

The Path to Interdependence

- Prologue -

Have you noticed that relationships have a serious knack for bringing out all our hidden issues?

If you've had the repeated experience of romantic partners triggering pain and defensiveness in you, leaving you feeling scared of rejection or abandonment, unworthy of love and support, wishing that you could just be with someone who understands you and wants to care for you no matter what, then this book is really going to resonate with you - and help you find what you've been looking for.

Who am I? I don't have a fancy degree or any wildly impressive credentials to woo you with. I am simply a fellow human, who has spent a lot of time and attention on personal development. I guess you could say I have a lay degree in that! I trust you to decide for yourself whether what I have to share stands on its own merits, and if what worked for me might work for you. A few years ago, I went through a heart-blowing transformation involving my relationship to relationships, and I learned a number of deeply valuable lessons that I truly believe could help you, as well.

Allow me to set the scene...

It's a Sunday afternoon, and I'm deep in contemplation about this guy I've been seeing, debating whether this is worth pursuing or not. (Oh - you've been there, too?) We have a very strong mutual attraction, on multiple levels, but he claims he doesn't want anything serious, though he acts like we're serious, until I act like it, too - it's a rollercoaster that is not floating my boat. Clearly, my needs are not going to get met in this relationship, and this is obviously not the right match for either of us. *But hang on a sec* - haven't I been here before? Right here, in this very same situation, with a number of distinctly different men?

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Damn. I totally have. And that means that I am quite likely to end up right back in this unpleasant quandary with the next guy I choose who I think is totally different from the last guy or any other. It becomes clear to me: *it's not the guys, it's me*. Not that they're without their faults, but I've apparently got some pretty persistent relationship issues, and I'm unlikely to work them out single, since it's the relationships that bring them to my surface.

At that point, I decided that I was going to stick it out with this guy - as long as he was down to ride this wacky rollercoaster, I was gonna stay on, too, and utilize the opportunity to work on my shit. With every trigger, I aimed to turn inwards, and explore what was coming up for me, and why. Then, what was underneath that. I did a lot of self-exploration, and I began to discover some pretty profound insights.

Let me add here, that I've been a personal growth geek since I was about 10, so I was already fairly practiced in this kind of introspection and self-awareness. Even so, this journey brought me to whole new levels of my subconscious, my past, my programming, and my insidious beliefs.

One thing I learned was that I had abandonment issues. (This guy actually pointed that one out to me!) My parents split when I was one and a half (weekdays with Mom and weekends with Dad), and I used to think that I'd gotten off pretty easy, having not had to go through such a thing at a more conscious, but still impressionable age, like 7 or 9. Of course, when I got older, and learned in my studies of psychology and human development that the first 3 to 5 years are the MOST impressionable, it never occurred to me to revisit that decision I'd made previously, that I was too young to have been traumatically impacted by my parents divorce. Flash forward into adulthood, and - sure enough - I definitely have some legit abandonment issues.

As I explored this further, I uncovered a pretty juicy bit of information: When those of us with a hearty fear of abandonment contort ourselves in an effort to please the object of our affection and prevent their potential

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departure, *we effectively abandon ourselves!!* Read that again. (Go ahead, I'll wait.) This, in turn, feeds the fear of abandonment that motivated the behavior in the first place, leaving us even more contortion-ey and clingy. I began to realize the weight of the task ahead of me: I was going to have to become secure enough in my own right, to learn how to be so fully myself, at the risk of losing the object of my affection. In order to find comfort in this (or any) relationship, I was going to have to love me, *myself*.

Man! I thought I already knew all about self-love. Boy, was I wrong. I mean, I was aware of the concept, and understood the importance of it; I even thought I was already pretty fond of myself. But when I started peeling back those layers, I found so much abandonment, insecurity, and low self-worth.

I had long valued independence, and I sought it in many areas of my life, but when it came to romantic relationships, I always wanted to be joined at the hip. Of course, the guys I was attracted to were always quite exemplary of my value of independence, so they were very much NOT interested in that kind of entanglement. Another revelation: I had some codependency issues. Without realizing it, I had been relying on my mates to love me where I did not. Hear me when I tell you: *that will never work!* I mean, yeah, your partner will probably love things about you that you're not overly fond of, finding them cute and endearing, but on the deeper level, even if they do accept what you don't, their acceptance will never make up for your rejection of it. We simply cannot receive love beyond that which we hold for ourselves.

So, after a few more challenges and growing pains, I found myself doubting our compatibility again. Maybe this just isn't worth it. But then again, there are some pretty redeeming qualities... ACK!! Enough! No, I refused to stay on that damn seesaw. I decided right then and there, that I was removing the option to leave from the table, so to speak. I recognized that with every difficult challenge - in love, in work, in life - if it seemed too hard, I had always just chalked it up to a bad match, and jumped ship. No more. From then on, instead of viewing challenges in that relationship as options to stay or go, I

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would see them as opportunities to grow. I vowed, in that moment, to rise to every challenge, look within for the answers, and to never retreat. I declared that, while this relationship might one day end, it would not be by my forceful doing, or in reaction to one of my trauma-triggers.

That commitment sealed the deal. I was not committing to a person, nor even to the relationship, but to my own personal growth. Since then, we've had many more trials and tribulations - perhaps some stories for another day - but we have continued to love each other, and to love ourselves. I am honored to call this man my Partner in Love. His name is Andrew.

Another insightful discovery that came up later involved the nature of our "attachment" styles. We are both somewhat "insecure" - him more so, and of the "avoidant" nature, and me: relatively secure, with "anxious" tendencies (especially when partnered with such an avoidant type). Folks with insecure attachment types have rather challenging love-lives. We both want very much to be loved but also distrust it when it's presented. Anxious partners get scared and move closer, while avoidants get scared and move away - hence the push and pull merry-go-round.

