

## **INTEGRATIVE BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY:**

### **Sustaining Love and Sexuality in Long Term Intimate Relationships**

Jack Lee Rosenberg, Ph.D. and Beverly Kitaen Morse, Ph.D.

A somatic sense of self allows you to tolerate the intense and profound experiences of life. To experience heightened aliveness, intimacy and spirituality with any consistency, you must be able to meet life unadorned, *without a facade or pretense*. To do this, you must know yourself, beyond the confusing, masking themes of your interior world—psychological, emotional, and physiological.

#### **LIFE IS A SOMATIC EXPERIENCE**

For many people a sense of self is an elusive concept, based on how others see us, how we look, what we own, what we do, and how we act in the world. In an attempt to become more self-validating, we may define ourselves by our intellectual assumptions, ideas and beliefs, tending to favor perceptions received through the mind rather than felt in the body—a somatic experience. Again, this is elusive. In general, most people have been taught to ignore the deeper, more authentic experiences of self that can only be felt in the body, thereby missing out on a rich and amazing inner life.

This body, or somatic, awareness of self, is the most fundamental experience in life. At this level we are able to witness the messages of our inner voice and experience a deep internal feeling of stability, consistency, the wonder of being alive, and a nonverbal body experience of truth and authenticity. Somatic experience allows us to acquire a sense of self that can be sustained no matter what we are faced with in life. But when our sense of self is not grounded in our body, we do not know where to look for the missing experience. Without somatic awareness, to avoid the feeling of emptiness and instability, we are compelled to try to find a substitute for the experience of self through “doing” behaviors.

#### **Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBP)**

For psychotherapy to be effective, each intellectual insight must have an “inside” awakening, an interior somatic awareness. To embody life’s knowledge we must know how to listen to our somatic intelligence. Without essential somatic intelligence, emotional and behavioral patterns do not change appreciably. Psychotherapy becomes endless statements of disembodied intellectual explanations of the “whys” of life. The why’s of life will remain only intellectual until a sound foundation of somatic

identity, a core experience of self, has been established in the body; effective psychological mental health skills have been mastered; and contemplative tools for exploring the transpersonal have been acquired. On the inner journey there are two very separate yet, intertwined tasks to which one must attend. *The nature of one is psychological and emotional, the other is existential and spiritual.*

The distortions and habitual patterns we bring to intimate relationships from these psychological arenas cause most of the misunderstandings and unhappiness for couples. IBP offers a map to guide both the client and the therapist through this growth process. Our map offers a way through the psychological/somatic interruptions to well-being and core experience. Psychological interruptions include repetitious behavioral patterns of early life traumas (Primary Scenario), protective defenses (Character Style) and how we abandon our core selves for love and approval (Agency).

Without knowing the difference between psychological interruptions and core self, we cannot trust our inner voice. Our inner voice is essential in exploring an equally important aspect of life's journey, the human existential dilemma. We all must face life's unanswerable questions - - - aloneness, death, life, impermanence, aging, authenticity, creativity, integrity, and infinity to mention a few. In other words, many things happen to us in life. But it is how we deal internally with what happens to us that determines our well-being and quality of life. IBP teaches how to come from the wisdom of your core with heightened aliveness in every aspect of your life.

For each psychological repetitive pattern there is a corresponding energetic holding pattern in the body. IBP teaches how to release somatic holding patterns with non-invasive means such as awareness and self-release techniques. We have had many years of experience for learning what works to effectively open the body, while implementing psychological insight in ways that furnish an interior experience in the body.

We help the client discover how to open their own body for emotional insight, to soften, to heighten their charge of aliveness and move this energy through out the body. They develop the skills, patience, courage and trust for opening and learning from inside their being. Clients learn to find and trust their own somatic intelligence, what Ghandi called the still small voice within.

Touch is important. When you are only doing bodywork touch is profound and healing. But when you start working with psychological issues, it changes the nature of the transference and the counter transference. Too much manipulation by the therapist can be invasive to the client's boundaries. When both the body and mind are worked with, the client is very open and can be easily invaded by the

therapist's biases ... as they were by parents in childhood. This duplicates the primary injury held in the body.

A non-verbal energetic core sense of self is established in the body by using specific effective IBP self release techniques, breathing, movement, and awareness. These movements are designed to duplicate the orgasmic reflex pattern movements. The orgasmic pattern replicates a full body release and rhythm of movement, with a heighten the charge throughout the body. With energetic presence, at the height of the charge, the client can open to a peacefulness and a self-validation of their being. Like a cloud lifting, a clarity of knowing emerges with a direct experience of self, a new understanding of former problems and a larger view of life. We call this opening the "I am" experience of self.

This opening of consciousness is used as a place from which to work. From this place of a more profound assurance, the task is to identify the psychological interruptions to this personal sense of well being. While identifying and working with patterns of interruption takes some time, establishing this sense of well-being and clarity in the body is not difficult. Once felt, the possibility of another level of consciousness and understanding is realized. From this place, the psychological struggles of the arenas are quickly resolved by using the IBP Steps Out of Fragmentation and the existential aspects of life are more easily bridged (See *The Intimate Couple*).

### **Somatic Intelligence**

We can not have certain experiences unless our bodies are awakened and our attention is focused inside our being. We call these body experiences or *somatic intelligence*. Trust, love, eroticism, and an experience of self are all examples in which a feeling in our body is essential for validation. Typically, when people have a body experience they say, "I kind of knew that, but now it feels different, like I really know.

Unfortunately for many people, their body has gone to sleep, so to speak, and their own body experiences are absent. To compensate, they may often mistakenly look to others for what can only be found in an interior experience: for the validation of their own feelings of how to be and who they are, for their erotic spark, and their own capacity for love, trust and spirituality. As a result of this lack of interiority, they do not build a stable internal experience of self.

By constantly looking outside ourselves to know our internal states, we miss the opportunity to build self-trust and an inner knowing at our core, and we are left with the feeling that our sense of self is

fragile. Only with an awareness of our somatic core can we feel experiences of high intensity, act with true volition, and feel our life is our own.

For really consistent and satisfying sexual lovemaking you must be able to develop your ability to love and trust; to become comfortable with intense and authentic experiences; to build, contain, spread, and release larger and larger amounts of energy in your body; and to show up fully as a lover for a mutually pleasuring experience. When you come face to face with the intense and profound experiences of intimacy, sexuality, and spirituality, the most important and challenging aspect is the ability to sustain your sense of self. You must have a strong enough sense of yourself that you can be vulnerable and fully available and giving, and not lose your inner stability. This balance is inherently difficult and is part of the ongoing struggle of relationships.

### **Trusting**

An intimate relationship should be a sanctuary with trust as its foundation. Fortunately, we usually choose a mate because we feel, “This one I can trust.” Although there are people who are not trustworthy, if mistrust is a recurring theme in your life, it probably has something to do with you. It is often difficult to trust because of the hurts you received early in your life: Your body, if not your mind, retains a memory of these hurts and predisposes you for mistrust. When your body opens for love and sexuality it also opens to all the warnings you have accumulated over your lifetime. These warnings, or memories, color how you see and treat your partner.

All that we experience affects our psyches and our bodies. When you are anxious at home or at work, your body tightens; when you witness violence in the media, your body harbors a feeling of caution, a reminder to be careful. We carry reminders of our daily experiences in our bodies and bring the messages home with us: “Be careful,” “Don’t trust.”

In order to trust you must, on a regular basis, take time to assess whether the inner warning light you carry in your body has much to do with your partner. Your body experience of trust may be dim. Trust needs consciousness and nurturing to be sustained.

