

*The*  
**SOULMATE  
EXPERIENCE**

A Practical Guide to  
Creating Extraordinary Relationships



**MALI APPLE & JOE DUNN**

## **Also by Mali Apple & Joe Dunn**

Wild Monogamy:  
Cultivating Erotic Intimacy to Keep Passion  
and Desire Alive  
*Available in 2023*

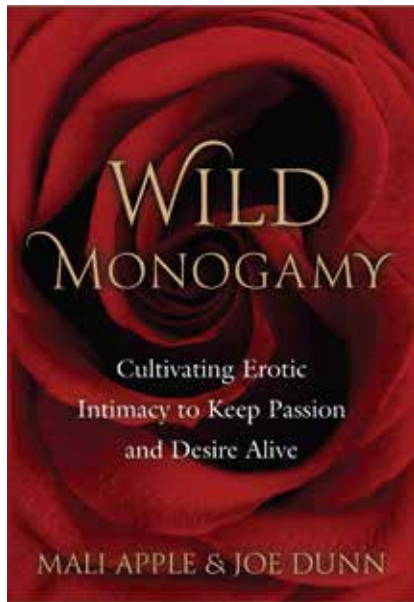
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## **WILD MONOGAMY: CULTIVATING EROTIC INTIMACY TO KEEP PASSION AND DESIRE ALIVE**

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Drawing on stories from real people and the latest research on sex and love, *Wild Monogamy* encourages couples to develop—or redevelop!—their erotic intimacy. You'll learn how to create an environment of love and trust in which you can compassionately and creatively work with personal challenges, explore your desires, and enjoy new depths of connection together.

- Enhance your emotional connection
- Use the healing power of eroticism to break free of fear, insecurity, inhibition, shame, and self-consciousness
- Transform everyday moments into moments of playfulness and passion
- See intimacy issues as perfect opportunities for healing, growth, and pleasure
- Design your own intimate adventures
- Ignite your attraction and desire for each other

**By cultivating erotic intimacy, you turn your long-term  
*relationship* into a long-term *adventure*!**

## What People Are Saying About *The Soulmate Experience*

"What a beautiful book! Written without the trappings of spiritual or psychological jargon, *The Soulmate Experience* is a user-friendly guide to a completely authentic way of being. In a simple and personal way, Mali and Joe usher you into a new paradigm of relating where the truth of unconditional love can actually be known and lived."

~**TOBIN GIBLIN**, AUTHOR OF *THE ART OF MINDFUL LIVING*

"Mali and Joe get to the heart of the heart."

~**FRANK FERRANTE**, STAR OF *MAY I BE FRANK*

"Reading this book is like listening to your best friend who knows you better than anyone else and loves you unconditionally." ~**LAURA ALAVOSUS**

"*The Soulmate Experience* has quite literally given me a new way to look at my life." ~**EVIE ROMERO**

"A truly wonderful book: easy to read and digest, practical, lighthearted, full of compassion and encouragement. One of those books you can pick up for a few moments and transform your day." ~**ED TUCKER**

"You are in great hands here with Mali and Joe and *The Soulmate Experience*. Their loving hearts, minds, and souls are here to change the world as we know it." ~**COLETTE KENNEY**

"This book demonstrates what soul-level connection is all about and how it can be cultivated—with lots of suggestions and ways for couples to get there together." ~**MONTY PERRY**

"The planet needs this book as soon as possible." ~**DIANE KNORR**

"This is a great guide to follow if you want a soulmate relationship—not only with that special someone, but with everyone you will ever meet." ~**MATTHEW M. WATSON**

"Looking at conflict as an opportunity to make a deeper connection with my husband shifted my thinking and deepened my love." ~**AMY ZIMMER**

"Thank you for being a part of the healing of the world!" ~**AVASA LOVE**

“What a pleasurable book to read! The language is so natural, the stories so easy to identify with, and the advice so practical—I felt like I was sitting around a kitchen table having a conversation with the authors.” ~**DIANE HART**

“Buy this book even if you don’t think you need it. The messages in it will transform your life and your relationships.” ~**JEAN MARSHALL**

“Mali and Joe offer inspiration and affirmation along every step of the path.” ~**BETH MIDDLECAMP**

“No matter how many other relationship books you’ve read, this is *the* book that gives you the tools to attract a soulmate, and find solutions to the challenges of relationship that will allow that soulmate experience to blossom.” ~**JOANNE SPROTT**

“Thank you for sharing your great teachings and way of being together in the world.” ~**SANDY MORRIS**

“As a married couple, we are delighted with this book. *The Soulmate Experience* is a must-read for all those desiring to bring love to themselves and healing to the world.” ~**CAROLE CHRISTE AND BUZZ FOOTE**

“When I think of being in the presence of you two, I am overwhelmed with love and peace. Thank you for being here and being awakened.” ~**MEGAN MONIQUE HARNER**

“I just need to keep reading this book over and over again. It’s made a huge difference in meeting new people.” ~**DEBORAH NEWTON**

“This book is not just about creating soulmate relationships with others. It’s about loving yourself enough to be open to receiving and giving love. I just want to buy up a million copies for all of my friends!” ~**KATIE LE NORMAND**

“Love the ideas and concepts—and especially the tons of easy to understand, practical suggestions.” ~**DEANNA DUDNEY**

“The world is a better place because the two of you care so much.” ~**PAUL CONTENTO**

“I love this book. Do you think it would marry me?” ~**ANNA EMBREE**

THE  
SOULMATE  
EXPERIENCE

A Practical Guide to  
Creating Extraordinary Relationships

Mali Apple & Joe Dunn



San Rafael, California

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*Interior art: Freedom Bean*

*Author photograph: Dominic Colacchio*

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*To Joe*

*For so willingly exploring all that it means to be in love*

*For gently encouraging me to be everything*

*I have the potential to be*

*And most of all, for opening my heart*

*Mali*

*To Mali*

*My lover, my spiritual teacher, and my best friend*

*I will be forever grateful for this heart-opening*

*opportunity to live life with you*

*Joe*



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## A Word About Our Soulmate Experience

Just like many other couples in a new relationship, we experienced a deeply profound, almost magical feeling of connection, what many would call a soulmate connection. But rather than gradually fading away, as so often happens, the love and passion we were experiencing actually continued to grow. We eventually found ourselves inspired—and even compelled—to investigate just what was making this “soulmate experience” possible. *What was keeping the magic alive?*

As we dedicated ourselves and our relationship to exploring this one question, we also began to coach singles and couples in applying our discoveries so that they could transform their own lives. We’re thrilled by the rapid shifts we’re seeing in the people we inspire and coach. People from all over the world say they’re feeling more loving and accepting toward themselves, more connected to those around them, and more confident about the possibility of creating their own soulmate experience. And many of them are doing just that.

This is not just another relationship book. Many of our ideas are unconventional. They also *work*.

People often tell us we're the happiest couple they've ever met. They see how connected we are, and they want to know our secrets. These are our "secrets"—all the ideas, tools, and techniques we use to continually create a magical life together.

We use these ideas to allow the things that come up in every relationship—from fears and expectations to jealousy and resentment—to *enhance* our experience rather than detract from it.

We use these ideas to lovingly guide each other into opening up to everything we have the potential to be.

We use these ideas to keep the love, passion, and fun alive, *every single day*.