I noticed that my anxiety was often contributing to interpretations of events that prevented me from experiencing the love that was present; that my deeply ingrained fear of abandonment was the source of every embitterment towards my partner, so sure that he was just keeping me at a distance because he wanted to be able to leave me on a whim, and that I should just leave him instead. I found, though, that when I was calm, clear, and centered, secure in my love for me, and my faith in Love, Itself, I could see that he was simply afraid of being hurt, and if I quietly and lovingly supported him with ample space - enough even to leave if he needed to - that he invariably moved closer, with a sense of trust and safety that enabled him to be more open and warm. I knew that I deserved a great love, and I wasn't sure if he was capable of it - nor, frankly, whether *I* was - but I knew that he deserved a

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great love, too, and I was willing to invest my love in both of us. The rewards have not disappointed!

What follows are the lessons I learned during that initial crucible (I only gave you the overview, but believe me - there was some major pain and heartache that was faced and overcome in there, too), and the exercises I performed to get me closer to my ultimate goal of INTERDEPENDENCE - where two people rely on *themselves* for the majority of their own core needs, and then work together to support each other in a *collaborative manner*, to reach their respective, and even collective, goals.

If enough of my story resonates with your story, and you're ready to move from the land of Insecure to a wondrous place known as Secure, allow me to guide you along *The Path to Interdependence*.

- *Intro to Interdependence* -

Between the extremes of independence and codependence, achieving interdependence in relationships requires the combination of a secure sense of self, and a connected sense of oneness. You can look to spirituality and even quantum physics to learn about the pervasive connection between all things, but a grounded sense of security, rooted within yourself, takes some introspection and personal refinement.

First, allow me to state that personal development is not about being a better You, but being You better; the idea is to be more truly yourself. The more rooted you become in yourself, the more security you will find from within, and the less you will rely on external sources of validation - which tend to come and go, and trigger a sense of insecurity.

Essential matters of reflection for your journey of distillation include developing an awareness around certain aspects of your life, such as patterns

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that play out on repeat; habits of seeking external validation; facets of yourself that you've abandoned and denied, and ways you might reframe those assessments in a more loving manner; and your fears around judgment.

It's also vital to perform an honest assessment of your needs and values, and an examination of their myriad means of fulfillment; to let go of expectations, and foster a practice of acceptance that both expands and honors boundaries; to release attachments, and hold space for blessed impermanence; and to end your battle with indecision, by swearing a commitment to seek expansion amidst life's challenges.

And of fundamental importance, is the ongoing cultivation of a robust support system; the routine evaluation of your beliefs; the regular maintenance of balance; and the constant infusion of gratitude for your experiences, and faith in your journey.

In all interactions, when expansive growth is your goal, you will have already succeeded; and when compassionate authenticity is your *modus operandi*, you will discover the depths of intimacy.

- Part I -

First, we need to get you *kissing the dragon within you*.

Loving others starts with loving you, and loving anything means acceptance without condition. We can only receive love at the level we give it to ourselves – eliminate the conditions for your love, and you'll maximize the flow. Here is what we'll cover in this section:

- Identify your patterns. What situations seem to keep playing out on repeat? Or, perhaps another question could be: What lessons keep presenting themselves as challenges for you to grow? If you feel like

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you're stuck in a rut in some aspect of your life, by examining the nature of the pattern, you can explore the underlying beliefs that are holding you back. Once you achieve a more enlightened perspective on the situation, whatever problems are presenting will resolve quite magically.

- Validate yourself. If you have an idea or a hypothesis, you might want to seek external validation to confirm its truth or accuracy. But how often do you look to others to validate your worth? I'm willing to bet that it's more often than you realize. Your worth is inherent in your existence. How your existence is valued by others is subject to their programming, and not representative of the validity of your intrinsic worth. Only YOU can validate your worth for yourself, and that will set the stage for all of your interactions with others.
- Embrace your shadow. One of the most unloving things we do to ourselves is done in our attempts to prevent abandonment, and it results in us abandoning ourselves. In order to appeal to those whose approval we seek, we splinter off bits and pieces of ourselves that we presume might be offensive or undesirable. All of these little shards are shamed and shunned away into our "shadow". One of the most loving things we can do for ourselves is to reclaim those parts, one at a time; accepting them as elements of our being, and loving them back into ourselves, to become whole again. Only as whole persons can we connect with others fully, and only then can we achieve true intimacy.
- Fear no judgment. That anxious spell of apprehension you experience when you're quietly fretting about how your words or actions might be received by another is essentially fear of judgment. It's worth noting, however, that the only judgments that affect us, are those we hold of ourselves. Once you've done your "shadow work", you will begin to recognize your fears about judgment, and remember that you've already deemed yourself worthy.

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Let's get started.

Lesson 1

This begins with identifying the patterns that are playing out in your life. The Universe provides lessons for you to grow, and each lesson will continue to present itself until it is learned. Then you graduate to a new one, with an effortless flow. Resistance is met with resistance; you cannot force a lesson to go away. Once you achieve the requisite mind-shift, the “problem” will evolve on its own.

Exercise:

Take some time to yourself, and write about patterns you've noticed, particularly the ones that keep repeating like a broken record. Really explore all aspects of your life. Everything is connected, so it's wise to take a holistic approach. Keep your list handy; you'll think of more over the coming days.

All of the lessons that we are offered to learn are intended to help us remember our innate divinity and Oneness. All of the results that we get in life are spawned from our beliefs - if you don't have enough, you don't truly believe that you are enough. But you ARE enough; you are divine; you are worthy - just as you are - of everything you desire. The desires you have in your heart of hearts, are aspects of your destiny, which is desiring for you to manifest it.

