

RELATIONSHIP

“Connection is why we are here.”

Brené Brown, professor and author

“We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance.

We need twelve hugs a day for growth.”

Virginia Satir, therapist and author

“When two people relate together authentically and humanly,

God is the electricity that surges between them.”

Martin Buber, Nobel philosopher, quoting Talmud, Jewish sacred text

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE COMPLEX

We have already touched upon the challenges of personal relationships, and about how just as many people find themselves trying to leave a relationship as to enter one. We might think we need a relationship to “complete” us, as a structure for our happiness. We can then be disappointed and confused when, after the initial honeymoon period, arguments arise. There is a myth about romantic love being somehow pretty, but in reality, however wonderful it is, it is also sometimes demanding and messy. It takes attention, effort and maturity to create a good relationship.

Most of us in the West tend to take it for granted we can choose who we will be intimate with. But in the past, and in some cultures today, relationships could be chosen for economic stability, social elevation and reproduction. Some relationships are still based on practicality, as are some phases of our relationships, but many people also want romance, elusive chemistry and emotional compatibility.

With so much choice today, there is often an inevitable sense of having made “the wrong” decision at some point – of there perhaps still being a better partner option out

there for us!

Unconsciously, most people are inclined to view each other as functional objects that should fulfil our needs, listen to us, look at us, touch us, hug us, make love to us, cook for us, clean for us, organize us, etc. But that's not an accurate or healthy foundation for the possible fullness of a relationship. Similarly, our addiction to orgasm as self-medication for stress can prevent the deliciousness of relationship.

Every human relationship is unique, as we all differently affect and alchemize each other. Each person has their own individual history, style, interests, abilities, likes/dislikes, moods, maturity and potential. Each moment in relationship is unknown. How will we act and react to each other?

In many respects, how we interact is beyond us on some levels, beyond the mind and our conscious thought, beyond our attempt to control. Often despite our best intentions, response arises in the body. A friend tells me how every day he decides to be kind with his wife and children, but the moment he walks in the door from work, something happens and the rows begin again . . . Despite himself, he can't relate differently, and feels sad and frustrated.

We sometimes believe our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are caused in us by something that someone else does . . . but that's not the full truth. Whatever we are feeling is caused by something somewhere deep in us, from our history, even if another person is the immediate catalyst in that moment. The only way through is to be totally responsible for our experiences and behaviour, not blaming anyone else for them.

The question for many of us in our relationships with others is whether we stay with ourselves or lose ourselves. Are we authentic, responsive and responsible? Do we compromise, shut down, become false to ourselves in order to keep the peace or the relationship? How much of ourselves do we bring to the relationship? How generously do we share our honest feelings? How available are we really?

A BASIC NEED TO BE SEEN AND WITNESSED

Until we receive true soul witnessing, we will have a need for someone else to provide it for us and our relationships will become focal points for our projected feelings. We will want to get our needs met from our favourite people, and when they disappoint us, they will turn into our psychological triggers. We keep repeating our historical experiences, until we can find a deep healing resolution, in life or therapy.

The truth is that everyone needs to be really seen and witnessed in some way. As babies we need to be seen in our joy and distress by our mother, or the person who fills that role for us. Our capacity to relate well with others as adults depends on how well we were cared for as babies and children, and on how well we have healed any wounds we may have from that time. This is known in psychology as attachment, a theory first pro-

posed by John Bowlby.⁸⁵ Is a person securely attached, insecurely attached or ambivalent? Even the most well-intentioned caregiver can of course still get it wrong for the baby they are looking after, or the baby might feel unloved due to having a condition that isn't resolved.

Ideas about best baby care have changed greatly over time. Some have advocated leaving babies to cry in prams in the garden, feeding them on a strict schedule, and children being seen and not heard. Many more variations on this approach ignore the natural arising needs of this unique baby, here and now.

Attunement is there in the quality of the mother's glance, touch of her hand and body, her timing, talk and song. Breastfeeding enables mothers and babies to gaze at each other at an optimal distance for connection for both. This gaze offers soul contact. A mother's love radiates through her eyes, heart, nipples and milk. A mother provides nourishment and is the equivalent of a god for the baby.

