avoided. Related to this concern, she also questions the current disease model for the many problems that have been included under the generic umbrella, called “addictions.” Her focal observation on this issue deserves attention. “The repeated focus on addiction as an illness reinforces resistance to taking responsibility and does not always help people recover. If your attention remains focused on the problem, disease, or difficulty, then you are that problem, disease, or difficulty. Negative-based recovery results in over identification with the problem and the

possibility of getting stuck in recovery.”

Extremists in the recovery field might denounce her stance here as heretical, not to mention controversial. But she doesn’t belabor the issue. She doesn’t need to, for her focus in this book is positive. In her *Magic Journal* and *Creative Recovery* workshops, she asks persons to seek the latent artist with-

in all of them and to express themselves in any way that will lead to self-knowledge.

Bryant has formulated twenty-three “creative processes” for anyone who has progressed beyond the beginning stages of recovery. As befits her style, these exercises, which quite often resemble intensive journalizing, are characterized by playfulness and humor, yet also

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require deep reflection. The point of all these venturings into one's many-splintered-and-splendored self is, of course, to discover the pain that is hidden from us, the joy that needs natural expression, and all else that lurks in the depths.

As we learn what controls us, we also learn what controls other persons. Perceptions sharpen. Tolerance becomes second nature. We eventually arrive at what Bryant calls "profound self-acceptance." In that state of being the flux of life doesn't disturb us. We are like a cork on the ocean, always afloat, whether in pacific or turbulent waters. We discover freedom.

The goal of a positive recovery, she maintains, is just that—freedom. One will intuit from the following words from *Stop Improving*

*Yourselves and Start Living* that Bryant has experienced such freedom.

True recovery is characterized by a freedom of expression, a freedom from fear and guilt; not only freedom from obsession, compulsion, and the need to control others, but also freedom from being vulnerable to control by others. Freedom is the ability to experience choice—the widest possible range of behavior options. Freedom means accepting responsibility without resentment.

***Empowerment: Vitalizing Personal Energy***

By William G. Cunningham  
*Atlanta, Georgia: Humanics New Age, 1991, Paperback \$12.95*

Kierkegaard once wrote, "To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose one's self... And to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become conscious of one's self."

As it turns out, *Empowerment* is a paean to the natural self, as expressed by those persons who indeed "venture in the highest sense."

Dr. William G. Cunningham, a professor at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, has conducted over the years hundreds of workshops on Empowerment, stress, and conflict management. Over three thousand persons have benefited from his insights. And perhaps thousands more will benefit from this penetrating narrative about our instinctive need to be our true self.

Being our true self is an ongoing, present-centered task, Cunningham notes well and often, but our "rule-role oriented" culture is teeming with people out of sync with both their inner natures and the outer nature they are embedded in. He provides a humorous context for how out of control, lost, and unnatural many humans really are. "It is like the pilot who proudly says to the air-traffic controller, 'Yes, I know I'm lost but I am making great time.' We are racing blindly down a well-traveled road."

Moreover, Cunningham thinks of these lost souls as wounded travelers along this road. "We often do not know who we are; therefore, we do not know how to be," he writes.

Drawing on East and West sources of knowledge and wisdom, he presents a hopeful message that humans can heal their wounds from within and mirror in everyday life the mindful state he calls "Vital Self-Reliance." First, though, he demonstrates persua-

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## Reviews

sively the need to work through and beyond the stages, “Magical Self-Indulgence” (unrepentant self-centeredness) and “Scripted Self Validation” (outer-directed in every sense of the word).

In working towards Vital Self-Reliance, he informs us, “The goal is to gain insight into our nature and how that nature is in balance with the world.”

It’s the same message, expressed here rather eclectically—that natural being in the moment is a subtle balancing act between such apparent dichotomies as culture and biology or emotions and reason. It’s not a new message, yet it bears repeating. It’s a message that has continued from ancient esoteric texts to the multifaceted writings of today.

Humans are asleep, unconscious, mindless, unnatural—so the message goes. They need to awake and to develop consciously, mindfully, and naturally. Or to use Cunningham’s term, empowerment. Being empowered, he writes, is this, “We can find what we seek if we are able to make our lives, our roles, our true nature, our conscious, and our unconscious congruent. This is the secret of empowerment.”

It is an open secret, though—one that has paradoxically been known but seldom widely responded to. Why? Because our bad habits of mind and behavior threaten—especially in this populous world—to make us a retrograde species.

I admire writers like Cunningham who see these regressive patterns and still think that humanity can pull off the necessary balancing act. I agree that it is possible to develop “a clear vision of one’s own nature.” The techniques he writes about—centering, guided imagery, insight or concentration meditation, etc.—can probably empower people.