All of our beliefs are born from our interpretations of events in our lives. Most of them took root in childhood, when we first had total trust in the interpretations that others provided us, and then a very limited perspective for making interpretations of our own. Later, you'll be invited to inventory your beliefs, and see that we can re-evaluate the sources of them, eliminating or drastically altering most of them.

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Start finding connections among these patterns of yours, and also between them and your childhood or past. If you ask yourself where you think one of them came from, your intuition will tell you what event spawned the belief that led to the pattern. Even if you don't feel it in your gut, just trust that it's the first thing that comes to mind. Let these insights serve as the first mile-marker on your path.

Lesson 2

Validation is a BIGGIE. If you spot Superman flying across the sky, you're going to turn to your companion, and ask, "Did you see that???" If they did not, you might question your senses. Or your sanity. This is a reasonable search for confirmation. However, we are unfortunately conditioned to rely quite heavily on external validation for our *internal* experiences. This does not lead to a solid sense of security or self-confidence.

Exercise:*

Begin developing an awareness around your habits of validation. When you are needing approval from someone; when you are anxiously awaiting a response from someone; when someone's feedback elates you or crushes you... All of these are examples of a reliance on external validation. And all of these are things we've all done. The goal is to develop the skill of self-validation.

*This is a *Noticing Exercise*. (The first of more to come.) For these, the goal is simply to notice your thoughts or behavior. You may even carry around a pad or scrap of paper, and keep a tally of each occurrence. It is CRUCIAL, however, that you DO NOT JUDGE yourself for behaving contrary to your desire. By simply setting your intention at the outset of the exercise - that you wish to either increase or decrease the frequency of the behavior, or alter the nature of the behavior - as you bring awareness to it throughout the day, you will naturally begin to respond accordingly. Again, resistance is met with resistance, and you cannot force lasting change. Change is born from acceptance. It's a paradox; I know.

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What you are essentially seeking in external validation, is proof of your worth. No one can effectively validate your worth; it is inherent in your existence. Only you can truly validate your worth for you. You have to know it in your core. Seeking it from outside sources is only going to set you on a never-ending course of heartache and malcontentedness.

Lesson 3

A major contributor to our pursuit of external validation lies within our Shadows. Your shadow is the accumulation of all the pieces of yourself which you have shamed and shunned. Anything that you, or anyone else, has ever said you are too much or not enough of, tends to get dumped in your shadow - a box of your personal aspects that you would rather weren't there, which you stash in your mental basement, hoping no one ever notices or finds it.

But these aspects are pieces of YOU, and this unloving behavior is what splinters you and destabilizes your foundation, leaving you partially abandoned and painfully insecure. Fortunately, your perception of these pieces is subjective - you can choose to view them differently. Shadow Work is where you go down into your mental basement, and bring that box up, into the light, dusting off those bits of you, one by one, polishing them up, and reclaiming each one back into your being, so that you can become whole again. This is a maintenance job though, requiring regular attention, and it's a matter of acceptance, integration, and authenticity.

Exercise:

Begin a list of things you don't like about yourself, or that you're afraid others don't or won't like. Keep it handy and add to it as you discover more of them. Once you have a few, pick one, and see how you might be able to view it in a positive light. "I'm too boring" can become "I am grounded and tranquil"; "I don't want people to know I'm interested in that; they'll think I'm weird" can become "Woohoo! I am such a fan of this - and look how many other people want

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to connect with me on it!"; "I wish I was prettier" can become "I'm so blessed to have this body, with its one-of-a-kind uniqueness". Then pick another, and keep flipping those coins from the dark side to the bright side - until you are a veritable ball of gleaming self-love and confidence!

As you do this work, you will begin to fall in love with yourself and go about your life with greater authenticity. You will see the strengths to all of your previously perceived weaknesses, and you will feel more comfortable in your skin, and more bold in your self-expression. Eventually, you will go deeper and deeper, and pull more of your beautiful divinity out for the rest of us to enjoy! Be unabashedly you. Be *flawsome!*

Lesson 4

When you do find yourself feeling apprehensive about being you, if you peel that back just a little, you will see that what you are experiencing is a fear of judgment. When you find yourself in that position, you'll merely need to remember that the only judgment of you that matters, is your own, and since you've already deemed yourself *flawsome* - perfectly imperfect - you can shake that fear right off.

Exercise:

Notice when you experience a fear of judgment. Check in with yourself, and see how you're already judging yourself in the way you fear it from others. If someone told you that your blue hair looked stupid, but you did not have blue hair, you would not feel judged, you would question their sanity. The only judgements we take personally are the ones we've internally bought into. Harken back to your shadow work, and reframe your self-image. Remember not to judge yourself for judging yourself; just embrace the wonder of practice, and the precious beauty of your humanness.

With continued progress along this path, you will come to find that every judgment you allow of yourself, splinters a piece of you off and into your

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shadow. You will also see that the behavior of judgment is unilateral, regularly being applied to yourself as well as others, and that it only serves to separate us - from one another and from our Oneness. It is what prohibits unconditional love. Your subconscious will only allow others to love you to the extent that you love yourself, so - ease up on those judgments, ok? We're all just trying to do our best down here, on this earthly plane, as spirits having a human experience. Notions of "good" and "bad" are purely subjective, and largely unnecessary.

The only distinction of good/bad that matters is what's in alignment with YOUR values. Others may have different value-sets, or prioritize similar values differently, but as long as we evaluate things in terms of what's "good" or "bad" for US, we can open up to the awareness that what's "good" or "bad" for others - what they may be basing their judgments of you upon - is not reflective of our nature, but theirs, and we need not take such perceptions personally.

While it's true that we are social creatures, and we do rely on one another for our wellbeing, there is an innate fear we have of being judged negatively that is not as true as our brains insist. It subconsciously fears the extreme potential of being rejected and banished, left to fend for ourselves and die alone in the bitter wilderness. The reality today, though, is that we live in a world of abundance, and while we do still have an emotional need for acceptance, we do not actually require it from any specific individuals.