### **Speed Limits for Erotic Sexual Lovemaking**

Your present comfort level with sexuality and eroticism was set when you were a child, almost like a speed limit, which you were taught not to exceed. This limit was formed by the attitudes of your family and social environment long before you could decide for yourself. It is now mostly unconscious and is

thoroughly embodied and incorporated in your being. We all have unconscious speed limits that we maintain in our bodies for most domains of our lives. They surface as discomforts--uncomfortable sensations or emotions in your body--or as a memory, usually of a problem, particularly one with your partner. If you wish to extend your limits for love or erotic sexual lovemaking, it is important to identify the speed limits set for you long ago in childhood.

Think back to your family environment, more in terms of feelings and tone than actual words or behavior. What was the general attitude about sexuality? Did anyone embody erotic energy? Can you imagine your parents enjoying loving, erotic sexuality? Were you supported in sustaining your erotic curiosity and experimentation?

On a scale of one to ten, with one being the least, rate your family's speed limit. Although you probably have never thought about it before, venture a guess. Most people rate the level of erotic sexuality allowed in their family at about three. Some assign a minus number, and few guess above six or seven. Those who rate their families above seven usually find, under closer scrutiny, that what was said and what was actually allowed were different.

Before they were married, Muriel and Joseph made love at the drop of a zipper. But her ardor and enthusiasm began to wane when they moved in together. A year later they were married, adopted two dogs, and became a family. Her sexual passion came to a screeching halt, replaced by, "I've got a headache," or a thousand other substitutes for no. Joseph can't understand why the traffic signal is always red in their bedroom, but he doesn't seem to mind much any more. Sometimes Muriel is turned on and masturbates for relief and wonders, "I don't know why I don't want Joseph any more. It just feels too uncomfortable in my body."

As Joseph and Muriel settled into feeling like a family, they unconsciously responded to old rules learned in their families during childhood and remembered silently in their bodies. They have both unconsciously returned to the comfort of their old family speed limits.

If your internal limit for sexually erotic excitement is low, as you become a family you may hope that your partner will provide the missing erotic sexual spark, even while you hasten to extinguish it. The limitations and the spark are both within you, and, like most people, you have probably chosen a partner with a speed limit similar to your own. Therefore, blaming your mate or expecting your mate to resolve your dilemma will not work.

To raise your speed limit, you will need to become conscious of them. And remember, if your good feelings suddenly disappear, it probably means that your old limitations are being challenged, even surpassed. This is not a crisis; on the contrary, it is a sign of success.

### **Positive Intention, Good Will**

Being in an intimate relationship is like dancing in a small closet: You are bound to step on each other's toes once in a while. When this happens, if you carry a body experience of mistrust, you are liable to misjudge your partner. It is imperative to remember that although your body may feel mistrust, your partner may not be doing what you think he or she is doing. Positive intention means that when your toes are stepped on, you can sustain a belief that your partner didn't do it on purpose, until you ask them of their intention.

A relationship without trust is neither safe nor intimate. Sustaining heightened sexuality is not possible without the intimacy of trust. Therefore, trust is not to be taken for granted or to be thrown about carelessly in the heat of an argument. It has to be protected, nurtured, honored and, if injured, brought back to health.

Trusting means approaching a relationship with an intention is to solve problems and misunderstandings, not to hurt or blame. Trusting means remembering that your partner also intends well toward you and your relationship, and is worthy of trust. If at any time you believe your partner has a negative intention toward you, ask. If your feelings are hurt, it implies doubt. Ask your partner what his or her intention toward you is: "Was it your intention to make me feel foolish and abandoned?" If you are holding a thought of *negative intention*, then when you feel stepped on, you may try to get even or prove that your partner is bad, defective, stupid, or trying to control you. If you have a *positive intention*, you will assume that your partner was not out to hurt you on purpose. You must remember that no matter how bad things look in the moment, if you have worked out differences and emotional injuries before, you can once again sort out your own and your partner's intentions each time doubt arises. But you must remain focused on solving the problem rather than reacting to it.

If you believe that your partner is truly out to demean, punish, hurt, or use you in some way, this is not a loving relationship. Change it or get out. It is not a healthy place to be. *If you believe your partner does not have a negative intent toward you, don't treat your partner as if she or he does, even in humor.* It only creates emotional injury, mistrust, and distance. If you are trying to suppress your partner

in any way so that you will feel bigger or better, stop. It is abusive. It is far better to empower your partner and to empower yourself. The ability for you and your partner to work together within an intimate environment depends on each of you maintaining a positive intention toward the other, particularly when you are making love.

### **The Relationships Bond**

The bond of a relationship is an energetic experience felt in your body. You know if it is there or not. This bond is to be cherished, taken care of, protected and nurtured if it is to sustain. When the energetic bond is alive and well couples can work out almost any issues between them.

The energetic experience of the bond is what we call intimacy, a feeling of closeness. The following four arenas, when not dealt with consciously, can cause us to confuse the past with the present, to distort our view of reality, to harbor adversarial or compliant reactions. When the traits activated in these arenas are triggered they interrupt a person's well being, what we call fragmentation. The emotions, fears, hurt and anger arise from our body's storehouse. When acted out we are likely to fragment our partner. Then the bond of the relationship is the next to go. When there are difficult straining times, even moments, we must be able to remember to protect the bond by not attacking or blaming. We must remember that we love even when we can't feel love as an emotion. "I love you, I want to work this out with you," goes a long way to insure the bond. If a problem isn't resolving easily, take time out to write in your journal and find our your part of the problem. If on a scale of one to ten, you carry a level of seven in emotional intensity for that issue, then your partner only has to do a "four" to make you feel at the top of your tolerance. A four can be worked out.

### **THE FOUR ARENAS**

Three "arenas" contain recurring psychological themes that mask core self-experience ... Primary Scenario, Character Style, and Agency. What happens in these arenas—when they remain outside of your awareness—causes most of the problems experienced in life, especially in intimate relationships. The fourth is the Existential-Transpersonal arena. The themes for each arena form unconscious, repetitive ways of being, that become all too familiar patterns. When you explore these arenas you will be working with universal aspects of human nature. Each arena represents a fundamental part of our underlying nature. By working on such a broad scope you will find that you don't have to solve every

wrinkle in your past or in your relationship. Couples who understand and take charge of these arenas are better able to stabilize their sense of self and sustain heightened intimacy.

For a deeper, more direct experience of self, you must be able to identify your patterns within each arena as separate *from who you are*. The arenas are a disruptive part of your emotional life and a stimulus for interior and relationship upsets and ensuing behaviors. *But they are not who you are*. If you confuse these arena patterns with who you are instead of seeing them as an internal voice that merely echoes the past, they remain automatic and they imprison you. When you no longer identify these old patterns as self, your facade fades and your true self can shine through. This allows you to experience the radiance at your core, the fourth arena, which is the spiritual realm. With this, the existential-transpersonal experiences of life within and beyond the self are felt and known. It bestows a deeper, spiritual truth, a special internal knowing that you are not alone and there is so much more.

IBP bodywork helps to differentiate reactions that arise due to “ghosts” of past influences from those triggered by present experience. The body exercises create an openness and aliveness, and they also help to establish a focal point in the body for self and well-being that is internally sustainable. For your sense of self to be authentic and stable, you must be able to witness who you actually are as well as your protective cover. You must know yourself undivided, not only the parts you like to admit but also that which you avoid and conceal from yourself. You must learn to live with the paradoxes of being human. For example, you must feel in your body that you are separate from others, while at the same time feel that we are one, intrinsically related. For an experience of self, you must take charge of the unfolding of your life.

### **Primary Scenario Arena**

The history of your childhood is explored in this arena. This includes the relationship patterns and the sense of yourself and others that you formed as you were growing up. Your blueprint for later patterns of intimacy, personal well being and limits for erotic sexuality were designed and established during this time. To sustain a core sense of self, you must identify the relationship patterns learned in childhood.