When a baby has not been really seen, there is a great sense of loneliness and abandonment. Many of us have unseen children inside of us crying out for attention, the walking wounded. The zombies are not out there, but in here. Many do not feel it's possible to fill their inner void of emotional need. We all want and need to be seen, to feel ourselves safe, in happy relationship with another . . .

INTERPLAY OF MASCULINE AND FEMININE ENERGY

In our everyday life, in the pairing of masculine and feminine, we usually regard the feminine as being the more passive and the masculine as the more active of the two. We tend to see men as playing active roles in the world, good at focusing, fixing and achieving things, while women are more in touch with feelings, details and food.

But if we zoom out to the bigger picture, we can see that in the cosmos, masculine and feminine are huge natural elemental forces, not the same thing at all as men and women, boys and girls. Masculine is the context, as constant awareness, emptiness, stillness and knowledge. Feminine is the manifestation, as changing form, energy, sensuality and aliveness. The masculine simply is, while the feminine is dynamic movement. The inter- play between these essential energies is the essence of creativity and life!

In human relationships, there is attraction between the magnetic opposite poles that creates a sexual spark – and between similar poles as we seek what mirrors us in our desire to know ourselves and grow. Feminine energy leads by invitation. Masculine energy follows that up with penetration. Because our culture does not value the feminine, it does not see the feminine invitation as leadership. It only acknowledges masculine action as leadership. We are missing out on seeing the equal dance of difference. People are born with clear natural tendencies irrespective of their gender.

Shamanic cultures have long recognized that there are more than two genders. Each of us is a combination of masculine and feminine in our three different aspects: a physically gendered body with external genitalia, an inner sense of self as a gendered identity and sexual orientation of attraction to others as a gender. Every human being contains both archetypal masculine and feminine energies. These show up in different ways in different areas of our lives; for example, how we are at work is often not the same as how we are in the bedroom. The nineteenth-century psychotherapist Carl Jung⁸⁶ called our inner masculine and feminine energy our Animus and Anima, while the ancient Chinese Taoists called these principles Yin and Yang.

We are attracted to someone who reminds us of our inner spiritual self. In traditional genders, a man is attracted to a woman whose feminine aspect reminds him of his own inner feminine, while a woman is attracted to a man whose masculine aspect reminds her of her own inner masculine. In this way we deeply recognize each other – a phenomenon we call falling in love. It is a mysterious process not organized by logic, time or space, but by significance, soul reflection and completion. When we see someone in love, we recognize their bright soul light shining.

A CONTAINER FOR HEALING

We learn about ourselves mostly through our relationships with other people. A relationship is a healing opportunity, a playground for exploring new pleasures and transforming old patterns. Very often, when choosing a partner, at an unconscious level we choose someone who is deeply familiar, meaning that they remind us of the difficulties we had with our parents. They often trigger our childhood wounds, but they also offer us the possibility of healing or retrieving a part of ourselves through owning our true feelings and taking responsibility for our actions. A relationship is really an opportunity that is less about the other and more about fully experiencing ourselves.

In relationship we move through cycles of ease and challenge, either resolving a conflict and deepening our connection, or separating. Relationship is not a fixed thing; it's always changing, demanding us to grow, respond and change. What do we need now to see, feel, understand, say or do?

Being without a partner brings us different but no less valuable healing gifts. Being single does not make us “incomplete”. Being single is an opportunity to expand individually, and to appreciate a wider, more complex set of relationships. The temptation when “in a relationship” is often to focus exclusively on “the other”, forgetting we are in relationship with everyone and everything around us. Both circumstances, being in and being out of intimate relationship, offer healing challenges and gifts.

A RELATIONSHIP LIVES

Each relationship has a life of its own; it is alive, it has an existence. In addition to the obvious interaction between people, a relationship also has a subtle energetic field, a relationship soul. A relationship has its own particular subtle atmosphere of mood, interest, images, colour and texture, etc. We are familiar with sensing this atmosphere; when, for example, entering someone's home or room, we can often tell if there is lightness or heaviness between people before they say a word.