So BE YOU. If some people don't jive with who you are, you will be fine because others will, and - in fact - the more truly You that you are, the more easily those who resonate with your frequency will find you. The more clear and consistent you are about who you are, the more effectively you will sort out the people who are "good" or "bad" for you. Although it can still be super scary, kindly thank your fear for looking out for you, and reassure it that you're doing ok. When you are so You that the misaligned reject you, reconnect to that security within you, that knows that their judgments are

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their issues, and that you are still worthy of YOUR love, as well as the love of others.

- Part II -

Next we shall get you *standing firm in your love*.

Being firmly rooted in Love – in a secure sense of unconditional acceptance, of ourselves, and our experiences – lends us the kind of strength we need in order to enjoy healthy relationships. These are the main ingredients:

- Get your needs met. Ask yourself what's missing from your love-life. What are the biggest disappointments and frustrations? Write them down... Now, since we operate in a world of duality, and everything in the existence of form has an opposite – a top for every bottom, a left for every right – accept the fact that if your unmet needs exist, so too do your met needs. What is the flipside of every coin on that list of woes? Go ahead and put those beauties into complete sentences, and craft an affirmation statement, assuming the reality of your ideal love scenario. “I’m so happy and grateful now that I am in a loving partnership, with mutual admiration and open communication...” Next, remove the partner from that scenario. That’s right. What does it look like when you are the one showing up for you? Write yourself the most powerful love letter you’ve ever written. “I’m so delighted to be in loving relationship to myself, feeling admiration for my dedication to growth, and bravery in communicating my perspectives...” Now you know how to love yourself better than anyone else ever will.

- Accept what is. (I think this might be the single most important thing in life.) Acceptance is not resignation, nor approval. It is merely the opposite of resistance or denial. One of our biggest spoilers in life is

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expectation; it is the very recipe for disappointment. It's one form of resistance, and an attempt at control – in contrast to an exercise in trust. Releasing expectations of others and of ourselves creates the space for Love to flow. Resistance is met with resistance, while acceptance catalyzes expansion. Accepting others and their experiences, lets them feel safe to be who they are and feel what they feel, which fosters a spiritual blossoming. Accepting yourself is the ultimate act of self-love. We all struggle with beliefs about not being enough; acceptance means we are. We don't have to accept people in particular roles in our lives, but the idea is to accept them as they are. If something's got to give, it's always more loving to alter the dynamic, than to attempt to change a person. The more you accept yourself, the more truly You you will feel safe to be; and the more authentically you conduct yourself, the more intimacy you will achieve in your relationships. You do you, and I'll do me. Do not seek to "fix", but offer love through acceptance. Personal development is not a matter of improvement, but one of distillation.

- Practice non-attachment. Attachment is another form of resistance. The one constant in life is change, and yet, we behave as though there is so much more permanence than there really is. In fact, the truth of Nature is impermanence. This can feel scary, but it is a beautiful fact – it is what makes the good things precious, and the struggles tolerable. Whatever ideal you are clinging to, let it go. Even if you think you've attained it, it will not remain as it is forever, and the tighter you grip it, the more deeply it will cut you when it passes. Hold on to hope, but do not become attached to the specifics of what you desire. Allow the grace of the Universe to present Its brilliance to you, in Its own elegant way. Rest assured, in any case: This too shall pass.

- Decide and commit. This is a common feature among every successful individual. These people don't fret over indecision; they make a decision, and they commit to seeing it through. They also trust themselves to overcome any "mistakes", course-correct, and adapt as

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needed. If you're feeling torn about your relationship, end the indecision! Change your perception of challenges from options to stay or go, to opportunities to grow. Commit to your growth, and you will have already succeeded. Commitment in "successful" relationship is not about two people committing to each other; it's about each person committing to their own growth, and choosing to make that commitment together. This may result in two people growing apart, but leaving that door open creates just the kind of breathing room a living entity needs to thrive.

Let's dive deeper.

Lesson 5

If you could paint the picture of your ideal relationship, what would it look like? What are the features that are most important to you, and that you are most aware of their absence? In what ways are you most unfulfilled? What if you could grant YOURSELF all of that? Let's write the most powerful love letter you've ever written.

Exercise: (This one is detailed...)

Set aside a half hour of uninterrupted you-time for this, and don't read ahead - do each one before moving on to the next. (Or do whatever you want; that's just my recommendation for getting the most out of this.)

Grab a pen and 4 sheets of paper (for real; no digital on this one).

Step 1 - Write a list of all that's displeasing about your love-life (eg: no good prospects; partner doesn't communicate well; etc).

*Step 2 - Write a list of the *opposite* versions of each of those things (eg: abundance of great prospects / found my perfect match; partner and I communicate excellently / bravely and compassionately; etc).*

Step 3 - DESTROY LIST 1! Burn it or shred it. (Seriously. Don't keep manifesting that junk.)

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Step 4 - Craft a positive affirmation from your list of ideals (eg: I'm so happy and grateful now that I'm in a loving romantic partnership).

*Step 5 - **Rewrite that statement without the 2nd party** (eg: I'm so happy and grateful now that I'm fulfilling the love I desire in my life).*

Step 6 - Toss that other statement. You don't need him - you need YOU. (Still appreciate your romance, though.)

This process is incredibly cathartic, and it will illuminate so elegantly what you truly need.

This is adapted from a more straightforward affirmation process, but when I first applied it to my love-life, I discovered something... My own Step 4 statement went something like this -

I'm so happy and grateful now that I am in a loving relationship, feeling admiration, adoration, and appreciation for each other. We delight in spending time together and making plans for our future together. We are committed to supporting each other's needs, and remaining grateful for one another. We communicate effectively, face challenges together, and honor our unique individualities.