We believe that as you incorporate even just a few of these ideas into your own life, all your relationships—including the one you have with yourself—will begin to feel more loving, more connected, and more rewarding. You'll find yourself feeling confident, excited, and inspired. And you will realize that you have everything it takes to create *your* soulmate experience.

In love,

Mali and Joe

# Introduction

**A**re you longing for a soulmate, someone you feel deeply connected to emotionally, physically, and spiritually? Are you ready to finally have *your* soulmate experience?

To make your dreams of such a relationship a reality, you don't have to be one of the lucky ones. Rather than wishing or waiting for your soulmate to show up, there are fundamental shifts you can make right now to draw that experience into your life.

The possibilities presented in this book, and the uplifting stories of people successfully putting them into practice, will give you the insight and inspiration to create and sustain your own soulmate experience.

## PART 1: CREATING YOUR SOULMATE EXPERIENCE

Relationships with soulmate potential come around a lot more often than you might imagine. The problem is, we're not always available for them. The ideas and exercises in **Part 1: Creating Your Soulmate**

**Experience** are designed to help you identify and clear out anything that might be preventing you from having a deeply connected relationship. By being *available* for the soulmate experience, you will naturally *attract* it into your life.

- **Chapter 1: Changing Your Mind** presents a powerful process for identifying and “trading up” attitudes and beliefs that aren’t producing the experiences you desire. You’ll also learn how to change your experience when feelings like insecurity, jealousy, or anger come over you.
- **Chapter 2: Loving Your Body** will help you to quiet your self-critical voice, see yourself without judgment, and treat yourself with more compassion and appreciation. You’ll discover why accepting, appreciating, and even loving the body you have right now increases your availability for the soulmate experience.
- **Chapter 3: Reducing Your Baggage** will give you simple and effective techniques for releasing feelings of loneliness, doubt, or anxiety, freeing yourself from resentment, and genuinely increasing your self-worth.
- **Chapter 4: Raising Your Soulmate Potential** will help you cultivate qualities that will make it much easier to manifest a truly connected relationship.

PART 2:  
KEEPING YOUR SOULMATE EXPERIENCE ALIVE

Every bit as important as attracting your soulmate experience is creating an environment for it to thrive. **Part 2: Keeping Your Soulmate Experience Alive** will give you tools and techniques for approaching the most challenging aspects of relationships in ways that will actually bring you and your partner closer together.

- **Chapter 5: Having a Guest in Your Life** introduces the soulmate model for creating extraordinary relationships. This enlightened approach to having a partner will help you ensure that your relationship continues to be loving, vibrant, and connected.
- **Chapter 6: Creating a Context** explores how to create an intention for your relationship that will guide and support you as the relationship adapts to changing circumstances and expands in new directions.
- **Chapter 7: Making Space** will help you create a safe, loving, receptive space for your relationship that encourages both of you to share your deepest thoughts, feelings, and desires. You'll also discover how to approach changes and challenges in ways that will *increase* the love and intimacy between you.
- **Chapter 8: Turning Expectations into Invitations** explores what may be the single greatest threat to any relationship: expectation. You'll come away with an invaluable technique for transforming potentially destructive *expectations* into simple, loving *invitations*.

- **Chapter 9: Transforming the Energy of Jealousy** will show you how to harness this powerful emotion to increase the passion, appreciation, and desire in your relationship. You will also discover the profound intimacy that results from coming together to explore jealousy's underlying causes.
- **Chapter 10: Playing Leapfrog** demonstrates powerful ways for assisting each other in healing from your pasts and rising above your perceived limitations. You'll also discover how to encourage and inspire one another to unlock the potential in every area of your lives and become your very best selves.
- **Chapter 11: Exploring the Edges** shows you how to keep the mystery and excitement in your relationship alive by "playing at your edges" in ways that are both intimate and fun. You'll also learn how to energize your sexual connection by helping each other break through limiting beliefs about yourselves and your sexuality.
- **Chapter 12: Connecting on a Soul Level** presents the five simple practices at the heart of relating on a soul-to-soul level. These practices, which are the foundation for every idea in this book, have the power to make every aspect of your relationship—and your life—more joyful, rewarding, and fulfilling.

## WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

Whether you are looking for a partner or already have one, this book contains the guidance, tools, and techniques you need to create a relationship that's fully connected and alive. This book is for you whether you're on a quest for your soulmate or just want to add more "soulmate experience" to the relationship you already have.

If you're single, you will discover how to cultivate qualities that will attract the soulmate experience into your life. You'll also learn how to recognize and draw out the soulmate potential in others.

If you're with a partner who doesn't share your enthusiasm for these ideas, you'll discover how you can transform your own experience—and be happier in the relationship for as long as you choose to stay in it.

If you already happen to be with the love of your life, you will learn exciting new ways to make sure you're keeping the *life* in your *love*.

The life-changing ideas in this book—and the many examples of real people using them successfully—will guide and support you as you create your own soulmate experience: a relationship that is a continual source of love, inspiration, and joy.



IN TRIBUTE TO  
MICHAEL NAUMER



Mary Small

Michael Naumer (1942–2001) was a brilliant man who devoted much of his life's energy to teaching people how to create loving, connected relationships. Joe, who had the privilege to study under him in the mid-1990s, credits Michael with helping him to vastly improve how he approaches not only his relationships but his entire life.

Michael and his wife Christina founded the Relationships Research Institute out of their shared passion for understanding what it takes to keep a relationship healthy and vital. Hundreds of people participated in their powerful, life-changing seminars.

Catherine Sevenau, Michael's assistant for the three years prior to his death, describes what it was like to take his seminar for the first time:

The course was about transformation. It was three intense days of awakening people to their conscious and unconscious beliefs. I was rocked, inspired, pained, and touched—but most of all, my thinking

## INTRODUCTION

and way of seeing my relationships and myself were completely transformed. I came out of that weekend with a heightened awareness and some practical tools that forever changed me.

Michael's words live on in the hearts and minds of the people who were fortunate enough to have known him. "Love is the recognition of the equal in the other," he liked to say. "When you diminish another person, you lose their ability to contribute to you." And, "Are you available for the relationship you say you want?"

In the spirit of keeping Michael's wisdom alive, we've chosen to honor his life and teachings by presenting some of his inspiring ideas in this book. We hope you're moved to put them to use and, as Michael would have said, "transform the process of relationship from a game you can't win to one you can't lose."

## Part 1

# Creating Your Soulmate Experience



The ideas and techniques that follow will help you identify and clear out any obstacles that might be keeping you from *your* soulmate experience.

When you're truly available for the soulmate experience, you will naturally begin to attract it into your life.

## Loving Your Body

*Too many of us go through life feeling less than loving toward our own bodies. We believe we're not attractive enough, not fit enough, or just flawed in one way or another. Such a negative self-image prevents us from fully sharing ourselves and can severely limit our ability to be intimate. Learning to accept, appreciate, and even love every aspect of your physical self will free you to explore new dimensions in your life and enjoy richer, more intimate relationships.*

**O**ur perfection-obsessed culture encourages us to view our bodies as a collection of parts and then to continually identify and reject "imperfections" in those parts. If you're like many people, you have a body part—or maybe several—that you've been giving yourself negative messages about for years.

Jessica, who runs marathons in addition to raising two children and managing her own business, focuses daily on the appearance of her stomach, which remains soft and round no matter how many miles she runs or sit-ups she does. Jason checks his bald spot in the

mirror almost every time he uses the restroom. Steven has worried since puberty about the size of his penis.