Just as each individual can evolve, so can each relationship. Where do we place our attention? Just on ourselves? Just on the other? Can we also attend to the shared relational field?

We need to care for the soul of our shared relationship as well as for each other as individuals. Might the grit of friction in our relationship, like in an oyster, create a "pearl" of radiance and durability?

ORDERS OF LOVE

Relationship is a dance of interaction, a play of two fundamental movements, towards and away from others. When we reach out to others, we say YES with interest, openness and energy: we want contact, relaxation, spontaneity and support. When we move away from others, we say NO, pulling back, protecting, rejecting, defending and fighting. It's important we can do both.

A romantic relationship often has three main phases: initial romance, settled togetherness and then deep commitment. We begin with feelings of "I fancy you, desire you, need you. I take you into my heart. You can have me completely. I love who you are and what you do for me." As a relationship moves into the second phase, we feel that "I love you and where you come from, everything that went into making you, your family, culture, past, child and partners who came before me." In the third phase, after many shared years together, we feel "I love you and wherever fate takes you and me."

Successful intimate relationships are characterized by an equal balance between the couple of both partners' needs, their give and take, their values shared. Adults bond over a thousand acts of exchange, cups of tea, conversations, considerations and sex, which is very bonding. In a thriving relationship, both partners refresh themselves outside of it, often with same-sex friendships.

However, conflict arises from time to time even in the best relationships. It is helpful to know that we all move between four types of feelings that have different effects on us and our partners:

Primary feelings, such as disappointment, gratitude or sadness, are honest, intense and temporary, and may be uncomfortable to admit but strengthening to express and resonant to others.

Secondary feelings arise when we don't believe our feelings will be met with a helpful response. Instead there's chronic blame, anger or worry, often connected with past hurt. Expressing these feelings is weakening; there's a sense of stasis, a substitute for taking appropriate action.

Systemic feelings show up in us but don't really belong to us. They may perhaps lead to us feeling unsafe, rejected, worthless or abandoned, or to have an impulse to start a family or to divorce. Due to an unconscious identification with an ancestor, these feelings may actually originate with someone else in the wider family system.

Impersonal meta-feelings are not emotional but carry strength to act in a crisis, such as wisdom, courage, meta-anger and even cruelty, for example when a mother is moved to lift a heavy car crushing her child.

When we are in a relationship, we are in relationship with not just an individual but their family too. Happiness occurs when we include everyone in a family, honouring everyone, respecting those who came first, including previous partners, older children, elders and ancestors, acknowledging what they have given to those who come later – literally life, attention, guidance, gifts, money, etc. We also need to accept that feelings of guilt and innocence do belong to those who earned them, those responsible need to feel and own them, freeing others in the system from the burden of carrying what is not theirs to carry. These “orders” occur invisibly beneath the surface of relationships, as described by psychotherapist Bert Hellinger.

From the shamanic view, an intimate relationship is a ritual that includes the upper world of souls, the middle world of everyday life together and the lower world of vulnerable and intimate secrets. A good relationship fully inhabits these three realms.

EVOLUTION FROM ENSLAVED TO EMPOWERED

There are three basic levels of human relating:

Chemical love

This is the simplest level, based on the hormonal secretions of the glands. This gives rise to the impersonal drive to procreate, where attraction is chemical and blind, and variety is seen as the spice of life.

Emotional love

This is about falling in love with another based on unconscious childhood survival strategies. The other is seen as an object who will help us to get our needs met. Such relationships of mutually entwined patterns of neurosis are demanding and controlling, involving love, hate and codependency.

Delicious love

This is empowered, genuinely vulnerable and freely expressive. It is based around considering what is best for the other, my lover. Delicious love is about allowing another person to be exactly and uniquely who and how they are. It is clear-sighted and respectful, with interest both in the other and in the self. It is based on qualities such as discipline, awareness, meditation and healthy lifestyle.