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## Reviews

Books like *Empowerment* can help, too. But when, I wonder, will books like this one finally make a collective impact that signals a transformation?

### *Surviving Death: A Practical Guide to Caring for the Dying & Bereaved*

By Charles Meyer  
Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991  
\$9.95 Paperback

A warm and compassionate man speaks through the pages of *Surviving Death*. Charles Meyer, an Episcopal priest, shares his eleven years of experience in relating to and working with dying patients and their families at St. Davids Hospital in Austin, Texas.

To be sure, he writes from the heart, but he is also an eminently practical and reasonable man who responds to tough questions about high-tech death, death planning, euphemistic theologizing, death myths that delude, grieving, legal and ethical issues, a survivor's life after death, and an afterlife. If the writing reflects the character of the writer, then Meyer is a tender-hearted man with a razor-sharp mind. He balances emotion and reason, and he is asking all of us—survivors after the death of a loved one at some time or other—to likewise learn how to balance emotion and reason.

It will become apparent as one reads this book that he also balances spirituality with plain-talking good advice. For example on the practical side, he recommends that people create a file of documents that might (depending on your choice in the matter) include a Living Will, Directive to Physicians, Durable Healthcare Power of Attorney, and an organ donor card—all of which are possible because a federal patients-

rights law mandates that such information be made available.

On the spiritual side Meyer is strongly supportive of the Christian tradition, but he by no means rubber-stamps what he considers to be delusions and denials of the church. In his chapter, "Theology By Slogan", he almost allows sarcasm to tinge his commentary. Example: "God took him (her)." His response: "...this slogan makes God into a celestial body snatcher, or as one person said, 'the great Hoover in the sky,' randomly vacuuming people up off the earth... Rather than providing comfort, this statement often results in blame and resentment for God's alleged theft by appropriation."

Or this one: "Time heals all wounds." His response: "Christian theology never equates time with healing. Rather, the stories and parables throughout the New Testament indicate that *repentance, faith, love, forgiveness, relationships, and trust* heal, not time."

No matter what issue we might be grappling with regarding death, Meyer still recommends that survivors remember first things first, which is to always "be there" with and for the dying patient, touching and talking (listening more than talking, he advises), recalling pleasant and even humorous incidents, and responding directly to wishes and needs.

Of course, the most agonizing decisions have to do with life support. Where is that fine line between *life-saving* and *death-prolonging*?

Obviously there are no easy answers to this or other questions that can throw us into a moral quandary. But Meyer does provide answers that draw upon a combination of faith and observation and the evolving recognition that

## Reviews

death cannot be defined simply anymore.

Now more than ever he recommends developing guidelines which, he writes earnestly, "are ethically, medically, and legally sound, to enable patients to circumvent the current system of medically obligatory high-tech-low dignity, high expense-low quality prolonged living/dying. It must be possible to replace that model with the *option* of high-dignity, high-quality, comfortable, life-affirming, active hastening of death."

*Surviving Death* is a book that will make one aware of this need, as well as provide knowing counsel.

### *Lucid Dreaming*

By Stephen LaBerge, PhD.

Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher 1985

Paperback \$5.95

As psychologist Robert Ornstein points out in his introduction to this classic book, Stephen LaBerge, noted dream researcher at Stanford University, lays out a banquet of "ideas and insight" that prohibit what William James referred to as "a premature closing of our accounts with reality."

*Lucid Dreaming* is an important book that could have an experiential impact on readers. LaBerge is a first-rate scientist who works within the parameters of his research and at the same time divines implications that point beyond present conceptual boundaries. By the end of the book, it will become quite clear why he thinks that lucid dreaming can be a consciousness-expanding technique of evolutionary significance.

Besides the heuristic value of lucid dreaming, there are also practical applications to consider: "scientific exploration; health and inner growth; creative problem

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## Reviews

solving, rehearsal, and decision making; wish fulfillment and recreation. “

So what are lucid dreams? What do “asleep but conscious” and “conscious yet dreaming” mean? Sound paradoxical? LaBerge, a gifted writer, explains clearly that interpretations need not be so fixated if we think of lucid dreamers less as being unconscious to the physical world than as “awake to the inner world of their dreams.”

To the point, LaBerge is advertising to the *possibilities* of lucid dreaming. Certain psychophysiological findings from Stanford and dream laboratories around the world are compelling researchers to rethink our conceptions about “dreaming, consciousness, and reality.”