Self-criticism has direct effects on our intimate relationships. Although Jessica is extremely fit, her almost obsessive thoughts about her stomach keep her from being fully comfortable when she's naked. This makes sex with her husband much less enjoyable than it could be. "He tells me I'm beautiful," she says, "but when we're making love, I'm constantly distracted because I'm thinking about my stomach." Jason began going bald in his early twenties and has never been comfortable when women touch his hair. Steven, consumed with the belief that he can't satisfy a woman through intercourse, admits, "I have never found myself lost in the experience of making love. I am always too busy worrying that I won't satisfy her."

When the world around us holds up flat stomachs, full heads of hair, and large penises as models of perfection, it's easy to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to those ideals day after day and coming up short every time. But even if we were able to "fix" the things we're convinced are our worst features—if Jessica endures liposuction, for example, or Jason goes through the pain and expense of hair implants—we wouldn't suddenly feel whole. That's because by the time we're young adults, the habit of scanning our bodies for features that don't measure up is deeply ingrained.

**We sabotage our  
self-image when  
we mentally dissect  
ourselves and find fault  
with the individual  
pieces.**



The truth is, our bodies are nothing short of miraculous. For all they are and everything they do for us, they deserve our compassion, admiration, and even reverence. Yet making critical remarks about our bodies often passes for casual conversation: "These jeans make me look fat." "Trash those pictures before someone sees them. I look so old!" Even if we never criticize our bodies out loud, many of us do so daily in our heads: "I hate that double chin!" "Why did I have to get the curly hair?"

*Any way in which you reject yourself prevents you from being able to fully connect with another human being. When you carry a belief that any part of you is unacceptable, you simply can't be completely present with someone else or, for that matter, even with yourself. Even if you don't belittle your body or put yourself down for not changing it in ways you would like, the more you can raise your appreciation for the body you have right now, the more available you will be for the soulmate experience.*

## QUIET YOUR SELF-CRITICAL VOICE

When we meet someone who has a trait that could be seen as undesirable, such as a birthmark, we don't typically start right in with criticism: "That mark on your face is so ugly. Have you considered doing something about that?"

Many of us, though, talk to ourselves regularly with just such a lack of compassion and love. Whenever we catch a glimpse of our reflection, the uncaring words are often right behind: "My skin looks

splotchy." "My arms are so flabby!" "Yep, my nose is as big as it was yesterday."

If you're one of the millions of people who give themselves negative messages whenever they see themselves in a photo or the mirror, it's high time you quieted that self-critical voice.

**A steady diet of self-criticism will make even the most poised among us feel less confident, less capable, and potentially miserable.**



### *See the Harm You've Been Doing*

Though we all know that putting ourselves down will never contribute to our sense of self-worth and probably won't motivate us to take better care of our bodies, many of us can't seem to stop. One powerful first step to ending the self-criticism is to get a sense of how cruel and insensitive you've been.

Stand in front of a mirror and make an honest review of the negative messages you've been giving yourself. Do your best to recall every self-critical remark you've made in the past week or month, and say them out loud with as much sincerity as you can muster. When you've done your best to uncover them all, ask yourself these questions: *What has this self-criticism done for me? Do I deserve to be put down like this? Is this behavior likely to contribute to my health and happiness? Is this behavior making me available for the kind of relationships I'd like?*

Natalie, a mother of three young children, has regularly criticized her body ever since she gave birth to her first baby. "I'd tell myself my hips were too wide, my chest was too flat, my skin wasn't tight like it should be. Doing this before going out on a date with my husband

would put me in a pretty sour mood—so much so that sometimes I couldn't even bring myself to go."

When the impact of what she'd been doing to herself hit her, Natalie said it was an incredible wake-up call. "I realized what a waste of precious time beating myself up was!" Natalie also saw that she was unintentionally modeling for her children behavior that was, in essence, self-abusive. "I decided I would do my best to start accepting that this is who I am right now and enjoying what I have."

Imagine how it would be to feel love and compassion for your miraculous body every time you looked in the mirror. This experience is within your reach—whether or not you change a single thing about your body. The realization you need is this: *Negative self-talk does you absolutely no good. More than that, it's extremely damaging to both you and your relationships.* Abusing your body, mentally or physically, is a waste of your life and the precious time you have to enjoy it. These ideas apply not only to your body, but to *anything* you don't accept about yourself: your past, your upbringing, your personality traits, or the choices you've made.

**The little things  
you can't accept  
about yourself  
have more control  
over your life  
than you realize.**



If you've been your own worst enemy for years, make this promise to yourself right now: *From this day forward, I promise to do my best to stop the self-criticism and to love the person who's looking back at me in the mirror.* It's unlikely you'll be able to let go of your negative self-talk all at once, but it is possible to drop a substantial amount of it by becoming aware of how truly pointless and harmful it is.



*Talk to Yourself with Compassion*

Now that you've taken a look at all the demeaning things you tend to say to yourself, use the [techniques](#) in Chapter 1 to identify and transform the beliefs that are generating your self-defeating thoughts. You might find that deep down, you hold beliefs like "No one wants a woman with real curves" or "If I don't look like I did in my twenties, I'm not attractive."

Because our self-critical voice can be so tenacious, affirmations can help us transform how we speak to ourselves. Affirmations are positive statements, such as "I am beautiful and capable," that we can repeat to ourselves whenever our self-critical mechanism is triggered.

**Learning to love  
your body will raise  
your self-worth,  
which will help you  
attract a partner  
with high self-worth.**



Affirmations are most effective if they are beliefs we're ready to accept as true. Jessica, the marathon runner who criticizes her stomach on a daily basis, says that repeating statements like "My belly is beautiful" or "My stomach is perfect just as it is" simply didn't work for her. "Every time I said them, I'd find myself arguing with them." Instead, she came up with this statement: "I am strong, healthy, and sexy." Because she really believes each of these ideas, this affirmation is effective for her. Now when she catches herself focusing negatively on her stomach, she quiets the self-deprecating voice by saying to herself, "I am strong, healthy, and sexy," feeling the truth in every word.

"As soon as I do that," she reports, "I immediately feel better."

Steven, who's still in the process of accepting the size of his penis, uses affirmations to remind himself of the positive things that being smaller has brought him. "I learned early on to focus on other ways to bring a woman pleasure, and I do think I'm a better lover today because of that," he says. "So when I start obsessing about my size, I remind myself that I'm a more attentive lover than I would have been."

### LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND SEE THE MIRACLE

Some of us are so used to criticizing our reflection that we haven't seen ourselves without the filter of our negative assessments in a long time. Our self-perception can be quite distorted, meaning that what we see in the mirror can be very different from what everyone else sees. Many of the features we zero in on are things nobody else would ever notice unless we pointed them out. Leslie, a cosmetologist, says she sometimes feels guilty taking people's money for certain procedures. "They're asking me to cover up spots or remove hairs I know no one else will ever see."

Michaela is a raven-haired beauty with rich brown eyes, full lips, and coffee-colored skin. Vivacious and energetic, she turns heads everywhere she goes. When she steps out of the shower and sees her reflection in the mirror, however, her attention is instantly drawn to the lines around her eyes. Though she does find

**Don't wait until  
ten or twenty  
years from now  
to realize you're  
beautiful today.**



herself attractive overall, those lines are often all she sees. If anyone else happened to catch a glimpse of Michaela naked, they would see a beautiful woman with a brilliant smile, lovely skin, and strong legs. They certainly wouldn't focus in on her age lines!