The uniqueness of our being begins very early in life. A newborn will understand its parents’ caring attitudes, moods, desires, and needs, and these will be energetically imparted in important “parent messages,” not through words or tasks but through presence, emotions and touch. These messages from a good mother and father will be integrated into the somatic core of the child to grow up with

confidence, a sense of self-worth, and the ability to form close relationships. A parent who as a child received these messages (beginning with “I love you; I want you; you are special to me.”) easily, naturally, and automatically passes them on. A parent who didn’t receive them finds this more of a challenge.

Words and deeds support the good parent messages but, without the full energetic quality that comes from somatic openness, authenticity, and presence in the givers, the messages are empty. If parents can’t express love, if they are depressed or merely following “rules,” their words will be false promises and will not foster a positive sense of self in the child. If parents split off or cut off from their own bodies, and are not emotionally and energetically “ present,” the messages are not sufficiently passed. When children who missed these messages become adults, although they may love their partner, they may not be transmitting these messages energetically. And/or they may not feel loved no matter how kindly treated. This pattern can be changed with an understanding of the arenas and body repatterning exercises.

No one has ever received all the messages perfectly. What we have not received we must fulfill for ourselves as part of our own self-development. If we don’t, we will exist in an emotional void, hungering for these messages. Yet, the protective barriers we erect do not allow us to take them into our core selves when given by others.

We have translated these good parent messages into, “feeling tones,” which parents impart to their children by consistent gestures, smiles, body contact, warmth, attitude, and behavior, as well as words. To have your own body experience of these messages, write them into your journal. The ones that you are uncomfortable with in some way are probably the ones you didn’t get enough of as a child and are now trying to get from others. Each message will promote a different body feeling.

The first fifteen in our list we call Good Mother Messages simply because as they are the earliest messages that can be given by parents, they have traditionally been given by the mother. The Good Father Messages come later. Optimally, both parents should give all messages.

Each message elicits a distinct body experience that can be identified in a different part of your body. “I love you” feels different from “I want you,” or “You are special to me,” and so on. Allow yourself to experience the feelings. Learn to listen to your body, not just your mind.

### **Good Mother Messages (earliest childhood messages)**

1. I love
2. I want you
3. You are special to me.
4. I see you and hear you
5. It is not what you do but who you are that I love.
6. I love you, and give you permission to be different from me.
7. I'll take of you.
8. I'll be there for you; I will be there even when you die.
9. You don't have to be alone anymore.
10. You can trust me.
11. You can trust your inner voice.
12. Sometimes I will tell you "no," and that's because I love you.
13. You don't have to be afraid anymore.
14. My love will make you well
15. I welcome and cherish your love.

### **Good Father Messages ("out in the world messages")**

1. I can set limits, and I am willing to enforce them.
2. If you fall down I will pick you up.
3. I am proud of you.
4. I have confidence in you, I am sure you will succeed.
5. I give you permission to be the same as I, to be more or less.
6. You are beautiful ( or handsome)
7. I give you permission to love and enjoy your erotic sexuality with a partner of your choice and not lose me.

Imagine how different your life would be if you already had received these messages and were no longer compelled to seek them from outside of yourself.

There is only a brief period of time or "window" in childhood during which each of these messages can be provided by your parents or others. When that time passes, the window closes. Even if

your parent belatedly recognizes your need and strives to fill it, it is too late. Your basic needs can no longer be completely satisfied from outside yourself. You may find yourself fruitlessly trying to obtain these messages from your intimate partner or children.

If your attraction to another is based on the hope of fulfilling good parent messages, your sexual approach will be childlike. As one woman so poignantly lamented, “When I first started having sex with my husband I always felt turned on. Now when he approaches me I feel sucked on.”

Two things that people unsuccessfully try to satisfy from the outside are longings and sexually. Together they are sure-fire sexual turn-offs for both partners.

### **Secret Themes**

From your childhood, whole primary scenario motifs can emerge as “secret” themes that haunt you like ghosts from the past. They drift through your feelings, beliefs and assumptions about yourself and your world. Particularly when you are vulnerable—as you are in love, intimacy, and when your body is open for erotic sexuality—undermining themes can show up in the form of uncomfortable thoughts and body feelings such as panic, anxiety, fear, anger, humiliation, shame, a sense of inadequacy or danger, or just disinterest, doubt, sadness, or betrayal.

We each have certain personal themes that we use to understand our experiences. They are based upon prior experience that forms beliefs about ourselves, about others, or about life and are used to shape and create our assumptions and to explain feelings and experiences. Unconsciously, these themes can obscure reality and lead you to the same false conclusions over and over again. The dogged, incessant quality of these themes makes them feel so akin to what you think is true that you are not likely to question their validity.

Because the same conclusions are reached so often they seem like profound personal truths. *They are not.* The conclusions reached are based on badly skewed, matrix-forming lessons held in the body rather than on the truth. If a mother who didn’t trust men raised you, the matrix for mistrust was set up in your body before you were old enough to question it. As an adult, when you are in the presence of a man, you will most likely feel a warning sensation in your body reminding you to reserve trust. This will surely alter your experience of the man. Wherever you go, a feeling in your body will constantly remind you to distrust men. These body feelings shape each relationship encounter, job, or social situation.

When themes that are the result of childhood emotional injury are evoked, they only serve to cloud our experiences and cause further emotional injury. These "themes" that follow, when left

unconscious, are a consistent source of interference to your sexuality. The older we get, the louder they speak.

Some themes may have originated through your own experience, but others were inherited like unwanted heirlooms from long-forgotten relatives. Themes can even skip generations. Some are particularly destructive to intimacy and descend upon your bed to dampen your passion, rendering sexual-lovemaking impossible.

Some of the specific themes that can permeate our lives and undermine our relationships are: *Birth Secret Themes*, Unwanted Child, Wrong Gender, Defective Product; *Generational Secret Themes*, My Heart Belongs To Daddy (Mommy), Phantom Lover, Victim-Martyr, Someone's Out-Of-Control; *Sexual Secret Themes*: Incest, Rape, Molestation. Other abandonment themes can be incorporated through the experiences of adoption or otherwise being sent away, and emotional losses through war, family illness, depression or deaths. There are many themes left over from childhood that couples act out in their relationship. Perhaps the most destructive one is gender prejudice.

### ***Gender Prejudice Theme***

This is the most important theme for a couple to confront. If it is not resolved, working on other problems is futile. Gender prejudice is an inherited, recurring bias, discomfort, devaluation, fear of, or anger against one gender or the other. It is the most prevalent and insidious of all themes, having the power to destroy intimacy and sexuality. Although mostly unconscious, when present this infuses every interaction with resentment and mistrust. Prejudice does not allow you to feel the body experience of trust. Therefore, it can provide you with a reason never to feel loving or sexual.

Prejudice is hard to acknowledge when it is clearly opposite to your conscious beliefs. If you are attracted to men but think them insensitive and not worthy of your trust, or if you like women but think them controlling or not too bright, then you are clearly prejudiced. But, you may not have these conscious thoughts and still hold a feeling in your body that causes you to disqualify a person on the basis of their gender. Friends don't count, since you choose them as exceptions to the rule.

This pre judgment, devalues people by seeing them as "too much" (controlling, manipulative, abusive, narcissistic) or "too little" (stupid, wimpy, shallow, unstable, incompetent, insensitive). You can "just not trust" them or you can use their character-style traits to justify your prejudice.

Prejudice against your own gender profoundly disturbs your sexuality by causing you to dislike, become distant from, or deaden your own body, making it impossible for you to feel a sense of gender-specific erotic sexuality. Hidden prejudice against your own gender can undermine your sense of self and impair your ability to express yourself fully as a man or a woman. It also undermines the ability to build a sense of satisfaction in your body.

Gender prejudice affects your body and your sexuality. If your prejudice is against men, you are likely to react negatively to any display of a man's erotic or masculine energy; if you're prejudice is against women, displays of feminine energy or erotic excitement will affect you negatively. This is especially true when you are prejudiced against your own gender.