Thinking that lucid dreams could be “flying carpets” to new vistas of perception, LaBerge makes a strong case for these dreams being harnessed as a process towards personal integration.

LaBerge has kept a dream journal since 1977 (900 recorded dreams up till the time this book was published), and since then he has learned and refined a dream technique—MILD (Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams—that can induce *effective* lucid dreams and enable one to become a good *oneironaut* (pronounced “oh-nigh-ro-knot”), his term for lucid dream subjects.

In other chapters, he explicates at length on many facets of lucid dreaming—cognition, perception, and even transcendence. Although he foresees the probable introduction of “lucid-dream induction devices,” he reminds us that “external assistance” should eventually become unnecessary, as the dreamer develops through experience.

To take an example of one of these facets, LaBerge suggests that

lucid dreams that induce transcendental experiences are “advantageous” because “they help us detach from fixed ideas about ourselves” and perhaps can lead one to “surrender” to his or her “true self.”

The most important message in *Lucid Dreaming* concerns our attempts to understand what being fully awake really means; “for as ordinary dreaming is to lucid dreaming,” LaBerge notes insightfully, “so the ordinary waking state might be to the fully awakened state.”

So perhaps, he concludes, “This capacity of lucid dreams, to prepare us for a fuller awakening, may prove to be lucid dreaming’s most significant potential for helping us become more alive in our lives.”

Shall we dream and find out?

### *Facing Love Addiction: Giving Yourself the Power to Change the Way You Love*

By Pia Melody with Andrea Wells Miller and J. Keith Miller  
San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992  
\$11.00 Paperback

One should not doubt the sincerity and good intentions of such books as *Facing Love Addiction*. Pia Melody is like many others who have suffered through body-numbing, mind-clouding, and soul-destroying experiences deriving from acute chemical dependencies and various extreme obsessive/compulsive behaviors.

There have been criticisms leveled against these persons who have emerged from their bleak and painful pasts, now spiritually enriched and intent on helping people who are suffering as they did. Such books as the *Codependency Conspiracy* and *I’m Dysfunctional, You’re Dysfunctional*, for example, question the disease concept of the many “addictions”

that are written about, maintain that scapegoating parents has caused an unfortunate cultural backlash, and argue that the recovery programs are too isolated from the rest of society.

The criticisms should be noted honestly, but I can still recommend this and similar books on addiction and recovery because quite often what surfaces above the clutter of an astonishing array of aberrant behaviors is a call for common sense, compassion, renewed spirituality, responsible behaviors, a commitment to community, and a realistic attunement to one's self.

Pia Melody, who is a consultant to The Meadows, a treatment center for addictions in Wickenburg, Arizona, can certainly be credited with setting forth a reasonable and commonsensical recovery regimen. She is under no delusions about the pain and misery that recovery might entail, yet she is not spellbound into thinking that recovery necessarily requires a lifetime of effort (as some recovery experts insist upon). In fact, she thinks three to five years of hard work and dedication can result in a couple progressing from a "co-addicted relationship" to a healthy relationship.

Melody is especially insightful in her discussion of the negative dynamics that characterize the partnership of a Love Addict and an Avoidance Addict. For instance, she writes the following on how an addiction becomes a priority inside a relationship. "This addictive priority for a Love Addict is the partner and the fantasy the Love Addict has developed about that partner. Love Addicts are obsessed with the partner and seek to create intensity inside the relationship—actually to relate too closely to the point of enmeshment rather than establishing healthy intimacy."

On the other hand, "This addictive priority in the Avoidance Addict's life is an addiction outside the relationship: alcohol, drugs, sex, work, religion, gambling, spending, being busy." Why? Because they fear being controlled as a consequence of the Love Addict's obsessive attempts at enmeshment.

The entangling emotional cycles of these two entirely at-odds partners will perpetuate a relationship that is without question "intense, chaotic, and undependable."

Hence, Melody offers the advice that Love Addicts and Avoidance Addicts acknowledge the symptoms underlying their unperceptive behaviors, see the harmful effects of their actions, act upon their addictions, and experience whatever withdrawal is necessary to stop the vicious cyclic process from ever starting again.

"Hug your demons or they'll bite you in the ass," she writes in Part II, "The Recovery Process." She is indeed a realist who knows that facing Love Addiction requires painful remembrances of things past—anything traumatic that splintered one's personality and caused the fragments to submerge into a dark unconscious realm.