If you've spent years comparing yourself to perfect, airbrushed models or beating yourself up day after day for whatever you've decided is unsatisfactory, the exercise that follows will help you begin to heal some of that self-inflicted damage.

For this exercise, set aside some time to be alone, maybe an hour or more. Have a couple of mirrors handy so that you'll be able to view yourself from various angles. As you'll be undressed at least part of the time, make sure the room is warm.

### *Appreciate Every Part*

The first part of this practice is to find some way to appreciate every aspect of your body. Even if you feel you already accept your body as it is, this exercise will help you love yourself even more.

Begin with whatever feels natural, such as a hand, a foot, or your eyes. Focus your full attention on that one part of your body, investigating it as though you were seeing it for the first time. For instance, if you start with your hand, you might feel the texture of the skin, the smoothness of the nails, and the structure of the bones underneath. Then experiment with all the different ways your hand can move. If negative thoughts come

**When we  
embrace something  
we've rejected  
about ourselves,  
we'll naturally be  
more accepting  
of others as well.**



up, allow them to drift by, without following or holding onto them, and refocus on what you appreciate.

As you connect with your hand, think about all that it's done for you. Imagine how your life would be without it. Contemplate the hundreds of thousands of tasks your hand has performed and the variety of wonderful and interesting things you've touched with it. Feel compassion for everything this body part has gone through: injuries, traumas, or even neglect.

Take a moment to honor any aspects of your hand that you may have criticized or rejected at one time or another. For instance, if you've ever thought of the veins on the backs of your hands as unattractive, contemplate how they've been there to faithfully carry blood all these years. Know that this part of you has always done the best it could.

Before moving on, find some way to feel even a small amount of gratitude for how this body part has contributed to your life. Jessica, the runner who has difficulty accepting her soft belly, might remind herself that it pro-

vided protection for her unborn babies. Steven, who has always felt less than positive about his penis, could contemplate the fact that it has provided him with a lot of pleasure over the years, as well as enabling him to father two beautiful children. Although Jason might not be able to find a way to appreciate his bald spot directly, he could focus on feeling grateful for the hair he does have.

**There's a way to  
appreciate every single  
aspect of ourselves.  
We just have  
to discover it.**



Don't rush through this exercise. Make sure you go over your entire body, spending more time with those areas that have endured the most rejection.

Megan, a communications manager for an online community, found this exercise so healing that she extended it.

For thirty days, she spent some time each day honoring a particular part of her body, focusing on a different part each day. This gave her the opportunity to pay attention to how she treated and thought about that part, and to find ways to honor it.

When you finally  
see yourself  
without a  
filter of self-judgment,  
you'll look  
completely different!



### *Really See Yourself—Without Self-Criticism*

If you have been viewing yourself through a smokescreen of self-judgment, you've been seeing a distorted picture of who you really are. So, after getting in touch with your gratitude for the individual parts of your body, take a step back to appreciate how they all come together and contribute to this unique human being—you. For this exercise, you'll need a full-length mirror and a few candles or a room that is equipped with lights that dim. You may want to do this exercise first with your clothes on, and then undressed.

Stand in front of the mirror. Begin with a single candle or with the lights dimmed so that you can just barely perceive your outline. Your goal is to see your entire image, without focusing on any one part and without making any self-critical assessments, even if only for a few moments at a time. It may help to imagine that you are viewing your

reflection from the perspective of an impartial observer, someone who has no judgment about you whatsoever. When you're able to look at yourself without judgment or criticism, gradually increase the lighting.

As you observe your reflection, feel yourself from the inside by focusing your attention on all the sensations you're experiencing. Follow each breath as it travels in and out of your body. Notice the feeling of the air on your skin. Try to detect your heartbeat and even the feeling of the blood circulating in your hands or feet. If negative thoughts arise as you observe yourself, set them aside and refocus your attention on the physical sensations you're feeling.

*Appreciation Is an Ongoing Process*

If you're still finding it difficult to stop criticizing a particular aspect of your body, take a little time to train yourself to redirect where your attention goes when you see your reflection. For example, if you can't seem to stop making negative comments about your teeth, learn to consciously redirect your attention to a feature you do like, such as your eyes.

It can also be helpful to try to take in the whole you—who you are beyond your physical appearance. As Deanna, a jewelry designer, says, "I like to think of myself as the 'whole' being—body/mind/soul all interconnected—and focus on my strengths, like intelligence and creativity. If I put positive energy and thoughts into the things I like, whether it's physical or mental, it's naturally more difficult to self-criticize."

**When you look  
in a mirror,  
take a moment  
to appreciate your  
favorite features.**



Accepting your body is an ongoing process—one that will continue for as long as you have it. And the kinds of exercises described above can be extremely powerful when done with a willing partner, as you'll see later on in this book.

### KNOW YOURSELF AS ONE POSSIBLE WAY OF BEING BEAUTIFUL

Our culture defines attractiveness so narrowly that it makes it impossible for the vast majority of people to ever measure up. Rather than taking society's word for what is beautiful, discover for yourself what's beautiful—and redefine what attractive means to you.

When Ryland was nineteen, he began to grow chest hair—dark chest hair. At first he plucked the hairs that were growing beyond what he felt were acceptable boundaries. He hoped the hair would soon stop spreading, but he found his chest just wouldn't cooperate.

By the time he was twenty-one, Ryland was tired of feeling uncomfortable whenever he took his shirt off. He was tired of the demeaning remarks he'd make about himself whenever he saw his chest in the mirror: "I hate how that looks!" So he began to look for a way to be able to see himself and his chest as attractive—and he discovered Nicolas Cage. He heard women talking about how this man with dark chest hair was sexy and attractive. Ryland decided to make Nicolas Cage his "new reference point" and to choose "to reside inside this collective agreement that men who look like this are beautiful." In other words, from now on he would see himself as

belonging to a group of men with a particular type of male beauty that thousands of women find attractive.

Ryland's idea of finding a new reference point can help many of us embrace our own unique form of beauty. If we feel we can't be beautiful because of particular characteristics, we can seek out new role models who we or others find attractive and who also have those traits.

For example, if you have difficulty seeing yourself as beautiful because you weigh more than you would like, you'll find plenty of heavier people who radiate confidence and beauty. Turn to these people as role models. You might also seek out the numerous websites that celebrate the beauty of all shapes and sizes, as well as inspirational television shows that help people make breakthroughs in accepting, embracing, and feeling confident in their bodies no matter what their age, shape, or size. The most important thing you can do toward making sustainable changes is to learn to love and honor your body exactly as it is right now.

**The more you  
love yourself,  
the more available  
you will be to  
love someone else.**



Another step you can take toward self-acceptance is to find a way to honor what you've been rejecting. Emma spent years trying to hide her hands, believing they were too large; today she has a collection of beautiful rings to wear in celebration of all that her hands do for her. Keisha had her belly button pierced and now wears a diamond in her navel to remind her to appreciate her stomach. Christine, a mother of two who's heavier than she'd like to be, indulges in sexy bras and underwear to honor herself as a beautiful woman. Rachel



named her new dog "Belly" as an ever-present reminder to love and accept her own belly.

Knowing yourself as beautiful is entirely a matter of perspective. It's not about being a particular age, weight, or body type, having certain features, or wearing the right clothes.

When you're feeling self-critical about your appearance, remind yourself: *Who I am right now is one possible way of being beautiful.* You may be surprised to discover that the more you know yourself as beautiful, the more beauty others will see in you as well.