And then I realized that I was needing most of that from myself. So I added the last two steps for my own self-affirmation, and my Step 5 statement became the following (bear with the variations in perspective; I read somewhere that it makes for more effective affirmations to mix those up) -

I'm so thrilled to be in love with you, Mariya - feeling admiration, adoration, and appreciation for your nature. I delight in being her, and she's gleefully emergineering a divine future of exploration, expansion, and connection. I am committed to supporting your needs, and remaining grateful for your being. You confidently express yourself, face challenges with zeal, and honor your unique individuality. I feel powerfully self-sufficient, and supremely loved.

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After doing that, I immediately needed substantially less from my mate, and found a greatly enhanced appreciation of what he does and who he is.

This process and the resulting statements are personal. Use this exercise to design your own self-affirmation, unique to you and your heart. Affirm your own worth and your love for yourself. See what blossoms!

Lesson 6

Accept what blossoms. Accept what doesn't. Expectations are the recipe for disappointment. Plus, as I've mentioned before (and will likely mention again), resistance is met with resistance, and change is born from acceptance. You see, everything is energy, and energy is constantly in motion, vibrating at varying frequencies, ranging between dense, or contracted, to open, or expanded. Our experiences of emotions are our experiences of energetic frequencies. The crummier we feel, the more contracted we are; the better, the more expanded. Contracted feelings include anger, sadness, guilt, and shame. Expanded feelings include love, joy, peace, and enlightenment.

Contracted frequencies are resistant, while expanded frequencies allow. Envision a cloth - if it is dense, nothing will flow through it very easily; if it is a more open weave, many things can flow through it with ease. And picture someone pushing you - you'd push back! Even just a little, so as not to fall over; or maybe a lot, if they are trying to force you to move. Well, all things respond this way; situations and circumstances, as well as most living things. Force or resistance is met in kind, and the same goes for acceptance.

Imagine someone telling you that they would like it if you could change the way you do this thing, or if you would alter your behavior just a little in this way. Now imagine someone telling you that they fully accept you, just the way you are; no modification necessary. You're perfect, with all your imperfections - BECAUSE of all your imperfections, in fact. Can you get a sense - within your physical body - of the heavier, more contracted feeling in the

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first scenario, compared to the lighter, more expanded feeling in the second case?

I brought up expectations - they literally are the recipe for disappointment. Whenever you're feeling disappointed, check your expectations. They're there. They don't have to be valid or invalid, they're just going to cause disappointment, no matter what. Granted, we need a few expectations to get on with our lives - like the sun will rise in the morning; my feet will carry me when I decide to walk; my well-maintained car will start when I turn the key - but when it comes to people, it's generally safest to keep it very minimal with new acquaintances, and then later base your expectations solely on their past behavior. There's no truly disappointment-proof method outside of a monastic lifestyle, but this certainly helps. And you can expect that people will change - some say no one does; I say everyone does, it's just a matter of how and how much - just don't get attached to the how and how much.

Exercise:

Practice acceptance. Notice when you're imposing your expectations onto others - or yourself. See if you can begin to cultivate truly unconditional love - love without condition. Love, just because they are a fellow human, and for that reason alone, deserve your compassion and support - just as they are - and so do you. You can want change for yourself, but start with accepting that this is who you are and where you are today. Think of personal development not as becoming a better you, but becoming YOU better.

The two ends of this spectrum can essentially be boiled down to fear and faith. Fear is contracted, while faith is expansive. Unless your life is actually in imminent danger, fear is just a trick of the mind, meant to keep you alive by maintaining the status quo, but only serves to hold you back from excellence and joy. It can also be viewed as the clash between the frequencies of the old perspective you're moving out of, and the new perspective you're

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moving into. You need only thank it for its concern and move past it to step into a new way of being.

Whatever your romantic situation, cultivate acceptance of it. Cultivate acceptance of you, and if you have a partner, cultivate acceptance of him or her (even if you eventually find that you do not accept them filling a particular role in your life). This is not “settling”; this is peace. This is love. We are all flawed - perfectly imperfect. Embrace it, and watch what shifts take place. *The best way to get what you want is to want what you’ve got.*

Lesson 7

Attachment is a form of resistance. It is resistant to the law of Impermanence (the one constant in life is change), and based on fear of loss, rather than faith in abundance. Everything changes; nothing stays as it is. When times are rough, take heart, for they will not last; when times are good, treasure them, for they will not last either. I find much solace in the phrase, “This too shall pass.”

Attachment is a fear-based attempt at control. We want to have control of our world, but the truth is that we do not. The only - and I mean the ONLY - thing we have control over is our thoughts. We may not always take advantage of this, but that is where our one potential for control lies. Our thoughts spawn our feelings; our feelings vibrate us into action; and our actions produce the results we get in life. But we do not control the way things unfold, and we most certainly do not have control over other people. Not ethically, at least. And we wouldn’t want to anyway - not really. Don’t you want the people around you interacting of their own free will?

Exercise:

Notice your attachments. Recognize them as fears, reassure yourself that you live in an abundant Universe, designed to help you to THRIVE, and utilize that faith to ease up on those contractions and move into expansion. Find joy in

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appreciating what IS, rather than worrying about what isn't. Here is where you will find that the present moment is the most precious thing on Earth, and no matter how hard you try, you cannot cling to it; you can only experience it - if you give it your attention.

Nonattachment is the ideal to aim for. (Not aloof and bitter *detachment*.) It is a state of perpetual release and acceptance. Being attached to something, or someone, or some idea, is like gripping an ice cube - it causes you pain, destroys the object, and distorts the relationship, ensuring the loss you sought to prevent. *What if what you think you want, never comes about?* Let it go. They say, "If you love something, let it go." Thich Nhat Hanh says, "You must love in such a way that the person you love feels free." Incidentally, you must also love in such a way that YOU feel free. Attachment is trying to trap both of you in a cage. Nonattachment places you in a nest in a tree under the open sky, where you can contribute to and benefit from the bounty of the Universe.