A pre judgment toward yourself can make you less able to experience feelings in your genitals; that is, you may tingle, vibrate, or have heightened awareness everywhere in your body except your genitals. The holding pattern may actually be in your entire pelvis, but the genitals will be the most affected.

When men who have this prejudice build a high charge with breathing and movement work, they can't feel much, if anything, in their penis or testicles. The tip of their penis is the last place they will feel the charge. Women, prejudiced against their own gender, may not feel their breasts, clitoris, labia, or vagina. After working through their prejudice, they will usually begin to feel their clitoris first, then their vagina, and then their uterus and ovaries vibrating when they have a charge.

With a self-prejudice, you may treat yourself as an object if you masturbate. You may be very hurried and distant when touching yourself and so limit your own aliveness, sexuality, and satisfaction. You may be a wonderful lover because your greatest satisfaction comes from satisfying your partner. But in the process, you may miss a whole part of yourself, the expression of your sexual identity, which can be such a significant source of pride, excitement and satisfaction.

Your parents can be prejudiced against your gender, although you were exactly the gender they wanted, if they also assumed that under their influence you would become "better" than others. "You'll never grow up to be one of that kind of man (woman). We're going to raise you differently." This form of prejudice is learned from the child's earliest caretakers, from their subtle, nonverbal attitudes as well as their not-too-subtle overt actions. Once you absorb it, you go through life finding evidence to reinforce it.

Gender prejudice was usually inherited through the mother, because she was usually more involved with the children at the very young age when this prejudice was instilled. Fortunately, this seems to be changing as men become a more integral part of the family. But the father certainly can compound gender prejudice, particularly since couples who marry generally have the same prejudices.

Although there are exceptions as to how this theme is passed on, it usually works in the following ways. If the mother has a prejudice against women, the father—if he is not discounted and has no prejudice against women—can counter it. He can tell the children, for example, “Those are your mother’s beliefs about women, but I know women are just as bright and capable as men.” If the mother has a strong prejudice against men, the father is powerless to dispel it because the family prejudice against men invalidates his opinion. Nor, for the same reason, can he dispel any prejudice the mother may have against women. But she can counter his prejudice against men if she is not herself disqualified by prejudice.

If a parent is trustworthy, successful, kind, gentle, and supportive, seen through prejudice he or she is apt to be discounted as weak. When generalized it sounds like “I don’t trust men (or women).” If the father is bad, he just proves the point. If there is no gender prejudice in the family but ample reason to regard the father or mother as “bad,” this feeling will remain specific to the parent and won’t be generalized. Every once in a while, a person is idealized and seen as an exception to the rule, “My father was wonderful, unlike most men.”

These days we have considerable freedom and autonomy and fewer gender-specific roles in our lives, so one doesn’t have to be a victim of gender prejudice. Rather than feel enraged and controlled if you suspect that your partner holds a prejudice against your gender, check to see if you, yourself, have a parallel prejudice. Are you trying to be an exception to the rule for your gender? This implies prejudice. *Trying not to be like your same sex parent is a prejudice. In addition, trying not to be like someone else does not allow the unfolding of one’s own potential.*

Understanding the Primary Scenario arena is relatively simple. It is just a matter of repeating family themes and having to carry the pain of childhood emotional injuries around in your body, sometimes mistaking these feelings as statements about you, others or your current life.

The next two arenas, character style and agency, are more complex as they are the ways we protect ourselves from real or imagined injury to our somatic core self. These arenas are so much a part

of our way of being that we rarely recognize how consistently they now cause injury to the core self they were meant to protect. Forged in childhood, the protective and defensive patterns you developed in relationship to your parents are now yours, and only serve to carry childhood themes and injuries into your self and adult relationships.

### **Character Style Arena**

In the formative years, our core sense of self is tentative, fragile, and vulnerable to our need for closeness and to the sometimes overwhelming feelings when it is not available. We are vulnerable to our parents and their ideas and assumptions about who we are and how we should be. To please, we may adapt to our parents needs and silently compensate by developing a protective character style cover to preserve our essential nature. But, unfortunately, after a while our core self becomes so concealed by its cover that its existence is hardly recognizable.

When as an adult you turn inward for your experience of self-identity for guidance, you are liable to mistake your character style, for the true self-identity it was formed to protect.

Each person acts out his or her style in the form of personal characteristics. In your relationship, you may have caught glimpses of these traits and called them idiosyncrasies or personality quirks. They are most often seen as isolated incidents, flaws or irritations in you and people you are otherwise fond of. Yet, most of us don't see these ways of being as whole, consistent, definable styles for protecting one's self in intimacy.

Your style keeps you acutely alert, searching for possible dangers that are similar to those you encountered in childhood. If your spouse says, "Let's make love," and you always had to be constantly on guard to not be controlled, you may hear this as parallel and therefore a command. If so, you may feel, "Don't tell me what to do," and communicate "no," not necessarily with words, but by your body expression and attitude. Character style responses are more of an echo of the past than a realistic assessment of the present and can cause you to feel childlike and as if old injuries were happening now.

The traits of character style dwell in what C. G. Jung so astutely called the "shadow" aspects of our being. They are parts of ourselves that we wish to deny. The more you try to hide traits, the more obvious they are to others. If you try to hide what others see so clearly, you seem like a phony, and engender mistrust.

### ***The Balancing Act***

A parent and child together need to accomplish three tasks for a child to grow up emotionally healthy and stable: 1) form a bond, 2) develop an empathic attunement, and 3) maintain enough breathing room for the child to develop a secure sense of self. In a successful loving relationship there must be a continual balancing of these same three tasks. In childhood, these tasks furnish a secure sense of self felt in the body. When not fulfilled, the emotional injury forms an *anxiety that remains in the body*. Protecting one's self against this anxiety forms character styles.

### ***The Bond: Abandonment Anxiety***

The first task, forming a strong bond with a primary caretaker, allows a child to feel secure, cared for, and loved in a consistent way. Without this trusting, nurturing bond, infants can die. If a child is separated for too long from the primary parent or a parent is emotionally depressed or distant, the natural longing for a physical and emotional union becomes exaggerated. *Any injury in this stage of development leaves the child constantly trying to secure that bond in intimate relationships throughout their adult life.*

Even when two people clearly have a loving alliance, a fear of abandonment generated in childhood can ignite the old terror of loss in the present situation. When this childhood insecurity is acted out as character style, as if it were a present reality, the bond of the relationship is liable to be pestered to the breaking point. This is guaranteed to stress a relationship and cause real abandonment to occur.

### ***Breathing Room: Inundation Anxiety***

All children need freedom and autonomy to test out their core self, to have their own thoughts, to make their own decisions and their own mistakes. Without breathing room, the child can't individuate, can't develop a healthy sense of a separate self, a sense of personal volition, confidence, curiosity, achievement, satisfaction, or safety in the outer world.

A child with controlling, inundating parents is likely, as an adult, to have feelings of inundation, claustrophobia, suffocation, or panic in an intimate relationship. Adults with this history may continually break the bonds of trust and hope in order to fend off the threat of control and gain the feeling of room to breathe. They often do this by insinuating a love or sexual interest in another person or by actually having affairs. This will usually create more distance than they bargained for, even if the affairs remain

unacknowledged by both parties. Any desire on the part of another to be close, helpful, loving, or sexual may be interpreted as controlling behavior and seen as a threat.