**Go easy on yourself.  
Move in the direction  
of greater  
self-acceptance,  
while at the same time  
honoring where you  
are right now.**



## TUNE IN TO YOUR BODY

Imagine that a thirsty child comes to you asking for a drink and you refuse to give it to her. This may seem inconceivable, but it's not unlike how many of us—being too busy, too lazy, or simply inattentive—ignore similar requests from our own bodies every day. "Hey, aren't you listening? I'm really parched! And I've been hunched over here for hours. When do I get to stretch?" We'd be more relaxed and efficient if we learned to listen for and respond to the signs that tell us when our bodies could use food, water, exercise, or rest. We'd also be healthier, happier, and more available for creating fulfilling relationships.

Our bodies have an incredible ability to process information and are virtually self-regulating. They instinctively know whether

the choices we're making about when, what, and how much to eat are healthy and nourishing. But who among us hasn't denied their body's requests for food and water or ignored the cues that they've had enough to eat?

Many of us tend to eat impulsively, letting our eyes or taste buds make our nutritional choices for us. Or we eat sporadically, ignoring the signals that we're hungry until it's too late to make a well-considered choice. If you recognize yourself here, learn to regularly check in with your body and listen to what it's telling you.

**When your body says,  
"I don't want another  
bite of cake,"  
put down your fork!**



Paul, whose parents always made him eat everything on his plate, says he's learned to stop eating before he feels full. "I realized that the pressure I felt to finish a meal was imagined," he explains.

Orann, who cooks in a vegan restaurant, says he's become much more aware of how various foods affect his body. "I still eat just about anything. But now I notice that when I have a burger, thirty minutes later I feel sluggish. When I eat the food from my restaurant, I feel *awake*." By making more nutritious food choices, you nourish not only your body, but every aspect of who you are.

Our bodies also let us know whether they're getting enough exercise. Ignoring those signals leaves us feeling weak, fatigued, irritable, or even depressed. In part, that's because regular exercise rewards us with, among other things, endorphins. Released into our bodies during sustained physical activity, these "feel-good" hormones reduce anxiety and stress, decrease the experience of pain, lower blood

pressure, strengthen the immune system, improve the memory, and slow the aging process. When you read that list, isn't it obvious that our bodies were meant to be nourished with endorphins on a regular basis? If all these benefits weren't enough, regular exercise can slow down the loss of muscle and bone that occurs as we age. Staying flexible through yoga or stretching helps relieve pain, improve circulation, and maintain mobility. Anything that helps reconnect us with our bodies—massage, acupuncture, warm baths, hot tubs, saunas, or just going for a walk into whatever nature is available to us—will help us tune in to our physical state.

Our bodies' need for rest is another request we frequently ignore. Even if we do manage to get enough sleep, many of us go through our days in a state of perpetual hurry, rarely ceasing our physical or mental activity to relax and recharge, even for a few minutes. We would do well to take a lesson from cats, who naturally relax all the parts of their bodies they're not using at the moment. Whatever we're doing—working at the computer, having dinner with friends, or going for a run—we can make it a habit to relax those muscles in our bodies that aren't required for that activity. Make a quick scan of your body from time to time, consciously releasing the tension in any muscles that aren't in use. You might be surprised to find your shoulders dropping several inches!

Bringing your conscious awareness to your body is a practice that will raise your appreciation for your physical self

**Shift your focus  
from how you look  
on the outside  
to how you  
feel on the inside.**



and make you more responsive to its signals. If you're walking, for example, tune in to all of your sense perceptions: the movement of your body, the feeling of your clothing and the air on your skin, your breathing, the sounds and sights around you. Also pay attention to internal sensations, such as the weight being transferred from one foot to the other and all the muscles that are working together to keep you balanced.

Learning to feel yourself as a whole, from the inside, may be the most precious gift you can give your body. In addition to encouraging you to make conscious choices about eating and exercise, this practice will help you to know yourself as one possible way of being beautiful—all the time.



*The relationship you have with your own body directly affects the quality and depth of all your relationships, especially intimate ones.*

*As you learn to treat yourself with greater compassion and appreciation and to recognize your own beauty, you'll find it easier to connect with another human being on a profoundly intimate level.*

## Part 2

# Keeping Your Soulmate Experience Alive



Every bit as important  
as attracting your soulmate  
is continually creating an environment for  
your soulmate experience to blossom.  
Such an environment encourages  
ever-deepening intimacy  
and allows you both to discover  
joy, love, and satisfaction  
in all aspects of your lives together.

## Having a Guest in Your Life

*The ways in which you approach your significant other will greatly influence the kinds of experiences you have together. Learning to treat your partner as an honored guest in your life will go a long way toward creating the rich, fulfilling relationship you imagine for yourself. In addition to keeping your connection fresh and alive, treating your partner as a guest in your life will bring a feeling of harmony and happiness to your everyday experiences.*

**A**t the start of a relationship, everything is new and exciting. We can't wait to get together with this person and learn everything we can about them. So many possibilities seem to be opening up for us, and our life feels passionate and full. People can tell just by looking at us that something special is going on: "Let me guess—you're in love!"

If we're like most people, we are also on a high because our new relationship is giving us all the validation we think we could ever

want—but sooner or later, we’re going to come tumbling down from that relationship high. No one out there can ever give us enough validation or make us feel special enough. No matter how loving, caring, or devoted our new partner is, he or she will never be the solution for our insufficiency conversation.

Because this basis for relationship is inherently unstable, we then try to stabilize it with rules and agreements. These rules may be explicit, informal, or unspoken. We think that if we make the right agreements in the beginning, we’ll be able to capture the experience we’re having now and preserve it for the future.

In addition to any rules or guidelines that couples might establish, most people come to a relationship with distinct sets of assumptions. These assumptions are often unexamined and unexpressed. But *agreements and assumptions won't produce the kind of relationship we want*. Instead of preserving or prolonging the excitement and life in a vibrant relationship, agreements and assumptions soon fill it with expectations. These expectations can be so destructive to a relationship that an entire chapter of this book is devoted to them ([see Chapter 8](#)).

It’s no surprise that we approach our relationships in this fashion. The vast majority of us have grown up without the benefit of an intentional “relationship education.” Think about it. Where did you get *your* relationship training? From watching your parents and others interacting? From television, books, or movies? If you’re like most people, the relationship education you received was inadequate for preparing you to have extraordinary relationships. Relationship is one of the most important aspects of our lives, and

many of us are struggling to get by with the only model available to us—a model that falls far short of creating the relationships we know are possible.

## THE CONVENTIONAL MODEL FOR RELATIONSHIP

The majority of relationships we see around us are generally based on one model. Though all of the characteristics below might not apply to your relationships, chances are you've at least witnessed each of them at one time or another. The conventional model for relationship produces characteristics like these:

- We view our partner as someone to complete us or to make us feel whole.
- We shield our partner from new possibilities because we're afraid that if they know what they're missing out on, they won't want to be with us.
- We stop fully listening to our partner because we feel we've heard it all before.
- We assign blame to our partner when we feel they're not meeting our needs.
- We become embarrassed or angry when our partner does something that we feel reflects poorly on us.
- We use manipulation, guilt, anger, and withdrawal to try to ensure that our partner consistently meets our expectations.