From my viewpoint, the "journaling exercises" might work best to bring about recovery. These exercises are designed to help one recognize and examine the symptoms of love addiction and "the stages of the love addiction cycle." They can also be utilized in making a "moral inventory" of ourselves. The many examples of this intensive journaling are arguably what makes *Facing Love Addiction* most valuable as a source for people in faltering relationships—that and its compassionate appeal to common sense. •

## CIIS AD

## Learning to Listen

Continued from page 79

dream, "Imagine no possessions, I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man."

Dreams lead us to act with boldness and love. That they may be impossible dreams doesn't mat-

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ter. They are not goals; they are the inspiration within each act as we move toward the vision. The cause and the effect, the means and the end are not separate; they are one. We need to embrace the impossibility of achieving a world that has no suffering in it and yet work for change at the same time. The Buddhists say, "Sentient beings are numberless, and I vow to save them." How can this be? We find out only in the action.

Having such a dream doesn't mean that we should deny the present as it is; on the contrary, it means that we see things just as they are, including the obstacles and difficulties, yet act as if the realization of our dream is possible. It was because Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mohandas Gandhi knew their own hearts and the hearts of their people that they had their dreams. If Don Quixote had not had his dream, if he had let the rational skeptics around him take it from him, he would never have brought his loving-kindness and wisdom into the lives of the people of La Mancha or into our own. His vision came to life in his actions, and they revealed the hidden truth which was filled with humor and joy.

Compassionate action is a way to keep the dream vital, present, breathing. If you need to get in closer touch with that dream, get out your handmade notebook or sit in front of your computer, and begin to put it into words. The words will be only a finger pointing at the moon, but they will help. Imagine that "better world" and what it would be like; it will tell you how to get there. Notice everything about it; if everyone in your perfect world has an automobile and you begin to wonder how this could happen, you may learn a lot about the distribution of

resources on the planet; if the grass in your vision world is green, you may be drawn to involvement in the development of alternative fuels, controls on toxic pesticides, or any of so many interrelated actions that will allow grass to continue to be green. Keep writing. Is everyone in this dream world getting enough to eat? How can this happen? Are there weapons systems? Does AIDS exist? Has the lion lain down with the lamb? Is color still a barrier that closes hearts and keeps people in prison? Every detail of your vision is important.

Lead with your dream. Let it be present in every act. It's what Gandhi was reminding us when he said, "Ask if your next act is of any value to the poorest person you know." That came from his dream. What will come from ours? Just imagine. •

From "Compassion in Action" by Ram Dass and Mirabai Bush. Printed by permission of Bell Tower, an imprint of Harmony Books, a division of Crown Publishers.

## Effects of Perfectionism

Continued from page 55

sounds and rhythms of music, the vibrations that impact our ears in just the right manner to create an inner sense of harmony with the outer world. This includes the natural pulses of movement that are never far from us, from the rhythms of the baby's heart pounding in its mother's womb to the continual dance of rhythm that pervades our daily life.

And there is perfection in the timing of the natural pulse of life. It can be the perfect timing of a good joke wittily conceived from an occurrence in the moment. the timely arrival of a letter or a visit by a friend or loved one when we

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## *Effects of Perfectionism*

*Continued from page 90*

most need it, the learning of certain lessons in life just when they are most important for us to grasp.

There is the perfection that may come when everything in our world seems peaceful and orderly, when we feel "God's in His heaven and all's right with the world."

### *EVERY MOMENT AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME*

When we learn to live with our attention centered in the present, more and more of the world can feel perfect to us. To present something means to bring it forth for consideration. What life presents to us can feel just right for our needs, even if it is unpleasant or painful. We begin to sense the meaning of the Zen phrase that "every moment occurs at just the

right time." To be in this perfect flow of life requires a surrendering to the present.

For the perfectionist, to surrender to the moment is to risk not being prepared for whatever may come in the next moment to threaten his security. As we have shown, the perfectionist views the present as the gateway to a future filled with apprehension, doubt, and possible failure.

To face this apprehension directly is the first step to settling more gracefully into the present. The present then becomes pregnant with possibilities that may lead to projects of excellence. When we learn to live in the present, we do not give up striving for excellence. We do not give up having goals. But we *do* give up the perfectionist's paralyzing anxiety and fear. We learn that the present is the fulcrum or balance point that empowers us to tackle

projects without fear or procrastination. Our immediate involvement in living brings us an excitement and willingness to engage the world that allows us to direct our energy into meaningful projects.