### ***Attunement: Combined Abandonment and Inundation Anxieties***

Attunement is necessary for mutuality. It is the most spiritually uplifting aspect of intimacy, a feeling you can't quite grasp, but you know when you have it and when you don't. Attunement is impossible to attain when abandonment and inundation anxieties are acted out. There are three basic aspects of attunement:

- 1) To be seen and heard: We all want to understand and be understood by the one we love. You must be able to see your partner's essence beyond what they speak and act out through their character style and beyond what you "need" them to be. You must also allow yourself to be seen unadorned by a character style facade.
- 2) Mutuality or shared experience: Mutuality is the body experience of looking across a room and feeling that you both understand the meaning of what has happened without speaking. Shared experience is engaging in things together, having most of the same, hopes, visions, desires, and commitments, but it does not promote mutuality, the spirit of attunement, getting to know your partner on a deeper level, heightened intimacy, and functioning as a team.
- 3) Communion versus communication: Communication means "to exchange or transmit information with the attempt to alter another's belief or action system." Communion means, "to share another's experience with no attempt to alter or change what that person is doing or believing." (*Stern, Interpersonal World of the Infant, 1985*) Communion, not communication, is the lack most couples feel. This sorrow causes people to feel alone no matter what is communicated. With communication, people usually are trying to get their point across, or win, and they don't listen. They also talk on a superficial level of a problem rather than about the dynamics beneath. They speak about their anger and "needs" as if the problem were solely the other person's responsibility.

When abandonment character style is acted out, there is a clinging to the bond. When an inundation character style is acted out, the bond is tenuous. When there is a struggle between these two anxieties, attunement—the experience of mutuality, reciprocity, and shared experience—is impossible.

An adult who did not experience this attunement as a child may be most comfortable and familiar with more superficial aspects of relationship. Without attunement, they and those with whom

they are the closest will find themselves yearning for some missed essence of the human spirit. We all want to be known and understood in a deeper way, to share meaning, to feel the attunement of intimacy. Those who did not receive attunement in childhood have difficulty tuning in to others. They may not know when their partner is upset or how to emotionally comfort or soothe. They don't know how to create a feeling of mutuality.

### ***Character Style Profiles***

If you have a high level of abandonment anxiety, moving closer to someone you care about will temporarily relieve any fears and discomfort felt in your body. If you have a high level of inundation anxiety, creating distance will temporarily relieve the distress. But if you have a high level of both anxieties, you are liable to feel immobilized, unable to move either way without triggering one anxiety or the other. Whether you feel either anxieties or you alternate between them, together they create more anxious feelings in the body than most people can tolerate and still remain present.

Character Styles are not pathological, but are ordinary human behaviors. Only your body knows which traits and examples are important and true for you. Remember, as you read, the styles vary both in terms of *rang*, whether you veer more toward fears of abandonment or toward inundation, and level of *intensity*, the degree your style is felt and acted out. Your range is fairly permanent, but the intensity, the variable that creates the barrier, can change. They are meant to help you discover parts of yourself that are so automatic you don't notice them. When you read about a hidden part of yourself that is difficult to accept you may feel excited, anxious, angry, hungry, sleepy, bored, or spacey.

To deal with our abandonment anxiety character style we develop a cluster of traits that are acted out in a multitude of ways. Abandonment anxiety traits feel like: Acquiescence - I will do anything, just don't leave me; Eternal longings - no matter what, it's never enough; Few boundaries - there's no such thing as too close; Clinging - constellate around someone or something; Hyper-vulnerable - I'm very aware of emotions and sensations in my body.

For inundation anxiety character style the cluster of traits are: Separate and removed: I am what I am; Cut off from feelings and emotions; Defined, rigid boundaries and assumptions; Literal, concrete right or wrong, black and white assumptions; Physically cut off and emotionally armored.

The abandonment and inundation character styles are relatively straightforward. *In The Intimate Couple* we lay out the many ways that people act these traits out. The following are an introduction to the six traits of the abandonment/inundation anxiety character style. See if these six traits fit for you.

They are more of a body experience than intellectual. In other words, you may feel an automatic no in your body and behaviorally go ahead and comply.

***Abandonment-Inundation anxiety character style traits:***

**Trait 1. Automatic No: Nobody Can Tell Me What to Do**

You don't like to be told what to do or who you are. You will:

- be relatively closed to outside information, opinions, and instructions, and have difficulty letting others in emotionally;
- have to do it your way; often present a *fait accompli* or unilateral decision;
- make your own rules. “I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it;”
- have difficulty with any kind of closure: making or following through on commitments, receiving or giving gifts, being on time, or expressing appreciation
- be very sensitive to being told who you are or what you are feeling; may interpret any comment as critical or controlling;
- reword and change your statements when others try to repeat what you have said. For example: “I hate my father.” “You hate your father?” “Well, I wouldn't say hate. He just wasn't there.” “He wasn't there?” “No, I hate my father;”
- always have a good reason for not taking information in: “If only you had said it in a different way, in a different tone of voice, at a different time;”
- have a difficult time working for someone else, therefore tend to be your own boss;
- sometimes feel compelled to enter the exit door, drive in the opposite direction of the arrows in a parking lot, see stop signs as only suggestions. You may collect traffic tickets and fight authority in secret little ways;
- not be able to tell yourself what to do; finish paperwork, theses, or assignments; pick up the clothes at the cleaners or stay on a diet or exercise program;
- have had difficulty learning to read, spell, or do math in school as a child;
- tend to take an adversarial position and find excitement in sparring.

**Trait 2. Have an Idea of How Things Should be and Cling to It**

You are attached to your picture of how things are. You will:

- do whatever it takes to prove your idea (or bring it about). You have to be right;

- try to calculate life, thinking more than responding from your somatic core emotions or sensations;
- have difficulty living in the moment, constantly turning to the past and planning the future;
- rarely learn from new experiences as you only focus on whether an experience matches your picture or not. So you keep making the same mistakes over and over;
- live life according to “when, then,” that is, “when (something) is complete, then I'll (something).”

### **Trait 3. Treat Myself and Others as Objects**

Because you do not accept your human frailties, you will:

- push yourself beyond your healthy limits and expect the same of others;
- be unconscious of your effect on others, miss or misjudge human emotions and wonder why people get upset;
- see your problems as emanating from others;
- overestimate your emotional or physical capacity.

### **Trait 4. Authenticity Gap: Tend To Lie Up or Lie Down**

You exaggerate and consistently miss the mark for authenticity. Because you don't tell the truth, particularly to yourself, you will:

- lie *up* about yourself, presenting a better picture than is true;
- lie *down*, modestly making yourself less and not getting pleasure or satisfaction from life or your successes (lying down is as much a lie as lying up);
- feel like a phony because you present yourself to the world outside differently from how you feel on the inside;
- feel alienated from your partner, or, more likely, your partner will feel alienated from you (no matter where or what the lie is);
- perpetuate your inauthenticity by trying to get people to accept your false front so they will think well of you;
- though you may be perfectly innocent, engender mistrust in others.

### **Trait 5. Intimate Relationships: Not Too Close, Not Too Far Away**

Partners may take opposite sides of the struggle between closeness and separation. You may do both alternately or simultaneously. You will:

- find that closeness triggers fears of inundation, distance triggers fears of abandonment;
- perceive separation as abandonment, or friendliness as inundation;
- when you feel close, say or do something hurtful that creates distance;
- miss the feelings of mutuality and of being understood, and miss the human essence of your partner and the relationship;
- fail to recognize or accept the constant dance you impose on any intimate relationship you are in.

### **Trait 6. Feel Split Off from Self, Body, Emotions, and Aliveness.**

Because you are overwhelmed by feelings, you disassociate from your body and will:

- not be present and not have a full range of your mental, sensory, and emotional capacities available;
- deaden your aliveness and heighten your sense of being alone with self-abandonment;
- have blank spots in your memory because you were split off and not really there;
- seek excitement, validation, and support for who you are from outside sources;
- with little interiority, not identify illness early, or recognize when you become hungry or tired;
- have a shield that keeps you from really making contact with others and others with you. “It’s as if I have a glass bubble around me;”
- make quick responses from intellectual rather than emotional or body feelings;
- avoid emotions and feelings of excitement or well-being; have a limited ability to contain feelings and energy. You will probably either discharge or split off, especially during sex;
- become intellectual or change the subject when you or others show emotions or have body sensations;
- heighten split-off sensations by using drugs, alcohol, or other substances. Favorite drug of choice is marijuana.