- If our partner steps out of the routine that's been established, we see it as a threat to the relationship.
- Complaint becomes a normal part of our everyday conversations.
- We react with jealousy when our partner shows interest in other people.
- As time goes on, we begin to treat our partner more like a housemate and less like a lover.
- After a while, we become quicker to judge, criticize, and blame, and less likely to give our partner the benefit of the doubt.

All of these behaviors lead to our partner slowly closing off parts of themselves to us. Not knowing how to stop this process, we become resigned to the idea that this is just what eventually happens in a relationship.

You can see that the conventional model for relationship is based, for the most part, on fear. Afraid of losing what we have, we try to protect and contain our relationship to keep it from changing. In the process, we inadvertently squeeze the life out of it, and our relationship begins to feel more like a burden than a blessing.

Back when people had to struggle to survive and their primary focus was on acquiring adequate food and shelter, this model served an important function by helping to keep families together. Even today, a traditional relationship, particularly when the roles are well defined, can

**You can't  
simultaneously  
control someone  
and have a  
soulmate experience  
with them.**



work on certain levels. But for many of us, the conventional model is dull and unfulfilling. It also won't produce the enlightened, soulmate experiences that we're longing for and know are possible.

## THE SOULMATE MODEL FOR RELATIONSHIP

While the conventional model for relationship is based primarily on fear, the soulmate model is based on something entirely different: freedom. Though many people find this idea unnerving, when we give ourselves and our partner freedom, our relationship continues to feel alive and compelling. What does a relationship under the soulmate model look like?

- We commit to taking responsibility for ourselves, including our beliefs, our attitudes, our issues, and our decisions.
- We see our partner as someone to enhance us rather than as someone to complete us.
- We know that being in relationship together is an ongoing choice.
- We support our partner's growth and evolution, even when it's scary.
- We use our individual and shared experiences as opportunities to keep our connection alive.
- We strive to see our partner and ourselves as clearly as possible and to accept who and where we each are right now.

- We watch for and do our best to minimize expectations and judgments.
- We understand that it's natural for us both to be attracted to other people.
- We're grateful for every day that this incredible human being chooses to be in our life.

Imagine what it would feel like to be in a relationship like this. Instead of becoming stale or dragging us down, our relationship continues to be a source of inspiration, excitement, and true connection. Without the pressures and struggles of the conventional model, our relationship can take place in a more harmonious and joyful state.

### SHIFTING FROM A CONVENTIONAL RELATIONSHIP TO A SOULMATE RELATIONSHIP

Making the shift from a conventional relationship to a more enlightened way of relating involves changing how you approach your relationships. One sure way to start that shift is to begin to treat your partner as a guest in your life. We're not talking about the kind of guest who's an imposition: expecting you to entertain them, overstaying their welcome, and leaving a mess behind. That sort of guest requires considerable time and energy. We're talking about the kind of guest you love to be with—someone who enhances your life rather than weighs it down.

When you have a guest like this, you feel honored that they would appear in your life and hang out for a while. You offer them

a safe, loving space from which they can discover new things about themselves and the world. You allow them the freedom to come and go as they please. You know your time with them is limited, so you make the most of it. Rather than wasting it in complaint or other negativity, you look for every opportunity to experience and share all the joys of life with them.

The soulmate model encourages and sustains the aliveness that is present at the start of a relationship.



Treating your significant other as a guest in your life means all of the above. It means remembering that they are with you out of their own free will. It means knowing that they are capable of following their own path and making their own decisions. It means having gratitude for whatever time you get to spend together.

### *Breaking the Orbit*

Have you ever noticed that people in conventional relationships often start to orbit around each other? You can see this in couples who need to check with each other before making even the most inconsequential decisions, or in people who are uncomfortable or insecure doing anything without their partner by their side.

Tatiana learned about the detrimental effects of orbiting the summer she was twenty. "I left behind a relationship that had grown stale and spent two and a half months traveling on my own. It was hard to return to school that fall after a summer-long adventure, but the first day back I met a handsome, intelligent guy and we began dating.

It was about three weeks later, when I was walking to class, that I realized I was having thoughts like 'What's he doing right now? What about the girls in his classes? Is he attracted to them?' I was stunned. After ten weeks of being independent and free, I found myself feeling anxious and unsure!"

**We never improve  
our relationships  
by obsessing about  
our partner.**



Tatiana had discovered a simple but profound truth about relationships: *The moment we immerse ourselves in fearful thoughts about what our lover is thinking, or indulge in speculation about their motives or intentions, we disconnect from ourselves and instantly feel uncertain and insecure. We feel much more grounded and secure when we focus internally, on our own experience, than when we focus externally, caught up in our ideas about someone else's experience.*

When we have a guest, we allow them the freedom to make their own choices and to come and go as they please. In the beginning stages of a relationship, we do the same for our partner. We enter into a relationship as independent, sovereign human beings, but then—very soon, for some people—something starts to shift. Once we begin to develop a new identity for ourselves as one half of a couple, we may start to feel threatened by our partner's independence and try to rein them in. As we exchange more of our individual identity for this half-of-a-couple identity, we may feel incomplete and insecure when our partner is off being independent without us.

Typically, we use subtle methods of control at first: "I know you've taken ski trips by yourself for years, but if you decide to go next

weekend, I'll probably be depressed the whole time." Later on, we become more direct: "Going skiing by yourself is called being single—and you're not single any more!"

Michael Naumer would advise us to "break the orbit and stay related." The more freedom our partner has to continue discovering themselves, the more they will enjoy (and appreciate) being with us. If you hold onto someone too tightly, you have a prisoner. If you offer someone a loving space to develop and grow, you have a lover. Although this may feel scary, in truth it's an indicator that your relationship is fully alive.

Our partner's  
freedom  
is not something  
we grant—  
it's something  
we honor.



### *Your Partner Doesn't Owe You Anything*

The conventional model for relationship comes with certain requirements, especially once we decide to make our relationship exclusive. There's an unspoken agreement that because you're now in a relationship, your partner "owes" you things—such as respect, love, or understanding. Not only that, but they're supposed to know exactly how and when you want or need these things. Of course, respect, love, and understanding are some of the primary reasons we're in a relationship. But to be authentic and truly satisfying, these things must be given freely, not insisted upon or coerced.

We think that meeting our needs is our partner's *responsibility*. We often expect this one person to meet a wide assortment of needs: physical, psychological, financial, social, sexual, spiritual. But need

fulfillment isn't a healthy foundation for a relationship. In addition, as Michael Naumer pointed out, "If your partner meets all your needs and they leave, what do you lose? Everything you need!"

This may be hard for some people to swallow, but it's not our partner's job to meet our needs. In fact, *the healthiest way to be in a relationship is to take responsibility for your own needs.*

When we believe it's our significant other's obligation to attend our family reunions or company picnics by virtue of being our partner, we may find ourselves with a reluctant date rather than an enthusiastic one. As Sebastian said about his former marriage, "The more guilt she laid on me to do things with her, the more I resisted—and the less I enjoyed myself if I did end up going." Our partner will be much more likely to want to accompany us when they feel their presence isn't just the fulfillment of an expectation. To create an environment that encourages your partner's willing participation, you might practice using invitation rather than expectation ([see Chapter 8](#)).

The more  
we think we need  
from our  
relationship,  
the less joy  
it can bring us.



People who treat their significant other as a guest in their life respect their partner's free will. They endeavor to always give their partner the freedom to choose. They do their best never to use guilt or coercion to influence their partner's decisions. Their partner is free to join them on any particular adventure because they *choose* to, not because they feel they *should*.