Lesson 8

In another beautiful paradox, we must balance our Nonattachment with Commitment. Can you make a decision to grow, and commit to it? Two of the strongest attributes of successful individuals are Decisiveness and Commitment. If you're anything like my former self, when you experience clashes in your endeavors, you presume that it's simply a matter of a poor match - be it a mate, or a job, or an idea. If you do regularly view these disharmonies as indicators of "time to try a new tack", how has that been serving you?

Maybe the new tack to try is committing. Commit to your evolution by shifting your perception of challenges, from options to stay or go, to opportunities to grow. End the indecision - DECIDE that you are not going to give up on this venture. It might end in some other way, but not by your forceful doing. The challenges are lessons to be learned, and forceful action (or resistance) will only perpetuate the lesson, which will simply show up again in

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another incarnation. Once you work through the lesson and find the appropriate mind-shift, you will effortlessly and spontaneously graduate to the next phase of growth, and the “problem” you were facing will cease to be a problem.

Exercise:

Every time you feel torn about whether or not you should bail on a commitment, ask yourself instead, how can you grow from this? Remember that resistance is just fear - “false evidence appearing real” - and that you deserve to thrive. That which triggers us is meant to teach us. Our triggers are our compass indicators for growth. Turning away from them only perpetuates the lesson that is trying to be learned by you. Moving into them is the way to move past them. “The only way out is through.” Look within you for the answers. Look to trusted advisors for guidance. Do not look to the door for escape - it will not grant it.

Thinking that you need to leave a challenging situation to serve you, is actually just your ego talking. Your ego is in charge of manifesting your beliefs, and it does so with such dutiful precision, that it thinks very highly of itself; so much so, in fact, that it fancies itself independent of the Universe. This results in all the emotional pain that we experience, for it is only the awareness of our Oneness that fulfills our needs for love and connection.

Utilize your ego as a tool for two purposes: 1) to gain insights into your limiting beliefs about yourself by what your ego manifests in accordance with them; and 2) recognize that it is your ego that wants, hurts, fears, and feels separate, while your heart is what empathizes, accepts, has faith, and knows Oneness. Trust your heart, not your ego. Commit to serving your heart, for it exists to serve Love, and being in the service of Love is the only way we can truly serve anyone, ourselves included.

- Part III -

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And now is the time for *fortifying your might for the love of your life*.

Having a solid foundation in your life sets you up for success in all your endeavors, and is essential to the well-being of a thriving relationship. These are the key components:

- Foster a robust support system. One of the most detrimental habits we seem to practice in modern relationships is placing the responsibility for satisfying all of our social needs squarely on our partner's shoulders. Most of our needs are actually best met from within, but the social aspects of them are most excellently served by diversifying their fulfillment among varied sources – friends, family, coworkers, different communities we take part in, and even nature. Stay open to all the support around you, and soak it up! Avoid fixating on getting your needs met in a particular way, or from a particular source; the more open you remain, the more you will receive.
- Regularly reevaluate your beliefs. Our beliefs shape our perspectives, and thus our experiences; they are basically little operating systems, running our lives. Each one was written in an isolated context, typically in our early years, solidified through repetition, and then generalized into our worldview. Part of our job as stewards of our wellness is to regularly inventory our beliefs and reevaluate them. Is this one true? In all circumstances, or just some? In any? Even now? Does it serve me or hinder me? What would my life be like if I didn't have this belief? Every result we get out of our endeavors is due to the belief that runs that program – be it health, wealth, or relationships. We are here to thrive! Beliefs that limit us are to be thanked and released, while those that empower us are to be nurtured and honored.
- Maintain your balance. I've boiled life down to nine main aspects: Mind, Body, Spirit, Career, Finances, Relationships, Growth, Experiences, and Contribution. Many people make the mistake of thinking that their job is

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to prioritize between them, but the real priority is finding balance among them – making sure that each one is receiving adequate attention. Everything is interconnected, and when we are struggling in one area, it is often a symptom of neglect in another area. It’s kind of magical how bringing a little attention to an underserved aspect will usually smooth out any difficulties in the apparent problem area. Keep tabs on your life aspects, and make sure they’re all getting attended to – schedule them in your calendar if you need to! (I do.)

- Exercise gratitude and faith. An attitude of gratitude is what creates the experience of abundance. When you develop the habit of appreciating what you have and focusing less on what you don’t have, you will become filled with joy. (This has a marvelously contagious side-effect.) And when you carry with you, faith in the benevolence of the Universe, and in all the meanderings of your journey, you will find an ease and flow that brings effortless goodness into your life like perpetual serendipity. Trust that everything happens for your benefit, and welcome the gifts of Life with grace.

Let's explore...

Lesson 9

So, what about when you give and give and give love, and then you feel empty and resentful? Well, that’s when you’re giving to get, and not really serving Love. In fact, over-giving can be hard on the receiver, too. Ever had an aunt or grandma who would drown you in gifts or food? We do this to people in an emotional manner when we’re actually needing something, and we think it has to happen in a certain way. We all have needs (like appreciation, connection, growth, order, safety) - “needy” happens when we get attached to the specifics of their fulfillment.

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One of the biggest mistakes we make in relationships is relying solely on our partner to fulfill all of our needs for love and connection. We do need support, but we also need to be open to the multiple sources of it, available all around us. This is why it is crucial to foster a strong support system. Most of our needs are actually best met from within, but we are social creatures, and we do need to connect with other beings. Remember that we evolved into tribal people, and it hasn't really been that long since we lived that way. Looking to Nature is generally a good rule of thumb for finding the healthiest methods of being, and one thing Nature teaches us, is to DIVERSIFY our resources. In this case, we are best served by diversifying our sources of support and connection.