Notice how the issues of abandonment, inundation, and the combination of the two influence you throughout the day. Awareness does not come with a flash of enlightenment. It is composed of little knowings felt in the body. Eventually you will see that your body is speaking to you and you will learn how to listen.

People who struggle with both abandonment and inundation anxieties—the As If character style—can usually remember a time in childhood when they first realized that being who they were was not gaining them the love, respect, and nurturing that they needed. To hide their presumed flaws they

acted *as if* they were their adopted pseudo-personality. Some simply rebelled; others went along with their parents' picture of how they ought to be, borrowed a fantasy character from the screen, a storybook, television, or any image that they thought would enhance their desirability.

After a while they could no longer tell the difference between acting and just being themselves. Now, no matter how well they do, their *As If* facade keeps them distant from themselves and everyone else, and they don't feel real. When they are loved, they don't truly believe it because, after all, it is only their facade that is loved.

Those who are unwilling to embody who they are beneath their character style are stuck, unable to unite with their core body voice which would provide them support, wisdom, and access to spirituality. They are just as stuck if they cannot accept their human fallibility which can lead to compassion with others and companionship on their life journey.

So, they are left struggling with neither God nor humanity—alone. Joining with their authentic body-voice is their only salvation and means to discover a deeper, true knowing.

To find meaning in life or even just relief from their interior struggle, the *As If* adult often embarks on a quest, usually a spiritual, a business, love, or occupational quest or a wondering journey. Their search is an external journey looking for the meaning of life. But, in truth, they are looking for the experience of being alive, and the only place they can find this truth is in their body.

If you never dare let anyone see who you are behind your facade, you may vehemently defend your right to do everything your way—even when it doesn't work—for fear that others will discover that you don't know who you are. Thus, you may find yourself defending who you aren't and never were, against who you are and want so much to be. Without an inner somatic sense of self for support, a person is left forever trying to figure out how to be. A false self always feels precarious. Like a balloon, it might burst or deflate if anyone comes too close with a sharp word or offers an authentic touch that breaches the protective coating and reveals the real self. Without a body commitment to authenticity there is little hope for sustaining a heightened body experience of self, aliveness and sexuality.

As one brilliant attorney said, “I feel as if I live in a double-walled glass bubble. I rarely allow information to come through the second wall, so I never have to respond with my emotions or being. The problem is I rarely touch others or feel touched. Most of the time I feel isolated and alone.”

With recognition, acceptance, a reawakening of authenticity in your body, and by learning skills for lowering your character style, you will have less need to act out your defensive barrier. When you can muster a little humor toward your and your partner's character styles, attunement will grow.

## Agency Arena

It is the lack of sexual desire and boredom, not the loss of love, that is the most common complaint in long-term monogamous relationships. When we hear such a cry for help, we suspect that at least one of the partners has taken responsibility as an agent for the well-being of the other. An “agent” is a helper who feels an obligation to fulfill the needs of other people, to fix, help, please, or otherwise stabilize them. They do this so intently that a sense of *who they are* and *what they want for themselves* at a core level, dims or becomes inaccessible.

Agency is developed in childhood, often in infancy. Infants are born with the capacity for self-agency, the ability to feel, know, and later, act in their own behalf. But, if a child comes to believe its survival depends on its ability to attend to the parent, to be or do what the parent wants, to please and calm the parent, self-agency psychologically takes a back seat.

Daniel N. Stern, in his 1985 groundbreaking book *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, described self-agency as one “of the experiences available to the infant, and needed to form an organized sense of core self.” He defined self-agency as “the sense of authorship of one’s own actions and the non-authorship of the actions of others: having volition, having control over self-generated action.”

The agent’s hyper-vigilance toward others severely limits the body experience of self-volition, and the trust, satisfaction, and heightened energy felt when acting in one’s own behalf. Taking on responsibility for the life, actions, and well-being of others establishes a lifetime pattern of core self-abandonment. Because of this, even while surrounded by those that love them and appreciate their goodness, they often feel empty and alone. These children fear that if they can’t fix their parent they will not be cared for and will die. In hope of finding their inner feeling of self, stability, and worth, they mistakenly try to fix others to attain self-validation, rather than turning inward to their own core body voice.

As an agent, a young child takes on an impossible task trying to make a parent feel fulfilled, happy, stable, and content. This is not something any person can provide for another, much less a child for a parent. Therefore, the child is doomed to have nothing more than temporary victories. Even the small victories are a lie that just perpetuates the agency stance. The parent’s momentary “fixes” can

cause the child to feel omnipotent, but because it never lasts for long, the child ultimately feels bad about himself or herself. They feel that they have done something wrong, failed at this job that is so vital to their survival and well-being. As an adult, they are haunted by an irrational, nagging feeling that they are bad and have done something wrong. To compensate for this gnawing emotional feeling in their body, they spend their whole lives trying to be the best they can.

Agency is driven by inner desperation; yet, from outside appearances, an agent can look the epitome of strength, competence, and wisdom...until they collapse... often with a physical illness. Their body screams, "Pay attention to your inner voice. If you don't I will speak louder in the only voice I know, the voice of pain and illness." Over time, the more consistent the agency, the more somatic distress is accumulated.

The problem for the agent is not the helping behaviors. It is the loss of access to self-generated experience in the body. As a child, the agent learned to relinquish any true self-awareness and expression to attune to the needs of others. In childhood, the family rules prevented acting directly in his or her own behalf. Now, even when they no longer wish to live as an agent does for others, they have a difficult time making any significant change because of the fears associated with breaking this rule. Each time they are successful in doing something for themselves, the core self-experience produced causes anxiety in their body that something horrible will happen. In this case, the anxiety is a healthy sign of success, a sign that they have broken the dysfunctional rule and are doing something that is self-affirming.

Sexual desire, which is highly dependent on feeling good about one's self and knowing that you can trust yourself to act in your own behalf, is lost when after time a lover chooses to act as an agent for their partner's satisfaction and well-being while their own core self remains neglected.

Agency is often mistaken for love. Yet, it is more a way of trying to earn love than real loving and caring. Trying to earn love implies that you are not inherently lovable. A loving relationship imparts a genuine reciprocity and respect for each other's capacities, the ability to restabilize when thrown emotionally off balance, to problem-solve, to be empathetic and humane. *Agency, on the other hand, implies that one's partner is inadequate, inept, or immature.* Because agency is more like overextended parenting than a mature love shared between adults is not sexually provocative, both partners' excitement dwindles and vanishes. Taking on another's problems and issues as one's own eventually causes the recipient of the agent's "generosity" to feel incompetent and unworthy, the opposite of the

agent's intention. This way of over-giving undermines the most loving of relationships. It deadens sexuality and the body, creates bewildering anger, and surprisingly, puts distance between people.

Because agency creates a “one up, one down” relationship, it is not equal and reciprocal. With the best of intentions some couples, in an attempt to be fair, form “agencies” rather than relationships. They end up “niceing” their relationship to death and wondering what happened to their excitement and erotic passion. Agency does not allow people to be authentic, for partners to accurately reflect one another. Nor does it create an environment for mutuality in which each person has the support, respect, and breathing room for solving his or her own problems.

If agency is treated as a behavioral problem—doing things for others—it neglects to address the real problem, which lies in the body, the denial of core self-experience in the body. It can also heighten somatic symptoms and destroy relationships. No matter how much a person focuses on doing or *not doing* for others, the core self remains inaccessible, hidden out of awareness in the body. Stopping the behavior without reestablishing a somatic experience of self-guidance does not produce the needed feeling of inner stability or well-being.