When you begin to feel blame or resentment toward your partner, you might remind yourself, "My partner doesn't owe me anything."

You'll feel the grip of your resentment begin to relax. This will create space for you to approach your partner in a more receptive way. Don't be surprised if he or she suddenly seems different to you!

*Your Partner's Actions Don't Mean Anything  
About Your Value*

When we first start dating someone, it's natural to treat them as we would a guest. We're open to who they are and how they express themselves. Then, after we've been together awhile, we may slowly begin to discourage them from engaging in certain behaviors or activities. As a result, the person who was at ease interacting with other people becomes guarded and cautious about where they look and in whom they show interest. Before you know it, it's not nearly as enjoyable to spend an evening out together.

This deterioration is, in part, a product of the belief that what our partner does or doesn't do means something about our own value. For example, you may believe that if your partner chats with someone else while you're out to dinner together, or chooses to spend an evening with friends rather than with you, it means he or she cares more about someone else than about you.

Or suppose your partner forgets your birthday. You might interpret their forgetfulness as a sign they don't care, although the reality might be far different. Your partner may have been distracted by work, tired from lack of sleep, or just bad at remembering dates. Whatever the reason, the fact that he or she forgot doesn't mean anything about your value—as a partner *or* as a person.



We may also believe that our partner's actions (at least those we don't approve of) reflect poorly on us. Julia often feels embarrassed by her husband in public: "He tells dumb jokes and then laughs at them when no one else does. I can't stand it." Julia's underlying belief is that if she's married to someone who tells dumb jokes, it means *she's* dumb too.

One reason  
people avoid  
long-term relationships  
is they know they'll  
be expected  
to give up  
certain aspects  
of who they are.



Elaine and Jordan have been living together for two years. In the last few months, Elaine has become frustrated with the fact that Jordan doesn't seem to have as much interest in sex as she does. "He's always telling me how beautiful and sexy I am, but he rarely comes on to me. I pretty much have to start things up every time," Elaine says. "Once we get started, everything's fine—but I want *him* to get things going. I've even counted to see how long it'd be if I waited for him. You know how long? Three weeks!" Elaine finds herself feeling so angry and hurt that she can't even speak to Jordan about the topic.

When Elaine believes that Jordan's apparent lack of libido means something about her value, she shuts herself off from him. If she were able to stay open to Jordan and remember that whatever is going on for him, his actions (or non-actions) don't reflect on her worth as a person, the situation would be less difficult for her. She would also be in a much better place to think of new approaches to energize their sexual connection.

*Be Aware of What You're Expressing*

When we have visiting guests, we may be more aware of our attitudes and behaviors than we are with the people we see every day. We're less likely to be disagreeable or temperamental, or to create a lot of drama. With people we interact with every day, it's easier to fall into the habit of being indifferent or even negative on a regular basis.

Have you noticed that many people seem to live their lives in a state of low-grade complaint? They may greet their partner at the door with remarks like "I can't believe how bad the traffic was on the way home! And the office was freezing today. I'm exhausted and cold and now I have to make dinner, but there's nothing here I'm even in the mood for." Or they may continually talk about minor grievances in the hopes of getting others to agree with them so they'll feel justified in feeling the way they do. People often have entire conversations that are nothing more than a familiar exchange of gripes.

**Take a  
week's vacation  
from complaint  
and notice the  
difference  
it makes  
in your life.**



*It's important to become aware of just how much our attitudes can and do affect the people around us. Although we may think such offhand complaining is harmless, putting out negative energy will often cause others to either join you in negativity or withdraw from you altogether. By growing more conscious of how we choose to express ourselves, we will increase our ability to have a connected experience with anyone we happen to be with.*

*Stay Open to Who Your Partner Is Right Now*

There is a story of a brilliant scientist who developed a brain tumor that destroyed his ability to form short-term memories. After he became ill, his wife grew tired of having to answer the same questions from him over and over. Eventually she hired a companion to take care of him. The companion was taken by the man's interest in life and his stories of the world. Each time she visited, the man was delighted with her as well and would fall in love with her, as if for the first time. The woman did not mind his loss of memory. In fact, she appreciated it. Where else would she meet a brilliant man who would fall in love with her time and time again?

**In many  
relationships,  
the longer you  
know someone,  
the less  
you're able  
to really see them.**



One reason relationships are so exciting at the beginning is that there's so much unknown. But after spending a significant amount of time together, we think we know who our partner is: their likes and dislikes, their motivations, their desires, even what they're experiencing in a given situation. All the unknown, we believe, is now known—and there goes the excitement.

What's really happened is that we've formed a set of fixed ideas about our partner and are now relating to them *through those ideas*. Your partner is constantly evolving, as are you. But your pictures from the past can greatly distort who you see in the present. Many couples spend years relating almost exclusively like this and are no longer able to truly see each other.

The deep sense of familiarity shared by two people who love each other is one of the most wonderful aspects of a close, long-term relationship. We get into trouble, though, when we begin to think we know everything about our partner.

**It's not our partner's  
responsibility  
to show up  
differently.**

**It's our responsibility  
to see them  
differently.**



Watch for any ideas or assumptions you form about who your partner is or what they should or shouldn't do. You might make a list of all the ideas and assumptions you have about them, everything you can think of. You may be surprised by how long your list is! Now consider how this collection of assumptions locks you into a particular idea about who your partner is.

When you are receptive to who your partner is in this moment, as you would be with a guest, the possibility opens for you to see something new in them instead of continuing to see the "same old" person. As Dylan, a graphic designer, says about his girlfriend, "It's important for me to always try to see Sara as someone new. It's something I do for *me*, not for her. I want to be in a relationship where I'm excited about who I'm with!"

When we find ourselves becoming irritated with something our significant other does, we can shift away from the blame we're feeling by taking responsibility for our own experience. For example, Kim was expressing frustration that her love life with her husband had become stale. Why does he always kiss me the same way, she would wonder.

Rather than putting the blame on her partner, Kim could choose to take responsibility for her reaction. Dropping her judgment and

blame will create the space for her to experience his kiss differently, move the kiss in another direction, or even take the initiative to suggest that they have fun experimenting with different ways of kissing.

When you're listening to your loved one tell a story you've heard before, it may be that you simply relax and sink into that sweet, comfortable feeling of familiarity. But if you find yourself getting annoyed instead, take a moment to shift your focus. Remind yourself that neither of you is exactly the same person you were a week ago, much less a year ago, or ten. If you listen without preconceptions, you're bound to hear something new and maybe even gain some unexpected insight.

"Lyle always likes to tell the story of how we met," Rose says. "Each time I hear it, I try to listen as though it's the first time and I don't know him. I experience it a little differently every time."

Even if we've been used to taking someone for granted, which is easy to do if we're not paying attention, we really can learn to start seeing them in new ways. Ask Amy, whose marriage of over twenty years seemed to be crumbling around her—until she and her husband decided to try a new approach to their relationship. "Enjoying who each of us is *right now* saved our marriage," she says.

### *Put Your Trust in Something Trustworthy*

When people are asked to name the most important factors in creating a successful relationship, trust usually appears near the top of the list. What many of us think of as trust, though, really isn't trust at all.

Think about this. We may claim to trust our partner, but then when they do something we don't want them to do, we say they've "violated our trust" and we take our trust away from them. This kind of trust is really just control in disguise. By having this type of "trust" for our partner—I trust you to do this, I trust you not to do that—we introduce fragility into our relationship. If our partner steps over the lines we've drawn, even once, our relationship could collapse. *Real trust has no requirements.* It doesn't attempt to monitor, manipulate, or judge someone else's actions or behavior.