Exercise:

Write a list of some of your common social needs and desires (eg: talking, emoting, being affectionate, philosophizing, venting, problem-solving, giving and receiving empathy or insights, shopping, dining, dancing, movie-going, adventuring, etc), then write a list of some of your favorite people to share in any one of these activities (eg: friends, neighbors, family members, coworkers, hobby mates, etc). Then keep these lists handy, so that when you want to connect with someone, you have a variety of sources to draw from. (Obviously certain romantic and intimate activities are naturally limited in their fulfillment, but while a few needs can be specific, all of them is definitely too much, and another recipe for disappointment.)

I said that most of our needs are best met from within, and we previously explored this notion with the self-affirmation exercise. Here are a few examples of some other needs that really have to start from within you: Are you needing more respect? There's probably room for you to boost that from within. Are you needing more appreciation? You might think that you're appreciating yourself, but I'll bet that if you dig deeper, you'll see that you're not. (Shadow Work is great for this!) Are you needing more connection? Guess what! You can get connected to Yourself, to Nature, to Spirit... Try meditating - quietly at home, or with a stroll through a park or the woods. Personally, I like

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to get connected with an energizing chakra-opening meditation. Or when I'm experiencing a difficult emotion, I like to have a loving conversation with it, like I would a small child, inquiring about its experience, and letting it be seen and heard.

Again - all emotional pain comes from separation; from forgetting that we are inherently connected to Everything. When you can really tap into Oneness, your needs will melt away, and you will feel fulfilled. I find it especially beneficial to view the Universe as my true partner, for It is the ultimate source of my support, love, and connection, and my constant and unwavering collaborator in our shared goals. As another reminder: your options basically boil down to faith or fear. When we are feeling intense needs, we are operating from a scarcity mindset, which is fear-based. When we are operating from a faith-based mindset, we courageously trust in the infinite Universe to support our needs, and the experience is much lighter.

Lesson 10

So what mindsets are you operating from? What are the beliefs that are programming your entire operating system? Do you believe in your infinite potential? Do you REALLY? I'm not talking about the things you think you believe; I'm talking about the beliefs that are wired into your subconscious. As I indicated previously, you can get a pretty good idea of what your beliefs are by observing your results.

Do you believe that you are worthy of prosperity? Do you believe that seeking money is greedy? Do you believe that wealth only comes from sacrificing more than you're willing to sacrifice? Did you know that money is just another form of energy, like a battery, that you can charge with your efforts, and exchange for goods or services produced by the efforts of others, and that your personal valuation of money reflects your personal valuation of yourself and your efforts? Did you know that the more money you have, the more good you can do?

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Do you believe that men you're attracted to won't find you worth any hassle? Do you believe that your romantic relationship is meant to provide your ultimate source of support? Do you derive your worth from the opinions of others? Do you rely on the validation of your mate for your emotional well-being? Did you know that abandoning pieces of yourself, in an effort to appeal to others, triggers abandonment issues and intensifies your fears of rejection, which lead you to desperation? Did you know that relying on external validation creates codependency?

Exercise:

The number one inhibitor to creating the life of your dreams, lies in your own mind. Inventory your beliefs and reevaluate each of them. Where did they come from, and what are they doing for you? What are they based on, and are they actually universal truths, or were they formed for a specific context, long since expired? We are here to thrive! Those beliefs that limit you, are simply untrue, and although they may have served you once, it is time to let them go, or rewrite them into something positive and productive. The ones that empower you, need to be expanded upon and nurtured.

Once again, it goes: Thoughts → Feelings → Actions → Results. Your beliefs are subconsciously programmed habits of thought that run your entire life. It is critical to evaluate and reevaluate them on a regular basis. "Don't believe everything you think."

Lesson 11

You know what I believe in? Balance. I am an avid proponent of the necessity of balance. I am a moderate in all - wait - most things. And one crucial piece of balance pertains to your foundation. You see, a wobbly foundation breeds insecurity. Imagine that you are standing on a rock next to a waterfall, preparing to jump into a beautiful pool below, just high enough to make you a little nervous, but not a dizzying height. And then you shift your

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weight and the rock moves. You hunker down and brace yourself! You are NOT feeling confident in the stability of your foundation, and you are not feeling that it is secure enough to jump off of.

Well, if we want to really live, to really experience the wonders of life, we need to take a few leaps now and then. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained”, right? Right! Sometimes we need to stretch our boundaries, so that we can grow, and this involves a bit of risk, but if your foundation is not balanced, you are not going to have the confidence you need in order to take those risks, and gain the most from your explorations.

We have nine main aspects to our lives, which make up our foundation: Mind, Body, Soul, Career, Finances, Relationships, Growth, Experiences, and Contribution. (The mind aspect covers the intellect, as well as our emotions; the body aspect includes both exercise and nutrition; career and finances are related but separate; relationships span everything from social and professional, to friendly and familial.) So, how balanced is your foundation?

Exercise:

Run an assessment of each of your nine life-aspects, and take note of how they're operating. For each one, consider what is working well, and what could be improved, but really focus on which aspects are receiving the most attention, and which aspects are being neglected. Take a look at your calendar, and see what you've been prioritizing, and what you've been neglecting. Then find ways to schedule time to attend to the underserved aspects. It's amazing what happens when you put personal care activities on your calendar - they actually get honored! Most people make the mistake of thinking that they have to prioritize among their life-aspects, but your real priority is to balance them. They all need a little attention. Only you will know what balance looks and feels like for you. Some things might need daily care, and others might do well with just weekly or monthly love.