Most people with a propensity for agency believe that if their mates would change or just “stay fixed” the pressure would be gone and they could take better care of themselves. But unfortunately, this is not true. The habit, motivating beliefs, desperation, and somatic loss of self are all felt and maintained in the body and psyche of the agent. Agency began in the primary relationship in childhood and is acted out in the relationships of today, but it is not a relationship issue, nor can it be resolved by working on the relationship. Because an agent is always acting in response to someone else, agency looks like a relationship issue. *It is not. Agency is an internal, self-perpetuated process.*

Agency is the psychic glue that can keep old scenario patterns and character style firmly entrenched forever, no matter how much you are working on yourself. It keeps you looking into the eyes of others to see who you are. The agent, generous to a fault, gives so much away that he or she feels, to some extent, like a nonentity valued only for his or her successful acts of agency. When a problem arises, an agent does the only thing an agent knows how to do, give more and try harder.

### **Nothing Like a Good Old “Fixer Upper”**

Some people choose a mate who is like an old car or house—great potential, but needs a lot of work. To feel loved and wanted, the agent needs someone to fix or help. An agent doesn't know another way to be

in a relationship or to be loved. If a partner gets “fixed,” the agent feels at a loss and fears abandonment. If one partner won’t stay “defective,” another will be found. Agents need their disabled to remain disabled.

Agency is a system made up of an agent and an agency target. A good target consistently comes up with another problem just at the time their agent needs a boost and says the magic words, “ You are the only one who can save me and make me feel good about myself.” This assurance of being special keeps the agent feeling loved and safe, but only for the brief time that the target stays “fixed” and grateful. Alcoholics, addicts and those with a high As-If character style are perfect targets.

If you are an agent, the slightest call for help from a loved one, your “target,” will, even if you do nothing, trigger a tightening in your body and the resulting loss of self-volition. If you simply deal with your behavior and not your body reaction, your body will continue to stay closed, responding to the old body fear—If I don’t do what you need I will die.

As a representative of others, your pay-off for soothing, fixing, and satisfying them will be different depending on your character style. Someone with a high fear of abandonment will use agency to avoid disaffection and a breach in the relationship. “I’ll do anything, just don’t leave me.” Those with both abandonment and inundation will use agency to gain validation for his or her professed identity. A person with just high inundation will not be in agency.

Interestingly, either partner may fill these two roles of agent and target, as people often switch roles.

### **Agency’s Interior Messages**

The following mantras deal with erroneous beliefs that cause and perpetuate agency. You will know what is causing the pain in your life when you identify which mantras you cannot say and believe intellectually and feel as truth in your body. Take your time and feel each of the twelve statements. If they do not ring true like a clear-sounding bell, figure out why you can’t bestow this basic kindness on yourself.

The first statement is the most important. Make sure that you can say this without a doubt before you move on. If you think you are bad, figure out what your “crime” is and how long you have been serving your sentence. Is your crime a thought crime in which you do not have pure thoughts? Is your crime that you haven’t been perfect (i.e. you have been human like the rest of us)?

With the second mantra, define first what it meant to “fix” your mother and other members of your family. Then identify your current targets. Identify your primary target of the moment. Then make sure you say the whole sentence together: “I’m not bad because I couldn’t fix my mother, and I am not bad because I can’t fix...”. It is important to keep repeating the sentence until you can feel the connection between the childhood agency hook (mother) at the same time as you feel the current one.

Use your journal to work on any of the statements you can’t easily say with emotional confidence. Take your time with each statement. Say them aloud, then notice what you feel in your body. It is the feeling in your body that will let you know if you truly believe each statement on a deeper, more meaningful level. If you read a statement quickly and move on, suspect that it has an important meaning to you that you are avoiding. Go back and read it again slowly and pause to feel your body response.

### ***Agency Mantras***

If one of these is a truth you need to hear, adopt it, repeating it to yourself again and again. Sometimes it will take a while for the body experience to penetrate to your core.

1. I am not bad. I haven’t done anything wrong.
2. I am not bad because I couldn’t fix my mother (father, sister, brother, etc.). And I am not bad because I can’t fix \_ \_ \_ (current agency target).
3. I am not selfish when I think of myself or act in my own behalf. I have a right to my own body-voice, my own body, my own toothbrush, to know what I think and want, and to speak up and ask for it.
4. I don’t have the power over, control of, or responsibility for other people’s lives. I was taught that I had these powers. This is a lie I now tell myself.
5. When I make the well-being of others my responsibility, when I try to change how they feel, no matter how positive my intention, it’s invasive and cripples them. With agency, I undermine those I try to fix as well as myself.
6. I will not abandon myself when I most need my own support.
7. I don’t have to depend on someone else or wait for him or her so I can live my own life.
8. This is not a crisis; only my agency habit makes me think it is. Agency is just a habit that I do not have to continue.
9. I have a right to my own interior life, my own thoughts, hopes and dreams; and I’m not bad if I don’t tell anyone about them.

10. I have a right to feel good about myself without feeling swollen-headed, narcissistic or grandiose.
11. I have a right to my own soul, my own destiny, my own personal communication with God, even if others don't agree.
12. Only in my body can I know the difference between an act of caring and an act of agency. The end of agency is not the end of love. It is the beginning.

It is only in your body that you can feel the difference between an act of agency and an act of love. You must pay attention to your body signals, the ones that speak on your behalf—exactly what the agent avoids.

### **Transpersonal Arena**

The transpersonal arena experience is one in which a person gains an awareness of self as something extending beyond his or her limits as an individual. This includes universal existential issues of existence and spiritual practices. Spiritual awakening involves the most basic issues of human existence, those that touch our soul. It powerfully affects you and your intimate relationships. When you truly make love, not just have sex, you invite a spiritual consciousness into your life. The spirituality we speak of is grounded in the body and in the realities of everyday life. This experience usually involves a realization, an insight, or an understanding that touches the core essence of self and is perceived by the body as undeniably true. These truths come from within the individual and are verified intuitively. There is a feeling of knowing linked with a reassessment of life's priorities. And this journey of spiritual consciousness is a somatic one—that is, it is revealed in the body where we feel the passions and zest for life.

It is truly possible by working with IBP therapy's first three arenas, to come to a place where these psychological issues become only background irritants. Although triggered into consciousness at times they can be quickly worked through with the steps out of fragmentation. Existence issues are not as easily put to rest. With existential issues, such as impermanence, aloneness, death., we must develop contemplative spiritual practices to be able to stay present and face the depth of these truths. We must accept the unanswerable issues of life that lead to the inevitable establishment of hope and trust that we are not alone.

The scientist who finds a universal truth in his lab may have a transpersonal experience, just as a mystic in a mountain cave may, or two lovers in a heightened erotic union. Creating a life and becoming a parent can, perhaps, be the most transpersonal experience of all. There is nothing like participating as a parent in the creation, birth, care, growth, and discoveries of a child to move you past and expand all previous self-limits of awareness and consciousness.

The personal growth of our being—the journey of the soul—can not be entirely fulfilled by any relationship, no matter how perfect. A relationship can be an exquisite vehicle to the transpersonal and can deepen your bond, but this journey is ultimately carried out alone ... and yet you are not alone. Whether you are in a relationship or not, you must develop a healthy somatic sense of self before you can sustain a more fulfilling, higher consciousness. In addition, you have to have lived long enough and had enough life experience to know in your body that there is more to life than sexuality and to be ready for it.

There is no better mirror in which to see yourself than the one presented in an intimate relationship. And there is more reflected than just the flat images of regular mirror. You no longer look with your eyes but with your heart. You know there is something deeper in life, something more profound and it is at this level that all the truly important discoveries and battles are made.

### **Fragmentation**

When one or more of the arena patterns destabilizes your feeling of emotional well-being, you may experience a state of emotional and physical fragmentation. Fragmentation is like a period of insanity that intermittently disrupts your state of mind, causing you to see life in a distorted fashion.