We can only trust  
people to do  
what they  
want to do,  
not what  
we want them  
to do.



So what *can* we trust our partner to do? For one thing, we can trust them to behave in a manner that's consistent with their own beliefs and desires. We can trust them to make choices and decisions based on what they want. We can trust that whatever they do, it will be the best they can do at the time.

This kind of trust may seem scary at first, because we feel like we're not in control. But rather than making a relationship *fragile*, trust like this makes it *flexible*—and flexibility is strength. Just like buildings and bridges need flexibility to be able to withstand periods of extreme stress, relationships need flexibility to weather the unexpected.

Yvonne, who has this kind of trust in her husband, says, "Even if I sometimes wish Joshua had done something differently, I always believe that he made the best choice he could at the time—for me, for him, and for us—whatever that looks like. This makes our

relationship feel much lighter and easier."

Yvonne recognizes that Joshua responds well to her "trust with no requirements." As he says, "I appreciate that Yvonne has such faith in me. It gives me a certain confidence knowing that she believes whatever I do will be the best thing."

In conjunction with trusting that everyone will act in alignment with their own beliefs and desires, here's something else you can put your trust in: *your own intuition*.

Intuition, which is knowing something without knowing exactly why you know it, is real. Our minds, which are more powerful than we can ever fully realize, take in and process millions of pieces of information and then communicate to us through what we call a gut feeling, a hunch, or our inner voice. Yet we often ignore or deny what that feeling or voice is trying to tell us.

*Your inner wisdom deserves your trust.* If you get an intuitive feeling that someone or something is unsafe or otherwise not right for you, learn to listen to and investigate that feeling.

Deanna, a successful artist in her mid-forties, has had several relationships with men who lied to her or hid things from her "in order to manipulate and control me, usually so I wouldn't break up with them." It took her years to realize, she says, "that I should always listen to my intuition and not stay too long in a relationship when I *know* intuitively that something is really wrong."

**The more we learn  
to trust our intuition,  
the better our decisions  
will be and  
the more confident  
we'll feel.**



### *Set the Kind of Boundaries That Work*

People are often advised to establish boundaries in their relationships, especially if they've been hurt before. As with trust, though, when we try to erect boundaries for someone else, we may be setting ourselves up for disappointment because we will never have control over what someone else does.

So what kind of boundaries *are* effective? The boundaries we set for *ourselves*. Boundaries like "I treat my body with love" and "I take care of myself" might mean we make sure to get enough exercise or make time for ourselves. They could also mean we won't allow ourselves to date someone who doesn't treat us well. For some people, establishing such boundaries might be the inspiration they need to begin taking steps to free themselves from an abusive situation.

Ann has these kinds of boundaries for herself. "In every relationship I'm in, I'm responsible for taking care of myself," she says. "This means I always act in a way that honors who I am and what's best for me."

## ELEVATE YOUR APPRECIATION

Gratitude is the feeling of thankfulness that comes from recognizing that you've received something of value, like the experience of beauty you get from watching a sunset. We naturally feel grateful when something special happens to us or when we recognize the wonderful things in our lives.

Making a conscious effort to feel genuine gratitude more often will have a profound effect on your life. Simply raising your *awareness* of



all that's good in your life will increase your *experience* of good in your life. Gratitude helps you enjoy what you have instead of always looking for what's next.

Studies confirm that the more we feel gratitude for our partner and the more often we express it, the better both of us will feel about the relationship. To bring the power of gratitude into your relationship, simply take a little more notice of who your partner is and all he or she does for you. Tune in to your appreciation for the simple pleasure of their company when you're together. When you wear a shirt they've washed or use an appliance they've repaired, focus for a moment on your gratitude for that small act. From time to time, spend a few minutes contemplating all the contributions they've made to your life. Also make it a practice to express your gratitude more often. *Expressing your gratitude increases your awareness of what's wonderful in your life.*

**Focusing on  
what you have,  
rather than on  
what you don't,  
instantly  
makes your life  
feel fuller.**



Here's an even more powerful way to create a truly happy relationship experience: Cultivate appreciation for all aspects of your relationship, *including the challenging things your partner brings you to work with*. It's often through these challenges that we grow the most.

Stephanie, a tax accountant, met Sean the day she turned thirty. "Five months after we fell in love," she says, "he confessed that he was forty thousand dollars in debt."

At first, Stephanie thought about ending the relationship. "In the past, I would have done just that. I had this belief that anyone I dated

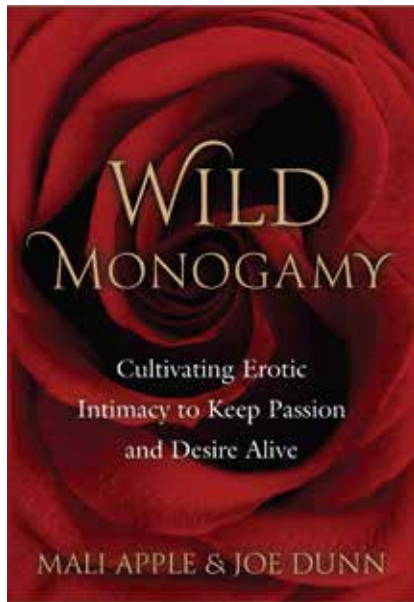
had to be financially responsible." But Stephanie really loved being with Sean. They connected in every way that was important to her, and they could talk about anything.

"I decided to see what I could get out of being in relationship with someone who didn't have it all together financially," she says. "I learned there was plenty. For one thing, we spent a lot of time just being together instead of always looking for something to 'do.' We made love more often than I had in other relationships. And by helping Sean find his way through his money troubles, I actually feel stronger and more financially confident than ever before."

Making a conscious choice to appreciate what at first appears to be a difficult, negative, or "bad" situation is a skill you can develop through practice—and life will give you plenty of opportunities to practice! Developing this skill will allow you to experience more happiness in your life each and every day.



*When you and your partner hold each other as guests in your lives,  
you give yourselves—and your relationship—essential space  
to breathe and to grow. Having that space makes it easier for you  
not only to weather the inevitable changes and challenges  
that arise, but to welcome them as opportunities  
to expand yourselves and your relationship.*



## **WILD MONOGAMY: CULTIVATING EROTIC INTIMACY TO KEEP PASSION AND DESIRE ALIVE**

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- Approach even the toughest challenges in ways that bring you closer together
- Keep the love and passion in your relationship fully alive, every single day

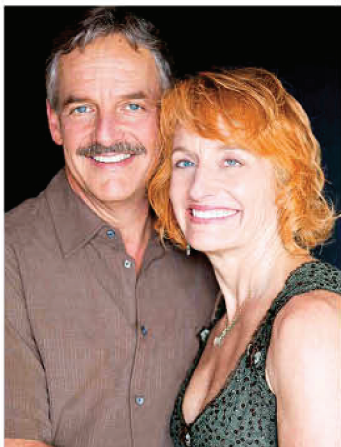
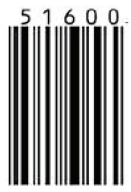


Photo by Dominic Colacchio

*Through their award-winning books and personal coaching, Mali Apple and Joe Dunn guide singles and couples to create intimate relationships that are compelling, connected, sexy, and fun.*

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