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As I've stated previously, everything is connected - just take a look at your amazing body! Or even your community. We are all systems, operating within systems, operating within systems, and they are all interconnected. So are these life features. The trick here, is realizing that you cannot resolve issues by dealing solely with the facet that appears troubled. They are like a spider web; when you notice a disturbance in one area, the tug is usually coming from a different sector. For example, if someone were to complain of low workplace productivity, I might recommend that they take up yoga; if another person were to suffer from neck and shoulder pain, I would inquire about their self-esteem.

By incorporating an awareness of this interconnectivity, you will start to notice that improving your care of previously neglected aspects, leads to spontaneous enhancements in other aspects, as well. With this in mind, just focus on what needs attention, and not necessarily on where you're struggling. As with many things in life, it's often the counterintuitive move that proves most fruitful.

Lesson 12

And how cool is that?? I am constantly amazed by this inspiring Universe. It is so complete, and so supportive. Recognizing this, I ask you: What would it take for you to trust your journey? This is a remarkably powerful question, by the way - "What would it take...?" Use that whenever you feel stuck. You don't even have to answer it; just asking it will open you up to the answer.

The ultimate key to your success in life and love, is Gratitude & Faith. An attitude of gratitude is what turns what you have into more than enough, and by programming your operating system to run on gratitude, you utilize a perceptive filter that recognizes goodness, and thereby enhances the goodness that is present, and attracts even more of it into your life. When you

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operate from a mindset of faith, rather than fear, you can accept that everything that happens is for your absolute benefit.

Exercise:

Cultivate an awareness of your energetic frequencies. Notice when your body is feeling contracted, or dense, or heavy, and when it is feeling expanded, or open, or light. When you sense your contractions, avoid fighting them, for they will only fight back; instead, offer them some love and acceptance, so that you can give birth to expansion. Recall that these sensations are based in fear, which comes from a painful sense of separation, and remember that you are not separate, but One with Everything, and that you do have faith in Goodness and the Universe's intention for you to thrive. Then explore the situation you're in, to find something about it for which you can be grateful. If nothing else, you can always choose to be grateful for the Universe's amazing mechanism of providing for our perpetual evolution by way of these triggers that clue us into our cosmic lessons.

Trust your journey. Trust in Love! Know that you are exactly where you need to be, that everything is unfolding perfectly, at the divine pace of You, that you have everything you need, and your future needs will be provided for as they arise. Be grateful for the opportunity to enjoy this miraculous adventure, and have faith in the knowledge that when growth is your goal, there is no chance of failure.

- *Outro* -

TA-DAA! That's it; you're all fixed. Please open the nearest door, and you will find your perfect mate, ready to fulfill all of your dreams. What? Not so? You're right. Maybe you have learned a thing or two.

Again - your journey of personal growth and spiritual development is not about becoming a better you, but becoming YOU better. You are perfectly

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imperfect, so there is nothing to “fix”, and of course there is no END to this process, until it evolves beyond the physical form you’re in. Also, no - you caught it - your mate is not meant to fulfill all of your dreams; that’s for you and your partner, the Universe, to do. Your mate is just one of the special players in your life, who provides a source of social interaction, and physical affection. He will, however, be the one who provides the majority of your growth triggers, so watch out for those, and be ready to move through them, and not away from them.

This Path to Interdependence is not really a “Point A to Point B” kind of path. It’s just a trail we can traverse, over and over again, changing the terrain with each tread, and learning our way around it more and more with each visit. So, keep these guideposts handy, and revisit them often.

- Epilogue -

Relationships are POWERFUL! They are the greatest gift in personal refinement. They can also be very challenging, activating all our triggers and heightening our insecurities.

When you experience clashes from differences between you and your partner, try find the greater potential made possible by those differences. *When the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, you have synergy.*

One excellent example of a synergistic relationship is that of water. All that is and could ever come from hydrogen alone, or oxygen on its own, pales in comparison to the myriad wonders of water, and all its mystifying properties.

The richness of experiences that arise from two people interacting is pretty synergistic, too – let alone the things that they can collaborate to create together! And the depth of love and growth that is made possible by a

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developing relationship is remarkably synergistic. There are three main features of this phenomenon.

1. Relationships are infinitely reflective.

Our relationships with others continually reflect the relationship we have with ourselves. And our romantic relationships are especially good at revealing some of our darkest corners! It's amazing how much we'll accuse each other of that we are perfectly guilty of in some other way. Recognizing this is humbling for ourselves and humanizing of our partner. It makes way for empathy.

How we perceive our partner – how we interpret their behavior, their motivations, their intent – speaks volumes on how we perceive ourselves; and how we view the relationship itself speaks to how we see our place in the world. *We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.* The same can be gleaned of our partner's perceptions.

2. Lasting relationships require courageous vulnerability.

There are such minefields of insecurities that arise within a relationship, and when our defenses get triggered, we can lash out or close up. So how can we really be in relationship, if we're not fully present? When we're so busy defending our ego, we lose the connection that is the very essence of Relationship.

When we are able to find security within ourselves, and stay present and open to our own experience, as well as our partner's experience, we create the space for real intimacy to occur.

3. The best relationships are magnificently complementary.

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But it takes differences to make complements. And with differences can also come clashes. We cannot have the possibility of one without the possibility of the other. It takes differences to have diversity, variety, beauty... It takes differences to create SYNERGY! Our similarities unite us, and our differences strengthen and enhance us – both individually and collectively.

As much as we're often compelled to want our partner to be more like us, when we are able to embrace their unique perspective and contribution, so much magic happens. This is a gateway to Unconditional Love – and that, my dear reader, is what It's all about.

We're all connected, interconnected, inter-being, and *interdependent*. We are all responsible for ourselves and to one another. The more we can find synergy in diversity - rather than clashes among our differences - the more possibility there will be for creative collaboration and mutual thriving. We have a beautiful opportunity to put this perspective into practice in our personal relationships, and thereby contribute to a world of people growing together, in supportive interdependence.

Looking forward,

Mariya