Like most people, there are periods in your life when things are good and life just flows along, and then there are periods when it all seems to fall apart, when you feel “off” and your emotions and responses are exaggerated, distorted, and fragile. At these times your thought process may seem a little bizarre to you and to others, this is why we sometimes refer to this state as intermittent insanity. Your judgments become black or white, and thoughts turn negative and hopeless—a jumble of “You always . . . You never . . . What’s the use? I’m too fat, too dumb, too ugly . . .” Your eyes blur and stop seeing in vivid color. Your mind dulls. You can’t find your keys, your wallet, or your sense of self, or sense of humor. You either don’t want to have sex or think you can’t live without it. You stumble and trip over words and thoughts. You feel smothered by loved ones or abandoned by them or both at the same time, and all your defensive patterns become exaggerated. We call this state fragmentation.

Sometimes a person is not aware that they are fragmented. They find themselves feeling irritable, angry, depressed, horny, hungry, or split off. These feelings don't seem associated with anything specific. This shift in body and mood is not random or without reason. Something has caused the upset. But dealing only with the current, obvious, external or superficial symptoms and not the underlying arena patterns allows "the blues" to hang on.

Fragmentation is brought about by the themes of your primary scenario, character style, agency, or transpersonal issues. If you have an upset today and nothing about it triggers these four arenas, the upset will be just an upset. It won't cause the deeper, more debilitating symptoms of fragmentation—the "crazy," rigid, unrealistic, incompetent behavior that can wreak havoc upon your body and life, especially your intimate relationship.

Some people get sick, and this causes them to fragment. Others become so fragmented that it affects their immune system and they become ill. While every physical illness has its psychological component, illness, if it arouses an underlying psychological theme can cause a fragmentation. People who know how to work with their fragmentations can manage to sustain their sense of well-being when they become ill.

You can't maintain yourself or a relationship in a constant state of well-being. We all fall into self- and relationship fragmentation. The trick is to not spend all your time trying not to fall apart but to focus instead on getting yourself together again as quickly as possible.

### ***The Wind surfing Story***

A few years ago we were in Hawaii, watching a group of young men wind surfing. It was wonderful to see how they attacked the huge waves, jumping or crashing through them for a thrilling ride.

They seemed to fly, hitting the waves, apparently without ever falling down. This amazed us. Most of the wind surfers we had ever seen spent the majority of their time falling down, struggling to get back onto their boards, then fighting to stay upright.

It seemed impossible that these young men never fell, so we watched them more closely. What we saw at first seemed like magic, because their movements were so swift and smooth. They did, indeed, fall. In fact, because they weren't afraid of falling they moved freely ventured more risk, and fell a lot. Their falls, we saw, were a graceful part of the ride. As they hit the water they swung their big sails

toward the sky, and their bodies and boards lifted as if by magic onto the next big wave without missing a beat.

So it seems, the secret in wind surfing is to learn not how to stay up, but mastering the art of *getting back up* when you are down.

What a great metaphor for mental health! In wind surfing, as in good mental health, no one can stay up all the time. We all have times when get fragmented or knocked into the water, so to speak.

But the secret in mental health, as in wind surfing, is in knowing how to get up again rapidly. Many people expend most of their energy trying to stay up and that is impossible. Relationships are the same way. Working on them constantly is exhausting; learning how to get back up is much more exciting. With a little practice, you can learn to “surf” you own well-being.

### **Writing in Your Journal**

There is no greater tool than writing in a journal to help you become a witness of your own life. A journal is not necessarily a record of events and experiences. It is also an opportunity for an inner journey. It can be an honest mirror, a friend, and an intimate companion that can help you gain a deeper sense of yourself. To take a profound journey to the core of your being, you must accept and face yourself with all your humanness. To become a witness of your life, you must allow yourself to see who you are beyond your defenses, your protective facade.

Have you ever noticed that often it’s easier to see and understand another person’s problem than your own? You can usually tell when someone else’s way of thinking is off. Just thinking about your own problems doesn’t give you enough perspective. Habitual ways of thinking take over, creating blind spots. Writing in a journal involves your body with your mind and provides a perspective that allows you to witness and examine your interior life. It is the best way to take charge of mind-body patterns that are so close to your being that they have become automatic and outside the realm of your awareness. Habitual ways of looking at and resolving problems will most likely always bring you to the same conclusions, whether they work or not.

The best kind of journal to use is one that is bound so that you can’t tear out or lose the pages. A journal with blank pages instead of lines is best so that you can write freely and even draw pictures. If you can, use a special pen that you feel comfortable with and keep it with your journal. If you are concerned about privacy, use a journal that you can lock. We strongly suggest that couples learn to turn

to their journals when a disagreement is not easily resolved. Arguing rarely will help you get to the heart of the problem, whereas using the steps out of fragmentation will.

The journal is best used as a companion for:

- ***Collecting your insights.*** The insights you gain as you read and practice—the ones you most think you will never forget—are the ones most apt to vanish. They are difficult to retain over time because they challenge your habitual way of being.
- ***Clearing up issues that are cloudy.*** The journal is the best place to sort out and clarify your feelings. Throughout this book, we will show you ways in which you can reestablish your inner sense of well-being, whether you are feeling a little “off-track” or completely “down and out.”
- ***Storing ruminating thoughts and emotions.*** When interruptive thoughts plague you, write them down and you will be more able to stay present for yourself and your experience. When you know that the emotions you are feeling are more than a situation warrants, your journal is your best friend and confidant. Journal writing is excellent for emptying out your mind before you go to sleep or when your sleep is interrupted. What is unfinished will tend to plague you. Writing it down creates a completion.
- ***Collecting your dreams.*** Most often your dreams speak to you from your unconscious body-mind. They carry important guiding messages from a deeper source of knowing. It is not as important that you work on your dreams as it is that you write them down. The writing introduces your unconsciousness intuitive process into your waking hours. Learning to live with your dreams is a means to heightened intuition, creativity, and consciousness.
- ***Becoming a witness to your life.*** In a sense the witness is the soul, that part of us that remains constant throughout life, or perhaps even death. The first step on the journey of awakening consciousness is the acknowledgment of a soul. As Ken Wilber has said in *Grace and Grit*, “The witness is the soul shining through.”

It is from your core self that your private journey must be chronicled so that you can see yourself more objectively, as clearly as you can see others. Being human is not easy. The constant presence of the witness shines a light on life’s path reminding us we are not alone in this precarious existence. The art of witnessing is the art of exploration. The art of understanding is the gift of compassion. The witness is indispensable to compassion.

## **THE WONDROUS FABRIC OF RELATIONSHIP**

A successful, loving relationship must be consciously woven like an intricate fabric. The arenas are the threads that give this wondrous fabric its color and texture. They weave through a relationship, creating its distinctive and unique qualities. Some couples want a lot of togetherness, others weave loosely for more breathing room. No one couple's "fabric" is inherently better or worse than another's. The only test for worth, satisfaction, and durability is whether the fabric suits the two people and is sufficiently flexible for comfort and growth. A relationship based on an idea of how a relationship "should be" is rigid and never comfortable.

To all relationships, you bring your unique blend of the four arenas that forms your personality. In an intimate relationship, not only are your arena issues intensified, but also you must deal with the complexity of two human beings functioning together. If a couple weaves their fabric without awareness of each person's primary scenario (Arena 1) it will be thin and without substance; with its secret themes, it will become riddled with holes and eventually fall apart. Character style (Arena 2) gives the fabric its color, texture, and, most importantly, its fit. Woven with too much agency (Arena 3) it will be a smothering blanket. The Transpersonal (Arena 4) provides vision, hope, endurance, the wonder of life, and the feeling of meeting as soul mates. It provides the graciousness to endure the inevitable passages of life. The fabric of your relationship provides warmth, vitality, trust, love, constancy, and hope for you as a couple.

The arenas hold the potential for the deepest love and caring as well as for the deepest pain.