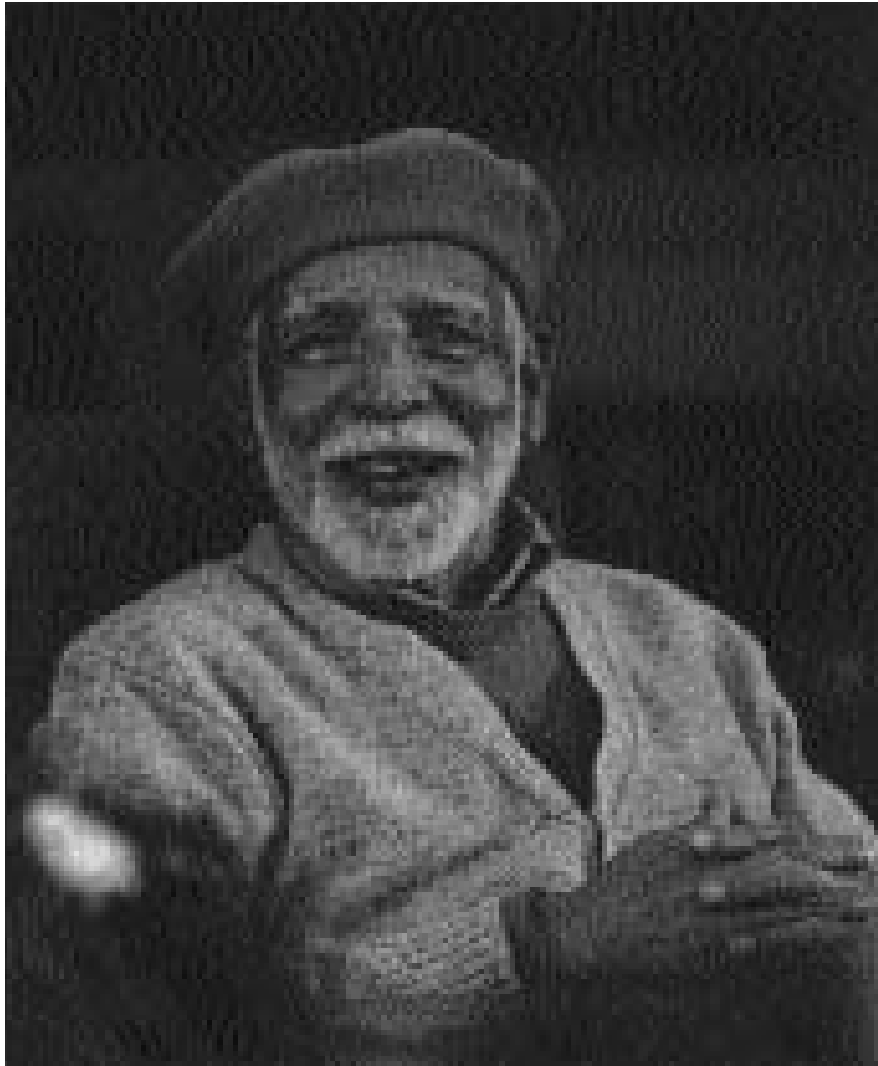
As we become more adept at accepting what life "brings forth for our consideration," we find the strength, courage, and resources to manage and transcend our everyday survival needs. We may find the motivation to meet those psychological needs (like feeling good enough about our right to be in this world and to pursue excellence) that lend depth, challenge, and meaning to a satisfying existence. And we can do all this without becoming ensnared in the perfection trap. •

*From the book "When Good Enough is Never Enough" by Steven J. Hendlin. Printed with permission from Jeremy Tarcher/Putnam Books.*

## Sierra Club Ad



# Patience



E K N A T H   E A S W A R A N

**P**atience is one of the most valuable allies in the difficult journey of self-transformation. As St. Francis says, "It is in pardoning that we are pardoned." When you are able to be patient with others, you can be patient with yourself, and that will give you all the inner support you need to persevere and make the changes you want to make in your life.

But patience can't be acquired overnight. It's just like building up a muscle. Every day you need to work on it, to push its limits. When people tell me they don't have any patience, I always say, "That's only because you've never pushed it."

Every day I push my patience. Whenever people provoke me or cause me difficulties (which is seldom, but it does happen), I don't get agitated or give up on them or try to be critical. I say to myself, "Here's a

chance to extend my patience. Let me bear with him until he falls down, and then help him get up. Let me bear with her until she comes around, and then work with her in harmony. "That kind of gritting your teeth and bearing it, establishing your roots deeper and deeper in your consciousness, can bring you, as Gandhi proved, an endurance that no government or corporation or institution can shake.

In Sanskrit, God is called kshamasagara, an ocean of patience. Look at all that we are doing to the earth, yet because God is an ocean of patience, when we learn to be patient with ourselves and others, we become humble instruments in his hands, bringing harmony and peace to the world. •

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