Delicious relationship occurs between two whole, fully-rounded and autonomous people, who can be independent and interdependent. My attention is caught right now by two people beautifully chatting in relationship next to me. Their quality of connection is palpable and spreads positivity. As an observer, I can feel the back and forth of the attention passing between them non-stop.

DELICIOUS INGREDIENTS

Deliciousness is a bringing of awareness to all of the ingredients of relating. It means relating with a positive intention for the best outcome for both yourself and the other, for everyone involved.

Freshness

Most of the time, we don't really perceive everything in our present circumstances; we rely on old ideas and assumptions, maps and labels, on what our parents told us, what we learnt at school, or what happened last year. It is not easy to have a good relationship when it is based on who we thought James or Fiona were five years ago, when actually, right now, they are somebody else entirely! How might it be not to define them based on past experience, but to see them again with fresh eyes, right now?

When we look afresh, we might see beyond society's ideas of attraction, perhaps to the raw data of their flesh, feelings and soul, maybe a wrinkle or pore, curve or hairiness, sensitivity or passion, and we might have no thought of "good" or "bad"; just as-it-is them.

We can begin to relate with the real them – not merely engage with information about them, such as where they were born, the colour of their eyes, their work, hobbies and opinions – but with them as they really are right now.

Allowing

Love is allowing another person to be exactly who and how they are with- out trying to change them to please yourself. If someone loves you, they will open themselves up to you. There is no need to intrude, manipulate or dominate, mother, father or baby them, demand or sulk. Simply be present in yourself and leave the other person alone to be themselves.

Generosity

Love is kindness, consideration, generosity to the other and for the other. It is not to forget oneself, but to attend to and give to the other, while at the same time being attentive and giving to self.

Responsiveness

A mature relationship is marked by its responsiveness to the other – by our openness, curiosity, consideration, care, trust and interaction. There is enjoyment, sincerity and authenticity: a real individual interacting with another real individual, both of us self-aware, unique and respectful. We are genuinely interested in the other, and we really want to know them, not fix them.

For a relationship to thrive, we need empathy, good contact and connection. We need to respect the other as a constantly unfolding person with their own experience, wants and needs. We keep on learning about ourselves and the other, both of us being real, respectful and responsive.

Vibrancy

There's a quality of immediacy, desire, pleasure and sensuousness; we are excited, nervous, vibrated and affected. We impact each other and are aware of this. Through our sensations, feelings, reactions and sexuality we affect each other's body and chemistry, creating a unique relational alchemy. Two people, attuned to themselves and to each other, will vibrate together, creating a kind of subtle energetic music.

Reflection

This means being constantly curious: what is this relationship? What is happening right now? I want to know myself with you – how do you feel with me, how do the two of us fit together?

We can feel our own delicacy in our responsiveness to the other, and the pleasure of our authenticity, energy, erotic nature, aliveness and love. Who am I in relationship with you? And now? And now?

Responsibility

When we rage and blame others, we give our power away, thinking other people have the agency in our life. We need to fully own our feelings. We all unconsciously generate

responsive interpretations from the complexity of our internal life, and we are responsible for our own experience. Real authentic communication does take time and effort. The benefits are that it usually feels better – bothering to dig down to express what is really true – and it usually gets a better response.

Self

The quality of relationship we are able to have with others depends on the quality of relationship we have with ourselves. This does not mean becoming self-obsessed, but becoming familiar with the ebbing and flowing, rising and falling changeability of our experience! The more we are in good contact with the depths and widths of our own experience, the more we can be in good relationship with others. It's important to experience what you feel, need and want, and what you don't want.

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'The Healing Power of Pleasure' book invites you to make a journey into the Universe of Deliciousness, for a more sensual, happy and confident life. You will travel via 7 medicines – Slow, Body, Depth, Relationship, Pleasure, Power and Potency – with inspiring ideas and practical exercises, empowering you to live an embodied life. Reviews said - "highly recommended" "a treasure trove" "fun and engaging"

You can get this book everywhere books are sold. Link to Amazon: [HealingPleasure](#)

You can join a retreat in September via links: [Greece Sept 1st](#) or [Greece Sept 8th](#)

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